

Board Of Studies For Research Degrees

Procedures and Notes for Guidance on the submission and consideration of the R2 Progress Report

'Mid-Programme Assessment of Progression in PhD Programmes'

August 2022

Note: These *Procedures and Notes for Guidance* shall apply to all doctoral candidates **except** those registered for Retrospective Route A leading to the degree of PhD by Published Work or PhD by Practice.

Preamble

Section 6 of the *Research Degree Regulations* describes the procedures for the mid-programme assessment of progression in PhD programmes. The Board of Studies has decided that the following notes for guidance should be issued so as to clarify the requirements during this important stage of research programme development. These notes and other documents and forms referred to are available from the University's website.

1. Documents Required

- 1.1 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees requires doctoral candidates presenting for the mid-programme assessment of their progression to **submit Form R2** as evidence of (a) the progress which has been made with the research and (b) the plans for its development to PhD standard, sufficient to justify progression through the programme. **Candidates and/or their Director of Studies must clarify the precise requirements in their individual case with the Research Co-ordinator responsible for their subject area.**

Form R2 must be accompanied by the following:

- 1.1.1 **A provisional draft of the proposed chapter titles** (where applicable) of the PhD thesis and/or a provisional draft abstract (maximum 300 words) of the thesis

and either:

- 1.1.2 **A full progress report** (between 3000 and an absolute maximum of 6000 words in length),

or

1.1.3 **A short progress report** (an absolute maximum of 1000 words in length),
accompanied by:

- **Normally a minimum of three draft chapters of the thesis, or:**
- **At least one output (peer-reviewed where appropriate) which has been published or accepted for publication, or:**
- **At least one item of evidence of practice.**

1.2 Note that the progress report itself must be an analysis of what has been accomplished so far and what the precise nature of the PhD stage of the work will be, including the original contribution it will make to the subject.

1.3 Once authorised by the candidate's supervisors, documentation should be submitted to the University's Research Degrees Administrator, who will record its receipt and initiate the procedures for consideration of the application by a local Standing Panel of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.

2. Establishment of Local Standing Panel

2.1 The relevant Research Coordinator or other responsible person shall select members for a Standing Panel of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees, following the requirements laid down in the terms of reference of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees (see section 6 below) and inform the designated Administrator accordingly. Note that the Board's terms of reference allow it to establish Standing Panels for off-campus students where a member of partner staff fulfills the role of external Standing Panel member

2.2 The Administrator shall arrange for the Standing Panel to convene at its earliest convenience to consider the transfer application/progress report and will normally act as Standing Panel Secretary.

3. Conduct and Outcomes of Panel Meeting

3.1 The Standing Panel Chair should outline the procedures to be followed, refer to the criteria against which the application is to be judged, and describe the reporting process. The Panel will then either:

- 3.1.1 observe a brief (maximum 20 minutes) oral presentation by the candidate (which may be live - whether face-to-face and/or online, or an audio-visual recording of sufficiently good quality made by the candidate) and which illustrates their R2 progress report;

and/or

- 3.1.2 have access to the completed R2 feedback form based upon the presentation previously made by the candidate.
- 3.2 Normally (except under circumstances described in 5.1.1 below) the Panel will also engage in synchronous or asynchronous discussion with the candidate (normally for 15–20 minutes), concentrating on matters which relate to the criteria listed in section 4 below. The supervisor(s), if present, may assist the candidate in responding, or offer clarification if they think it necessary, or if requested. However, it should be noted that the Panel will be concerned in part with the candidate's capacity to engage in authoritative debate reflecting familiarity with issues related to the research and its wider context.
- 3.3 At the conclusion of the proceedings the candidate leaves the Standing Panel meeting whilst the Panel formulates its conclusions and a recommendation to be forwarded to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees for consideration.
- 3.4 The outcomes of a Panel meeting may be to recommend that:
 - 3.4.1 The candidate is permitted to progress, with recommendations for the subsequent stages of the research and/or the content and/or structure of the thesis if appropriate.
 - 3.4.2 The candidate is referred until the Panel can be satisfied on specified points (with or without additional recommendations, as above).
 - 3.4.3 The candidate is not permitted to progress and must either change course (e.g. to a Master of Philosophy, Professional Doctorate, or taught Masters programme), or be withdrawn from the University on grounds of unsatisfactory academic performance.
- 3.5 Where the candidate is referred under 3.4.2 above, the Standing Panel must agree and record both the means by which the candidate is required to address their concerns and the process through which the Panel will subsequently consider whether it is satisfied on the referral points. These might comprise, for example, Chair's Action or distribution to Panel members in respect of any written response from the candidate, or a reconvened Panel (with or without the candidate being present).
- 3.6 Supervisors are requested to relay relevant information to the candidate soon after the meeting.
- 3.7 Brief written minutes of the Standing Panel meeting will be prepared by the Secretary to the Standing Panel, who will arrange for the minutes to be approved by the Standing Panel Chair and then made available to Standing Panel members, the candidate's supervisors, the candidate, and the Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.

Supervisors are required to discuss the content of the minutes with the candidate without delay.

- 3.8 The Chair of the Standing Panel should only authorise the final R2 progress report (i.e. that which may have been revised and which has resulted in a recommendation that the candidate be permitted to progress) and pass it back to the designated Administrator. The Administrator will inform the candidate's supervisors and the candidate accordingly and pass the final R2 progress report and all Standing Panel minutes to the Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.
- 3.9 The Secretary to the Board of Studies for Research Degrees will arrange for all relevant Standing Panel minutes (including, where applicable, those from initial and reconvened Panels) to be considered by the next meeting of the Board and for all R2 documentation to be stored in the student's centrally held file.

4. Criteria for Consideration of Mid-Programme Assessment of Progression

- 4.1 The Board of Studies for Research Degrees must be satisfied that the research so far completed provides a sound basis for the proposed development to PhD and that the latter comprises a programme which is likely to lead to a significant contribution to knowledge and which the candidate is capable of completing. The following points should therefore be given particular attention in the application; they should also provide a framework for the Standing Panel's consideration of R2 progress report.
- 4.1.1 Clarity and appropriateness of the overall objectives of the research.
- 4.1.2 Currency, completeness and cogency of the theories and findings presented in the literature review.
- 4.1.3 Transparency and validity of the theoretical and empirical framework of the research so far completed.
- 4.1.4 Adequacy of the description and justification of the essential features of the research methodology for the research so far completed.
- 4.1.5 Clarity of the summary of main findings from the research so far completed and their practical and theoretical implications and impact.
- 4.1.6 Explicitness and strength of the stated relationship between the research so far completed and its proposed development to PhD.
- 4.1.7 Clarity of the specific aims, objectives and methods of the PhD component and the achievability of the timescale envisaged for their attainment.

- 4.1.8 Exposition and adequacy of the qualitative distinctiveness of the PhD component which justifies the claim that it will represent a significant contribution to knowledge.
- 4.1.9 Demonstrable technical proficiency in English language in the written submission including style, clarity, spelling, grammar and punctuation.
- 4.2 The length of transfer/progress reports may vary between 1000 and an absolute maximum of 6000 words, as per 1.1.2-1.1.3 above (this upper limit does not apply to thesis chapters or to publications or other outputs). Note however that reports which display clarity and conciseness in the achievement of their purpose are likely to be more favourably received.
- 4.3 Within these word limits it is suggested that approximately two thirds of the report should be concerned with the description of the research so far completed (4.1.1 – 4.1.5 above) whilst the remaining one third should be taken up with the development of the PhD (4.1.6 – 4.1.8 above). **By far the most common reason for referral of reports is that insufficient attention has been paid to one or more of the matters listed in 4.1.7 – 4.1.8 above.**

5. Off-Campus Students

- 5.1 Students studying at off-campus locations (normally outside the UK but exceptionally - and only with the Board's permission - inside the UK) may make their presentation of their research progress to date and planned further work in **one** of the following three ways:
 - 5.1.1 Presentation at a conference arranged for the purpose in the host country. This is useful when cohorts of students are reaching the same stage simultaneously. The presentation should be observed either via physical presence and/or synchronous online audiovisual link by at least three members of staff who are not the student's supervisors, at least one of whom must be a member of University of Bolton staff.
 - 5.1.2 Audiovisual recording of sufficiently good quality prepared by the student, with asynchronous questions asked through e-mail or chat-room by a formally constituted Standing Panel convened to consider the R2 application, all or some of whom may either be physically present or online.
 - 5.1.3 Synchronous presentation to - and consideration of the R2 application by - a formally constituted Standing Panel, all or some of whom may either be physically present or online.

Note that the Board's terms of reference already allow it to establish Standing Panels for offcampus students where a member of partner staff fulfills the role of external Standing Panel member.

- 5.2 In the case of 5.1.1 above, the R2 application itself may or may not be available in draft form at the time of the conference/online presentation but it will in any case be completed

subsequently for consideration by a formal Standing Panel convened for the purpose. In such cases at least one of the non-supervising members of staff who witnessed the presentation should be a member of - and provide feedback to - the Standing Panel convened to consider the R2. Feedback on the presentation may be aggregated where several staff and/or conference delegates are asked to complete the pro-forma during the presentation. The notable differences between the normal procedure and 5.1.1 above are that in the latter the student presentation precedes the formal submission and consideration of the R2 by the Standing Panel, and that there may be only partial overlap between those staff who observe the student presentation and the members of the Standing Panel subsequently considering the R2. Therefore, the Standing Panel may exercise the right to view the presentation (either live or in recorded form) and engage in discussion with the candidate (either face-to-face or online – whether synchronously or asynchronously), as it sees fit.

- 5.3 Other documents will be presented to Standing Panel in accordance with current regulations and procedures, including the completed presentation evaluation sheet if the presentation has preceded the Standing Panel.

Note that the presentation forms only one component of the R2 process and that the midprogramme assessment as a whole, including the written material, must meet the criteria described in Section 4 of these *Procedures and Notes for Guidance*.

6. Standing Panels

- 6.1 In addition to its normal meetings, the Board of Studies for Research Degrees shall make use of Standing Panels convened by the responsible person (the Convenor) in each academic department.
- 6.2 The Convenor should ensure that each Standing Panel shall include:
- 6.2.1 at least three members selected by the Convenor for their capacity to make a meaningful contribution to the business under consideration by the Panel; members may be included who are relatively inexperienced in research degree matters, as long as the capacity of the Standing Panel to arrive at valid decisions is not compromised as a result;
 - 6.2.2 adequate representation from the relevant research area(s), bearing in mind the business under consideration at the Panel's meeting;
 - 6.2.3 at least one member who is external to the academic department; (note that Standing Panels may be established for off-campus students where the role of external Standing Panel member is undertaken by one or more partner staff, as long as all the other requirements of section 6 are also met);

- 6.2.4 at least one member who is also a member of the Board of Studies for Research Degrees;
 - 6.2.5 in the case of candidates whose presentation has been given separately (see 5.1.1 above), at least one of the non-supervising members of staff who witnessed the presentation;
 - 6.2.6 a member of the Professoriate or other senior researcher as Chair.
- 6.3 The Convener shall ensure that no Standing Panel Chair has direct involvement with any applicant under consideration (including acting in a supervisory or advisory capacity to the applicant). If this situation arises then an alternative Chair shall be appointed for the Standing Panel meeting in question.
- 6.4 Directors of Studies and second supervisors should be invited to be in attendance at Panel meetings convened to consider their own students but must not chair or be members of any such Panel, except in the case of Panels convened to assess the annual progress of all students in the academic department
- 6.5 Additionally, no Standing Panel shall comprise a membership in which half or more of its number have direct involvement with an applicant under consideration. If necessary, the Convener shall seek replacement members, whether internal and/or external to the academic department, so that the majority of Standing Panel members do not have direct involvement with an applicant under consideration.
- 6.6 Panels shall consider:
- 6.6.1 Proposals for initial registration;
 - 6.6.2 Proposals for transfer from Master of Philosophy to Doctor of Philosophy;
 - 6.6.3 Mid-programme assessments in respect of applicable students registered for PhD direct;
 - 6.6.4 The annual progress of research students.
- Panels are responsible for making clear recommendations to the Board on the registration, annual and mid-term progress, and transfer of award intention by students, with the Board having the final right of approval of all recommendations.
- 6.7 Upon request by the Convener, an Administrator will normally make the practical arrangements for the Standing Panel and act as Panel Secretary, recording the proceedings and producing a report for the Board of Studies.

R2 - Mid-programme Assessment of Progression in PhD Programmes
Evaluation of R2 *Progress Report *and *Presentation *(delete
if not applicable)

Name of Standing Panel member				
Student's name				
Title of research programme				
Date on R2 form				
		(Y)ES or (N)O	COMMENT	GRADE*
1.	Is there demonstrable technical proficiency in English language in the written submission including style, clarity, spelling, grammar and punctuation?			
2.	Is the title consistent with the R1? <i>Where a change is requested, confirm the revised title and complete an R9 form, for approval at the Board of Studies for Research Degrees.</i>			
3.	Does the research have clear aims and objectives?			
4.	Is there a clear problem definition?			
5.	Is the background to the research sufficiently contextualised and clear?			
6.	Is the case for undertaking the research well-articulated and clear?			

7.	Is there evidence that the presenter has considered sufficient relevant and up to date literature in order to ensure that their work is being considered in the context of work undertaken by others in this field?			
8.	Is the methodology clear and exhaustive, to the extent that substantive conclusions can be drawn from any results?			
9.	Does the presentation identify where the contribution to knowledge will be in the context of a PhD - as identified in the adjacent column?	(a) The discovery of new empirical data		
		(b) The exercise of independent critical powers and the generation of theoretical hypotheses?		
10.	Would the research, subject to amendments, be worthy of publication in an international journal?			
11.	Were the slides clear, easy to read and informative? (Presenters have been reminded of the need to present a small number of clear informative slides consistent with the time allowed for presentation.)			
12.	Was the presentation clear and succinct?			
13.	Did the researcher adequately respond to questions and discuss issues raised?			

* Rate on a scale of 1-5 where 5 = Excellent, 4 = Very Good, 3 = Good, 2 = Average, 1 = Below average

Formal criteria for transfer/mid-term assessment

4.1.1 Clarity and appropriateness of the overall objectives of the research.

4.1.2 Currency, completeness and cogency of the theories and findings presented in the literature review.

4.1.3 Transparency and validity of the theoretical and empirical framework given as the basis of the MPhil component and/or of the research so far completed.

4.1.4 Adequacy of the description and justification of the essential features of the research methodology for the MPhil component and/or of the research so far completed.

- 4.1.5 Clarity of the summary of main findings from the MPhil component and/or of the research so far completed and their practical and theoretical implications and impact.
- 4.1.6 Explicitness and strength of the stated relationship between the MPhil component and/or of the research so far completed and its proposed development to PhD.
- 4.1.7 Clarity of the specific aims, objectives and methods of the PhD component and the achievability of the timescale envisaged for their attainment.
- 4.1.8 Exposition and adequacy of the qualitative distinctiveness of the PhD component which justifies the claim that it will represent a significant contribution to knowledge.
- 4.1.9 Demonstrable technical proficiency in English language in the written submission including style, clarity, spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Procedures and Notes for Guidance on the submission and consideration of the R2 Progress Report	
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