Annual and Interim Progress Review Handbook

For Research Degree Students (PhD, MPhil, Professional Doctorate) and Supervisors

Contents

1. General Introduction

1.1 At Keele University, we regard the regular review of a research degree student's progress as an essential mechanism for maximising the likelihood of the student completing the programme within their registration period, and ensuring that the student receives appropriate support to make improvements in cases where progress is unsatisfactory. There are two regular progress review processes which research degree students must undergo: Annual Progress Reviews and Interim Progress Reviews.

1.2 This Handbook provides detailed guidance to staff and research degree students on both Annual and Interim Progress Reviews, supplementing the information contained in the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees. Staff for whom the Handbook has been written include supervisors and other members of supervisory teams, interview panel members, and the PGR Administrators. Students for whom the Handbook is intended are those on MPhil, PhD, and DM programmes, and those who are either entering or are in the research component of a Professional Doctorate (e.g. EdD, DBA, DCrim, DSW, DPharm). As Professional Doctorate students undergo their own doctoral progression process, all sections of the Handbook with the exception of Section **3.2** (on Annual Progress Review 1) are applicable to them.

1.3. Section 2 presents to research degree students and staff the expectations of the University surrounding (i) students' need to maintain good academic standing and (ii) the procedures in place in each Faculty/Research Institute (RI) to support their use of academic warnings. These two elements are features of the University's general approach to progress monitoring, but also feed into the processes of Annual and Interim Progress Review.

1.4. Section 3 outlines to students the requirements for the three stages of the Annual Progress Review process, and emphasises to staff involved (panels, supervisors, and PGR Administrators) how to administer and conduct each of these review stages.

1.5. Section 4 sets out to students and supervisors the Interim Progress Review process, which both parties complete at 6-monthly intervals.

1.6. Section 5 defines the progress monitoring procedures in place for students on MPhil programmes.

1.6. Section 6 summarises the academic appeal procedure and the grounds on which students can submit an appeal at each Annual and Interim Progress Review milestone.

2. General Progress Monitoring: Academic Standing and Academic Warnings

2.1. Requirement to Maintain Good Academic Standing

2.1.1. For research degree students, maintaining good academic standing involves in general their fulfilment of the rights and responsibilities laid out in the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees (Section 6.3). It entails students performing at a satisfactory level on their thesis (e.g. producing work of an acceptable standard) and engaging with their studies to a satisfactory level (e.g. making appropriate progress in their ongoing acquisition of research training and personal development/employability skills).. If a student falls out of good academic standing, this may be a consequence of unsatisfactory academic performance and progress, non-engagement with studies, or

a combination of the two factors. Continuing failure to remain in good academic standing may result in a student's Faculty/RI PGR Committee recommending their withdrawal from the University.

2.1.2. Throughout their degree programmes, students should keep in regular contact with their Lead Supervisor, and submit work in accordance with the schedule agreed and set out in the Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP). Students are responsible for keeping their supervisors informed about any barriers to their satisfactory progress, either in their regular supervision meetings or at one of the formal Annual or Interim Progress Reviews.

2.1.3. Supervisory teams should take care to inform students about any concerns regarding unsatisfactory progress, and must document these concerns in writing (e.g. in the Lead Supervisor's notes following a supervision meeting or in comments on submitted work) so that there is a clear record for the student to consult when addressing the concerns. If the problem persists for a month, the supervisory team should notify the PG/PGR Director for the relevant Faculty/RI and discuss whether action is required in the form of an academic warning. Where relevant, staff within the research environment (predominantly members of the supervisory team) should also identify whether it is feasible to offer the student additional support or guidance, either within the Faculty/RI or via other support services at the University.

2.1.4. Depending on when the Lead Supervisor (or other staff in the research environment) become aware of the issue(s) affecting a student, the most appropriate forum for handling them may be either be a supervision meeting or one of the formal Interim or Annual Progress Reviews. Sections 3 and 4 contain further detail on the procedures for resolving unsatisfactory academic performance and the actions available in cases where problems cannot be resolved within the framework of formal process.

2.1.5. If there are exceptional circumstances that have resulted in (or will in all likelihood result in) unsatisfactory academic progress, students should identify, with the support of University staff, whether it is possible to request an extension or leave of absence (maximum of 12 months in normal circumstances) or a change of status. Students must discuss any interruptions to their study with their Lead Supervisor in the first instance (and also Immigration Compliance for international students). . Guidance on extensions, leave of absences, or other changes to a PGR student's registration status is available on the University's website.

2.1.6. The University retains the right to enforce a compulsory leave of absence, in accordance with Regulation C10 and Regulation B4.

2.1.7. If a student fails to maintain good academic standing as a result of unsatisfactory academic performance/progress and/or non-engagement with their studies, and does not take appropriate action to make improvements, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee may recommend to the University's Research Degrees Committee (RDC) that the student should be withdrawn from the University. The main grounds on which the Faculty/RI PGR Committee would make this recommendation would be exhaustion of the procedures under the academic warning process (see **2.2** below).

2.1.8. Students can appeal against the decision of the RDC to approve the withdrawal of their registration from the University. For more information about the PGR appeals process and the grounds on which a student can make an appeal, see **Section 6** of this Handbook or consult the Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page.

2.2. Academic Warnings

2.2.1. At any point in a research degree student's programme, the student's Lead Supervisor can advise the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to issue an academic warning to the student under the terms of Regulation C10 (Section 8) Academic warnings normally result from a student not maintaining good academic standing, which is most commonly the case if a student receives a grade E (unsatisfactory) in an Interim Progress Review (see **4.34** and **4.51** below). The warning takes the form of a letter which the PG/PGR Director addresses to the student, and which should detail a programme of work for the student to undertake over the following 4 weeks.

2.2.2. In total, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee can issue three consecutive academic warnings to a student. In the first warning period, the student would have 4 weeks to satisfy the terms of the warning. In the second and third warning periods, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee can use its discretion to vary the number of weeks the student has to address the terms of the warning, though the standard remains at 4 weeks. If a student fails to comply with terms of the third warning, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee may recommend to the RDC that the student be required to withdraw from the University.

2.2.4. In order for the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to make a recommendation of withdrawal, the three academic warnings given to a student must be in succession. Three separate first-stage warnings given over the duration of a student's programme are not sufficient grounds to recommend withdrawal.

2.2.5. Once a student has satisfied the terms of an academic warning, they will return to being in good academic standing. Students can expect any further problems to be subject to another first-stage warning.

2.2.6. Faculties/RIs should ensure that the academic warning letters sent to students are clear about the details of the work which the student must complete within each warning period in order to fulfil the terms of the warning. The PGR Administrators in each Faculty/RI should share copies of all warning letters with the Student Records & Examinations Officer (PGR), to ensure that the University has a central record of the measures taken to help a student return to good academic standing.

3. Annual Progress Reviews

3.1. Introduction to Annual Progress Reviews

3.1.1. Annual Progress Reviews serve as gateways for progression to the next stage of a research degree student's programme, helping to ensure that a student is on track to meet the expected submission date. Annual Progress Reviews also support requirements for the intended award against individual targets and the University Criteria for Award of Research Degrees. In addition to their regulatory function, the Reviews present an opportunity for research degree students to engage in dialogue with both their supervisory team and other academic staff in their disciplinary area about their research and ideas. In this sense, the Reviews should provide helpful preparation for the oral examination (viva).

3.1.2. Faculties/Research Institutes (RIs) must complete an Annual Progress Review Report for all full-time research degree students at approximately 10 months into each year of the degree (or equivalent for part-time students, i.e. every 2 years). In total, therefore, there are three Annual Progress Review stages: 1, 2, and r 3. Sections **3.2-3.4** below describe each stage in detail.

3.1.3. Students on standard PhD programmes must complete each Annual Progress Review stage. Professional Doctorate students will complete doctoral progression as the culmination of the taught

section of their programme; they do not therefore need to undertake Annual Progress Review 1, but should complete Annual Progress Reviews 2 and 3. MPhil students are not expected to complete any of the Annual Progress Review milestones: **Section 5** below outlines the progress monitoring procedures in place for these students.

3.1.4. A research degree student's progression to the next year of study, and permission to submit a thesis for examination, are conditional on completion of each Annual Progress Review Report, which requires the input of both the individual student and staff (the Independent Review Panel in Annual Progress Review 1, and the supervisory team in 2 and 3).

3.1.5. At each stage, Annual Progress Reviews can result in a recommendation to alter the student's status to that of an MPhil path (if on a doctoral programme) in cases of unsatisfactory progress or otherwise when the Independent Review Panel (in Annual Progress Review 1) or supervisory team (in Annual Progress Reviews 2 and 3) deem it in the best interests of the student. Students can also indicate at each stage that they wish voluntarily to amend their student status from a doctoral programme to an MPhil.

3.1.6. The Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees sets out the expectation that each Annual Progress Review will take place as a face-to-face meeting. Sections **3.2-3.4** below cover procedures for monitoring the progress of research degree students based at remote locations

3.2. Annual Progress Review 1

3.2.1. Purpose
Annual Progress Review 1 is a research degree student's first formal annual progress review. It takes the form of an Independent Review Panel interview which is based around the student's submission of a form, substantial piece of written work (see **3.25** below), and an up-to-date Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP). The review focusses on a student's progress with their initial research, research plan, and their research training and personal development. The Panel will decide, based on the work submitted, whether a student is suitable to progress to the next stage of doctoral study or whether transfer to an MPhil path would be appropriate.

3.2.2. Timescale
Annual Progress Review 1 must take place approximately 10 months (for full-time students) or 20 months (for part-time students) after the date of the research degree student's initial registration. The Faculty/RI should make every effort to ensure that the Independent Review Panel interview takes place as close to this time-point as possible.

3.2.3. In exceptional circumstances, a research degree student may receive an additional period of time beyond the initial 10 months before undergoing Annual Progress Review 1. Such an eventuality will depend on the student and supervisory team making a case to the relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee for extending the deadline of the review, and for this case to meet with the approval of the Committee.

3.2.4. The Faculty/RI must provide the student with a **minimum of 14 days' notice** of the date of the Independent Review Panel Interview.

3.2.5. Submission Requirements
Research degree students must submit, **no later than 14 days** before the Independent Review Panel interview, the following documents to the PGR Administrator in their Faculty/RI:

a. The Annual Progress Review 1 Report Form with Sections A and B completed;

b. *For Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (Applied Sciences and Medical Sciences), Faculty of Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences students*:

A report of c. 5,000 words (or equivalent) which should include the following:
   i. Literature review summary and/or update;
   ii. Background and rationale for proposed research;
   iii. Research methods to be used;
   iv. Acquisition of skills and techniques;
   v. Report on preliminary studies;
   vi. Research plan for the next year of study;

   For Humanities students (including Creative Writing students and Music Composition and Technology students), please see the requirements as set out in the Humanities Postgraduate Research Handbook (Section 14.2).

c. An up-to-date Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP);

d. If required, confirmation of ethical clearance for the proposed research project (see **3.2.8** below).

The PGR Administrator will share the material submitted by the student with the Independent Review Panel.

3.2.6. It is good practice for students to get supervisory feedback on all items submitted for the Independent Review Panel interview. With this in mind, students should liaise with their supervisory team about an appropriate timescale for sharing these items, which should allow sufficient time for the team to review the materials (e.g. at 9 months) before the student submits them formally to the PGR Administrator.

3.2.7. In Section B of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report Form, research degree students can indicate whether they wish voluntarily to alter their student status to that of an MPhil path (if on a doctoral programme) or doctoral degree (if on an MPhil programme). Where students indicate a willingness to change their degree programme from PhD to MPhil, they must complete and submit the Change of Status Application Form, which will proceed to the Faculty/RI PGR Committee for consideration. Section 5 below details the process for a student to transfer from MPhil to PhD.

3.2.8. Ethical Approval
All research degree projects which involve human participants, their tissues, or personal information must receive approval from either: (i) one of the University's Ethical Review Panels, (ii) an NHS external Ethics Committee, (iii) a non-NHS Research Ethics Committee, or (iv) the Social Care Research Ethics Committee, as appropriate, before the project can commence. The body from which a research degree student seeks approval will differ according to the nature of the research. For more information about how to obtain the appropriate ethical approval for their research, students should consult the information about Research Ethics.

3.2.9. Composition of the Independent Review Panel
The Independent Review Panel which the Faculty/RI PGR Committee appoints must feature a minimum of 2 members and a maximum of 4 members (including the Chair). The basic composition

of the panel (in terms of the roles of members) should be specified in the relevant Faculty/RI Postgraduate Research Handbook.

3.2.10. When appointing members of staff in the Faculty/RI to an Independent Review Panel, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee should be mindful of the following:

- The Chair should not be a member of the research degree student's supervisory team. The role should be filled by a senior member of staff experienced in postgraduate research (as evidenced by her/his supervisory record). The PG/PGR Director is not excluded from consideration for this post.
- The panel should not include members of the supervisory team. The Faculty/RI PGR Committee may appoint panel members on the basis of their subject expertise or other criteria, as deemed fit, provided that each panel member is appropriately qualified to make a decision on the outcome of the Independent Review Panel interview (see **3.2.16**. below).
- Members of the supervisory team are welcome to attend the Independent Review Panel interview in an observing capacity only, subject to the advance agreement (at least 24 hours before the interview) of the student and the Independent Review Panel.

3.2.11. The Independent Review Panel Interview

As stipulated in the [Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees](#) (Section 8.1.3), the expectation is that the Independent Review Panel interview will take place as a face-to-face meeting, with all parties present in the same room. Where possible, research degree students and Panel members should make arrangements to ensure the meeting comprises this format.

3.2.12. There are, however, cases in which a face-to-face meeting will not be practicable, e.g. where a research degree student is studying at the University via a remote location. In such instances, the Faculty/RI and student should make arrangements to conduct the Independent Review Panel interview via video link. The technology used for this purpose must be a video conferencing system that the University's Audio Visual Services (AVS)/IT staff support and operate. Skype (or an equivalent and appropriate application) should only be used as a back-up option. All parties should, however, check their Skype connection (or that of the equivalent application) when testing the video conferencing system to assess its suitability as a contingency plan. In no circumstances should students and Panel members conduct the Independent Review Panel interview via telephone conference.

3.2.13. To safeguard the academic standards and integrity of an Independent Review Panel interview conducted via video link, both research degree students and academic staff should note the following requirements:

- When scheduling a time for the interview, participants should consider the time-zones involved where one of the parties is overseas.
- Participants should conduct a trial run with the remote party and the University site on the day before the interview.
- The PG/PGR Director should review and approve the arrangements made in advance of the date of the interview, to ensure that the student is not placed at a disadvantage compared to one undergoing a face-to-face interview. The PG/PGR Director (if not a member of the Independent Review Panel) also reserves the right to observe the interview, subject to the advance agreement (at least 24 hours before the interview) of the student and the Independent Review Panel.
- In circumstances where the student is the remote party, the student's Lead Supervisor should be present at the start of the interview to verify the student's identity. The student

should also identify themselves to all parties and show their Keele Card as verification as a matter of course in situations where one of the participants is based at a remote location.
- The student should identify any materials brought to the interview to all participants at the start of the event.

3.2.14. Criteria for Progression

The criteria which determine a research degree student's ability to progress with a doctoral level of study align with those set out in Section C of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report. Taken together, these criteria ask the Independent Review Panel to establish the degree to which a student has:

Research Planning and Skills
- Completed a thorough literature review and demonstrated understanding of the context for the proposed research;
- Identified a clear research question and/or topic;
- Put in place a clear research plan;
- Developed understanding or acquired knowledge of methodologies appropriate for the research area;
- Demonstrated the ability to work to realistic deadlines for the production of work;
- Either demonstrated that ethical approval is not required, or else what plans are in place for obtaining ethical clearance by one of the University's Ethical Review Panels (or by a recognised external committee);

Research and Personal Development Skills Training
- Submitted an up-to-date Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP);
- Undertaken what the interview panel considers sufficient research/personal development skills training in their first year of study (taking into account their plans for the following year of study and the University's overall requirement of 200 hours over the course of the research degree);
- Identified research/personal development skills needs to be addressed over the next year of study.

3.2.15. Section C of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report asks members of the Independent Review Panel to assess whether a student has met each criterion for progression, with a choice of 'Yes' or 'No'. In cases where ''No' is the most appropriate option, Panel members should take care to set out in the relevant 'Comments' box what this assessment means in context and what measures the student needs to take in order to satisfy the criterion fully. Panel members may also add comments which explain or qualify the decision to assign 'Yes' to a criterion.

3.2.16. Possible Outcomes

Once the Independent Review Panel has considered the degree to which the student has satisfied the criteria, there are three recommendations available:

- The student is suitable for doctoral study and may continue with their existing registration or, in the case of a student registered for an MPhil degree, be permitted to transfer to registration for a doctoral degree (**pass)**;
- The student has not yet produced work sufficient to complete this milestone and must undertake a programme of work (specified by the panel) over a period not exceeding 2 months (full time) or 4 months (part time), after which period the Panel will re-assess the student and confirm the final outcome (**defer**);
- The student is not suitable for doctoral study, but is suitable for a FHEQ Level 7 qualification and should now prepare a thesis for submission for either an MPhil or MRes degree.

3.2.17. The Chair of the Independent Review Panel (with input from other Panel members, as required) is responsible for completing a report arising out of the interview (Section D of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report). As a minimum, the report should comprise:

- An assessment of the success with which the research degree student has completed the criteria detailed in **3.2.14**;
- The Panel's recommendation, chosen from one of the three options outlined in **3.2.16**;
- A brief account of the meeting, highlighting in particular areas of concern and suggestions for how the student can address them;
- In the case of students for whom a decision is deferred, a clear outline of the programme of work which the student is expected to complete before the Panel reconvenes, and whether this programme is to be judged on the basis of written work or a second interview.

3.2.18. The Chair of the Independent Review Panel should complete the report **within 14** days of the interview.

3.2.19. Once Sections A-D of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report are complete, the Chair should forward the report to the PGR Administrator. The relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee will consider the form and the recommendation made. If the Committee approves the report, the PG/PGR Director will complete Section E and confirm that the report has been shared with the student. The student should confirm (via email in most cases) that they have received the report and seen its content.

3.2.20. The Faculty/RI PGR Committee has the power to approve the recommendation or, in cases where there is doubt over the conduct of the interview or recommendation, to stipulate that the Panel reconvenes and re-runs the interview.

3.2.21. Students can appeal against the decision of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to alter the level of their degree. For more information about the PGR appeals process and the grounds on which a student can make an appeal, see **Section 6** of this document or consult the Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page.

3.3. Annual Progress Review 2

3.3.1. Purpose
Annual Progress Review 2 is a research degree student's second formal annual progress review. It takes the form of a student's interview with their supervisory team. The interview aims to cover (i) the student's general progress and standard of work, (ii) progress with research training and personal development, and (iii) any other issues which the student and/or supervisory team wish to discuss. Annual Progress Review 2 =builds on the Interim Progress Review process, but is distinguished from it in inviting contributions from the full supervisory team (including those members of the team based off-campus) rather than Lead Supervisor alone. It should be a productive dialogue to which all parties have the opportunity to contribute.

3.3.2 A student's ability to re-register for their next year of doctoral study is dependent on the submission of a completed Annual Progress Review Report 2. Any failure to complete this process, on the part of either the Faculty/RI or student, will prevent the student from re-registering.

3.3.3. Timescale
Annual Progress Review 2 must take place approximately 10 months into a full-time research degree student's second year of doctoral study (or equivalent for part-time students, i.e. the fourth year of

doctoral study). The supervisory team and research degree student should make every effort to ensure that the meeting takes place as close to this time-point as possible.

3.3.4. In exceptional circumstances, a research degree student may receive an additional period of time beyond the initial 10 months before undergoing Annual Progress Review 2. Such an eventuality will depend on the student and supervisory team making a case to the Faculty/Research Institute (RI) PGR Committee for extending the deadline of the review, and for this case to meet with the approval of the Committee.

3.3.5. The supervisory team must provide the student with a **minimum of 14 days' notice** of the date of the meeting.

3.3.6. Submission Requirements
Research degree students must submit, **no later than 14 days** before the interview with their supervisory team, the following documents to the PGR Administrator in their Faculty/RI:

    a. The Annual Progress Review 2 Report with Sections A and B completed ;
    b. The two most recent Interim Progress Review Reports;
    c. An up-to-date Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP).

The PGR Administrator will share the material submitted by the student with the supervisory team.

3.3.7. In Section B of the Annual Progress Review 2 Report , research degree students can indicate whether they wish voluntarily to alter their student status to that of an MPhil path (if on a doctoral programme). Where students indicate a willingness to change their degree programme, they must complete and submit the Change of Status Application Form, which will proceed to the Faculty/RI PGR Committee for consideration.

3.3.8. The Supervisory Team Interview
The expectation is that the supervisory team interview will take place as a face-to-face meeting with all parties present in the same room. Where possible, students and Panel numbers should make arrangements to ensure the meeting comprises this format. There are, however, cases in which a face-to-face meeting will not be practicable. In instances where either the student or a member of the supervisory team cannot be physically present at the interview (e.g. the student is studying at the University via a remote location), all participants should arrange to conduct the interview via video link. See sections **3.2.10** and **3.2.11** above for detailed instructions and conditions for holding the supervisory team interview via video link.

3.3.9. In the context of the supervisory team interview, 'all parties' refers to the student and each member of the student's supervisory team, i.e., the Lead Supervisor, Co-Supervisor and, if relevant, any additional Co-Supervisors based at another institution or external organisation.

3.3.10. The Lead Supervisor must take part in the interview. If circumstances mean that the Co-Supervisor or another member of that supervisory team is unable to participate either at a face-to-face meeting or from a remote location, there should be provision for that person to be (i) consulted about the parts of the Annual Progress Review Report 2 which the student has completed, and (ii) given the opportunity to have a meaningful input to Section C of the report.

3.3.11. Possible Outcomes
In order to complete the requirements of Annual Progress Review 2 fully, students must have received a grade C ('Satisfactory') or above in their last two Interim Progress Review Reports (see guidance on

the grading structure in **4.34** below below). There are therefore two potential outcomes of the supervisory team interview:

- Students who received a grade C or above in their last two Interim Progress Review Reports can progress to the next stage of their programme (year 3 for full-time students and year 5 for part-time students) and work to the plans discussed at the interview in preparation for Annual Progress Review 3, which will assess their readiness to submit their thesis.
- Students who received a grade below C in one or both of their last two Interim Progress Review Reports (e.g. C and D, D and D, D and E) can expect that their Faculty/RI PGR Committee will discuss their Annual Progress Review 2 Report t at its next meeting, and that their supervisory team will implement measures to support the student in improving their progress.

3.3.12. Students who have received an 'E' grade in one of their last two Interim Progress Review Reports should already be working on a directed programme of work in order to return to good academic standing in line with the academic warning procedures detailed in **2.2** above. The supervisory team may request that the student attend a reconvened interview and/or recommend that the student access one of the University's support services with a view to putting in place additional support measures.

3.3.13. In the cases of students who have received one or two 'D' grades, the supervisory team may also request that the student complete a specific piece of work to improve their progress, attend a reconvened interview, and/or access one of the University's support services.

3.3.14. If the supervisory team do not feel that a student will be able to complete a doctoral programme within the maximum timeframe allowed (see Ordinance IV), they can record this in Section C on the Annual Progress Review 2 Report and make a recommendation that the student's status be altered to that of an MPhil path. The final decision on this recommendation rests with the Faculty/RI PGR Committee.

3.3.15. The Lead Supervisor (with input from other members of the supervisory team, as required) is responsible for completing Sections C and D of the Annual Progress Review 2 Report. Once the supervisory team has added its content, the Lead Supervisor should forward the report to the PGR Administrator. The relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee will consider the form and the recommendation made. If the Committee approves the report, the PG/PGR Director will complete Section E and confirm that the report has been shared with the student. The student should confirm (via email in most cases) that they have received the report and seen its content.

3.3.16. The Committee has the power to approve the recommendation or, in cases where there is doubt over the conduct of the interview or recommendation, to stipulate that the supervisory team reconvenes with the student for a second interview.

3.3.17. Students can appeal against the decision of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to alter the level of their degree. For more information about the PGR appeals process and the grounds on which a student can make an appeal, see **Section 6** of this document or consult the Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page.

3.4. Annual Progress Review 3

3.4.1 Purpose

Annual Progress Review 3 is a research degree student's third and final formal annual progress review. As with the second Annual Progress Review, it takes the form of an interview between a student and their supervisory team. The interview aims to assess the readiness of the student to submit their thesis, and should be a productive dialogue to which all parties have the opportunity to contribute. The supervisory team will base its assessment on (i) the student's general progress and standard of work in advance of the anticipated submission date, (ii) completion of all research training and personal development requirements, and (iii) any other issues which the student and/or supervisory team wish to discuss as part of agreeing a plan to completion.

3.4.2. A student's ability to submit their thesis is dependent on the submission of a completed Annual Progress Review Report 3. Any failure to complete this process, on the part of either the Faculty/RI or student, will prevent the student from submitting their thesis.

3.4.3 Timescale

Annual Progress Review 3 must take place up to 10 months into a full-time research degree student's second year of doctoral study (or equivalent for part-time students, i.e. the sixth year of doctoral study). The flexibility with the date of this review stage is for the purpose of accommodating students who plan to submit their thesis earlier than the end of their third year.[1] If students are in receipt of a stipend and submit earlier than 36 months, they may not receive the full stipend payment. The supervisory team and student should make every effort to ensure that the meeting takes place no later than 10 months into the third year.

3.4.4. In exceptional circumstances, a research degree student may receive an additional period of time beyond the initial 10 months before undergoing Annual Progress Review 3. Such an eventuality will depend on the student and supervisory team making a case to the Faculty/Research Institute (RI) PGR Committee for extending the deadline of the review, and for this case to meet with the approval of the Committee.

3.4.5. The supervisory team must provide the student with a **minimum of 14 days' notice** of the date of the meeting.

3.4.6. Submission Requirements

Research degree students must submit, **no later than 14 days** before the interview with their supervisory team, the following documents to the PGR Administrator in their Faculty/RI:

   a. The Annual Progress Review 3 Report with Sections A and B completed;
   b. The most recent Interim Progress Review Report;
   c. An up-to-date Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP), which should show that the student has fulfilled all research and training development requirements as set out in the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees.[2]

The PGR Administrator will share the material submitted by the student with the supervisory team.

3.4.7. In Section B of the Annual Progress Review 3 Report, research degree students can indicate whether they wish voluntarily to alter their student status to that of an MPhil path (if on a doctoral programme). Where students indicate a willingness to change their degree programme, they must

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[1] The minimum and maximum supervision periods are set out in Ordinance IV. The minimum period is the smallest allowable number of months a research degree student must complete before submitting their thesis.
[2] The Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees (Section 9.7) states that students on a three-year full-time doctoral programme must commit two weeks a year or 200 hours over the course of the programme to (i) subject-specific research training and (ii) personal development and employability skills training.

complete and submit the Change of Status Application Form, which will proceed to the Faculty/RI PGR Committee for consideration.

3.4.8. The Supervisory Team Interview

The expectation is that the supervisory team interview will take place as a face-to-face meeting with all parties present in the same room. Where possible, students and Panel numbers should make arrangements to ensure the meeting commences in this format. There are, however, cases in which a face-to-face meeting will not be practicable. In instances where either the student or a member of the supervisory team cannot be physically present at the interview (e.g. the student is studying at the University via a remote location), all participants should arrange to conduct the interview via video link. See sections **3.2.10** and **3.2.11** above for detailed instructions and conditions for holding the supervisory team interview via video link.

3.4.9. In the context of the supervisory team interview, 'all parties' refers to the student and each member of the student's supervisory team, i.e., the Lead Supervisor, Co-/ Supervisor and, if relevant, any additional Co-Supervisors based at another institution or external organisation.

3.4.10. The Lead Supervisor must take part in the interview. If circumstances mean that the Co-Supervisor or another member of that supervisory team is unable to participate either at a face-to-face meeting or from a remote location, there should be provision for that person to be (i) consulted about the parts of the Annual Progress Review 3 Report which the student has completed, and (ii) given the opportunity to have a meaningful input to Section C of the form.

3.4.11. Possible Outcomes

In order to complete the requirements of Annual Progress Review 3, students must (i) attach their most recent Interim Progress Report, (ii) have an agreed timetable/plan for the completion of their thesis, and (iii) have completed all of the research and personal development/employability skills training required (see **3.4.6** above).

- Students who have satisfied each of (i)-(iii) above can prepare their thesis for submission according to the plan agreed with their supervisory team.
- Students who do not have a satisfactory timetable/plan for the completion of their thesis and/or have not completed all of the research and personal development/employability skills training required can expect (i) a follow-up piece of work on the back of the fist supervisory team interview and (ii) for the supervisory team and student to reconvene no longer than two months after the date of the initial interview. The nature of the follow-up work will depend on the circumstances discussed and the plan agreed to support the student to make improvements. In some cases, the plan will involve a directed piece of work which will be discussed at the reconvened interview. In other cases the supervisory team may ask the student to access one of the University's Professional Services, e.g. to access appropriate training courses and sessions.

3.4.12. If the supervisory team do not feel that a student will be able to complete a doctoral programme within the maximum timeframe allowed (see Ordinance IV), they can record this in Section C on the Annual Progress Review 3 Report and make a recommendation that the student's status be altered to that of an MPhil path. The final decision on this recommendation rests with the Faculty/RI PGR Committee.

3.4.13. The Lead Supervisor (with input from other members of the supervisory team, as required) is responsible for completing Sections C and D of the Annual Progress Review 3 Report. Once the supervisory team has added its content, the Lead Supervisor should forward the report to the PGR

Administrator. The relevant Faculty/RI PGR Committee will consider the form and the recommendation made. If the Committee approves the report, the PG/PGR Director will complete Section E and confirm that the report has been shared with the student. The student should confirm (via email in most cases) that they have received the report and seen its content.

3.4.14. The Committee has the power to approve the recommendation or, in cases where there is doubt over the conduct of the interview or recommendation, to stipulate that the supervisory team reconvene with the student for a second interview.

3.4.15. Students can appeal against the decision of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to alter the level of their degree. For more information about the PGR appeals process and the grounds on which a student can make an appeal, see **Section 6** of this document or consult the Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page.

4. Interim Progress Review

4.1. Introduction to Interim Progress Reviews

4.1.1. In addition to the three Annual Progress Review stages set out in **3.2-3.4**, research degree students must have an Interim Progress Review at 6-monthly intervals for the duration of their research degrees. The process of Interim Progress Review requires a student and their Lead Supervisor(s) to complete and submit an Interim Progress Report Form twice a year, providing formal feedback to students that may not otherwise be addressed in supervision meetings. In this sense, Interim Progress Review is distinct from the regular recording associated with supervision meetings, and forms an important part of the University's progress monitoring and review procedures in place for research degree students. There is no expectation that members of the student's wider supervisory team (e.g. the Co- Supervisor) will contribute to the report.

4.1.2. The Interim Progress Review Report reflects on two main areas: (i) the student's general progress and standard of work since the previous Interim Progress Review, including their alignment with the University Criteria for Award of Research Degrees, and (ii) the student's progress with their Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP). There is also provision for both students and Lead Supervisors to raise other issues which have had a bearing on the student's progress and production of work.

4.1.3. In the interests of ensuring a joined-up process of progress review at the University, Interim Progress Report Reviews feed into the Annual Progress Review gateways which students undergo. This is the case in particular at the Annual Progress Review 2 stage, where the criteria for completion takes into account the student's last two Interim Progress Review Reports.

4.2 Timescale

4.2.1. Interim Progress Reviews take place every 6 months for both full-time and part-time students, in line with the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees (Section 8.3.1).

4.2.2. The PGR Administrator(s) in each Faculty/RI will confirm the deadline for Interim Progress Reports to both supervisors and students at the start of each academic year. There are two harvest periods for reports per year in March/April and September/October. Local deadlines in each Faculty/RI will differ in slight respects, but should fall in each of these two broad periods.

4.2.3. Unlike Annual Progress Reviews, supervisors and students must continue to complete and submit Interim Progress Review Reports at 6-monthly intervals throughout a student's period on continuation status.

4.3 Part One – Supervisor's Report

4.3.1. When completing the Supervisor's Report, supervisors must complete each box in Sections A and B with the exception of the one relating to Actions Required, which is optional.

4.3.2. If supervisors wish to log an action on the Report Form, the statement included should be as explicit as possible at identifying who should complete the action and within what timeframe.

4.3.3. Supervisors should assign a single clear grade to each Interim Progress Report Form. This grade provides a helpful gauge for measuring a student's progress over the course of their degree, and provides Faculty/RI PGR Committees with a clear indication of significant changes in the level of a student's progress.

4.3.4. The grading system on the Interim Progress Report Form operates on an A-E scale. Below is an explanation of each grade and the criteria for awarding it:

- **A** – Should reflect outstanding achievement on the part of the student, exceeding the expectation of the Lead Supervisor in respect of progress towards completion, the standard of work produced, and the fulfilment of agreed research training and personal development targets.
- **B** – Should reflect that the student has made good progress towards completion, has produced work of a high standard, and is broadly fulfilling agreed research training and personal development targets.
- **C** – Should reflect that the student has made satisfactory progress towards completion and produced work of a satisfactory standard, but needs to develop research training and personal development targets further.
- **D** – Should reflect that the student has failed to make progress towards completion or produced work to the standard expected, and is not meeting research training and personal development targets.
- **E** – Should reflect that the student has made unsatisfactory progress to a significant extent in respect of progress towards completion, the standard of work produced, and fulfilment of research training and personal development targets. The student will no longer be in good academic standing, and the grade will trigger a formal academic warning (see **4.5** below).

When considering a student's general progress and standard of work, supervisors should take into account factors such as progress with research and progress with writing. It could be the case, for instance, that a student is working at an 'A' level in terms of research but a 'C' level in terms of writing. When combined with your appraisal of the student's research training and personal development, your grade should reflect your overall assessment based on each of these considerations (e.g. in the example above, a supervisor may feel that 'B' is a reflective grade after balancing research and writing progress and taking into account a good record training and personal development).

4.3.6. Once supervisors have completed the Supervisor's Report, it is good practice for them to discuss both it and the Student's Report with their student, before sending their form to the PGR Administrator for their Faculty/RI. The discussion could take place either in person or via email.

4.4 Part Two – Student's Report

4.4.1. When completing the Student's Report, students must complete each box in Sections A and B with the exception of the one relating to 'Research Environment and Supervision', which is optional.

4.4.2. It is a student's responsibility to keep their Lead Supervisor informed about their progress, production of work, and current level of training and personal development. Students should therefore aim to be as forthcoming as possible in notifying supervisors of any barriers to their progress. Doing so will enable students and supervisors to have an open discussion about difficulties encountered and ensure that students receive the appropriate level of support to address them.

4.4.4. Once students have completed the Student's Report, it is good practice for them to discuss both it and the Supervisor's Report with their supervisor, before sending their form to the PGR Administrator for their Faculty/RI (who will combine them). The discussion could take place either in person or via email.

4.4.5. If students are reluctant to comment on their 'Research Environment and Supervision', e.g. due to difficulties in their relationship with their supervisor, other members of the supervisory team or the PG/PGR Director are alternative points of contact whom they could considering approaching with any issues. If there are ongoing problems with organising regular meetings with their Lead Supervisor(s), students should inform the PG/PGR Director in their Faculty/RI, who will investigate the case.[3]

4.5 Possible Outcomes

4.5.1. Actions and outcomes which arise from the Interim Progress Report Form depend on the grade which the Lead Supervisor assigns to the student's general progress, standard of work, and progress around the acquisition of research training and personal development skills in the review period. The possible outcomes are below:

- **A –C**: If progress is satisfactory to excellent, a student can expect continue with their doctoral study with little or no follow-up actions or tasks.
- **D**: If progress is below satisfactory, the PGR Administrator in the Faculty/RI will note the student's Interim Progress Review Report Form for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee. Students can expect more substantial follow-up actions in order to work towards achieving a satisfactory level of progress before the end of the next Interim Progress Review period. This could involve actions which the Lead Supervisor specifies on the Supervisor's Report section of the Interim Progress Review Report Form.
- **E**: If progress is clearly unsatisfactory, the PGR Administrator in the Faculty/RI will note the student's Interim Progress Review Report Form for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee. The student will no longer be in good academic standing, and can expect the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to issue them with a formal academic warning concerning their unsatisfactory level of progress. The warning letter should make clear that if the subsequent Interim Progress Review is also unsatisfactory, the Faculty/RI PGR Committee may initiate procedures to withdraw the student from the University (see **2.2** above). This involves the Committee referring a recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), who make the ultimate decision on whether to withdraw the student.

4.5.2. If the RDC decides to approve the withdrawal of a student for unsatisfactory progress, the student can appeal against this decision. For more information about the PGR appeals process and the grounds on which a student can make an appeal, see **Section 6** of this document or consult the Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page.

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[3] In line with the Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees (Section 7.11), students and their Lead Supervisors should meet at least every 8 weeks in term time.

5. Progress Monitoring for MPhil Students

5.1. Because an MPhil is a maximum of 24 months for full-time students (and 48 months for part-time studentS) (see Ordinance IV), and does not generally involve progression to a doctoral level of study (see **5.3** below), MPhil students and their supervisory teams do not need to complete any of the Annual Progress Review stages as part of the requirements of their degree.

5.2. MPhil students (both full-time and part-time) should complete Interim Progress Reviews every 6 months in tandem with their Lead Supervisor, in line with the process set out in **Section 4** of this Handbook. All guidance and procedure contained in that section applies to MPhil students.

5.3. If an MPhil student wishes to upgrade from an MPhil path to a PhD one, the student and supervisor should contact their PG/PGR Director and PGR Administrator. In this case, the Faculty/RI will make arrangements for the student to undergo Annual Progress Review 1 with an Independent Panel Interview. The process should align fully with that set out in **3.2** above. The student should indicate in Section B of the Annual Progress Review 1 Report that they wish to change status from MPhil to PhD.

5.3.1. A student planning to change status from MPhil to PhD must meet all of the Annual Progress Review 1 submission requirements relevant to their Faculty/RI (see **3.2.5** above). It is on the basis of the Independent Panel Interview, and the Faculty/RI PGR Committee's subsequent approval of the panel's recommendation, that Student Records & Examinations will change a student's Programme of Study from MPhil to PhD. The student does not therefore need to complete a Change of Status Application Form to make such a change.

6. Academic Appeals

6.1. **Sections 2-5** above set out the two main scenarios in which a research degree student can submit an academic appeal. These are:

- The decision of the RDC to withdraw their registration from the University for not maintaining good academic standing (see in particular **2.1.5**, **3.2.16**, and **4.5.1-4.5.2** below);
- The decision of the Faculty/RI PGR Committee to alter the level of their degree due to the academic failing at the progress review point (see in particular Section **3.2.20**, **3.3.13**, and **3.4.14** below).

6.2. Students should initiate academic appeals, in accordance with Regulation 7. The purpose of the research degrees appeals process is to allow all students the right to appeal on the following grounds:

- Procedural irregularities;
- Extenuating circumstances, providing that these circumstances were not known by the Research Degrees Committee (or Faculty/RI PGR Committee) at the time it made its decision, that these circumstances can be substantiated, and that there is a valid reason for not notifying the Research Degrees Committee (or Faculty/RI PGR Committee) in advance in accordance with the relevant provisions of Regulation 8; and/or

- Inadequacy of supervision or facilities (However, students should note that alleged inadequacy of supervisory or other arrangements during the period of study must be raised at the time and does not constitute grounds for appeal following the submission of the thesis).

6.3. Students can seek assistance on the University processes from the University's Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Team or may wish to seek independent assistance from Advice & Support at Keele (ASK).