How to apply for Confirmation of D.Phil. Status

Professor Marta Kwiatkowska

Oxford University Computing Laboratory

The Nature of Research

- 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.

- The progression (NB deadlines different for DTC students)
  - PRS: Probationary Research Student, 1st year
    - Start research, take courses, participate in research activities
  - Important changes: status lapses if deadlines not met
  - 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

- Application process (forms MAT.3 and GSO.14/14a)
  - Application due week 0 of 9th term, but possible earlier
  - Expected completion within 9 terms
  - In exceptional cases, supervisor applies for deferral to DGS
  - If not applied for confirmation or deferral, student status lapses and reinstatement needed
  - Can hold D.Phil. status for maximum of 12 terms
  - New: formal review by DGS panel if not applied for confirmation within 12 term
  - 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

- 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

- 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

- 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 has 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

- 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 2nd attempt,
  - either outright failure or transfer to MSc by Research

Some Advice

- 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 and outcomes
  - For example, your status as student lapses if you don't apply for confirmation within 9 terms
  - Likewise, if you don't submit your thesis within 12 terms (NB continuation fees will apply to those starting in MT2011)
- 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

- 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