UCL Division of Infection & Immunity
Divisional Graduate Research Committee

Thesis Committee Guidelines
A guide for students and their supervisors

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The Division of Infection & Immunity, UCL, acknowledges the assistance of MRC National Institute for Medical Research in developing these guidelines.

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<thead>
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<th>Contact details</th>
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</thead>
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Section 1: THESIS COMMITTEE OVERVIEW

Introduction: the function and role of the Thesis Committee

All Research Students (both MPhil/PhD and MD(Res) registered in the Division of Infection and Immunity starting after 1st September 2013 will be 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 staff 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/.

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 and signed by all TC members.

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.

**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. 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.

**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**

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

**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.
- 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. The TC members will need to sign it off.

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 sent to the Postgraduate Research Administrator by email 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 TC members are expected to attend the presentation.

The objectives of the transfer report are:
• To provide training in how to write up research for publication in top class journals.

• To summarise what the student has done during the first year, 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 problem 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 Content, Submission & Viva
Detailed guidelines for Students can be found on the Division website: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/infection-immunity/study/phd/current_students/#mphil_upgrade

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 by your Primary Supervisor and sent to the Postgraduate Research Administrator along with the TC report, who will then arrange Divisional Graduate Tutor approval and your status will be upgraded on Portico.

Further information on the upgrade process can be found here:

http://www.ucl.ac.uk/current-students/research_degrees/upgrade_mphil_phd

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.

**Thesis Outline and Final Experiments**

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.
- 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.
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.

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 Report Form (page 10).

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.

Students can submit their thesis outline to the TC anytime between TC3 and the end of March 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 will need to sign-off the Log entry.
Upgrade Thesis Committee Meeting Report Form (TC3)

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<tr>
<td>Name of thesis committee members: 1.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
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*Please provide a succinct review of the Student’s viva and Upgrade Report*

Overall the Student’s report was:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Above average</th>
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<th>Average</th>
<th>Below average</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>We recommend that the Student is upgraded to PhD</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>We recommend that upgrade to PhD is deferred*</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Signed by a representative member of the thesis committee (NOT the Second Supervisor)</th>
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Signature: Date:

* If this option is selected please ensure your decision is clearly justified. The Graduate Tutor will contact you to arrange an additional meeting with the Student and their supervisor.