Guidance Notes for Students, Supervisors and Assessors – Late Stage Review

The College requires that following PhD registration (at 3 month stage) a student’s progress during PhD registration must be formally monitored at two key stages after the date of initial registration. The first, the Early Stage Assessment (ESA), is held at 9 months (18 months for part-time students).

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 second review is the Late Stage Review (LSR).

The purpose of the review is to confirm that the student has an adequate understanding of the research problem, a critical awareness of the relevant literature on the subject, a realistic research plan and schedule and the capacity to pursue research. The process for the Late Stage Review Assessment has to be assessed and approved by the School of Public Health.

The decision to allow the student’s PhD registration to continue will be based upon the two written assessments (a written plan of future work and a report written in a recognised manuscript style) and an oral presentation by the student. The assessment will be carried out by the independent assessors and the supervisor(s). The review must also consider whether the student needs additional English language support and whether the student has completed the compulsory transferable skills training workshops prescribed by the student’s Graduate School.

Written reports

The written reports and oral presentation will be assessed by a panel of at least two assessors who are independent of the student and supervisor and who can provide an objective and independent assessment of the report. The supervisor is responsible for identifying assessors at the beginning of the research programme. It is normally expected that one assessor shall be internal to Imperial College and/or the School of Public Health and the second will be external, although it is recognised that this is not possible in every instance. In ordinary circumstances the individuals who assessed the research plan for the student’s application for registration for PhD will be asked to assess the work for the ESA and LSR. The internal assessor will normally be asked to fulfil the role of Chair at the meeting following the presentation where the student receives feedback on the written report and oral presentation. Instructions for chairing this meeting are available at the end of this document.

When submitting the written documentation the student should ensure that:

- The plan of future work is no more than 2000 words.
- The report is approximately 3000 words in length (excluding figures, tables, legends and references).
- The report is written in a recognised manuscript style, i.e. in the form of a paper submitted for publication.
An updated training plan (signed by the supervisor) and an up-to-date CV is appended.

Please note that all Late Stage Review Assessment Documentation must be submitted to the SPH PhD Administrator at least 3 weeks in advance of the assessment.

The oral presentation

The presentation will take the form of a conference style presentation and will last 10 minutes followed by a 10 minute question and answer session, with the student responding to questions from the assessors and audience. The presentation topic will be based on the written paper submitted by the student for the Late Stage Review assessment.

Normally both assessors should attend the oral presentation. However, where this is not possible one assessor can attend the presentation and feedback session, with the second assessor sending in a written report of the student’s work. This must be agreed by the Director of Postgraduate Studies well in advance of the presentation taking place. Where only an external assessor is available to attend the presentation and feedback meeting the supervisor must find a suitable independent academic member of staff to chair the meeting. In this case both the written report from the assessor and the presentation will be taken into consideration when assessing whether the student has reached the required standard.

After the oral presentation

Following the oral presentation, the panel of assessors will meet with the student to provide feedback on the student’s written assessment. The feedback provided should give guidance on the student’s strengths and should identify areas for improvement. At this stage feedback will also be given on the student’s presentation and presentation style. This discussion should last no longer than 30 minutes and should also consider if the student may need additional English Language support. Following this meeting the assessors will agree on any recommendations. The Chair should inform the student of their recommendations at the end of the discussion.

If the assessors or the supervisor identify any issues which may need to be dealt with during the follow up meeting, they should inform the Director of Postgraduate Studies and/or the School’s PhD Administrator. The Director of Postgraduate Studies may wish to attend the meeting as an observer or nominate another member of staff.

Attendance of the supervisor at the feedback meeting is optional according to the wishes of the student.

Should the assessors agree that the student’s work has not met the required standards, or be unable to reach an agreement, the Director of Postgraduate Studies will meet all concerned to decide what action to take. The student may be offered one of the following options:

- Resubmission of the report, and/or oral presentation, within 3 months of the date of the initial LSR
- Downgrading to the degree of MPhil;
- Requested to leave the programme due to unsuitability.
NB. The oral presentation and later discussion will not normally be allowed to proceed if the assessors have not received the written report a sufficient time in advance, and if all of the required elements of the report have not been included.

The internal assessor/Chair should ensure that the paperwork is completed and signed by both assessors and all supervisors. Once the form is fully completed it should be returned to the SPH PhD Administrator, Emma Grant, who will ensure that it is submitted for formal approval by the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

The paperwork will subsequently be forwarded to the Student Records Office and the Administrator will provide the written feedback from the assessors to the student and to all supervisors.
Transferable Skills

If the student has not completed the transferable skills training workshops prescribed as compulsory by the student’s Graduate School, the College will transfer the student’s registration to the degree of MPhil. If the student subsequently fulfills the transferable skills training requirement, a request will be made by the School’s teaching team to transfer their registration back to the degree of PhD. The date of PhD registration will, in this case, be taken as the date of the initial PhD registration.
Appendix A

Instructions for Chairing Late Stage Review Assessments
(for the internal assessor)

The Chair is the facilitator of the discussion and should:

1. Summarise and discuss the Late Stage Review with the assessors and supervisor(s).
2. Enter comments into the assessment form.
3. Invite the student into the room for the discussion.
   NB: the supervisor may or may not be present according to the wishes of the student.
4. Ensure that the student is provided with helpful feedback, raising awareness of the student’s strengths and areas for improvement, and identifying actions to be taken to improve performance.
5. Summarise between all parties and allow the student time to ask any further questions.
6. Ensure the form is fully completed and signed by all parties.
7. Return the completed form to the School of Public Health’s PhD Administrator, Emma Grant.

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