

GUIDELINES FOR POWCS HIGHER DEGREE RESEARCH STUDENT RESEARCH PROGRESS REVIEW PANELS

PURPOSE OF PANEL REVIEW

It is a condition of continual enrolment in a higher research degree at UNSW that student performance is assessed by a formal annual research progress review. The process is designed to be a 'positive and constructive process', not only to provide an independent and objective review of the progress of the research, but also to project manage and assist in planning of the thesis. The goal is a supportive experience – the panel gives feedback on progress to-date, the plan for the next period of research, and areas where improvement is required.

The preferred time for completing a PhD thesis is within 3.5 years (full time equivalent; FTE) and Masters students within 2 years FTE. The focus of the panel is the progress of the research with respect to the typical milestones for the duration of the candidature. Except for the confirmation review, where the panel with the aid of a content expert as required will assess if the research project is valid and achievable, progress reviews are not the forum to review the research methodology and the science of the project in detail. Thus, the panel will not judge the value or technical merit of the higher degree research topic or methods. However, as required panels do consider the adequacy and likelihood of completion of work given the stated methods and objectives and the timeframes proposed. Therefore, questions may be asked as required to understand or clarify any issues related to progress or lack of progress, and if there is a key change in the research focus. Candidates are asked to summarize and briefly discuss their work as one way of demonstrating to the panel their understanding and progress in their chosen field of study.

It is **mandatory for the primary supervisor to attend** the review, unless otherwise approved by the school. Joint and co-supervisors are welcome and may be expected to attend the review in order to discuss academic progress and/or facilitate resolution of specific issues; in some cases, their attendance may be specifically requested by the panel.

For all students, the annual research progress reviews provide an opportunity for students, supervisors and the POWCS to:

- Take stock of how the project has progressed over the past year (or since commencement for 1st year students)
- Review the plan of action for the next year
- Confirm all approvals are in place (ethics, OHS and IP)
- Identify and respond to any impediments towards progress to a timely completion of a high-quality thesis
- Identify areas where the student needs support and/or training
- Confirm the supervision arrangements are adequate and working
- Discuss candidature options including: submitting early, extensions, leave, changes to full time or part time, upgrades to PhD, downgrades to Masters, withdrawal, or inclusion of publications in a thesis. It is recommended that any changes in candidature should be flagged with the school and the panel as early as possible to allow adequate time for policy and procedure.

ONLINE RESEARCH PROGRESS REVIEW SYSTEM, FORMS AND REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS

There is an online research progress review system to submit review forms and supporting attachments. This system is GRIS (Graduate Research Information System).

Progress Review information, instructions, related links and user manuals are available on the UNSW Graduate Research website: <https://research.unsw.edu.au/managing-your-candidature>

Students and the primary supervisor can access the online system with this link:
<https://gris.unsw.edu.au/login>.

To login, please use zID number and zPass – same as for My.UNSW.edu.au or accessing UNSW email.

Some helpful notes:

- GRIS seems to like Internet Explorer browser more than others – particularly when opening attachments. Mac Users can also use Safari quite easily.
- If you are having difficulty logging onto GRIS (for example, if you are on a different network domain or your home computer) you may need to prefix your zID with **ADUNSW**

Students are responsible for ensuring the online review form (all student and supervisor sections) and both required attachments are ‘submitted’ for the panel’s review no later than two weeks before their scheduled progress review.

1. **Online Research Progress Review Form** – sections to be ‘submitted’ by both student (A, B and C) and primary supervisor (D)
2. **Summary attachment** – Maximum 2 page overview of the research as well as the agreed objectives and milestones. The summary should briefly outline the research project, including a background, the hypotheses tested, broad research plan, results, and conclusions to date** (see additional notes below for first year students to ‘confirm their candidature’).
3. **Timetable attachment** – Maximum 1 page listing the student’s main research components (eg experiments and data collection), the writing progress, and any other key milestones to achieve across the *whole candidature* as well as specifically *by the next review*. For example, this can be a table of contents for the thesis together with the completion status of each section and a timeline for completion of each section, manuscripts, presentations and the planned thesis submission date. The school interprets a ‘completed chapter’ to be a final draft that has been reviewed and approved by the supervisor.

**** For students completing their first year**, the purpose of the interview is to ‘confirm their candidature’. Students need to be able to demonstrate progress in their research and that they can write and synthesize the published literature. If no panel member in the student’s review has expertise in the student’s research area, a content expert will be nominated by the primary supervisor. This expert will be asked to attend the panel to ensure the research project is valid and achievable. Candidates will also be asked to make a ten minute presentation at the time of confirmation reviews.

The **summary attachment** for first year HDR students also requires more detailed information in accordance with Faculty guidelines (maximum 4 pages):

- Key objectives, criteria and milestones of the research

- A literature review (summary only within 4 page limit); students must have completed a draft literature review chapter by the time of their confirmation panel review. The supervisor must confirm to the panel that they have read and provided feedback on the literature review.
- A brief justification of the research
- An assessment of the resources required to support the research
- A statement of how the research will be conducted in accordance with the UNSW policies for intellectual property, OHS and ethics.

A **timetable attachment** is also required for first year students.

The student should attach both the summary and timetable before 'submitting' their section of the online form for their supervisor's review.

After reviewing, the supervisor will complete their section D and either 'submit' the online form for the panel's review or can choose to return the online form to the student for further revisions.

Each time the online form is 'submitted', an automatic email is sent to the next recipient(s) in line to review it with a direct link to the online form.

Late or incomplete documents and forms are not acceptable. It is up to the discretion of the panel to proceed, cancel or reschedule the review. It is also up to the discretion of the panel whether to note 'marginal' or 'unsatisfactory progress' as a result of insufficient documentation or time to prepare.

FORMAT OF PANEL REVIEW

The overall format of the review meeting is shown in the table below; note, times are approximate and the process should be shorter for students who are progressing well:

Panel only: briefly review key issues as outlined in submitted documentation and agree on focus of interview	2 min
Panel, student and supervisor(s): Student describes project summary and timetable, elaborating where necessary	5 min
Panel, student and supervisor(s): Panel can ask student and supervisor(s) questions	5 min
Panel interviews student alone	5 min
Panel interviews supervisor(s) alone	5 min
Panel only: discuss progress and complete progress form	5 min
Panel, student and supervisor(s) - discuss the panel's recommendations	5 min

It is the role of the panel Chair to direct the meeting and re-focus any off-track discussion.

The intention is that reviews will be held via a face-to-face meeting format between the student, supervisors (including, where possible, co-supervisors and joint supervisors) and panel members. In exceptional circumstances, a student or supervisor may be permitted to participate in the meeting via teleconference or Skype, but it is expected that in the great majority of instances, this will not be necessary due to the extended notice provided by the School of the dates of forthcoming reviews. Should teleconference or Skype facilities be necessary for the completion of a review, the review will nevertheless be conducted at the time originally scheduled by the School.

KEY ISSUES THAT MUST BE COVERED DURING REVIEW

- Progress of the project and the thesis – has the student started writing? Is the literature review complete? As appropriate, how many chapters are in draft form and have been reviewed by the supervisor?
- Activities in terms of previously set goals and milestones – progress of the data collection, analysis, writing up.
- Infrastructure and resources – are they adequate and appropriate for the research? Does the student have everything they need? Is everything working as it should?
- Communication – does appropriate communication exist between all parties?
- The role of the supervisors – are the expectations of the student and supervisors clear and reasonable? Are supervisors fulfilling their obligations at the appropriate level? Are the meetings occurring frequently enough?
- Intellectual property, occupational health and safety, ethics – does the student (and supervisor) understand these policy requirements as they relate to the research project?
- Any problems (personal, technical or academic) identified by student or supervisors? Is additional expertise or training required?
- Goals and milestones until next review – both academic and professional development (e.g. presentation skills or writing course).
- A decision regarding progress relative to expected benchmarks or milestones – satisfactory, marginal or unsatisfactory.
- Discuss candidature options including: submitting early, extensions, program leave, changes to full time or part time, upgrades to PhD, changes to Masters, withdrawal, or requests for overtime enrolment. It is recommended that any changes in candidature should be flagged with the school and the panel as early as possible to allow adequate time for policy and procedure and referring cases to the High Degree Committee for approval.

BENCHMARKS FOR HDR PROGRESS

Minimum procedural requirements for a HDR project:

- Timeframe achievable given stated objectives, methodologies and resources
- Supervisor support, infrastructure and resources available
- Student has the motivation to complete the project

If a panel is concerned about the progress of a project, the issues of concern will be discussed with the supervisor and raised with the student. It may be necessary to reconvene the panel after the student and supervisor have had time to discuss the issues and develop a plan for the next 12 months.

The panel makes an assessment of whether progress has been at the level expected for the state of enrolment in candidature. The following benchmarks are to be used as a guide only and the field of the research must be taken into account:

	Literature review	Methods chapter(s)	Completed results chapters
PhD			
1 st year	Draft	Draft	0
2 nd year	Solid draft	Solid draft(s)	1-2
3 rd year	Completed	Completed	2-4
Masters			
1 st year	Draft	Draft	0-1
2 nd year	Completed	Solid draft	1-2

PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS

The panel must decide whether student progress is satisfactory, marginal or unsatisfactory. The panel must justify their decision in writing on the progress review form. In all but exceptional circumstances (including cases in which the student's APR documentation was not received by the School Administrator by the deadline), a rating of 'unsatisfactory' cannot be assigned without additional reviews having been undertaken.

MILESTONES

Each candidate will be set milestones to ensure progress is made toward the completion of their degree. These milestones should be entered into GRIS as part of the panel recommendations. Progress Review panels will use the milestones set within the first three months of candidature by the candidate and their supervisor(s) and previous reviews to gauge the candidate's progress. As part of the review process, candidates are expected to provide an outline of achievements since the last review, or the initial agreement made with their supervisor(s), against agreed objectives/criteria and milestones. It is accepted that new findings or other issues might result in changes to previously noted milestones. This is not a problem provide the changes are clearly explained and justified.

The panel should ensure that milestones are agreed upon; have specific dates by which they should be achieved; appropriate time is given to achieve them; and candidates and supervisors are actively involved in the process of setting the milestones.

For marginal and unsatisfactory reviews, it is critical that more detailed milestones are set that are considered achievable in three full-time equivalent months and that remedial actions are proposed to address the key factors identified as impeding progress.

If appropriate milestones are not set, the PGC will return the review form to the panel for revision.

MARGINAL AND UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS

Additional reviews are indicated when a rating of 'marginal' progress is assigned. A marginal recommendation indicates that the panel considers that the degree is at risk of an overtime completion. In instances of marginal progress, the panel must clearly specify milestones that the student must reach by specific times. A review date must be scheduled to take place within three full-time equivalent months following the marginal outcome. The same panel then reconvenes at this time for this additional review. Following a Marginal outcome, there are only two possible outcomes from the additional review: Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. If the progress is judged Unsatisfactory following the Marginal review outcome, then candidates are placed on a

Management Plan that they must adhere to and the process following an Unsatisfactory outcome must be followed.

Unsatisfactory recommendations are a serious review outcome that reflect poor progress of the research. Detailed milestones must be set and remedial actions developed to address the key factors identified as impeding progress. Specific dates by which milestones must be achieved should be set.

OVER-TIME STUDENTS AND OTHER STUDENTS WITH MARGINAL OR UNSATISFACTORY PROGRESS REPORTS

Students at 4 years (PhD) or 2 years (Masters) must apply for overtime enrolment if they require more time to complete their degree. In these cases, students must have a progress review before census date and the outcome must be either Marginal or Unsatisfactory. The student must then request overtime enrolment formally in GRIS (a Variation request) and provide documented evidence for this request. The request will need to be supported in writing by the candidate's supervisor(s) and PGC. The decision whether to allow overtime enrolment is made by the faculty's HDC.

If convening to discuss overtime enrolment, the panel must ensure that:

- There is a clear plan for the completion of any outstanding data collection
- The student has protected time to write, preferably their thesis rather than manuscripts
- The student and supervisor are meeting face-to-face on a regular basis
- The student gives supervisors sufficient time to review their work
- Any impediments to completion are raised and a solution is agreed by all parties
- Where necessary, 3-monthly reviews are scheduled
- In the case of marginal or unsatisfactory progress, deadlines are set and the school is informed when they are met
- If the student has submitted their thesis and received a 'D' from the examiners, this student must complete a 'Review of Milestones' document for the panel to review and assess revision progress accordingly.

KEY FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL PANEL

A panel will perform its role well when:

- It is a forum for problem-solving to facilitate the on-time completion of a high-quality degree.
- The environment is constructive.
- The student feels comfortable enough to raise all issues of concern to them.
- The student is given sufficient time to consider their response to a question.
- It protects the interests of the student – panel members must emphasize the need to balance chapter completion and manuscript preparation.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

Review panels will consist of at least three academic staff to each higher research degree candidate. Consistent with UNSW Graduate Research School (GRS) policy, the panel will be selected according to the following criteria:

- At least two panel members will hold an appointment equivalent to at least UNSW Academic level B (Lecturer);
- Together, the panel must be able to provide an independent and objective review of student progress;
- The panel should be Chaired by a senior member of POWCS academic staff or a Postgraduate Coordinator;
- No more than one panel member will be an early career researcher [defined as either (i) less than seven years post-award of PhD; or (ii) no previous primary or co-supervision of a PhD student to successful completion];
- No more than one panel member will be external to UNSW;
- As far as possible, the same panel will review the progress of the candidate throughout the candidature.

Although the School will appoint review panels, the student and supervisors can request a change in panel members in cases where there is a conflict of interest or other issues not foreseen by the School's HDR team. Such requests must be received by the School Administrator in writing from the student and/or supervisor and clearly explain the nature of the perceived conflict. Prior determination of a marginal review is not in itself sufficient reason for exclusion of panel members. In addition, the students/supervisors may suggest additional discipline-specific panel members if needed (for example, a health economist), who can either be added to the panel members suggested by the School or can replace the junior panel member.

It is the Review Panel Chair's responsibility to ensure that the online APR form is completed and submitted on the day of the review. The completed form is then reviewed by the Postgraduate Coordinator who submits it to be published to the student. The student has a chance to review the panel's comments and submit the form to the Graduate Research School.

UPGRADE FROM MASTERS TO PHD

Masters by Research students requesting an upgrade to a PhD must ensure they have the support of their supervisors and that their annual review report clearly states this request. As a guide, students must meet the following:

- Completed a solid draft literature review, i.e. demonstrate that they are able to write and synthesize the published literature
- Have an accepted peer-reviewed first author conference abstract based on original research or a first author peer-reviewed manuscript based on original research; documentary evidence of such must be provided, i.e. peer-review assessment of their research performance
- A clear and justified research plan

Cases will only be reviewed by the Faculty of Medicine Higher Degree Committee if they have the written support of the student's supervisors, the postgraduate coordinator or Head of School, and the annual progress review panel.

REFERRALS

Panels can recommend that:

- Students undertake additional theoretical training or writing skills courses.
- Co-supervisors with specialist expertise be sought.
- Students who are in a state of distress approach the UNSW Research Candidature Manager, Simon Kalucy, for independent advice. Simon can be reached on 9385 6067 and s.kalucy@unsw.edu.au.

Students and/or supervisors who believe that the review process has been unsatisfactory must contact the POWCS Postgraduate Coordinator immediately.

POWCS Postgraduate Coordinators

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