### Policy on Progress Reviews for Postgraduate Research Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Title</th>
<th>Progress Reviews for Postgraduate Research Students</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>Applies to all Postgraduate Research Students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Proctor’s Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Approving Committee</td>
<td>Postgraduate Research Committee (PGRC), then Academic Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>Policy approved date</td>
<td>June 2016</td>
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<td>Policy effective from date</td>
<td>September 2016</td>
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<td>Policy review date</td>
<td>End session 2016/17</td>
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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

POLICY ON PROGRESS REVIEWS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Principles

The QAA Quality Code for Research Postgraduate degrees stipulates that universities must “put in place clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring and supporting research student progress, including formal and explicit reviews of progress at different stages”. “The main purpose of the monitoring process is to provide overall support for the research student to maximize his or her likelihood of completing the research programme successfully within an appropriate timescale.” The purpose and frequency of progress reviews, as well as the relevant arrangements for the reviews, must be “made clear from the outset, so that both the research student and the supervisor can plan adequately for them, prepare relevant documents, and consult other individuals as appropriate.”

Purpose

The annual progress review should:

- Ascertain whether the research student has progressed satisfactorily in their programme of study.
- Be a useful feedback exercise.
- Give the student formal practice in talking about their work (the subject of their dissertation, its importance to the field, and its methodological approach) to an interested audience that may include a non-specialist.
- Promote the timely and successful completion of postgraduate research degrees.
- Identify problems early, and help resolve problems where possible.
- Ascertain whether any decision is required concerning the re-registration of a student for a higher or a lower degree than the one for which they are registered, or concerning leave of absence, extension, withdrawal, or termination of studies.
- Serve as an opportunity for the student or supervisor to raise any concerns, and as a checkpoint to ensure school and supervisory provisions are satisfactory.

Procedure

Every postgraduate research student, including part-time students, will undergo a formal progress review at least once in each year of registration, normally by month nine. The school must make the requirements, timing, style, assessment criteria and potential outcomes of these reviews clear to students from the beginning of their programme.

Schools are responsible for assigning a review panel for each student. Review panels will normally include at least two members of the School designated by the Director of Postgraduate Studies (DoPG). If supervision duties for a student are shared between two schools, then both schools should normally be represented on the review panel. The panel should not include any member of the research student's academic supervisory team, but may include the second supervisor if this role is restricted to the provision of pastoral care.

1 UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Chapter B11: Research Degrees, Indicator 13 (p. 21).
In case of a re-review, at least one member of the review panel should be an experienced member of staff.

While each school is responsible for setting its own requirements for progress review submissions, the following documents must be included:

- A supervisor’s report
- A student self-assessment form (including a detailed completion plan – compulsory from year 2 onwards, recommended from year 1)
- Reviewers’ reports from any previous reviews.

Students are to be assessed on both the quality and quantity of their work. They should not be judged based on the review panel’s own preferences in regards to topic, method or findings, so long as the work produced is of an appropriate level.

Each student’s work will be classified according to one of four categories:

- Green – Satisfactory
- Yellow – Satisfactory with minor concerns
- Amber – Satisfactory with major concerns
- Red – Unsatisfactory.

After the review meeting, the reviewers complete the feedback form in MMS and recommend one of the outcomes above. The DoPG is responsible for approving the feedback and submitting it to Registry, as well as to the student and the supervisor as appropriate. Students should always receive written feedback regarding the outcome of their review, preferably within one month of the review meeting. The DoPG may consult the PGR Pro Dean on any reviews of particular concern.

In situations where a re-review is recommended, the DoPG is responsible for approving and overseeing the arrangements for the re-review. Reviewers’ comments from the initial review must be made available for the re-review. Any re-reviews should normally take place between two and five months after an initial review. In a situation where an unsatisfactory progress review serves as the first indication of a possible termination of studies, the period between the initial review and the re-review must be at least two months. This will serve as the probationary warning period. If the student’s progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory at the re-review, then their case will be referred to the PGR Pro Dean to begin the termination of studies process, unless the student decides to withdraw from the programme.

First-year reviews take on particular importance, as they determine whether students will be upgraded from a probationary status to full status of the relevant research degree. If third- or fourth-year reviews raise significant doubts about timely completion, the next review should take place within six months. If students are within three months of the submission of their thesis, they may be excused from the review, provided they have the support of their supervisor. In case an extension is granted, students in their fifth year should be regularly monitored and actively supported, but will not normally undergo a full review. Completion plans should include clear milestones with an indication of the quantity, nature and envisioned stage of readiness of work to be undertaken.

The DoPG should recuse themselves for any cases where they are also the supervisor and refer these back to the Head of School for approval and oversight.
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<th>Colour coding</th>
<th>Review Outcome</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Resulting actions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Satisfactory.</td>
<td>The student demonstrates a clear understanding of the context and aims of the project, and has demonstrated a capacity to complete it in a timely fashion. In a first year review they can describe an achievable concrete goal, situate the work in the context of previous literature, and have produced work that displays the skills necessary to complete the relevant research degree in their discipline. Where relevant they will have clearly established research questions and begun to develop an appropriate methodology. Where required, they have also completed taught courses as required in their department. In later year reviews they have completed work over the preceding year that is proportional with timely completion. Their plans for completion are practical and well thought-out. Where relevant they will have a developed a nuanced sense of the argument or arguments of their thesis. This category does not preclude reviewers from having advice or suggestions which may aid the student.</td>
<td>The result of the review, including any suggestions for improvement from the reviewers, is to be shared with the student and their supervisor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Satisfactory with minor concerns.</td>
<td>The project is realistic and the student has demonstrated that they have the capacity to complete it. However, the reviewers have noted some areas of potential improvement which might further enable timely completion. For example, they may have failed to complete required taught courses, or their research questions may be either too broad or too narrow. This category may also be used in cases where the reviewers think that the student would benefit significantly from further skills training, reviewing further literature, developing their analysis more deeply, considering alternative methodologies, or undertaking further practice in presenting their work.</td>
<td>A re-review is unlikely. The DoPG will, at their discretion, correspond with the student and/or their supervisor regarding the recommendations made by the review panel, and any specific actions the student may need to take.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amber</td>
<td>Satisfactory with major concerns.</td>
<td>The reviewers have concerns regarding the viability of the project and/or of the student’s ability to complete on time. In a first-year review, they may lack important skills, demonstrate poor understanding of the context of their work, or have a limited view of the direction of the research. Research questions may be ill-defined. The piece of work produced for review is incomplete or does not demonstrate the level of skills necessary to the relevant research degree in their discipline. In a later-year review the quantity of work completed over the preceding year does not seem to be in line with timely completion, and they have no clear sense of the argument or purpose of their research. Their plans for completion may also be impractical or unrealistic.</td>
<td>A re-review is likely, with the possibility of a re-registration to a lower degree path should problems continue to be evident. Even if a full re-review (including interview) is not scheduled, a new submission by the student is required, which needs to be assessed by both the supervisor and the initial reviewer team. If an amber outcome is returned regarding a student in their third or fourth-year then a re-review should take place within six months in order to strongly support timely completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory.</td>
<td>The reviewers have significant doubts regarding the project and/or the student’s ability to complete it. In a first-year review, expected aspects (basic research skills, understanding of context and a sense of direction) may be lacking entirely. The piece of work produced for review is partial and demonstrates none or few of the skills necessary to complete the relevant research degree in their discipline. In a later-year review the student appears to have done little work over the preceding year, and plans for completion are either vague or highly unrealistic.</td>
<td>Pending approval from the DoPG, a re-review is scheduled, with the possibility either of re-registration to a lower degree path or termination of studies should the result be unsuccessful.</td>
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