



## Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Policy and Guidance

*This document sets out the expectations and guidance on attendance and engagement monitoring and absence reporting for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) and is intended to give staff greater clarity in relation to the University's expectations of an effective attendance monitoring and engagement process.*

### Principles

1. Attendance and engagement monitoring is recognised as an important element in supporting Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) retention, performance and success. Recording and monitoring attendance and engagement is crucial in supporting our duty of care to PGRs, allowing for timely and appropriate interventions.
2. Monitoring of attendance and engagement has been a University requirement for many years. Regular and appropriate attendance is a University requirement as stipulated in the [Curricular Ordinances and Regulations](#)
3. The attendance and engagement of all PGRs must be monitored throughout the research degree candidature, with absence being recorded. The monitored attendance sessions must include all formal supervisory meetings as well as progress reviews and other appropriate events as defined by the School/Faculty.
4. PGRs' attendance must be monitored across all years and a standard, fair and auditable approach taken to ensure equity of treatment.
5. A central system, the Graduate Record of Achievement and Development (GRAD), is used to record all PGR engagement in an auditable way, and helps in identifying PGRs who are absent. Under the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures](#), PGRs and Supervisors are expected to engage with GRAD, ensuring in partnership that there are written records in GRAD of formal supervision meetings, and that absence and location reporting is completed.
6. The responsibilities and expectations of the supervisors, the PGR, and the School and Graduate School with respect to commitment to research activity, attendance, engagement and progress reporting, and engagement with GRAD are outlined in the [Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#).
7. For PGRs failure to attend and progress and/or prolonged or unexplained absence without permission can result in instigation of the Progress Support Process, Fitness to Study or the presumed withdrawn process.

8. The operational arrangements which support PGR attendance and engagement monitoring are described in more detail in the separate PGR Standard Operating Procedure for Attendance Monitoring.
9. Under the requirements of the Home Office and the conditions of the University's Student Sponsor Licence, the University must report PGRs who fail to complete registration when expected or who are absent without authorisation for a period.
10. It is essential that our monitoring and associated reporting is accurate and that our records are accessible to protect our UKVI Sponsor Licence, along with meeting the professional/statutory body requirements for certain programmes of study.
11. Accurate attendance and progress records are required as evidence in student case work and as part of any consideration and determination of student contract complaints and legal cases.

### **Expectations under the Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures**

12. The requirement is that a full-time PGR will have a minimum of 10 supervision meetings a year. The relevant number for part-time PGRs is 6 a year. This requirement continues until the PGR has submitted their thesis which includes the overtime period. Whilst the pattern and timing of meetings will vary according to the precise stage of the candidature and between subject areas it is expected that meetings will be held regularly throughout the standard period of study with gaps between meetings of no more than 8 weeks for full-time PGRs (or 12 weeks for part-time PGRs). Notes must be kept of all formal supervision meetings in GRAD.
13. It is expected that formal supervision meetings will normally take place in person. Formal supervisory contact may take place by other means (e.g. video streaming, MS Teams or other similar software package when a PGR (or Supervisor) is away from the University<sup>1</sup> including during periods of fieldwork, or for PGRs on split-site, distance-learning or other collaborative programmes). Online supervision meetings should not be considered a routine alternative to in-person meetings, except where a PGR (or Supervisor) is away from the University as described above or if agreed as part of any reasonable adjustment. Email does not count as a suitable method by which supervisory sessions can take place. The only exception to this is when a PGR is on fieldwork and communication links are limited and emails ensure that supervision can still take place.
14. In order to keep the research on course for submission before the maximum time limit, it is required that supervisory contact will continue during any overtime period after the end of the standard period of study and that the supervisor will continue to monitor progress. In this overtime period, the University appreciates that supervision meetings may be in the format of reading and commenting on draft chapters of the thesis prior

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<sup>1</sup> This may also include the overtime period where a change of study location has been completed as set out under 25

to submission. Full-time PGRs will continue to be entitled to no fewer than 10 supervision meetings a year (and part-time candidates no fewer than 6 a year). A written record of these meetings must be kept in GRAD

15. PGR's progress will be monitored formally at regular intervals during the candidature. As a minimum there must be a report by the supervisor at the mid-point of the first year of the candidature (the "First Formal Progress Report") and at the transfer stage. All doctoral PGRs are subject to a formal transfer assessment process which includes attendance for a transfer interview (normally by 12 months for full-time study and 24 months for part-time). Annually, thereafter, there must be a meeting to review progress, where the PGR is interviewed, and a report of the meeting submitted (the "Annual Progress Review"). All these progress reviews are managed through the GRAD system.
16. PGRs are expected to work on their research project for periods of time that are comparable to a full-time academic post (the equivalent of an average of at least 37 hours a week). This does not include paid work. Part-time PGRs are expected to work on their research project for periods of time equivalent to 20 hours per week. It is inevitable that their work load will be variable during the course of the year and it should be agreed with their supervisor(s). When approaching a specific deadline such as the submission of a transfer report or thesis additional hours of work will be necessary. They will also be expected, to undertake other professional activity, for instance to attend conferences, undertake fieldwork and other research activities outside of the University.

### **Responsibilities under the Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures**

17. The responsibilities and expectations of PGRs and Supervisors with respect to attendance, engagement and progression are set down in the [Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures](#) as follows:

#### *Responsibilities of the PGR*

- Commit to research activity in accordance with the University's expectations
- Carry out research effectively, to attend the University, to present work regularly and to an adequate standard in an appropriate form and against an agreed timescale taking into account any holiday entitlement;
- Agree to a supervisory programme, to maintain regular contact with their supervisor(s) and to attend for formal supervision meetings throughout the programme of study (including the overtime period).
- Engage with the University's system for maintaining a record of the research degree candidature (Graduate Record of Achievement and Development (GRAD)). This includes ensuring, in partnership with the supervisor, there are written records of formal supervision meetings.
- to ensure that any absences for study are requested through one of the recognised routes: annual leave, authorised absence, suspension of study.

- Assist the University in keeping their personal record up to date by cooperating fully with administrative procedures.
- Submit, when requested, regular written summaries of overall progress to their supervisors.
- Take measures to attend appropriate training including induction, personal development programmes and research seminars in consultation with their supervisor
- Comply with normal working arrangements in the School.
- Promptly draw to the attention of the supervisor or Director of PGR Studies when there is a situation where it may be necessary to request a suspension or extension of study. If appropriate, documentary evidence should be provided (e.g. medical certificate);
- Discuss with the supervisor, in good time where possible, should they wish to be away from their research activity (e.g. in the case of holidays and authorised absence);

#### *Responsibilities of the Supervisor(s)*

- Agreeing a supervisory programme with the PGR and arranging regular meetings with the PGR throughout the programme of study (including the overtime period)
- Ensuring that arrangements are made for the transfer review within the prescribed timescale for the programme of study and identifying individuals to serve on the transfer panel.
- Preparing regular reports on the PGR's progress
- Engaging with the University's system for maintaining a record of the research degree candidature (Graduate Record of Achievement and Development (GRAD)). This includes ensuring in partnership with the PGR, that there are written records of formal supervision meetings.
- ensure that any absences for study are requested through one of the recognised routes: annual leave, authorised absence, suspension of study.
- Alerting the Director of PGR Studies, in a timely manner, to any situation where it may become necessary to request a suspension or extension of study for a PGR.
- Bringing to the attention of the Director of PGR Studies any concerns about a PGR's unsatisfactory progress and, where appropriate, engaging with the [Progress Support Process](#);
- Keeping the Head of School informed of any absences likely to impact upon time available for supervisory duties.
- Reporting to the Director of PGR Studies when for an individual PGR there has been a change of study location, no contact or when there has been a pattern of absences which is affecting the PGR's progress or causing concern for the PGR's well-being

#### **Expectations of the School/Graduate School**

18. The responsibility for management of appropriate recording will rest with the Dean of the Faculty, who may allocate the responsibility (via the Faculty Graduate School Committee and the Head of School, Head of Graduate School and Director of PGR Studies (DoPGRS)) to schools or other appropriate units within the faculty.
19. Faculties/schools must have procedures in place for contacting PGRs who have failed to attend monitored attendance sessions without authorisation. These procedures

should involve the Head of School or the Director of PGR Studies and be clearly stated. Evidence of these activities will be required in the event of a Home Office audit, so it is essential that records are kept and are accessible. The Director of PGR Studies will usually be the first point of contact when such information is required.

20. As a minimum, Graduate Schools on behalf of Faculties/Schools will be required to put the following procedure in place:

- Supervisors will be required to report to the Director of PGR Studies and Graduate School when there has been no contact or missed supervision meetings with individual PGRs for a month (unless absence has been authorised for illness or other suspension, etc), or where there is a pattern of absences which is affecting the PGR's work or causing concerns for the PGR's wellbeing.
- The Director of PGR Studies or Graduate School should contact the PGR promptly to explore any problems, in consultation with Doctoral College Operations if appropriate. This provides an opportunity for issues to be resolved with the PGR and to identify any more serious problems early. It may for example be appropriate to consider a suspension of studies, instigating the Progress Support Process (PSP) or the Fitness to Study Process.
- Where issues cannot be quickly resolved, the Graduate school should work closely with Doctoral College Operations and other colleagues to explore whether support can be offered that enables the PGR to return to studies, or whether a suspension of studies should be considered until issues are resolved. Complex cases may require a case conference-style approach to allow consideration of all necessary factors to be discussed and prioritised. In addition to academic progress and University regulations, these factors may include health considerations, personal/family considerations, immigration advice, compliance with Home Office regulations and financial considerations (including effects on any sponsorship).
- Academic progression or engagement concerns should be addressed using the [Progress Support Process \(PSP\)](#). Under the procedure the PGR will be interviewed, normally by the Director of PGR Studies and the supervisor, and specific instructions and objectives given. This provides a framework for responding consistently to academic progression or engagement concerns, to ensure that PGRs are informed of the risk to their academic progress, but with an emphasis on targeted support to help get the PGR back on track. It also allows for consideration of other factors including health, personal/family circumstances, immigration advice, compliance with Home Office regulations and financial considerations (including effects on any sponsorship). Where issues remain unresolved or if a prolonged absence continues, it may be necessary for the PGR to suspend or withdraw or be presumed withdrawn. If progress or engagement concerns are health related [the Fitness to Study Process](#) might be instigated.
- Where it becomes clear a PGR is no longer engaging with their programme and where they are not in contact, this should be addressed using the steps outlined

in the Standard Operating Procedure for Attendance Monitoring (SOPAM). A series of communications will be sent by the Graduate School with the aim of re-establishing contact, so that reasons for the absence can be explored, and options for support or formalising a break from studies considered. Where prolonged absence continues, it may be necessary for the formal presumed withdrawn process to be instigated. A School may only instigate the Presumed Withdrawn where a PGR is absent from studies without authorisation for more than 4 weeks, and where no response has been received to at least three written communications from the School, Teams messages and the PGR has not responded to/attended invitations to a meeting under the Progress Support Process. Guidance on the process to be followed is set out in the SOPAM.

- Where a PGR undertakes a period of full-time study outside of the UK (e.g. for the purposes of fieldwork or during the overtime period) for a period of one month or more, schools must ensure that the Change of Study Location Workflow in GRAD is completed.
- For a PGR in the referral period, supervisors are asked to provide up to 6 supervision meetings a year. For PGRs in the UK on a student visa, the School will need to implement standard supervision meeting and attendance monitoring arrangements, with at least 10 supervision meetings a year with gaps of no more than 8 weeks. Engagement and progress monitored following the standard processes included in this policy.
- Guidance on the processes to be followed for authorised absences, suspensions, presumed withdrawn and change of study location and the procedures for reporting are set out in Standard Operating Procedure for Attendance Monitoring (SOPAM) for Postgraduate Researchers.

### **Procedures for attendance and engagement monitoring**

21. The detailed operational procedures which support this Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Policy are set out in a Standard Operating Procedure for Attendance Monitoring (SOPAM) for Postgraduate Researchers. This describes the operational procedures for monitoring PGR attendance and engagement in place across the Doctoral College and Academic Schools, including supervision meetings and formal progress reports, PGR and Staff responsibilities, absence reporting arrangements, registration requirements<sup>2</sup> and change of study location.
22. The attendance of all PGRs must be monitored throughout the research degree candidature, with absence being reported. The monitored attendance sessions must include all formal supervisory meetings as well as progress reviews (First Formal Progress Report, Transfer and Annual Progress Reviews), the thesis submission and

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<sup>2</sup> All PGRs are required to re-register each year within 4 weeks of the anniversary of their start date, or within 4 weeks of the end of a period of suspension. Details and deadlines, are published each year on the [website](#). If PGRs are unable to register before the registration deadline date they must discuss their next steps with the relevant department and their Graduate School as a priority.

final viva. Other appropriate events include induction events, University training courses, and annual meeting with the Director of PGR Studies. Further details on the attendance sessions agreed by Graduate Board as suitable for recording and monitoring purposes for PGRs are set out in more details in the SOPAM.

23. The importance of engaging with GRAD and keeping good location, absence and supervision meeting records and ensuring that they are signed off in a timely manner is emphasised by the Board, to ensure that University records are robust, accurate, facilitate support and wellbeing activities, and meet [visa-related responsibilities](#).
24. **Absence reporting:** Any absences from study must be authorised by the School and recorded in GRAD under one of the recognised absence reporting routes: Unauthorised absences from study may lead to instigation of the Progress Support Process, Fitness to Study or lead to a PGR being presumed withdrawn.
  - a. Suspension of studies: A “suspension” is a period of more than one month when a PGR temporarily leaves the programme. During a period of suspension a PGR is not expected to progress their research. Suspensions will not normally be backdated for more than one month. Further advice is available in the suspension and extension policy.
  - b. Authorised absence: An authorised absence is a short period of approved absence in addition to any period of annual leave. Schools may authorise absence/s up to four weeks in any one calendar year<sup>3</sup>. During a period of authorised absence the PGR remains registered but is not expected to progress their research. It is expected that the absence can be absorbed into the overall candidature, and the time away from studies must have no impact on the PGR’s ability to meet the final thesis submission deadline.
  - c. Annual leave: PGRs are entitled to annual leave (26 days for full time PGRs; equivalent to 15.5 days pro-rata for part time PGRs on 0.6 FTE), plus the university closed days.
25. **Change of study location:** Periods up to 12 months study outside the University during the standard period of study can be approved by the School. Further guidance on the process for periods exceeding 12 months is set out on the [website](#). Academic engagement and progress monitoring arrangements should continue during periods of study away from the University. Under Home Office regulations the University is only able to continue to sponsor a PGR under the Student Visa route for study away from Leeds during periods of approved fieldwork or if the PGR is in their overtime period. A Change of Study Location Workflow must be completed so that the University is informed of the dates and location of study for UKVI reporting purposes. Applications for change of study location made on other grounds<sup>4</sup> during the standard

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<sup>3</sup> In exceptional circumstances, an absence can be approved for a maximum of 8 weeks by the UKVI Student Immigration Compliance Manager, on the understanding that the absence can be absorbed into the overall candidature.

<sup>4</sup> for example, a for personal, family or health reasons

period of study should be managed under authorised absence, annual leave or suspension of studies processes.

26. It is recognised that there are different events and timelines within different schools which reflect the varying nature of research study. Schools and Faculties may already have their own practices which relate to these events. These events and associated procedures should be clearly stated in the faculty/school handbooks or on the website.
27. The Graduate Record of Achievement and Development ([GRAD](#)) is the online system used by all PGRs, Supervisors, Directors of PGR Studies and the Doctoral College to support PGR processes, including attendance monitoring. It is used for a wide range of tasks including organising and recording supervision meetings, recording all progress monitoring meetings, thesis submission, and managing requests for authorized absence, suspension of study or change of study location. This provides and accurate, auditable, and accessible record of PGR attendance and any absence. Further detail is set out in the Standard Operating Procedure for Attendance Monitoring.

**Related policies and procedures:**

[Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidatures](#)

[Suspension and Extension Policy and Guidance](#)

[Progress Support Process](#)

[Fitness to Study Procedure](#)

[Ordinance X. Research degrees](#)

[Student Contract](#)

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## Non-engagement and steps leading to presumed withdrawn

*The following is a summary of the process for non-engagement and steps leading to instigation of presumed withdrawn. A detailed step by step process is available to Graduate Schools in the SOPAM, including a suite of email and teams templates*

### Informal steps

Where a PGR has an unexpected unexplained absence; for instance, failure to attend a supervision meeting or absence from the lab/shared working space without explanation, it is expected that the Supervisor would make contact with the PGR to check-in, re-schedule any missed meetings and, if necessary, signpost the PGR to the relevant support services or to the Graduate School.

Where there may be recurring periods of short, unexplained absence the Supervisor should flag any concerns with the Director of PGR Studies and/or Graduate School who may want to arrange a meeting with the PGR to identify any underlying issues and support that might be needed. It may for example be appropriate to consider a suspension of studies, instigating the [Progress Support Process \(PSP\)](#) or the [Fitness to Study Process](#).

If it becomes clear a PGR is no longer engaging with their programme, and where they are not in contact, this should be addressed using the formal steps outlined below.

If an absence is a particular cause for concern Graduate Schools may contact the Student Counselling and Wellbeing duty service who can provide consultation and consideration of next steps (where an emergency response is not required – there is a separate emergency response pathway).

### Formal steps

Where it becomes clear a PGR is no longer engaging with their programme and where they are not in contact, this should be addressed using the steps outlined in the SOPAM. A series of communications will be sent by the School to register concerns with engagement, but with the aim of re-establishing contact to explore the reasons for absence and support or other actions (e.g. authorised absence, suspension of studies) that might be needed. The PGR should also be invited to a Meeting under the Progress Support Process. This may also be supplemented by other contacts e.g. telephone.

Where the PGR responds, and depending on the nature of the individual circumstances, they may be directed towards support services, or an authorised absence or suspension of studies may be needed. In some cases the Progress Support Process may be continued or the Fitness to Study process may need to be followed.

Where no response is received, and where a prolonged absence continues, it will become necessary for the formal Presumed Withdrawn process to be instigated.

## *Presumed Withdrawn*

A School may only instigate presumed withdrawn process where a PGR has been absent from studies without authorisation for more than 4 weeks, and where no response is received to at least three written communications from the School, team messages or to invitations to a meeting under the Progress Support Process.

A recommendation for presumed withdrawn must be forwarded from the Director of PGR Studies to the DCO (P&E) team. A template for this provided, and in sending forward a request the template will require confirmation that:

- The PGR has been absent without authorisation for more than four weeks.
- The Supervisor/s have confirmed that there has been no contact and/or missed supervision meetings with the PGR (where the PGR has not contacted their Supervisor/s (or responded to their emails)).
- There is an unauthorised and unexplained absence with no record of engagement via supervision meetings during the period of absence or a record of engagement with other attendance/engagement points, for example progress reviews or training events; and
- There is no evidence of absence recording submitted by the PGR (for example a suspension request or a request for an authorised absence or annual leave); and
- At least three communications in writing via email<sup>5</sup> with a read receipt have been sent to the PGR's University email by the Graduate School regarding engagement; and
- At least two communications via Microsoft Teams have been sent to the PGR by the Graduate School regarding engagement; and
- At least one email has been sent to the PGR's personal email address (if held); and
- The PGR has failed to respond to any communications from the Graduate School; and
- The Graduate School has recorded in writing an attempt to reach the PGR by arranging a MS Teams appointment under the Progress Support Process.
- There has been no contact with other parties (Supervisor or Director of PGR Studies) since the absence was first reported.
- Details of any other attempted contacts (e.g. other emails or telephone calls).

The above are the minimum steps that must have taken place before a presumed withdrawn recommendation can be made, however these may be preceded and/or supplemented by additional contacts from the Supervisors, and/or Graduate School or Director of PGR Studies.

On receipt of a presumed withdrawn recommendation DCO (P&E) will:

- Send a final communication to the PGR.
- If no response is received from the PGR within 10 working days, check whether any contact has been made with the Graduate School or Supervisor, or if any absence or other workflows have been started in GRAD.

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<sup>5</sup> Standard set of templates provided.

- If no response or contact from the PGR is confirmed, DCO will update the Banner student record to permanent leaver within 5 working days.
- For PGRs on a Student Visa, DCO will notify UKVI of the withdrawal within a further 10 working days
- For PGRs on a Student Visa, DCO will send a letter to the PGR confirming the report to UKVI, with actions needed and signposting to support.

There is a process to allow Schools to support and apply for reinstatement of registration following presumed withdrawn, should a PGR resume contact after the withdrawal has been actioned (up to 2 years after withdrawal).

#### *Minimum contacts before presumed withdrawn*

The following are the minimum contacts that must have taken place before a presumed withdrawn recommendation can be made, however these will often be preceded and/or supplemented by additional, informal, contacts from the Supervisors, and/or Graduate School or Director of PGR Studies.

| Contact                                     | Sent by         | Contact routes                                      | Purpose of Email   | Timescale for response |
|---|-----------------|---|--|------------------------|
| First written contact regarding engagement  | Graduate School | University email & Teams                            | Note engagement concern<br>Pastoral support<br>Options for authorised absence/suspension<br>Invitation to a support meeting  | 10 working days        |
| Second written contact regarding engagement | Graduate School | University email & Teams & prompt to personal email | Continued engagement concern<br>Pastoral support<br>Options for authorised absence/suspension<br>Note that presumed withdrawn may be instigated<br>Visa advice and signposting | 10 working days        |
| Third written contact regarding engagement  | Graduate School | University email                                    | Continued engagement concern<br>Notify Presumed withdrawn to be instigated<br>Pastoral support<br>Options for authorised absence/suspension<br>Visa signposting                | N/A                    |
| Final written contact regarding engagement  | DCO             | University email & prompt to personal email         | Confirm presumed withdrawn instigated – final reminder<br>Pastoral support<br>Options for authorised absence/suspension<br>Visa signposting                                    | 10 working days        |
| Fifth contact                               | DCO             | Personal email                                      | UKVI report letter   | N/A                    |