Guidelines for Supervisors on the Transfer to / Confirmation on the PhD Register (PGR3) Process

Document Owner: Graduate Studies Office (DCU)

Document Version 1: June 2025

What is the Transfer/Confirmation Exam For?

As per Regulation 8.2.1 of the [Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis](#):

> "Students initially admitted on a PhD-track registration will have to undergo a confirmation procedure generally no earlier than 12 months and no later than 21 months research after initial registration for full-time students and at an appropriate corresponding time for part-time students. This is a distinct and separate exercise to Annual Progress Review. Applications from such candidates for confirmation on the PhD register must be supported by the Principal Supervisor and will be subject to both an evaluation of a written submission and a satisfactory performance in an oral examination conducted by the Principal Supervisor and an Internal Examiner (selection based on regulation 10.1), approved by the Head of School."

Students on the Master's register may also apply for transfer to the PhD Register using the same procedure and under the same conditions.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to ensure that a student undergoes the Transfer/Confirmation process within the timeframe specified in the Regulations.

The Transfer/Confirmation Exam will:

- Ultimately, assess whether the candidate is *moving in a satisfactory direction*, at a *satisfactory pace*, and meeting *quality expectations* so that they could very reasonably be expected to submit a thesis for examination at NFQ Level 10 within the next 2-3 years approximately (F/T registration, equivalent timeframe for part-time). The Transfer/Confirmation exam is **not** an assessment of whether the candidate is nearly ready to submit or defend a doctoral thesis.

1

- Provide the candidate with concrete feedback on progress to date, on strengths and weaknesses.

- Provide the candidate with advice on aspects such as theory, methodology, data analysis, literature gaps etc.

- Provide the candidate with advice on how to manage their schedule to ensure timely completion.

- Provide the candidate with practical advice and support on conference paper or article publication. Where the candidate intends to submit a PhD by Publication, it is recommended that at least one article should be accepted at this point in time and there should be a clear and realistic timeframe for submission of the remaining two articles. Please refer to the [Guidelines for Candidates, Supervisors and Examiners on PhD by Publication](#) for further guidance on this.

- For PhDs by Artefact and PhDs by Creative Performance/Practice, please refer to the [Guidelines for Candidates, Supervisors and Examiners on PhD by Artefact or Creative Performance/Practice](#) for further guidance on what is expected to be in place at this point for Transfer/Confirmation.

- Document clearly progress to date and/or lack of progress to date and linked recommendations in the PGR3 form; It should be very clear to the candidate what the overall assessment is (e.g. excellent, very good, good, fair or weak) and, where relevant, how to address weaknesses for the remainder of the research project. Any concerns about progress should be clearly articulated in the report along with concrete expectations for milestones to be met.

- Through the Internal Examiner, provide the supervisory panel with any support they may need in communicating feedback, expectations and timelines to the candidate, while being aware that the feedback to the student should come **jointly** from the internal examiner and the supervisors.

- Discuss the use of Gen AI tools, transparency and reporting requirements, as per the [Guidance for Candidates and Supervisors on Responsible Use of Generative AI in Doctoral/Master's Research](#) and the guidance on the reporting of use.

- Be conducted in a manner that resembles a viva voce by including a brief presentation and a mix of broad and specific questions on the research topic.

What should be submitted for it and how much content?

- A personal statement of between 800 and 1000 words indicating what has been done to date, what has been written and submitted to supervisors, what training has been undertaken (GTEs, transversal skills), conference papers presented, articles submitted, accepted or published, and clearly outlining the future work plan and timeline to submission. Any barriers to progress can also be formally recorded.

- In addition, although there are variations in practice across disciplines, one chapter at least. The contents of this chapter should be discussed and agreed in advance with the supervisor(s).
- With agreement from the internal examiner, more than one chapter could be submitted. However, the internal examiner is not obliged to read more than one chapter and the personal statement. **A mini thesis is not required at Transfer/Confirmation stage**.

At this stage in the research journey, it can be expected that **at least** the following have taken place:

- An extensive literature review
- Identification of a research gap and clear research questions
- Identification of the most appropriate methodology/gies and, where relevant, theoretical framework(s)

Some candidates may also have:

- Applied for, and possibly be granted, ethics approval
- Collected some (pilot) data, analysed it and written up results
- Conducted some experiments
- Submitted, and possibly have had published (or accepted), one or more articles
- Created or exhibited an artefact or performance.

What are examiners assessing during the Transfer/Confirmation process?

While there are some disciplinary differences, in general examiners should be looking for:

- Sustained progress within the research project, with at least one draft chapter that meets general expectations for academic writing at doctoral level and that is at a level that could reasonably be expected to eventually be examined for an award at Level 10;
- A growing knowledge of the relevant topic within the discipline and ability to discuss it confidently;
- While some data may have been collected at this point, a candidate is not expected to have completed data acquisition and data analysis for the Transfer/Confirmation process;
- Clear articulation of research questions;
- A relatively well-advanced understanding of appropriate methodology and data acquisition methods;
- Knowledge of relevant theoretical frameworks;
- Consideration of the need for ethics approval, where required;
- Consideration of dissemination and publication activities;

- Ability to demonstrate ownership of the research, including articulation on the responsible use of Gen AI for research;
- A clear plan for bringing the project to *timely* completion;

The examiners may see signs that the candidate is struggling and should identify appropriate courses of action such as additional training, support, stricter deadlines and monitoring. Some conditions and a timeline may be set and recorded in the form. The outcome can entail a decision that the candidate should submit for examination to exit with a Master's by Research award or remain on the Master's track, as applicable.

When should it be carried out?

As specified in the regulation above, the Transfer/Confirmation examination ***must be carried out between Month 12 and 21*** for a student who is registered full-time and ***month 18 to 31.5*** for a student registered part-time. For full-time candidates, the outer limit of this date is almost two years into the research project. Exceptions due to deferrals or suspension of studies are possible.

However, it is not acceptable to delay a Transfer/Confirmation exam on the basis that the student is not making satisfactory progress.

The Transfer/Confirmation exam should be used to ascertain progress formally. An unsuccessful Transfer/Confirmation *may* result in the opportunity to repeat the examination *within six months*. Neither should the process be delayed because examiners or supervisors could not find time in their schedules to conduct it.

It is not acceptable to submit a PGR3 form for approval to GRSB at the same time as submitting a PGR4 form (Notice of Intention to Submit for Examination).

Why is it important to aim for this timeframe?

The Transfer/Confirmation exam is an important milestone in the PGR journey, where consistent progress monitoring is known to be a factor that contributes to timely and successful completion. It provides an

opportunity to formally check on progress and to ascertain the quality of work conducted to date, and to highlight concerns, if they exist. It assesses whether the student is moving in a satisfactory direction, at a satisfactory pace for an eventual Level 10 qualification and can act as reassurance for the candidate. The process gives the candidate an early experience of the nature of a PhD defence. The lower limit of ten months is chosen as a minimum time period required to realistically meet the expectations laid out above. Engagement with a formal process prior to this would be premature and would disadvantage the candidate. Adherence to the upper limit is required because it is imperative that students receive timely, structured feedback about the likelihood of their studies being ultimately successful before they have invested excessive personal time and resources into the process. A 12-21 month window has been chosen as it offers an appropriate balance between these conflicting requirements.

If the Transfer/Confirmation is conducted outside this timeframe, what happens?

This should only happen if there are legitimate reasons, e.g. deferral or suspension of study. If there are delays, they should be acknowledged in the PGR3 form and an explanation should be provided along with commentary on how the candidate will be brought back on track for timely completion. GRSB is the body that approves PGR3 forms. Any delayed forms with no acknowledgement or credible explanations will be returned to the principal supervisor.

Who should do the examining?

The examination must be conducted by both the Internal Examiner (IE) and the Supervisor(s). The IE does not bear sole responsibility for the decision. At the same time, the IE should not be pressured towards a particular outcome. The criteria for selection of IE for the Transfer/Confirmation are the same as those set out in the Regulations for IE selection for the final examination.

Some Schools have an open presentation and Q&A as part of the process. However, those who are not part of the supervisory/examination panel should leave before the formal examination takes place. The report on the oral performance of the Transfer/Confirmation exam should focus on the questions asked by the examination panel, not those asked during a public presentation. On submitting the report, the Supervisors, IE and Head of School should make sure that the report clearly specifies that the examination was conducted by the internal examiners *and* the supervisors. If this is not clear, the form will be returned by GRSB to the PI.

What should the examination involve?

The examination involves:

- Assessment in advance by the internal examiner and the supervisor(s) of the materials submitted by the candidate;
- A presentation on progress by the candidate (approx. 20 minutes);
- A Q&A session on the content submitted and presented, by both the internal examiner and the supervisor(s);
- Independent discussion by the panel, **in the absence of the candidate**, about progress to date and recommendations for the future, with a follow up with the candidate;
- Completion and submission of the PGR3 form with adequate detail. N.B.: one or two sentence descriptions of, e.g., the oral part of the exam do not provide sufficient feedback for the candidate nor for GRSB approval. Explicit guidance is given on expectations for word count in the form itself and it is required that the word counts are adhered to. In addition, it should be clear from the report that the examination was conducted both by the internal examiner and the supervisors.

What should colleagues do when the Transfer/Confirmation exam has been completed?

- Finalise the report;
- Ensure all signatures, dates, and other information have been filled in correctly;
- Submit to Registry: Note: **The Principal Supervisor has responsibility for submitting the PGR3 form because it is they who have formal responsibility for the management of the candidate's progression** (Regulation 7.2). The form is submitted to the Registry immediately after completion of the Transfer/Confirmation;
- If the examination results in a negative recommendation, the student has the right to appeal solely on the grounds laid out in the Regulations (Regulation 8.2.5);
- The student may be invited to complete research to graduate with a Master's degree;
- In exceptional circumstances, students may be advised to re-apply for transfer/confirmation within a period of six months (Regulation 8.2.2).