

Transfer of Status for DPhil and MSc(R) students

Guidance for students

Every graduate student starting to work for a research degree in Oxford is first given the status of a Probationary Research Student (PRS). Only after an assessment of your progress during the probationary period is your status formally changed to that of a DPhil or MSc(R) student. Transfer of status should not be viewed as an impediment or hurdle, but rather as a process designed to support you in your development as an active researcher. However, the University Regulations do require you to complete your first attempt to transfer within particular time limits¹.

Since these limits refer to the time to **complete** the process, the Department's dates for submission of material are earlier. For non-CDT DPhil and MSc(R) degrees, the deadline for submission of the material is the Monday 6 weeks before Monday of 1st week of your 4th term (this is typically around the beginning of September for students starting in Michaelmas term, the beginning of December for Hilary term starters and the middle of March for Trinity term starters). For CDT students, the dates will be set by the CDT director and you will be notified separately of these.

1. Outline of your tasks and of the process

There are four tasks that need to be completed:

1. Report

- a. You should submit three soft-bound copies of the written work described below to the Faculty Office (8th floor Thom Building); you can print and bind them yourselves or ask the print room (printroom@eng.ox.ac.uk) to do this for you². These will be passed directly to the assessors by the Faculty Office.
- b. You should also email a pdf copy of your report to postgraduate.studies@eng.ox.ac.uk. The report file should be named *yoursurname_yourstudentnumber_transfer.pdf*. The subject of the email should be "transfer of status report". Please **do not** email the report to your assessors.

2. **GSO.2 form.** You should download the GSO.2 form from the University website <https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/guidance/graduate/progression?wssl=1>. Complete section 1 and the supplementary information, sign in section 1, and give the form to your supervisor (in either soft or hard copy). It is your supervisor's responsibility to submit this to the Faculty Office. The Faculty Office will contact your college directly for the college signature.

¹ These are four terms for a DPhil student, but usually six terms for CDT students (but check with your programme's administrator, since there is some variation). Terms are counted starting from your arrival in Oxford.

² Please allow at least five working days for printing and binding to be completed.

3. **Presentation.** You will be asked to deliver a presentation to your two assessors (and/or possibly to a wider audience, depending on your research area).
4. **Interview.** You will be asked to attend an interview with your two assessors at a time and place arranged by mutual agreement. If you do not hear from your assessors within two weeks of your documents being sent to them (you will receive an email when this has been done), then please contact your assessors directly. At the interview, they may ask you to make a presentation if they have not heard it before. The interview will typically last around 45-60 minutes. You should be prepared to spend a substantial amount of time discussing your plans for future work. Note that your supervisor will not attend.

Your assessors are selected by the Director of Graduate Studies (in consultation with the chairs of the relevant teaching/research panels in the Department) as having suitable expertise in your area. They will consider all aspects of your submission, including a report from your supervisor on the GSO.2 form, and make a recommendation to the Director of Graduate Studies, who will consider all the evidence and make a recommendation to the University. You will then hear back formally from the University with the outcome, although you are very likely to hear back more informally as well from your assessors in the meantime.

2. Written work

The written work can take two forms: 'paper' mode and 'report' mode. The former presents your work in the form of a scientific paper (this does not have to have been submitted for publication), in parallel with a literature review and research proposal; the latter is a single report. You should discuss with your supervisor which option is better for you; there is no inherent advantage in either. If you have already drafted a paper, the first option might be better for you; alternatively, if you are involved in a substantial design of a piece of equipment, the second option might be preferable. Templates for both options are available on the graduate section of Weblearn.

The research proposal should contain detail of the work planned for the next 9 months, with well-considered ideas for the remaining period of your studies. You should be planning for submission of a thesis by months 36-42 (DPhil) or month 24 (MSc(R)): there are different target submission dates for CDT students, but you will be informed of these by the Director of your CDT and the University.

2.1 'Paper' mode

For this mode, you need to submit two parts.

1. **Part I:** This should be written in the form of a scientific journal or conference paper. It should have all the usual elements: a title, abstract, introduction and review of relevant work; several sections describing research output; a conclusions section; and a bibliography. The paper typically should not exceed 10 A4 pages, including all diagrams and bibliography, when set in 10pt Times New Roman in a single spaced, double column format, with page margins of 20 mm all round.

2. **Part II:** This should be a critical review of the literature sufficient to set your existing and proposed work in context, followed by your research proposal. The proposal is a key element: the content, time required, and risk involved in your proposed research must be fully thought through. You must provide a risk assessment identifying critical points or uncertainties, and indicate how you will manage these. The review and proposal is limited to 25 A4 pages, set in 12pt Times New Roman, double spaced with 20 mm margins all round. You may well find that there is some overlap between the literature reviews in the two parts. Do not be concerned by this, as cross-referencing between the two parts is perfectly acceptable.

2.2 'Report' mode

For this mode, a single report is required, written rather like a mini-thesis. The report should contain an abstract, introduction, literature review, chapters describing work undertaken, and overall conclusion. The substantive differences from the 'paper' mode are that the review of literature is unified, and that the format might make it easier to describe equipment build. The report also gives an opportunity to write a literature review or equipment chapter that can be included in your final thesis. The literature review and research conclusions should provide a clear motivation for your research proposal in the last chapter. This proposal is again of key importance, and it should include the level of detail already described for the 'paper' mode. The entire report should not exceed 50 A4 pages when set in 12pt Times New Roman, double spaced, with 20mm margins all round.

3. Outcomes

The criteria used by assessors for transfer of status are that they must be satisfied that:

1. The student has proposed a viable DPhil project that can be completed within the proposed timeframe and funded period or within 12 terms³.
2. The work undertaken to date provides an appropriate background and platform for progress.
3. The student has developed a critical understanding of the relevant literature.
4. The student understands, can justify and defend their research project, its objectives and rationale.
5. The student has a clear plan for the future direction of the project.
6. The student has begun to take intellectual ownership of the project.

They are looking for evidence of all-round basic competence as a researcher: someone who is able to read, understand and appreciate the significance of existing literature; to come up with relevant and timely ideas; to pursue them via theory, experiment, and analysis; to draw conclusions about the outcome and "what next"; and to present their work so that other researchers can understand it.

In many cases, the assessors will recommend transfer of status without any concerns. There is then nothing for you to do but await the formal letter from the University.

³ Note that these are 12 terms of study, i.e. periods of suspension do not count.

It is possible that the assessors may raise some concerns that will need to be addressed by you more formally than simply by discussion in the interview. In such cases, the assessors will ask you to provide a written response within two weeks of the interview, agreed with your supervisor, before recommending transfer.

It is also possible that the assessors will not be able to recommend transfer of status. You will receive a formal letter about this from the University, along with a copy of the assessors' report. You will be granted one further term in which to apply for transfer of status a second time. You should discuss the situation with your supervisor and with the Director of Graduate Studies to explore all options available to you. If you are unsuccessful on a second attempt at transfer of status, you will be required to leave the University.