**HLS MPhil to PhD upgrade examination guidance: PGR students**

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This document is intended for students who started their PhD studies from September 2023 onwards. Students who commenced their studies prior to this date should follow previous guidance.

## **The purpose of the upgrade:**

Guidance from the Postgraduate Research Handbook

[9 - Upgrade from MPhil to Doctoral Study - Teaching Quality Assurance Manual - University of Exeter](https://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/pgr/9-upgradefrommphiltodoctoralstudy/#purpose):

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.

## **Upgrade timeline:**

* 1. The upgrade process, including approval of any revisions, should be **completed by 12 months** of full-time registration with the **upgrade report deadline at 9 months** (pro-rata for part-time students).
  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. **If you have health and wellbeing challenges and/or specific learning and support needs,** you should ensure any reasonable adjustments required for the upgrade assessment are specified in your individual learning plan (ILP) ahead of the upgrade document submission. Please see here for [information on inclusive practice in academic study: postgraduate research students](https://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/lts/ilp/#pgres).
  4. **Deferral:** In exceptional circumstances beyond your control, applications for deferral to the deadline for transfer of registration may be made. The postgraduate research handbook should be consulted for more information. [Applications for upgrade deferral](https://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/pgr/9-upgradefrommphiltodoctoralstudy/#Annex-1-Applications-for-deferral).

## **HLS Upgrade documents:**

* 1. You must produce a report, **not exceeding 3,500 words**, excluding references but including tables and figure legends, which should appear in-line within the text as opposed to at the end of the document. The report should contain the following headings:
     1. Background/introduction
        + This section should include information on the originality and contribution to knowledge of the proposed work.
     2. Aims/hypothesis.
     3. Proposed methodology.
     4. An outline of progress to date, including any training.
     5. A plan and timeline for the proposed future work (including a Gantt chart).
     6. Risks and mitigation/alternative approaches.
     7. References
     8. 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)
  2. You must log into [iExeter](https://i.exeter.ac.uk/campusm/home#login/207/188) and select the Student Record tab. Alongside the contact diary there is a link to ‘My upgrade’. You should upload your report to myPGR by the upgrade report deadline which can be found on that site.

## **HLS Upgrade committee:**

* 1. The PGR support team will email the lead supervisor 8-weeks before the upgrade report deadline and request the names of the upgrade committee members, but the lead supervisor is expected to have sought informal agreement from the examiners ahead of formal nomination.
  2. The PGR support team liaises with the relevant Department Director(s) of PGR for your home department, confirming the eligibility and suitability of the upgrade committee and once confirmed shares the upgrade guidance documents with the examiners.
  3. You will be examined by two academic staff members from the University of Exeter who have suitable experience and expertise related to your programme of work.

## **Upgrade examination:**

* 1. **HLS Upgrade assessment guidelines**:These reflect the [PhD level assessment criteria](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/policies/calendar/part1/regulations/#collapseTwentynine) as outlined in the TQA manual, and have been adapted for the stage in the programme:
     1. **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.
     2. 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**.
     3. 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.
     4. **Recognition of potential challenges within the proposal project** and consideration of how to handle unforeseen problems.
     5. An **emerging** understanding of applicable techniques and advanced academic enquiry and **the training they require to reach an advanced level**.
     6. A satisfactory level of literary presentation.

*These criteria will be assessed through a combination of the written upgrade report, oral presentation, and upgrade viva (oral examination).*

* 1. **Upgrade marking criteria (completed via myPGR):**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **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 examiners as part of the upgrade 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**
  1. **Academic research misconduct:** The upgrade process is governed by the [rules and policies around research misconduct as outlined in the TQA manual](https://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/pgr/researchmisconduct/). The upgrade report may be assessed for plagiarism using software such as Turnitin as part of the examination process.
  2. **Scheduling the examination:**
     1. The examination is expected to be completed within 4-weeks of upgrade document submission.
     2. **You and** **lead supervisor** are 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.
     3. If the oral presentation is open, you or your supervisor should also ensure that it is advertised to the department in a timely manner via contact with the relevant department manager.
  3. **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 primary supervisor. While this can be very helpful it is recognised that this 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 your or interject unless specifically requested by the examiners.**

* 1. **Oral Presentation:** 
     1. As part of the upgrade examination process, prior to the viva you should give an oral presentation with slides, **maximum 15 minutes in duration**.
     2. Oral presentations may take place in-person or virtually via Teams or Zoom.
     3. 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. This could be scheduled as a standalone session or may take place as part of a departmental or other seminar series.

or

* + - * **Closed** - with only yourself, the examiners and one member of the supervisory team (if desired by the student) in attendance.
    1. After an open oral presentation there may be **up to 10 minutes of Q&A** from the audience.
    2. In the event of an open presentation, the lead supervisor is expected to chair, introducing you, 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.
  1. **Viva voce (oral examination):**
     1. The upgrade viva typically lasts for **no more than 90 minutes** 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](https://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/pgr/9-upgradefrommphiltodoctoralstudy/#Annex-2-Upgrade-Vivas-by-Video-link).
     2. You should be prepared to answer questions related to any aspect of the upgrade document, including related background knowledge.
     3. **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.
     4. **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.
     5. After the student consultation, you will be asked to leave the room or virtual meeting and the examiners agree on a preliminary outcome.
     6. You and your supervisor (if present) are then invited back and are then be informed of the preliminary outcome. Be aware that this is subject to formal ratification by the faculty after submission of the upgrade examiner’s report.

## **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:
     1. Upgrade to PhD
     2. Upgrade to PhD, subject to minor modifications of the upgrade materials within 2-months (or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration)
     3. Refer for a second attempt within 3 months (or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration) and normally recommend initiation or progression of a case under the ['Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice’](http://as.exeter.ac.uk/academic-policy-standards/tqa-manual/lts/unsatisfactoryprogress/).
        + 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.

## **Upgrade feedback:**

* 1. You will receive verbal feedback after the upgrade and 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. Corrections should be seen as a learning opportunity to help you improve your work.
  4. In the event of corrections, the panel will clearly tell you how they would like the amendments to be presented - track changes, highlighted etc.