

## PhD First Year Assessment

### Guide for Students, Supervisors and Assessors

All candidates for the PhD Degree are admitted on a one-year probationary basis. Towards the end of their first year, a formal assessment of progress is made. This takes the form of a single report document and a viva (oral examination).

**The submission deadline** for the report is June 30<sup>th</sup> for students who started in the preceding October; for students who started in January or April, the submission deadline is 8 months later. The assessment of progress must take place within the first academic year, i.e. by the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> month. This ensures that students needing extra help can be appropriately supported, gives time for a re-assessment where appropriate, and also allows the opportunity to direct students unsuitable for PhD study towards other options, for example transferring to the MPhil. All students should have an agreed outcome of the assessment of progress by the end of the first year, unless problems have been identified during the viva and the student has been given time to address these issues before a re-assessment.

#### **The Report**

The student should prepare a written report of the work in progress and should include a proposal for further research. The report should include an indication of the overall aims of the study and the steps the student plans to take to achieve these aims. This takes the form of a single document of 3000 – 6000 words in length (exclusive of tables, bibliography and appendices), and a viva. The report should be divided into three parts:

- (a) a brief overview of the proposed PhD as a whole (including the rationale for and scope of the PhD);
- (b) completed work from the first year; and
- (c) work planned during the second, third (and fourth) years.

Students should keep in mind that in an ideal scenario, all data collection should be planned to finish by the end of the penultimate year or by the end of the first term in the final year at the latest, to allow at least 9 months for writing up. The report would ideally include a Gantt chart or other summary of the timeline of the planned work, and students should pay particular attention to demonstrating feasibility.

Many students will have completed a first study or experiment and part (b) of the report may be written in the form of a manuscript to be submitted for publication so that the student is not duplicating their efforts. However, a completed first study is not a requirement of the report, and a summary of work in progress is also acceptable. Ideally, whether the first study is

complete or in progress, the report should contain empirical data and show evidence of some data analysis. Where empirical data is not available, students should explain why not and instead may provide a literature review and narrative account of their first year.

### **The Viva (oral examination)**

The Supervisor should appoint Assessors and arrange with them the viva (oral examination) to discuss the report with the student. The viva should be used to assess the student's ability, progress, and the suitability of the project(s). The feasibility of achieving the project aims within the remaining 2 or 3 year period, the academic suitability of the project in relationship to the requirements for the PhD Degree, and the availability of expertise and resources should all be considered. The convention is that the student and Assessors meet together on a single occasion to discuss the report. The viva is usually about one hour in duration, and should give the student some experience of the PhD viva. At the same time, the viva is intended to be educational and constructive, and efforts are made by the Assessors to minimize the stress of the experience. After the viva, the Assessors make a joint recommendation on the student's assessment of progression, including any feedback they wish to provide for the student and Supervisor. Possible outcomes are:

- Student should now be registered formally for the PhD
- Student should be asked to revise and be re-examined at a later date (please indicate how long to allow)
- Student should be advised to take the MPhil option
- Student should be asked to withdraw

In cases where progress has been unsatisfactory and the student seems unlikely to meet the requirements for the PhD after at least a further two years of full-time research (or part-time equivalent), or if (s)he has insufficient funding to complete two more years, or wishes to finish early for any other reason, the student can be registered for the qualification of the MPhil degree instead. Alternatively, where the student has made a slow start and cannot be registered at this stage, but shows promise, feedback can be given and a second attempt at the assessment of progress (new report and viva) allowed no more than two months after the first assessment.

### **Supervisors' responsibility**

Around a month before the viva is due to take place, the Supervisor should inform the Psychiatry Education Team of the date of the viva and names of Assessors.

The report is intended as a fair assessment of the ability of the study and the feasibility of completing the PhD within a 3 (or 4) year period. To this end, the report should be the student's own work and a declaration to this effect should be included in the report document. Supervisors, Advisors, and Mentors can support the student with discussion and critique, but should not alter or otherwise directly contribute to the drafting of the report.

After the viva, the Supervisor will also write an account of the student's progress in the light of the Assessors' feedback and make his or her own recommendation on the outcome. The Degree Committee will consider the Assessors' reports together with the Supervisor's recommendation and, on the strength of these, recommend an outcome to the Board of Graduate Studies.

The supervisor should discuss the Assessors' recommendations and comments on the student's assessment of progression after the viva and show the student the Assessors' joint report.

### **Assessors**

The report must be examined by two Assessors, neither of whom is the Supervisor (Principal or Second), Advisor or Mentor. If a student is part of a research group, at least one Assessor will be from outside this group. **Before the viva, each Assessor should write an independent account** on the student's report with their recommendation so that there is written evidence of the decision that is *independent of the student's performance in the viva*.

Assessors should pay particular attention to the following:

1. Has the student clearly integrated their planned research within the existing literature? Is their work clearly justified and are there explicit hypotheses?
2. Is the quantity of data sufficient for the period of research undertaken? Are the data novel and/or confirmatory? Are the methods free from pitfalls? Did the student carry out the research? How much help did they receive?
3. Has an appropriate analysis been used and are the interpretations reasonable and free from confounds?
4. Writing must conform to scientific standards and scholarship and be sufficiently critical. References should be correctly cited and formatted.
5. Are the plans for future work realistic/feasible? Is the student on track to finish on time? What are the plans for publishable outcomes?
6. Scrutiny of the logbook should play a part in the review of the probationary period. The purpose of this review is educational, to encourage candidates to focus on training to develop skills suitable to their individual development and to address any particular shortcomings noted by the Assessors (e.g. writing skills). Please note that the logbook cannot be assessed formally as part of the registration examination, nor should lack of engagement with skills training be used as the sole criterion for preventing registration. Examiners should inform the Graduate Tutor and Education Team if they notice that the student has not attended regular meetings with their Supervisor.

After the viva, a joint report form should be completed and signed by both Assessors, including the outcome of the viva, their recommendation, and any feedback they wish to provide for the student and Supervisor. The joint report form will be sent to the Assessors in advance of the viva. The Assessors should send a signed electronic copy (Word or PDF) of their joint report directly to the Education Team [psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk).

Possible joint Assessors' Recommendations following a 1<sup>st</sup> year viva are:

- Student should now be registered formally for the PhD
- Student should be asked to revise and be re-examined at a later date (please indicate how long to allow)
- Student should be advised to take the MPhil option
- Student should be asked to withdraw

*\*NOTE – assessors should not recommend longer than two months for the student to revise and*

*resubmit the report, if necessary, unless there are exceptional circumstances. A follow up viva appointment should be arranged within this period of time.*

### **Submitting the report**

All reports should be sent by email to the Education Team:

[psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk) and to the Primary Supervisors, along with the student's logbook.

***Should an extension be required, students must formally apply by completing a corresponding form and submitting it to the Education Team at least four weeks before the submission deadline. You can obtain the form from the Education Team.***

### **Originality**

Attention is drawn to the University's guidance concerning plagiarism. The University states that "Plagiarism is defined as submitting as one's own work that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement. It is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity." The University's guidance concerning plagiarism and good academic practice can be found at [www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/](http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/plagiarism/students/)

### **Any questions - please feel free to contact:**

- Education Supervisor (Adisa Broadhurst [ap686@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ap686@medschl.cam.ac.uk))
- Director of Postgraduate Education (John Suckling [js369@cam.ac.uk](mailto:js369@cam.ac.uk))
- Education Team (Autumn Stamford and Adisa Broadhurst [psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk](mailto:psych-education@medschl.cam.ac.uk))