

**DOCUMENTS REGARDING TRANSFER OF STATUS AND CONFIRMATION OF STATUS ISSUED BY THE SOCIAL SCIENCES DIVISION (REVISED AND AMENDED FOR DEPARTMENTAL USE)**

**TRANSFER OF STATUS**

NB: special regulations apply to the alternative PRS pathway for anthropology, though much of the advice in this section applies there too.

**1. The Purpose of Transfer of Status**

The Probationer Research Student (PRS) status is intended to be used constructively, permitting a wise choice of the research topic to be made in the context of broader reading as well as preliminary research, helping the student to become accustomed to the rhythm of graduate work, and allowing for the acquisition of any specific skills appropriate to the research.

The Transfer of Status assessment is to ensure that the student is making satisfactory progress in the development of the research, to ensure that the work is of potential D.Phil. quality, and that the methodology of the research is appropriate and practicable. The transfer process provides the opportunity for the student to discuss their work with two independent members of staff and to receive feedback. Broadly the assessment should show a plan for the thesis, which locates the research in the context of earlier work in the field, sets out the questions, hypotheses or issues on which it will focus, and describes and explains the methods by which these will be answered, tested or addressed.

The assessment procedures are intended to remove the risk of failure and to reduce the risk of referral as far as possible, and must therefore be as rigorous as necessary to achieve this.

The formal Regulations for Transfer 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.

Students who have been granted leave to supplicate for the degree of Master of Philosophy, where the subject of the Master's thesis is in the same broad field as the research proposed for the D.Phil., may progress directly to D.Phil. status with the transfer of status assessment waived.

**2. The Timing of Transfer of Status**

The *Examination Regulations* state that PRS status can be held for a maximum of six terms for students who commenced their studies before October 2011, and for a maximum of four terms for students commencing their studies from October 2011 onwards. However, Departments and Faculties are strongly encouraged by the University's Education Committee to require students to transfer status sooner. Anthropology's regulations are summarised above (pp. 7-9).

Any student who has not applied to transfer status by the end of their fourth term may 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 Transfer of Status). The purpose of this meeting will be to review progress to date, and to draw up a clear timetable to ensure that Transfer of Status is successfully achieved within six terms as required by the *Examination Regulations*. The student will also be required to apply for a formal deferral of Transfer of Status for one or two further terms using the form GSO.2b available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gso/forms/>. Students are required to complete the form, which should then be signed by the student's supervisor and College and be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies or other senior departmental officer.

In exceptional cases only, an extension of PRS status may be granted beyond six terms. Applications for such extensions should be again made using the form GSO.2b and will require the same approvals as above and, in addition, approval of the University's Education Committee as it requires formal dispensation from the

*Examination Regulations.* Any extensions to PRS status do not affect the overall time permitted for registration on the D.Phil.

### **3. How to Apply for Transfer of Status**

See information above (pp. 7-9). The following is a checklist of headings that might be included in the typical transfer paper:

1. Proposed Thesis Title
2. Thesis Outline
3. Research Proposal
4. Timetable for Completion
5. Literature Review
6. Bibliography
7. Presentation of work at the PRS research seminar
8. Research Ethics Forms
9. Health and Safety Forms (e.g. for fieldwork)

### **4. The Transfer Assessment**

The Graduate Studies Committee or Director of Graduate Studies will appoint two assessors, neither of whom will normally be the student's supervisor (they will normally be academic staff working in the University of Oxford; only in exceptional circumstances will external assessors be appointed) to read the transfer application and to interview the candidate. 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.

### **5. Instructions to Assessors**

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 find it an anxious wait, and may have good reasons for wanting the assessment completed as soon as possible (please let the Graduate Studies Administrator know if there is a problem in this respect at the time of application).

Assessors are invited to consider whether the student is capable of carrying out advanced research, and whether the subject of the thesis and the manner of its treatment proposed by the student are acceptable for transfer to D.Phil student status. Assessors should judge the application against the criteria for success defined below. They should aim to provide constructive criticism and advice to the student to identify and address deficiencies and thereby strengthen their proposed research project, rather than to present a judgemental verdict. Dismissive or aggressive remarks are not appropriate. An application to transfer to D.Phil. status must provide evidence that the applicant can construct an argument, can present material in a scholarly manner, has a viable subject to work on, and can be reasonably expected to complete it in three to four years. However, the assessors should judge the submissions in the light of the fact that they usually reflect up to three terms work and are made at the early stages of the research project. The written work will not necessarily be, or read like, a final thesis. Omissions, unpersuasive arguments, or missing perspectives are not fatal unless they seem to indicate an inability to reach the necessary standard. The research proposal and thesis structure need not be completely finalised, but the student should have clearly defined ideas of what the research questions are, and have possible ways to answer them.

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 a permanent 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. 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 Studies Committee, in consultation with the assessors and supervisors.

## **6. Criteria for Success**

For transfer of status to be approved, the student will need to be able to show that their proposed thesis and treatment represents a viable topic and that their written work and interview show that they have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject. Students must show that they are competent to complete and present their thesis in English. In addition, the assessors will judge the application against the criteria set out below:

1. Attendance and presentation at PRS class
2. Competence in both written and spoken English
3. The aims of the research are realistic and focused
4. Evidence of wide reading and critical analysis
5. Appropriate methodology and research techniques are proposed
6. Limitations to the research are addressed
7. It is clear how the research will develop for a D.Phil.
8. There is a suitable timetable for the research
9. The candidate demonstrates the progression of an argument
10. The candidate shows a scholarly and rigorous approach to research issues
11. The research topic and treatment meet the Division's ethical standards
12. The written work and interview show that the candidate has a good overall knowledge and understanding of the subject
13. The University has adequate facilities (including supervision) to enable the research to progress
14. The student is capable of carrying out advanced research
15. The proposed schedule of work can be completed within three or at most four years for the D.Phil.

## **7. Outcomes of Transfer of Status**

The assessors may recommend one of four outcomes, which must be considered and approved by the Graduate Studies Committee or the DGS acting as chair:

- (i) Successful transfer. Accompanied by suggestions and advice for future progress.
- (ii) Referral for a second attempt at transfer (with or without a further interview). This should normally involve the same assessors and take place within one term of the first attempt. If the first attempt is made in the fourth term or later of PRS status, a one-term extension of PRS status is automatically granted to allow the second attempt. This extension of PRS status does not affect the total amount of time permitted for registration on the D.Phil. The assessors should provide clear guidance on what needs to be done to improve the application prior to the second attempt at transfer being submitted. This may require additional written work or other evidence, and possibly the appointment of an additional assessor.

Referral should not necessarily be seen as a failure, it may simply represent attempts to ensure that the student's work is enhanced so that it is set on the best possible course.

- (iii) Transfer to the M.Litt. Although the work presented was not suitable for transfer to D.Phil. status, nonetheless, the assessors felt it was strong enough for the lower award which is a less demanding and shorter time-scale research degree.

- (iv) Reject the application. The assessors cannot recommend transfer to either DPhil. status or the lower award, and thus it is recommended that the student should withdraw from the course.

At the first attempt at transfer, only options (i)-(iii) should normally be chosen. At the second attempt, options (i), (iii) or (iv) should be considered. Only in exceptional circumstances may a third attempt at transfer be made, and this would require the support of the Graduate Studies Committee and approval by the University's Education Committee.

If a student is transferred to the lower degree under option (iii), they may apply to transfer to D.Phil. status again until the end of their sixth term following admission to PRS status. However, the Graduate Studies Committee would need to be convinced that the research plan had been much improved.

If, following a second unsuccessful attempt at transfer, a student does not accept the recommendation to withdraw under option (iv), further action will be required. In such circumstances, informal counselling, involving the student's college, should be an integral part of the procedures. The Department should refer to the *Examination Regulations* governing the removal of a graduate student from the Register of Graduate Students for more information.

## **CONFIRMATION OF STATUS**

### **1. The Purpose of Confirmation of Status**

The Confirmation of Status process allows the student to have an assessment of his/her work by two assessors, normally other than the supervisor(s), to give a clear indication of whether, if the work on the thesis continues develop satisfactorily, consideration of submission within the course of three further terms would appear to be reasonable. 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. 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 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 the thesis. 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 is often painful, and it may take some 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. Anthropology's regulations appear above, pp. 9-10.

### **2. The Timing of Confirmation of Status**

#### **i) Students who entered the D.Phil. as a Probationer Research Student**

The general regulations of the *Examination Regulations* state that all students should apply for confirmation of status within nine terms of their admission as a graduate student.

#### **ii) Students who progressed to the D.Phil. from an M.Phil.**

The general regulations of the *Examination Regulations* state that all students should apply for confirmation of status within nine terms of their admission as a graduate student. For students who have previously completed an Oxford M.Phil., (with a thesis in the same broad field as the topic for the D.Phil.) and have progressed

directly to D.Phil. status, (i.e. transfer of status was waived), this normally means that confirmation of status should be applied for by the end of the third term of the D.Phil.

### **iii) Deferral of Confirmation of Status**

If a student is unable to apply for confirmation of status within nine terms of admission as a graduate student (or by the deadline defined in the subject specific regulations if later), they must apply for a deferral of confirmation of status, otherwise their student status will lapse and their name will be removed from graduate register. It is possible to apply for a deferral of confirmation of status for up to three terms, as long as the total number of terms from admission as a graduate student does not exceed twelve.

Any student who is considering applying for a deferral of confirmation of status may 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 proposed period of deferral.

To apply for a deferral of confirmation of status, a student will need to submit the GSO.14B form available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gso/forms/>. Students are required to complete the form, which should then be signed 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 any). If a student does not achieve confirmation of status within twelve terms of admission as a graduate student, his/her status will lapse. In exceptional cases only, deferral may be granted beyond twelve terms; however, this requires approval by both the Director of Graduate Studies and the University's Education Committee, as it requires formal dispensation from the *Examination Regulations*.

### **3. How to Apply for Confirmation of Status**

Applications for confirmation of status should be made using the GSO.14 form available from <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gso/forms/>. Students are required to complete the form, which should then be signed by the student's supervisor and College. You 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. You will also be asked to complete the supplementary form. Academic materials for submission are listed on pp. 9-10, above.

### **4. The Confirmation Assessment**

The Graduate Studies Committee/Director of Graduate Studies will appoint two assessors neither of whom will normally be the student's supervisor (they will normally be academic members of staff working in the University of Oxford; only in exceptional circumstances will an external assessor be appointed) to read the confirmation assessment and interview the candidate. 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 <insert details> weeks of submitting their transfer application, though this may be longer during the vacation periods due to availability of the assessors. The interview is not an official examination or viva, and sub fusc is not worn. The assessors will write a report and submit recommendations to the Graduate Studies Committee.

### **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 find it an anxious wait, and may have good reasons for wanting the assessment completed as soon as possible (please let the Graduate Studies Administrator 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, however if at interview the student can satisfy the assessors 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 D.Phil. 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. As with the transfer assessment, 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 to present a judgemental verdict. Dismissive or aggressive remarks are not appropriate. If it is unclear during the assessment of 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 a permanent 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.

In particular, the assessors are asked to consider the clarity of the goals, the chapter structure, the timetable for completion and progress to date, the significance to the existing literature and field, and to 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 provided evidence of being able to undertake research that provides new knowledge/understanding which is capable of advancing their field, will withstand peer review, and may be suitable for publication. 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.

## **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 D.Phil. 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 criteria set out in Appendix A.

## **7. Outcomes of Confirmation of Status**

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

- (i) Successful confirmation – Accompanied by suggestions and advice for future progress.
- (ii) Revision of application – The assessors may request further clarifications of the research proposal or completion schedule and/or additional written work before making a first recommendation. In such cases it should be possible to complete the additional work within the term of assessment.
- (iii) Referral for a second attempt at confirmation - This should normally involve the same assessors and take place within one term of the first attempt. 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 D.Phil., however if the student has already been registered on the D.Phil. for twelve terms, the extension is counted as one of the potential nine 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 prior to the second attempt at confirmation being submitted. This may require additional written work or other evidence, and possibly the appointment of an additional assessor.

Referral should not necessarily be seen as a failure, it may simply represent attempts to ensure that the student's work is enhanced so that it is set on the best possible course. However, a referral will of course be very disappointing to a student and may take some time to get over, especially if the assessors' comments are highly critical. Most students who do then go on to successfully complete the D.Phil. see the comments in retrospect as helpful, having given them the opportunity and incentive to make substantial improvements to the thesis and to avoid the risk of a far more costly and time-consuming referral of the final thesis.

(iv) Transfer to <*M.Litt./M.Sc. by Research*> - Although the work presented was not suitable for confirmation of D.Phil. status, nonetheless, the assessor(s) 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 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 graduate register.

(v) Reject the application – The assessors cannot recommend confirmation of status, or transfer to the lower award, and thus it is recommended that the student should withdraw from the course. 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 normally be chosen. At the second attempt, options (i), (iv) or exceptionally (v) should be considered. The Graduate Studies Committee may also request additional work or other evidence, or appoint an additional assessor to help in making a final decision. (Only in exceptional circumstances may a third attempt at confirmation be made, and this would require the support of the Graduate Studies Committee and approval by the University's Education Committee).

If following a second unsuccessful attempt at confirmation, a student does not accept the recommendation to withdraw under option (v), further action will be required. In such circumstances, informal counselling, involving the student's college, should be an integral part of the procedures. The Department should refer to the *Examination Regulations* governing the removal of a graduate student from the Register of Graduate Students for more information.

## **Appendix A**

The criteria for success will vary between departments. Examples of possible success criteria are provided below:

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. Presentation of the thesis at a seminar
11. The draft chapters are of the quality expected for a final D.Phil. thesis