INTRODUCTION

The end-of-probation ‘first-year’ review is a crucial stage in the progress of potential PhD students:

- Serious problems need to be dealt with at this stage if they have not been already
- Minor problems, and suggestions for improvement, can be formally recorded and acted on

In this Faculty, the process consists of four main steps:

1) **Formal assessment** of the candidate’s written report by two Assessors (neither of whom is the supervisor) – to include an oral and to take place before the end of the first year of study

2) **Feedback** - given to the student and supervisor

3) An invitation to submit a **report by email** on the student’s progress and aptitude in first year by the **Principal Supervisor** including a clear recommendation on whether or not the student should now be registered for the PhD.

4) Consideration of the above reports by the **department** responsible for the student, leading to a **recommendation** to the **Degree Committee**, who formally recommend the outcome to the **Board of Graduate Studies**

The outcomes will be familiar from the format of the PhD examination itself and are as follows:

- In most cases, Assessors recommend that the student **passes** the probationary review first time, and may suggest some points for discussion with their supervisor(s); subject to a satisfactory supervisor report by email and departmental agreement, the student can be **REGISTERED** for the PhD degree;
- In a few cases, Assessors may want to see a **corrected/amended report** before agreeing to recommend a student for registration for the PhD;
- In a small minority of cases, the Assessors cannot recommend student for registration and may ask for a **revised report and second meeting** with the student; this will either lead to registration for the PhD, or the Degree Committee’s process for dealing with students who have **failed** to be registered for the PhD then comes into play.

The following pages explain these steps in more detail.

A **flow diagram** of the process is appended.

You can find the process described from the student’s viewpoint at https://www.dcpc.physsci.cam.ac.uk/graduatestudents/1styear
FOR ASSESSORS

1) Assessment by two independent Assessors

a) This is a formal process and works along the same lines as a PhD examination. Ideally the process will be completed within 6 weeks of you receiving the student’s work:

- **Appointment:** Assessors will be asked (normally by the Supervisor) whether or not you are willing *in principle* to examine the report; *please try to avoid any discussion* of the student and his/her work at this point so that you remain independent of the other Assessor and of the Supervisor.

- **Receipt of student’s work:** Following confirmation of your appointment by the Degree Committee, you will receive the student’s work and supporting documentation via a Moodle link sent by the Degree Committee Office. PLEASE ALLOW ONE WEEK FOR THIS PROCESS.

- **Your independent pre-oral report:** You are asked to review the candidate’s work and make your own independent, provisional pre-oral assessment using *form Reg1*. Please provide brief comments to support your ratings.

- **Oral:** You will need to arrange to meet the candidate and the other Assessor for an oral examination as soon as possible AFTER you have received the student’s work. Please allow at least 10-14 days after the deadline when scheduling a viva date.

- **If the student has declared any disability or chronic condition** that (s)he wishes you to know about or requires adjustment to viva, we will tell you.

- **Joint report and recommendation:** Having conducted the oral, you should write a *joint report* and make a *recommendation* concerning registration using *form Reg2* and upload all your reports in one package (pdf) to Moodle as quickly as possible after the oral.

- **Fee:** If you are not a University Teaching Officer, or employed in a post that includes teaching among its requirements, you can claim a small fee for this work – see [http://www.dcpc.physsci.cam.ac.uk/examiners/examiner1styear](http://www.dcpc.physsci.cam.ac.uk/examiners/examiner1styear)

b) What the assessment should cover

- Evidence of the student’s *ability* and *aptitude for research* as provided by the written work, its oral defence, and the candidate’s *knowledge* of the field in general

- Aptitude of the student to work at *doctoral* level

- Suitability of the *project* for completion within the normal time scale for the PhD

You may also wish to comment on:

- Suitability of current supervisory arrangements

- Suggestions for further/remedial work

c) Assessors’ recommendation on registration – see coversheet Reg2

Assessors are asked to choose between these possible outcomes:

| Based on this evidence, are you satisfied that the candidate should now be registered for the PhD? | Yes :- student and project are suitable. [If more training needed, or project needs adjustment to complete in 4 years, please specify] – *register for PhD = Reg2 option1* | Yes, but :- we wish to see the report *corrected* before recommending registration – you may *defer your decision* for up to 4 weeks; give the student correction advice, and when you are satisfied with the corrections, then proceed as above | We can’t tell yet :- student shows aptitude, but the report and oral do not provide sufficient positive evidence to allow us to recommend continuation. [Please advise on suitable *remedial action*] – *allow to resubmit report, 2nd viva = Reg2, options 2 (a-d)* | No :- on this evidence, the student is not suited to doctoral research, and resubmission is not likely to change our view – *do not register for PhD* In this case, please advise on a possible *alternative outcome* = Reg2, options 3 (a-d) |

Note that Assessors’ reports and coversheets will be made available to the student, the supervisor and the Department as part of our decision-making and feedback processes.
FOR SUPERVISORS

2) Opinion of the Supervisor
Supervisors play no part in the assessment of their student’s probationary report, but their opinion is important to the Department and Degree Committee in coming to a final decision as to whether the student can be registered and, if so, for which degree.

As soon as the DC Office has received the Assessors’ reports on your student’s probationary review, we will contact you by email, give you access to the reports on Moodle (the student and the department’s graduate office will also gain access to the Assessors’ report at the same time) and advise you what to do next:

a) IF the ASSESSORS’ recommendation is positive
i) If you are content that
   • The assessors recommendation is positive
   • Any remedial action suggested by the Assessors can be achieved
   • The student’s progress is indicative of being able to complete a PhD in the usual timeframe
   • You are happy to continue to supervise the student for a PhD

You should
   • email a progress report with a clear recommendation on registration to your Dept Graduate Office within 14 days
   • propose a title/research topic for the PhD (which is provisional only)

Please note that
   • you should not send your report to the Assessors, who must be able to act independently
   • your student will be able to see your report as part of the normal online feedback process

ii) If you are NOT content that
   • The student should be registered for the PhD, even though the Assessors may recommend it

You should
   • consult your departmental Director of Graduate Studies within 14 days and before making your report

Your Department will make a registration recommendation based solely on the Assessors’ reports if they have not received your report, or been contacted by you about registration concerns, within 14 days of the Assessors’ reports being released to you.

b) IF the ASSESSORS require the report to be revised and resubmitted
   • We will contact you and the student and give you the Assessors’ reports, as above
   • We will ask you and the student to meet to discuss the report and to plan for the revision
   • We will give you a deadline for resubmission
   • You should consult your Departmental Director of Graduate Studies
   • You should continue to submit supervision reports in CamSIS on a termly basis.
FOR SUPERVISORS, ASSESSORS and DEPARTMENTS

3) Decisions of the department
The Department’s Graduate Office is notified by the Degree Committee Office when the Assessors’ reports are ready to be viewed on Moodle.

a) Most probationary reviews are completely straightforward. The Department will receive the Supervisor’s report and registration via email. The department’s designated graduate officer will be able to recommend registration on the strength of the reports, by uploading the supervisor’s report and recording a registration recommendation in CamSIS.

b) In the minority of cases where the outcome is not straightforward, the department officer will refer the reports to the department’s Director of Graduate Studies for consideration. In this case, registration will not be recommended until further discussion and/or a reassessment has taken place.

c) In a very small minority of cases, an apparently straightforward Assessors’ recommendation may be followed by a negative Supervisor’s report. In this case, the Department will need to discuss this further with the Supervisor and an attempt made to mediate and/or make alternative supervisory arrangements.

Possible scenarios on first assessment are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations &amp; Department actions</th>
<th>Supervisor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>positive</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessors positive</td>
<td>Recommend registration for PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessors negative</td>
<td>Ask the Supervisor to respond to the Assessors’ report (this may include comments on supervision) If the student shows promise but is behind the expected level of achievement, (s)he should normally be allowed to revise the report, (and possibly do more experiments and/or more training etc.) Remedial action should be specified</td>
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4) Decisions of the Degree Committee
- The DC Office considers all the reports
- straightforward cases will be registered by the officers without reference to the Committee
- where revision is required, the DC office will make arrangements with the student, Supervisor and Assessors
- the Degree Committee will make the final recommendation to the Board of Graduate Studies on non-straightforward cases.

THE BOARD OF GRADUATE STUDIES IS THE DECIDING BODY IN THE MATTER OF STUDENT REGISTRATION
FOR SUPERVISORS, ASSESSORS and DEPARTMENTS

5) Students who fail to be registered for the PhD after the second attempt

The Regulations for Graduate Students make provision for alternative outcomes and the possibility of further progress assessments at the discretion of the Degree Committee (see Ordinances Chapter VI, General Regulation 9: http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/so/).

If a student fails at the second attempt, the Department should assemble relevant documentation (e.g.: supervision reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings) and submit it to the Degree Committee. This should provide sufficient evidence for the DC to address the following questions\(^1\) in turn:

a) Is the student likely to be able to write up this work for an MSc in up to one or two years? If not:  
b) could (s)he write up this work for an MPhil in up to 3 months? If not:  
c) could (s)he be awarded the CPGS on basis of this work without further assessment and exit? If not:  
d) (s)he should leave without an award.

Obviously, the strength of evidence required to limit a student’s possibilities of gaining a degree increases going down this list.

In the case of a) and b), providing the Department is satisfied that sufficient improvement is still possible (if, for example, the student experienced particular difficulties during the probationary period and these difficulties may be/have been overcome) and can provide a suitable case, the Degree Committee may consider recommending registering the student for a masters degree pro tem and may agree to offer the student a further, final attempt in a few months (typically about 6 months, or before the end of the 2\(^{nd}\) year, whichever is sooner) on the understanding that:

- Further assessment with a view to registering for the PhD is dependent on supportive supervision report(s) being submitted at least a month prior to the deadline for reassessment  
- The Assessors may be the same or different from the original ones  
- There is no guarantee that a further assessment may lead to an upgrading of the registration status, but may simply confirm registration for a masters degree

Students who are not satisfied with the outcome will be referred to the University’s complaints and appeals procedures.

THE BOARD OF GRADUATE STUDIES IS THE DECIDING BODY IN THE MATTER OF STUDENT REGISTRATION

\(^1\) This sequence of questions is implicit in the Regulations for removal from the register – see Regulation 10g of the General Regulations for Admission as a Graduate Student

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