**UCL Division of Infection & Immunity**

**Divisional Graduate Research Committee**

**Thesis Committee**

**Guidelines**

**A guide for students and their supervisors**

**Edition: February 2021**

# Divisional Contacts

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**Section 1: THESIS COMMITTEE OVERVIEW**

**Introduction: the function and role of the Thesis Committee**

The Thesis Committee (TC) has an advisory role and does not substitute for the primary Supervisor. The purpose of the TC is to ensure that the student receives additional input and expert advice at regular intervals over the course of the PhD. The TC may also suggest specific training activities, help the student gain particular expertise needed for the research and advise the student on career progression.

All Research Students (both MPhil/PhD and MD(Res) registered in the Division of Infection and Immunity are required to have a Thesis Committee (TC). The role of the TC is for its members to support the Student throughout the PhD programme.

The TC comprises the Second Supervisor, who will chair the TC, and 1 to 3 additional members with relevant expertise in the area. These members may be UCL faculty or external, and may include the Graduate Tutor or Deputy Graduate Tutor. Primary Supervisors do not form part of the TC.

The Primary Supervisor chooses the TC members in consultation with the Student at the beginning of the PhD. Each TC member should be registered with the student’s UCL Research Student Log, [http://researchlog.grad.ucl.ac.uk/.](http://researchlog.grad.ucl.ac.uk/) External members should obtain a UCL honorary contract and be registered as secondary supervisors at UCL.

**Members of the TC will be responsible for assessing the MPhil/PhD upgrade of the Student, and as such cannot perform the duties as final PhD examiners.**

Over the course of the programme there are scheduled formal meetings with the TC (see below), although the Student, Supervisor or TC can request an additional meeting at any time. Students may also approach TC members informally (individually or as a group) for advice and support should the need arise.

The outcome of the TC meetings should be entered into the UCL Research Student Log.

The timeline outlined below is for conventional 3+1 year PhD studentships. The timeline starts after the rotation period is concluded, that is: when the Student has chosen the lab.

**Organisation and Schedule of Thesis Committee meetings**

**Organisation**: It is the student’s responsibility to organise the meetings of the thesis committee. However, if the student experiences difficulty in getting an agreed date from the TC members within a reasonable time, he/she should seek help from his Primary Supervisor, or from the Graduate Tutor or Deputy.

**Schedule and Description of Thesis Committee Meetings**

***TC1 Preliminary Research Plan – 3 months***

The Student and Supervisor will prepare a research plan to submit to the TC for approval (1,500 words max). The Student meets with the TC for a brief discussion of the project proposal. The Primary Supervisor should be attending TC1. The TC may recommend some changes to the project proposal and/or have some ideas that may be incorporated. The TC should also discuss with the Student a plan for any specific training or additional expertise that is, in the TC’s view, required for the project.

***TC2 Thesis Committee Meeting 2 – 9 Month Report***

The second TC meeting will take place approximately 9 months into the PhD. The Student is required to write a short progress report (1,000 words max) describing key findings and a plan of future work. The TC will also assess progress on the specific training agreed at the previous meeting. During the TC meeting the Student is required to give a short presentation which should expand on the written report and form the basis for discussion.

***TC3 Thesis Committee Meeting 3 – Upgrade (by 18 months)***

For all Students the third TC meeting forms part of the upgrade from MPhil to PhD. Prior to the meeting the Student must submit a report (see separate guidelines), which the TC will review in advance of the meeting. The student is also required to give a presentation to the Division, which should be attended by members of the TC. The panel will decide if the Student has fulfilled the criteria required to upgrade to PhD. At this stage, the TC may recommend that an additional TC meeting is held within six months to monitor progress.

***TC4 Thesis Committee Meeting 4 (by 24 months)***

This meeting is not compulsory but the TC might recommend it at the time of the Upgrade.

***TC5 Thesis Committee Meeting 5 (no later than 33 months)***

Students present their thesis outline and writing plan to the TC. The timing of TC5 is flexible and should be decided between the Student and supervisor based on when the Student is near completion of experimental work. At this meeting, the Student and the TC members should discuss the Student’s career plans and provide advice on the next career step.

**MBPhD Students**

MBPhD students are required to re-enrol on their MBBS after two years and nine months. Therefore the thesis committee schedule for MBPhD students is as follows: TC1, TC2, TC3 as for PhD students. There will be no TC4 as TC5 will take place to assist in thesis preparation.

**Table summarising the schedule, reporting and presentation requirements**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Thesis committee meeting | Written report | Presentation | Deadline |
| TC1, Research plan | Yes (1,500 words max) | Yes (15-20 mins) | 3 months after start in selected lab |
| TC2, 9 Months report | Yes (1,000 words max) | Yes (20-30 mins) | 9 months after start |
| TC3, Upgrade | Yes (see guidelines) | Yes (30 mins) | 18 months after start |
| TC4, Follow up | No | Yes (20-30 mins) | 26 months after start |
| TC5, Thesis outline | Yes (plan of thesis) | Yes (20-30 mins) | 33 months after start |

**Words limits**

Please do not exceed word limits. A word count should be included on the front page of your reports.

**Section 2: GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS**

* It is your responsibility to organise the meetings and it is advisable to set the dates at least one month in advance to ensure you are able to meet with your TC before the deadline.
* You should be prepared to discuss your results/data so have them to hand should your TC want to review them again (including raw data if required).
* The Student should discuss specific training with the TC and seek advice on career moves.
* Following the meeting you will need to write a short entry in your UCL Research Student Log of the meeting outcome and any comments/suggestions made by the TC.

**TC1 Thesis Committee meeting - Preliminary Research Plan (3 months)**

***NOTE*** it is advised that you set the date **one month in advance of the meeting** to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

***Plan Submission***

Your Research Plan should be approved by your Primary Supervisor before sending it to members of your TC.

***Plan Content***

Your Research Plan should include the following:

• Abstract (300 words max.).

• A succinct review of the key literature to contextualise the work.

• Hypothesis and aims of your project.

• A clear plan of experimental approaches for the next 6-12 months including a graphical timeline.

• Bibliography.

Word limit: 1,500 (excluding bibliography)

The research plan will form the basis for your discussion with the TC. Prepare a 15-20 minutes presentation for the TC. The Primary Supervisor should be present at this TC meeting.

***Outcome***

Members of your TC will return suggestions and amendments of the plan. Following the TC meeting, a revised version of your plan should then be approved by your Primary Supervisor and TC members.

**Student Action:** The final TC approved version of your plan should be uploaded onto the eLogbook as soon as possible after the TC1 meeting.

**TC2 Thesis Committee Meeting 2 (9 months Report)**

***Report Submission***

Your report should be sent to all members of your TC no less than 2 weeks before the meeting.

***Report Content***

Please prepare a short progress report (1,000 words max) outlining what you have achieved in your first 9 months since starting your final choice of laboratory. The report should complement your Preliminary Research Plan and should include progress to date and a plan of future experiments (a methods section is not required).

***Thesis Committee Meeting***

It is your responsibility to organise your TC meeting and it is advised that you set the date **one month in advance of the meeting** to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare a 20-30 minutes presentation, to include the project outline, progress to date and a plan of future experiments.

The written report and oral presentation will form the basis of the discussion with your TC.

***Outcome***

A recommendation for continuation into your second year will be made by your TC. The TC must be satisfied that you have made satisfactory progress during the first 9 months. The TC may recommend that your review period is extended and, following consultation with your Supervisor, Graduate Tutor and TC, you will be set objectives which you are required to meet within a defined period of time (usually 3 months) if you are to continue on the programme.

**Student Action:** Following the meeting you will need to write a short entry in your UCL Research Student Log of the meeting outcome and any comments/suggestions made by the TC.

**TC3 Thesis Committee Meeting 3 (MPhil/PhD Upgrade) (by 18 months)**

***Overview of the Upgrade Procedure***

All UCL Students initially register for the MPhil degree. Upgrade to PhD will take place after successful demonstration of the criteria set out below, the primary components of which will be assessed through the upgrade report and viva. You will also give a presentation to the Division. Your Thesis Committee (TC) members are expected to attend the presentation.

Upgrade should happen 15 months after your registration (18 months for students who had rotations in different labs).

The TC members are the examiners, and the chair of the TC will lead the viva. It is therefore important that students have their TC meetings at the appropriate time. Please note that it is the student’s responsibility to arrange TC meetings.

**The objectives of the upgrade report are**:

* + - * To provide training in how to write up research for publication in high impact journals.
      * To summarise what the student has done during the first year or year and a half, and ensure that they have a clear plan for the succeeding years.
      * To identify students whose performance is judged below the standard required to complete a PhD.
      * To identify problematic projects as early as possible.

In addition, examiners will look for:

* Commitment to pursuing research at UCL leading to the PhD degree.
* Ability to formulate a viable research question that could be completed within the normal time frame of the PhD programme.
* Demonstrated knowledge of the relevant literature.
* Completion of the relevant sections of the UCL Research Student Log.
* English language proficiency, both written and spoken.

***Report Format***

The upgrade report should be similar to a Cell or Immunity paper, and should be written according to the following specifications:

The main text should contain **60,000** characters including spaces maximum (character count to be provided after the Abstract). This character count *excludes* the Material and Methods section, the Figure legends and the References but *includes* the Abstract. The text should be organised as follows:

Title

Abstract (250 words max)

Introduction

Results

Discussion

Future directions

**Methods (excluded from word count)**

**References (excluded from word count)**

**Figure legends (excluded from word count)**

No limits on the number of Figures or Tables. Please keep Figures legible with each panel of a size sufficiently large to be properly assessed. Data provided by somebody else should be clearly labelled as such and the person providing the data should be acknowledged. Examiners may ask to see the raw data of a Figure so please keep the data well organised and easy to consult should the case arise.

The Methods should be given in detail and can be also presented before the Results, if the student chooses so.

Future direction section: In addition to the future experimental plans, you should describe how you intend to organise your PhD thesis in three Results chapters.

***Outcome***

The TC may recommend upgrade or may recommend that your review period is extended and, following consultation with your Supervisor, you will be set objectives which you are required to meet within a defined period of time (usually 3 to 6 months) if you are to be upgraded. The TC will complete a report to be sent to your Primary Supervisor, which will include a recommendation.

**Student Action**: The **Upgrade Form** must be completed and signed by the TC members and sent to the Postgraduate Research Administrator, who will then arrange Divisional Graduate Tutor approval and your status will be upgraded on Portico.

The Upgrade report should be uploaded onto the eLogbook as soon as possible.

Further information on the upgrade process can be found here:

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/status/research-students/upgrade>

**TC4 (by 26 months)**

This TC4 may be recommended by your TC at the time of the Upgrade. The purpose of this TC4 is to discuss parts of the main project that are problematic or falling behind schedule. No written report is required. You should prepare a short presentation (15-20 minutes) that will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

**TC5 Thesis Plan (before 33 months)**

The purpose of TC5 is to review your thesis outline and discuss what, if any, final experiments you need to complete for your thesis. The timing of TC5 is flexible and should be decided between you and your Supervisor based on when you are near completion of your experimental work. TC5 is a valuable opportunity to discuss future career plans and seek advice from the TC members.

***Thesis Outline and Final Experiments***

Usually, a PhD thesis will contain and Introduction, a Methods chapter, **three** Results chapters and a final Discussion. Your thesis outline should contain a breakdown of each chapter into sub-headings, and include figure titles and/or any other relevant notes/comments about the content of each section. You should indicate which sections need further data to complete. There are no limitations on word or page limit but you should aim to be as clear and concise as possible.

You should also include a timeline of remaining experiments so that you, your Supervisor and TC all have a clear idea about what you will be doing over the final months.

**Section 3:**

**GUIDELINES FOR THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Members**

* Meet with the Student at the designated times (minimum four times) throughout the progress of the PhD.
* Read Student reports prior to the TC meeting.
* Sign off the meeting reports entered into the student’s Research Log.
* Make recommendations for Upgrade.
* If required, provide additional support for the Student e.g. additional TC meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress.
* Advise the Student on specific training required.
* Advise the Student on career steps.
* Raise any concerns regarding the Student’s academic progress and/or supervision with the Graduate Tutor.

**NOTES:**

TC members are not required to organise the meeting, this is the responsibility of the Student. They should, however, respond to student timetabling requests within a reasonable time so as not to delay the TC meetings unduly.

**Thesis Committee Chair**

The Second Supervisor should act as the chair and is responsible for ensuring the completion and timely return of the TC’s report. The Second Supervisor may, if they wish, nominate another member of the TC to complete and return the TC’s report.

**TC1 Preliminary Research Plan**

The purpose of the Preliminary Research Plan is to review the Student’s project proposal/experimental plan and determine whether or not the TC agrees a suitable PhD project has been proposed. This will be emailed to TC members, who should suggest any amendments before a final plan are agreed, which should then be returned by email to the Postgraduate Research Administrator. At this stage, advice should be given to the Student on any specific training or courses that may be required for the project.

**TC2**

If the Student has failed to make satisfactory progress or the TC has particular concerns e.g. academic understanding of the subject area, these should be discussed with the Student during the meeting. The TC may recommend that the Student’s review period is extended and, following consultation with the Primary Supervisor and the Graduate Tutor, the Student will be set objectives which he/she is required to meet within a defined period of time (usually 3 months) if the student is to continue on the programme. A report should be written and noted in the UCL Research Student Log entry. TC members will need to sign-off the Log entry.

TC3

*Please also see TC3 in the Guidelines for Students section (page 5)*

The Student is required to submit an Upgrade report to the TC at least 2 weeks in advance of the meeting, present their work during the meeting (*viva*), and present at the Divisional Internal Seminar Series. The purpose of the *viva* is to explore the points outlined below, discuss any weaknesses/gaps in the project and also provide the Student with positive feedback:

* Knowledge of literature within field of study.
* Experimental design.
* Presentation of results.
* Critical analysis of results.
* Contextualisation of findings.
* How well the hypothesis has been addressed.
* Future planning.
* Is the work presented reasonable for the period of study?
* Is the work of a suitable standard for progression to PhD?

It is essential that the Student demonstrates evidence of independent thinking and is able to contextualise their work. Following the *viva* the TC should complete the Upgrade Thesis Committee Meeting ReportForm (page 10).

**TC4**

The TC may recommend this meeting when, during the Upgrade, some concerns over some aspects of the project become apparent. The Student should prepare a short presentation focusing on such aspects, which will form the basis for the discussion. The Student should then write an entry into the UCL Research Student Log recording his/her progress, which should be signed by the TC members.

**TC5: Guidelines for Thesis Committees**

Students can submit their thesis outline to the TC anytime between TC3 and the end of their fourth year. During the meeting the TC and Student should discuss the thesis outline and the TC should make recommendations as appropriate, which the student will record in their UCL Research Student Log. TC members should also discuss with the Student career plans and provide advice to that end. TC members will need to sign-off the Log entry.

**Upgrade Report Form (TC3)**

## **Upgrade from MPhil Degree to PhD Degree UPGRADE PANEL REPORT**

**Student:**

*(Please enter full name and title)*

**Student Number:**

*(Please enter student number if known)*

**Supervisory Team**

Principal Supervisor:

Subsidiary Supervisor:

*(Please enter names of Supervisory Team)*

**Thesis Title:**

*(Please enter provisional thesis title)*

**Composition of the Upgrade Panel:**

Chair:

Other members:

*(Please enter full names of each member of the panel, including their position in relation to the student i.e. Subsidiary Supervisor, DGT etc.)*

**Date of Upgrade:**

I confirm that the date of the Upgrade Viva falls within the Upgrade timeframe as defined by the regulations:

If Upgrade has taken place outside this timeframe, please comment on the extenuating circumstances:

**Please Note:** This report on the outcome of the Upgrade should be signed and submitted by the Chair of the Upgrade Panel to the Departmental Graduate Tutor for signature, and thereafter retained in the Department. This report should be copied to the Student, Supervisors and the Head of Department.

**N.B. Student and Registry Services (Student Records) should also be notified by the Departmental Graduate Tutor when the student has successfully upgraded.**

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| --- |
| SECTION A: **Summary of Upgrade Outcome** |
| **The Upgrade Panel confirm** that they have reviewed the Upgrade Reports submitted by the student  and by the Principal Supervisor, and have also examined the student orally.  **The Upgrade Panel further confirm that they have satisfied themselves that the student:**  *Please check the box against the following criteria for Upgrade:*   |  |  | | --- | --- | | 1. Is committed to pursuing research at UCL leading to the PhD degree. 2. Has achieved satisfactory progress in the work, so far. 3. Has demonstrated sufficient awareness of the context of the work and completed such tasks as a review of the relevant literature and a bibliography. 4. Has demonstrated the ability to formulate a viable hypothesis or research question that could be completed within the normal time frame of the PhD programme. 5. Has achieved satisfactory technical and generic skills development (students funded by funding bodies, such as  the Research Councils, must meet the specific requirements stipulated by those bodies). 6. Has formulated a viable plan for the work. 7. Has considered the research ethics dimensions of the project and applied for ethics approval from the relevant  Research Ethics Committee if appropriate. 8. Has completed the appropriate sections of the Research Student Log. 9. Has demonstrated English Language proficiency, both written and spoken. 10. Meets any other Department or Faculty criteria. |  |   Please comment in Section B below, and provide feedback if you are not satisfied in any of the above.  **Please continue overleaf…** |
| **The Upgrade Panel confirm that they have determined ONE of the following:**  **Upgrade – 1st Attempt**   1. The Student has met the criteria for the Upgrade and is recommended for upgrade to PhD status: 2. The Student has NOT met the criteria for the Upgrade and should be referred to a specific date,  with specific criteria to meet, for a second attempt with the need for a second viva. 3. The Student has NOT met the criteria for the Upgrade and should be referred to a specific date,  with specific criteria to meet, for a second attempt WITHOUT the need for a second viva.   **Upgrade – 2nd Attempt (if applicable)**   1. The Student has met the criteria for the Upgrade and is recommended for upgrade to PhD status: 2. The Student has NOT met the criteria for the Upgrade and should remain registered for the MPhil: |

|  |
| --- |
| SECTION B: **Upgrade Panel Joint Report** |
| *This section of the report should be completed by the Upgrade Panel and give the grounds on which the Upgrade decision is based. This should include, if applicable, feedback on the specific criteria to be met after a first failed attempt or the criteria that have not been satisfied after a second  failed attempt.* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| SECTION C: **Upgrade Panel Signature Confirming Result of the Upgrade** | |
| Declaration: **We confirm this is the Upgrade Panel Report for the above named student.** | |
| Signed (Chair of Panel):    *(Please print name)* | Date: |
| Signed (Panel member):    *(Please print name)* | Date: |
| Signed (Panel member):    *(Please print name)* | Date: |
| Signed (Departmental Graduate Tutor):    *(Please print name)* | Date: |