

KING'S
College
LONDON

University of London





The Masters-PhD transition in the UK and at King's

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Some facts about King's

- Established 1829, and one of the founders of the University of London in 1836. Now autonomous.
- 19th in world Qs rankings
- Comprehensive research University
- c23000 students
- 7500 Masters students (3rd largest in UK)
- 2800 PhD students (up 70% in last 7 years)
- Highest PhD completion rates in UK (89% submission within 4 years, 88% completion rate)
- 81% overall satisfaction score in national PRES survey



Begin at the beginning. Using the Bachelors curriculum to create researchers

- Changes in Bachelors programmes in research-intensive universities.
- Incorporate research training in curricula
- Incorporate research projects in curricula
- Undergraduate Research Fellowships. Merit-based placements with academic staff in Summer of second year to undertake defined project. Evidence of research publications as outputs



UK Masters market in transition

- Bachelor fees now Euro 11,400 per year, high student debt.

Will there be the same demand in future for Masters study?

Masters numbers unregulated in past so financial dependence.

- Masters tuition fees rising to match Bachelor fees
- Research councils withdrawing funding for stand alone Masters
- MRes programmes increasingly concentrated into universities with government-funded Doctoral Training Centres eg 20 in Social Sciences. Implications for those universities which do not succeed in national competitions? How do they recruit PhDs?

6



The Masters landscape: creative diversity

1. Vocational Masters (MA, MSc), Taught plus perhaps a project
 2. Passion Masters (MA, MSc), Taught plus perhaps a project
 3. Research preparation Masters (MRes), Taught plus research project/proposal
- But what will the balance of student demand be for these three forms in future?
 - Plus Integrated Masters linked to Bachelors, to access student loans (3+1)



The British Phd

- Expectation that thesis submitted within three years
- Maximum = 4 years
- Need formal extension if go over 4 years. Usually only granted for mitigating circumstances and request assessed by Graduate School not supervisor or department



The PhD monitoring regime at King's

- First review after 3 months
- Six monthly thereafter
- Progress reports by student
- Progress reports by supervisor(s)
- Reviewed by Faculty Head of Graduate Studies



How many students make the Masters-PhD transition:

DLHE evidence

- 6.3% of King's Masters students go on to doctoral study within 6 months of graduating (n=132)
- Cf Oxford 19% (highest in RG) and Glasgow 0.3% (lowest in RG)
- But we also get those who return in subsequent academic years so total percentage higher

10



Different PhD models: different pathways

- standard 3/4 year PhD (with MPhil entry registration). Training front-loaded but embedded
- 1 yr freestanding MRes followed by 3 yr MPhil/PhD (1+3)
- 4 year MPhil/PhD with 1st year rotations between labs
- 1+3 collaborative Doctoral Training Centre MPhil/PhD model (1st year at lead institution receiving basic training and deciding topic)
- 3 month preparatory training extensions to scholarship for MPhil/PhD.(eg ESRC Foundation methods where +1 not warranted).
- Mphil/PhD embedded within 5 year MBBS, suspend MBBS and return to it

11



Getting a fast start to the MPhil/PhD

- Project approval form at beginning of programmes to ensure that project well-founded, supervision in place, resources in place and timetable agreed
- Sections on:
 - Aim; background; plan of work; resources required; training needs, novelty of topic, distinctiveness of project from analogous projects in same lab, intellectual contribution, statutory issues; funding; supervision
 - Head of Department has to sign-off



MPhil/PhD

- No student registered at King's at the outset for a PhD. All registered as M.Phil students. Effectively a probationary PhD status
- System inherited from University of London. We reviewed and debated its efficacy 2 years ago and reviewed what other UK universities were doing, and chose to retain
- Subject to the normal progress monitoring regime at Kings
- An on-line system to record outcomes and ensure transparency

13



MPhil/PhD upgrade1

- The 'upgrade' process
- Takes place when student deemed to be ready. Typically completed within 18 months of first registration (FT), often within 12 months
- Time monitored by Grad School
- Format varies slightly between disciplines



Our regulations

- ‘It will involve the student producing either a *substantial report, draft chapters* or other pieces of work, along with a *research schedule*, a clear *research question* and evidence of a *clear methodology*, set of *research procedures* or framework of inquiry and a *formal review meeting* to assess the submitted work. The key principle for upgrading is that the student is well on course to produce research of the required standard within the permitted timescale.
- Students may also be asked to produce a *record of training* and development activities undertaken and points accrued for review at the upgrade stage’.



PhD

- 11.5 The PhD degree shall be assessed by a thesis submitted by the student against the relevant criteria listed below and by an oral examination. The scope of the thesis shall be what might be reasonably expected after three or at most four years of study, or the part-time equivalent. It shall:
- (a) consist of the student's own account of her/his investigations, the greater proportion of which shall have been undertaken by the student during the period of registration under supervision for the degree;
 - (b) form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power;
 - (c) be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument;
 - (d) give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings, include discussion on those findings and indicate in what respects they appear to the student to advance the study of the subject; and, in so doing, demonstrate a deep and synoptic understanding of the field of study, (the student being able to place the thesis in a wider context), objectivity and the capacity for judgment in complex situations and autonomous work in that field;
 - (e) be of satisfactory literary presentation;
 - (f) not exceed 100,000 words (inclusive of footnotes but exclusive of appendices and bibliography, the word limit not applying to editions of a text or texts);
 - (g) include a full bibliography and references;
 - (h) demonstrate research skills relevant to the thesis being presented;
 - (i) be of a standard to merit publication in whole or in part or in a revised form (for example, as a monograph or as a number of articles in learned journals); and
 - (j) where ethical approval is required, indicate that such approval has been granted by the appropriate body.



Questions to be addressed at upgrade

- Is **ethical approval** required to complete this thesis? Has ethical approval been obtained?
- Has the student acquired all of the **necessary training** set out in their progress reviews in order to complete their proposed research?
- Has the student demonstrated **adequate knowledge** of the background material?
- Does the upgrade report:-
 - (i) identify **clear research questions/objectives**
 - (ii) set out a **research methodology/approach** appropriate for addressing them in the time scale and with the resources available for the PhD
 - (iii) show **evidence** that the student is capable of meeting the academic requirements for the award of a PhD from King's College London?

17



The central question for the upgrade panel

Based on the report and the student's performance in the oral defence, are you confident that the student can achieve the standard expected for a PhD at King's?



MPhil/PhD upgrade 2

- Typically involves submission of written work plus on-line progress log
- Review of training undertaken
- Written work reviewed by two reviewers, neither of which are on the supervisory panel
- Usually an oral exam or viva
- Student may have to give an oral presentation to department in advance; defence of project, evidence of knowledge of field



Application for Transfer from MPhil to PhD

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------------|--|--|--|--|------------|---------------------|--|--|
| Student Name | | | | | | Date of Examination | | |
| Student ID | | | | | Department | | | |
| Student Signature | | | | | Date | | | |

Report on Upgrading Examination

(Please complete ALL sections. If needed use additional paper, marked with the relevant question number)

| | | | |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Is ethical approval required to complete this thesis?* | Has ethical approval been obtained? | Approval ID Number: |
| | * SSPP students who need ethical approval for their thesis cannot be upgraded unless approval has been obtained. | | |
| 2 | Has the student acquired all of the necessary training set out in their progress reviews in order to complete their proposed research? Has the student demonstrated adequate knowledge of background material? | | |
| 3 | Does the upgrade report (i) identify clear research questions/ objectives (ii) set out a research methodology/ approach appropriate for addressing them in the time scale and with the resources available for the PhD (iii) show evidence that the student is capable of meeting the academic requirements for the award of a PhD from King's College London? | | |
| 4 | Based on the report and the student's performance in the viva, are you confident that the student can achieve the standard expected for a PhD at King's? | | |



Preparation for the upgrade

- Grad School training session on preparing for the upgrade.

Content:

- Awareness of regulations and standards expected
- Likely format of upgrade
- Preparing for the viva and likely questions
- The upgrade form

Also offer training in public presentations



MPhil/PhD upgrade 4

- Possible outcomes: -
- Re-registered from MPhil to become a PhD candidate
- Required to complete specified work to get project into shape and on-track. Re-assessed by same panel on specified date
- Recommended to submit work for an MPhil exit qualification
- Required to withdraw for failure to make satisfactory progress



Outcomes of upgrades

- Proceed directly to PhD 89%
- Referred for additional work 10%
- Required to submit as MPhil 0.5%
- Required to withdraw 1%
- Number of appeals per annum 1 or 2



Why such a low failure rate?

- Careful Admission policy
- Project approval form requires thought and preparation
- Trained and rewarded supervisors
- Grad School courses get students off to a fast start
- Close monitoring and feedback
- Upgrade event taken very seriously by doctoral candidates



Appeals against decision

- Candidate can undertake upgrade process twice, but failure at second requires withdrawal
- Candidate can appeal the decision of the panel by taking the matter to the College appeals department
- Cant appeal an academic judgement but can appeal procedural irregularities



Appeals process

- Appeal Panel of Faculty Head of Graduate Studies + 2 members of school Postgraduate Committee.
- Can't include staff involved in first panel
- Can be advisors external to King's
- Considers full evidence from initial panel



Strengths

- Encourages a fast start. Immediate goal in sight
- Sets early tasks to complete
- Encourages candidate to write early
- Allows review of candidate and project
- Exit strategy for those not able to complete or with poor project
- Externality in assessment. Circumvents 'cosy complicity' between supervisor and candidate
- Excellent practice for eventual defence of thesis



Weaknesses

- Considerable staff time to arrange and conduct review
- MPhil becoming known as a 'failed PhD'. Value in the labour market?
- Some external scholarships wont fund Masters, and regard MPhil as Masters.
- Potential disagreement between opinion of supervisors and assessment panel. How reconcile if they disagree? Contentious



Encouraging Masters/PhD transition at King's

- Value of retaining your best students providing their applications are assessed against usual criteria and they are joining a doctoral community made up largely of externally-recruited students who bring diversity
- Relationship between supervisor and candidate been tested
- 'Continuing at King's' recruiting events & King's Alumni Bursaries plus short presentations in Masters programmes
- Recent Hefce Widening Participation project. PhD mentors for our Masters students from deprived neighbourhoods to raise aspiration and provide role models for continuation into PhD

29

