



## Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Researchers

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### 1. Introduction and Purpose

- 1.1 This document details the minimum requirements in relation to progress, review and attendance monitoring of postgraduate researchers (PGRs) at the University of Manchester.
- 1.2 This policy forms part of the University's [Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- 1.3 PGR attendance requirements are formally set out in the [University's Policy on Recording and Monitoring of Attendance](#).

### 2. Scope and definitions

- 2.1 This policy is intended for use by academic staff, professional service staff and PGRs.
- 2.2 For the purposes of this policy, the term PGR refers to researchers on all Doctoral, MPhil, MSc by Research and Doctor of Medicine degrees. PGRs on professional doctorate programmes may follow different timeframes for review and may be required to pass additional structured taught, clinical or practice-based components.
- 2.3 Formal and informal review meetings are conducted to ensure that both the PGR and the University are meeting their respective requirements and responsibilities; the PGR, and supervisory team, are aware of progress in relation to programme objectives; and any changing needs or difficulties are identified early and addressed effectively.
- 2.4 Local practice may vary according to discipline and additional supplementary guidance may be provided at Faculty and/or School/Division/Department level.
- 2.5 Two types of progress review meetings are set out in this document:
  - a. Supervisory meetings involving the PGR and supervisor(s) to discuss routine matters relating to the PGRs research.
  - b. Formal review meetings which involve individual(s) independent of the PGR and the supervisory team to assess the progress of the PGR.
- 2.6 CDT/DTC/DTP programmes may contain a taught element, in which case progress will be reviewed and examined on credit bearing units, and continuation will be based on the PGR's level of attainment.

2.7 PGRs registered on a CDT/DTC/DTP programme of study with a taught element will be required to follow this policy once they have begun the doctoral degree element of their programme.

### 3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 It is the responsibility of the **supervisors** to:

- a. Meet the minimum requirements in relation to supervisory meetings as set out in the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- b. Complete the University expectations form in discussion with their PGR at the start of the programme and throughout the PGR's programme thereafter.
- c. Agree a training and development plan with PGRs at the start of their programme and annually monitor their progress in relation to relevant research and professional/career objectives. For further details please refer to the [Postgraduate Researcher Professional and Career Training and Development - Statement of Expectations](#).
- d. Discuss and agree flexible research arrangements with their PGR at least annually, giving consideration to the PGRs personal circumstances e.g. [caring responsibilities](#) alongside their ability to progress and complete within their original deadline.
- e. Record any agreed flexible research arrangements in the University's progression monitoring system at least annually.
- f. Advise on the amount, nature and timing of any teaching (GTA) activity undertaken by PGRs to ensure that it will not interfere with the requirements of their programme or negatively impact academic progression.
- g. Voice concerns if it is felt that the PGR's time spent on teaching (GTA) is negatively impacting their academic progression and revisit agreed research arrangements if deemed necessary.
- h. Ensure that their PGR is aware of the purpose and frequency of progress review meetings and the possible outcomes of these meetings as set out in this policy.
- i. Prepare adequately for supervisory meetings and formal review meetings.
- j. Attend the PGR's formal review meeting where necessary.
- k. Agree completion dates for successive stages of work. Including the submission of written work which should be reviewed and returned to the PGR with feedback within an agreed timeframe. If completion dates cannot be agreed between the supervisor/s and the PGR, the supervisor/s can impose reasonable deadlines which must be recorded and communicated to the PGR.
- l. Make sure that the PGR is aware of the importance of the formal review and planning meetings for progression purposes.

- m. Ensure that the standard of work expected and possible outcomes from the formal review meetings, are fully explained and discussed with the PGR at the start of the degree and at subsequent meetings.
- n. Ensure that the PGR produces a progress report/piece of work to be considered by a panel at the formal progress review meeting.
- o. Ensure that the outcomes of supervisory meetings are recorded appropriately..
- p. Consider any specific issues raised by their PGR that might impact their progression and consider how any potential impact relates to the University's [Policy on Supporting Health, Fitness and Return to Study](#).
- q. Consider and, where possible, facilitate the implementation of recommendations made in any support plan developed by the Disability Advisory Support Service (DASS) for the PGR.
- r. Communicate expectations to the PGR regarding engagement and attendance at the University.
- s. Indicate to a PGR if their progress is considered to be unsatisfactory and to take steps to help the PGR to identify any problems or issues which may be affecting their progression.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2 It is the responsibility of the **PGR** to:

- a. Maintain regular contact with their main supervisor / supervisory team as set out in the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- b. Prepare adequately for and attend routine supervisory meetings and formal review meetings.
- c. Keep a record of routine supervisory meetings, in conjunction with their supervisor/s.
- d. To make their supervisor(s) aware of any changes to their personal circumstances, e.g. [caring responsibilities](#) that may necessitate a change to their agreed research arrangements, at the earliest opportunity.
- e. Discuss with their supervisor(s) the amount, nature and timing of any planned teaching (GTA) activity to ensure that it will not interfere with the requirements of the programme or negatively impact academic progression.
- f. Discuss with their supervisor(s) if they feel that their teaching responsibilities (GTA) are negatively impacting their academic progression and revisit agreed research arrangements if deemed necessary.
- g. Agree with their supervisor/s the completion dates for successive stages of work. This includes submission of written work which should be reviewed and returned to the PGR by the supervisor/s with constructive feedback within an agreed, reasonable timeframe. If completion dates cannot be agreed between the supervisor/s and the PGR, the supervisor/s can impose reasonable deadlines which must be recorded and communicated to the PGR.

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<sup>1</sup> The supervisor should provide support and guidance wherever possible, and where necessary seek advice from PGR support services.

- h. Consider their research and career training/development needs with the support of their supervisor/s at the start of their programme and annually thereafter to form a planned timetable of researcher development.
- i. Ensure that any barriers to the progress of their research or any issues of concern that might impact on their progression are raised with the supervisory team as early as possible, either through the regular supervisory meetings or through alternative routes as appropriate.
- j. Remain engaged with their programme and maintain regular contact with their supervisor/s throughout.
- k. Inform their supervisor/s in writing, at the first opportunity, of any issue(s) that may detrimentally impact engagement and progress.
- l. To discuss with their supervisor/s, where necessary and at the first opportunity, development of a support plan based on Disability Advisory Support Service (DASS) recommendations.

3.3 It is the responsibility of the **independent assessor** to:

- a. Ensure that the formal review meetings are independent, robust, fair and unbiased.
- b. Maintain and enhance the University's reputation for academic excellence.
- c. Provide supportive and constructive feedback to PGRs to help them develop academically.
- d. Agree a joint recommendation with the review panel on PGR progression through engagement with the review process (see section 10 for possible outcomes).

## 4. Supervisory Meetings

- 4.1 The academic progress of all PGRs must be monitored on a regular basis through the supervisory process to ensure that the required standard of work, including written and verbal presentation, are achieved. Further details can be found in the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- 4.2 As part of an initial meeting, the PGR and supervisor/s should agree a provisional schedule of supervisory meetings taking account of the agreed targets and deadlines which should be adapted as necessary in accordance with how the research degree develops.
- 4.3 Supervisory meetings should mainly be used to discuss matters relating to the PGR's research, and to incorporate targets and deadlines for the completion of distinct stages of work required by the research degree, the University, and where appropriate, external sponsors or collaborators. The PGR and supervisor/s should use these meetings to plan and prepare for formal review meetings, setting targets and deadlines where appropriate.
- 4.4 The frequency of meetings between supervisor/s and PGR will be determined by the nature of and the stage of development of the PGR's research. A minimum expectation would be for supervisory meetings to take place monthly for all PGRs.

- 4.5 It is expected that supervisory meetings will be held face-to-face. However, at the request of the PGR, supervisory meetings can be held remotely via video-conferencing tools such as Zoom / Teams.<sup>2</sup>
- 4.6 For PGRs who are registered on a split-site research degree the same minimum expectation applies but it is recognised that contact may need to take place remotely e.g. over email, telephone or via video conferencing tools. Further information can be found in the University's [Policy for Split-Site Arrangements](#).
- 4.7 PGRs on a distance learning programme or PGRs undertaking extended fieldwork away from the University are expected to remain in regular contact via email, telephone, and/or video conferencing tools throughout their programme. Where PGRs have industrial/external supervisors, meetings should be set out in each case according to PGR needs.

## 5. Formal Review Meetings

- 5.1 Formal review meetings are used to review and record a PGR's progress and formally recommend a PGR's ability to continue on the programme and they will normally take place at least once a year. The 'annual progression review meeting' or 'continuation/transfer review' are examples of a formal review meeting.
- 5.2 Within each Faculty there may be arrangements for additional formal progression review meetings throughout the year and practice should follow guidelines prescribed by the relevant Faculty or School/Division/Department.
- 5.3 For full-time and part-time PGRs, whether their initial registration was on a doctoral degree, MD, MPhil, or MSc by Research, a formal review meeting must take place, as a minimum, towards the end of the first year of study and at any point where the PGR is completing probationary training or moving to a new programme of study.
- 5.4 The frequency and structure of formal review meetings for subsequent years of study after the first year review has taken place will be defined at School/Division/Department level with approval from the Faculty.
- 5.5 Appointment of the members of the formal review panel should be approved by the PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate). The PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate) may consult with the supervisor/s when appointing members of the formal review panel.
- 5.6 Faculties/Schools/Divisions/Departments should be aware of the impact on registration and any maintenance payments when considering the timing of a formal review meeting.
- 5.7 Formal review meetings should be conducted in English.
- 5.8 PGRs can raise any issues or concerns at the formal review meeting.

## 6. The Formal Review Panel

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<sup>2</sup> Consideration must be given to UKVI attendance monitoring requirements for PGRs on a student route / tier 4 visa (monthly supervisor meetings at least six of which must be in-person in any 12-month cycle).

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of the formal review panel to review and record the progress of a PGR and assess their ability to continue on the programme. The panel must recommend an outcome from the panel meeting.
- 6.2 The formal review meeting panel can be made up of the following members of staff:
- Academic individual(s) independent of the PGR and their supervisor/s (see criteria in section 7).
  - The main supervisor and/or co-supervisor/s.
  - The PGR.
  - The advisor (where appropriate).
- 6.3 The PGR can request to meet with an independent review panel without any of their supervisors being present. Any requests should be directed to the relevant Faculty/School/Division/Department Graduate Office for consideration and must include clear reasons why the PGR would wish the supervisors to be excluded from the review meeting. The relevant PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate) will make the final decision.
- 6.4 Where the main supervisor does not attend the meeting they must fully brief the panel in relation to the PGR's progress, prior to the review meeting. They should also be involved in any discussions after the review regarding implementing the final progression recommendations.
- 6.5 When appointing members of the formal review panel, consideration should be given to any future assessment of the PGR's work. For example, where a member of staff has acted as a member of a formal review panel for a PGR on more than one occasion, they must not be appointed as the internal examiner or independent chair for the final thesis or equivalent. Further information on the nomination of examiners for research PGRs can be found in the [Nomination of Examiners and Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Policy](#).
- 6.6 Academic staff who are invited to attend the formal review meeting but who do not contribute to the final progression decision recommendation are not considered part of the 'formal review panel'.

## 7. Independent Assessor - Appointment Criteria

- 7.1 The independent assessor should:
- Be an academic member of staff at the University of Manchester.
  - Have co-supervised at least one PGR student to completion OR;
  - have examined at least one UK PhD OR;
  - have completed at least one previous UK progression review for a research degree.
  - Be independent of the PGR, the project and the supervisory team but possess sufficient knowledge of the subject area to be able to effectively assess progress.

## 8. Formal Review Assessment

- 8.1 PGRs will be assessed for satisfactory progress against criteria set by the programme / stage of study which may include literature review, developed research questions, methodology and design, research plan, demonstration of attained skills and knowledge, draft papers or a pilot project.
- 8.2 Where research degrees incorporate a prescribed taught element of credit bearing taught units or other compulsory or recommended research training, supervisors should ensure that the PGR has demonstrated satisfactory attendance and examination performance. PGRs will be examined on the credit bearing taught units according to the expected attainment level of the programme in accordance with the [taught degree regulations](#).
- 8.3 PGRs should be able to demonstrate that any professional reports, where required by the degree programme of their sponsors, meet the required standard.
- 8.4 Formal review meetings must be arranged to adhere to the deadline dates set by Faculty and allow enough time before the end of the academic year to allow consideration of suitability for continuation into the following year of study. Where the university is at fault and a formal review outcome has not been reached before the PGRs next registration point the PGR should be permitted to re-register in advance of the review outcome.
- 8.5 In exceptional circumstances, when a PGR has taken an approved interruption and has not completed their formal annual review process before their next registration point they will be required to re-register before they attend their formal progress review meeting. The outcome of the formal progress review meeting will inform the continuation of registration at the University of Manchester. In this case, PGRs and administrators should refer to the [registration guidance](#).
- 8.6 Successful completion of a formal progress review meeting is a condition of PGRs continuing their research degree programme.
- 8.7 A written report on the outcome of the formal review meeting must be completed by the review panel and submitted via the University's progression monitoring system. PGRs can view the report in the system prior to it being submitted for consideration/approval by the relevant Faculty or School/Division/Department postgraduate research committee.

## 9. PGR Progress Reports

- 9.1 The progress report or other assessment material should be substantial enough to enable the panel to assess the PGR's progress and ability to continue through the research degree.<sup>3</sup> The format of the report will vary across disciplines according to the nature of the research. It should, however, be of sufficient length and detail to demonstrate the PGR's understanding of the subject and ability to pursue the appropriate level of research for the degree.

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<sup>3</sup> PGRs should consult their programme handbook for details of any discipline-specific requirements.

9.2 The written material submitted by a PGR for a formal review meeting in years 2 or 3 may differ in length and detail from their original submission in year one. The supervisor/s should ensure that the PGR is aware of the required level of written submission in advance of the agreed deadline.

9.3 PGRs should ensure that the progress report or other assessment material is submitted through the University's progression monitoring system in advance of the agreed deadline. The submitted report or assessment material should be agreed with the PGR's supervisor before being considered at the formal progress review meeting.

## 10. Formal Review Outcomes

10.1 Following a formal progress review, a number of possible outcomes are available for recommendation, dependent on the type of degree on which the PGR is registered. It is the responsibility of the members of the formal review panel to make the decision recommendation using the following progression outcomes:

10.2 PGRs initially registered on a doctoral degree:

- a. CONTINUATION - The PGR has met the required doctoral standards and the recommendation is made for the PGR to continue registration on the doctoral degree.
- b. RESUBMIT – the PGR has almost met the required doctoral standards but further work must be done to continue registration. Following the first attempt at a formal review, PGRs will normally be given one opportunity to resubmit work for a further review and will normally be given up to 10 weeks after the first panel meeting to complete the remedial work and submit it to the panel for consideration. The resubmission and review of the submitted work should, where possible, take place before the end of the PGR's current year of study. Following the review of the remedial work the outcome 'RESUBMIT' must not be recommended. The outcome must be either, 'Continuation', 'Transfer' or 'Withdrawal'.
- c. TRANSFER - The PGR has not met the required doctoral standards and a recommendation is made for the PGR to be transferred from the doctoral degree to MPhil or PG Dip.
- d. WITHDRAWAL – The PGR has not met the required standard for doctoral degrees or MPhil and the recommendation is made for the PGR's registration to be terminated.

10.3 PGRs initially registered on an MPhil or MSc by Research degree:

- a. CONTINUATION - The PGR has met the required doctoral standards and a recommendation is made for the PGR to be transferred from MPhil or MSc by Research to the relevant doctoral degree.
- b. RESUBMIT – the PGR has almost met the required standard of the programme but further work must be done to continue registration. Following the first attempt at a formal review, PGRs will normally be given one opportunity to resubmit work for a further review and will normally be given up to 10 weeks after the first panel meeting to complete the remedial work and submit it to the panel for consideration. Following the review of the remedial work the outcome 'RESUBMIT' must not be recommended.



- c. WITHDRAWAL – The PGR has not met the required standard for the MPhil or MSc by Research and the recommendation is made for the PGR's registration to be terminated.
- 10.4 The final recommendation of the formal review panel meeting will be reported to the relevant Faculty or School/Division/Department postgraduate research committee for approval (or by chair's action).
- 10.5 Where the panel is unable to reach an agreed recommended outcome and the PGR Director/PG Tutor is unable to resolve any issues in discussion with the PGR and members of the panel following the review, the final progression decision will be referred to the relevant Faculty Associate Dean for Postgraduate Research for a final decision.
- 10.6 The candidate must be informed, within a reasonable timeframe, of the final outcome of the formal progress review. The School/Division/Department should have a process in place for informing candidates of the outcome of their formal progress review.
- 10.7 Where the outcome of the formal review meeting is withdrawal the PGR's [registration](#) will be terminated. If the PGR is on a student visa the Student Immigration Team will inform the relevant external authorities.
- 10.8. The decision of the Faculty or School/Division/Department postgraduate research committee is final. Appeals are allowed under [Regulation XIX](#).

## 11. Attendance / Engagement Monitoring

- 11.1. Supervisors must record satisfactory attendance and engagement information on the University's progression monitoring system.
- 11.2 Attendance normally requires the supervisor/s to have physically seen the PGR via a monthly supervisory meeting. Where a PGR is studying away from the University, or an [official leave of absence](#), a physical meeting may not be possible, in which case, where the PGR is maintaining regular contact through remote communication and they are pursuing their programme as required, attendance can be deemed to be sufficient.
- 11.3 Where a supervisor/s notice unexplained absences or non-attendance / engagement that gives cause for concern, it should be logged in the University's progression monitoring system and the supervisor/s must create a plan of action to rectify the situation. If the concern is significant, or likely to persist for more than one month the supervisor/s should discuss the issue with members of the supervisory team and/or the PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate) and inform the appropriate Faculty / School / Division / Department Graduate Office.
- 11.4 Where there are unresolved issues with attendance of PGRs on a student visa, the Student Immigration Team should be contacted for further advice at [visa@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:visa@manchester.ac.uk).
- 11.5 Further information on the attendance requirements for PGRs at the University of Manchester can be found in the [Policy on Recording and Monitoring Attendance](#).

## 12. Unsatisfactory Progress

- 12.1 Practice for handling cases of unsatisfactory progress should follow guidelines prescribed by the relevant Faculty or School/Division/Department.
- 12.2 Where a PGR's progress has been identified as unsatisfactory at any stage of the programme, supervisors should record, monitor and reassess the PGR's progress at regular intervals, normally every month, as part of regular supervisory meetings.
- 12.3 Faculties/Schools/Divisions/Departments can initiate formal progress review meetings at any point throughout the programme where issues with progression have been identified.
- 12.4 If progress continues to be deemed unsatisfactory by the supervisor/s, the matter should be discussed by the supervisory team and/or the PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate) and an action plan agreed. Subsequent unsatisfactory progress should be referred to the next appropriate formal review panel or the relevant Faculty/School/Division/Department committee.
- 12.5 The PGR should be informed as soon as possible of any meeting arranged to consider their unsatisfactory progress and the possible outcomes from the meeting.
- 12.6 In all cases where the progress of a PGR is deemed unsatisfactory the PGR should be given advice on where they can obtain information about the local review process and who they can contact if they have any questions. Once the supervisory team have agreed an action plan the PGR should be formally notified in writing about the stages of the review process, who will be involved with the review and any possible outcomes.
- 12.7 Where a PGR and supervisor agree to a transfer from a doctoral degree to an MPhil after a period of regular supervisory meetings the request should be considered and approved / denied by the relevant PGR Director/PG Tutor (or their delegate). The resulting decision to transfer or withdraw a PGR will be managed according to each Faculty's guidelines.

### **13. Changes to a Degree**

- 13.1 Changes to a programme may occur for a variety of reasons instigated by either the PGR or the University. The outcomes of formal progress review and regular supervisory meetings may lead to changes in a degree. Detailed guidance on the processes and procedures associated with changes to programme can be found in the University [Change of Circumstances Policy for Postgraduate Research Students](#).

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