



## School of Medicine

### Guidance to MPhil to PhD/MD Transfer Examiners

#### *The Transfer Interview*

The conduct of the interview should be as close to that of a final PhD/MD viva as possible. Examiners should make every effort to ensure that the student feels at ease during the examination, and discuss strengths as well as weaknesses of the student's work. Whilst some intense questioning of the candidate may be needed, this must be non-aggressive.

Examiners **may** wish to explore some of the following general areas when conducting the oral interview about the transfer report.

1. Overview of the candidate, scientific background, degree, prior laboratory experience etc.
2. Discussion of whether the candidate's project is part of a coherent research programme or whether the research is "stand-alone" or a completely new avenue of research for the supervisor concerned.
3. Discussion on whether ethical approval has been obtained and if so, the part played by the student in this. Discussion, if relevant, on obtaining Home Office approval for animal work.
4. Discussion of the amount and level of supervision needed and given. Opportunity for presentation at laboratory meetings, journal clubs and the like.
5. Discussion on whether the work has undergone peer review or will do so in the near future. The likely impact of the work on the scientific field of the candidate could also be discussed.
6. Discussion on the extent of support provided by their supervisor in writing the transfer report.
7. The candidate should be able to summarise the work to date and to explain its interest to him / her and its importance / relevance to his / her specific research field. He / she should have clear aims and objectives, even if only partially completed at this stage.
8. The candidate should be able to discuss the background of their work and have knowledge of several individual papers relevant to their subject area.
9. The candidate should be aware of some of the flaws in the hypotheses behind their work and be able to discuss them in their broadest sense. They should be able to critically appraise their own and published work.
10. The candidate should have intimate knowledge of the background to the methods used so far in their project, and broadly why they were chosen.
11. The candidate should be able to explain any data they have, clearly and concisely. If they have negative data, they should be able to explain why, and outline how they propose to proceed.
12. The candidate should show signs of being able to defend most of their data when challenged by the assessors.
13. The candidate should be enthusiastic and have many suggestions for future work or improvements to the project.
14. The candidate's ability to recall the contents of at least 2 key references picked at random from the bibliography.

Examiners are also requested to make some time to discuss the candidate's Doctoral Development Plan. The candidate is required to undertake a training needs analysis prior to submission of their transfer report, and to use this as the basis for their development plan for the remainder of their research programme. Copies of these documents should be submitted along with the transfer report. The examiners are requested to comment on the development plan. If, on reading the transfer report, or during the course of the interview, they have identified an area of training that has not been considered by the student when formulating their development plan, they should highlight this during the interview.

### ***Completion of MPhil to PhD/MD Transfer Report Form***

At the end of the interview, the examiners are requested to complete the transfer report form, which is enclosed here, and available as a download from <http://www.shef.ac.uk/medicine/current/postgraduates/procedure.html>

Constructive feedback on how the student's report and/or viva performance might be improved is welcomed.

### ***Doctoral development plan***

The examiners are requested to discuss and comment on the student's proposed development plan for the remainder of their research programme. Is it a clear and credible plan? Also, if, during the course of the *viva voce*, the examiners have identified any areas for targeted training, these should be highlighted in the report. Also, if the required regulatory procedures for continuing the work (e.g. ethical and research governance approval) are not in place, please make a note of this in the report.

### ***The recommendation***

There are two possible recommendations.

**YES:** The student's transfer report and viva performance reaches the standard acceptable for an MPhil and the student is recommended for transfer.

**REFER TO COMMITTEE:** The student's transfer report and viva performance does not reach the standard acceptable for an MPhil and the examiners feel that the student should submit their work for the degree of MPhil only, or the examiners are unable to come to a decision regarding transfer and agree to refer the decision to the School Graduate Research Committee (SGRC). The student's progress will then be evaluated by a panel of the SGRC, usually comprising the Departmental PGR Lead, the SGRC Chair, and other members of SGRC where appropriate. The assessment will include progress in the RTP or DDP, laboratory notebooks, supervisor statements etc.

The table below provides some guidance to examiners considering a “REFER TO COMMITTEE” decision.

***Criteria used to guide examiners considering a “refer to committee” decision.***

<b>“refer to committee”</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Failure to submit a transfer report and/or attend for interview giving no reasons and despite repeated attempts (3) at communication.</li> <li>• Failure to submit a transfer report within 1 week of the set date or failure to attend the oral interview without due reason.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The transfer report is written by a third party.</li> <li>• The transfer report is generally poorly written and/or incomplete and/or the candidate is unable to present their work orally in a reasonably clear manner.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the opinion of the assessors, the student has not performed a large portion of the work presented in the transfer report.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student is unable to communicate effectively the background to, the methods, results and/or discuss the nature of the research being performed.</li> <li>• The candidate does not understand and/or is unable to describe adequately the majority of the methods used in the project.</li> <li>• The clarity of the results section and/or depth of discussion is poor.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The student and the transfer report fall short of the acceptable standard for an MPhil thesis.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The candidate appears to have had no ideas about either the current or future work programme.</li> <li>• The candidate is unable to provide ideas for future work and/or is unable to discuss the limitations of their project.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The report is poorly written and/or incomplete and/or the candidate is unable to present their work orally in a reasonably clear manner.</li> <li>• The candidate has a ‘poor’ understanding of the background to the work and/or of the impact of their research in relation to the field of study.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The candidate has a ‘poor’ understanding of the background to the work and/or of the impact of their research in relation to the field of study</li> </ul>

For clarification, the University requirements **for the Degree of Master by Research** are shown below:

*Before the award of MPhil, each candidate is required to complete a prescribed period of research, and:*

- (i) present a thesis that must either contain a record of research carried out by the candidate **and***
- (ii) pass an oral examination in matters relevant to the subject of the thesis*

*The Examiners are required to review the thesis, and in doing so, should be satisfied that it:*

- *Contains a record of the research carried out*
- *Displays a good general knowledge of the area of study*
- *Shows comprehensive and detailed knowledge of some part or aspect of the study*