

# Progress Review Handbook

For Postgraduate Researchers (PhD, MPhil, Professional Doctorate) and Supervisors

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## General Introduction

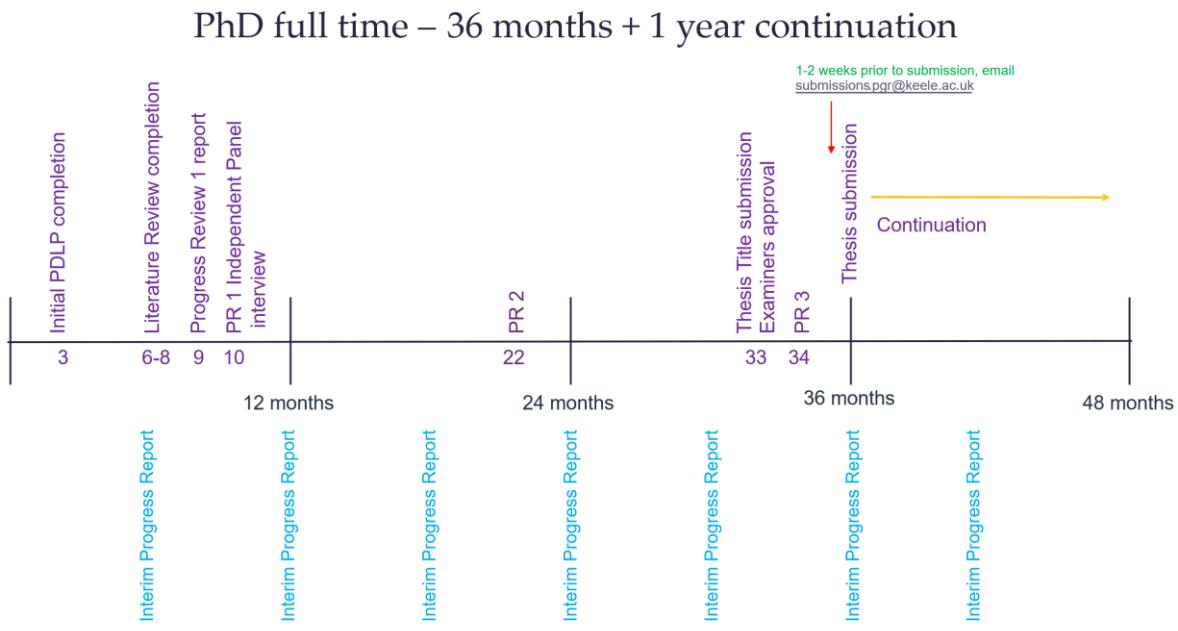
The regular review of a Postgraduate Researcher's (PGR's) progress is an essential mechanism for completing the programme within their registration period with appropriate support from the University. The review process consists of regular reviews in the form of Interim Progress Reviews and Progress Reviews (more major evaluations). The timelines below detail when reviews take place for each type of degree. The handbook then goes through each of these in more detail.

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

For doctoral PGRs, Progress Reviews happen three times during the degree: Progress Review 1 (doctoral progression; PR1) occurs for PhD PGRs 10 months into year 1 (or pro rata equivalent) and for Professional Doctorate PGRs 24 months after their start date at the end of the taught phase of their degree. Progress Reviews 2 and 3 happen after the next 10 months of each successive year (or pro rata equivalent). Because an MPhil is a maximum of 24 months full time and does not generally involve progression to a doctoral level of study, MPhil PGRs 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.

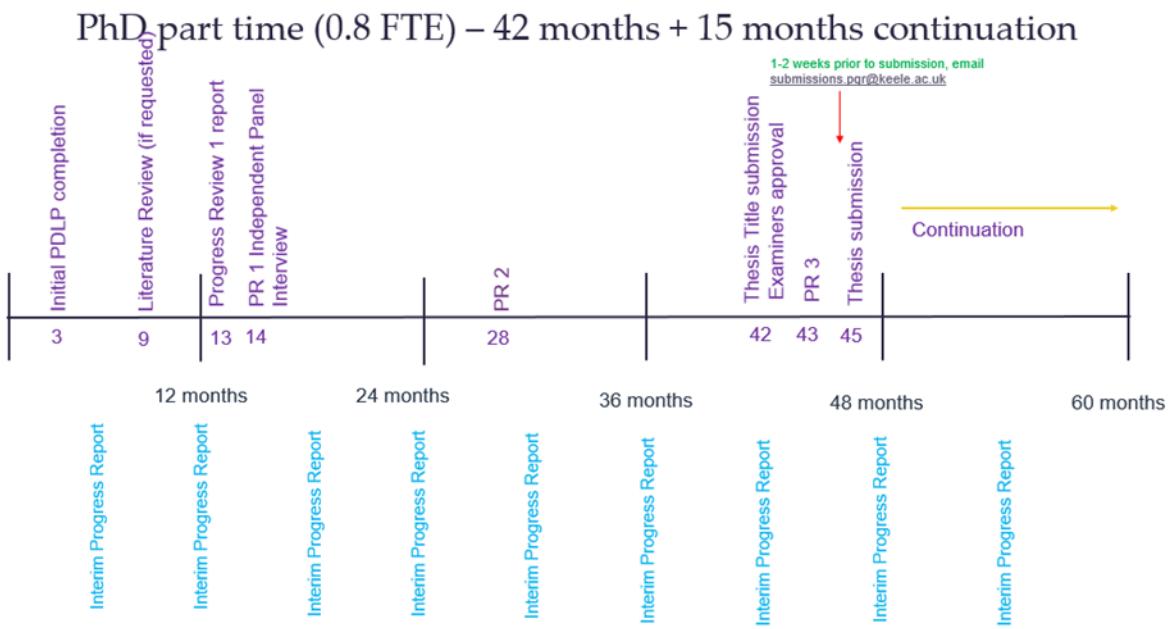
If PGRs require reasonable adjustments to any of the PGR progress reviews, they should notify Disability Support and Inclusion at the earliest opportunity. The Disability Adviser (DA) will identify the PGRs' needs and liaise with relevant staff (for example Disability Inclusion Tutor, PGR Director, Supervisor) to agree reasonable adjustments and how they are to be implemented. If a PGR discloses a disability related need to a supervisor or their PGR Administrator and DSI are not already aware, the staff member should ask DSI to contact the PGR directly to discuss reasonable adjustments. It is the PGR's responsibility to liaise with DSI to ensure appropriate adjustments can be identified and implemented. Reasonable Adjustments cannot contravene academic standards; however, adjustments can be made to the way a PGR demonstrates their competence. In some instances, advice can also be sought from the Chair of the Research Degrees Committee should there be concerns over the review being compliant with Keele processes. The PGR Administrator will be notified by the Supervisor and will ensure all parties receive clear instructions on how the review should be conducted.

Fig 1 - timeline indicating deadlines for a full-time PhD PGR



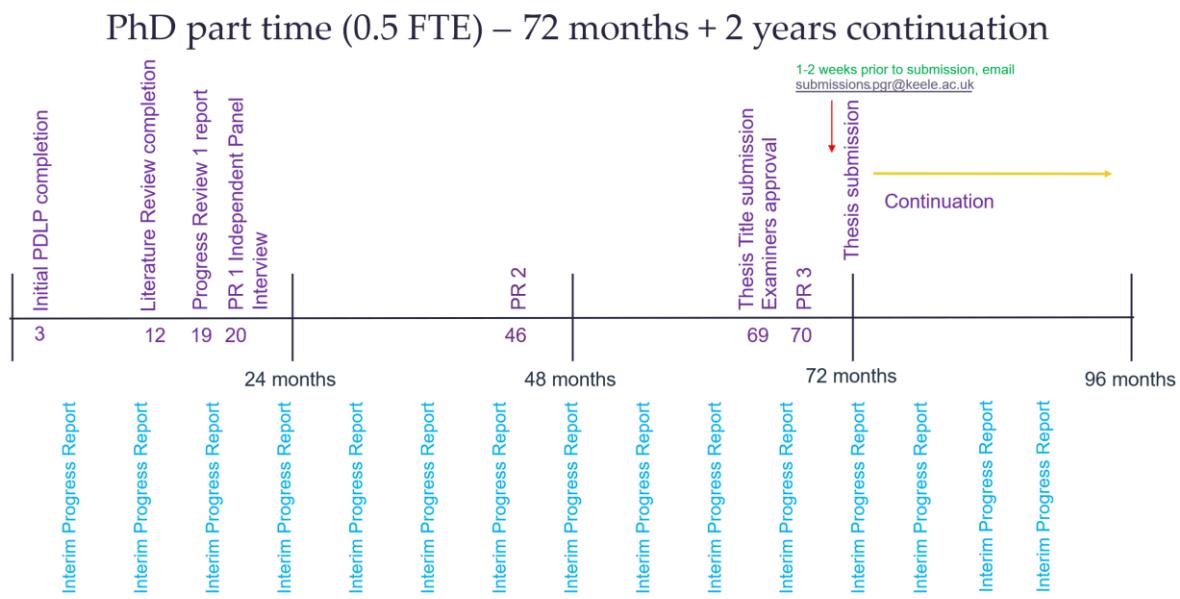
A full time PhD PGR will have their first progress review 10 months into year 1, their second 10 months into year 2 and their third 10 months into year 3.

Fig 2 - timeline indicating deadlines for a part-time PhD PGR on a 0.8 route



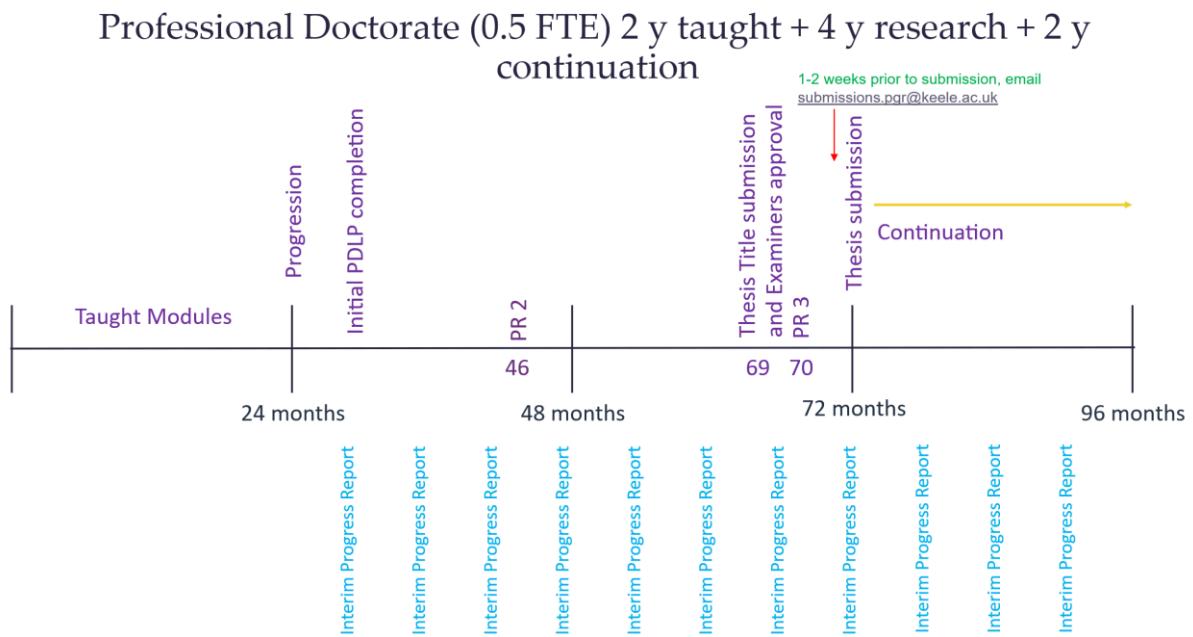
A part time PhD PGR on a 0.8 FTE would have their PR1 13 months from their start date, or 1 month into year 2. Their PR2 would take place 28 months after the start date, and PR3 would take place at 45 months.

*Fig 3 - timeline indicating deadlines for a part-time PhD PGR on a 0.5 route*



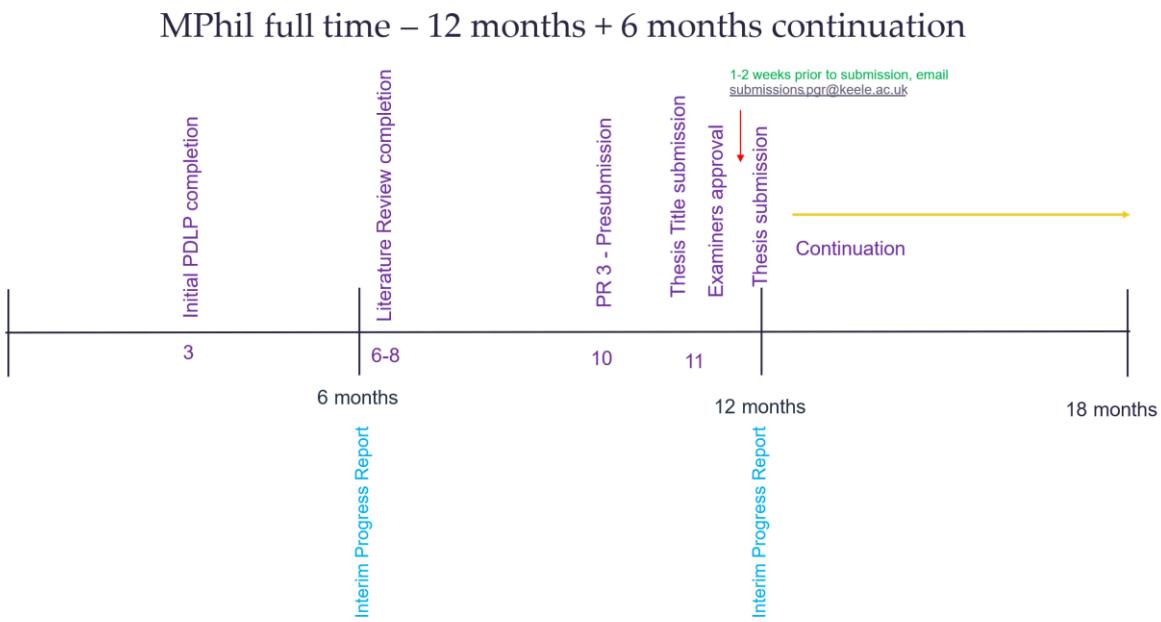
A part time (0.5FTE) PhD PGR will undergo their first progress review 10 months into year 2, their second 10 months into year 4 and their third 10 months into year 6.

*Fig 4 - timeline indicating deadlines for a Professional Doctorate PGR*



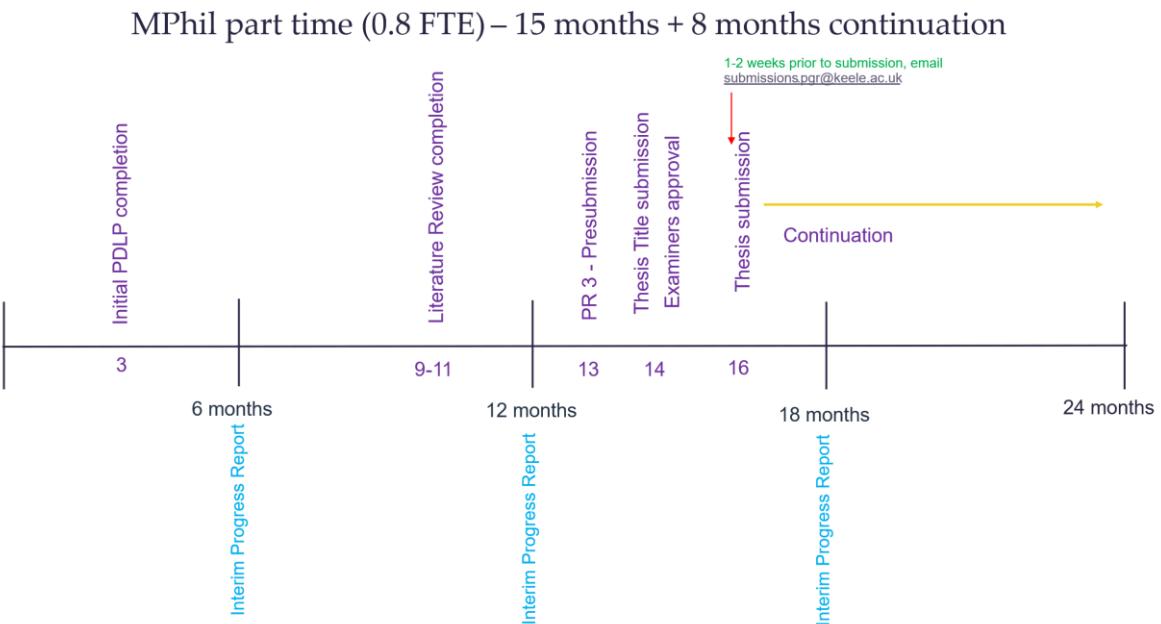
A Professional Doctorate PGR will complete their first progress review following completion of their taught modules approximately 24 months following their start date. Their second and third progress reviews will then fall at the same time as a part time PhD PGR as detailed above.

*Fig 5 - timeline indicating deadlines for a full-time MPhil PGR*



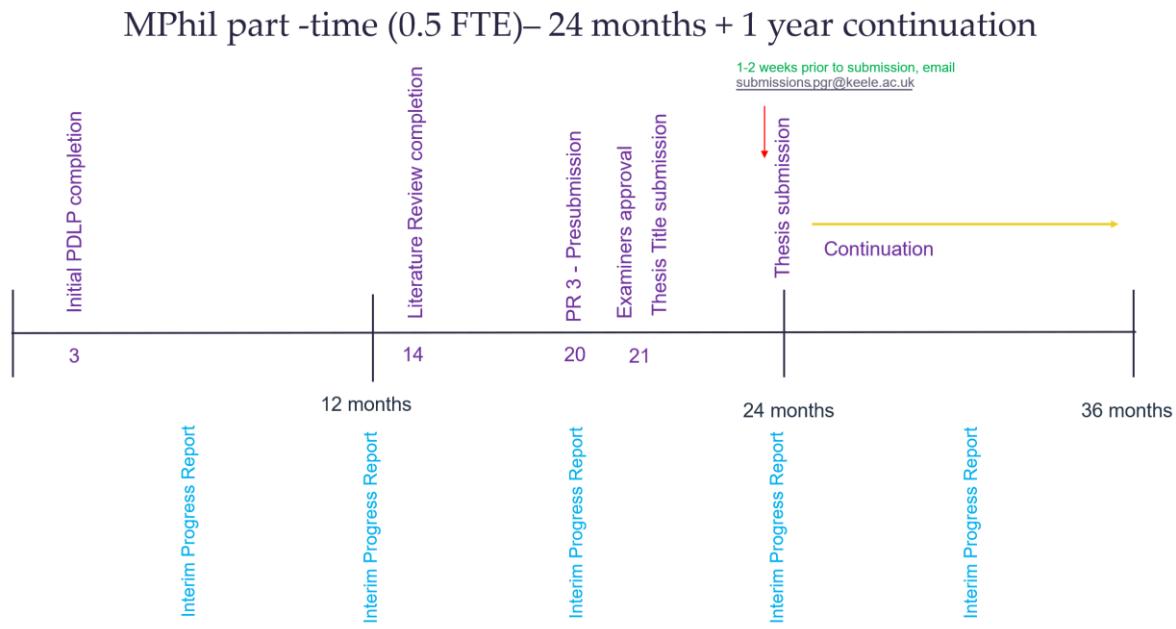
As MPhil PGRs do not undertake PR1 or PR2, their only Progress Review (PR3) will take place 10 months from their start date and assesses readiness to submit.

*Fig 6 - timeline indicating deadlines for a part time MPhil PGR on a 0.8 route*



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

*Fig 7 - timeline indicating deadlines for a part time MPhil PGR on a 0.5 route*



A part time (0.5FTE) MPhil PGR 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 PGR'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 PGR 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 PGRs at the times specified in the [PGR Handbook](#), and in the timelines above. In total, there are three Progress Review stages for Doctoral PGRs (PR1 – 3). MPhil PGRs are only required to complete Progress Review 3 as it assesses readiness to submit.

Progress Review 1 can result in the panel recommending to alter the PGR's status to that of an MPhil from a PhD path or an MRes from a Professional Doctorate path based on the work submitted. If any progress reviews show insufficient progress, then this may trigger academic warnings. PGRs 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 PGR wishes to upgrade to a PhD, the PGR and supervisor should contact their PGR Director and PGR Administrator. In this case, the Faculty will make arrangements for the PGR to undergo Progress Review 1. The process should align with the information on PR1 detailed in this handbook. Before requesting to transfer to a doctoral degree, PGRs should consider the financial

implications of this. The increase in programme length from a level 7 to level 8 degree will incur additional tuition fees and, in some instances, additional project costs (also known as bench fees).

Where PGRs 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 to Mode of Attendance Form](#) within Skillsforge.

### Progress Review 1 (PR1)

PR1 is a doctoral PGR's first formal progress review and involves an independent review panel interview which is based on the PGR's submission of a report comprising a substantial piece of written work and an up-to-date Personal Development Learning Plan (PDLP). The review focuses on a PGR'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 PGR 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 should ensure that the Independent Review Panel takes place as close to this time as possible.

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

For PR1, PGRs must submit the following documents in Skillsforge, by their required deadline. The interview will normally take place within 8 calendar weeks of the PGR's deadline and will often be organised by the PGR Administrator before the PGR has submitted to ensure that all members of the panel will be available.

For PhD PGRs:

- a. 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;
- b. For PhD PGRs, an up-to-date version of their training records from within their Personal Development and Learning Plan (PDLP); Whilst the implementation of Skillsforge is ongoing, PGRs are asked to download their PDLP training records and upload with their PR1 report. Guidance on downloading the PDLP is [here](#).
- c. If required, confirmation of ethical clearance for the proposed research project.
- d. 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 PGR 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, PGRs should consult the information about

[Research Ethics](#). Ethical review is not a requirement of PR1, however, it must be in place prior to this element of research being undertaken.

For Professional Doctorate PGRs:

It is good practice for PGRs to get supervisory feedback on all items submitted for the independent review panel interview. PGRs 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 PGR submits them formally to the PGR Administrator.

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. Faculty PGR Directors can also assist where necessary.

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

- The Chair should not be a member of the PGR'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 within their own faculty.
- The Chair can hold a joint role, acting as an Independent Panel member and Chair (where necessary and appropriate).
- 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 PGR 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 PGR can be verified.

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

- The PGR is suitable for doctoral study and may continue with their existing registration or, in the case of a PGR registered for an MPhil degree, be permitted to transfer to registration for a doctoral degree (**pass**)
- The PGR 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 degree if on a PhD route or MRes degree if on a Professional Doctorate route.

- The PGR has not yet produced work sufficient for this review 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 PGR has had the required amount of time to undertake the work, the panel will reassess the PGR 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 PGR progresses or may request a second review meeting. The possible outcomes of this second review can be either:
    - The PGR is suitable for doctoral study and may continue with their existing registration or, in the case of a PGR registered for an MPhil degree, be permitted to transfer to registration for a doctoral degree **(pass)**
    - The PGR 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 degree if on a PhD route or MRes degree if on a Professional Doctorate route.
    - The PGR is withdrawn from their programme of study.

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. As a minimum, the report should comprise:

- An assessment of the success with which the research degree PGR has completed the criteria;
- 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 PGR can address them;
- In the case of PGRs for whom a decision is deferred, a clear outline of the programme of work which the PGR 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. The Faculty PGR Committee will consider the report, and the recommendation made. If approved, the PGR Director will sign and the outcome will be initially sent via Skillsforge, with confirmation from PGR records.

If PGRs require reasonable adjustments to their Progress Review interview, they should discuss this with their lead supervisor in the first instance and both should discuss adjustments with Disability Support.

### Progress Reviews 2 and 3

Both the second and third progress reviews take the form of an interview between a PGR 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 (or other nominated member of the supervisory team) alone. The timescales of when these should take place, depending on programme and mode of attendance can be found in the PGR Deadlines in the Keele Doctoral Academy's (KDA) and figures 1-7 at the beginning of this document. PR3 can take place earlier than set out in the deadlines document should the PGR want to submit their thesis earlier,

but early submissions must be in line with the minimum period of registration set out in the Code of Practice. If PGRs are in receipt of a stipend and submit their thesis earlier than 36 months, they may not receive the full stipend payment. The supervisory team and PGR 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 PGRs only and covers the PGR's general progress and standard of work, progress with research training and personal development and any other issues which the PGR and/or supervisory team wish to discuss. There is no requirement for independent panel review as with PR1.

All research PGRs will undertake Progress Review 3 as it assesses readiness to submit their thesis. The supervisory team will base its assessment on the PGR'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 PGR and/or supervisory team wish to discuss as part of agreeing a plan to completion. A PGR's ability to submit their thesis is dependent on the submission of a completed PR3. Any failure to complete this process will prevent the PGR 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 PGR has completed and given the opportunity to have a meaningful input in the form. For both PR2 and PR3, supervisors of doctoral PGRs can recommend that the PGR 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, PGRs must have received Satisfactory or above in their last two Interim Progress Review Reports (see section on IPR outcomes below). There are therefore two potential outcomes of the supervisory team interview:

- PGRs who received satisfactory 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.
- PGRs who received unsatisfactory in one or both of their last two Interim Progress Review Reports 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 PGR in improving their progress.

PGRs who have received unsatisfactory 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 PGR attend a reconvened interview and/or recommend that the PGR access one of the University's support services with a view to putting in place additional support measures.

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

Following this, if PGRs are still making unsatisfactory progress, the supervisory team can recommend that the PGR transfers to a level 7 course at this stage (as detailed below).

#### Possible outcomes for PR3

To complete the requirements of Progress Review 3, PGRs 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. The possible outcomes of PR3 are:

- Submission according to a plan agreed with the supervisory team, if all criteria above are satisfied.
- Transfer to MPhil, as below.

Once the supervisory team has added its content, the relevant Faculty PGR Committee will consider the form, and the recommendation made. If the Committee approves the report, the report will be shared via Skillsforge.

In cases of unsatisfactory progress, PR2 and PR3 can result in a recommendation to alter the PGR's status to that of an MPhil path for PhD PGRs or an MRes for Professional Doctorate PGRs which would then be referred to the Faculty PGR Committee. Supervisors should work with the PGR to agree on a submission plan and seek advice from the PGR Director regarding deadlines. The Student Records and Exams officer (PGR) and/or the KDA PGR Officer will be able to assist with calculating deadlines.

## Interim Progress Reviews

In addition to the three progress review stages detailed above, research degree PGRs 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 PGR's general progress and standard of work since the previous review, and the PGR's progress with their PDLP. There is also provision for PGRs and supervisors to raise other issues which have had a bearing on the PGR's progress and production of work. Further information can be found on the Keele Doctoral Academy webpages.

#### Timescale

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

There are two harvest periods for reports per year in March/April and September/October.

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

If PGRs 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, the PGR Director or the SESO are alternative points of contact whom they could consider approaching with any issues. PGRs 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), PGRs 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 PGRs, then they can also contact the PGR Director to investigate. Either party can also submit a [concern form](#).

## Part 1 – PGR’s report

PGRs must begin the interim review process by commenting on their general progress to date. It is the PGR’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 PGRs and supervisors to have an open discussion about difficulties encountered and ensure that PGRs receive the appropriate level of support to address them.

### Possible outcomes

Actions and outcomes which arise from the Interim Progress Report depend on the outcome which the Lead Supervisor assigns to the PGR’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:

- If progress is excellent, a PGR can expect to continue with their research degree study with little or no follow-up actions or tasks.
- If progress is satisfactory, the PGR Administrator in the Faculty will note the PGR’s Interim Progress Review Report for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty PGR Committee. Should the Faculty PGR Committee agree that follow up actions are required, PGRs will be given follow-up actions to work towards 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.
- If progress is clearly unsatisfactory, the PGR Administrator in the Faculty will note the PGR’s Interim Progress Review Report for discussion at the next meeting of the Faculty PGR Committee. The PGR 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 PGR 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 PGR.

## Part 2 – supervisor’s report

Once the PGR has submitted their interim progress review, supervisors are required to comment on the PGR’s progress. If supervisors wish to log an action, the statement included should be as explicit as possible in identifying who should complete the action and within what timeframe.

A clear outcome must be assigned to each interim progress report. The outcome provides a helpful gauge for measuring a PGR’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 PGR’s progress. The progress outcomes are as follows:

- Excellent - – Should reflect outstanding achievement on the part of the PGR, 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.

- **Satisfactory** – Should reflect that the PGR has made satisfactory progress towards completion and produced work of a satisfactory standard but needs to develop research training and personal development targets further.
- **Unsatisfactory** – Should reflect that the PGR 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 PGR will no longer be in good academic standing, and the grade will trigger a formal academic warning.

When considering a PGR'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 PGR's research training and personal development, the outcome should reflect the overall assessment based on each of these considerations.

## Maintaining good academic standing

Maintaining good academic standing involves a research degree PGR's fulfilment of the rights and responsibilities laid out in the [Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees](#). If a PGR 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, PGRs 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 PGRs at least every 4 weeks during term time, and PGRs should ensure that their supervisor is informed of any barriers to their progress.

Supervisory teams should inform PGRs about any concerns regarding unsatisfactory progress, at the earliest opportunity and must document concerns in writing so there is a clear record for the PGR to consult. Staff within the research environment should identify whether it is feasible to offer the PGR 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, PGRs 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. PGRs must discuss any amendments to their mode of attendance with their lead supervisor in the first instance (and Immigration Compliance for international PGRs). Further guidance on changes to a PGR's registration status is available in the [University's PGR Handbook](#).

If a PGR 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 PGR 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 PGR under the terms of [Regulation C10](#) (or [Regulation C9](#) for Professional Doctorate PGRs) at any stage of the programme. The Faculty PGR Committee can issue three consecutive academic warnings to a PGR. In the first warning period, the PGR 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 PGR has to address the terms of the warning. If a PGR fails to comply with the terms of the third warning, the Faculty PGR Committee may recommend to the RDC that the PGR 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 PGR's programme would not be sufficient grounds for withdrawal. Once a PGR 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 PGR 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 PGR 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).

PGRs 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. PGR 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](#).