

**RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE  
The Graduate School**



**Unsatisfactory Academic Performance and Progress of Research Students:  
Policy and Procedure**

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**Developed by :** Dr G Maxwell, Postgraduate Research Tutor GSBS, Prof B Steves, Graduate School Director and Dr V Long, Senior Postgraduate Research Tutor GSBS.

## Unsatisfactory Academic Performance and Progress of Research Students: Policy and Procedure

### 1. Monitoring of Academic Performance and Progress

- 1.1 Academic performance and progress are monitored regularly through the supervisory-student meetings and are required to be discussed and recorded in meeting records 12 times per year for full-time students and 6 times per year for part-time students.
- 1.2 The Annual report submitted by the supervisory team and the student once per year to the School Research Progression and Awards Board also monitors the academic progress of the student and includes comments from both student and supervisory team on the student's progress over the year.
- 1.3 The progression stage RDC2 - *Confirmation of Progression to Doctor of Philosophy* - specifically reviews the student's progress at 9 months for full-time students and at 14 months for part-time students. In the progression review the student must show that they have made satisfactory progress and can clearly demonstrate their ability to pursue study to doctoral level. They do this through a progression report, oral presentation and a mini-viva examination.
- 1.4 If progress is not deemed satisfactory after the mini-viva, the panel undertaking the mini-viva can select 3 possible outcomes at first attempt: recommendation 1) that the student resubmit the written report 2) that the student be registered as an MPhil student 3) that the student's registration be terminated and RDC7 - withdrawal of doctoral registration - be implemented.
- 1.5 If progress is not deemed satisfactory after the outcome of resubmission of the written report, the panel undertaking the review can select 2 outcomes: recommendation 1) that the student be registered as an MPhil student or 2) that the student's registration be terminated and RDC7 - withdrawal of doctoral registration - be implemented.
- 1.6 Students are expected to make satisfactory academic progress throughout their programme of study. The School RPAB monitors regularly in each year whether the candidate is still actively engaged on the programme of study, is maintaining regular and frequent meetings with the supervisors and considers the annual report from the student and the supervisors on the student's progress.
- 1.7 If the student fails to show satisfactory academic performance at any stage of their programme after the RDC2 - *Confirmation of Progression to Doctor of Philosophy* progression stage, the student can be asked to undertake a formal examination of their progress in which they are requested to provide a progression report, oral presentation and mini-viva examination (See Appendix 1 for the Examination of Academic Performance and Progress Form and process flow chart) If progress is not deemed satisfactory after the mini-viva, then sections 1.4 and 1.5 are applied.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See also Research Degree Regulations paragraph 3.7

1.8 The recommendations of all mini-viva examinations are submitted to the School RPAB for appropriate action which may include the withdrawal of the student's registration.

## **2. Principles and Good Practice related to cases of unsatisfactory academic performance and progress**

2.1 There is an expectation that the Director of Studies (DOS) and other relevant School staff, including the Associate Dean of Research (ADR), have taken all reasonable measures to avoid the outcome of withdrawal.

2.2 Each case of unsatisfactory academic performance is considered with its individual attendant factors.

2.3 The records of supervisory meetings and annual reports will record the case specific issues and required action points, so that the student is aware that their performance and progress is in question and considered unsatisfactory by the supervisory team.

2.4 The supervisory team will ensure the student is advised of all appropriate support, e.g. the Students' Association Advice Centre and the Student Wellbeing Service.

2.5 When the supervisory team considers that an unsatisfactory academic level is likely to persist, they will discuss the case with the departmental Postgraduate Research Tutor (PGRT) and School Senior PGRT. This may initiate the process of examination of academic performance and progress which could result in withdrawal of registration.

2.6 Withdrawals do not restrict the student's rights under the University's Complaints Handling procedures.

## **3. Process of examination of cases of unsatisfactory academic performance and progress**

3.1 With ADR support, the DoS and Senior PGRT, with the other members of the supervisory team as appropriate, advise the student that if satisfactory, substantial and sustained improvement is not evidenced during the next 4 months (full-time), or 6 months (part time), they may be required to withdraw. The process (as set out in below) is explained to the student.

3.2 The student is advised of the level of improvement attained, or not attained, at each subsequent supervisory meeting. Supervisory meetings may increase in frequency if considered necessary.

3.3 Where the academic standard remains unsatisfactory, or reverts to being unsatisfactory, within 2 (full-time) or 3 (part-time) months of the initial meeting described in 3.1, the formal review process is initiated and the student is notified that they are required to do a formal, mini-viva examination.

- 3.4 The Director of Studies writes formally to the student stating that the supervisory team have reviewed their progress since the initial meeting of 3.1 and deem it still not to be satisfactory. The student is therefore required to undertake a formal mini-viva to confirm whether or not they should progress to the next stage of their/ her research plans.
- 3.5 The *Examination of Academic Performance and Progress* process of Appendix 1 is used. This process includes having the supervisory team and an experienced assessor outwith the team, in consultation with the School Senior PGRT, make an academic judgement on the calibre and progress of a student's doctoral work.
- 3.6 The examination will require the student to provide a written progression report, give an oral presentation and undertake a mini-viva examination. The DoS will state clearly in writing to the student what the expectations are of the written report for submission in advance of, and for presentation at, the mini-viva. *The progression report is required to show progress to date and plans to progress in the future.*
- 3.7 The written communication to the student will clearly state the support that they will receive from the supervisory team during the time specified to develop and write the report.
- 3.8 The supervisory team will review the written report and give feedback to the student in preparation for submission to the formal mini-viva. This feedback will be timely and supportive and address the areas of weakness *and enable progression.*
- 3.9 The supervisory team and Senior PGRT will decide together on a reasonable timeframe for the student to complete the writing of the report and prepare for the mini-viva and provide a deadline to the student in writing.
- 3.10 At the formal mini-viva, one examiner will be a member of the supervisory team, normally the DoS. If the student or DoS has raised concerns about a breakdown of the DoS/ student relationship, the 2nd supervisor will be on the examination panel and will meet with the student regarding advice and support in preparation. The second examiner will be an experienced assessor but must not have any close working relationship with the DoS or the supervisory team and is therefore transparently impartial. If required, this may be an experienced member of academic staff from another department or school.

#### **4. Outcomes of the examination of academic performance and progress**

- 4.1 The examination panel judges if the formal mini-viva work constitutes doctoral level work and whether the student has shown sufficient evidence of academic ability to proceed in their doctorate. Using the *Examination of Academic Performance and Progress* report form, the examination panel will recommend one of the following 4 outcomes:
- 1) That the student progresses with their doctorate;

- 2) That the student is given the opportunity to re-submit the written report for progression;
- 3) That the student is registered as an MPhil student;
- 4) That the student is withdrawn from doctoral registration.

4.2 In the case of resubmission of the written report, the assessment panel can recommend one of 3 outcomes of 4.1 for the resubmission: 1), 3) or 4).

4.3 Where the formal mini-viva work is judged by the examination panel to be academically unsatisfactory, the Examination Report summarising the case, including the rationale for the decision of the examination panel, will be reviewed by the School ADR.

4.4 If the conclusions of the Examination Report are supported by the ADR, the student may then be required to withdraw under the RDC7 notification process. The DoS, departmental PGRT, and ADR are all required to sign the RDC7 *which appends the supporting evidence of the Examination of student performance report*.

4.5 The RDC7 plus Examination Report are submitted for final approval to the next School Research PAB.

## 5. Appeal of an examination decision

5.1 The student may not challenge the academic judgement of the examiners.

5.2 The student may only request a review of the examination decision on one or more of the following grounds:

- 1) There are circumstances that affected the student's performance, which the examiners were not aware of at the mini-viva examination
- 2) There is evidence of procedural irregularity in the conduct of the examination, including administrative error, of such a nature as to cause doubt *as to whether the result might have been different had there not been such irregularity*
- 3) There is evidence of unfair or improper assessment on the part of one or more of the examiners.<sup>2</sup>

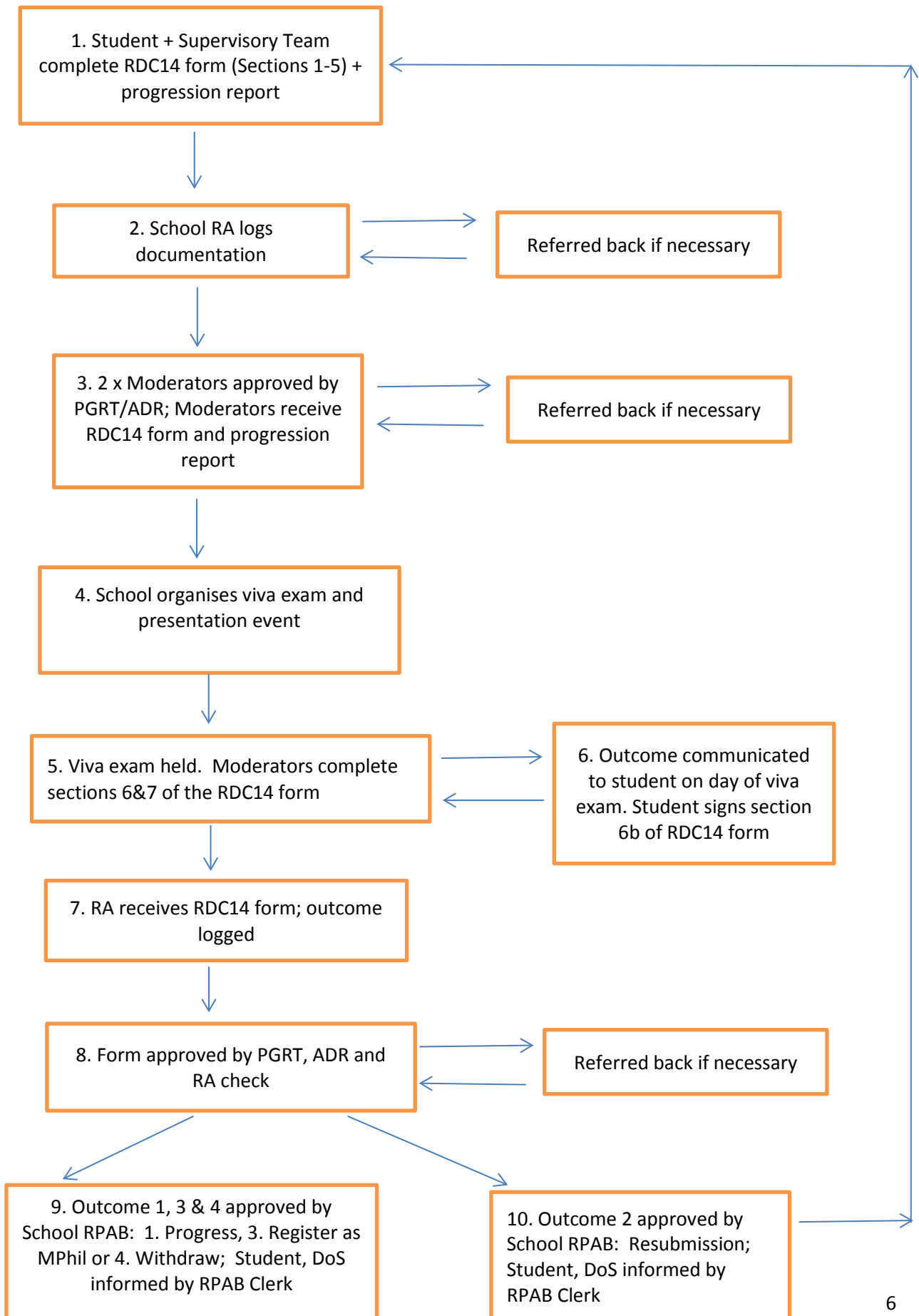
5.3 The process for requesting a review of the Examination decision is given in the Research Degrees Examination Regulations ( Section 10).

5.4 Any complaints or grievances relating to the study period, alleged inadequacy of supervisory or other arrangements during the period of study shall not constitute grounds for requesting a review of the examination decision. Complaints and grievances should be dealt with separately under the University's normal Complaints Handling Procedures.

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<sup>2</sup> See Research Degree regulations 10.3

**Appendix 1 RDC14: Examination of Performance and Progress - process flow chart**



**RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE**  
**The Graduate School**



University for the Common Good

**Form RDC 14**  
**EXAMINATION OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND PROGRESS**

**Purpose:**

All research students are expected to make satisfactory academic progress throughout their programme of study. If the student fails to show satisfactory academic performance at any stage of their programme, they can be requested to undertake an examination of performance and progress to demonstrate that they have made satisfactory progress and that they have the ability to pursue study at doctoral level. Students are required to prepare a full written progression report, give an oral presentation and undertake a formal mini-viva examination for the supervisors and relevant research experts appointed by the School Research Progression and Awards Board.

**Section 1 Student Information**

<b>Full Name</b>	
<b>Student ID</b>	
<b>School</b>	

**Section 2 Registration**

<b>Registered for</b>	<b>MPhil</b> <b>PhD</b> <b>ProfD</b> (Delete as Applicable)
<b>Matriculation Date</b>	
<b>Mode of Attendance</b>	<b>Part-time</b> <b>Full-time</b> (Delete as Applicable)
<b>Title of research programme</b>	
<b>Date of approval of RDC 1</b>	
<b>Date of approval of RDC2</b>	
<b>Expected date of completion</b>	

## Section 3 Supervisors

<b>Director of Studies</b>	
<b>Second Supervisor</b>	
<b>Third Supervisor</b>	

## Section 4 Report by Supervisors (To be completed by the Supervisory Team)

<b>Is this form a Resubmission?</b> The resubmission must be made on a new RDC14 form and this box checked to indicate the resubmission.	Yes/No Delete as Applicable
<b>On the candidate's progress within their project</b>	
<b>On the candidate's progress with the programme of related studies: Please attach the candidate's updated Personal Development Plan and Record and comment on progress to date and future plans</b>	
<b>Has the student received the required minimum number of supervision sessions, normally 12 per year for full time students and 6 per year for part time students?</b>	
<b>Ethics - Are there any additional or outstanding ethical implications? If yes full details should be provided. (Please note that approval of the project by the University Ethics Committee and/or External Ethical Committees may be required). If ethical approval had not been given at the date of the RDC1 and/or RDC2 submission, please state here the date and details of ethical approval. Please state here the status of any applications for additional or continuing ethical approval. Have any ethical issues been addressed/resolved during the viva?</b>	

<b>Signed by Director of Studies</b>		<b>Dated</b>	
<b>Signed by 2<sup>nd</sup> Supervisor</b>		<b>Dated</b>	
<b>Signed by 3<sup>rd</sup> Supervisor</b>		<b>Dated</b>	



**Section 5 Summary of Progress** (To be completed by the student)

The Candidate is required to submit the progression report for approval by the candidate's School. The progression report should normally be from 6,000 to 8,000 words (max) in length. The candidate should be guided by the requirements of the Director of Studies for the written report and presentation at the mini-viva. The progression document should show progress to date and plans to progress in the future. The list of possible components is shown below.

I declare that the work contained in the attached report/abstract is my own

<b>Signed by Candidate</b>		<b>Dated</b>	
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**Progression Report Components**

The progression report (6,000-8,000 words) could include:

- Abstract\* (please insert also below)
- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Literature Review
- Research Aim and Research Objectives
- Methodology and Methods including Ethical Considerations
- Data Collection and Results
- Conclusions and Outline of Future Work (provide Timetable in Appendix)

**\* The 500 word abstract below should accompany the form to the School Research and Progression Board.**

<b>Progression Report Abstract (max 500 words)</b>

**Section 6a. Moderators' Comments** (To be completed by the Academic Moderators)

Signed by 1 <sup>st</sup> Moderator (D.o.S. or Nominated Supervisor)		Print Name	Dated	
Signed by 2 <sup>nd</sup> Moderator (not a member of Supervisory team)		Print Name	Dated	

The table below should be completed by the moderators based on: the written report; presentation; and viva exam performance.

Progress Review Assessment Form (written report, presentation and viva exam)	
Areas for Consideration	Brief Comments/Recommendations
<b>ACADEMIC RIGOUR</b>	
Has this research the potential to make a new and original contribution to knowledge?	
Has the research question been clearly justified by the literature review?	

Is the research project grounded in relevant theory/theories?	
Is the research design appropriate and justified?	
Does the project show clear development at PhD level?	
<b>STUDENT PROGRESS AND RESEARCH CAPACITY</b>	
Does the student demonstrate an understanding of the proposed research and theoretical models?	
Does the student demonstrate the capacity to carry out the proposed project?	
Are there any concerns arising from the student's module grades (Prof D students only)?	
Is the written work to the academic standard expected?	
Is the Written/Spoken English language to the standard required at this stage?	
Please provide additional comments on the presentation and viva exam	
Is the rate of progress satisfactory?	
<b>FEASIBILITY</b>	
Is the project feasible within the available time and resources?	
<b>ETHICS</b>	
Does the project appear to be ethical?	
Have ethical issues been addressed/resolved?	

**Section 6b. Moderators' Feedback Received** (To be completed by the Student)

<b>Signed by Student confirming that they have received this feedback from the Moderators after the viva exam</b>		<b>Print Name</b>	<b>Dated</b>	
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**Section 7. Moderators' Recommendations** (To be completed by the Academic Moderators)

Students who are successful at this Examination Review of Performance and Progress have their status as doctorate students confirmed (outcome 1). Those who are deemed unsuccessful have 3 possible outcomes at first attempt (2, 3 and 4 below). For outcome 2, they are given specific feedback on where they need to improve and are asked to return for a second attempt; if they are again unsuccessful they will be required to exit the PhD/ProfD programme and either pursue an MPhil qualification (outcome 3) or withdraw from the programme of study (outcome 4).

<b>Progression Review Decisions</b>	<b>Please select one of the decisions and provide comments</b>
1. A recommendation by the University that the student can progress with their doctorate.	
2. A recommendation that the student is given the opportunity to re-submit the written report for progression normally within 4 weeks FT and 6 weeks PT from the date of the viva exam. A. Re-submit the written report with amendments only + a second RDC14 form, OR B. Re-submit the written report and re-sit formal mini-viva exam and/or presentation + a second RDC14 form.  *This is not an option if the application is a resubmission*	A or B Delete as applicable if this outcome is selected. .
3. A recommendation that the student be registered as an MPhil student.	
4. A recommendation that the student's registration be terminated. This should be supported by evidence that the student has received documentation on lack of progress during the period of study.	

**FOR INTERNAL USE ONLY****Section 8 Support by School**

<b>Approved by PGRT</b>		<b>Dated</b>	
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<b>Research Administrator Check</b>		<b>Dated</b>	
<b>Approved by ADR</b>		<b>Dated</b>	

<b>Date Sent to Clerk of the School RPAB</b>	
<b>Date Approved by School RPAB</b>	

**Checklist of materials to be submitted with the RDC14 form**

- |   |        |
|---|--------|
| 1. Signed RDC14 form                                    | Yes/No |
| 2. Any emails confirming approval in lieu of signatures | Yes/No |
| 3. Progression Review Report                            | Yes/No |
| 4. Personal Development Plan and Record                 | Yes/No |