

Queen Square Institute of Neurology

Thesis Committee Meeting Guidelines

September 2020

We acknowledge the UCL Cancer Institute for sharing their documentation on which the development of these guidelines was based.

Institute Contacts

Name	Role	Contact details
Prof. Steve Kennerley	DGT. Queen Square Institute of Neurology	s.kennerley@ucl.ac.uk
Miss Tracy Skinner	Research Degree Programme Coordinator	t.skinner@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Dave Thomas	RDGT. Dept. Brain Repair and Rehabilitation	d.thomas@ucl.ac.uk
Prof. Sven Bestmann	RDGT. Dept. Clinical and Movement Neurosciences (Queen Square site)	s.bestmann@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Jan-Willem Taanman	RDGT. Dept. Clinical and Movement Neurosciences (Royal Free site)	j.taanman@ucl.ac.uk
Prof. Louis Lemieux	RDGT. Dept. Clinical and Experimental Epilepsy	louis.lemieux@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Frances Wiseman	RDGT. Dept. Dementia Research Institute	f.wiseman@ucl.ac.uk
Prof. John Ashburner	RDGT. Imaging Neuroscience	j.ashburner@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Jo Barnes	RDGT. Dept. Neurodegenerative Disease	j.barnes@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Tammaryn Lashley	RDGT. Dept. Neurodegenerative Disease	t.lashley@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Rachael Scahill	RDGT. Dept. Neurodegenerative Disease	r.scahill@ucl.ac.uk
Prof. Claudia Wheeler-Kingshott	RDGT. Dept. Neuroinflammation	c.wheeler-kingshott@ucl.ac.uk
Dr. Robert Pitceathly	RDGT. Dept. Neuromuscular Diseases	r.pitceathly@ucl.ac.uk
Prof. Paul Whiting	RDGT. Dept. Neuromuscular Diseases	p.whiting@ucl.ac.uk

DGT = Departmental Graduate Tutor

RDGT = Research Department Graduate Tutor

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Change Log

Version 2.0 June 2020

Added clarification that students should give a presentation at their first TC meeting, page 6
Personal development plan now requires that the individual who will supervise the acquisition of certain technical skills be named, page 21
RDGT signature now required on the TC Panel form, page 16
Ethics evaluation form updated to include question on whether ethics approval has already been obtained, pages 18-20

Version 3.0 December 2020

Added clarification that primary supervisors should attend the first TC meeting but no further meetings, page 3
Addition of student name on the TC Panel form, page 16
TC forms should be sent to the Research Degree Programme Coordinator, page 9
Clarification of the submission of upgrade panel report, page 7 and 11
Institute contacts have been updated, page 1

Version 4.0 July 2021

Protected writing time for Clinical PhD students, page 4
Clarification on flexibility of TC timepoints, page 4
Clarification on upgrade thesis word limit, page 12
Institute contacts have been updated, page 1

Section 1: Thesis Committee Overview

Function and Role of the Thesis Committee (see Appendix for FAQs)

All MPhil/PhD students registered in the School of Life and Medical Sciences starting after 1st September 2019 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 Subsidiary Supervisor and at least two additional members with relevant academic experience, but who are not from the same laboratory as the Primary Supervisor. These members may be UCL staff or external to UCL, but at least one should be a member of UCL academic staff. They may include Research Fellows (e.g. postdocs) or Emeritus members of staff. The TC will be chaired by the Subsidiary Supervisor, but could be chaired by one of the other members of the TC, if it was deemed that they had more relevant expertise. Primary Supervisors do not form part of the TC, but can do in exceptional circumstances, as approved by the DGT. Primary Supervisors are allowed to attend TC1 but no further TC meetings.

The Primary Supervisor continues to supervise the Student's research project on a day-to-day basis. The TC acts to support both the Student and Supervisor throughout the PhD programme.

The Research Departmental Graduate Tutor (RDGT) has responsibility for approving the TC members at the beginning of the PhD, taking into account the views of the Student, supervisors, DGT and HoD. The TC members must be approved by the RDGT/DGT and the HoD (see below) within one month of registering for a PhD. It is expected that all UCL staff who supervise PhD students will serve on TCs.

Members of the TC cannot act as final PhD examiners.

Formal meetings with the TC are scheduled over the course of the programme (see below for full-time and part-time students), 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 TC Chair prepares a short report of the outcomes of a TC meeting and sends this to the Student and members of the committee. If all agree that this reflects the outcome of the meetings, the Student gives a copy to their Primary Supervisor and the Student enters the report onto the UCL Research Log.

The timeline outlined below is for a conventional 3-year PhD studentship and for 1+3 year PhD studentships. In the case of a 1+3 studentship, the timeline starts after the first year rotation period has concluded. In both cases, submission should be within 4 years of initiating the PhD. Part-time student programmes are generally five years and part-time students should submit within five years.

In the event that a Student enters Continuing Research Status (CRS), the TC should remain active and continue to meet every six months.

Table 1. Summary of the schedule, reporting and presentation requirements

Thesis committee meeting	Written report	Presentation	Timing Full-time	Timing* Part time
TC Panel form	Yes (max 300 words)	No	1 month	1 month
TC1, Preliminary Research Plan	Yes (~1,000 words)	Yes	3 months	6 months
TC2, 9 Months report	Yes (~1,000 words)	Yes	9 months	15 months
TC3, Meeting	No	Yes	18 months	30 months
TC4, Meeting	No	Yes	24 months	39 months
TC5, Thesis outline	Yes (plan of thesis)	Yes	30 months	48 months

*The suggested timing of TC committee meetings for part-time students is scheduled for students who would take the maximum time allowed to complete their part-time PhD. However, many part-time students set out to complete in a much shorter timescale. At the beginning of the PhD, the Student, Supervisors and TC should consider what might be a likely time scale for the PhD and then schedule the timing of the TC meetings accordingly.

Clinical PhD students typically do not have a CRS year to write-up the PhD (as they must return to clinic at the end of the 3rd year). To ensure that clinical PhD students complete on time, the SLMS PhD committee recommends a period of protected writing time in the final year of the PhD. The IoN recommendations are that for clinical students i) at the start of the PhD, all Supervisors should discuss and agree with their student and the thesis committee (TC) the number of monthly/weekly hours they are expected to dedicate to clinics and similar activities, ii) Supervisors should make every effort to accommodate requests by clinical PhD students to work fewer clinical hours in the final 3-6 months of the PhD to allow time for thesis writing unless there is some justification otherwise, iii) the TC will provide oversight that the clinical workload is not impinging on the PhD, and any concerns should be referred directly to the DGT.

For all PhD students, these suggested TC and upgrade timings are flexible depending on the timeline of your PhD and are a form of guidance to ensure that you remain on track for your PhD. In most cases, the student will successfully progress through their PhD programme and submit their thesis on-time. If you are late with meeting these timepoints, you should arrange a discussion with your RDGT for guidance.

At the 9 month TC meeting, the TC recommends whether the Student should progress to Upgrade. In most cases, it is expected that the TC will recommend Upgrade.

If the TC does not support progression to Upgrade, the TC should recommend set objectives for the Student to achieve and schedule another meeting (usually within 3 months) to review whether the student is ready to proceed to Upgrade. The Student should also be referred to the DGT to discuss the reason for insufficient progression and possible solutions of alternatives as appropriate. The DGT may - in agreement with the Student and

Supervisors - impose a Learning Agreement which defines progression milestones, timelines and potential consequences of insufficient progress. If a student fails their Upgrade, they may have a second attempt within the next six months. In this case, the timeline for TC meetings should be adjusted to best support the Student throughout their PhD, or if the second attempt at the upgrade fails, in completing their MPhil.

Table 2 Summary of TC Committee Meetings

TC Panel Meetings	Attending	Structure of Meeting	Purpose	Actions Post Meeting
Approval of TC Panel 1 month	Primary Supervisor Subsidiary Supervisor Student RDGT (if possible)	<p>The Supervisors and Student discuss the project and potential TC committee members.</p> <p>A plan of required project skills (see Personal Development Plan worksheet) should be discussed (i.e., methods, analysis), with individuals identified to provide necessary supervision (supervisors, lab members, collaborators).</p>	To ensure that the overall topic of the thesis has been determined and to decide on the membership of the TC. This should be balanced in terms of expertise and stage of career (e.g. would not contain two postdocs)	<p>Student submits a TC Panel Form (TCPF) with a description of the project (300 words max), and the nominated TC members to Tracy Skinner in the Education Unit (within one month of registering).</p> <p>The RDGT and HoD approves the TC membership</p> <p>The TC Panel nomination form can be found at the link below*</p>
TC 1 3 months	TC Committee Primary Supervisor Student	<p>Student provides TC with the following one week in advance of the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preliminary Research Plan (~ 1000 words) - Personal Development Plan - Ethics Evaluation Form <p>The Student gives a 15-20 minute presentation to the TC to outline their research plan and progress.</p> <p>The documents and presentation form the basis of the discussion between the Student, the Primary Supervisor and the TC.</p> <p>The TC1 checklist is completed.</p>	<p>Demonstrate that the Student understands and can explain their project and initial aims.</p> <p>Recommend to the Student any possible changes or additions to the project plan.</p> <p>Confirm that the Student has considered and is covered by any required ethical or H&S approvals.</p> <p>Discuss the Student’s Personal Development Plan including skills/supervision plan</p>	<p>The Chair of the TC provides a short report on the TC1-CL form which is sent to the Student, Primary Supervisor & TC.</p> <p>If all agree this is representative of the meeting, the Student uploads the TC1 checklist (TC1-CL) to the Research Log together with the preliminary research plan (TC1-PRP), presentation, ethics evaluation form (TC1-EE) and personal development plan (PDP).</p> <p>The entry is approved by the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors and the RDGT.</p>

				The TC Panel forms can be found at the link below*
TC2 9 months	TC Committee Student	<p>Student provides TC with the following two weeks in advance of the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a 1,000 word Progress Report describing key findings, plan of future work outline for upgrade report - a Personal Development Plan <p>The Student gives a 15-20 minute presentation to the TC that ends with a plan for the Upgrade Report content.</p> <p>The documents and presentation form the basis for discussion.</p> <p>The TC2 checklist is completed.</p>	<p>Provide an independent review of student progress.</p> <p>Provide formative feedback on progress of project, student's presentation skills, and the student's understanding of their data and the broader field.</p> <p>Suggest recommendations (if needed) regarding the future project plan.</p> <p>Discuss the Student's Upgrade plans.</p> <p>Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan</p>	<p>The Chair of the TC provides a short report on the TC2-CL form which is sent to the Student and TC.</p> <p>If all agree this is representative of the meeting, the TC sends the report to the Primary Supervisor. The Student uploads the TC2 checklist (TC2-CL) to the Research Log together with the Progress Report, presentation and personal development plan (PDP).</p> <p>The entry is approved by the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors and the RDGT.</p>
Upgrade from MPhil to PhD 9 – 18 months	<p>TC Committee Student</p> <p>An external examiner may be invited if the TC and / or Primary Supervisor considered that this would be helpful, but it is not a requirement.</p>	<p>The Student will submit their Upgrade Report (thesis) to the TC (and any additional examiners) two weeks before their scheduled seminar and <i>viva</i>.</p> <p>The Student will present a seminar to their Research Department.</p> <p>A formal Upgrade <i>viva</i> will be conducted by the TC (and</p>	<p>Assess student's progress and potential as appropriate for a PhD student at this stage*.</p> <p>Suggest (if needed) possible changes to the future project plans, or any particular development needs of the student.</p>	<p>The Student uploads their Thesis, Presentation and 'Upgrade Panel Report' to be reviewed and signed by the RDGT/DGT.</p> <p>The template for the Upgrade Panel Report and other information about Upgrade Guidelines can be found below*</p>

		examiner). The Subsidiary Supervisor, TC Chair should chair the presentation and <i>viva</i> but should not be considered an upgrade examiner. The Primary Supervisor should <i>not</i> be present for viva.	Recommend upgrade of student from MPhil to PhD, or the need for re-assessment within 6 months.	The completed Upgrade Panel Report should be sent to Tracy Skinner.
*All TC forms and Upgrade Guidelines: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ion/study/postgraduate-research-degrees/research-degree-faqs				
TC3 18 months	TC Committee Student	<p>The Student gives a 15-20 minute presentation to the TC on their progress since the Upgrade and their plans for the next six months.</p> <p>The presentation forms the basis for discussion with the TC.</p> <p>The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.</p> <p>The TC3 checklist is completed.</p>	<p>To ensure that everything is on track, and that it has been possible to take on board any recommendations following the Upgrade.</p> <p>To determine whether any problems have been encountered and advise the Student accordingly.</p> <p>Review the objectives.</p> <p>Review training progress and identify training / personal development needs.</p>	<p>The Chair of the TC provides a short report on the TC3-CL form which is sent to the Student and TC.</p> <p>If all agree this is representative of the meeting, the TC sends the report to the Primary Supervisor. The Student uploads the TC3 checklist (TC3-CL) to the Research Log together with the presentation and personal development plan (PDP).</p> <p>The entry is approved by the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors and the RDGT.</p>
TC4 24 months	TC Committee Student	The student gives a 15-20 minute presentation of their progress with clear objectives for the next six months.	To discuss any areas of the project that may have encountered problems or are falling behind schedule and advise the Student accordingly.	The Chair of the TC provides a short report on the TC4-CL form which is sent to the Student and TC.

		<p>The presentation forms the basis for discussion with the TC.</p> <p>The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.</p> <p>The TC4 checklist is completed.</p>	<p>Review the objectives.</p> <p>Review training progress and identify training / personal development needs.</p>	<p>If all agree this is representative of the meeting, the TC sends the report to the Primary Supervisor. The Student uploads the TC4 checklist (TC4-CL) to the Research Log together with the presentation and personal development plan (PDP).</p> <p>The entry is approved by the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors and the RDGT.</p>
TC5 30 months	TC Committee Student	<p>Student provides TC with the following two weeks in advance of the meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thesis Outline describing planned detailed structure of the thesis and any final experiments requiring completion. - an updated Personal Development Plan. <p>Student gives a 15-20 minute presentation to TC to expand on their report.</p> <p>The report and presentation form the basis for discussion with the TC</p> <p>The personal development plan is reviewed and updated.</p> <p>The TC5 checklist is completed.</p>	<p>Provide an independent review of student progress.</p> <p>Provide formative feedback on proposed thesis structure, student's presentation skills, and the student's understanding of their data and the broader field. Suggest recommendations (if needed) regarding any outstanding experimental plans leading up to final submission.</p> <p>Review training progress and identify training / personal development needs.</p>	<p>The Chair of the TC provides a short report on the TC5-CL form which is sent to the Student and TC.</p> <p>If all agree this is representative of the meeting, the TC sends the report to the Primary Supervisor. The Student uploads the TC5 checklist (TC5-CL) to the Research Log together with the thesis outline, presentation and personal development plan (PDP).</p> <p>The entry is approved by the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors and the RDGT.</p>

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 in case your TC wishes to discuss an experiment in detail.

Following the meeting you will receive a report of the TC from the chair, you will need to complete your UCL Research Log of the meeting and attach the relevant documentation (as detailed in Table 2).

Thesis Committee Nomination meeting (1 month)

It is your responsibility to meet with your Supervisors in the first month of your PhD to outline your research project including a skills/supervision plan, and nominate TC Panel members. You must submit the 'TC Panel' form to Tracy Skinner, the Research Degree Programme Coordinator, for approval by the RDGT and HoD no later than 2 months into your PhD.

TC1 Thesis Committee meeting 1 – (Preliminary Research Plan) (3 months)

NOTE: it is advised that you arrange a date for the meeting one month in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare Submission

Your Preliminary Research Plan Form, Ethics Evaluation Form and Personal Development Plan should be completed by you and approved by your Principal Supervisor, and then sent to all members of your Thesis Committee at least one week before your meeting.

Discussion

You should present a 15-20 minute oral powerpoint presentation to include the project outline, progress to date and your experimental plan. The presentation, together with your Preliminary Research Plan, Ethics Evaluation and Personal Development Plan will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

You should discuss any training requirements required for successful completion of the initial project aims and as proposed in your Personal Development Plan.

Outcome

Members of your TC will provide feedback. Following the TC meeting, you should revise your plan, if required, and send it to your Primary Supervisor and TC members to approve.

The TC1 Checklist will be completed by the Chair of your TC at the meeting.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare a report and send it to you and to your Primary Supervisor and TC members for approval. You should upload your Preliminary Research Plan, Ethics Evaluation Form, Personal Development Plan and TC1 Meeting Checklist with Report to the Research Log. You should complete the relevant sections in the Research Log.

TC2 Thesis Committee meeting 2 (progress toward Upgrade) (9 months)

NOTE: it is advised that you arrange a date for the meeting one month in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare Submission

Your Progress Report (1,000 words max) should contain a written summary of progress to date with representative figures of data obtained, and a plan of future experiments with a timeline. It should be approved by your Primary Supervisor. The Progress Report, together with your Personal Development Plan should be sent to all members of your Thesis Committee at least two weeks before your meeting.

Discussion

You should present a 15-20 minute oral powerpoint presentation to include the project outline, progress to date and a plan of future experiments. You should have a plan for the content and timing of your Upgrade.

The Progress Report and the Oral Presentation will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

The TC will consider and advise you on your Upgrade plans.

You should also discuss any training requirements for your experimental work and for your personal / career development.

You should set a date for your Upgrade.

Outcome

The TC must be satisfied that you have made satisfactory progress during the first 9 months. If this is the case, they will give feedback on your research plans and on the work that you should aim to complete before your Upgrade *viva*.

If the TC considers that satisfactory progress has not been made, your DGT and RDGT will be informed and your Primary Supervisor and TC – in coordination with the RDGT/DGT – will set objectives that you will be required to meet within a defined period of time (usually 3 months) if you are to continue on the programme.

The TC2 Checklist will be completed by the Chair of your TC at the meeting.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare a report and send it to you and to your TC members for approval. You should upload your Progress Report, Personal Development Plan, powerpoint presentation and TC2 Meeting Checklist with Report to the Research Log. You should complete the relevant sections in the Research Log.

You should set a date for the Upgrade presentation and the *viva*. Details about the upgrade seminar (i.e., title, venue, time) should be emailed to all members of the Department (ask your Departmental Administrator to email seminar details) *at least* two weeks before the planned Upgrade.

Upgrade (9 – 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 (Thesis) and *viva*. The Upgrade Panel Report and information relating to the Upgrade can be found at: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ion/study/postgraduate-research-degrees/research-degree-faqs>:

The examiners will be looking for:

- Commitment to pursuing research at UCL leading to the PhD degree.
- Satisfactory progress in the work so far.

- 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 and sufficient awareness of the context of the work.
- Satisfactory technical and generic skills development.
- English language proficiency, both written and spoken.

Prepare Submission

You need to produce an upgrade report (7,000 – 10,000 words* maximum) summarising your project background and hypothesis, detailing your progress and key findings to date, and outlining your future aims, expectations and timeline for the remainder of your degree. It should be approved by your Primary Supervisor, and then sent to all members of your Thesis Committee and any additional examiners at least two weeks before your meeting seminar and *viva*.

*Word limit is excluding references and figure/table legends.

Discussion

You will give a formal seminar to your Research Department, after which you should be prepared to answer questions from the audience. Your seminar will be followed by a *viva* examination of your Thesis by your TC and possibly additional examiners.

Outcome

If your progress has been satisfactory, your TC will recommend upgrade. If they consider that you are not yet on course to complete a PhD, and you fail your Upgrade, you can have a second attempt within 6 months.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare the Upgrade Panel Report. You should upload your Thesis, seminar presentation and the Upgrade Panel Report to the Research Log. Your Upgrade Panel Report should also be sent to Tracy Skinner, Research Degree Programme Coordinator.

TC3 Thesis Committee meeting 3 (Post Upgrade) (18 months)

NOTE: it is advised that you arrange a date for the meeting one month in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare Submission

Your Personal Development Report and Plan should be approved by your Principal Supervisor, and then sent to all members of your Thesis Committee at least one week before your meeting. You should prepare a 15-20 minute powerpoint presentation of your research progress and aims for the next 6 months, having taken into account any recommendations at your Upgrade.

Discussion

Your presentation and Personal Development Report and Plan will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

You should also discuss any training requirements for your experimental work and for your personal / career development.

Outcome

Members of your TC will provide feedback.

The TC3 Checklist will be completed by the Chair of your TC at the meeting.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare a report and send it to you and to your TC members for approval. You should upload the approved TC report, your presentation, Personal Development Plan and TC3 Meeting Checklist with Report to the Research Log. You should complete the relevant sections in the Research Log.

TC4 Thesis Committee meeting 4 (24 months)

NOTE: it is advised that you arrange a date for the meeting one month in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare Submission

Your Personal Development Report and Plan should be approved by your Principal Supervisor, and then sent to all members of your Thesis Committee at least one week before your meeting. You should prepare a 15-20 minute powerpoint presentation of your research progress and aims for the next 6 months, having taken into account any recommendations at your Upgrade.

Discussion

Your presentation and Personal Development Report and Plan will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

You should also discuss any training requirements for your experimental work and for your personal / career development.

Outcome

Members of your TC will provide feedback.

The TC4 Checklist will be completed by the Chair of TC at the meeting.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare a report and send it to you and to your TC members for approval. You should upload your presentation, Personal Development Plan and TC4 Meeting Checklist with Report to the Research Log. You should complete the relevant sections in the Research Log.

TC5 Thesis Committee meeting 5 – (Progress toward Completion) (30 months)

NOTE: it is advised that you arrange a date for the meeting one month in advance to ensure completion of the meeting before the deadline.

Prepare Submission

You should prepare a Thesis Outline containing a detailed 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 Primary Supervisor and your TC all have a clear idea about what you will be doing over the final months. This document, together with your Personal Development report and Plan should be sent to all members of your TC at least two weeks before your meeting.

Discussion

You should present a 15-20 minute oral presentation supported by powerpoint slides, to explain your thesis structure, the key scientific conclusions that you will present, and a timeline for completion of any outstanding experiments and the thesis writing.

The Thesis Outline, oral presentation and Personal Development Plan will form the basis of your discussion with the TC.

You should also discuss any training requirements needed to support your successful completion, or desired for your personal / career development.

Outcome

Members of your TC will give feedback on your Thesis Outline and the experiments required to complete your experimental work. Following the TC meeting, any revision to your plan should be approved by your Primary Supervisor and TC members.

The TC5 Checklist will be completed by the Chair of your TC at the TC meeting.

Student Action

The Chair of your TC will prepare a report and send it to you and to your TC members for approval. You should upload your presentation, Personal Development Plan and TC5 Meeting Checklist with Report to the Research Log. You should complete the relevant sections in the Research Log.

Section 3: Guidelines for Thesis Committee Members

Responsibilities of Thesis Committee Members

- Meet with the Student at the designated times (minimum five times) throughout the progress of the PhD.
- The Subsidiary Supervisor usually Chairs the Thesis Committee
- Respond to the Student promptly with timetabling requests
- Read Student reports prior to the TC meetings. The Student should typically provide the reports 1-2 weeks in advance of each meeting
- Respond to the student should they request additional meetings with any members of the TC
- The Chair is responsible for the timely preparation of TC committee reports and feedback
- The TC should respond promptly to the Chair in approving the report
- The TC committee examines the Student's Upgrade from MPhil to PhD
- Raise any concerns regarding the Student's academic progress and/or supervision with the DGT. Serious concerns as to the Student's well-being should be raised with the DGT immediately.
- The Primary Supervisor, Subsidiary Supervisor and RDGT sign off the Research Log. The RDGT will have access to the Research Log.

TC1 Thesis Committee meeting 1 – (Preliminary Research Plan) (3 months)

- Discuss the Student's Preliminary Research Plan with the Student and Primary Supervisor and confirm that a suitable PhD project has been proposed and that the initial experimental plan is appropriate. Provide feedback for the oral presentation. The TC may make suggestions for additions or amendments to the plan.
- Ensure that the Student has considered and is aware of any ethical, legal or H&S issues relating to their project, and, where these exist, that the Student has identified the relevant Research Ethics Committee (REC) approval, risk assessment, GM approval, HO animal licence or other necessary guidance/regulations. If ethics approval is required for research performed in the PhD, the appropriate ethics application *must be submitted* prior to this meeting. It is the responsibility of the *Primary Supervisor* to ensure that these are in place.
- Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan (including skills/supervision plan) and their intended training programme. It is important to ensure that the supervisor(s) and/or senior

lab members will be available to provide direct training of required techniques/approaches (i.e., methods/analyses). Any potential gaps in training support should be identified and resolved (e.g., by adding additional supervisors, collaborators); contact the RDGT/DGT if concerns remain.

- The TC Chair will complete the TC1 Meeting Checklist that includes a short report and distribute this to the Student, Primary Supervisor and TC members for approval.

TC2 Thesis Committee meeting 2 – (Progress toward Upgrade) (9 months)

- Discuss and provide feedback on the Student's Progress Report, oral presentation and research plan. The TC may make suggestions for additions or amendments to the plan.
- Discuss and review the Student's Upgrade plans and provide feedback on the realistic timing for this.
- Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan and their intended training programme. Ensure that the supervisory team (and/or host lab) are providing direct training/support for required techniques. Add additional supervisors/collaborators if gaps are identified.
- The TC Chair will complete the TC2 Meeting Checklist that includes a short report and distribute this to the Student and TC members for approval.
- Should the TC have concerns about the Student's progress and potential for PhD study, they should inform the DGT and RDGT. The TC, together with the Primary Supervisor and RDGT/DGT, should prepare a set of progress targets for the Student to achieve over a 3 month period.

TC3 Thesis Committee meeting 3 – (Post Upgrade) (15 months)

- Discuss and provide feedback on the Student's oral presentation and research plan that have taken into account any issues that were raised at the Upgrade. The TC may make suggestions for additions or amendments to the plan.
- Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan and their intended training programme. Ensure that the supervisory team (and/or host lab) are providing direct training/support for required techniques. Add additional supervisors/collaborators if gaps are identified.
- The TC Chair will complete the TC3 Meeting Checklist that includes a short report and distribute this to the Student and TC members for approval.

TC4 Thesis Committee meeting 4 (24 months)

- Discuss and provide feedback on the Student's oral presentation and research plan. The TC may make suggestions for additions or amendments to the plan.
- Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan and their intended training programme.
- The TC Chair will complete the TC4 Meeting Checklist that includes a short report and distribute this to the Student and TC members for approval.

TC5 Thesis Committee meeting 5 – (Progress toward Completion) (30 months)

- Discuss and provide feedback on the Student's oral presentation and Outline Thesis plan. Discuss and make any recommendations on the thesis structure, outstanding experimental / analytical work as appropriate
- Discuss the Student's Personal Development Plan and their intended training programme.
- The TC Chair will complete the TC5 Meeting Checklist that includes a short report and distribute this to the Student and TC members.

All full time PhD students should submit their thesis within 4 years of registration. In the event that a student enters a Continuing Research Studies (CRS) year, the TC should continue to meet on a 6 month basis to support the Student in the completion of their PhD studies.

Section 4: Form Templates

Attached are templates for the following forms, required for the TC Meetings and Research Log.

1. TC Panel form (TCPF)
2. Preliminary Research Plan Form (TC1-PRP)
3. Ethics Evaluation Form (for TC1-EE)
4. Personal Development Plan Form (PDP)
5. First Thesis Committee Meeting Checklist (TC1-CL)
6. Second Thesis Committee Meeting Checklist (TC2-CL)
7. Third Thesis Committee Meeting Checklist (TC3-CL)
8. Fourth Thesis Committee Meeting Checklist (TC4-CL)
9. Fifth Thesis Committee Meeting Checklist (TC5-CL)

All TC forms and Upgrade Guidelines: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ion/study/postgraduate-research-degrees/research-degree-faqs>

TC Panel Form (TCPF)

Student name:

Provide the Title of your PhD Project

Provide an abstract of your proposed research (300 words)

Name	Role	Contact details
	Primary Supervisor	
	Subsidiary Supervisor	
	TC Member	
	TC Member	
	RDGT	

Add boxes for additional members if required.

Student and Supervisors confirm they have discussed required skills (see Personal Development Plan) and identified individuals that will supervise skill acquisition.

Please tick box if the above statement is correct

Research Student Signature _____ **Date** _____

Primary Supervisor Signature _____ **Date** _____

Subsidiary Supervisor Signature _____ **Date** _____

RDGT Signature _____ **Date** _____

Preliminary Research Plan Form (TC1-PRP)

Title

Abstract (200 words)

Provide a succinct review of the key background 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 = 1000 words (excluding bibliography)

Ethics Evaluation Form (TC1-EE)

1. During your project, will you use human tissue or blood? Yes No

If no, go to question 2. If yes, answer questions 1a-1d.

a) What human materials will you use, and for what purposes?

b) How will you obtain this material, and what is the mechanism for ensuring and recording that informed consent is given?

c) How is the storage of these materials compliant with the Human Tissue Act 2004?

d) Provide details of the relevant Research Ethics Committee approval and whether approval has been obtained.

2. Will you be using patient data or details of their clinical management? Yes No

If no, go to question 3. If yes, answer questions 2a-2d.

a) What information will be used, and what will be done with this information?

b) How will this information be collected, and what is the mechanism for ensuring and recording that informed consent is given?

c) How will any identifiable or coded data be protected during storage?

d) Provide details of the relevant Research Ethics Committee approval and whether approval has been obtained.

3. Will you be using any other personal data (e.g. questionnaire results)? **Yes** **No**

If no, go to question 4. If yes, answer questions 3a-3d.

a) What information will be used, and what will be done with this information?

b) How will this information be collected, and what is the mechanism for ensuring and recording that informed consent is given?

c) How will any identifiable or coded data be protected during storage?

d) Provide details of the relevant Research Ethics Committee approval and whether approval has been obtained.

4. Will you be working with live animals or animal tissues? **Yes** **No**

If no, go to question 5. If yes, answer questions 4a-4d.

a) What animal or animal tissue related work will be done?

b) Provide details of the Home Office project animal licence that covers this work or go to question 4d.

c) If you will conduct animal work yourself, provide details of your Home Office personal animal licence that covers this work.

d) If no animal licences are required for this work, provide details of why this is the case.

5. Will you be using micro-organisms? **Yes** **No**

If no, go to question 6. If yes, answer questions 5a-5b.

a) Which organisms will be used, and to which Hazard Group do these belong according to the HSE?

b) Provide details confirming that the laboratory where the work will be carried out meets the appropriate Containment Level for those organisms.

6. Will you be using mammalian cell lines? **Yes** **No**

If no, go to question 7. If yes, answer questions 6a-6b.

a) Which cell lines will be used?

b) Provide details confirming that the laboratory where the work will be carried out meets the appropriate Containment Level for those cell cultures.

7. Will you be using or producing genetically modified cells or organisms? **Yes** **No**

If no, go to question 8. If yes, answer questions 7a-7b.

a) What modifications will be performed on what cell lines or organisms?

b) Provide details of the relevant HSE approval for this work.

8. Have you read and confirmed all relevant documents related to ethics applications, Home Office licences, HSE approvals, HTA licence or biological risk assessments for your project?

Yes **No**

Research Student Signature _____

Date _____

Primary Supervisor Signature _____

Date _____

Subsidiary Supervisor Signature _____

Date _____

Personal Development Plan (PDP)

Before your TC, consider your current skill set and what areas you think it important to develop. For skills related to experimental techniques and data analysis, you and your Supervisor(s) need to identify who will provide direct support/supervision for these skills. This can either be a Supervisor, immediate lab member, or collaborator.

Fill in your PDP form before your TC1 meeting and then updated it ahead of each of your subsequent TC meetings. You may wish to modify your training plan after discussion with your TC.

Suggested courses may come from UCL's Doctoral Skills Development Programme, external courses, conferences, workshops (internal/external), local training events, etc.

We ask that you consider your skills and development need in each of the below areas, although you needn't include something under each heading each time.

Skill area: Statistics / Mathematical packages / IT

Skill required / suggested course	Individual to supervise skill acquisition	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Research techniques / analysis / other specialised research training

Skill required / suggested course	Individual to supervise skill acquisition	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Research integrity / ethics

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Presentation / speaking

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Writing

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Teaching

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Personal / professional development

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Careers / employability

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Skill area: Other

Skill required / suggested course	Recommended time frame / date	Completion date / reason for not pursuing

Thesis Committee Meeting #1

(TC1 should take place between the Thesis Committee, Student and Primary Supervisor)

Student Status (FT/PT): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Name of Student: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Name of Primary Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Chair (Subsidiary Supervisor): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Name(s) of other Panel Members: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date of Meeting: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Tick to confirm that the following were received prior to the meeting:

Student provided completed Preliminary Research Plan form

Student provided completed Ethics Evaluation form

Student provided completed Personal Development Plan

Tick to confirm that the following occurred at the meeting:

Student successfully explained the preliminary research plan and initial aims

Feedback (as appropriate) on the research plan has been provided by the TC

Any training needed for these initial aims has been identified

TC confirmed that appropriate ethical and H&S approval exists for this project

TC confirmed that a personal development plan is in place

Student meets/discusses project with Primary Supervisor: **weekly** **monthly** **< monthly**

TC confirmed that student progress and development to date is appropriate

Was anything raised requiring the attention of the RDGT/DGT? **YES** **NO**

The Chair of TC should provide a short summary of the meeting below (expand box as necessary):

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Thesis Committee Meeting #2

(TC2 should take place between the Thesis Committee and Student)

Student Status (please tick one box)

- PhD Full-time student (meeting should take place at 9 months)
PhD Part-time student (meeting should take place by 15 months)

Name of Student: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name of Primary Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Chair (Subsidiary Supervisor): [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name(s) of other Panel Members: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Date of Meeting: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Tick to confirm that the following were received prior to the meeting:

- Student provided written Progress Report (1000 words)
Student provided a Personal Development Report and Plan

Tick to confirm that the following occurred at the meeting:

- Student gave a clear 15-20-minute presentation of their project to date
Student showed understanding of current data and its interpretation
Student has a sound proposal for future work
Feedback (as appropriate) on the research project has been provided by the TC
Any training needed for these project aims has been identified
The Student's Upgrade plans have been discussed
TC confirmed that the personal development has been discussed
TC confirmed that student progress and development to date is appropriate
Student meets/discusses project with Primary Supervisor: **weekly** **monthly** **< monthly**
Student and TC confirmed that the supervision of the Student's project is appropriate
Was anything raised requiring the attention of the RDGT/DGT? **YES** **NO**

The Chair of TC should provide a short summary of the meeting below (expand box as necessary):

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Thesis Committee Meeting #3

(TC3 should take place between the Thesis Committee and Student)

Student Status (please tick one box)

- PhD Full-time student (meeting should take place at 18 months)
PhD Part-time student (meeting should take place by 30 months)

- Name of Student:** [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name of Primary Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Chair (Subsidiary Supervisor): [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name(s) of other Panel Members: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Date of Meeting: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Tick to confirm that the following were received prior to the meeting:

- Student provided a Personal Development Report and Plan

Tick to confirm that the following occurred at the meeting:

- Student gave a clear 15-20-minute presentation of their project to date
Student showed understanding of current data and its interpretation
Student has a sound proposal for future work
Feedback (as appropriate) on the research project has been provided by the TC
Any training needed for these project aims has been identified
TC confirmed that the personal development has been discussed
TC confirmed that student progress and development to date is appropriate
Student meets/discusses project with Primary Supervisor: **weekly** **monthly** **< monthly**
Student and TC confirmed that the supervision of the Student's project is appropriate
Was anything raised requiring the attention of the RDGT/DGT? **YES** **NO**

The Chair of TC should provide a short summary of the meeting below (expand box as necessary):

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Thesis Committee Meeting #4

(TC4 should take place between the Thesis Committee and Student)

Student Status (please tick one box)

- PhD Full-time student (meeting should take place at 24 months)
PhD Part-time student (meeting should take place by 39 months)

Name of Student: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Name of Primary Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Chair (Subsidiary Supervisor): [Click here to enter text.](#)

Name(s) of other Panel Members: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Date of Meeting: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Tick to confirm that the following were received prior to the meeting:

- Student provided a Personal Development Report and Plan

Tick to confirm that the following occurred at the meeting:

- Student gave a clear 15-20-minute presentation of their project to date
Student showed understanding of current data and its interpretation
Student has a sound proposal for future work
Feedback (as appropriate) on the research project has been provided by the TC
Any training needed for these project aims has been identified
TC confirmed that the personal development has been discussed
TC confirmed that student progress and development to date is appropriate
Student meets/discusses project with Primary Supervisor: **weekly** **monthly** **< monthly**
Student and TC confirmed that the supervision of the Student's project is appropriate
Was anything raised requiring the attention of the RDGT/DGT? **YES** **NO**

The Chair of TC should provide a short summary of the meeting below (expand box as necessary):

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Thesis Committee Meeting #5

(TC5 should take place between the Thesis Committee and Student)

Student Status (please tick one box)

- PhD Full-time student (meeting should take place at 30 months)
PhD Part-time student (meeting should take place by 48 months)

Name of Student: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name of Primary Supervisor: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Chair (Subsidiary Supervisor): [Click here to enter text.](#)
Name(s) of other Panel Members: [Click here to enter text.](#)
Date of Meeting: [Click here to enter text.](#)

Tick to confirm that the following were received prior to the meeting:

- Student provided a detailed Thesis Outline
Student provided a Personal Development Report and Plan

Tick to confirm that the following occurred at the meeting:

- Student gave a clear 15-20-min. presentation of their project & thesis outline
The Student's Thesis Outline has been discussed
Student showed understanding of current data and its interpretation
Student has a sound proposal for completion of their experimental work
Feedback (as appropriate) on the research project has been provided by the TC
Any training needed for the completion of the project has been identified
TC confirmed that the personal development has been discussed
TC confirmed that student progress and development to date is appropriate
Student meets/discusses project with Primary Supervisor: **weekly** **monthly** **< monthly**
Student and TC confirmed that the supervision of the Student's project is appropriate
Was anything raised requiring the attention of the RDGT/DGT? **YES** **NO**

The Chair of TC should provide a short summary of the meeting below (expand box as necessary):

[Click here to enter text.](#)

Appendix - FAQs

1) What is a Thesis Committee?

A Thesis Committee (TC) supports both the Student and Primary Supervisor during the course of a PhD. They provide the student with a wider intellectual input, access to broader expertise and an overview of the student's progress at prescribed points during the degree. The TC will provide feedback to students to discuss with their primary supervisors. The TC also has the primary responsibility of monitoring the overall skills training programme of the student. The TC can potentially identify concerns with research progress, supervision or training, and can raise these with the supervisor and/or DGT, as appropriate.

2) Who has responsibility for supervising the project?

The Primary Supervisor has responsibility for the overall project strategy and the day-to-day supervision of the project. The TC can report back to the primary supervisor and DGT if they feel that there are concerns with the Student's progress.

3) When are Thesis Committees going to be introduced?

All PhD students who register from September 2019 will have a TC. This will not be introduced retrospectively for existing students.

4) Who appoints the Thesis Committee members?

The Student and the Primary and Subsidiary supervisors should meet in the first month of the PhD to discuss the PhD project plan and nominate TC Panel members. The Student is required to submit a "TC Panel form" within one month of registering as a PhD Student, and no later than two months into the PhD. The TC Panel form includes a short description of the project (max 300 words) and the nominated TC Panel members. This form should be submitted to Tracy Skinner at the Education Unit (t.skinner@ucl.ac.uk). The Research Departmental Graduate Tutor (RDGT) has responsibility for approving the members of the TC taking into account the views of the Student and Primary Supervisor. They will ensure that the TC membership is balanced and consistent with that recommended by the DGT and HoD.

5) Who are the members of a Thesis Committee?

The TC comprises the Subsidiary Supervisor and at least two other members with relevant academic experience, but whom are not from the same laboratory as the Primary Supervisor. The Primary Supervisor is not a member of the TC except in exceptional circumstances as approved by the DGT.

6) Who Chairs the Thesis Committee?

The TC is chaired by the Subsidiary Supervisor, but can be chaired by one of the other members of the TC if it is deemed that they have more appropriate expertise.

7) What are the eligibility criteria for being a member of a Thesis Committee? Do all Thesis Committee members have to be approved on the UCL Electronic Record of Supervisors (EROS)?

Only the Primary and Subsidiary Supervisors need to be approved on EROS as the other TC members are not officially supervisors and do not have to fulfil the criteria for supervisors at UCL.

8) Do Thesis Committee members have to be employed at UCL?

No, of the two members that are not supervisors, one should be a member of UCL research staff, though in exceptional cases, both additional members could be external to UCL.

9) Can junior researchers be a member of a Thesis Committee?

More junior members of staff, such as post-doctoral researchers, can be members of the TCs, provided they are not from the same laboratory as the Primary Supervisor, or supporting the student directly in their research. This is a good opportunity to give postdocs experience of supporting PhD students and exposure to PhD supervision. However, a TC must be balanced and the circumstances under which a postdoc is a member of a TC will be determined by the RDGT and Head of Department.

10) Can members of the TC Panel attend meetings via video conference?

Yes, it is important that the TC meetings adhere to the schedule. As long as video conferencing (e.g., Skype) allows the TC members to see any presentation and participate in the discussion, then TC members do not have to be physically present at the TC meeting.

11) Can Thesis Committee members change during the course of the PhD?

Yes, it may make sense for a new member to join the TC, or replace one of the original members, e.g. if a change in the direction of the research would benefit from additional expertise, or a member leaves and needs to be replaced. Postdoctoral researchers may not be able to commit to TC membership for the entire PhD programme. Tracy Skinner and your RDGT should be informed of this change.

12) What happens in the event that the Primary Supervisor leaves?

The primary supervisor has responsibility to ensure the continuity of supervision and training of the PhD Student and the project.

13) Who has responsibility for uploading the Thesis Committee reports on to the Research Log?

The Chair of the TC has the responsibility for preparing the report, in consultation with the TC members and student. If all agree that this reflects the outcome of the meeting, the Student has the responsibility for uploading the report on the Research Log. The Primary Supervisor still has the responsibility for monitoring and approving Research Log events/submissions of their students.

14) How does the upgrade fit into this?

Under the UCL Doctoral School regulation, the upgrade should take place between 9 and 18 months for full time students and between 15 and 30 month for part-time students. This will take place between the second and third TC meetings.

15) What is the format of the upgrade?

Consistent with current practice at IoN, the Student will give a formal presentation of their work to their Research Department followed by a *viva*. The *viva* will be conducted by the TC. However, the TC can invite an additional examiner, who is external to the TC, should they consider this to be helpful.

16) Won't TCs deplete the pool of academics that can be invited to be final examiners?

No. if anything, TC's will increase the pool of final thesis examiners because in some cases, junior researchers (ie post-docs) will be on TCs and performing upgrade examinations in place of academics performing this role.

17) What does the TC do if they have concerns about the student's well-being?

Any concerns about the student's well-being, e.g. concerns about harassment, bullying or mental health issues should be reported to the DGT (Prof Steve Kennerley) immediately. The student should also meet with their local RDGT if they have any concerns about their PhD.

18) What about the workload exercise?

The Head of the Research Department and the DGT have the responsibility for monitoring the workload.

19) Regulations for TCs and their enforcement.

The Head of Research Department and the RDGT/DGT have the responsibility for ensuring that each student has a Thesis Committee, and that the guidelines are followed.

20) How many Thesis Committees should an academic be part of?

The expectation is that an academic should sit on one Thesis Committee for every student for whom they are a Primary Supervisor.

21) How will the additional workload of the Subsidiary Supervisor and TC members be recognized?

We are developing systems that will recognize contributions on TC membership in appraisals and promotion processes.