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FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENT

**School of Earth and Environment**

**The PhD Transfer/Upgrade Process and Viva**

***Guidance for Staff and Postgraduate Researchers (PhD)***

**INTRODUCTION**

* The transfer process and *viva voce* examination is a critical stage in any PhD researcher’s study. It determines whether or not a PGR has shown sufficient ability, dedication, and drive to have an excellent chance of completing and successfully defending their PhD thesis within the normal timeframe allowed for full or part time study.
* The quality bar, which provisional PhD researchers have to reach, must be clearly communicated to the candidate by the supervisory panel and it should be strictly enforced. Candidates who do not show sufficient research potential will not be permitted to progress beyond this stage.
* The date for the transfer viva should be agreed at the First Formal Progress Meeting (6 months for full-time and 9 months for part-time study).
* The transfer process should **BEGIN 9 MONTHS** after the commencement of study for full-time researchers (*pro rata* for part-time study).
* It must be completed **WITHIN 12 MONTHS** of the commencement of study for full-time researchers (*pro rata* for part-time study).

The Leeds Doctoral College offers training and development opportunities for PGRs. Full details are available on the OD&PL website (<https://peopledevelopment.leeds.ac.uk/services/postgraduate-research/>).

**RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Postgraduate Researcher must:

1. have given a talk on their PhD topic to their Institute prior to their transfer viva;
2. have submitted a report or a draft of a manuscript/submitted/published paper which clearly demonstrates progress to date. This material must exclusively be a product of the research being conducted by the researcher as part of their PhD. No other material is permissible. The report/manuscript should be submitted on GRAD for access by the full Transfer Panel at least 2 weeks prior to the date of the viva. The ‘Statement of Academic Integrity’ forms part of this submission and confirms that the research has been undertaken by the researcher;
3. provide a list of training undertaken so far and requirements for the future;
4. provide a publication plan;
5. provide a planned schedule for completion of the thesis within the standard period of study (eg, by using a Gantt chart)
6. attend the viva.

The Supervisor(s) must:

1. with reference to the outcomes of the First Formal Progress Meeting (which should have documented the steps required to ensure a successful transfer), ensure, before the viva itself, that the researcher is clearly aware of what will be required of them in terms of demonstrating appropriate research progress to be transferred to full PhD candidate status past transfer;
2. ensure that as many Transfer Panel members as possible attend the researcher’s transfer talk;
3. read and comment on the researcher’s report or manuscript/paper **prior** to the viva;
4. conduct a formal viva which is to be chaired by a Transfer Chair and includes a Transfer Examiner. It is the **Transfer Chair and Transfer Examiner that makes the decision on whether a researcher passes the viva, not the supervisor(s);**
5. provide an opportunity for the researcher to discuss any issues around supervision or other complicating factors which may have a bearing on the outcome of the viva, confidentially, with the Transfer Chair, prior to the viva itself;
6. ensure that the Joint Report of the Transfer Panel form within GRAD is completed and submitted by the Transfer Chair no later than 2 weeks after the viva has been held.

**THE TRANSFER PANEL**

1. The transfer panel consists of a transfer chair and a transfer examiner that are independent of the supervisory group.
2. At least one examiner must be from a cognate subject area to the work under examination.
3. Transfer panel makes the final decision on upgrading the candidate from provisional PhD candidate to PhD candidate.
4. The transfer panel ensures that where there is a disability, [reasonable adjustments](https://www.see.leeds.ac.uk/fileadmin/Documents/PGR/Reasonable_Adjustments_PGR.pdf) are made.
5. The transfer panel provides the opportunity for the PGR to discuss their supervision without the supervisors present, and such discussion to include the planned format of final PhD thesis to be submitted (eg, Alternative Format or standard format).
6. Members of the supervisory team must attend the viva voce examination and are involved in the discussions during the viva.
7. Supervisors are not involved in the decision-making process of whether or not a candidate should be upgraded. This decision rests with the transfer panel.
8. The transfer panel uses the transfer report, the transfer talk and the transfer interview to come to a decision on the potential of the PGR and the research project to be successful at doctoral level.
9. The transfer chair leads the transfer examination and is fully involved in the decision-making process.
10. The transfer chair has to ensure that the transfer process is completed within the university guidelines.

**THE TRANSFER REPORT**

The PhD researcher must write and submit a report which:

1. **does not exceed 5000 words** (excluding references, figure and table captions, abbreviations, contents pages and appendices);
2. clearly states the **rationale** for the work;
3. succinctly and clearly states the **specific aim and objectives** of the project;
4. for the project aim and objectives, clearly relate to a number of **specific and testable hypotheses**;
5. provides a succinct summary of the **relevant literature** and shows evidence of critical ability in the assessment of previous work;
6. documents the **methods** used or to be used in the project;
7. presents the **results** to date and summarizes their significance and potential weaknesses;
8. **outlines a clear pathway** for the 2nd year of study and beyond (as appendix);
9. includes a **publication plan** (as appendix);
10. includes a summary of **training** undertaken and still required (as appendix).

The transfer report must allow the transfer panel to judge the potential of the research to be successful on doctoral level within the standard period of study and must show the potential of the PGR for independent research work, critical ability, and an overall familiarity with the research topic.

Set out above is the default format and content for transfer reports. If supervisors would like their researchers to prepare a report with a different format or length, the Primary Supervisor should make a case to the PGRD, immediately following the First Formal Progress Meeting explaining the reasoning for this and seeking clearance, in advance of notifying the researcher, of a change in requirements.

**THE TRANSFER INTERVIEW (VIVA VOCE EXAMINATION)**

* The proposed format of the viva voce examination is outlined in the **Guidelines on University Procedures and Recommended Best Practice for Members of a Transfer Panel** under **Transfer Interview**
* These guidelines are available at <http://ses.leeds.ac.uk/info/22172/research_degrees/1030/regulations_codes_policies_and_procedures_for_postgraduate_research> (under ‘Progress and monitoring’).

**UPGRADE DECISION**

During the transfer process the transfer panel must be satisfied that the PGR and the research project have the potential for success at doctoral level and also whether completion of a thesis within the standard period of study for the programme concerned is a reasonable expectation.

The transfer panel must base its decision on the transfer report, the transfer talk and the candidate’s performance during the viva. The recommendations that may be made by the transfer assessment panel are:

1. In the case of Provisional candidatures for doctoral degrees or Postgraduate Research candidatures, **transfer to doctoral registration**;
2. In the case of Provisional candidatures for the degree of PhD or Postgraduate Research candidatures, **transfer to MPhil registration**;
3. On the first occasion only that the work is assessed, **deferment** of a decision about the transfer for a limited period to permit the work to be revised and then reassessed;
4. A decision that the PGR **withdraw** from a research degree candidature.

**Please note that transfer to a Mastership by Research at this stage of a candidature is not permitted.**

**Formal Assessment Reporting**

The Transfer workflow must be completed within the candidate’s [GRAD](https://research.leeds.ac.uk/do/leeds-auth/login) record (use ISS username and email logon). Members of the transfer panel *were given access to this record when the Transfer Panel and viva date were agreed and input into GRAD by the Graduate School Administrator*:

Before the transfer interview

1. *First Formal Progress Review*: FFPR workflow to be completed by PGR and by Supervisor. This should be completed 6 months after commencement of study for full-time researchers and 9 months after commencement of study for part-time study.
2. PGR to upload transfer report into GRAD, and complete the Transfer workflow which includes academic integrity and ethics status (if applicable).

After the transfer interview

1. *Joint Report of the Transfer Assessment Panel:* Workflow to be completed within GRAD and submitted and approved by Transfer Chair.
2. If required by the transfer panel, an updated transfer report following a decision to defer transfer.