Post-Graduate Researcher progress reviews in COESE: a guide for PGRs and staff

This is a general guide for the whole college. There may be small differences between schools, in which case you should follow any school-specific guidance.

Any questions not answered by this doc should be directed to:

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The review system is at: https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/postgrad_review/ (you can check who a PGR’s supervisors, internal and chair are here, and also on MyBangor).

For any issues with your details on the system, contact: Chris Parry sciencesite.pgr@bangor.ac.uk

A). What are the aims of the reviews?

1. Assess progress: For PhD/MPhils: in the first year recommend whether the PGR proceeds to a PhD or MPhil (as applicable); in subsequent years recommend whether the PGR continues or transfers to an alternative program. For MScRes: assess whether they are on track to complete their degree within the expected 12-15 months from registration.

2. Provide constructive advice and support to the PGR, helping them to improve their research and publish it.

3. Prepare the PGR for their viva.

The new regulations have lots of detail in section 5 about the requirements https://www.bangor.ac.uk/regulations/regulations.php.en, and this is also covered in the CoESE induction lectures (on Blackboard: CoESE Postgraduate Research).

1. Assessing progress

- Reviews are not a formality that the PGR passes by default. PGRs should prepare for them thoroughly and expect searching questions.
- Reviews are an important mechanism for assuring the quality of our research degrees: both the training and experience provided to the PGR and the resulting thesis/papers.
- The committee has a responsibility to the PGR, the school and the university to ensure the PGR completes their degree successfully and on time: tackle any issues earlier rather than later.
- If progress is not satisfactory, the committee will make recommendations and require another meeting (usually within three months). A new review will be created on the system for this review, and a new set of forms will be completed. Committees should not shy away from this option, which does not necessarily reflect badly on the PGR who may have suffered setbacks outside their control. Note: problems and setbacks are not a reason to avoid holding a review by the deadline, or to pass a PGR without a second meeting.
- The committee should also consider the PGR’s needs (for training, support, equipment etc). Committees will make recommendations to supervisors or the school (via the PGR leads) if additional support is required – make sure PGR leads are aware of any issues.
2. Improving the quality of the research

- The reviews should not be treated as a bureaucratic box ticking exercise: have rigorous, interesting discussions about the science.
- The annual review is an opportunity for the PGR to get input from another subject specialist who has read their work thoroughly, in addition to their supervisors.
- The committee will comment on whether the PGR is on course to produce publishable work: a PhD thesis is required to contain work of publishable quality and expect MScRes and MPhils to also produce publishable work.
- The PGR will provide their plans for publishing their research. The experience of publishing in a peer-reviewed journal is an integral part of research training and the college’s expectation is that all PGRs will publish at least one peer-reviewed paper from their thesis.

3. Prepare the PGR for their viva

- PGRs who have been through robust annual review meetings will be much better prepared for their viva.
- Committees should treat the reviews like a scaled down viva (especially in the final year), and PGRs should prepare accordingly. Just like a viva, they will include plenty of searching questions and in-depth discussion, in a positive and constructive environment.

B). When do reviews take place?

- MScRes: February-March (for those who registered in Sept/Oct). 4-5 months post registration for others, i.e. by end May for Jan starts. Reviews will also be held for any MScRes who go into their second ‘grace’ year, normally during Feb-March regardless of when they originally started.
- PhD and MPhil: no later than 9 months post-registration (and 21, 33 etc months post reg in subsequent years). I.e. for PGRs who started in an October reviews should be completed before the end of June each year.
- Note that the system may refer in different places to “forms deadline” and “Review to be completed by” – these are the same.
- Re-reviews, if needed, should normally be completed within 3 months of the 1st review.

C). When might a review be delayed or cancelled?

- If a PGR has suspended their studies for a period (e.g. maternity leave) the review deadline can be delayed until they have returned to work but should be conducted within a couple of months of return. Of course, the time out should be taken into account by the committee when considering progress, but it is important the PGRs have a review to ensure they are adequately supported.
- If the previous year’s review was delayed (e.g. due to suspension) the next year’s review can be held up to 9 months after the previous year’s review, with appropriate allowance made when judging progress.
- Part-time students should be reviewed every year, with appropriate allowance for their PT status in terms of the progress expected. So: PT status is NOT a reason to delay a review.
- PGRs who have submitted their thesis do not need a review unless the PGR or supervisor thinks one would be useful (e.g. as viva prep). We strongly discourage cancelling/postponing reviews for students who are “about to submit” (certainly unless they have near-final drafts of all chapters). Experience shows that this often takes longer than planned! Instead, it is
better to hold them as early as possible to maximise usefulness. If a PGR really is nearing submission, preparing the forms for the review meeting should be a very easy task!

- In all cases, please email sciencesite.pgr@bangor.ac.uk and the relevant PGR lead if you believe the deadline needs to be changed or if a review is not required.
- Review meetings can of course be held by Teams.

D). Who does what, when?

**PGRs**

- PGRs should contact their supervisors as soon as the reviews are created to discuss when and how the meeting will be arranged – some supervisors may delegate this to the PGR, some may prefer to set it up themselves.
- Schedule a minimum of 1hr for an MScRes review meeting, and 1.5hrs for PhD/MPhil.
- Once a time has been agreed, PGRs should enter the date into this form: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VUXHxiQpKk2b1OzjuoJbsq8oXSKkBdLi8vFWFgQBUkZQk2MjhjRFUyQzA5S1hDTk82VRUOlRIJi4u so the PGR leads know the meeting has been arranged.
- Complete your PGR form AND survey on the review system https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/postgrad_review/ by the deadline and at least 1 week before your review meeting. You might want to also email any uploaded documents to your committee, in case of technical problems.
- If uploading more than one chapter/paper, the PGR should let their Internal know which is the most important to read in detail.
- After the meeting, you will get an automated email asking you to “Agree” the outcomes of the meeting – you should log into the system and either agree them or consult with your chair if you have concerns (don’t “disagree” until you have first consulted with the chair).

**Supervisors**

- Contact your PGR as soon as the reviews are created, to discuss arranging the meeting, and what the PGR needs to do to prepare.
- Either help your PGR set a date for the meeting or take charge yourself if you prefer – but make sure it gets done in a timely fashion!
- Help your PGR prepare for the review – give timely feedback on e.g. their lit reviews etc.
- Submit your supervisor’s form in plenty of time (definitely at least 1 week before the meeting date).
- Supervisors are normally welcome to attend meetings, especially in the first year. However, they should usually be “seen and not heard”, and should refrain from answering questions instead of the PGR.
- After the meeting, you will get an automated email asking you to “Agree” the outcomes of the meeting – you should log into the system and either agree them or consult with your chair if you have concerns (don’t “disagree” until you have first consulted with the chair).

**Chairs**

- Although the supervisor/PGR will take the lead in organising the meeting, the chair is ultimately responsible for ensuring it happens and the review is concluded by the deadline.
So if you haven’t heard anything you will need to chase up. You can easily check the status of all the reviews you are involved in on the system.

- Read the forms before the meeting (the chair doesn’t need to read uploaded documents like chapters or lit reviews). If the PGR’s forms are submitted too late to allow proper scrutiny, the chair should consider returning an unsatisfactory verdict and scheduling a new review.
- Chair the meeting and ask questions, ensuring that the PGR is treated fairly, and is given the opportunity to talk about the supervisory relationship in confidence (without the supervisor present). **Note:** the chair should always do this even if all seems to be well. They should not ask the PGR if they want this opportunity.
- Ensure that supervisors, if present, do not dominate proceedings.
- Ensure that the forms are completed in a timely fashion after the meeting (in consultation with the internal), and ensure that the supervisor and PGR agree to the outcomes. Usually the best way is for the internal and chair to stay on for a few minutes after the meeting to complete all the forms there and then.
- Once the report is finalised and submitted **at least one action must be added.**
- NB: The internal and chair have equal access to all documents and functions on the review system.

Internals

- Internals should read at least one substantial doc (draft chapter or lit review) in full for each annual review, in addition to the thesis plan and other shorter docs, and provide feedback.
- During the meeting, Internals will normally ask most of the questions of the PGR.

All staff should check [https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/postgrad_review/](https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/postgrad_review/) that all reviews in which they are involved (as chair, internal or supervisor) are 100% completed before the deadline and chase up accordingly. Every year a huge amount of our time is wasted chasing up reviews that have not been completed.

**E). Who is on the committee?**

**The chair:** a senior academic, research active and experienced in supervising and examining PhDs, not necessarily a subject specialist. They chair the meeting, ensure due process, and advise on the progress expected at each stage. They will also normally chair the PGR’s viva. By default they act as the PGRs personal tutor, with whom the PGR can discuss anything which they do not want to discuss with their supervisor. While supervisors should always be the PGR’s first point of contact, PGRs are encouraged to discuss any concerns with their chair/personal tutor and/or the school’s PGR leads at any time during their degree if they wish. Chairs are appointed by the PGR lead/PGR admin shortly after PGRs register, and PGRs and supervisors will receive an email informing them of this.

**Internal:** a subject specialist, qualified to evaluate the research and provide subject-specific advice. They will normally act as the internal examiner at the viva, but this should be reviewed as the viva approaches. When a PGR starts, the supervisor identifies a suitable internal and, having secured their consent, lets the PGR lead and PGR admin know, and the PGR is informed.

PGRs and staff can check who the committee is by looking at the review system or on MyBangor.
**F). Who else is involved?**

**Supervisor(s).** Unlike the viva, supervisors can attend review meetings and are encouraged to do so – this will be especially valuable in the first and second year. However, the PGR should do the talking and the supervisor should only contribute when requested by the committee.

**External supervisors.** Many PGRs in COESE have external supervisors from other institutions. Although they won’t be able to access the online system directly (unless they have a Bangor login) they are encouraged to contribute to the supervisor’s evidence form and to attend the review meeting. After the review meeting, the chair’s form and actions should be shared with external supervisors (it can be downloaded and saved as a PDF).

**G). Post-Graduate Researcher’s form**

- Incomplete forms can be saved without submitting, but I recommend drafting the text for the form in Word then pasting into the online system and/or saving the form frequently to avoid losing text if it times out.
- This form is completed by the PGR prior to the meeting. It is only seen by the committee (internal and chair) not by the supervisor(s).
- However, PGRs can ask their supervisors for advice on any part of the form. E.g. PGRs would normally discuss their chapter plan and other documents with their supervisors before submitting.
- Make sure you give clear and self-explanatory file names to all of your documents.
- Remember that you can also discuss issues in confidence with your chair/personal tutor at any time during your studies. If you have an important/sensitive issue to discuss with them you might wish to arrange to see them prior to the annual review meeting.

**H). PGR’s survey**

As well as the form above, PGRs complete a survey (which again is only seen by the chair and internal). Unlike the PGR and staff forms, this survey is standardised across the whole university.

**I). Supervisor’s evidence form**

- Incomplete forms can be saved without submitting, but I recommend drafting the text for the form in Word then pasting into the online system.
- This form is completed by the supervisor(s) prior to the meeting (co-supervisors who are university staff have equal access to the system).
- Normally the principal supervisor will complete the form in discussion with co-supervisors, but any Bangor University co-supervisor can complete the form (as long as they are listed on Banner as a co-supervisor). Supervisors are welcome to share/discuss drafts of the form with co-supervisors outside Bangor (e.g. CEH, KESS partner).
- NB: The supervisor’s form is only seen by the committee, but the chair’s form will be seen by all.

**J). Chair/Internal’s report**

- This is nearly identical to the supervisor’s form. It is completed by the committee (internal & chair) during/after the meeting, based on the supervisor’s form, the Post-Graduate Researcher’s (PGR’s) form and survey, and the meeting itself.
- Chair and internal have identical access to the form.
• The chair & internal must also note some actions to be undertaken by the PGR, supervisor, or other parties (e.g. the PGR lead). They will also choose an “outcome”.
• Once the form is finalised and at least one action added, the form is automatically sent to the PGR and supervisor for their agreement. If they do not agree, they will be able to add a comment explaining why they don’t agree, and the chair & internal can choose to either modify the report/actions/outcome or overrule them.
• Please make sure that you finalise the form, add at least one action and send for agreement.

Progress Rubric

On the staff forms, “progress rubric” is a scale with the following options:

• Met or exceeded all specified requirements.
• Substantively met requirements, targeted improvement needed in some areas.
• Failed to meet requirements in some areas. Significant improvement is required.
• Failed to meet requirements for the programme.

A PGR doesn’t need to be given the highest result in every section to end up with a “proceed” outcome. Indeed, it is common for a committee to class several areas as needing targeted or significant improvement, but still recommend “progress/continue”. The PGR and/or supervisors would then be given specific actions to complete before the next annual review.

Outcomes

The committee can recommend the following outcomes:

  o Progress/Continue (in which case another review will be held in 1 year’s time)
  o Unsatisfactory: Re-review within three months
  o Transfer to alternative program (e.g. for PhD transfer to MPhil or MSc by Research).
  o Withdraw from studies

The latter two cases should be discussed with the PGR lead and will be referred to the Dean of Graduate Studies, who makes the final decision.

K). PGR Review System Screen Shots

Step 1 go to https://apps.bangor.ac.uk/postgrad_review/ (Log on required)

Step 2 then you should see the following
At this point follow the instruction to click on the ‘review’ in the grey navigation bar.

PGRs - only your own PGR review should appear
Staff will have a different view to students as they have 3 potential roles: internal, supervisor, and chair and can click on each of these separately to bring up something like the following). In the following example, there is also ‘progress report’ which only PGR leads can see.
Click on the blue ‘Review ID’ number on the left to bring up something that looks like the following:
Then PGRs need to complete the first 2 forms while the supervisor fills in the ‘supervisor evidence form’ (in this case I have completed it so it has already gone green).
The steps required after this point can be completed only once all 3 forms are completed.