

Progress Review Handbook

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

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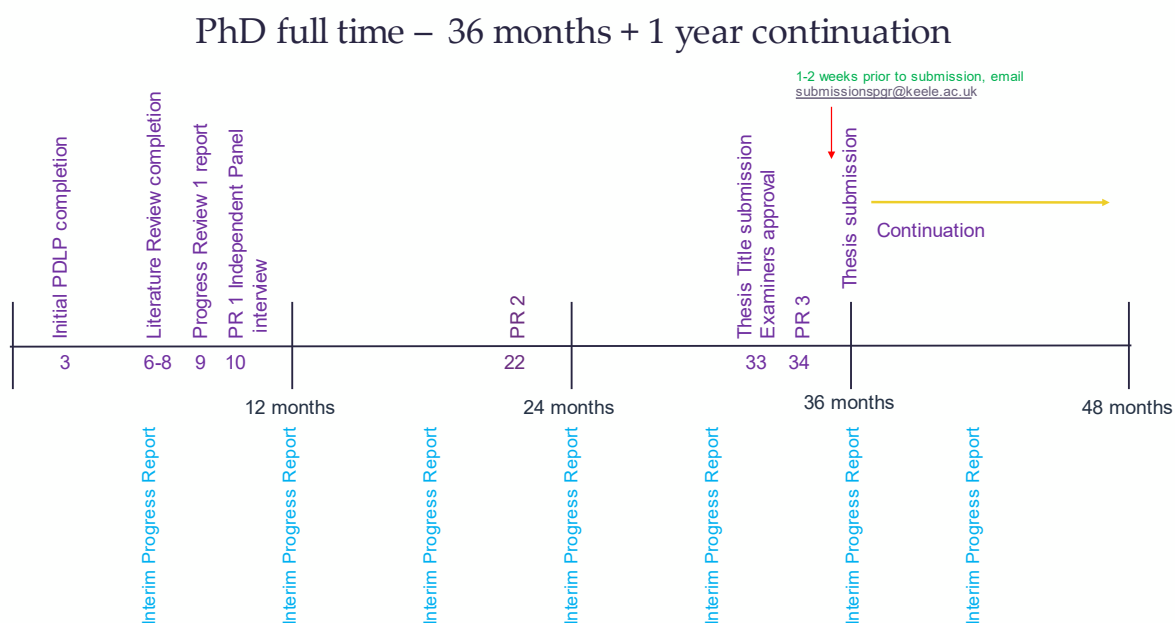
General Introduction

The regular review of a research degree student’s progress is an essential mechanism for completing the programme within their registration period with appropriate support from the University. There are two formal progress review processes which research degree students must undergo: Progress Reviews and Interim Progress Reviews. The timelines below detail when Progress Reviews take place for each type of degree. The handbook then goes through each of these in more detail.

For doctoral students, Progress Reviews take place 10 months into years 1, 2 and 3 (pro rata) for PhD students. Professional Doctorate students will undertake their first progress review 24 months after their start date at the end of the taught phase of their degree. Because an MPhil is a maximum of 24 months full time and does not generally involve progression to a doctoral level of study, MPhil students and their supervisory teams do not need to complete PR1 or PR2, but they are required to complete PR3 to assess readiness to submit. The Faculty PGR Committee has the power to approve the progress review recommendation or, in cases where there is doubt over the conduct of the interview or recommendation, to stipulate that the panel or supervisory team reconvenes and reruns the interview.

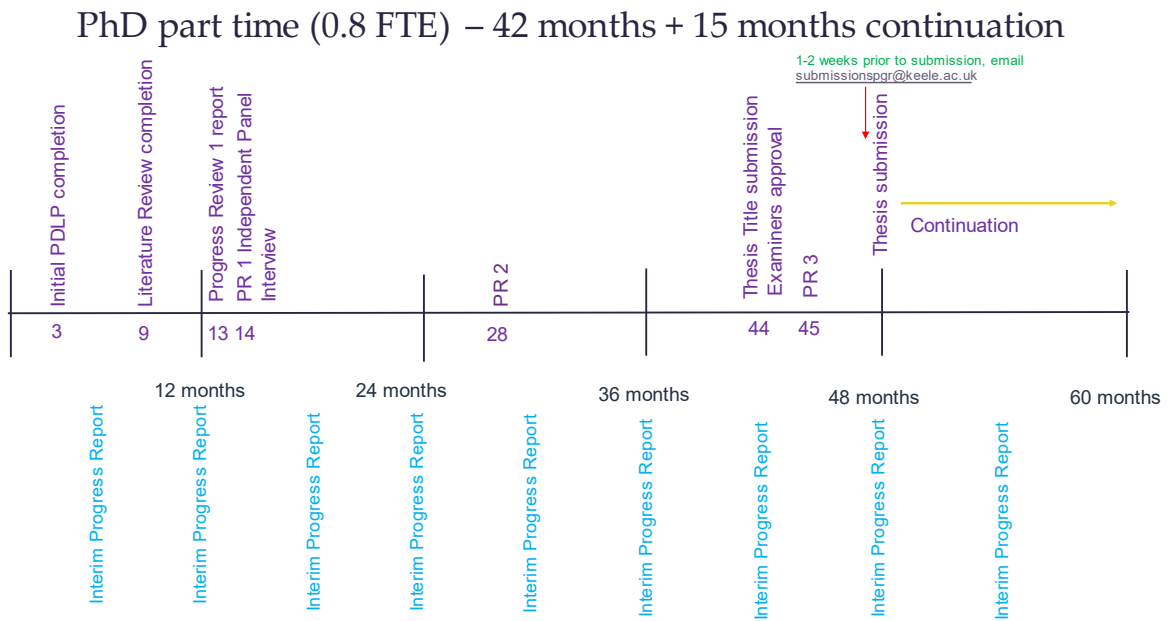
Interim Progress reviews take place every six months throughout the degree regardless of the mode of attendance or start date and provide formal feedback to students that may not otherwise be addressed in supervision meetings. There are two harvest periods for reports per year in March/ April and September/ October. For Professional Doctorate students, Interim Progress Reviews will only begin following successful completion of Progress Review 1.

Fig 1 - timeline indicating milestones for a full-time PhD student



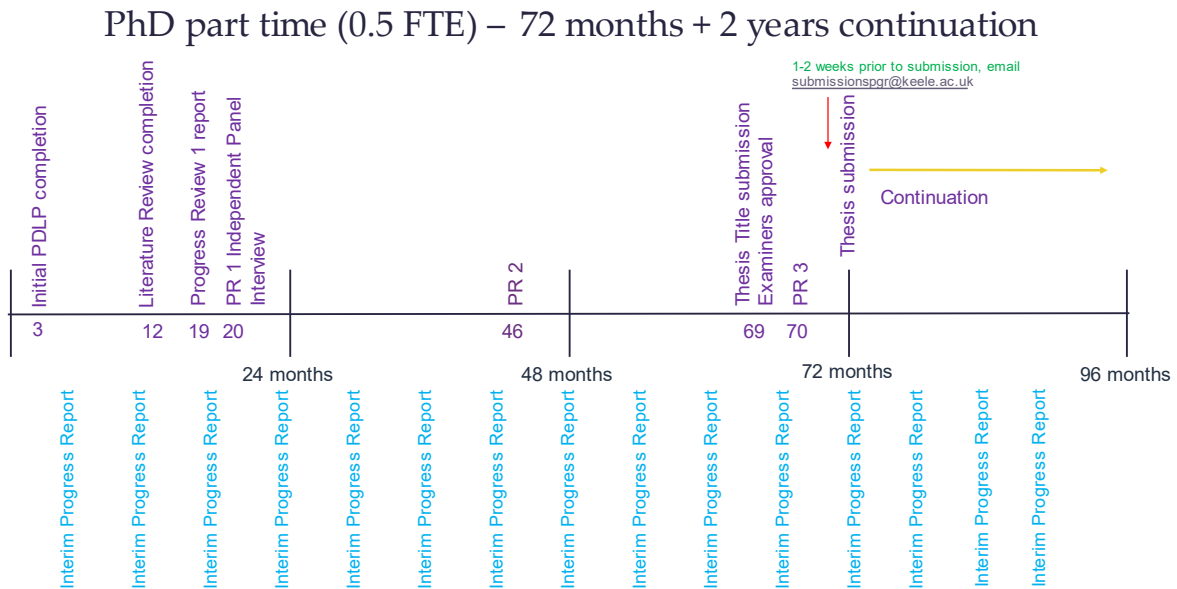
A full time PhD student will have their first progress review 10 months into year 1, their second 10 months into year 2 and their third 10 months into year 3.

Fig 2 - timeline indicating milestones for a part-time PhD student on a 0.8 route



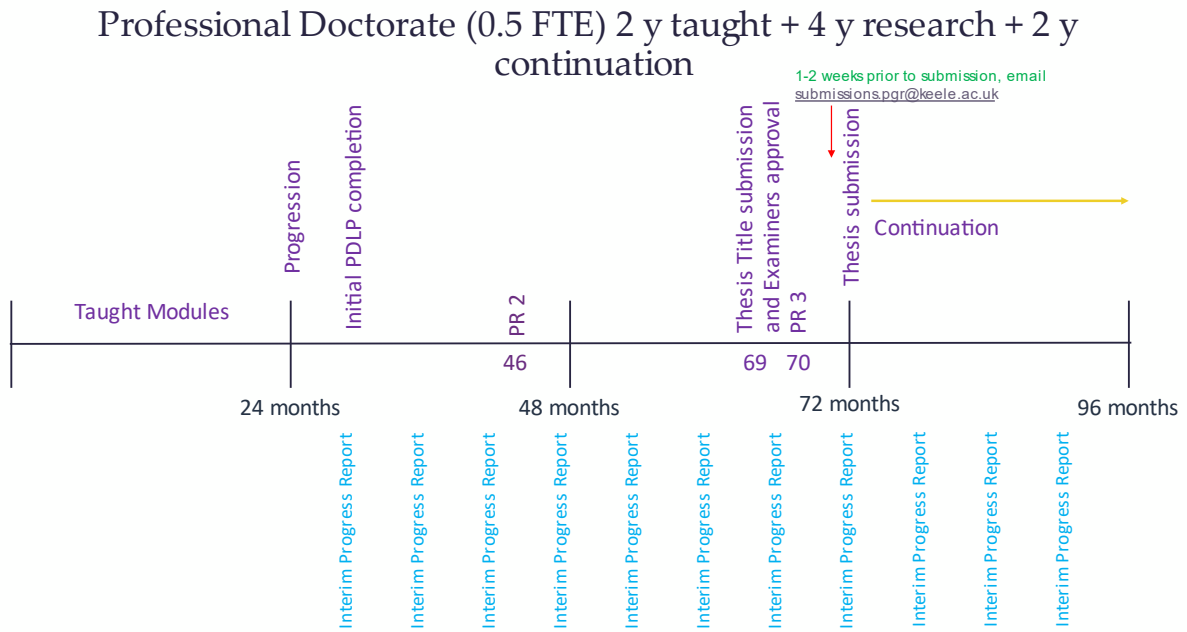
A part time PhD student on a 0.8 FTE would have their PR1 13 months from their start date, or 1 month into year 2. Their PR2 would take place 28 months after the start date, and PR3 would take place at 45 months.

Fig 3 - timeline indicating milestones for a part-time PhD student on a 0.5 route



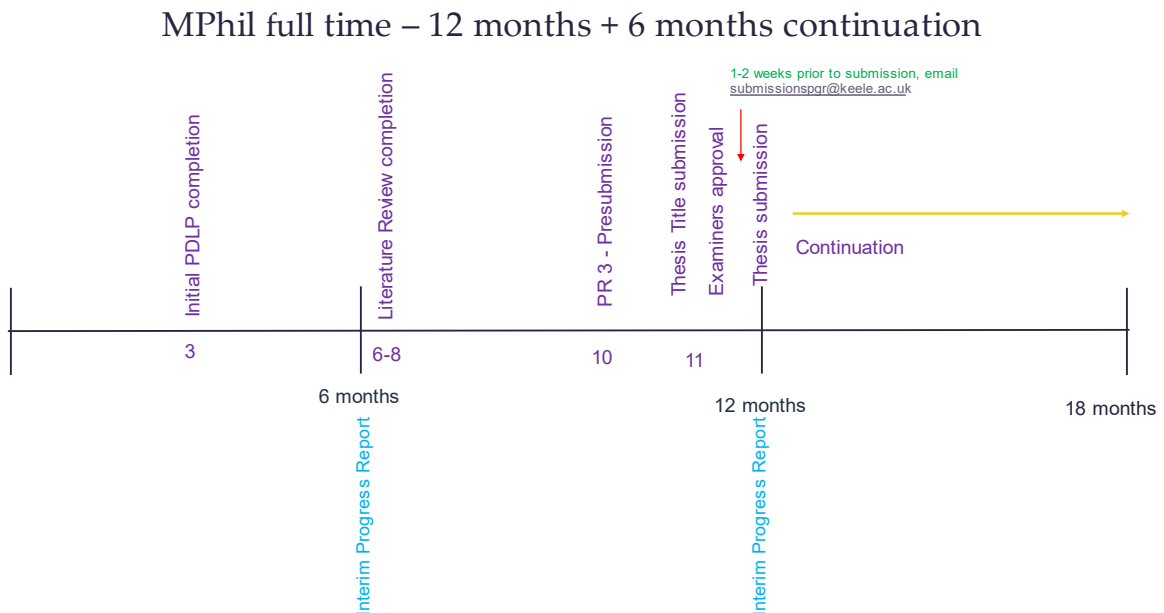
A part time (0.5FTE) PhD student will undergo their first progress review 10 months into year 2, their second 10 months into year 4 and their third 10 months into year 6.

Fig 4 - timeline indicating milestones for a Professional Doctorate student



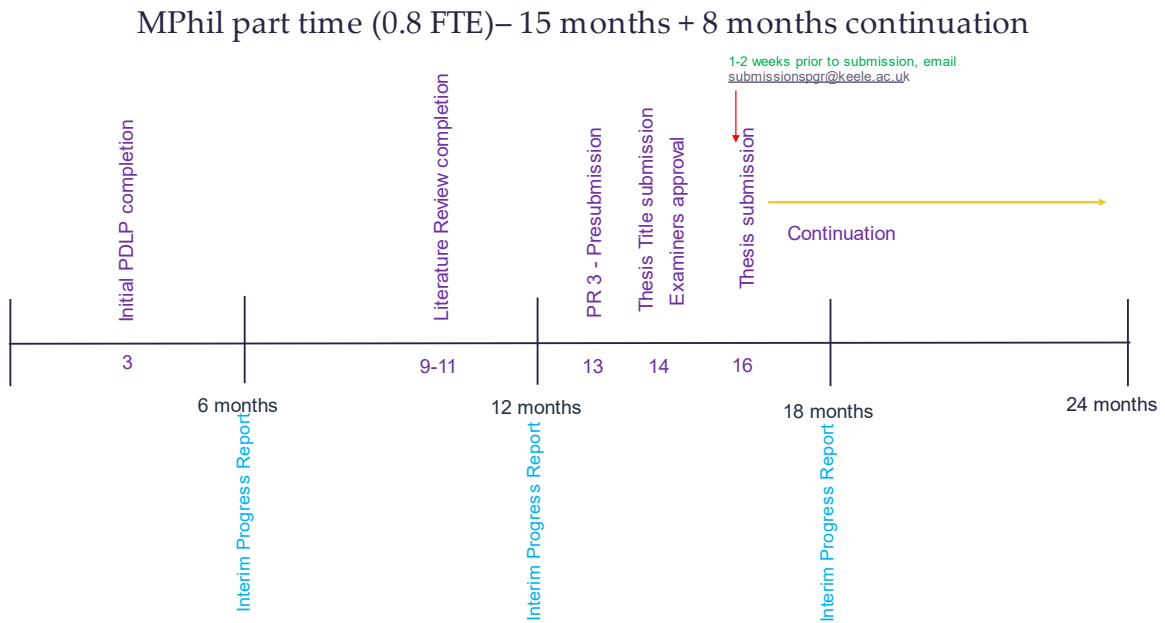
A Professional Doctorate student will complete their first progress review following completion of their taught modules approximately 24 months following their start date. Their second and third progress reviews will then fall at the same time as a part time PhD student as detailed above.

Fig 5 - timeline indicating milestones for a full-time MPhil student



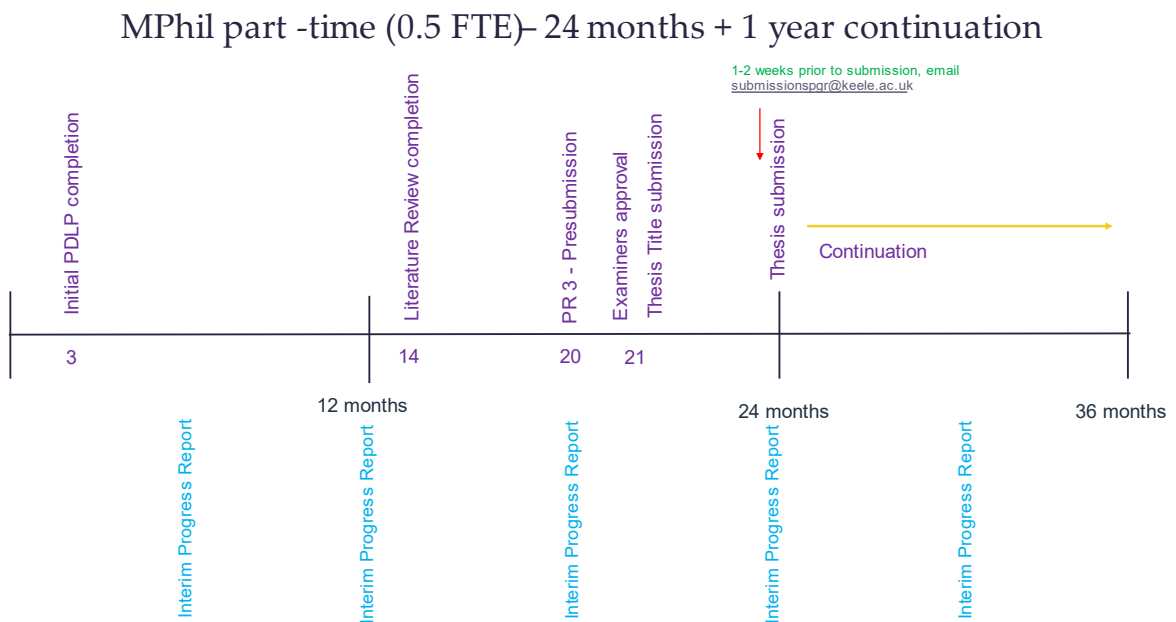
As MPhil students do not undertake PR1 or PR2, their only Progress Review (PR3) will take place 10 months from their start date and assesses readiness to submit.

Fig 6 - timeline indicating milestones for a part time MPhil student on a 0.8 route



An MPhil student on a 0.8FTE route will have their PR3 13 months from their start date.

Fig 7 - timeline indicating milestones for a part time MPhil student on a 0.5 route



A part time (0.5FTE) MPhil student will have their PR3 20 months from their start date.

Progress Reviews

Progress Reviews serve as gateways for progression to the next stage of a student's research degree programme and help to ensure they are on track to meet the expected submission date. Progress Reviews also support requirements for the intended awards against individual targets and the [University Criteria for Award of Research Degrees](#). They also present an opportunity for the student to engage in dialogue with both the supervisory team and other academic staff about their research and ideas. Progress Reviews can also be helpful preparation for the viva.

Faculties must complete a Progress Review Report for all doctoral level research degree students at the times specified in the milestones set out in the [PGR Handbook](#), and in the timelines above. In total, there are three Progress Review stages and MPhil students are only required to complete Progress Review 3 as it assesses readiness to submit.

Progress Review 1 can result in a recommendation to alter the student's status to that of an MPhil from a PhD path or an MRes from a Professional Doctorate path in cases of either unsatisfactory progress or when the independent review panel or supervisory team deem it in the best interests of the student. If any progress reviews show insufficient progress, then this may trigger academic warnings. Students can also indicate at each stage that they wish to voluntarily amend their status from a doctoral programme to a masters programme.

If an MPhil student wishes to upgrade to a PhD, the student and supervisor should contact their PGR Director and PGR Administrator. In this case, the Faculty will make arrangements for the student to undergo Progress Review 1. The process should align with the information on PR1 detailed in this handbook, and the student should indicate in section B of the PR1 form that they wish to change status from MPhil to PhD.

Where students wish to change their degree programme from a doctoral degree to a masters degree (or vice versa) they should also complete and submit the [Change of Status Application Form](#).

Progress Review 1 (PR1)

PR1 is a doctoral student's first formal progress review and takes the form of an independent review panel interview which is based around the student's submission of a form, and, for PhD students, a substantial piece of written work and an up-to-date Personal Development Learning Plan (PDLP). The review focuses on a student's progress with their initial research, research plan, and their research training and personal development. Based on the work submitted, the panel will decide whether a student is suitable to progress to the next stage of doctoral study, or whether a transfer to an MPhil path or MRes path would be more appropriate.

PR1 must take place as per the guidance set out in the [PGR Handbook](#) and the Faculty PGR Committee should ensure that the Independent Review Panel takes place as close to this time as possible.

The Faculty must provide the student with a minimum of 14 days notice of the date of the Independent Review Panel interview.

For PR1, students must submit the following documents to the Faculty PGR Administrator at least 10 calendar days before the interview is due to take place:

- a. The [Progress Review 1 Report Form](#) with Sections A and B completed;

- b. For PhD students, a report of c. 5,000 -10,000 words (or equivalent) which should include the following:
 - i. A literature review, summary of recent literature, or an annotated bibliography or similar discussion of relevant literature, as appropriate for the respective research area;
 - ii. Background and rationale for proposed research;
 - iii. Research methods to be used;
 - iv. Acquisition of skills and techniques;
 - v. Report on preliminary studies if applicable;
 - vi. Research plan for the rest of the programme of study;
- c. For PhD students, an up-to-date version of their Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP);
- d. If required, confirmation of ethical clearance for the proposed research project.

The PGR Administrator will share the material submitted by the student with the Independent Review Panel no later than one week before the interview.

It is good practice for students to get supervisory feedback on all items submitted for the independent review panel interview. Students should therefore 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 usually one month (pro rata) before the student submits them formally to the PGR Administrator.

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](#). Ethical review is not required prior to PR1.

The independent review panel will be nominated by the supervisor, in liaison with the PGR Lead and must feature a minimum of 2 members and a maximum of 4 members including the Chair.

Staff nominating panel members for the review panel should be aware of the following:

- The Chair should not be a member of the student's supervisory team. The role should be filled by a member of staff experienced in postgraduate research (as evidenced by their supervisory record). The PGR Director cannot act as Chair.
- The panel should not include members of the supervisory team. The supervisory team may suggest panel members on the basis of their subject expertise or other criteria, as deemed fit.
- The PGR Lead should confirm the panel is appropriate, including the chair.
- Members of the supervisory team may 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.

Reviews can either take place in person or remotely via a Microsoft Teams video link, though they cannot take place via a hybrid set up where some members attend in person, and some via a video link. All parties should test their Teams connection to assess its suitability. In no circumstances

should the review be conducted via telephone conference to ensure that the identity of the student can be verified.

The criteria set out in Section C of the PR1 form determine a research student's ability to progress with a doctoral level of study.

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 of 2 months (full-time) or 4 months (part-time) (**defer**)
 - o **Following the decision to defer**, and once the student has had the required amount of time to undertake the work, the panel will reassess the student and confirm the outcome. Upon receiving the resubmitted work, the panel will re-assess it, and submit an updated report which will either recommend that the student progresses or may request a second review meeting. Students can be withdrawn after two unsuccessful attempts.
- 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.

The Chair of the Independent Review Panel (with input from other Panel members, as required) is responsible for finalising the 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 Section C of the PR1 form;
- The Panel's recommendation, chosen from one of the three options outlined above;
- 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 based on written work or a second interview.

The Chair of the Independent Review Panel should finalise the report (with input from other Panel members, as required) **within 10 working days** of the interview. Once sections A-D of the report have been completed, the Chair should forward the report to the PGR Administrator as soon as possible. The PGR Administrator will then submit to the Faculty PGR Committee. The Faculty PGR Committee will then consider the form and the recommendation made. If approved, the PGR Director will sign section E of the report and confirm that the report has been shared with the student by the PGR administrator.

Progress Reviews 2 and 3

Both the second and third progress reviews take the form of an interview between a student and their supervisory team. Both reviews build on the interim reviews but are distinguished from them in inviting contributions from the full supervisory team rather than the lead supervisor alone. The timescales of when these should take place, depending on programme and mode of attendance can be found in the PGR Milestones in the Keele Doctoral Academy's (KDA) [PGR Handbook](#) and figures 1-

7 at the beginning of this document. PR3 can take place earlier than set out in the milestones document should the student want to submit earlier but must be in line with the minimum period of registration set out in the Code of Practice. 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.

Progress Review 2 is for doctoral students only and covers the student's general progress and standard of work, progress with research training and personal development and any other issues which the student and/or supervisory team wish to discuss.

All research students will undertake Progress Review 3 as it assesses readiness to submit their thesis. The supervisory team will base its assessment on the student's general progress and standard of work in advance of the anticipated submission date, completion of all research training and personal development requirements, and any other issues which the student and/or supervisory team wish to discuss as part of agreeing a plan to completion. A student's ability to submit their thesis is dependent on the submission of a completed PR3. Any failure to complete this process will prevent the student from submitting their thesis.

For both Progress Reviews 2 and 3, the supervisory team will organise the meeting, and documents will be completed either during or after the meeting.

The Lead Supervisor must take part in the interview. If the co-supervisor or another member of the supervisory team cannot participate, there should be provision for that person to be consulted about the parts of the form the student has completed and given the opportunity to have a meaningful input in Section C of the form. For both PR2 and PR3, supervisors of doctoral students can recommend that the student transfers to an MPhil or MRes route. If this is recommended, it will be referred to the Research Degrees Committee as per section 8.2 of the [Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees](#).

Possible outcomes for PR2

To complete the requirements of Progress Review 2 fully, students must have received a grade C ('Satisfactory') or above in their last two Interim Progress Review Reports. 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 and work to the plans discussed at the interview in preparation for Progress Review 3.
- 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 PGR Committee will discuss their Progress Review 2 Report at its next meeting, and that their supervisory team will implement measures to support the student in improving their progress.

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 to return to good academic standing in line with the academic warning procedures. 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.

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.

Possible outcomes for PR3

To complete the requirements of Progress Review 3, students must attach their most recent Interim Progress Report, have an agreed timetable/plan for the completion of their thesis, and have completed all of the research and personal development/employability skills training required.

- Students who have satisfied each of the above can prepare their thesis for submission according to the plan agreed with their supervisory team.

For both PR2 and PR3 the Lead Supervisor is responsible for completing sections C and D of the report form. Once the supervisory team has added its content, the Lead Supervisor should forward the report to the PGR Administrator. The relevant Faculty PGR Committee will consider the form and the recommendation made. If the Committee approves the report, the PGR Director will complete Section E and confirm that the report has been shared with the student by the PGR Administrator. The student should confirm (via email) that they have received the report and seen its content.

In cases of unsatisfactory progress, PR2 and PR3 can result in a recommendation to alter the student's status to that of an MPhil path for PhD students or an MRes for Professional Doctorate students which would then be referred to the RDC.

Interim Progress Reviews

In addition to the three progress review stages detailed above, research degree students must have an interim progress review (IPR) at 6-monthly intervals for the duration of their programme. The interim progress review report reflects on two main areas: the student's general progress and standard of work since the previous review, and the student's progress with their PDLP. There is also provision for students and supervisors to raise other issues which have had a bearing on the student's progress and production of work. The form, along with all the other forms mentioned can be found on the Keele Doctoral Academy webpages.

Timescale

IPRs take place every 6 months for both full-time and part-time students including those on an MPhil route. The only exception to this is if doctoral students' IPRs fall at the same time as PR2 and PR3, when the PR2 or PR3 replaces the interim review. Professional Doctorate students will not have IPRs during their taught phase and will have their first IPR following successful completion of PR1.

The PGR Administrator will confirm the deadline for the IPR 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.

Once students and supervisors have completed their report, it is good practice for them to discuss both reports with each other, before sending their form to the PGR Administrator for their Faculty. The discussion could take place either in person or via email.

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 PGR Director are alternative points of contact whom they could consider approaching with any issues. Students can also contact PGR Leads, Student Services, PGR Representatives and/or the KDA.

If there are ongoing problems with organising regular meetings with their Lead Supervisor(s), students should not wait for a progress review but promptly inform the PGR Director in their Faculty, who will investigate the case. If supervisors have concerns about the relationship with their students, then they can also contact the PGR director to investigate. Either party can also submit a [concern form](#).

Part 1 – supervisor’s report

Supervisors must complete each box in sections A and B except for the one relating to actions required, which is optional. If supervisors wish to log an action on the form, the statement included should be as explicit as possible in identifying who should complete the action and within what timeframe.

A clear grade must be assigned to each interim progress report form. The grade provides a helpful gauge for measuring a student’s progress over the course of their degree and provides Faculty PGR Committees with a clear indication of significant changes in the level of a student’s progress. The grading operates on an A-E scale:

- **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.

When considering a student’s general progress and standard of work, supervisors should consider factors such as progress with research and progress with writing. When combined with the appraisal of the student’s research training and personal development, the grade should reflect the overall assessment based on each of these considerations.

Part 2 – student’s report

Students must complete each box in sections A and B except the one relating to ‘Research Environment and Supervision’ which is optional. It is the student’s responsibility to keep their supervisor informed about their progress and training so they should therefore be as forthcoming as possible in notifying supervisors of any barriers to their progress. This 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.

Possible outcomes

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 to continue with their research degree study with little or no follow-up actions or tasks.
- **D:** If progress is below satisfactory, the PGR Administrator in the Faculty will note the student's Interim Progress Review Report Form for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty PGR Committee. Students can expect more substantial follow-up actions 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 will note the student's Interim Progress Review Report Form for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty PGR Committee. The student will no longer be in good academic standing and can expect the Faculty 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 PGR Committee may initiate procedures to withdraw the student from the University. This involves the Committee referring a recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC), who make the ultimate decision on whether to withdraw the student.

Maintaining good academic standing

Maintaining good academic standing involves a research degree student's fulfilment of the rights and responsibilities laid out in the [Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees](#). If a student falls out of good academic standing, this may be a consequence of unsatisfactory academic performance and progress, non-engagement of studies or a combination of the two.

Throughout their degree, students should keep in regular contact with their supervisor and submit work in accordance with the schedule agreed and set out in the Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP). Supervisors should meet with their students at least every 8 weeks during term time, and students should ensure that their supervisor is informed of any barriers to their progress.

Supervisory teams should inform students about any concerns regarding unsatisfactory progress, at the earliest opportunity and must document concerns in writing so there is a clear record for the student to consult. Staff within the research environment should identify whether it is feasible to offer the student additional support or guidance from either within the faculty or via other University support services. If the problem persists for a month, the supervisory team should notify the PGR Director and discuss whether an academic warning would be appropriate.

If there are exceptional circumstances that have resulted in or could result in unsatisfactory progress, students should identify whether it is possible to request a small extension to the progress review (up to four weeks), a leave of absence or a change of status. Students must discuss any amendments to their mode of attendance with their lead supervisor in the first instance (and Immigration Compliance for international students). Further guidance on changes to a student's registration status is available in the [University's PGR Handbook](#).

If a student fails to maintain good academic standing and does not take appropriate action to make improvements, the Faculty PGR Committee may recommend to the University's Research Degrees Committee (RDC) that the student should be withdrawn from their studies. The main grounds for this would be exhaustion of the academic warning process (see below).

Academic warnings

Lead supervisors can advise the Faculty PGR Committee to issue an academic warning to a student under the terms of [Regulation C10](#) at any stage of the programme. The Faculty 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 requests detailed in the warning. In the second and third warning periods, while the standard remains at 4 weeks, the Faculty PGR Committee can use its discretion to vary the number of weeks a student has to address the terms of the warning. If a student fails to comply with the terms of the third warning, the Faculty PGR Committee may recommend to the RDC that the student be required to withdraw from the University.

For the Faculty to make a recommendation of withdrawal, the three academic warnings must be in succession. For example, three first stage warnings given over the duration of the student's programme would not be sufficient grounds for withdrawal. Once a student has satisfied the terms of an academic warning, they will return to being in good academic standing and can expect any further problems to be subject to another first-stage warning. Academic warning letters must be clear about the details of the work which the student must complete within each warning period, and PGR Administrators should share copies of all warning letters with the Student Records & Examinations Officer (PGR) to ensure that there is a central record.

Academic Appeals

There are two main scenarios where a student can submit an academic appeal. These are:

- The decision of the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) to withdraw their registration from the University for not maintaining good academic standing (see section above);
- The decision of the Faculty PGR Committee to alter the level of their degree due to the academic failing at the progress review point (see sections below).

Students should initiate academic appeals in accordance with [Regulation B6](#) and can appeal on the following grounds:

- Procedural irregularities
- Extenuating circumstances, providing that these circumstances were not known by the RDC or Faculty PGR Committee at the time it made its decision, and that there is a valid reason for not notifying either committee in advance in accordance with [Regulation D1](#); and/or
- Inadequacy of supervision or facilities. Student 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 a thesis.

For more information, consult the [Research Degrees – Academic Appeals web page](#).