

Guidance for Independent Assessors of the Postgraduate Research Student Annual Progress Review.

The Process

Before meeting the student.

- Briefly liaise with your co-assessor, regarding:
 - arrangements for the Annual Progress Review
 - the 2000 word or chapter¹ for 3rd & 4th APR (6th – 8th APR part time) of the PGR's work that you are jointly choosing to read.
- Read the student's Annual Progress Review report and the student's work that you have selected. Review with the eye of a doctoral examiner, whilst bearing in mind the stage of the doctorate and type of doctorate that the PGR is engaged in. Identify areas for discussion during your meeting with the PGR.
- Ensure that all questions are fully covered in the report. It is important that the PGR:
 - provides a Personal Development Plan (PDP) indicating the researcher development that has been undertaken, as well as indicating the development that they intend to complete during the next year.
 - has met the word counts for their stage of the doctorate and have indicated where they have made progress against the completion of their thesis (draft chapters/ notes etc against the proposed thesis outline).
 - has made a statement to whether they have ethical clearance and that the research has been reviewed to ensure that no further changes to ethical clearance are required.
- RDSS will let you know if a student has a Tutor Awareness Sheet (TAS) and/or has requested reasonable adjustments during their APR. Where relevant, liaise with the doctoral student/candidate about how to apply the noted reasonable adjustments during the event. In most cases, this would be extra break scattered through the APR/Progression meeting.
- On the day of the Annual Progress Review, meet with the other assessor before you meet with the student. Agree the areas where you would like to ask questions about the report and part of the thesis that you have read.

During the meeting:

- Listen and appraise the student's presentation for clarity of message, understanding of topic and progress made.

¹ For APRs at the later stages of the doctorate, you might want to deliver the APR as a 20-minute mock viva. This provides a scaffold for doctoral students as they work towards completion and enhance their knowledge and experience of doctoral examination situations.

- Discuss the progress the PGR has made towards the completion of the draft/completed thesis, their development as a researcher including a discussion about the development aims outlined in the PDP. If the PDP is weak², explore why this is the case.
- Address the areas for further discussion that you have identified.
- If necessary, discuss any areas of further development that you feel would benefit the PGR.
- Discuss the PGR's supervisory arrangements and offer the PGR with the opportunity to discuss issues that they would like to raise. It is important to verify that regular supervision is taking place and that the PGR knows who to approach if there is a breakdown in communication.

After the meeting:

- Discuss both the quality of the student's work (assessed from your reading and the student's presentation) and the progress made. Progress made should include:
 - 1) progress from previous APR,
 - 2) work towards a draft/completed thesis
 - 3) progress in their holistic development as a researcher (PDP).
- Agree an outcome.
 - Pass
 - Pass with modifications.
 - Proceed with Caution (previously 'At Risk')
 - Complete as MPhil (APR 1 and 2 full time; APR 1, 2, 3 and 4 part time)
- Complete the Independent Assessors Report, sign the report and return it to RDSS@wlv.ac.uk

Professionalism

- APR is a constructive process. Feedback should be developmental, supportive and provide the PGR with ways and ideas to improve themselves.
- As an Independent Assessor (IA) you are limited to making commentary about the quality of the student's work and their progress; this does not include any judgement of a supervisory approach that is not agreed with.
- IAs should avoid giving supervisory style advice during APR and refer the student back to their supervisors.
- In the spirit of accepting that academics thrive on differences in approach and theoretical standpoints, where differences of opinion arise with regards theory, methodology, or analysis, this should be viewed as a matter for discussion, **not correction**. As part of APR, we are preparing students in the defence of their work. Decision about different approaches will be made by the doctoral student and their supervisors. These changes should not be forced by the IAs.

² A weak PDP would be one that has little activity outlined and/or little reflection on the learning gained through engaging in activities and/or no forward plan to the coming year (where appropriate).

- IAs should take consideration and care in their communication with the student such that they do not disrupt trust with their supervisory team.
- IAs should be aware of the programme of study (Prof Doc vs PhD) and align expectations to this.