

The Medical School MPhil to PhD/MD Transfer Guidance Notes

Procedure for Transfer of Registration from MPhil to PhD/MD

Students are normally admitted to read initially for the degree of MPhil, with the expectation that, subject to satisfactory progress, they will later transfer registration to PhD/MD. Students who are admitted to read for a PhD, are required to participate in the same assessment process. The final decision on whether to allow exemption from the transfer process is that of the University's Research and Innovation Services.

The decision to recommend transfer to PhD/MD is usually taken towards the end of the first year for full time students, and towards the end of the second year for part-time students. MD Students, regardless of candidature, are expected to transfer towards the end of their first year. The decision to transfer is based on satisfactory progress as indicated by the supervisor, the production of a transfer report, a satisfactory performance at an interview based on the submitted transfer report and completion of the School's compulsory DDP modules. The candidate must also have achieved agreed development needs and produced a clear and credible development plan for the succeeding two/three years.

Students due to transfer registration from MPhil to PhD/MD will be contacted by the PGR Programme Administrators prior to the proposed transfer of registration date. The report hand in date will be dependent on the start date of the student concerned and the report must be submitted in the first instance to the PGR Programme Administrators.

Transfer Report:

The transfer report forms part of the overall transfer process from MPhil registration to PhD/MD. The following information is provided as guidance for the format of the transfer report. Students should consult with their PGR Tutor/Departmental PGR Lead/PGR Programme Administrator for more detailed information.

1.0 In General All Transfer Reports Should Include the Following Sections:

- A table of contents
- A list of figures
- A list of tables
- A summary
- An introduction
- Methods and materials
- Results
- Discussion
- Future work
- Bibliography

The Transfer Report including all sections must not exceed 50 pages in length including the bibliography.

2.0 Suggested Transfer Report Format 1 – “Mini – Thesis” Style:

The Transfer Report will normally take the format of a “Mini-Thesis” based on the sections outlined above in section 1. Every attempt should be made to balance the length of the sections e.g. the report should not be 90% introduction. One suggested layout could be as follows: tables of contents, summary and introduction 20 pages, methods and materials 10 pages, results 10 pages, discussion and future work 5 pages, bibliography 5 pages. The literature review completed as part of the DDP module MED6950 may form the basis for the introduction to the report. Guidelines on the preparation and format of theses for research degrees can be found in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes available at <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ris/pgr/code/index.html>

3.0 Suggested Transfer Report Format 2 – Presentation of Peer Reviewed Original Research Papers:

In circumstances where appropriate, original research papers can be submitted in place of the methods, results and discussion sections of the Transfer Report, however a more detailed introduction section covering the scope of the whole research project would still be required to be submitted as part of the Transfer Report.

4.0 Submission of Transfer Report:

The examiners will not accept a transfer report without a signed (by the supervisor or in exceptional circumstances the co-supervisor) approval title page. This can be found on the following page: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/medicine/current/postgraduates/procedure.html>

Interview:

The purpose of the interview is to enable the examiners to clarify any ambiguities in the transfer report, to satisfy themselves that the report is the student's own work, that the student is familiar with the relation of his/her work to the field of study and that his/her knowledge of the field is of the standard one would reasonably expect at the time of MPhil to PhD/MD transfer.

Students will be assessed on the contents of their transfer report by 2 examiners (one internal and one external to the student's Department) who may or may not have knowledge of the specific subject area. The examiners will be nominated by the supervisors and approved by the Departmental PGR Lead and ideally, will not be from the same research group as the student being assessed. Where possible, both examiners will be Academic Staff members, but where this is not possible it is essential that at least one of the examiners is a member of Academic Staff and the second can be a senior or experienced postdoctoral researcher.

Interview dates and times will be arranged directly with the student by the internal examiner. The transfer interview must take place within 6 weeks of receipt of the mini-thesis by the examiners at a time that is mutually convenient to all parties.

Interviews will be conducted under the chairmanship of the internal examiner and will aim to represent the experience of a standard PhD/MD oral examination. Interviews should last for approximately one half to one hour. At the interview, the examiners will together explore the

student's knowledge of matters relevant to the subject of the transfer report.

Assessment of the Transfer Report and Performance at Interview:

The examiners will assess the transfer report and the oral interview separately and will make a recommendation for transfer to PhD/MD based on both of these to the supervisor and the Departmental PGR Lead/PGR Programme Administrator using a standard form (see page 5). The form lists the general areas to be assessed by the assessors. Guidance on the conduct of the oral interview is given on page 7. All recommendations will ultimately be attached to the 'University of Sheffield transfer of candidature from MPhil to PhD/MD forms' and returned to the PGR Administrators.

The outcome of the transfer process will be **"yes"**, or **"refer to committee"**.

If **"yes"**, examiner reports will be sent back to the PGR Programme Administrators who will forward them to the supervisors of the student and the relevant PGR Lead. These individuals will use the **"yes"** recommendation made by the examiners to guide their decision on whether to recommend transfer to PhD/MD status. The final signature required for this process is that of the Departmental PGR Lead.

The outcome of the transfer process may be **"refer to committee"**. The criteria that will be used to guide the examiners in the use of this option are available (see table, page 6).

The **"refer to committee"** option should be used when the examiners feel that the student should submit their work for the degree of MPhil only, or when they feel that the student is lacking in one or both elements (the transfer report or the interview) but are unable to make a final decision without other background information on the candidate's performance to date. A subcommittee of the School Graduate Research Committee will then make a recommendation to either transfer or not based on the performance of the student during the first year (i.e. DDP portfolio, laboratory notebooks, mini-thesis, supervisor's assessment, personal tutor reports) and/or interview of the student concerned.

In the case of a **"refer to committee"** recommendation, the examiners will prepare their report and submit this to the PGR Programme Administrator. The Programme Administrator will inform the student of the recommendation and let them know that they will receive further information shortly. When a course of action has been agreed by the subcommittee, the candidate and their supervisors will be informed of this and sent a copy of the transfer report form. If the supervisor disagrees with the recommendation then a meeting will be arranged between the supervisor, the Departmental PGR Lead and the examiners to discuss the issues further. If there is no agreed decision or course of action after this meeting, a final decision on whether to endorse the decision for transfer will be taken by the PGR Lead and/or Head of Department. In cases where agreement cannot be reached the examiner's report(s) will be appended to any documentation that is sent to Research and Innovation Services. The candidate may also be recommended to submit for an MPhil. The guidance notes, taken from the University regulations and pertinent to the award of this degree are indicated on page 7.

Complaints:

Should decisions be made that are not acceptable to any party then the standard University complaints procedure should be followed in the first instance and a letter explaining the relevant issues should be submitted to the Departmental PGR Lead.

MPhil to PhD/MD Transfer Report Form

Name of student:

Name of supervisor:

Transfer/upgrade report

Does the report provide evidence that the student is capable of developing their area of research to meet the standard required for PhD or MD in terms of 1) research methods, 2) writing abilities, 3) original ideas, 4) familiarity with the literature and 5) presentational skills?

Doctoral Development Programme

Has the student produced a credible development plan for the remainder of their research programme?

Do you have any recommendations for targeted training?

Viva Voce

Was the student's performance satisfactory?

Ethics/Research Governance

If the project involves human subjects or human tissues, are the necessary ethical and research governance approvals in place? If not, what is the anticipated approval date?

If the project involves animal work, is a Home Office license in place?

Recommendation for transfer/upgrade to PhD (please tick one)

YES	*REFER TO COMMITTEE
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Please continue below or overleaf if required.

Signatures

Senior examiner:

Signature:

Date:

Co-examiner:

Signature:

Date:

***The student's progress will be evaluated by a panel of SGRC. The assessment will include progress in the RTPs, laboratory books, supervisor statements etc.**



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.

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

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*