

# **Policy on the Progress and Review of Postgraduate Research Students**

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**Research Degrees and Researcher Development  
Directorate of Research and Business Engagement**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1** This document details the minimum requirements in relation to progress, review and attendance monitoring of postgraduate research students at the University of Manchester.
- 1.2** For the purposes of this policy, the term 'postgraduate research student' refers to students of ALL Doctoral, Master of Philosophy, MSc by Research and Doctor of Medicine degrees. Students on professional doctorate programmes may follow different timeframes for review and may be required to pass additional structured taught, clinical or practice-based components.
- 1.3** This policy is intended for use by academic and administrative staff and full time and part time postgraduate research students.
- 1.4** There are a wide range of procedures in place across the University which enable the progress of postgraduate research students to be monitored on a regular basis, through meetings between the student and their supervisor(s) and supervisory team, researcher development sessions and more formal mechanisms such as an annual review of progress.
- 1.5** Formal and informal review meetings are conducted to ensure that: both the student and the University are meeting their respective requirements and responsibilities; the student, and supervisory team, are aware of progress in relation to programme objectives; and any changing needs or difficulties are identified early and addressed effectively. It is expected that local practice may vary according to discipline and that additional supplementary guidance may be provided at Faculty and/or School level.
- 1.6** Two types of progress review meetings are set out in this document:
  - a. supervisory meetings involving the student and main supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s) to discuss routine matters relating to the student's research
  - b. formal review meetings which involve individual(s) independent of the student and supervisory team to assess the progress of the student
- 1.7** Progression monitoring of postgraduate research students registered on a Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT), Doctoral Training Centre (DTC) or Doctoral Training Partnership (DTP) programme may differ from standard doctoral procedures and students and staff should refer to the relevant guidelines provided by the School or Faculty. 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 student's level of attainment. Students registered on a CDT/DTC/DTP programme of study will be required to follow this Progress and Review policy once they have begun their doctoral degree element of the programme.

- 1.8** Attendance requirements are formally set out in the University's policy on monitoring of attendance which can be found at:  
[http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/map/studentsupportdevelopment/learningandprogression/recording\\_monitoring\\_attendance/](http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/map/studentsupportdevelopment/learningandprogression/recording_monitoring_attendance/)
- 1.9** This policy forms part of the University's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees. Further information relating to the Code of Practice can be found at:  
<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/>.

## **2. PROGRESS REVIEW RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **2.1 Responsibility of the supervisory team**

- a.** The main supervisor is required to meet the minimum requirements in relation to supervisory meetings as set out in the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- b.** The supervisory team will ensure that their student is aware of the purpose and frequency of all types of progress review meetings and the possible outcomes of these meetings as set out in this policy.
- c.** The main supervisor will prepare adequately for routine supervisory meetings and formal review meetings.
- d.** The main supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s) may attend the student's formal review meeting
- e.** The main supervisor, co-supervisor(s) and student are jointly responsible for agreeing completion dates for successive stages of work. This includes submission of written work which should be reviewed and returned to the student by the supervisor with constructive feedback within an agreed, reasonable timeframe. If completion dates cannot be agreed between the supervisor and the student, the supervisor can impose reasonable deadlines which must be recorded and communicated to the student.
- f.** The supervisory team should ensure that the student is aware of the importance of the formal review and planning meetings for progression purposes.

- g.** Main supervisors should ensure that the standard of work expected, and possible outcomes from the formal review meetings, are fully explained and discussed with the student at the start of the degree and at subsequent meetings.

## **2.2 Responsibilities of the student**

- a.** To maintain regular contact with their main supervisor and supervisory team as set out in the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).
- b.** To prepare adequately for and attend routine supervisory meetings and formal review meetings.
- c.** To keep a record of routine supervisory meetings, in collaboration with the supervisory team.
- d.** The main supervisor and student are jointly responsible for agreeing completion dates for successive stages of work. This includes submission of written work which should be reviewed and returned to the student by the supervisor with constructive feedback within an agreed, reasonable timeframe. If completion dates cannot be agreed between the supervisor and the student, the supervisor can impose reasonable deadlines which must be recorded and communicated to the student.
- e.** To 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 soon as possible, either through the regular supervisory meetings or through alternative routes as appropriate.
- f.** The student must remain engaged with their studies and maintain regular contact with their supervisor(s) throughout the programme.
- g.** Unless a student is undertaking approved fieldwork / a formal placement, is registered on a split-site programme, on a distance learning programme or is in a period of Submission Pending, the University requires students to reside within a commutable distance from Manchester during their time as a registered student. This is to ensure that students are able to meet attendance expectations and participate in wider research activities within their discipline area and/or School. Should a student be unable to do this at any point during their programme, in exceptional circumstances, a formal case must be made to the Faculty office, with the full support of their supervisor(s). The University reserves the right to reject such a request where it is considered that the student's residency could have a detrimental impact on the progression and engagement of their studies.

- h.** The student is required to discuss their research at the formal review meeting and ensure that the research is undertaken in a manner consistent with the University's Health and Safety policy:

<http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=654>

### 3. SUPERVISORY MEETINGS

- a. The academic progress of all postgraduate research students must be monitored on a regular basis through the supervisory process to ensure standards of work, including written and verbal presentation, are achieved. The University policy on supervision for postgraduate research degrees provides further detailed guidance and can be found at:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/supervision/>

- b. As part of an initial meeting, the student 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.
- c. Main supervisors are required to complete the University expectations form in discussion with their student at the start of the programme and throughout the student's programme thereafter.
- d. Supervisory meetings should be mainly used to discuss matters relating to the student'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 student and supervisor(s) should use the routine supervisory meetings to plan and prepare adequately for any formal review meetings, setting targets and deadlines where appropriate.

#### 3.1 Frequency of supervisory meetings

- a. The frequency of meetings between supervisor(s) and student will be determined by the nature of the research, and the stage of development of the student's research but a normal expectation would be for supervisory meetings to take place every fortnight for full time students. All disciplines should, however, expect students to meet with their main supervisor at least on a monthly basis. Students registered on a part time basis would normally be expected to meet with their main supervisor once a month. Students who are registered on a split-site research degree should have regular supervisory meetings at least monthly but it is expected that some contact may take the format of email, phone, facetime and video conferencing. Further information relating to the University's policy on split-site arrangements can be found at:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/collaboration/>

- b. Students on a distance learning programme, or in Submission Pending and living away from Manchester for financial reasons, are expected to remain in regular contact via email, phone, facetime and/or video conference conferencing throughout their programme. Where students have industrial/external supervisors, meetings should be set out in each case according to student needs to ensure appropriate contact and support is maintained with the industrial sponsor.
- c. For further information see the [Policy on Supervision for Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).

#### **4. THE FORMAL REVIEW**

##### **4.1 Formal review meetings**

- a. Formal review meetings which review and record a student's progress and formally recommend a student's ability to continue on the programme will normally take place at least once a year. The 'annual review meeting' is an example of a formal review meeting.
- b. Within each Faculty there may be arrangements for additional formal progression meetings throughout the year and practice should follow guidelines prescribed by the relevant Faculty or School.
- c. For full-time and part-time students, whether their initial registration was on a doctoral degree, 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 student is completing probationary training or moving to a new programme of study.
- d. 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 level with approval from the Faculty. In addition, Faculties/Schools may initiate formal review meetings at any point throughout the programme where issues with progression have been identified by any of the supervisory team or the student.
- e. Appointment of the members of the formal review panel should be approved by the PGR Director/PG Tutor. The PGR Director/PG Tutor may consult with the supervisor(s) when appointing members of the formal review panel.
- f. Faculties/Schools should be aware of the impact on registration and funding payments when considering the timing for a formal review meeting.



- g. Formal review meetings should be conducted in English.

#### 4.2 The formal review panel

- a. The responsibility of the formal review panel is to review and record the progress of a student and their ability to continue on the programme. The panel must recommend a transfer/continuation/discontinuation outcome from the panel meeting (as detailed in section 4.5 of this policy).
- b. In addition to the student's attendance at the formal review meeting, the assessment panel should be made up of at least one academic individual independent of the student and their supervisor(s). The student's main supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s) may be present at the meeting.
- c. The formal review meeting panel can be made up of the following members of staff:
  - Academic individual(s) independent of the student and their supervisor(s)
  - The main supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s)
  - The student
  - The advisor (in a pastoral role where appropriate)
- d. Where the formal review panel cannot agree a continuation decision, a recommendation will be presented to the appropriate PGR Director for final approval. The PGR Director can approve or overrule the formal review panel decision.
- e. The student can request to meet with an independent review panel without any of their supervisors being present. Any requests should be directed to the relevant School/Faculty Graduate Office for consideration and must include clear reasons why the student would wish the supervisors to be excluded from the review meeting. The relevant PGR Director, or nominated representative appointed by the Head of School, will make the final decision.

Where the main supervisor does not attend the meeting they must fully brief the panel in relation to the student's progress, prior to the review meeting. They should also be involved in any discussions after the review regarding implementing the final progression recommendations.

- f. When appointing members of the formal review panel, consideration should be given to any future assessment of the student's work. For example, where a member of staff has been appointed a member of a formal review panel more than once, they must not be allowed to be appointed as the internal examiner or independent chair for the final thesis. Further information on the nomination

of examiners for research students can be found in the Nomination of Examiners and Independent Chairs for Postgraduate Research Degree Examinations Policy:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/submissionandexamination/>

- g.** 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'.

### **4.3 Assessment at the formal review meeting**

- a.** In the first year of study students will be assessed for satisfactory progress against criteria which should typically include a thorough review of relevant literature which demonstrates a good understanding of the research context. The student should also be able to demonstrate that they have developed, in consultation with the supervisory team, a suitable research plan and approach for carrying out the research, and that they have attained the skills and experience necessary to achieve the research plan.
- b.** Where research degrees incorporate a prescribed taught element, of credit bearing taught units, supervisors should ensure that the student has demonstrated satisfactory attendance and examination performance. Students 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 which can be found at:  
<http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/policies-and-procedures/>
- c.** Students should be able to demonstrate that any professional reports, where required by the degree programme of their sponsors, are of an acceptable standard.

Formal review meetings must be arranged to adhere to the deadline dates set by Faculty and before the end of the academic year to allow consideration of suitability for continuation into the following year of study.

- d.** In exceptional circumstances, when a student 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, students and administrators should refer to the registration guidance at the following link:  
<http://www.saa.manchester.ac.uk/student-finance/tuition-fees/withdrawals-and-interruptions/>

- e. Successful completion of a formal progress review meeting is a condition of students continuing their research degree programme.**
- f. A written report on the outcome of the formal review meeting must be completed by the review panel. Students can view the report in the University's progression monitoring system prior to it being submitted for consideration/approval by the relevant Faculty or School postgraduate research committee.

#### **4.4 Student Submissions for the formal review meeting**

- a. As a minimum, the supervisor should ensure that the student produces a progress report/piece of work to be considered by a panel at the formal progress review meeting.

This report/piece of work should form a substantial body of work that enables the panel to assess the student's progress and ability to continue through the research degree. The format of the report will vary across disciplines according to the nature of the research. It should, however, be of sufficient length to demonstrate the student's understanding of the subject and ability to pursue the appropriate level of research for the degree. The written material submitted by a student 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 student is aware of the required level of written submission in advance of the agreed deadline.

- b. Students should ensure that the progress report or piece of work is submitted through the University's progression monitoring system in advance of the agreed deadline. The submitted report or piece of work should be agreed with the student's supervisor before being considered at the formal progress review meeting.
- c. Students may also be required to present their findings orally to other staff and students at various stages throughout the research degree. Supervisors should, in consultation with the student, explore opportunities for dissemination of research findings. The student should be encouraged to present their findings at national and/or international conferences and should consider throughout the degree, opportunities for publishing the outcome of their research.
- d. Students can use the formal review meeting to raise any issues or concerns.

#### 4.5 Outcomes from the formal review meeting

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

##### a. Students initially registered on a doctoral degree:

- i. CONTINUATION - The student has met the required doctoral standards and the recommendation is made for the student to continue registration on the doctoral degree.
- ii. RESUBMIT (remedial work) – the student has almost met the required doctoral standards but further work must be done to continue registration. Following the first attempt at a formal review, students 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 student's current year of study. The outcome of 'RESUBMIT' should be based on the quantity and quality of the revisions that would be necessary to achieve the standard required in the time available. Following the review of the remedial work the outcome 'RESUBMIT (remedial work)' must not be recommended. The outcome must be either, 'Continuation', 'Transfer' or 'Withdrawal'.
- iii. TRANSFER - The student has not met the required doctoral standards and a recommendation is made for the student to be transferred from the doctoral degree to MPhil.
- iv. WITHDRAWAL – The student has not met the required standard for doctoral degrees or MPhil and the recommendation is made for the student's registration to be terminated.

##### b. Students initially registered on an MPhil or MSc by Research degree:

- i. TRANSFER - The student has met the required doctoral standards and a recommendation is made for the student to be transferred from MPhil or MSc by Research to the relevant doctoral degree.
- ii. CONTINUATION - The student has not met the required standard for transfer to doctoral level and the recommendation is made for the student to continue

where applicable on the MSc by Research degree, or register for the MPhil submission pending period.

- iii. RESUBMIT (remedial work) – the student 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, students 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 (remedial work)' must not be recommended.
- iv. WITHDRAWAL – The student has not met the required standard for the MPhil, MDC or MSc by Research and the recommendation is made for the student's registration to be terminated.
- c. Applicants who do not meet the formal criteria for admittance onto a doctoral programme may be admitted to the degree of MPhil in the first instance, depending on the admission criteria in the School, and be reviewed for progression on to the doctoral degree at their first formal progress review.
- d. The final recommendation of the formal review panel meeting will be reported to the relevant Faculty or School postgraduate research committee for approval (or by chair's action). The Faculty/School postgraduate research committee can approve or overturn the decision based on the reported outcomes of the formal review panel meeting.
- e. Where the panel is unable to reach an agreed recommended outcome, or the PGR Director/Tutor is unable to resolve any issues in discussion with the student and members of the panel following the review, the final progression decision will be referred to the relevant School/Faculty postgraduate research committee for a final decision.
- f. The candidate must be informed, within a reasonable timeframe, of the final outcome of the formal progress review. The School should have a process in place for informing candidates of the outcome of their formal progress review.

## **5. ATTENDANCE AND ENGAGEMENT MONITORING**

- a. The main supervisor has a responsibility to ensure that their student is engaged and in attendance at the University, is maintaining regular contact and is attending seminars and training events as required. Supervisors should record satisfactory attendance on the University's progression monitoring system, and where attendance begins to be an issue, they should make plans to rectify the situation and contact the relevant Faculty/School Graduate Office with their concerns.

- b. Attendance normally requires the supervisor(s) to have physically seen the student via a monthly supervisory meeting or in a laboratory at least once a month. Where a student is studying away from the University, on an approved period of absence such as fieldwork, a physical meeting may not be possible, in which case, where the student is maintaining regular contact through remote communication and they are pursuing their studies as required, attendance can be deemed to be sufficient.
- c. Where a supervisor notices unexplained absences or non-attendance that gives cause for concern, it should be logged in the University's progression monitoring system and the supervisor 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 should discuss the issue with members of the supervisory team and/or the PGR Director/Tutor and inform the appropriate Faculty/School Graduate Office.
- d. Where there are unresolved issues with attendance of Tier 4 sponsored students, the Student Immigration Team should be contacted for further advice at [visa@manchester.ac.uk](mailto:visa@manchester.ac.uk)
- e. Further information on the attendance requirements for students at the University of Manchester can be found in the Policy on Recording and Monitoring Attendance: <http://www.tlso.manchester.ac.uk/policies-and-procedures/>

## 6. PROGRESS RECORD

Supervisors should ensure that the outcomes of all regular supervisory meetings are recorded appropriately and that the formal review outcome is recorded on the relevant form, on the University's progression monitoring system, for each of their students.

## 7. RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT

- a. A programme of researcher development is a mandatory component of all postgraduate research degrees and all students are expected to engage in the skills training provision as part of their progression through their research degree. All postgraduate research students are required to consider their training needs with the support of their supervisor at the start of their research degree and annually thereafter to determine their research, transferable and generic skills requirements. The agreed outcomes of these discussions will provide the basis for a planned programme of researcher development. The supervisory team is responsible for agreeing a training plan with students and monitoring their progress in relation to relevant skills and training objectives.

- b. The supervisory team is expected to take into account the differing commitments of part-time students when building a training plan. Further details relating to skills training can be found in the University's postgraduate research skills training policy:

<http://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/services/rbess/graduate/code/skillstraining/>

- c. Students may also be required to present their findings orally to other staff and students at various stages throughout the research degree. Supervisors should, in consultation with the student, explore opportunities for dissemination of research findings. The student should be encouraged to present their findings at national and/or international conferences and should consider throughout the degree, opportunities for publishing the outcome of their research.

## 8. REGISTRATION

Students are expected to have made satisfactory progress throughout their degree. If the outcome of the formal review meeting is not satisfactory the student's registration will be revoked. The Student Immigration Team will inform the relevant external authorities if a student who is being sponsored with a Tier 4 visa has had their registration revoked. Further information on registration can be found at: <http://www.saa.manchester.ac.uk/registration/>

## 9. UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS

- a. Practice for handling cases of unsatisfactory progress should follow guidelines prescribed by the relevant Faculty or School.
- b. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to indicate to a student at any stage if their progress is considered to be unsatisfactory and to take steps to help the student to identify any problem areas or issues which may be affecting their progression. The supervisor should provide support and guidance wherever possible, and where necessary seek advice from the appropriate PGR administrator.
- c. Where a student's progress has been identified as unsatisfactory at any stage of the programme, supervisors should record, monitor and reassess the student's progress at regular intervals, normally every month, as part of regular supervisory meetings. If progress continues to be deemed unsatisfactory by the supervisor, the matter should be discussed by the supervisory team and/or the PGR Director and an action plan agreed. Unsatisfactory progress should be referred to the next appropriate formal

review panel or relevant Faculty/School research degrees committee, whichever is due to convene earliest.

- d. The student should be informed as soon as possible of any meeting arranged to consider their unsatisfactory progress and the possible outcomes from the meeting.
- e. In all cases where the progress of a student is deemed unsatisfactory the student 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 student should be formally notified in writing about the stages of the review process, who will be involved with the review and any possible outcomes.
- f. Where a student and supervisor agree to recommend a downgrade from a doctoral degree to MPhil after a period of regular supervisory meetings the recommendation should be considered by the earliest meeting of the relevant Faculty or School postgraduate research degrees committee to approve the change. The decision to downgrade or discontinue a student will be managed according to each Faculty's guidelines.

## **10. CHANGES TO A DEGREE**

Changes to a research degree may occur for a variety of reasons instigated by either the student 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 research degrees can be found in the University policy on Policy on circumstances leading to changes to postgraduate research study: Policy on Circumstances Leading to Changes to Postgraduate Research Study: <http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=8162>



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