



University of
St Andrews

Progress review guidance

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Purpose	To provide additional guidance on the structure of progress reviews and the responsibilities of everyone involved.

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1.2	Minor updates to reflect policy changes	Approved	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	07/10/2022

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS, SUPERVISORS, REVIEWERS, AND STUDENTS

1. General Guidance

This guidance supports the policy on [Progress reviews and termination of studies for postgraduate research students](#). The guidance provided in this document may (and should) be supplemented but not superseded or contradicted by School-specific guidance for staff and students.

The annual progress review serves to ensure that all research postgraduates are successfully progressing towards timely completion. It enables both Schools and the wider university to offer advice and assistance to any students who may be struggling, whilst also providing valuable intellectual feedback to those with few or no problems with their progress. Finally, it serves as an important opportunity for students to reflect upon their progress and to raise any concerns which they might have.

The expectations of all participants in the review process are discussed below and are summarised in the diagram at appendix 2 of this document. Although this guidance contains specific sections designed for Schools, supervisors, reviewers, and students, all participants in the progress review process may benefit from familiarising themselves with the guidance given to all groups. The appendices are of potential relevance to all individuals involved.

2. Guidance for Schools

Schools are responsible for administering the annual progress review and for ensuring that the process is managed smoothly and in a timely fashion for all involved. The process will generally be overseen by the Director of Postgraduate Research (DoPGR).

Every research student will undergo a formal progress review at least once in each year of registration, normally by their ninth month of study. The School should ensure that the timings and assessment criteria of the progress review are made clear to incoming students when they begin their course of study. Schools should ensure that all participating staff and students are aware of University-wide regulations and guidance in addition to producing School-specific guidance documents. For example, Schools should set a consistent length of time for progress review interviews to take to ensure all students are treated fairly.

The DoPGR is responsible for allocating an appropriate review panel to each student being reviewed. In addition to referring to the policy regulations regarding the allocation of reviewers, DoPGRs are encouraged to use their discretion and familiarity with the relationships within their own School to ensure that there can be no conflicts of interest in the case of reviewers chosen. The DoPGR, in correspondence with reviewers and other appropriate members of university staff, will also confirm the final outcome of all progress reviews, and will oversee the smooth running of any ensuing processes, such as re-reviews. Any required re-

reviews should take place between two and five months after the initial review, although where School guidelines allow, students can request an earlier re-review.

The timeline at appendix 3 indicates the manner in which the review process should operate from the perspective of the School's role in organising it.

3. Guidance for Supervisors

Supervisors should be familiar with the quality and quantity of their students' work, and should read the entire review submission where possible. Supervisors should give guidance on preparing for the yearly review, including preparing the required documents, and complete the supervisor report form.

Supervisors should be open and honest in their supervisor's assessment but should keep in mind that the progress review is an information sharing process and the student will have access to their report. To that end, concerns or criticisms should always be constructive and stated in a way that is not unnecessarily damaging to the student. In rare cases a supervisor may have serious concerns about the student and would benefit from an additional conversation with the DoPGR, Associate Provost Students or Registry Student Support Officer prior to submitting the supervisor's assessment (see Appendix 4: Information Sharing).

Following the review, supervisors should discuss the feedback from reviews with their students and agree a plan of action based on the outcome. Advising students on reassessing their approach is particularly important in cases where the student's work is deemed less than satisfactory.

If a situation arises where it becomes clear that a student is not making adequate progress, the supervisor should be proactive in discussing alternative options with their students, including leave of absence, extension, re-registration for a lower degree, or withdrawal from study. Where necessary, supervisors should direct students to other sources of support and advice, for example the Registry Student Support Officer, CEED and Student Services.

4. Guidance for Reviewers

The progress review is, first and foremost, intended to track the progress of research students and to ensure that they both have the capacity and are receiving the necessary support to complete the relevant research degree in a timely fashion. Within the broad spectrum of students that reviewers will encounter during the progress review process, their most serious responsibility is to those who may be seriously struggling with the demands of research. In these cases, the reviewers' feedback can begin a process in which students are given as much support as possible to enable them to continue or, where necessary, are guided through the process of transferring to an alternative degree or terminating their studies.

However, the vast majority of students going through the review process will not be in this situation. For these students, the review process serves a variety of purposes that reviewers should be sensitive to. It provides an opportunity for them to garner new perspectives on their work, outside of their supervisory team. It is also an

opportunity for them to discuss any concerns they may have, for example with their supervisory arrangements.

The structure of the progress review

(For a broader picture of the review process, please see appendix 3.)

In first year, PhD students will submit a piece of work (the form of which is set by the School) alongside a self-assessment form and a data management plan (where data are used/produced). Depending upon the structure of their programme this may also apply to other research students, although this is left to the discretion of the School. In later years, students will submit a self-assessment form plus any other materials required by the School (for example a calendar of anticipated completion).

Reviewers will read this material and then conduct an interview with the student. After the interview reviewers will complete a report and will allocate one of four outcomes to the student under review: satisfactory, minor concerns, major concerns, and unsatisfactory.

The interview

Some Schools utilise the interview as an opportunity to provide students with a 'practice viva'. Reviewers should only treat an interview as a viva if this is explicitly suggested by the School and is made clear to students in advance. They should also ensure that such an approach still leaves time for students to raise any concerns they may have. The interview should be a constructive experience for the student. Whilst reviewers may communicate a general sense of how well the interview has gone, they should not communicate their intended classification to the student during the course of the interview, as it is subject to confirmation by the DoPGR.

4-tier outcomes

The 4-tier outcome system is intended to enable reviewers to respond with sufficient nuance to students across the spectrum. The two lower tiers ('unsatisfactory' and 'major concerns' require a student to undergo a re-review and are to be used when the reviewer has major concerns regarding their capacity to finish in a timely fashion. The two upper tiers ('satisfactory' and 'minor concerns') allow for reviewers to provide feedback and suggestions to students who seem to be reasonably well on track to complete.

Awarding a 'satisfactory' outcome does not preclude a reviewer from having comments or advice in their feedback to a student who is clearly doing well. 'Minor concerns' may be used to give more weight, where it is felt necessary, to advice that might be of significant benefit to a student's project and their timely completion. Should the review process reveal significant methodological differences between a reviewer and a student, but these do not impact upon a student's capacity to complete, 'satisfactory' and 'minor concerns' are appropriate outcomes to use.

Should a reviewer award an outcome of 'unsatisfactory' or 'major concerns', further decisions on the student's status will be taken by the DoPGR in their School, in discussion with other appropriate individuals.

Two consecutive amber outcomes will normally be treated the same as a red outcome and lead to probation and the first termination of studies warning, although the DoPGR has the discretion to recommend a different course of action to the

Associate Provost Student if termination of studies proceedings are not deemed appropriate for a particular student's circumstances.

Expectations of reviewers

Reviewers are expected to read work and conduct interviews with students in a timely fashion. They should be responsive to the fact that different students may have a variety of needs and may respond best to a variety of different approaches in terms of the interview and feedback provided. They should provide conscientious advice on a student's project within their expertise to do so and should treat seriously any concerns that individual students may raise. Reviewers should be sensitive to the dynamics of the student-supervisor relationship and be aware of the need for discretion when discussing any potential supervisory concerns. Reviewers are encouraged to ask about, and give advice on, the normal range of supervisory concerns, but are not expected to deal with especially complex or sensitive matters. The student should be directed to the DoPGR, Associate Provost Students or Registry Student Support Officer to discuss these concerns (see Appendix 4: Information Sharing).

5. Guidance for Students

Students should make themselves aware of the requirements for each annual review from the beginning of their programme of study and should work towards being well prepared for each review.

Students should approach the progress review as a valuable opportunity in a number of different ways. Firstly, it encourages students to reflect upon their own progress and to proactively manage their research in order to write the best thesis possible within the time allotted. It is also an opportunity for students to receive feedback on their work from academics outside of their supervisory team, and provides students with experience of discussing their project with interviewers who have read material relating to it but have not been closely acquainted with its development.

The annual progress review is also an opportunity for students to report how they feel things have been going – how their research, from their point of view, is progressing, and whether they are happy with the supervisory and other support arrangements provided by the School. Students should feel encouraged to discuss concerns they have with the review team (e.g., a desire for more frequent supervisions or the possible need for a change of supervisor due to a change in the direction of the research) but should remember that the progress review is an information sharing activity. If students have any issues that they would like to discuss in confidence they may contact their DoPGR, the Associate Provost Students or the Registry Student Support Officer at any time (see Appendix 4: Information Sharing).

Students should note that material submitted during the progress review does not confer credit, and as such does not fall under the university policy regarding multiple submission. As such, any relevant material (e.g. literature reviews, methodological discussions) may be incorporated into their dissertation should they so wish. Of course, the usual rules of [Good Academic Practice](#) still apply.

Following the progress review students will receive an outcome and a reviewers' report. The review outcome and report may provide advice or recommend specific actions that the student might take to improve the progress of their research. Students should be proactive in taking any such suggestions on board and in discussing them with their supervisors. If a re-review is necessary, students will receive advice and guidance on the process from the DoPGR, their supervisor, and other members of staff where appropriate.

If students have any concerns or problems, and if there is anything they feel is hindering their progress, they should, at any point, feel free to contact the DoPGR, the Registry Student Support Officer (reg-support-pgr@st-andrews.ac.uk), or the Associate Provost Students (assocprovost-students@st-andrews.ac.uk).

Appendix 1: Accommodating Different Circumstances

Although the guidance given above should apply to the vast majority of research students, certain circumstances may require adaptations to the process described above and flexibility on the part of the School and DoPGR. The notes below aim to clarify some of the circumstances in which this may be the case, but are by no means exhaustive. Schools should contact Registry for further advice if situations remain unclear.

Clarification regarding part-time students:

Part-time students should undergo a progress review in every year of enrolment, rather than in every year of FTE study. Therefore, assuming no leaves of absence, they should undergo review once every calendar year. Reviewers should, however, be sensitive to the different time-scales and expected progress rates involved.

Research degrees with a taught element:

Some research degree programmes — such as the DEng, or PhD programmes as part of Centres of Doctoral training — can contain significant taught components, and these are often concentrated in the first two years of the programme. In these cases, annual reviews in the first two years should make allowance for the time available for research, and assess progress on that basis. E.g., a taught course component equivalent to 60 undergraduate credits is estimated to require 16 weeks of 37.5 hours, and so at a nine-month assessment, such a student would only have had at most five months to dedicate to research.

In cases where the first year of such a programme contains only full-time taught courses (and no research component), where it is not appropriate to review research progress, the annual review process may instead take the form of checking the student has attained the required grades in the taught courses.

In such cases it may also be appropriate to hold additional assessments after 15 or 18 months to check the transition from taught to research components. Where this is the case, students should be made aware of the full arrangements well in advance. See also discussion under joint programmes below.

Cross-School supervision:

In circumstances in which a student is supervised by academics in more than one School, they should undergo one progress review each year (i.e. they should not be reviewed separately by each School). DoPGRs from different Schools should correspond regarding which School it would be most appropriate for students to be reviewed in. All relevant Schools should normally be represented on the review panel.

Co-tutelles and other joint programmes:

In case of co-tutelles, the process for progress reviews must be clearly laid out in the individual co-tutelle agreement. This agreement should be consistent with university policy. Normally, the lead institution is responsible for carrying out the review process. If St Andrews is not the lead institution, the School postgraduate committee should request a copy of the annual progress reports.

In addition to co-tutelles, some PhD or DEng programmes involve consortia of UK universities which impose their own annual review procedures, as required by

funding bodies. If these reviews are consistent with the annual review policy, it may be possible for the DoPGR to review the feedback from this review process and submit it to Registry. In cases where it is unclear whether the review procedure is consistent with university policy, the DoPGR should consult with the Associate Provost Students, who has authority to vary university policy in such circumstances as necessary, in the interests of the student and the spirit of the policy.

Re-reviews and government funding:

If a student in receipt of government funding receives an amber or red result in a progress review, any re-review should be completed by month 11 of that student's academic cycle in order for re-registration or withdrawal to take place without financial ramifications. However, the period between the initial review and the re-review must be at least two months.

Extension period:

In case an extension is granted, students in their extension period should be regularly monitored and actively supported, but will not normally undergo a full review. Students should submit updates on their work every three months, which will be monitored by both the supervisor and the DoPGR. If there are doubts about timely completion, the DoPGR may schedule a full progress review.

Appendix 2: Expectations

Students should...

- Familiarise themselves with relevant rules, regulations, and guidelines.
- Establish a successful working pattern.
- Produce the agreed amount of work.
- Complete the student self-assessment form.
- Contact, at any time, their DoPGR, the PGR Registry Student Support Officer, or the Associate Provost Students if they wish to discuss any concerns or problems.

Supervisors should...

- Familiarise themselves with relevant rules, regulations, and guidelines, and be equipped to answer student questions about them, and to provide guidance throughout the review process.
- Be available for, and encourage, regular supervision meetings.
- Be familiar with the quantity and quality of their student's work.
- Provide realistic, constructive feedback on their student's progress.
- Complete the supervisor report form.

Annual Progress Review Expectations

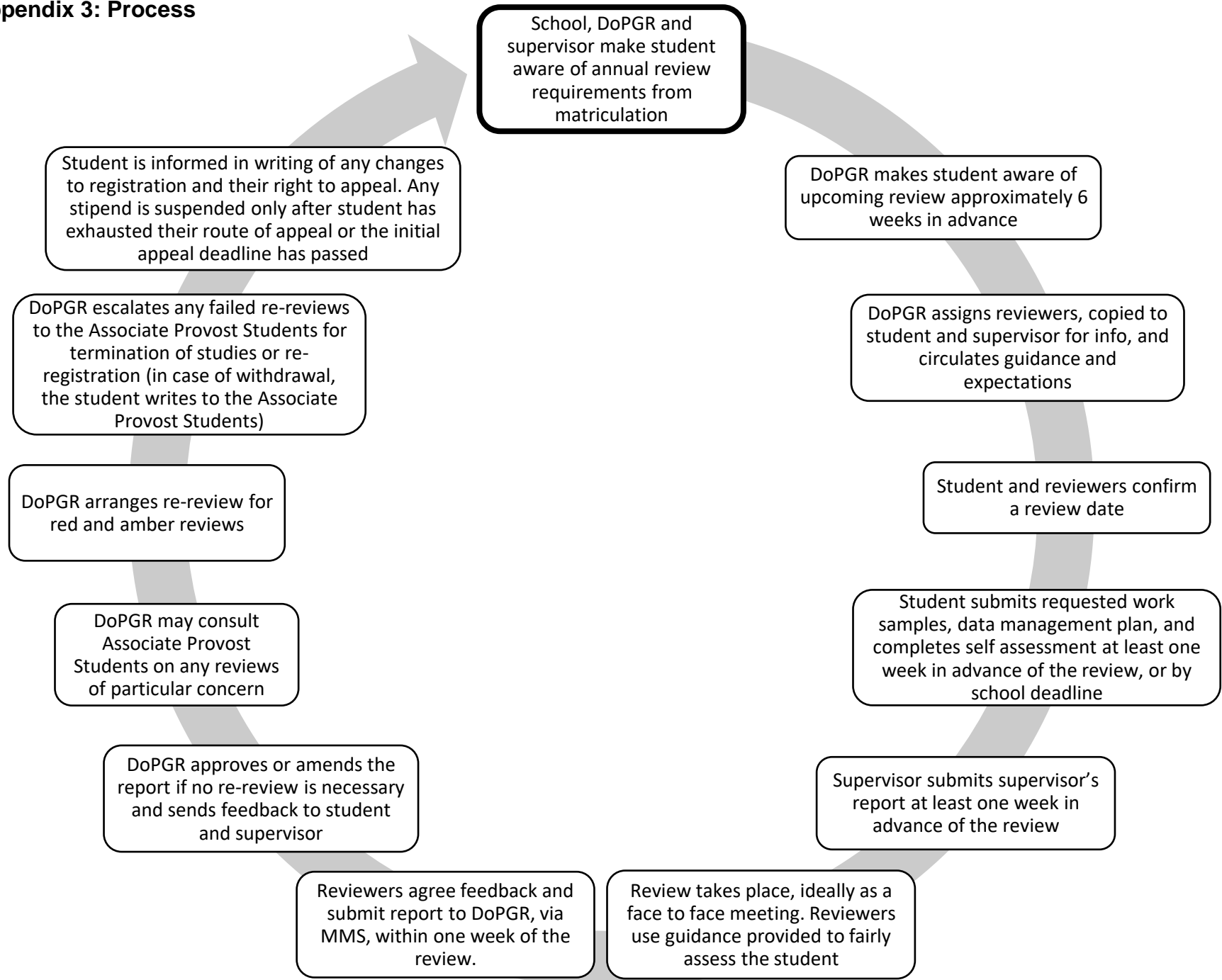
The Director of Postgraduate Research should...

- Assign reviewers, with reference to subject coverage and any potential conflicts of interest.
- Ensure that reviews happen in a timely fashion.
- Review all outcomes and agree and communicate follow-up actions where necessary.
- Address any issues relating to supervisory arrangements that may have come to light during the review process.

Reviewers should...

- Read all submissions and conduct interviews with students in a timely fashion.
- Identify any areas for concern, including minor and non-academic concerns.
- Identify any additional training or supervisory needs.
- Provide constructive feedback for student and supervisor, and fill in the reviewers' report.

Appendix 3: Process



Appendix 4: Information Sharing

The progress review is essentially an information-sharing exercise, ensuring that students, their supervisors, and the School are all working towards the same expectations and standards. However, it also involves the creation and distribution of material and information that may be of a sensitive nature. The process, therefore, also creates an opportunity for the student to share some information confidentially with the DoPGR. This table indicates what information or documents should be shared with the different individuals involved at each stage of the review process.

	Director of Postgraduate Research	Reviewers	Student	Supervisor
Before / during progress review, has access to or receives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcomes of and all documents relating to a student's previous reviews. - The documents submitted in the current review by the student and supervisor. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outcomes of student's previous reviews, and reviewer's reports. - The student's review documents. - The supervisor's report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own documents. - The supervisor's report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Should see any supporting material submitted by the student (e.g. a draft introduction, or sample chapter), including the student's report. - Their own report.
After progress review, has access to or receives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete reviewers' report. - Any supervision-related concerns, which the student only wishes to share with the DoPGR in the first instance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Their own report. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete reviewers' report. - DoPGR may correspond directly with the student regarding supervisory concerns and how they might best be addressed before taking action (which is likely to involve discussing issues with the supervisor). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewers' report. - DoPGR may correspond directly with supervisor regarding a potential re-review or any other action a student may need to undertake.

Version number	Purpose / changes	Document status	Author of changes, role and school / unit	Date
1.0	New guidance		Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	01/07/2016
1.1	Changes to Associate Provost titles	Approved	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	03/08/2021
1.2	Minor updates to reflect policy changes	Approved	Emily Feamster, Academic Policy Officer, Principal's Office	07/10/2022