University *of* Exeter

HLS Faculty MPhil to PhD upgrade examination guidance: PGR students

Contents

The Faculty upgrade process aligns with the Postgraduate Research Handbook: <u>Chapter 9 - Upgrade from MPhil, MA by Research or MSc by Research to Doctoral Study</u>.

This document is intended for all students who started their PhD studies from 1st August 2023 onwards and outlines the specific Faculty requirements for the upgrade process.

For students who commenced their studies prior to 1st August 2023, please follow <u>previous guidelines</u> based on your PhD programme title or funding.

1. The purpose of the upgrade

The purpose of the upgrade process is to:

1. Confirm that you are making satisfactory progress.
2. Confirm that there is evidence that you can produce work of doctoral quality.
3. Act as a structural milestone within your research journey.

4. Provide you with formal feedback on your work, and a developmental opportunity in the form of a viva (oral examination).
5. Provide an opportunity for a detailed review of the research project and plan from experts independent of the supervisory team.

2. Upgrade timeline

1. The upgrade process, including approval of any revisions, should typically be completed no later than 12 months of full-time registration with the upgrade report deadline at 9 months. The deadline is adjusted on a pro-rata basis for students registered part-time (e.g. upgrade report deadline at 18 months for a student studying at 0.5 full time equivalent).
   Note: For some students, such as those funded via GW4, the upgrade process may be completed to a slightly adjusted timeline. The PGR support team will notify you if this applies.
2. PGR Support will notify you and your lead supervisor of the upgrade deadline on entry to the programme and will send a reminder approximately 6-8 weeks before the deadline.
3. **Deferral:** In exceptional circumstances beyond your control, applications for deferral to the deadline for transfer of registration may be made. Please contact PGR support to discuss this (hls-exeter-pgrsupport@exeter.ac.uk). The Postgraduate Research Handbook (Chapter 9, Section 4.3) should be consulted for more information (see Chapter 9, Annex 1a).

3. Structure of the upgrade process

The upgrade process can be divided into three parts, the details of which are outlined below:

a. Submission of the upgrade report
b. Examination, consisting of an oral presentation and viva (oral examination), by the upgrade examiners
c. Report from the upgrade examiners

4. Upgrade report

a. You must produce a report, **not exceeding 3,500 words.** The word limit excludes the references but includes the legends of any included tables and figures. Figures and tables in the main document should appear in-line at the appropriate place within the text as opposed to at the end of the document. The report should contain the following headings, but you can determine the order in which these are addressed in the text:
   i. Cover page with a generative AI statement (see section 10 below)
   i. Background/introduction.
      - This section should include information on the originality and contribution to knowledge of the proposed work.
   ii. Aims/hypothesis.
   iii. Proposed methodology.
   iv. An outline of progress to date, including any training.
   v. A plan and timeline for the proposed future work (including a Gantt chart).
   vi. Risks and mitigation/alternative approaches.
   vii. References.
   viii. Appendix (not to exceed 4-pages, 1cm margins, arial 11pt font, single spacing)
      Example content includes, but is not limited to:

- Indicative chapter structure for the thesis
- Systematic review protocol (where relevant)
- Conference abstracts (where relevant)

    b. You must submit the upgrade document via the 'My upgrade' link in myPGR by the stated deadline.

5. Upgrade committee

1. The upgrade committee consists of two academics from the University who have expertise in your research area. At least one member of the committee (Chair) will be an experienced PhD supervisor.
2. The **PGR support team** will email your lead supervisor 8-weeks before the upgrade report deadline and request the names of the upgrade committee members. The **lead supervisor** is expected to have sought informal agreement from the examiners ahead of their formal nomination date.
3. The **PGR support team** liaises with the relevant **Department Director(s) of PGR** for your home department, confirming the eligibility and suitability of the nominated upgrade committee members and once confirmed shares the upgrade guidance documents with the **examiners**.
4. Members of the upgrade committee should disclose any situations that have the potential to impair the ability to make a fair and impartial assessment of the upgrade. Please see the Postgraduate Research Handbook (Chapter 9, Section 7.2) for further details.

6. Upgrade examination

1. **HLS Upgrade assessment guidelines**: These reflect the <u>PhD level assessment criteria</u> as outlined in the Postgraduate Research Handbook, and have been adapted for the stage in the programme:
   i. **Potential** for creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication.
   ii. Evidence of the **beginning** of a systematic acquisition and understanding of a body knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice and **evidence of a clear plan to extend this**.
   iii. Evidence of a **developing** ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, application or understanding at the forefront of the discipline.
   iv. **Recognition of potential challenges within the proposal project** and consideration of how to handle unforeseen problems.
   v. An **emerging** understanding of applicable techniques and advanced academic enquiry and **the training they require to reach an advanced level**.
   A satisfactory level of literary presentation.

These criteria are assessed through a combination of the written upgrade report, oral presentation, and upgrade viva (oral examination). In addition, the upgrade committee are also provided with a statement from the lead supervisor about your progress to date, engagement with the training required, and the viability of the project within the timeframe allowed.

2. **Marking criteria**

	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Good	Excellent
Context/background to the research				
Originality and scope of project to contribute new knowledge				

Level of critical analysis and understanding conveyed in the scientific report				
Capacity of the proposed methods to address the research questions				
Literary standard of written report and capacity to communicate effectively in English				
Student's plan for a higher level of study differentiating between the MPhil and PhD				

Other questions to be addressed by the upgrade committee as part of the examiners report. *This section will be used to justify on the scores given in the above sections (unsatisfactory-excellent)*:

- Has any work been published to date? **Y/N**

- If no, is future work of sufficient scope/ standard to be publishable? **Y/N**

- Has any required training been completed? **Y/N**

- Please comment on any other aspects of the submitted report that informed the upgrade decision. This might include highlights/things that were done especially well in the report; or might elaborate on areas of the report that were identified as unsatisfactory in the questions above.

- Please describe the student's performance in the oral presentation

- Please describe the student's performance in the viva voce examination. This might include highlights/ things that were done especially well in the viva; or it might identify areas where the student might seek to improve for the future.

- Where relevant, have the appropriate ethics questions and the need for ethics approval been considered/addressed? **Y/N**

3. Academic research misconduct: The upgrade process is governed by the rules and policies around research misconduct as outlined in the Postgraduate Research Handbook. The upgrade report may be assessed for plagiarism using software such as Turnitin as part of the examination process.

4. Scheduling the examination:
   i. The examination is expected to be completed within 4-weeks of submitting the upgrade report.
   ii. **Your lead supervisor** is responsible for coordinating with the examiners to organise the timing and location of the upgrade examination (both oral presentation and viva), including room bookings or Teams/Zoom links as appropriate.
   iii. If the oral presentation is open, your supervisor should also ensure that it is advertised to the department in a timely manner via contact with the relevant department administrative team.

5. Presence of your supervisor during the examination: Independent of the supervisory team, the Chair of the upgrade panel should confirm with you ahead of the examination whether you would like a member of the supervisory to be present during the oral presentation and/or viva, typically the lead supervisor. While this can be very helpful, such as making notes of the discussions, it is recognised that having your lead supervisor present may make some people nervous. Your preference will be honoured regardless of the supervisor's preference. Only one supervisor may be present during a closed presentation or viva.

> **If present at any stage of the upgrade, including the presentation, supervisor(s) should only be observers, they should not answer questions for you or interject unless specifically requested by the examiners.**

6. Oral Presentation:
   i. As part of the upgrade examination process, prior to the viva you will deliver an oral presentation with slides (e.g. PowerPoint), **maximum 15 minutes in duration**.
   ii. Normally, the presentation will be delivered immediately before the viva, but this could be scheduled as a standalone session or may take place as part of a departmental or other seminar series.
   iii. Oral presentations may take place in-person or virtually via Teams or Zoom.
   iv. Upon mutual agreement between yourself and your supervisor(s), this oral presentation may be either:
   - **Open** – with the examiners and members of your department invited to attend.
     or
   - **Closed** - with only yourself, the examiners and one member of the supervisory team (if desired by the student) in attendance.

Your preference for presentation type should take precedence over the view of the supervisory team.

   v. After an open oral presentation there may be **up to 10 minutes of Q&A** from the audience.
   vi. In the event of an open presentation, the lead supervisor may act as Chair (in agreement with the Chair of the upgrade panel), introducing the student, and ensuring that the presentation and Q&A run on time. If the supervisor(s) are not present this role should be undertaken by the Chair of the upgrade panel.

7. Viva voce (oral examination):
   i. The upgrade viva typically lasts for **no longer than 90 minutes in duration** and can be held in person or virtually via Teams or Zoom. Vivas that take place by video-link must comply with the procedure set out in [Annex 2: Upgrade Vivas by Video-link](#).
   ii. Audio, audio-visual or transcript recording of the upgrade is not permitted by anyone attending the viva.
   iii. You should be prepared to answer questions related to any aspect of the upgrade document, including related background knowledge.
   iv. Supervisor consultation (if supervisor present): After completion of the viva, if they wish, the examiners may ask the supervisor if they have anything constructive that they would like to share about your progress to date and observations on the viva discussions. At the discretion of the examiners, you may be asked to leave for this conversation.
   v. Student consultation: After the supervisor consultation, if a supervisor is present, they should be asked to leave the room or virtual meeting and you will be given the opportunity to talk about your PGR experience to date. You will be asked to reflect on what is going well and given the opportunity to express any concerns that you may have related to your programme of

study, including supervisory team. If appropriate, you will be asked for your consent for this to be fed back to your supervisors or shared with the Department Director of PGR or pastoral tutor as appropriate.

vi. After the student consultation, you will be asked to leave the room or virtual meeting and the examiners agree on a preliminary outcome.

vii. You and your supervisor (if present) are then invited back and are then informed of the preliminary outcome and some initial feedback may be shared. **Please note that this outcome is provisional and subject to formal ratification by the Faculty after submission of the upgrade examiner's report.**

7. Upgrade outcomes:

1. The combined decision of the upgrade panel is reported by the upgrade Chair via the panel report form in myPGR.

2. The Panel may recommend:

   i. Upgrade to PhD without amendments (pass)

   ii. Upgrade to PhD, subject to minor amendments of the upgrade materials within 2-months

   iii. Refer for a second attempt within 3 months and normally recommend initiation or progression of a case under the 'Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice'.

   - Upon review of a second submission, if the Upgrade Committee are satisfied, a recommendation of 'pass' can be made without the necessity for a second viva.

3. PGR Support formally notifies you regarding the decision of the Panel via myPGR and ensures that the upgrade documentation is approved by Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research. PGR Support will also ensure all other relevant records (for example myPGR) are updated accordingly.

Note: The above timelines will be adjusted on a pro-rate basis for part-time students.

8. Upgrade feedback:

1. You may receive verbal feedback on the day of the upgrade examination. After the upgrade written feedback will be provided by the examiners by competing the upgrade examiner's form on myPGR, which is then shared with you.

2. Feedback will be constructive, highlighting what was done well, as well as areas for improvement.

3. It is normal at this stage for the examiners to recommend amendments to your work, so please see this as a learning opportunity to help you improve your work.

4. In the event of amendments, the panel will clearly tell you how they would like the amendments to be presented (track changes, highlighted etc). Amendments may mean that the word count for the original report is exceeded, but this should be reasonable and in proportion to the requested amendments. The date by which the amendments are to be completed is set within myPGR and will be indicated in the email that you will receive after the upgrade.

9. Adjustments and individual learning plan

1. **If you have health and wellbeing challenges and/or specific learning and support needs,** you should ensure any reasonable adjustments required for the upgrade are specified in your individual learning plan (ILP) ahead of the upgrade document submission.

2. If you have an ILP, please check this is suitable for your circumstances. If you have concerns, please discuss this with AccessAbility and PGR support before the upgrade takes place.

3. If you don't have an ILP, but feel you may need one, please contact the AccessAbility team.
4. Further information on inclusive practice within academic study can he found [here](#).
5. Useful links:
   1. AccessAbility
   2. Inclusive practices

10. Generative AI (GenAI) statement

In accordance with the Postgraduate Research Handbook, all students must include **one** of the following statements in the title page of their upgrade report:

If you have used GenAI:

I acknowledge the use of [insert the name of GenAI tool(s) used and link] to*:

a. generate materials for background research and independent study*

b. generate materials that I have adapted to include within my upgrade portfolio*

c. refine writing/improve grammar within my upgrade portfolio*

d. I confirm that no content from generative AI has been presented as my own work. Any use of generative AI has been referenced throughout the upgrade portfolio.

*Delete any statements that do not apply

If you have not used GenAI:

I have not used any generative AI tools in preparing the upgrade portfolio.

Note: The absence of any generative AI statement will be considered a declaration that you have not used GenAI in preparing your work.

Please see the Postgraduate Research Handbook (Chapter 9, Section 6) for further guidance around the ethical and responsible use of using GenAI.

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