

Research Degrees: Guidance notes series

5. TRANSFER (From MPhil registration to PhD)

Author Graduate Studies

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Key words: transfer

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Related document Policy 2Q: Admission, supervision and monitoring of research students
Research Degree (RD) forms, available on the Portal

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Introduction

1. Students are expected to transfer from MPhil registration to PhD, normally between 12 and 18 months of full-time study (24 - 36 months for part-time study).
2. The transfer process may seem onerous and a distraction from the student's project. However, it is a valuable opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved and reflect on the remaining body of work that needs to be done before he or she will be in a position to submit a thesis. It is also one of the occasions when students get careful feedback from experienced academics who are not directly involved in their project. Experience shows that successful negotiation of the transfer process substantially increases the likelihood of timely completion of a PhD thesis.
3. Failure to submit an application within 18 months of the commencement of full-time study, or part-time equivalent, may result in a recommendation that the research be submitted for MPhil.

Principles

4. A candidate enrolled initially for MPhil with possibility of transfer to PhD, who wishes to transfer to PhD should apply to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) when he/she has made sufficient progress on the work to provide evidence of the development to PhD. Transfer will normally take place after between 12 and 18 months of full-time study (24-36 months for part-time study).

In support of the transfer application, the candidate must prepare a full transfer report accompanied by form RD2T for the RDC of no more than 10,000 words. The report should be substantive, substantial and sufficient and include as a minimum:

- A chapter-by-chapter outline of the thesis, detailing the research question to be addressed, the materials to be examined, the methods to be employed and the work undertaken to date;
- A literature review;
- A draft chapter or evidence of substantive critical writing (such as an introduction to the research problem or a discussion of methodology);
- A timetable of completion of the thesis between 3-4-years full-time or 6-8 years part-time from the date of initial registration.

A progress report by the supervisor must also be completed as part of form **RD2T**.

5. The Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator shall arrange a transfer viva voce and Transfer Panel, which should involve a minimum of two assessors from the University's research supervisor pool and the Director of Studies. The assessors will normally be internal to the University. An external assessor may be appointed, if approved by the RDC. The Transfer Panel will complete a report to be submitted to the RDC
6. For tracking purposes, form **RD2T** must be completed by the student, supervisor(s) and Transfer Panel and returned to Graduate Studies by the Transfer Panel.
7. Normally transfer applications will be considered at one of the standard points in the annual monitoring cycle. Where the transfer report is submitted as part of the annual monitoring process, this report will take the place of the normal annual monitoring report.
8. Before approving transfer from MPhil to PhD, the RDC shall satisfy itself that the candidate has made sufficient progress and that the assessors have determined that the proposed programme provides a suitable basis for work at PhD standard which the candidate is capable of pursuing to completion.
9. In the event of an unsatisfactory transfer application, the RDC may offer the candidate the opportunity to revise the application in the light of feedback from the panel. In the event that the transfer application is not approved, the student will remain registered for an MPhil.
10. A candidate who is registered for the degree of PhD and who is unable to complete the approved programme of work may, at any time prior to the submission of the thesis for examination, apply to the RDC for their registration to revert to that of MPhil, provided that the maximum permitted period for MPhil registration is not exceeded.
11. A candidate enrolled for the degree of MPhil only may also apply to transfer the registration to PhD. In such cases the candidate must comply with the transfer regulations as set out in Policy 2Q (Admission, supervision and monitoring of research students).

The transfer process

12. The Hub will appoint two independent assessors, Southampton Solent University staff members, who have some familiarity with the general field in which the research is located and/or with its methodology, but who are not members of the supervisory team.
13. The student is required to submit to his/her supervisors and the independent assessor a report of no more than 10,000 words. The report should:
 - a) Describe progress on the PhD thus far;
 - b) Discuss and evaluate the research design and methods used, and outline any provisional findings;
 - c) Set out a clear and explicit plan (including a precise timetable) for completing the research and submitting the thesis;
 - d) Demonstrate that the project is going to deliver independent contribution to knowledge.
14. Supervisors should discuss the report in draft with the candidate. It is important that supervisors have enough time to read and comment on the draft(s) and that candidates allow themselves sufficient time to think about the comments and respond to them before the deadline for submission.
15. The report must be accompanied by form **RD2T**, which must be duly completed and signed by the student and ALL supervisors before it is submitted to the Transfer Panel.
- 16. Transfer forms which are not fully completed and signed will not be accepted.**
17. The Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator will arrange a viva voce and Transfer Panel meeting, when the student will meet with the review panel, which will normally consist of the assessors, the Director of Studies and the research student.
18. The meeting should open with a short presentation by the student, followed by questions and answers, and informal discussion.
19. The assessors are permitted to allow the student to withdraw the application to transfer, if discussion reveals that there are major problems with the report. If the transfer application is being made instead of an annual monitoring report, this may mean that a decision on progression to the next year may be deferred.
20. If the student wishes to make minor amendments to the report in the light of discussion, then they may be allowed to undertake minor revisions and resubmit it to the panel.
21. The Transfer Panel should give the student informal, verbal feedback at the end of the review meeting and indicate the main content of the written report. The Transfer Panel should then agree the drafting of the written report to complete form **RD2T** prior to submit it together with the student's report (revised if necessary) to Graduate Studies. This will then be submitted to the next meeting of the RDC.

Transfer assessment criteria

22. The RDC needs to satisfy itself about three issues:
 1. That the candidate has made sufficient progress to make completion possible within the permitted registration period;
 2. That the project, as it has actually developed, is going to deliver an independent contribution to knowledge (which is what distinguishes a PhD from an MPhil)
 3. That there is a feasible and realistic plan of work to ensure that the project will be completed satisfactorily.

The transfer report

23. The transfer report (**RD2T**) must convince the review panel and then the members of the RDC that the report presents enough detailed factual material about:
 - What has happened so far
 - What methods have been used and how they have been deployed
 - What findings have emerged or are expected to emerge
 - What will be the potential contribution to knowledge
 - What plans there are to complete the outstanding fieldwork/data collection, analysis and write up in order to provide confidence that completing within the permitted registration period is a practical option, and that, if completed, the thesis will meet the criteria for a PhD.

25. The style of drafting and presentation must also convince Panel and Committee members that the student is capable of working at PhD level. This means that the report must show that:
- The candidate can write clearly and in a manner appropriate for an advanced piece of academic work;
 - They can handle concepts, theories and relevant methodological issues confidently and accurately;
 - They can present data or evidence in ways that comply with academic conventions, and that they understand how to interpret these data and know their limitations;
 - They can distinguish clearly between explanations, interpretation and speculation in the discussion of findings and the inferences to be drawn from them.
26. Students are therefore advised to pay careful attention to the drafting and presentation of the report, as well as its content.

Transfer Panel Recommendations

27. The Transfer Panel will need to produce a report (PART E of RD2T), which will:
- Assess each of the three transfer assessment criteria;
 - Clearly acknowledge the strengths of the project, as well as any weaknesses or limitations, and where possible provides constructive suggestions for addressing them;
 - Provide an explicit recommendation as to whether or not the applicant's application to transfer should be accepted, or should be referred back for amendment and resubmission;
 - In cases where the recommendation is for referral, state clearly what issues need to be addressed and how this will be achieved, before the application should be resubmitted.

Outcomes

28. The RDC attaches great weight to the Panel's report but has the final responsibility for deciding whether to approve the application. It may approve the application, ask for minor amendments or require further work to be done. Students will receive official notification of the decision in writing. They should also seek informal feedback from their Hub Postgraduate Research Coordinator.

Arrangements for distance learning students

29. It is important to remember that whatever arrangements are made for distance learning students, these students are just as entitled to sensitive and constructive feedback as those studying face-to-face, and supervisors and assessors are reminded that this is often better delivered by phone than by email. Phoning (or 'Skyping') offers the student an opportunity to ask questions and check their understanding of what is being said especially when difficult or subtle messages are being conveyed. This may be particularly the case when dealing with students who are not native English speakers.