

# How to apply for Confirmation of D.Phil. Status

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# The Nature of Research

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- What is a research degree?
  - *“Finding out something to find out, then finding it out”*
  - Freedom from tightly prescribed courses, textbooks, exams...
  - ... but more responsibility for organising own time and taking charge of investigation
- D.Phil.
  - qualifies you to become **an equal** to faculty
  - a **requirement** for a career as a university professor or researcher in many fields
  - useful in many other professional careers: management, consultancy, government/service, etc
- Awarded for
  - a **significant and substantial piece of research**
  - **the thesis**, examined by experts and defended in a viva-voce

# Milestones in the life as a D.Phil.

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- The progression (NB deadlines different for DTC students)
  - PRS: Probationary Research Student, 1<sup>st</sup> year
    - Start research, take courses, participate in research activities
  - Transfer to D.Phil. (or M.Sc. by research) Status, **within 4 terms**
    - Submit qualifying dissertation (research report and thesis proposal)
    - Be examined by 2 assessors (not supervisor)
  - **Confirmation** of D.Phil. Status, **within 9 terms**
    - Submit progress report, incl. thesis contents and timetable
    - Be examined by 2 assessors (departmental policy is not supervisor)
  - **Submission** of thesis and Examination, **within 12 terms**
    - External and internal examiners
    - Viva voce, in subfusc
- For more information see MPLS Flowchart
  - <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/intranet/teachingandlearning/graduateprog.html>

# Requirements for Confirmation

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- Application process (forms MAT.3 and GSO.14)
  - Application due week 0 of 9<sup>th</sup> term, but possible earlier
  - Expected completion within 9 terms
  - In justified cases, supervisor must apply for deferral to DGS
  - Can hold D.Phil. status for maximum of 12 terms
    - Extensions possible, in justified cases
    - If no extension, student status lapses and reinstatement needed
  - NB cannot submit without confirmation
- Progression conditional on
  - Satisfactory progress of research to date (publications, etc)
  - Evidence of research activities and training, e.g. seminar and conference presentations
  - Satisfying assessors that able to submit in 3 more terms

# More about Confirmation

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- Why confirm?
  - To get **feedback** from assessors on the overall direction and thesis, and hopefully **address problems** before submission
- When to confirm?
  - Ideally, **6–12 months** before submission
  - Must be able to:
    - Formulate **your thesis** (as opposed to dissertation) before confirmation
    - Explain and justify what the **original contribution** is in relation to state of the art
- What the assessors are looking for
  - Evidence that the thesis is “in the bag” – ability to write about it and talk about it with authority, etc – as **an equal** to faculty
  - Evidence that it is your own work (for joint papers must state in the thesis what your contribution was)
  - ... does not matter if the research changed direction since transfer, but the assessors might like to hear your story...

# Thesis vs Dissertation

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- Thesis
  - **The case** you are trying to argue
  - Must be describable in one paragraph, e.g.
    - “Algorithm A is efficient on systems of type C”
    - “Mathematical construct F extends to functions of type X”
- Dissertation
  - **The document** in which you make the case
  - Must include the **scientific and rigorous justification** for the thesis, e.g.
    - Complexity proof for A
    - Experimental evaluation of A which demonstrates efficiency on a set of test cases, relative to known methods
    - Definition of F on X and proof of correctness
- For a D.Phil. to be awarded, the thesis must be a **significant original contribution** to the state of knowledge

# What to Submit for Confirmation

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- Progress report concerning research to date
  - **Brief report** if publications arose from the work, then cite publications and include as Appendix
  - Alternatively, incomplete **draft** of dissertation
  - Include list of **conference/seminar presentations**, etc
- Table of contents of the thesis
  - A **statement of the thesis**
  - **List of chapters**, which brief description of contents and how much as been written
- Plan for remaining investigations
  - Must be **clear, feasible** and without open-ended problems
- Timetable for completing the writing
  - Allow **6 months** for write-up
  - Remember writing a dissertation is substantially different from writing a research paper

# The Confirmation Process

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- Submit D.Phil. Confirmation forms with your report
- Viva by two assessors
  - our Comlab policy is not supervisor(s) and at least one with successful experience of supervising D.Phil. students to completion
- Must convince them
  - that your research has resulted in significant **original contribution** to knowledge worthy of D.Phil.
  - have a feasible and clear **plan** to complete the research and write-up
- If pass, proceed to submission
- If fail,
  - revise and resubmit, usually within one term
  - ... but you are unlikely to fail if handbook advice followed
- If fail 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt,
  - either outright failure or transfer to MSc by Research

# Some Advice

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- Remember, D.Phil. Confirmation is an opportunity
  - Don't delay and prepare
- Seek advice of your supervisor and DGS if necessary
  - ... and listen to it
- Regs, regs, regs
  - Regulations clearly specify the process, deadlines, forms
  - For example, your status as student lapses if you don't **submit** thesis within 12 terms
- If you feel things are going wrong...
  - Talk to supervisor(s)
  - Next, talk to advisors
  - else DGS (via Julie Sheppard) or Director

# Sources of Information

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- The Graduate Research Student handbook
  - Comlab and Computer Science specific
  - Available on the Comlab webpage
  - <http://web.comlab.ox.ac.uk/teaching/dphil/>
- MPLS handbook
  - Essential information about the process, forms to fill, deadlines, etc
  - <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/intranet/teachingandlearning/graduateprog.html>
- The 'grey book'
  - Authoritative, but MPLS handbook more detailed on regulations and code of practice