UON University of Northampton

Postgraduate Research Satisfactory Progress Policy

1 Introduction and background

1.1 The Academic Regulations for Research Students and the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice set out the expectations of research degree students. This policy covers those instances when students are not meeting their responsibilities and when concerns are raised about a student's progress, engagement or ability to meet the requirements of their programme.

1.2 The responsibilities of research degree students are set out in section 4.6 of the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice. It is expected that the process of regular supervision and researcher development, as described in the Postgraduate Research Supervision Policy and Framework for Postgraduate Researcher Development respectively, will ensure that students are aware of their responsibilities and are supported to meet them.

1.3 The responsibilities of the Director of Studies and the supervisor in supporting satisfactory progress are set out in section 4.2 and 4.3 of the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice.

2 Purpose and scope

2.1 This Policy supports the retention and progression of students by providing a procedure to help students to meet their responsibilities and to resolve concerns that are raised about a student's progress, engagement or ability to meet the requirements of their programme.

2.2 This policy applies to all research degrees programmes offered by the University of Northampton, as well as any delivered via partner arrangements, except where alternative arrangements have been agreed during the approval of the arrangement.

3.0 Definitions

3.1 Postgraduate Research Degrees are Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (including Practice-based PhDs in The Arts), Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) by Published Works, Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Professional Practice (Health and Social Care) (D.Prof.Prac) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil).

3.2   The Graduate School is the University's central hub for postgraduate research degree administration, quality assurance and researcher development. The Head of the Graduate School is the academic lead. The Postgraduate Research Manager and administrative staff provide a university-wide administration for research degrees programmes.

3.3   A student's progress may be deemed to be unsatisfactory when the supervisory team believes that they are not meeting their responsibilities as laid out in section 4.6 of the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice.

3.4   The requirements for PGR student engagement are set out in section 4.5 of the Academic Regulations for Research Students. A student may be referred to this policy by the supervisory team if they are not meeting these requirements.

4.0   Key principles

4.1   This policy is primarily to support students to make satisfactory progress towards the successful completion of their degree but also to support students and supervisors to recognise when their success is at risk and action is necessary, including where engagement does not meet requirements.

5.0   Procedure

Stage One – To be managed by the supervisory team

5.1   Any concerns about a student's progress, engagement or in relation to their responsibilities shall initially be raised with the student by the supervisory team at a routine supervisory meeting. Supervisors should indicate that they have concerns in Gateway by completing the 'concerns' section of the supervision log, making it visible to the student. Supervisors should then inform the Graduate School that they have initiated Stage 1.

5.2   When supervisors are concerned about a student's progress or engagement they should initiate Stage 1 of this procedure by ensuring that the student fully understands their responsibilities and the reasons why their progress or engagement is considered to be unsatisfactory. Where concerns relate to engagement of an international student on a Student Route or Tier 4 visa, initiation of Stage 1 will be used as the first point of non-engagement.

5.3   Initial measures taken will be supportive and may include, for example, the development of an action plan, additional training, recommendation of suspension of studies where there are personal difficulties, reformulation of topic or recommendation of transfer to a lower degree. Appropriate deadlines and measurable outcomes should be set by the supervisory team and clearly communicated to the student. Where personal difficulties include concerns about a student's health, wellbeing and fitness to study, it may be appropriate to

refer the student to the University's Health, Wellbeing and Fitness to Study Policy. In such cases, the Director of Studies should inform the Postgraduate Research Manager, who will provide further guidance.

5.4   The Director of Studies should be included in meetings with the student where such concerns are discussed. The team may also wish to include the Faculty's nominated Research Leader or Postgraduate Research Leader in such meetings. All meetings should be logged as part of the routine supervision record and agreed by the student and each member of the team. The agreed actions and deadlines should be recorded.

5.5   The student should be made aware that the measures taken constitute Stage 1 of this procedure and that continued lack of progress or engagement will be reported to the Research Degrees Board. The student should be referred to this Policy, the Academic Regulations for Research Students and the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice. Where the concern relates to non-engagement of an international student on a Student Route or Tier 4 visa, the student should also be made aware that continued non-engagement of 40 days from initiation of Stage 1 will be reported to the International Student Support team.

5.6   It is the responsibility of the supervisory team to follow-up tasks or deadlines set and notify the student if they have not been met satisfactorily and record any concerns in Gateway in a supervision meeting log.

5.7   Where a student starts to make satisfactory progress or engagement and fulfils their responsibilities as set out in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice, the student leaves Stage One of the procedure. Any future lack of satisfactory progress will be initiated again at Stage One.

Stage Two – Report to a Research Degrees Board member

5.8   If, following Stage One, supervisors continue to have concerns about whether a student is meeting their academic obligations or have serious doubts about a student's progress or ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered they should raise their concerns with the Chair of the appropriate Research Degrees Board (RDB). The Chair will identify an RDB member to meet the student and will inform the Graduate School of the RDB member overseeing Stage 2.

5.9   As described in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice, Research Degrees Board members fulfil a pastoral role and it is in this capacity that the RDB member will then discuss the matter with the student.

5.10   The RDB member should ensure that students fully understand their responsibilities and the reasons why their progress or engagement is considered

to be unsatisfactory. The student should be given the opportunity to disclose any reasons for their lack of satisfactory progress or engagement. The student should also be referred to this policy.

5.11   The RDB member should discuss their findings with the supervisory team and further supportive action may be recommended as described in 5.3 or it might be decided to progress the matter immediately to Stage Three. It is the responsibility of the RDB member and supervisory team to follow-up tasks or deadlines set and notify the student if they have not been met satisfactorily.

5.12   The supervisory team and the RDB member will determine when Stage Two has concluded. The RDB member shall provide a report to the RDB on the meeting with the student. The amount and level of detail given in any reports to RDBs will depend upon the nature of the issue. The RDB members must be sensitive to the confidentiality of students and other RDB members in their reports.

5.13   Where the student starts to make satisfactory progress and engagement and fulfils their responsibilities in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice, they will initially return to Stage 1 of this Policy. They may subsequently leave the Policy or, if they fail to make satisfactory progress or fulfil their responsibilities, they may return to Stage 2. A return to Stage 2 will be initiated by the supervisory team approaching the RDB Chair.

Stage Three – Formal report to the Chair of the Research Degrees Board

5.14   If, following Stage Two, a student's progress, engagement or ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered remain unsatisfactory the Director of Studies will formally report the matter to the Chair of the Research Degrees Board. Where such action is taken the student must be notified in writing by the Director of Studies and should be advised that they may make representations to the Board.

5.15   A student who has been referred to this procedure having not met or who will be unable to meet transfer or thesis submission timescales as set out in the Academic Regulations for Research Students shall be considered at Stage 3 directly. In such cases, the Research Degrees Board may initiate the Stage 3 process.

5.16   The Board will receive written submissions from the student, supervisory team, and where applicable, the Research Degrees Board member involved in Stage 2.

5.17   The Board will invite the student, supervisors, and (where applicable) the RDB member from Stage 2 to discuss the matter, except where 5.18 below is applied. The matter may be discussed at a routine meeting of the Research Degrees Board, or by convening a panel. Such panels will be chaired by the Chair of the

Research Degrees Board and will include two other members of the Board from subject areas other than that which the student is registered.

5.18   Where the case is referred directly to Stage 3 and the Board is satisfied that there is sufficient evidence within the written submissions to recommend supportive action, a recommendation may be confirmed without inviting the student and supervisory team to discuss the matter further. If the student will be offered the opportunity to discuss the outcome with the Board if they wish to do so.

5.20   Following consideration of all the circumstances the panel or board may recommend that:
i.   no further action is taken;
ii.   return to Stage One;
iii.   return to Stage Two;
iv.   termination of the registration is recommended.

5.21   The Officer to the board will inform the student of the recommendations in writing.

5.22   When 'no further action' is recommended, a record of the process will be held on the student's file and may be presented as evidence in any future proceedings carried out under this policy.

5.23   When 'return to Stage One' or 'return to Stage Two' is recommended, further supportive action may be recommended as described in 5.3, which may include conditions for progression with appropriate deadlines set by the RDB. Where these conditions are not met, the matter shall be referred to the Chair of the RDB for consideration at Stage Three of this policy. Where a student is referred to the Health, Wellbeing and Fitness to Study Policy, the RDB may wait until the conclusion of the procedures under that policy before setting conditions for progression.

5.24   If, having been returned to a previous Stage, a student's progress continues to be unsatisfactory, records of previous lack of satisfactory progress shall be considered as evidence at Stage Three.

5.25   If a student is given a 'formal written warning' and continues to fail to meet academic obligations the supervisory team shall report this in writing to the Chair of the RDB. Stage Three of this policy shall then be followed.

5.26   If 'termination of registration' is recommended the Officer to the RDB shall present the evidence reviewed by the board or panel to the Research Degrees Committee with the minutes of the board or panel meeting. The RDC may:

i.   terminate the student's registration

ii.   seek further information or evidence before agreeing an outcome

iii. return to Stage Two

5.27   When the outcome is termination of registration, the Officer to RDC shall inform the Academic Registrar. The Academic Registrar shall inform the student and supervisory team of the outcome in writing and the student shall be made aware of the Postgraduate Research Student Appeals Policy and the University's Complaints Policy.

5.28   When termination of registration is not recommended, the Officer to RDC shall inform the student and supervisory team of the RDC's recommendations in writing.

5.29   When 'return to Stage Two' is recommended, further supportive action may be recommended as described in 5.3, which may include conditions for progression with appropriate deadlines set by the RDC. Where these conditions are not met, the matter shall be referred to the Chair of the RDB for consideration at Stage Three of this policy. Where a student is referred to the Health, Wellbeing and Fitness to Study Policy, the RDC may wait until the conclusion of the procedures under that policy before setting conditions for progression.

6.0   Key responsibilities

6.1   Students are expected to meet the responsibilities as set out in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice and the Academic Regulations for Research Students. Each student is referred to the Code of Practice during the admissions process and at the compulsory induction.

6.2   Supervisory teams are responsible for the ongoing monitoring of students in relation to the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice and for raising concerns with students and other relevant parties as set out in this Policy

6.3   Directors of Study are responsible for supporting students and supervisors in taking action to ensure, as far as possible, that students meet their responsibilities and progress as required.

6.4   Research Degrees Board members have a pastoral responsibility towards students and should support students and supervisors to resolve any problems that occur.

6.5   Research Degrees Boards are responsible for receiving reports on students about whom concerns have been raised at Stage Two and Stage Three of this policy.

6.6   The Research Degrees Committee is responsible for considering recommendations from RDBs at Stage Three of this policy and for monitoring the cases referred under this policy.

7.0   Links to related UN Policies/Guidance/Regulations

Regulations
7.1   Academic regulations for Research Students
Policies
7.2   Postgraduate Research Supervision Policy
7.3   Framework for Postgraduate Researcher Development
7.4   Postgraduate Research Code of Practice
7.5   Postgraduate Research Thesis and Examination Policy
7.6   Research Ethics Code and Procedures
7.7   Complaints Policy
7.8   Postgraduate Research Degrees Appeals Policy
7.9   Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy
7.10   Research Misconduct Policy
7.11   Intellectual Property policy
Guidance
7.13   Transfer Guidance

8.0   Links to related external documents (e.g. QAA)

8.1   UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees

9.0   Appendices

Summary Sheet:

Policy Title:	
Postgraduate Research Satisfactory Progress Policy (formerly the Postgraduate Research Neglect of Academic Obligations policy)	

Purpose of Policy and to whom it applies (please specify cohorts):	
To meet the requirements of the QAA UK Quality Code for HE, Chapter B11: Postgraduate Research Degrees. This policy applies to all research degrees programmes offered by the University of Northampton, as well as any delivered via Education With Others arrangements, except where alternative arrangements have been agreed during the approval of the arrangement.	

Owner and Department:	
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Principal contact:	
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Dissemination and implementation plan:	
Via RDC and RDBs Via web	

Date of initial committee approval (state committee name):	Research Degrees Committee – June 2015
Date of Senate approval:	July 2015
Date for implementation and cohorts to which it applies:	All cohorts with immediate effect.
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Date of last annual update:	May 2023
Proposed date of full review:	
Date of last full review:	
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