



Swansea University  
Prifysgol Abertawe

School of Physical Sciences  
Department of Computer Science

Postgraduate Research Progression  
Procedures and Criteria

## 1 General Principles

The Department Research Committee has the remit of overseeing postgraduate research training in the Department and will therefore be responsible to the Head of Department for approving the procedures and the progression criteria contained herein, as well as possible future changes that may be considered necessary. The Head of Postgraduate Research will be responsible for the implementation of the procedures described below and will report to the Research Committee.

These procedures and criteria related predominantly to the PhD programme, though some mentions are made to the MPhil programme. These procedures and criteria will be reviewed yearly by the Research Committee during its first meeting in the Autumn term.

## 2 University Progression Rules

*This section summarises the University Regulations governing the progression monitoring of Postgraduate Research Students, as outlined in the **Swansea University Research Student Handbook 2008/09**, provided by the Academic Registry to all Research Students and Supervisors. Clarification and fuller details can be found in this document.*

The University's Postgraduate Research Faculty (PGRF) has a formal process for monitoring each research student's progress and deciding whether the student should be allowed to proceed with their research programme.

Within the first three months of a student's enrolment, a **Confirmation of Candidature** must be submitted by the Department confirming that the student has fulfilled all administrative requirements and is academically prepared to undertake an agreed research project.

Each research student will be assessed by the Department at least once a year and their progress reported to the PGRF Progression Board where a formal decision to allow the student to proceed or not is made. The recommendation made by the Department to the PGRF Progression Board will be based on a formal report produced by the student's main supervisor which the student is required to sign, having added any relevant comments.

There are three different types of report, depending on the stage of the studies at which the assessment is made: Probation, Progression, or Completion.

**Probation Stage Report:** Every research student starts with a one full year probationary period. A Probation Stage Report is produced at the end of the first year of a full-time PhD student's candidacy period (or at the end of the second year of a part-time PhD student's candidacy period, with an interim probationary report produced at the end of the first year). The student will be expected to have met the criteria set by the Department for determining the student's ability to proceed with their research programme. The following recommendations may be made by the department:

**Satisfactory. Pass Probation.** The student successfully completes probation. The next progress report will be due in one year.

**Moderate. Pass Probation. Next Report 6 months.** The student successfully passes probation, but there are concerns regarding progress. Therefore, a progress report will be required in six months.

**Extend Probation.** The probation criteria have not been met. The probation period is extended by six months, and a new Probation Stage Report must be submitted at the end of this extended probationary period.

**Required to Withdraw.** Progress is unsatisfactory, and the student is required to withdraw. (A transfer down from a PhD programme to an MPhil programme may be recommended in this case.)

**Progression Stage Report:** After a student has passed probation, a Progression Stage Report is produced on a yearly basis (or more frequently if required). These reports seek to establish whether the student's research project is proceeding according to schedule, and to highlight concerns and difficulties. The following recommendations may be made by the department:

**Progress Satisfactory.** Progress is satisfactory. The next progress report will be due in one year.

**Moderate. Report 6 months.** There are concerns regarding the likelihood of the project being completed within the normal candidacy period. Therefore, a progress report will be required in six months.

**Required to Withdraw.** Progress is a very serious concern, and the student is not expected to be able to complete the project within the maximum candidacy period. Therefore, the student is required to withdraw from the programme. (A transfer down from a PhD programme to an MPhil programme may be recommended in this case.)

**Completion Stage Report:** At the end of the normal candidacy period (three years for a full-time PhD student, or six years for part-time PhD students), the student is expected to have completed their research and be ready to submit their thesis. A Completion Stage Report is required at this time, and at six-monthly intervals thereafter. The following recommendations may be made by the department:

**Submitted.** The student has submitted their thesis.

**Continuing (Satisfactory).** The main body of research is completed, a first draft of the thesis has been produced and reviewed by the supervisors, and the student has agreed a work plan with the supervisors to ensure that submission will occur within six months.

**Continuing (Moderate).** The student has completed the main body of research; however, progress is a concern and concentrated effort is needed to ensure that the student submits within six months.

**Continue as Full Fee Paying.** The student is still carrying out a significant amount of research under full supervision and should therefore not progress to the Completion Stage.

**Lapsed – Not Expected to Submit.** The student is not expected to submit within maximum candidature.

### 3 Department Procedures

The procedures to be followed by the Department in order to submit the recommendations to each PGRF Progression Board will be as follows:

1. The Department's PGRF Representative distributes the progression forms for which progression recommendations are required to the relevant supervisors.

2. Every student to be reported on produces a report on their activities as outlined in Section 4.
3. Supervisors assess the students' progress based on their reports and interviews. Supervisors fill out the progression forms, which must include comments by the students (noting that they agree with the recommendation and/or outlining any areas of concern they have) and be signed by the students, and return these to the PGRF Representative.
4. The PGRF Representative brings the progression forms to the next meeting of the Department Research Committee, which makes formal recommendations to the PGRF Progression Board via the on-line system.
5. After the PGRF Progression Board, the PGRF Representative files all progression forms in the students' department files.

## 4 Progression Criteria

The academic criteria to be used to decide whether a student is allowed to progress are described below for each of the three types of report: probation, progression and completion.

### 4.1 Probation

This is a critical stage of a research candidature and a very careful assessment of the student's progress and potential must be made. In order to successfully pass probation the student must satisfy the following criteria:

- The student must have completed a state of the art review and must demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of all important concepts in the chosen topic of research.
- The student must show sufficient proficiency in any theoretical, practical and technical skills required for their research.
- The student must show potential to make an original contribution in the chosen field and must have identified the areas where this contribution will be made. Some initial progress towards this aim is welcomed and in many cases it should be expected. However, for some topics this may not always be possible at this stage.
- The student must demonstrate adequate written and oral communication skills. This will be assessed by requiring the student to complete a **Thesis Proposal**

of approximately 20 pages, which will be examined in an interview by (at least) the two supervisors. At this stage it is reasonable to expect that the communications skills may still need further development and that the student may still have some difficulties in expressing complex concepts in a logical manner or in answering searching questions. The minimum level, however, that should be accepted at this stage would be similar to that of a completing MSc/MRes student. For students whose first language is not English, a suitable proficiency in English is now essential.

If the above criteria are met, but only marginally leaving concerns about the student's ability to make satisfactory future progress, then the recommendation of "Moderate. Pass Probation. Next Report 6 Months" should be made.

A student who does not satisfy one or more of the above criteria should not be allowed to pass probation. If the deficiencies can be put right in a short period of time, and the student shows reasonable potential, the option of extending probation for six months should be chosen. If the failure relates to an inability to make an original contribution, the student should be downgraded to MPhil. In cases where the student shows clear failings in several of the above areas, a recommendation of "Required to Withdraw" must be made.

## 4.2 Progression

Satisfactory progress at this stage implies that the research is moving in accordance with a work plan that leads to completion within the normal candidature period. It is often the case that this plan may need to be constantly adjusted by agreement between the student and the main supervisor.

In addition to the criteria described above for probation, a student must by now have developed further their expertise in their field. They should have also made a significant original contribution and be competent in expressing their ideas orally and in writing. This will be assessed by requiring the student to write a **Progress Report** of about 10 pages, which will be examined in an interview by (at least) the two supervisors.

If the amount of progress made since probation is so small that the project is not expected to be finished within the maximum candidature period, then a decision should be made either to downgrade the student to MPhil, or in extreme cases to require the student to withdraw.

## 4.3 Completion

A **Completion Report** of about 5 pages is required just before a student reaches the end of their normal candidacy period, and thereafter at six-monthly intervals. The Com-

pletion Report will be examined in an interview by (at least) the two supervisors. At this stage, a student should ideally have submitted their thesis, or be in a position to submit their thesis before their enrolment period ends. If this is not the case, it is crucial that students re-enrol so that the University and the Department can keep track of their progress. A student in this situation can be re-enrolled as “Continuing” with no further tuition fees, or as a full fee-paying student.

A decision to re-enrol a student as “Continuing” without fees implies that the main research has been completed. All developments have been carried out and data gathered. There may, however, still be some data to be analysed or some examples to be finalised or interpreted. The student may also still need to write up their work in the form of a suitable thesis. The decision to force a student to re-enrol paying full fees would typically imply that data is still being gathered using Department facilities, or that more developments are needed before the work is deemed to have enough originality for the intended degree.

For MPhil students, a completion report is due at the end of year 1. Occasionally, students will wish to move on to a PhD at this stage, without the need to submit an MPhil thesis. In this case the criteria that should be used to make this decision is the same as for probationary doctoral students.