

SCHOOL OF ANTHROPOLOGY AND MUSEUM ETHNOGRAPHY

Confirmation of Status Guidance

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Brief Overview

1. Students must have presented at the Graduate Research Seminar, or at an agreed equivalent to qualify for confirmation of status.
2. Student and supervisor to agree on assessors and supervisor to informally invite them*
3. Students to fill in the [GSO14 SSD form](#) in conjunction with their supervisor
4. DGS to approve the assessors
5. GCA to formally invite assessors
6. GCA to confirm assessors with student and supervisor(s)
7. Student to submit work and [GSO14 SSD form](#) to the assessors directly, copying in the GCA
8. The GSO14 SSD form will only be signed by DGS after the interview
9. Student and assessors to set up meeting time jointly and inform the GCA
10. Assessors to send report to GCA after meeting (reminded by GCA if not done within 2 weeks)
11. GCA to obtain DGS approval and send to Social Sciences Division (SSD) to process the milestone

**Please consider who will be appointed as the internal examiner for the final viva as some members of staff do not wish to do both.*

1. Purpose

The Confirmation of Status process allows the student to have an assessment of their work by two assessors, to give a clear indication of whether it would be reasonable to consider submission within the course of a further three terms, if work on the thesis continues to develop satisfactorily.

However, successful confirmation of status should not be seen as being explicitly linked to the final outcome of the examination of the thesis.

The confirmation assessment is different to the transfer assessment. The assessors will be focusing on how the research is progressing, the quality of the draft chapters, and on the plan for completion. The assessors will therefore be looking to ensure that the student is making the appropriate amount of progress in the development of the thesis, so that submission will be achieved within three or at most four years (or six to eight years for part-time students). In doing so, they are also required to ensure that the student is not attempting to deal with an impossibly or unnecessarily large amount of material. The student should benefit from independent assessment of his/her work and should receive authoritative comments and suggestions on problems and how to address them. The assessors may be able to provide guidance on how to better present the material, or on the use of concepts or methods. Even if the thesis is in good shape, the assessors may often stimulate valuable improvements to it. However, the assessors may also identify any weaknesses in theory, research design, data collection and analysis, which may compromise the final thesis. It should also be remembered that the confirmation assessment is a test (which it is possible to fail), and receiving critical comments can be difficult, and it may take a few weeks to come to terms with them. Finally, the interview is a good opportunity to prepare for the *vive voce* examination of the thesis.

The formal Regulations for Confirmation of Status are set out in the general regulations of the [Examination Regulations](#) and in the special regulations for individual subjects, grouped within their particular Division. Further information is also available in the Education Committee "Policy on Research Degrees" <https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/research-degrees>.

2. Timing

i) Students who entered the DPhil as a Probationer Research Student

The general regulations of the Examination Regulations state that all students should normally apply for and achieve confirmation of status within **nine** terms of their admission as a graduate student (eighteen terms for part-time students). Students should also normally achieve confirmation of status three months before submission of their thesis.

ii) Students who progressed to the DPhil from an MPhil

Students who have previously completed an MPhil (with a thesis in the same broad field as the topic for the DPhil) who have been admitted directly to DPhil status, (i.e. transfer of status has been waived) should normally have achieved confirmation of status by the end of the third term of the DPhil. However, in the School of Anthropology & Museum Ethnography students are required under the subject specific regulations to achieve confirmation of status by the **Fourth term of the DPhil** (twelfth term for part-time students). Students should also normally achieve confirmation of status three months before submission of their thesis.

3. How to Apply for Confirmation of Status

Applications for confirmation of status should be made using the GSO14 SSD form available from the [Graduate Forms page](#).

Students are required to complete the GSO14 SSD form, which should then be signed by the student's supervisor and College before the assessment. Supervisors are asked [in consultation with their student] to suggest names of appropriate assessors. The DGS will approve it after the completion of the assessment. Students should include details of any research specific and/or personal and professional skills acquired, or further training needed in, and also information on any other related activities undertaken, e.g. presentation of posters, attendance at conferences etc. Students are also required to state whether their work required research ethics approval (and if appropriate, was granted). Students are also required to provide evidence that they have successfully completed the University's online researcher integrity training course (unless already provided when applying for Transfer of Status).

In addition students will also be required to submit/complete the following:

Monograph Format

1. Thesis outline and timetable for completion

A detailed outline of the whole of the proposed thesis, including an indication of the topics, theories, arguments etc. to be covered in individual chapters.

2. Sample chapter

Students are advised to submit one sample chapter that is ethnographic.

3. Sample chapter

Students are advised to submit one sample chapter concerning the more general comparative and/or theoretical issues.

Integrated thesis format

1. Thesis outline and timetable for completion

An introduction to the thesis together with a statement outlining how the chapters are integrated as a complete text.

2. Sample chapter(s)

Student may submit 2 chapters if preferred.

3. List of Publications

A statement listing any papers published, accepted for publication, or under consideration for publication, outlining the student's contributions to any collaborative efforts.

4. Permission from collaborators

As a separate document, a statement of permission from collaborators to include the work in the thesis, with each collaborator confirming the extent of the candidate's contribution.

The outline should not exceed 4,000 words, and the submitted chapters should not exceed 20,000 words in total. If these materials do exceed these limits (excluding the thesis outline document), the student is asked to indicate in the text where 20,000 words has been reached. It is understood the

assessors are under no obligation to read beyond them, though they are permitted to require the student to submit extra materials to help them in reaching a recommendation.

The complete application for confirmation of status should be submitted to the assessors, copying in the GCA.

4. The Confirmation Assessment

The Director of Graduate Studies will appoint two assessors neither of whom will be the student's supervisor to read the confirmation assessment materials and interview the candidate (for both the first, and second attempt if the student is referred back). The assessors will normally be academic members of staff working in the University of Oxford; only in exceptional circumstances will an external assessor be appointed. It is permissible for the same assessor to be used for both transfer and confirmation of status, and this person may also act as the internal examiner for the D.Phil. viva voce examination.

Students should normally expect to be interviewed **within** 4 weeks of submitting their confirmation application, though this may be longer during the vacation periods due to availability of the assessors. The Confirmation assessment is a formal requirement, but the interview is not an official examination or viva, and *sub fusc* is not worn. The assessors will write a joint report and submit recommendations to the Graduate Studies Committee. Following their interview, students should normally expect to hear the outcome of their assessment within 3 weeks, though this may be longer during the vacation periods.

5. Instructions to Assessors

The assessors are asked to contact students as soon as reasonably possible to arrange a time for the interview, or to explain problems in doing so. Students may sometimes find it an anxious wait, and may have good reasons for wanting the assessment completed as soon as possible. Students should let the GCA know if there is a problem in this respect at the time of application.

An applicant for confirmation of status should be close to having a complete thesis plan, and the work submitted should be close to reading as a complete thesis chapter. In contrast to the transfer assessment, omissions and missing perspectives are much more serious at this stage, but if the student can satisfy the assessors at interview that matters will improve, this should not be a reason to decline recommending confirmation of status. The work should be presented in a scholarly fashion and should be essentially of the standard expected of a DPhil thesis in the final examination, though it is not expected that every footnote should be in place yet etc. The assessors should judge the application against the criteria for success defined below. The assessors should aim to provide constructive criticism and advice to the student to identify and address deficiencies and thereby strengthen their thesis, rather than presenting a judgemental verdict. Dismissive or aggressive remarks are not appropriate. If it is unclear during the assessment how the research will be completed, or the proposal is over-large, the assessors may request a revised thesis outline or further written work before submitting the initial report.

The joint assessors' report should be 1-2 pages in length, providing a permanent record of advice given to the student at this stage and indication of the student's progress. It should normally include a summary of the points raised in the interview, feedback on the written work submitted prior to the interview, comments on the positive aspects of the student's work, as well as any concerns about the student's progress and suggestions for the research going forward. Once the report is completed, please send to the GCA.

In particular, the assessors are asked to consider the clarity of the goals, the chapter structure, the timetable for completion and progress to date, and the significance to the existing literature and field. They should also provide an evaluation of the written work submitted by testing whether the work is presented in a scholarly and lucid manner. More specifically, the assessors should consider commenting on whether the student has presented evidence of being able to undertake research that provides a significant and substantial contribution in the particular field of learning within which the subject of the thesis falls. Also, they should consider whether the student has developed a systematic acquisition and understanding of the substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of their field and a thorough understanding of the techniques for research needed for advanced academic enquiry. Furthermore, the student should show the capacity to design, carry through and defend the thesis within three or at most four years. Finally, for non-native English speakers, the report should indicate the assessors' view of the student's ability to present and defend the work in English.

Significant differences of opinion between the assessors will be adjudicated by the DGS and/or Graduate Teaching Committee, in consultation with the assessors and supervisors.

6. Criteria for Success

For confirmation of status to be approved, the student will need to be able to show that the research already accomplished shows promise of the ability to produce a satisfactory thesis on the intended topic, the work submitted for assessment is of the standard expected of a DPhil thesis in the final exam, the bulk of any fieldwork has been completed and the analysis is well developed, and the research schedule is viable so that the thesis can be completed within three, or at most four, years from admission.

Students must also show that they are able to present and defend their work in English. In addition, the assessors will judge the application against the following criteria:

1. Evidence of wide reading and critical review of the literature
2. A clear indication of how the research is being developed into a thesis
3. Potential original contribution to the field of study
4. Evidence of a progression of argument and logic throughout the thesis
5. Evidence of a scholarly and lucid approach to the research issues
6. A clear timetable for the completion of the research within three, or at most four, years from admission
7. The ability to write in clear and coherent manner, with due attention to presentation
8. Competence in both written and spoken English
9. The ability to articulate and defend the argument in the interview
10. Satisfactory presentation of the thesis at a seminar
11. The draft chapters are of the quality expected for a final DPhil thesis

7. Outcomes of Confirmation of Status

The assessors may recommend one of five outcomes, which must be considered and approved by the Graduate Teaching Committee (excluding option (ii)).

(i) Successful confirmation – Accompanied by suggestions and advice for future progress.

(ii) Revision of application – The assessors may request further minor clarifications before making a first recommendation. In such cases it should be possible to complete the additional work within one month of the assessment.

(iii) Referral for a second attempt at confirmation (with a further interview) - This should take place within one term of the first attempt and normally involve the same assessors. A fresh application form should be completed and an interview should always be held. If the first attempt is made in the final term permitted, a one-term extension is automatically granted to allow the second attempt. This extension does not affect the total amount of time permitted for registration on the DPhil, however if the student has already been registered on the DPhil for twelve terms, the extension is counted as one of the potential six terms of extension of time permitted under the general regulations. The assessors should provide clear guidance on what needs to be done to improve the application before the second attempt at confirmation is submitted. This may require additional written work or other evidence, and possibly the appointment of an additional assessor.

Referral may simply represent attempts to ensure that the student's work is enhanced and set on the best possible course, and should not necessarily be seen as a failure. However, a referral may be disappointing to a student and may take some time to come to terms with, especially if the assessors' comments are highly critical. Most students who do then go on to successfully complete the DPhil see the comments in retrospect as helpful, having given them the opportunity and incentive to make

substantial improvements to the thesis and to reduce the risk of a far more time-consuming referral of the final thesis.

(iv) Transfer to MLitt - Although the work presented was not suitable for confirmation of DPhil status, nonetheless, the assessors felt it was still strong enough for the lower award which is a less demanding and shorter-timescale research degree. In cases where transfer to a lower award is approved, if the student is already in their ninth term or beyond, a formal extension of time will also be needed to allow the student to stay on the graduate register for the lower degree, otherwise their status will lapse, and they will have to subsequently apply for reinstatement to the Register of Graduate Students.

(v) Reject the application – The assessors cannot recommend confirmation of status, or transfer to the lower award. This exceptional outcome should only be used if the quality of the student's work has regressed to below the standard previously achieved for transfer of status.

At the first attempt at confirmation only options (i)-(iii) should be chosen. At the second attempt, options (i), (ii), (iv) or exceptionally (v) should be considered. The Graduate Teaching Committee may also request additional work or other evidence, or appoint an additional assessor to help in making a final decision.

If a student fails to confirm DPhil status or to transfer to the status of the applicable lower degree after two attempts, then their student status will lapse and their name will be removed from the Register of Graduate Students. In such circumstances, informal counselling, often involving the student's college, should be an integral part of the procedures.

8. Deferral of Confirmation of Status

If a student is unable to achieve confirmation of status within the prescribed number of terms permitted by the *Examination Regulations* they must apply for a deferral of confirmation of status, otherwise their student status will lapse and their name will be removed from the Register of Graduate Students. It is possible to apply for a deferral of confirmation of status for up to three terms (depending on provisions in Special Regulations), as long as the total number of terms from admission as either an MPhil or PRS student does not exceed twelve.

SAME students are required to achieve Confirmation of Status within six terms of admission to the DPhil and are not normally able to apply to apply for deferral.

Any student who is considering applying for a deferral of confirmation of status will be required to attend a formal academic review meeting involving their supervisor(s) and Director of Graduate Studies (or at least one other member of academic staff who may or may not be a future assessor for confirmation of status). The purpose of this meeting will be to review progress to date, and to draw up a clear timetable to ensure that confirmation of status is successfully achieved within the proposed period of deferral.

To apply for a deferral of confirmation of status, a student will need to complete an online application accessed via Student Self Service <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/selfservice>. The application will then be considered by the student's supervisor and College. The Director of Graduate Studies will then assess the application for deferral, taking into account any recommendations from the academic review meeting. If confirmation of status is not achieved within nine terms of admission as a graduate student, or approval given for a deferral of confirmation of status, his/her status will lapse.

In exceptional cases only, deferral may be granted beyond twelve terms. Applications for such deferrals require the approval of the University's Education Committee for formal dispensation from the *Examination Regulations*. Students should contact their Graduate Studies Assistant (<http://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/contacts>) for details of the application process.