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Progress Review Policy for Research Students

POLICY DOCUMENT



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Coláiste na hOllcoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Progress Reviews for Research Students

All registered research students in UCC will undergo a formal review, at least annually, either by the relevant local Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), or by a Progress Review Panel (PRP) to which the GSC has delegated this function. This may include an initial review, within 3 months of commencement of a student's research, to ensure that an appropriate initial research learning plan has been put in place, and to review the student's plan for training and professional development (e.g., through attendance at required or optional modules). Part-time students will also be required to undergo an annual review, but the requirements for the review will be modified to take into account the student's part-time status. Annual reviews are a formal strand of UCC's structured PhD programme.

Students registered for a Master's by Research programme will be required to undertake a progress review if they are registered for more than one calendar year.

Doctoral students on thematic or practitioner doctorate programmes will be required to undertake a progress review on an annual basis once they have commenced the research component of the programme.

It is also required that all students applying for transfer between research programmes (e.g., between MSc/MPhil/PhD Track and doctoral degrees) should be subject to reviews by a GSC or PRP, as appropriate. A copy of the review report should accompany the application to transfer between programmes.

A common approach to progress reviews is required to support supervisors and supervisory teams and to ensure that research students have regular milestones throughout their research. Such systems must take account of disciplinary norms, and must respect and support the supervisor(s)-student relationship and existing supervision practices. Progress review templates are available from the Graduate Studies Office for Academic Units that do not have their own forms developed. The key principles and responsibilities of the Graduate Studies Committee with regard to the arrangement and oversight of the progress review system are described below.

1. Every student will undergo a formal review on an annual basis at a minimum.
2. Academic units should make every reasonable effort to accommodate students when scheduling progress reviews. Insofar as possible, reviews should be co-ordinated with review processes operated by external funding bodies, so as to minimise the burden on students and staff.

3. In cases where a student misses a scheduled review through illness, leave of absence or other unforeseen circumstances, and the academic unit is notified in advance, a review is required on the student's return.
4. If a student fails to present for review, this will (unless a reasonable excuse is given) count as an unsatisfactory review and the student will be notified of the date for the next review meeting.
5. The purpose of progress reviews is to support both student and supervisor(s) by giving an opportunity to reflect and report on progress and achievements in the year concerned, and plans for the subsequent year. Progress will be recognised and acknowledged and, where appropriate, constructive and detailed feedback and advice will be provided. In cases where problems with the progress of research are identified, local steps to resolving such problems will be identified during the review and followed up.
6. The GSC will either undertake the reviews, or delegate the conduct of reviews to a PRP, which will normally include one member of the GSC and at least one additional member of staff, who is not a supervisor of the student under review. If a student's supervisor(s) is not on the GSC/PRP, the GSC/PRP must ensure that they consult with the supervisor(s) to ensure that they have all relevant information.
7. The local GSC is responsible for ensuring that reports from each student's reviews are recorded and stored appropriately. Each GSC is expected to report annually to their College Graduate School on the reviews conducted, any generic issues arising and the update of taught modules undertaken and suggestions for the development of future modules.

While details of the exact operation of review systems may be defined by the relevant

GSC, basic common principles are that such reviews:

- Reflect the requirements of the specific discipline;
- Reflect the different stages of research depending on stage of the student's progress, which may lead to differentiated review requirements for students in year one to six.
- Support the advancement of the student's research;
- Encourage student self-assessment in advance of the review;
- Are evidence-based, such that the GSC/PRP has sufficient information to advise the
- student on their progress.
- Provide appropriate guidance arising from the findings in writing to the supervisor(s)
- and the student.

A GSC/PRP should apply the appropriate review requirements to all students under

their responsibility.

All reviews should include the following elements:

- At a minimum, a review should take the form of a written report by the student to the PRP/GSC and/or a presentation by the candidate to allow progress to be discussed and any issues clarified. Additional evidence could include a student written self-assessment, student written work, a report by the supervisor(s), or a joint student-supervisor(s) progress report.
- A report on the modules undertaken by the student since their last review and plans for the coming year
- Any obstacles affecting progress
- All students should be notified in writing of the result of the review along with any recommendations from the panel.

Overall, the review process and its requirements should not be too onerous for the student, supervisor/supervisory team or GSC/PRP, and should not represent a significant interruption to the progress of a student's research.

Once a student has completed the minimum period of registration, subsequent reviews conducted by the GSC/PRP should primarily ensure the student is on track with submission. The supervisor/supervisory team will need to verify that this is the case and provide indicative timelines to completion.

In the case of all students who have reached the maximum registration period (six years in the case of a PhD student), a detailed review must be conducted before an application for extension can be made. The review report (which must have been conducted within six months of the application) must accompany the application for extension which is signed off by the Department/School and College/Faculty.

Following their review, the GSC/PRP could reach a number of recommendations, such as concluding that the student's progress is:

- **Satisfactory:** recommend the student continue with their research. This may include some recommendations for the coming year, including publishing papers, attending conferences or training or academic modules to be undertaken.

- **Not satisfactory:** request another review meeting within a specified number of months

(normally within a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months (or pro-rata in the case of a part-time student), with a full report addressing concerns. In such cases, detailed and clear feedback on the time period and the type of achievements which are expected in must be provided in writing to the student (e.g., a target of a chapter, piece of work, or set of experiments which should be completed in the time concerned).

Following a second unsatisfactory review of progress, a GSC/PRP may advise a student that it is in their best interests to choose to change their registration or deregister from their research degree programme. However, if a student wishes to continue in their programme despite this advice, this will result in the initiation of an adjudication process to determine the student's likelihood of successful progression.

Students should be made fully aware that positive results in progress reviews should not lead them to assume that their thesis examination is in any way pre-determined, as the examination process will be conducted in a manner that is entirely independent of preceding reviews and commences on submission of the thesis.

5. Adjudication process for progression of PhD students

The process of progress reviews is clearly intended to be a constructive and positive experience for the student and supervisor(s) and should recognise and acknowledge good progress made. However, such reviews may occasionally result in negative conclusions by the GSC/PRP, i.e., there are major concerns about the lack of progress being made by a particular student in their research.

In all cases where a PhD student is deemed at a review to have made unsatisfactory progress, they will be allowed a supplementary review, usually a minimum of 3 months and a maximum of 6 months later, for which they will have been recommended specific targets or objectives in their research which should have been achieved. At this stage, if the supervisor(s) are not on the GSC or PRP which reviewed the student progress, that body should discuss the progress issues with the supervisor(s) to ensure that all relevant facts are known.

If the judgement of such a supplementary review is unsatisfactory and the student wishes to continue on his/her programme of research despite the advice of the PRP/GSC, the case will be referred to an adjudication process.

1. An Adjudication Panel comprising the Head of School/Department/Discipline in which the student is registered (or nominee in cases where the Head has been directly involved in the review process), the Head of a cognate academic unit (who will chair the panel), and an External Adjudicator from outside UCC. The Head of School/Department/Discipline will inform the Graduate Studies Office on initiation of an Adjudication process, and this office will provide advice on procedures. The External Adjudicator shall have expertise in the research area concerned, should be in a position to judge the merits of the work the student has completed to date on their thesis, and should be familiar with supervision of research students; they must also be free of conflicts of interest with the student, subject matter or supervisor(s). The External Adjudicator and Head of cognate academic unit will be nominated by the Head of School/Department/Discipline for approval by Head of College.

2. The panel shall be provided with the reports of the GSC/PRP in the matter plus any

evidence provided by the student or supervisor(s) to the GSC/PRP on their progress (e.g., presentation, written report). The panel may also seek additional information from the student and/or supervisor(s), if the panel deem this necessary.

3. The reports of the GSC/PRP should also be made available to the student to allow the student the right to respond or clarify any matters.

4. Following consideration of these matters, when the panel is satisfied that all relevant

facts are known, the adjudication panel shall make one of the following recommendations on a suitable course of action in writing to the ACGSC as follows:

a. Student continues PhD study and guidance is provided to supervisor(s) and student, where appropriate, on any measures required to enable the student to progress (including a possible recommendation of change of supervisor); or

b. Student registration is changed to a Masters programme (in the case of doctoral students only) and guidance is provided to supervisor(s) and student, where appropriate, on any measures required to enable the student to progress;

c. Student is deregistered, on the basis of lack of sufficient progress.

5. The outcome of the adjudication process will be made known to the student in writing

by the Registrar and Senior Vice-President for Academic Affairs (or nominee) within 30 days of the meeting of the ACGSC which considers the matter.

6. Within 28 days of receipt of the above notification, a student may appeal the outcome

of an adjudication process by writing to the Academic Secretary. Academic Board will then appoint a group to consider the appeal, which shall be conducted without prejudice to possible future examination of the student's thesis and independently of any other grievance procedure which may be concurrently in process.

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Schematic flowchart of annual review and adjudication process for a PhD student

