

## Postgraduate Research Proof Reading Policy and Guidance

This PGR Proof-Reading Policy and guidance came into effect from 01 September 2023. This document was updated in June 2024 to include information and links to the Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers.

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### What is covered by the policy

This document sets out University policy on third party proof-reading of a PGR's work. It sets out:

- What the policy covers.
- Who a third party is.
- What work may be made available to a third-party-reader.
- What is, and what is not, acceptable support from a third party proof-reader.
- Guidance on the various sources of academic support for PGRs.

The fundamental principle is that responsibility for all aspects of the thesis submitted for assessment remains with the PGR as the author of the thesis.

This guidance relates to proof-reading of the thesis by a third party. “Third-parties” are persons whose services a PGR may use to proof-read their work. This may be fellow-PGRs, friends and family (paid or unpaid), or professional proof-readers. The definition of “third-parties” does not include the PGR’s Supervisors. It is important to distinguish between third-party proof-reading and the academic support available from the PGR’s Supervisory team. Separate guidance is given [in the supervisory support section of this document](#).

This Postgraduate Research Proof-reading Policy and guidance applies to the research component of a research degree programme. It does not apply to any work submitted for assessment as part of a taught module (which may form part of an integrated degree of PhD and Masters or professional doctorate programme or on a “stand alone” basis). Where a Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) will be submitting work for assessment as part of a taught module, the separate [University Policy on Proof Reading for taught assessments](#) will apply to any work submitted for assessment. PGRs undertaking an assessment for a taught module will, be subject to that policy for the assessment.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers. Please see Annex I.

## What is proof-reading?

- “Proof-reading” is defined for the purposes of this guidance as the systematic checking and identification of errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and sentence construction, formatting and layout in the text, including the bibliography.
- “Editing” is defined as any material amendment to the presentation of text which exceeds proof-reading, as defined above. In particular it includes any alteration which substantially changes, corrects, expands or condenses the academic content of the work.
- “Third-parties” are persons whose services a PGR may use to proof-read their work. This may be fellow-PGRs, friends and family (paid or unpaid), or professional proof-readers. The definition of “third-parties” does not include the PGR’s Supervisory team. Separate guidance is given [in the supervisory support section of this document](#).

## What PGR work can be proof-read by a third party

PGRs are permitted to have their **thesis** proof-read by a third party before submission for examination, following the guidance set out below. PGRs may also have their final thesis (after successful examination) proof-read by a third party as part of any corrections to the thesis after the viva.

## What PGR work **CANNOT** be proof-read by a third party

Third-party proof-reading of work at earlier stages in the candidature might mask a need for support or training with academic writing. For this reason, third-party proof-reading of work submitted for assessment outside of the thesis submission is not permitted. This includes any work submitted as part of:

- First Formal Progress Review
- Transfer Process<sup>1</sup>
- Annual Progress Review
- Progress Support Process

It is important for PGRs to develop the skill of proof-reading their own work to identify specific flaws and errors. PGRs are encouraged to seek assistance in developing their skills in academic writing and proof-reading from a number of sources of support provided by the University. Further information is provided in the [support with academic writing section of this document](#). It is also important to distinguish between third-party proof-reading and the process of supervisory review and comment on written work which is expected to take place throughout the candidature. Further information is given [in the supervisory support section of this document](#).

## Reasonable adjustments for disabled PGRs

The process for identifying and agreeing support and reasonable adjustments for PGR assessments can be found in the [guidance on support and reasonable adjustments for PGR assessments](#).

## Rules for third party proof-reading

This section provides more clarity for third party proof-readers and PGRs. The University defines support with third-party proof-reading of the thesis into the categories set out below.

### Acceptable support from a third-party proof-reader for the thesis

It is acceptable for a third-party proof-reader to **check, identify and correct** issues related to:

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<sup>1</sup> For PGRs commencing study from 01/09/2023, proof-reading of the transfer submission is not permitted. For PGRs commencing study before 01/09/2023 proof-reading of the transfer submission is strongly discouraged. This position applies third-party proof reading only. Please refer to Annex 1 for the guidance on the use of AI assistance tools.

- Spelling and punctuation
- Grammar and syntax
- Word usage (excluding specific terminology)
- Inconsistencies in capitalisation, italics, abbreviations, quotations, numbering of sections, tables, illustrations, and appendices
- Inconsistencies in formatting of page numbers, headers and footers
- Inconsistencies in the presentation of in-text citations or references in the bibliography

It is acceptable for a third party proof-reader to **check and identify BUT NOT correct** issues related to:

- Clarity of expression
- Changing usage of passive verbs/tense into active forms
- Issues with logical sequencing and linkage between sentences and paragraphs
- Ambiguity
- Repetition

All the above recommendations must be visible and should involve the use of the comment function to annotate the work, rather than track changes. Electronically annotated text should be returned to the PGR in PDF format, so that a clear distinction can be drawn between successive drafts of a piece of work. Where work is submitted to a third party-proof reader as hard copy, comments should be annotated on the draft and returned to the PGR. The PGR remains responsible for considering each suggested comment critically and carefully, and for the identification and inclusion of an appropriate correction to the text.

### **Unacceptable** support from a third-party proof-reader for the thesis

It is **NOT acceptable** for a third party proof-reader to do any of the following.

In general, any recommendations for editing or amendment to the text which exceeds the guidance in the sections above is not acceptable. This includes any alteration which changes, corrects, expands or condenses the academic content of the work.

A third party proof-reader must not:

- Correct issues relating to clarity of expression, tense, sequencing, ambiguity or repetition, as covered in the section above.
- Add, condense or re-write any of the PGR's sentences or sections of work. A proof-reader may identify issues with the clarity of expression, tone, ambiguity or repetition as set out in the section above, but the proof-reader must not correct these on the PGR's behalf.

- Rearrange passages of text, sequences of code or sections of other material. A proof-reader may identify issues with the sequencing or linkages between sentences or paragraphs as set out in the section above, but the proof-reader must not correct these on the PGR's behalf.
- Contribute or add additional academic material to the original text.
- Contribute missing or additional references to the thesis text and/or bibliography.
- Check academic information included in the thesis including, technical content, data, calculations, equations or formulae.
- Rewrite formulae, equations or computer code.
- Re-label figures or diagrams.
- Translate any work into English.
- Alter the substance of any ideas and arguments put forward within the work.

## Guidance on proof-reading of the thesis submission

It is strongly encouraged that PGRs consult with their supervisor(s) before seeking the services of a third-party proof-reader for their thesis submission. The University may request sight of any draft of the thesis made available by the PGR to a proof-reader and the marked-up work. PGRs must give any proof-reader a copy of this policy, and must retain a copy of any work marked-up by a proof-reader as the PGR may be required to produce draft material and evidence of the annotations and changes suggested or made by the proof-reader.

Responsibility for all aspects of the thesis submitted for assessment remains with the PGR as the author. Inadequacies in proof-reading by a third party will not be accepted in mitigation of any deficiencies in the thesis. Delays due to proof-reading by a third party will not normally be accepted as grounds for an extension of studies

PGRs must formally acknowledge the use of a third party proof-reader (whether paid or not) on the second page (declarations page) of their thesis. Where the thesis was proof-read by a third-party proof-reader before submission the PGR must add the following statement to the declaration page:

*The thesis was proof-read before submission by a third-party proof-reader. The PGR confirms that the third-party proof-reading undertaken was in accordance with the Postgraduate Researcher Proof-reading Policy.*

## Academic support (Supervisors, Examiners and peer-review)

### Supervisory Support

It is important to distinguish between third-party proof-reading and the process of supervisory review and comment on written work, and peer review. It is entirely

appropriate – and indeed required - for PGRs to submit their work to their Supervisors for review and comment. This support takes place throughout the candidature.

It is expected that this will result in the provision of comments and advice regarding the content, logic and clarity of the arguments in the work under review, and/or to improve the structure and clarity of the argument and standards of written English and presentation. In all cases ultimate responsibility for deciding how best to respond to comments from the Supervisors rests with the PGR as the author.

Although a Supervisor is expected to provide feedback on attention to standards of written English and presentation, the University does not expect the role of the Supervisor to extend to that of ‘proof-reader’ or to the systematic identification of grammatical and spelling mistakes, or typographical errors. It is important for PGRs to develop the skill of proof-reading their own work to identify specific flaws and errors. Responsibility for all aspects of the work submitted for assessment ultimately remains with the PGR as the author of the work.

## Peer Review

It may also be the case that PGRs will submit work to journals or other academic outputs where it will be subject to peer review. As part of this process, PGRs may receive feedback and comments from supervisors, co-authors or referees, which may extend to proof-reading of the work submitted for publication. In all cases ultimate responsibility for deciding how the text, images and other content within the thesis responds to comments from supervisors, co-authors or referees rests with the PGR as author.

It is understood that work that has appeared in multi-author papers and been through peer review has potentially been proof-read by a number of people in addition to the PGR. For this reason, it is essential that any part of the thesis which has been taken from other academic outputs must be clearly identified as such.

Where the PGR is the sole, lead, first or primary author on a publication the University will permit the use of the work contained within the publication which the PGR was directly responsible for authoring to form the basis for all or part of a chapter of the thesis. Guidance on how this material should be incorporated into the thesis, and must be declared at examination entry, can be found in the [guidance on the use of work from solely and jointly-authored publications](#) or the Faculty’s [protocol for an alternative format thesis](#). This includes declaring the contributions of other authors to any jointly-authored publications, and which must also include declaring any further proof-reading support received as part of the publication process. This guidance relates to any work which has been submitted for publication (even if ultimately not accepted), which is under review at the time of thesis submission or published during the candidature which is being re-used in the thesis submission.

## Examiners

As part of the examination process, some examiners may choose to provide specific editorial comment, either as a separate list of corrections or marked in a copy of the thesis given to the PGR after the viva. However, the University does not expect Examiners to proof-read the thesis and there is no requirement or expectation that examiners will identify all typographical errors requiring correction. It is sufficient for examiners to state that the thesis must be thoroughly proof-read, as part of any corrections required to the thesis after the viva.

## Support with academic writing

In addition to the advice and support available from the Supervisory team, support with academic writing is available from a number of teams across the University. PGRs are able to access additional support and/or training with academic writing from the following:

- Support from [Organisational Development and Professional Learning \(ODPL\)](#)
- Academic writing and development [support provided by Library](#)
- Support via Disability Services: The process for identifying and agreeing support and reasonable adjustments for PGR assessments can be found in the [separate guidance on support and reasonable adjustments for PGR assessments](#).

You may also wish to check if the [Language Centre](#) are offering additional academic writing skills courses.

## Academic Integrity

The fundamental principle is that responsibility for all aspects of the thesis submitted for assessment remains with the PGR as the author of the thesis. Any proof-reading support which is used must not exceed what is defined above as acceptable support. PGRs must complete a Declaration of Academic Integrity in GRAD at the point of thesis submission which confirms that the submitted thesis is their own work, that they have not presented anyone else's work as their own and that full and appropriate acknowledgement has been given where reference has been made to the work of others (including declaring the services of any proof-reader on the second page of the thesis).

Any case which is suspected of breaching this policy will be investigated in accordance with the University's [procedures on academic misconduct](#). This will include:

- Where the support provided by a third-party proof-reader is considered to have exceeded the boundaries of acceptable support, as defined above.
- Failing to acknowledge support provided by a third-party proof-reader in the thesis

- Third-party proof-reading of work at First Formal Progress, Transfer<sup>2</sup>, Annual Progress Review or as part of the Progress Support Process.

Concerns with any work submitted for the taught elements of research degrees are covered by the separate taught procedures [available on the Student Cases Website](#).

## **Document Version History**

Graduate Board

December 2022

Updated September 2023 to include Artificial Intelligence position statement

Updated 22 September to include links to the [University AI guidance for staff](#)

Updated August 2024 to include information and links to the Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers

Version 4.0

Maintained by: Doctoral College Operations

August 2024

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<sup>2</sup> For PGRs commencing study from 01/09/2023 onwards



## Annex 1: The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) assistance tools and academic integrity

The University has approved detailed guidance on using generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in your research degree studies. This replaces the former PGR Position Statement which was published as an Annex to this Proof Reading Policy and Guidance.

You can [view the Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers here](#).

The Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers is intended to ensure that any use of Generative AI (Gen AI) is effective, ethical and transparent. The guidance has been developed to cover the specific expectations for assessment at PGR level. Staff and PGRs should be aware of the guidance for PGRs and ensure that any use of Gen AI tools remains within the guidelines set out in the detailed guidance.

### Guidance for PGRs on the use of Gen AI tools

The detailed guidance for PGRs is [available here](#) and includes:

- Key Strengths and Weaknesses of Generative AI
- What AI usage is permitted in PGR assessments and what would be considered a breach of the academic integrity procedures
- Data Restrictions and Security, and ensuring any use of Gen AI tools is consistent with University guidelines on the sharing, safeguarding and management of material.
- Ethical considerations, including where appropriate and necessary obtaining approval through the ethics review processes
- Acknowledging the use of and referencing Generative AI in your thesis and other work
- Publication and other research activities, and how Gen AI tools should be considered, especially where you will be re-using published work in your thesis
- Generative AI Quick Checklist – a quick checklist to help support PGRs and Supervisors with the different considerations.

### Guidance for Supervisors on the use of Gen AI tools

In addition to the detailed Generative AI Guidance for Postgraduate Researchers, [additional guidance for Supervisors in supporting PGRs is available](#) on the staff guidance on the use of AI in research on the Generative AI website.