
Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee

- 1. Procedures for dealing with appeals by research students to the Committee against a decision by their department not to confirm their registration for PhD¹ at the early or late stage assessment**
- 2. General**
 - 2.1. The College requires that, following the Research Proposal Confirmation (RPC), a student's progress during PhD registration must be formally monitored at two key stages after the date of initial registration:
 - i. at 9 months for full-time students and at 18 months for part-time students
 - and**
 - ii. between 18 and 24 months for full-time students and between 30 – 36 months for part-time students.
 - 2.2. The assessment must be based upon an examination, which involves the submission by the student of a written report and an oral examination on the report. The assessment panel will include at least one independent academic assessor (independent from the research "group", i.e. from the project and the supervisor).
 - 2.3. The purpose of the Early Stage Assessment (ESA) is to confirm that the student has an understanding of their field of research and the direction of their project, and has the potential to pursue research. Data presented at this stage may be minimal but should be indicative of the student's ability to perform. The assessment must also consider whether the student needs additional English language support. If the College determines that the student's progress is such that they cannot continue, the student may be required to withdraw from the College at this stage; alternatively the College may transfer their registration to the degree of MPhil. The date of MPhil registration will, in this case, be backdated to the date of the initial PhD registration. A student has one opportunity to repeat the Early Stage Assessment (ESA) if required to do so by the department, and this must be within 11 months (22 months for part-time students) of the date of the initial PhD registration.
 - 2.4. The College requires that a second review of a student's PhD research ability must be undertaken between 18 and 24 months (between 30 and 36 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration. This is known as

¹ These procedures are also applicable to a decision not to transfer an Engineering Doctoral student's registration from MPhil to EngD.

the Late Stage Review (LSR). The form of review will be determined by the student's department² and will have been approved by the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee. As a minimum students should submit a research plan at 24 months for completing the programme by 36 months (and equivalent part-time). The purpose of the review is to confirm that the student (a) has an adequate understanding of the research problem, (b) has a critical awareness of the relevant literature on the subject, (c) has a realistic research plan and schedule and (d) has the capacity to pursue research. The review must also consider whether the student needs additional English language support and whether the student has completed the professional skills development training workshops prescribed as compulsory by the Graduate School. If the College determines that the student's progress is such that they cannot continue, the student may be required to withdraw from the College at this stage; alternatively the College may transfer their registration to the degree of MPhil. The date of MPhil registration will, in such cases, be backdated to the date of the initial PhD registration. A student has one opportunity to repeat the Late Stage Review (LSR) if required to do so by the department, and this must be within 3 months of the date of the initial PhD registration.

3. Grounds for Appeal

- 3.1. An appeal against a decision not to confirm registration for PhD but to transfer registration to MPhil should be made in writing to the Academic Registrar within one month of that decision being communicated to the student.
- 3.2. Any appeal should set out the grounds on which it is based which may be one or more of the following:
 - a. Administrative error of such a nature as to cause reasonable doubt as to whether the result of the assessment would have been the same had the circumstances not arisen;
 - b. Evidence of bias on the part of one or more of the assessors such that the result of the assessment should not be allowed to stand;
 - c. Evidence of inadequate assessment on the part of one or more of the assessors such that the result of the assessment should not be allowed to stand; or
 - d. Extenuating/mitigating circumstances affecting the student's performance at the assessment of which the department was unaware and that these had produced an unfair result.

4. Appeal Procedure

- 4.1. The Head of Department is asked to consider the appeal, in consultation with the Director of Postgraduate Studies and Postgraduate Tutor and, if

² Any reference to "Departmental" or "Department" may include Imperial College Schools, Institutes, Centres or Divisions, as appropriate.

acceptable, either to confirm the student's registration for PhD or to schedule a fresh assessment examination within two months. If the Head of Department is not prepared to agree to either course of action the matter is referred to the Vice Provost (Education).

- 4.2. The Vice Provost (Education), in consultation with the Director of Student Support and Academic Registrar, may dismiss an appeal on the basis of the candidate's submission alone, without a hearing being held and without seeking further information, where in his/her opinion the application does not fall within the remit in paragraph 3.2 above or does not disclose arguable grounds.
- 4.3. If the Vice Provost (Education) does not dismiss the appeal under the terms of Paragraph 4.2, he/she may determine that the matter is referred to the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee.
- 4.4. The Research Degree Assessment Committee comprises the following:
 - 4.4.1. A College Consul from the Faculty of the Appellant as Chair [if both Faculty Consuls have been involved with the assessment of the appellant then a Consul from another Faculty shall chair]
 - 4.4.2. A Director of Postgraduate Studies from a different Faculty to that of the appellant
 - 4.4.3. A member of the Senate panel for dealing with appeals
 - 4.4.4. With a Secretary to the Committee appointed by the Academic Registrar.
- 4.5. The student will be invited to attend the Appeal Committee and the Head of Department will be invited to send a representative to the hearing. Students may, if they wish, be accompanied by a member of Imperial College (either a fellow student, or a Personal Tutor, Warden or other member of the academic staff); the friend may speak in support of the student if the latter so desires. In keeping with the Human Rights Act (1998), students may, if they wish, request that the hearing be held in public.
- 4.6. Written statements will be required from the Head of Department as follows:
 - a. A report on the assessment examination(s) clarifying the reasons underlying the decision not to confirm the student's registration for PhD;
 - b. A copy of the student's written report;
 - c. Copies of any reports completed by student and supervisor on the student's progress; and
 - d. Copies of any other relevant correspondence relating to the student's research progress to date.

These statements will be sent to the student at least one week before the hearing.

- 4.7. The conduct of the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee will be standardised as far as possible. Both the student and the departmental representative (if attending) will be before the Committee at the same time; the Chair will explain that the Committee is only empowered to hear an appeal based on one or more of the grounds set out in paragraph 6 and supported by evidence of those grounds. The student will be invited to present their case, with the department representative being permitted to put questions; following which the representative will then make a statement of the departmental view, with the student permitted to put questions. Finally, the student will be invited to make any further comments they wish; after which the student and 'friend' (if present) and departmental representative will withdraw, before the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee consider the matter.
- 4.8. The Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee shall take one of the following decisions:-
 - a. To reject the appeal, in which case the result of the original assessment stands;
 - b. To request the examiners to reconsider their decision. The examiners shall normally be expected to hold another oral examination before reaching a decision as to whether the result should be changed;
 - c. To determine that the original assessment be cancelled and that a new assessment be conducted. The new assessment shall where possible be conducted by examiners who did not take part in the original assessment and were not involved in the appeal.
- 4.9. The Secretary to the Appeal Committee will write to the appellant within ten working days of the hearing taking place, informing him/her of the Committee's decision, and providing reasons for the judgement reached in relation to submissions made at the hearing.
- 4.10. The responsibility for hearing and deciding upon appeals is vested in the Senate and is delegated by the Senate to the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee, whose decisions are final.
- 4.11. A formal report on all decisions of the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee is made to the Senate. In keeping with the Human Rights Act (1998), should the student choose, the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee's decision and reasoned judgement will be published.
- 4.12. Once a student has completed the College's internal appeals or complaints procedures, the College will issue the student with a Completion of Procedures Letter. If the student is still dissatisfied, the student may direct their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator within twelve months of the date on which the Completion of Procedures Letter was

issued. Information on the complaints covered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) and the review procedures is available at <http://www.oiahe.org.uk/>

- 4.13. A note on the conduct of the Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee appears below.

**Appeal Against Decision not to Confirm PhD
Registration
Conduct of Research Degree Assessment Appeal
Committee**

1. Both the student and departmental representative (if attending) will be before the Committee at the same time.
2. The Committee and the student will be provided with:-
 - a. The written appeal and supporting evidence provided by the student;
 - b. A report on the assessment(s) clarifying the reasons underlying the decision not to confirm the student's registration for PhD;
 - c. A copy of the student's assessment report;
 - d. Copies of any reports completed by student and supervisor on the student's progress; and
 - e. Copies of any other relevant correspondence relating to the student's research progress to date.
- 2.1. The Chair will explain that Research Degree Assessment Appeal Committee is only empowered to hear an appeal based on one or more of the grounds set out in paragraph 3.2 and supported by evidence of those grounds.
3. The Chair will then invite the student to present their case.
4. The departmental representative is then invited to put questions.
5. Members of the Committee may address questions to the student.
6. The Departmental representative will then make a statement of the departmental view.
7. The student is then invited to put questions.
8. Members of the Committee may address questions to the departmental representative.
9. The student is then invited to make any further comments they wish.
10. The student (and 'friend' if present) and the departmental representative are then asked to withdraw.
11. The Committee then deliberates and reaches a decision, which is communicated in writing by the Secretary to the student.

12. Note

- 12.1. The above procedures are also applicable to a decision not to transfer an Engineering Doctorate (EngD) student's registration from MPhil to EngD.

Approved by Senate
May 2012

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