



Higher Degree Research (HDR) Students

Progress Review and Probation Guidelines

1. Overview

It is recognised that from time to time, problems may arise during the candidature of a Higher Degree Research (HDR) student. Long completion times and high attrition rates have frequently been identified as hazards associated with higher degree by research study. Some difficulties may be experienced in the progress of the project, in the supervisory relationship, or students may have personal or financial problems.

Overall, students have a responsibility to maintain progress of their research including the presentation of written material as agreed in sufficient time to allow for comments and discussions before proceeding to the next stage. The supervisor(s) must ensure that the student is made aware of inadequate progress or of standards of work below those generally expected, specifying the problems and suggesting ways of addressing them. It is expected that supervisors and students would attempt to work together to develop strategies to alleviate any problems. Heads of Units should be kept informed of student progress and any strategies developed.

The Annual Progress Report (APR) process for HDR Students is designed to allow students and their supervisors the opportunity to report on student progress and to highlight any problems or issues that have arisen during that year of candidature. There may, however, be occasions where situations arise that need to be dealt with that cannot be left for the APR process.

It is equally important for academic units to follow procedures when dealing with situations when student progress is deemed to be unsatisfactory at a time that is outside of the annual reporting period. These guidelines have been devised to guide academic units through the correct procedures for handling unsatisfactory progress whether that be during the Annual Progress Reporting process or on ad hoc occasions throughout the candidature.

As well as these guidelines, unit procedures should at all times adhere with the Code of Practice Supervision, the relevant Higher Degree Course Rules and Faculty Handbooks. Copies of these guidelines and the Code of Practice Supervision will be made available to students at the time of induction. The guidelines are also applicable if the student or supervisor disagrees with the assessment of progress.

2. Academic Progress

Continuation of HDR candidature is conditional on maintenance of satisfactory progress. A supervisor or supervisors may draw the attention of the Head of Unit to problems with progress of a student at any time. Indeed, a supervisor is required to report immediately to the Head of Unit any failure by a student to make satisfactory progress or to abide by other requirements in the regulations governing the degree.

When a student is not making satisfactory progress or not maintaining adequate and regular contact, the student must be advised in writing of the requirements. (It should be noted that satisfactory academic progress is also a visa requirement for international students).

3. Supervisor Responsibilities

The full range of responsibilities of supervisors is detailed in the Code of Practice Supervision. It is the responsibility of the supervisor(s) to advise the student promptly of unsatisfactory progress with regard to any aspect of the research program, the agreed timetable or deadlines, performance in seminars, performance in prescribed course work, attendance, interaction with other students or technical staff, observance of laboratory or other practical guidelines (including occupational health and safety). The supervisor(s) must put this advice in writing if unsatisfactory progress is considered likely to interfere with satisfactory completion of the research by the agreed deadlines or create other problems within the Academic Unit/Department. If circumstances arise where a supervisor becomes unable to carry out their normal

supervisory responsibilities (ie due to a period of leave, or an unexpected and significant increase other academic responsibilities), then the supervisor, Head of Unit and/or Head of Postgraduate Studies have a responsibility to ensure alternative supervisory arrangements are made and that the student is advised, in writing, of any such changes in supervision.

4. Student Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of students to inform their supervisor(s) of problems affecting the progress of the research as they arise. These problems may include personal, academic and resource problems. These problems should be documented formally by the student within one month of their occurrence if not resolved. If a student does not believe that his/her supervisor or supervisors are meeting supervisory responsibilities as defined in the Code of Practice Supervision, then student should raise their concerns with the supervisor(s). If the student is not satisfied with the response by the supervisor(s), then he/she should raise the matter with the Head of Postgraduate Studies, Head of Unit or Associate Dean. If the student feels unable to discuss some issues affecting candidature with supervisor(s) he/she should contact the Head of Postgraduate Studies, Head of Unit, the Dean of Students or a Wollongong University Postgraduate Association (WUPA) student advocate.

5. Internal Reviews

Initial attempts to rectify unsatisfactory situations should take place within the Unit. If initial meetings between the supervisor(s) and the student fail to rectify problems, a meeting between the student, the supervisor(s), the relevant Head of Unit and the Associate Dean and/or the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies should be convened (either independently or as a group) to discuss the situation with the student and supervisor(s), with the aim of developing specific strategies and recommendations for improving progress towards completion.

These strategies may include:

- reassessment of the revised research plan or methodology;
- institution or reactivation of a written "contract" between student and supervisor regarding frequency of meetings, comments on written work, hours of attendance, etc;
- modification of supervisory arrangements;
- provision of specific training or support for aspects of the project;
- changes to enrolment pattern (e.g. leave of absence or part-time studies)
- setting of specific timelines/milestones.

Faculties and Departments should not use the term "Probation" to refer to a Faculty or Unit level processes, only the Pro Vice Chancellor (Research) can impose a period of probation on HDR students (see Section 7). It is important that the outcome of these consultations is recorded and copies given to the student and the supervisor. A copy should also be sent to the Research Student Centre and the Dean of the Faculty to be placed on file. It is equally important for the progress to be monitored, approximately two to six months after strategies have been decided and put in place. A re-review of progress should take place after a set period of time to ensure that problems have been satisfactorily addressed, and that progress is now satisfactory. The Head of Unit or Head of Postgraduate Studies are the most appropriate people to do this, the report of the re-review should be forwarded to the Head of Postgraduate Studies, Dean and RSC and placed on file.

The Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies (HPS) should be consulted if matters are not resolvable at Unit level. Consideration may then be given to placing the student on probation. If the Unit or Faculty determines that the best response to the matter is for steps to be taken to place the student on probation, a copy of the "HDR Student Progress Review Report" (see Appendix 1 to this document) should be completed and forwarded to the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies and the Dean for consideration, accompanied by a written report outlining attempts that have been made at a Unit level to optimise progress, and the outcomes of these attempts. The Dean must then make a recommendation concerning probation to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). A copy of the progress review report is to be forwarded to the RSC and placed on file.

Students and supervisors have access to normal University of Wollongong channels for Grievance Resolution at any time.

6. Annual Progress Reports

A formal annual review of progress of all students takes place in the latter part of each year. Written reports from the student and the supervisor are an important and formal means to monitor the progress of the student. Each report should be a forthright appraisal of the student's progress by both the supervisor(s) and the student. The annual report is the means by which the University assesses whether the candidature will continue into the following year. The Research Student Centre (RSC) distributes an Annual Progress Report Form to all enrolled students.

It is essential that the completion of the annual progress report is taken seriously by the students and their supervisors. When requests for extensions to candidature or scholarships are made, annual progress reports are consulted to determine whether delays were noted and discussed at the time, and what action was taken. It is important that supervisors provide accurate reports including any concerns they may have about the progress of a student. By noting these it provides the opportunity for discussion and for setting clearer objectives.

It is the responsibility of the student to complete the appropriate section and pass the form on to the supervisor(s) by the due date. Ideally the supervisor(s) and student should meet to discuss progress and the completion of the student's and supervisor's sections. In the unusual event that a student feels threatened by this procedure then the student should immediately notify either the Head of Unit or the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies of any concerns. If at this stage unsatisfactory progress is recorded, the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies or Head of Unit is required to discuss the matter with the student, set out requirements that should be met for continued enrolment and ask the student to sign to indicate that he or she is aware of the unsatisfactory progress assessment and of the expectations for continuation of candidature.

After the student and supervisor(s) have completed their sections of the form, the supervisor should forward the completed form to the Faculty's Head of Postgraduate Studies, who reviews the report and makes a recommendation concerning the student's candidature, and then forwards the recommendation (on the form) with the report to the Dean of the Faculty. The Dean reviews and signs-off on the report and recommendations before all reports are forwarded to the RSC who should follow-up any problems identified with progress. Remedial action can be instigated at this stage in most cases.

Note that failure of the student to provide a progress report when required will be taken automatically to constitute unsatisfactory progress.

8. Probation

If unsatisfactory progress matters are not resolved within the Faculty, the Dean may recommend to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) that a period of probation is necessary. **Faculties cannot place students on probation. Probation is a formal University process that can only be imposed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).**

The student shall be notified of the probation recommendation and will be given 28 days after notification to submit a response to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). After this period, the PVC(R) shall make a final decision.

If probation is imposed, the PVC(R) will appoint a senior academic **to oversee the supervision process and research progress** for a period of not less than three months and not more than one year. At the end of probation, the senior academic will make recommendations, in a report to the PVC(R), addressing any perceived problems. The recommendations may include: continuation of enrolment; termination of candidature; transfer of award; change of supervisor or appointment of a panel of supervisors; including members from outside the academic unit. The PVC(R) has the power to impose any of the above recommendations.

Prior to acting on a recommendation of termination of candidature, the PVC(R) will review all documentation concerning that student's candidature held by the RSC and will advise the student of the impending termination, so that the student can provide the PVC(R) with any additional relevant information concerning his/her candidature, supervision and progress.

The student shall be notified of the recommendation and will be given two weeks after notification to submit a response to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). After this period, the Pro Vice-Chancellor shall make a final decision. Students and supervisors shall be informed of the outcomes of the final decision in writing. If

they disagree with any of the outcomes, then they may appeal the decision to the Higher Degree Research (HDR) Student Academic Appeal Committee.

7. Grievance Procedures

Any problems or any disagreements encountered during the candidature, other than allegations of Plagiarism which are dealt with in HDR Course Rule 10.8, that cannot be immediately or easily resolved between the student and the supervisor should be dealt with in accordance with the HDR Student Academic Grievance Procedures.



HDR STUDENT PROGRESS REVIEW REPORT

(To be completed by review participants and supervisors present who should refer to the Code of Practice Supervision prior to making a recommendation - a copy of this report must be made available to the student.)

Student name: _____ Student #: _____ Review Date: _____

Degree: _____

Principal Supervisor: _____ Co-supervisor: _____

Research Topic: _____

_____ Sessions enrolled: PT _____ FT _____

Review: 1st 2nd 3rd 4th Date of most recent seminar: _____

In attendance (names and roles): _____

Statement of Progress Difficulties*

Recommended action:

<input type="checkbox"/> Further Review*	<input type="checkbox"/> To PVC(R) for Probation Consideration	<input type="checkbox"/> Change of Supervisor (s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Change of status (e.g. LOA or PT)	<input type="checkbox"/> Other*
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** Please attach a separate sheet clearly outlining milestones and time frames to be completed (by whom, by when: e.g., additional training, coursework, rewrite proposal, re-review, changes in supervision, topic change, status change, program transfer, discontinue). The student, supervisor(s), and review panel should have input.*

Review Panel follow-up date: _____

Signatures of those present (copies to all involved)

Student Signature: _____ Name: _____

Principal Supervisor Signature: _____ Name: _____

Head of Unit Signature: _____ Name: _____

HPS Signature: _____ Name: _____

Dean's comments _____

Dean's Signature: _____ Name: _____

Copy of this form sent to Research Student Centre (enter date): _____