POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 9 - Upgrade from MPhil, MA/MSc by Research to Doctoral Study

Contents

Annexes

- Chapter 9 Annex 1 - Applications for upgrade deferral.
- Chapter 9 Annex 2 - Upgrade Vivas by Video-link.

Important Notice to all Students

All students in receipt of funding, whether that is through the University of Exeter, a Research Council, a Masters or Doctoral Loan or any other financial sponsorship, must check

whether upgrade from MPhil, MA By Research or MSc by Research to Doctoral Study is allowed under the terms and conditions of their funding. It is the student's responsibility to check these conditions ahead of requesting to change status.

1. The Regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1.1 The Regulations provide that:

"Candidates registered for a degree of Master of Philosophy, Master of Arts by Research or Master of Science by Research may be allowed to transfer their registration to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and to have all or part of the period of study already completed under the original registration counted towards the period under the new registration." (Regulations, Section 2.2)

2. Application to Upgrade

2.1 A student registered for the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil), Master of Arts by Research or Master of Science by Research (hereafter referred to as "Masters by Research") who wishes to upgrade to an appropriate doctoral programme shall submit a formal application, provided that they have met the entry requirements for the doctoral programme.

2.2 It is important to note that Masters By Research students wishing to upgrade, who are receipt of a UK student loan **must** check and understand the terms and conditions of their loan provision with their PGR Support Team, and understand the consequences of changes to their programme on their loan provision before decisions about upgrade are confirmed. Students are responsible for ensuring that they understand the implications of upgrading from MByRes to Doctoral Study on any loans, sponsorship or other funding that they receive.

2.3 Masters By Research students wishing to upgrade who have a Student visa must discuss their plans with the International Student Support Office, as upgrading may have serious implications for their visa.

3. Purpose of & Assessment Criteria for Upgrade

The purpose of the upgrade process is to:

3.1 Assess the candidate's research progress, according to the following criteria:

3.1.1 Confirm that the student is making satisfactory progress.

3.1.2 Confirm that there is evidence that the student is able to produce work of doctoral quality.

3.2 Act as a structural milestone within the student's research journey.

3.3 Provide the student with formal feedback on their work, and a developmental opportunity in the form of a viva.

3.4 Provide an opportunity for a detailed review of the research project and plan to take place from experts independent of the supervisory team.

4. Timing of Upgrade

4.1 Entrants registering before the 2019-20 academic year:

4.1.1 Timeframes for transfer of registration should be specified in Faculty and Department Handbooks and should normally be completed not later than after 18 months of full-time registration, or 36 months of part-time registration. Applications to transfer registration should take place within a timeframe that allows a decision about changes to registration status to be made within this timeframe.

4.2 Entrants registering from the 2019-20 academic year:

4.2.1 Transfer of registration should normally be completed not later than after 12 months of full-time registration, or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration, and as specified within Faculty and Department Handbooks[1]. Applications to transfer registration should take place early enough to allow a decision about changes to registration status to be made within this timeframe. This means that Departments should specify internal deadlines for initial

[1] Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS); Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (HLS); Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy (ESE)

submission of documentation for consideration by the Department Upgrade Committee.

4.2.2 Students initially registered on a Masters by Research programme should discuss their intention to upgrade with their supervisor at the earliest opportunity.

a. The student should submit an MByRes Intention to Upgrade form (available in the Doctoral College PGR Handbook) to their PGR Support Team no less than 4 weeks before the Faculty upgrade deadline (or pro-rata equivalent for part time students).

b. The decision about whether a student shall be permitted to apply to upgrade will be made by the Faculty PGR, or delegated authority. The person considering the intention to apply to upgrade must not be one of the upgrade examiners.

c. The deadline to upload documents for upgrade will match the Faculty norm. Further details about the intention to upgrade are confirmed in the Faculty and Departmental Handbooks.

4.3 Deferral of upgrade, applicable to all students:

4.3.1 In exceptional circumstances beyond the student's control applications for deferral to the deadline for transfer of registration may be made. These will be considered by the Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)). Further details on the process to be followed in consideration of deferral of the deadline for the transfer of registration from MPhil or Masters By Research to Doctoral Study, which may involve applying for deferral of the deadline for initial submission of documentation to the Department Upgrade Committee, is appropriate as set out in the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 9: Upgrade from MPhil, MA by Research or MSc by Research to Doctoral Study, Annex 1: Applications for upgrade deferral.

4.3.2 The form to request a deferral to the upgrade is available in the Doctoral College PGR Handbook.

5. Submission Requirements

5.1 Supervisory Team Submission: The candidate's supervisors appointed for the initial registration on the MPhil or Masters by Research shall have the opportunity to submit a report commenting on the application and statement.

5.2 Student Submission:

5.2.1 **Students upgrading from MPhil**: The student shall apply to upgrade via MyPGR and shall upload documents as required by their Department (available below and in the relevant Faculty Handbooks).

5.2.2 **Students upgrading from Masters by Research**: The student shall submit their documents via email to their PGR Support Team by the deadline confirmed to them when they return their MByRes Intention to Upgrade form (available in the Doctoral College PGR Handbook). Students wishing to upgrade from Masters by Research programmes must demonstrate that they have met the entry requirements for the doctoral programme. Exceptions to the entry requirements for upgrade to the doctorate may only be considered as an exception by the Faculty Director of PGR.

5.2.3 **All students**: The required documentation will vary by Department, in order to account for disciplinary variations. Approval of upgrade submission requirements in each Faculty sits with the Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)). Departments or Faculties may also determine whether any additional mechanisms for considering upgrade applications are necessary; but if any mechanisms are in place they must be operated without exception for all applications within the Department or Faculty.

5.3 In all cases the documentation required must be sufficient to allow the Department Upgrade Committee to form a judgement and provide feedback on the candidate's progress and determine whether or not to make a recommendation to support the candidate's request to upgrade.

5.4 Faculty and Department Handbooks should provide clear guidance on the documentation required. Indicatively, this might include:

a. A statement of aims and objectives.

b. A Generative AI (GenAI) use statement (see 6 below).

c. A statement of how the candidate expects the final thesis to demonstrate how the thesis meets the programme requirements for an award at doctoral level, with reference to the qualification descriptor for level 8 in the TQA Credit and Qualifications Framework, Chapter 7: Academic Level.

d. Contents outline for the thesis.

e. Submission of one or more pieces of written work (as defined by the Department) in good presentational order.

f. Confirmation that the student has discussed the ethical implications of their research with their supervisor, and where applicable, started to make preparations for ethical approval for their data collection, and/or started the application process for ethical approval.

g. A draft timetable for submission of the thesis within the candidate's planned submission period.

h. Confirmation of completion of all PGR Mandatory Training, as specified by the Training Needs Analysis.

5.5 The candidate may also be expected to give a presentation on their work.

5.6 All students are required to attend an upgrade viva (see Section 8 below).

6. Generative AI (GenAI) Statement

6.1 All students **must** include one of the following statements in the title page of their upgrade portfolio submission. The relevant statement (6.1.1 OR 6.1.2) can be copied and pasted.

6.1.1 I acknowledge the use *of [insert the name of GenAI tool(s) used and link]* to*:

a. generate materials for background research and independent study*

b. generate materials that I have adapted to include within my upgrade portfolio*

c. refine writing/improve grammar within my upgrade portfolio*

d. I confirm that no content from generative AI has been presented as my own work. Any use of generative AI has been referenced throughout the upgrade portfolio.

*Delete any statements that do not apply.

6.1.2 I have not used any generative AI tools in preparing the upgrade portfolio.

Note: The inclusion of statement 6.1.2, or the absence of any generative AI statement will be considered a declaration that you have not used generative AI in preparing your work.

6.2 Students will not be penalised for using GenAI tools in their submitted work, provided the use falls within the latest referencing guidance at Using generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in academic work - Referencing. However, failing to declare the use of GenAI may be considered under the University's research misconduct procedures, available at the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 13: Research Misconduct: Procedure for Graduate Research Students suspected of Research Misconduct.

6.3 Students are expected to keep a record of how they have used GenAI when preparing their upgrade portfolio, including:

a. the prompts used.
b. the outputs obtained.
c. how the *output* was adapted for use in the work etc.

This information does not need to be included in the upgrade portfolio, but students may later be asked to submit it as evidence if they are asked to discuss how they have used GenAI.

6.4 Additional information about using and referencing AI is available at the University StudyZone pages.

7. Department Upgrade Committees

7.1 Upgrade requests should be considered by a Department Upgrade Committee. The Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) must give approval to the arrangements for Upgrade Committees within their Faculty/Department. These arrangements should ensure that:

7.1.1 One member of the Department Upgrade Committee is nominated to act as Chair.

7.1.2 The Department Upgrade Committee comprises at least two members of academic staff, none of whom should be (or have been) a supervisor, PGR Pastoral Tutor or mentor of the student.

7.1.3 It is expected that at least one member of the Upgrade Committee is experienced in the upgrade process.

7.1.4 All members of the upgrade committee are expected to complete training and continuous professional development as necessary and as specified by the Faculty.

7.2 Conflict of Interest

7.2.1 Upgrade committees and FDPGRs should disclose of any situations that have the potential to impair the committee to make a fair and impartial assessment of the student's upgrade portfolio or their ability to meet the upgrade criteria.

7.2.2 Where there is a conflict of interest, or the perception of a conflict of interest applies, the person in question should not be appointed to the upgrade committee, unless exceptional circumstances can be proven.

7.2.3 Members of the upgrade committee may become the internal examiner for the candidate for their final examination, provided they meet all other criteria for appointment (outlined in Section 4 of the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 12, Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes.

7.2.4 Examples of potential conflicts are detailed in section 4.7 of the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 12, Handbook for Examination of Postgraduate Research programmes.

7.2.5 In any case where a person is unsure about whether a circumstance might constitute a conflict of interest, the onus is on that person to declare it or in the first instance seek advice from the Faculty DPGR. Should it be determined that there is a conflict of interest or the perception of such it would only be under exceptional circumstances that the nomination would continue without change.

7.2.6 Where there is a potential conflict, the upgrade committee must submit a rationale to the Faculty DPGR providing information to explain why the appointment would not lead to the perception of a conflict of interest. The written consent of the PGR student and the nominated committee member would need to be given prior to the confirmation of the upgrade committee.

8. The Upgrade Viva

8.1 When is a viva required?

Stage of Upgrade	First Submission	Minor Amendments	Resubmission
A viva must always be held	Yes	No	No
There is substantial disagreement between the upgrade committee members	N/A	Yes	Yes
The upgrade committee are inclined to recommend that the student does not upgrade to PhD	N/A	Yes	Yes

8.1.1 When reviewing minor or major amendments, the upgrade committee are expected to reach their recommendations without holding a viva unless there is a substantial disagreement or where the upgrade committee is inclined to recommend that the student does not upgrade.

8.2 Purpose of the Upgrade Viva

8.2.1 The upgrade is a milestone whereby the upgrade committee will assess the candidate's upgrade portfolio. The upgrade assessment is split into two parts: the portfolio of work that the candidate submits for assessment and an oral defence, traditionally called a 'viva voce', meaning 'by or with the living voice', referred to as a 'viva'.

8.2.2 The upgrade viva provides an opportunity for the upgrade committee to discuss the submitted portfolio with the student in order to:

a. Determine that the portfolio is the work of the candidate, by assessing the thoroughness of the candidate's understanding of the work completed to date and project design (as submitted in written form).

b. Provide the candidate with the opportunity to justify their research questions and proposals.

c. Provide, as a result of discussion, independent formative feedback.

d. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the portfolio and thesis plans and its justification, as well as an initial assessment of the candidate's knowledge of the relevant academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice, and understanding of relevant theories, concepts and research techniques.

e. Provide an opportunity for the candidate to experience a viva voce ahead of their final examination.

8.2.3 Thereby, the upgrade viva provides candidates with an opportunity to talk about their portfolio and future research plans with academics independent from their supervisory team and to receive feedback from them.

8.2.4 All vivas are different, but they normally follow a question-and-answer format. The questions can address any aspect of the submission, and there is no minimum or maximum number of questions that might be asked. The nature and quantity of questions should be sufficient to enable the viva to fulfil the purposes outlined in 8.2.2 above. By the end of the viva, the upgrade committee should be able to determine whether the portfolio is the work of the candidate, and whether it is of the standard to progress to PhD level, based on the assessment criteria outlined in Section 3 above.

8.2.5 If there are concerns as to whether or not the thesis is the work of the candidate, the upgrade committee should refer to The TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 13: Procedure for Graduate Research Students suspected of Research Misconduct.

8.2.6 If the portfolio is not of the standard to upgrade to PhD, formative feedback must be provided in the upgrade report, specifying why the written submission does not meet the relevant assessment criteria and detailing how it should be revised so that it does meet the criteria (see section 9 below). The dialogue between the upgrade committee and the candidate during the viva can inform the preparation of the upgrade report to ensure good quality formative feedback is provided.

8.3 Attendance at the upgrade viva

8.3.1 Only the following people **should** normally be in attendance:

a. The candidate.

b. The upgrade committee.

c. A member of the supervisory team (normally the lead supervisor) as a non-participant observer where they have been invited to do so by the candidate.

d. The Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) **may** give permission for additional people, in a non-examining role, to be present at the examination to ensure fairness and consistency. The upgrade viva **must not** go ahead if written permission from the FDPGR has not been obtained ahead of the viva. Any additional attendees will be appointed for a specific purpose and must attend as a non-participating observer, e.g., to fulfil the requirements of an ILP.

8.3.2 An upgrade viva may not proceed without all members of the upgrade committee and non-participating observers/attendees being present. If one of the upgrade committee is unable to attend, the viva should be postponed, or where necessary consideration given to revising the membership of the upgrade committee (for example where a panel member will be unavailable for an extended period of time).

8.3.3 Audio, audio-visual or transcript recordings of the upgrade viva **should not** be taken by anyone attending the viva, whether they are active participants or not.

8.3.4 Attendance of a member of the supervisory team:

a. Candidates **may** invite one member of their supervisory team to attend their upgrade viva, but this is at the discretion of the candidate. If invited, is normally the candidate's lead supervisor who attends the upgrade viva, but the candidate **may** invite an alternative member of the supervisory team or opt to invite no one from the supervisory team. The supervisor would be there in support of the candidate as a non-participant observer, and to enable them to better provide supervision of the candidate should the candidate be required to complete amendments or resubmit their upgrade portfolio.

However, the following requirements apply, if a candidate chooses to invite a supervisor:

b. Whilst supervisors **should** make every effort to attend the upgrade viva should they be invited to do so; candidates must be minded that it may be difficult for their supervisor to do so unless they are invited before the organisation of the upgrade viva.

c. No more than one member of the supervisory team may attend the upgrade viva, in order not to unbalance the viva. This **may** be the lead supervisor, as they will take key responsibility for supporting the candidates with any amendments required, but a different member of the supervisory team **may** be invited at the student's request.

d. The supervisor, if invited, **should** only be present at the upgrade viva in the presence of the candidate. To allow the student to make any comments they wish to the Committee without their supervisor being present, the student **should** always be invited to talk with the Committee after the supervisor is asked to leave. The supervisor should be invited to leave the upgrade after the completion of questioning and before the panel retires to determine the upgrade outcome.

e. A supervisor, if invited, **should** be present as an observer only. They **should not** take any active part in the proceedings, with the only exception being after the upgrade committee has announced their recommendations and the upgrade viva has formally ended (see 'Following the return of the candidate in section 8.7 'Agenda' below), at which point they **may**, in consultation with the candidate, ensure that they both have a clear understanding of any amendments outlined by the upgrade committee at this stage.

f. A supervisor who is attending an upgrade viva **must** attend for the duration of the viva (except for 8.3.5d, above). See also 'Agenda', below.

g. A candidate **should not** invite anybody other than their supervisor to attend their viva. The upgrade viva **must not** go ahead if additional attendees are

present without written permission being given from the FDPGR ahead of the viva.

8.4 Arrangements for the upgrade viva

8.4.1 The upgrade viva **should** be conducted in an appropriate, comfortable location where the probability of interruptions occurring is minimal and where any reasonable adjustments recommended by a candidate's Individual Learning Plan (ILP) can be accommodated.

8.4.2 Upgrade vivas are arranged depending on Faculty and Department guidance. Upgrade Committees and candidates are expected to refer to their Faculty and Department Handbooks for more information.

8.4.3 In arranging the upgrade viva, consideration should be given to any reasonable adjustments detailed in a candidate's (ILP).

8.4.4 Students who have an ILP are responsible for liaising with their PGR Support Team to confirm any reasonable adjustments that are required for their upgrade. If a student or the upgrade committee have any concerns about the reasonable adjustments proposed, they **must** discuss with the PGR Support Team before the upgrade viva takes place. Further guidance around the implementation of an ILP, and what to do if there is uncertainty around any proposed adjustments, is available in the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 26, Inclusive Practice within Academic Study.

8.4.5 The candidate **should** confirm their identity at the start of the upgrade viva (by producing their Unicard, or other photo ID, such as a passport). The upgrade viva must not proceed without this confirmation.

8.4.6 The upgrade viva **should not** exceed more than 90 minutes, excluding any student presentations. Candidates and upgrade committees are expected to refer to their Department Handbooks[2] for further guidance.

8.4.7 The chair of the upgrade viva may offer short comfort breaks if needed.

8.4.8 The upgrade viva may take place by video-link provided it complies with the procedure set out in the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 9: Annex 2: Upgrade Vivas by Video-link.

8.5 Language of the upgrade viva

8.5.1 All upgrade vivas **must** be held in English unless the candidate has been given permission to submit their thesis in an alternate language (see TQA PGR Handbook: Chapter 11, Presentation of Thesis). If they have been given such permission by the Dean of Postgraduate Research, the upgrade viva may be conducted in English and/or the language of submission as appropriate, and as agreed in advance by the upgrade committee in consultation with the candidate.

8.6 Upgrade Viva Agenda

8.6.1 The following sets out a basic agenda for the upgrade viva. The upgrade viva **may** be conducted in accordance with this agenda.

8.6.2 Prior to the arrival of the candidate and their supervisor:

a. Introductions.

b. Confirmation that all members of the upgrade committee have received and understand the regulations for upgrade to PhD along with this policy, the 'Upgrade from MPhil, MA by Research or MSc by Research to Doctoral Study'.

c. Outline by the upgrade committee chair of the upgrade viva schedule and process, including, but not limited to the expectations regarding upgrade viva

[2] Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (HASS); Faculty of Health and Life Sciences (HLS); Faculty of Environment, Science and Economy (ESE)

length, the process for informing the candidate of the preliminary outcome of the assessment, and a reminder that the upgrade viva should not be recorded.

d. Confirmation by the upgrade committee of priority areas about which the committee wish to ask questions and discussion of the order of questions.

e. Confirmation by the upgrade committee that any reasonable adjustments required to the upgrade viva, as confirmed by the student's ILP, will be adhered to. Where necessary, the committee should confirm how adjustments will be managed throughout the viva and which member of the committee will be responsible for ensuring that adjustments are followed.

8.6.3 Following the arrival of the candidate and their supervisor:

a. Introductions (led by the upgrade committee chair).

b. Confirmation of the candidate's identity (led by the upgrade committee chair).

c. Housekeeping (led by the upgrade committee chair).

d. Explaining the process of the upgrade viva to the candidate, and what happens at the end of it and a reminder that the upgrade viva must not be recorded by anyone in attendance (led by the upgrade committee chair).

e. Questions (led by the upgrade committee, the supervisor and any other attendees **must** remain silent observers).

f. Conclusions – providing information to the candidate on what will happen next; confirming that the candidate is satisfied that they were given a fair chance to defend their upgrade portfolio (led by the upgrade committee chair), offer the candidate an opportunity to return to the viva location after the Board's private discussion to receive preliminary feedback (if the Board feels it is appropriate).

g. ILP confirmation - all participants should confirm that they are satisfied that any reasonable adjustments in the student's ILP, which are relevant to the upgrade committee, have been followed to the satisfaction of all attendees. If anyone is not satisfied that this is the adjustments have not been followed, this must be raised to the PGR Support Team immediately following the viva.

8.6.4 Following the departure of the supervisor:

a. The candidate is invited to make any comments to the upgrade committee without their supervisor present.

8.6.5 Following the departure of the candidate:

a. Initial consideration of whether the upgrade portfolio is the work of the candidate and whether it meets the upgrade criteria (see section 3 above).

8.6.6 Following the return of the candidate and supervisor (optional):

a. Disclaimer (led by the upgrade committee chair) to explain that these are only preliminary recommendations, in accordance with the following principle:
The upgrade committee **may** if they choose, inform the candidate of their preliminary recommendations. However, in doing so it **must** be made clear to all concerned that this **may not** be the final recommendation that the upgrade committee makes in its written report.
Furthermore, this will be a recommendation only, which the upgrade committee **may** be asked to amend by the Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)). Candidates **should** be made aware that until they receive formal confirmation of the outcome via the formal upgrade report from MyPGR, any information received is only provisional.

b. Preliminary notification and explanation of recommendations (if this is felt to be appropriate) and of the nature of the amendments likely to be required for the portfolio to meet the standard required to upgrade to PhD. Candidates **should** be made aware that until they receive formal confirmation

of the required amendments via the formal upgrade report from MyPGR, any information received is only provisional.

8.6.7 Ending the viva: (led by the upgrade committee chair) to provide confirmation that the upgrade viva is formally complete. This may either be confirmed as part of step 8.6.3 above, if the candidate is not returning or should take place at the end of step 8.6.6 above, if the candidate has returned.

8.7 Upgrade viva deferrals

8.7.1 See the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 9, Annex 1 for further information about upgrade deferrals. The Upgrade Committee **should not** request a deferral on behalf of the student once the portfolio has been submitted, even if the work submitted is not to the standard that is expected (See 9.1 below for further details)

9. Upgrade Outcomes

9.1 The submission of the portfolio starts the examination, and the examination must proceed in full before feedback can be given to the student. Deferrals after submission of the upgrade portfolio and before the upgrade viva may only be requested under specific circumstances, by the student, as detailed in the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 9, Annex 1. If the work submitted is not to the standard expected, the upgrade examination should continue, and the upgrade outcomes must be used.

9.2 The Committee shall satisfy itself that, through discussion with the student about their work at the viva, that, bearing in mind the requirements in respect of periods of study (see the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Periods of registration and changes to registration status for Postgraduate Research students for the projected programme of research) can be completed within the period of study stipulated.

9.3 At the first attempt at upgrade, the following outcomes are available:

a. Pass.

b. Require completion of minor amendments within 2 months (or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration). This option should be for the correction of typographical and presentational errors or for limited revisions in the

material of the portfolio. Further research and/or rewriting may be required but must be realistically completed within 2 months (or the pro-rata equivalent).

c. Resubmit the upgrade portfolio within 3 months (or the pro-rata equivalent for part-time registration) and **may** recommend initiation or progression of a case under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice. This option should be used where the candidate has not met the required criteria and significant amendments and/or additional research is required.

9.4 Following a second attempt at upgrade as a consequence of outcomes 8.1.2, 8.1.3 or 9.3c above at the first attempt, the following outcomes are available to the Department Upgrade Committee:

9.4.1 For students **initially registered on an MPhil**:

a. Pass.

b. Remain registered as an MPhil student, where a student has provided satisfactory evidence of their ability to submit work of MPhil quality, within the appropriate timeframe for an MPhil.

c. Remain registered as an MPhil student and normally recommend initiation or progression of a case under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice.

9.4.2 For students **initially registered on a Masters by Research**:

a. Pass.

b. Remain registered as a Masters by Research student, where a student has provided satisfactory evidence of their ability to submit work of Masters by Research quality, within the appropriate timeframe for a Masters by Research.

c. Remain registered as an Masters by Research student and normally recommend initiation or progression of a case under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice.

9.5 Upon review of a second submission by a student, if the Department Upgrade Committee are satisfied that a recommendation of 'pass' can be made to the Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) without the necessity for a second viva they may make this recommendation to the Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) without delay. Should the upgrade committee be inclined to recommend no upgrade (that the student remain registered on MPhil or MbyRes) a second viva must be held. See section 8.1 above.

9.6 When a student has not met the criteria for upgrade, the Department Upgrade Committees may determine whether or not it is appropriate to recommend initiation or progression of a case under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice. This should normally be used where there is evidence that:

9.6.1 Performance at upgrade is indicative of wider concerns with performance.

9.6.2 Performance at upgrade indicates a failure to engage responsibly with their studies.

9.7 Normally, upgrade will not be the first point at which progression concerns might be noticed, as such, it is important that referrals to the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice are not delayed as a matter to be dealt with through the upgrade process. This means that it is more likely that the Department Upgrade Committee will normally recommend progression rather than initiation of a case under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice. Warnings issued prior to upgrade can usefully use completion of upgrade requirements and performance in the upgrade as actions that a student needs to successfully undertake to demonstrate satisfactory performance. Staff responsible for monitoring action under the TQA LTS Handbook, Chapter 15: Unsatisfactory Student Progress, Engagement and Attendance: Code of Good Practice can ask Department Upgrade Committees to report accordingly in their feedback.

10. Health and Wellbeing and Upgrade

10.1 If the Department Upgrade Committee has concerns that a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviour is significantly impacting their ability to successfully complete the upgrade process no decision (for 19/20 entrants in line with the above outcomes in Section 9) should be taken until it is determined whether it is appropriate to take alternative action under the 'Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures'.

11. Feedback to Students

11.1 As this is a developmental process the Department Upgrade Committee will provide written feedback in the upgrade report to the student on their submission and their performance in the viva.

11.2 At the end of the upgrade viva, once the panel have discussed and agreed a provisional outcome, the chair of the panel may share the provisional outcome with the student and their supervisor. This must be accompanied by a disclaimer to explain that these are only preliminary recommendations, in accordance with the following principle:

11.2.1 The upgrade panel may if they choose, inform the candidate of their preliminary recommendations. However, in doing so it must be made clear to all concerned that this may not be the final recommendation that the upgrade panel makes in its written report.

11.2.2 Furthermore, this will be a recommendation only, which the upgrade panel may be asked to amend by the Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)).

11.2.3 Candidates should be aware that until they receive formal confirmation of the outcome via the formal examiners' report from the Postgraduate Administration Team any information received is only provisional.

12. Sponsorship Progress Reports

12.1 Where the University is required to provide progress reports to a student's sponsor, the report of the Department Upgrade Committee should be used as a source of information for that purpose.

13. Final Authority and Quality Check

13.1 The Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) retains final authority regarding the decision to approve or reject upgrades of registration. The FDPGR may delegate authority and sign-off of upgrade outcomes to the Department DPGR at their discretion.

13.2 Where authority has been delegated, the FDPGR must complete a quality check of a sample of upgrade outcomes annually. The quality check is the process used to assure that assessment outcomes are fair and reliable, and that assessment criteria have been applied consistently. Any quality check method must be proportionate to ensure fairness, reliability and consistent application of the upgrade criteria.

13.3 Annually, the FDPGR will review a 20% sample of completed upgrades from across the Faculty. The sample of quality-checked upgrades must be representative across departments and all outcomes. Where there is variation in practice, the FDPGR is responsible for addressing this and for escalating concerns.

13.4 The quality-check for upgrades will not change the outcomes for students. It is a formative exercise to ensure academic standards are consistent across departments.

13.5 The FDPGR will report quality check outcomes to the PGR Board. Issues identified with the completion of upgrade within Faculties will be addressed through local training and feedback to upgrade panels, as needed. Systemic issues or recommendations for improvements of the upgrade process from Faculties reported to the PGRB will be addressed through the PGR Board or delegated authority or addressed through the Educator Development Programme.

14. Transfer of Registration from PhD to MPhil/MbyRes (Downgrade)

International Students who are Student visa holders: transferring from a Doctoral programme to a Masters level programme can have serious consequences for your immigration status as the University may be required to report this change to the Home

Office. It is important that you receive advice on the implications of your decision, which you can access by contacting International Student Community & Support.

All students in receipt of funding, whether that is through the University of Exeter, a Research Council, a Student Loan or any other financial sponsorship, must check whether transfer of registration from doctorate level to masters level is allowed under the terms and conditions of their funding. It is the student's responsibility to check these conditions ahead of requesting to change status.

14.1 Faculties (or delegated Schools) should be aware that the transfer of a student to a doctoral research programme through upgrade, or the acceptance of a candidate onto a doctoral research programme, is a contractual undertaking by the Faculty to provide a student with a programme of supervision in preparation for examination at doctoral level. It is not possible, therefore, for a student's registration to be 'downgraded' from a doctoral research programme to MPhil/MbyRes without the agreement of the student. Note that 'downgrade' is not an outcome of upgrade (the outcomes for upgrade are detailed in section 9 of this document).

14.2 In cases where a Faculty, after due consideration, has reason to believe that a student is not able to produce work at doctoral level, this must be clearly stated to the student with the recommendation that they transfer their registration to an MPhil or MbyRes Programme.

14.3 Following agreement from a student, a Faculty Director of PGR (FDPGR) (or nominated Departmental Director of PGR (DDPGR)) may approve the downgrading of registration.

14.4 Confirmation of the change in programme should take place through the completion of a change in programme form, available on request from the PGR Support Team.