

Guidance on Milestones for Postgraduate Research Degrees 2021-22

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2021-22 Update

The Guidelines on Milestones for Postgraduate Research Degrees is reviewed annually. Changes may be made throughout the year if required, so please refer to the [Graduate School website](#) for the latest version of this document.

The document is owned and updated by the Manchester Metropolitan University Graduate School on behalf of Academic Board. Queries should be directed to the Graduate School (gsresearchdegrees@mmu.ac.uk).

Scope of this document

Manchester Metropolitan University produces a suite of documents that outline the formal regulations and procedures for postgraduate research degrees.

The Guidelines on Milestones for Postgraduate Research Degrees provides the operational detail to support research students in understanding the requirements of each milestone, including how they will be assessed.

This document should be read alongside the regulations and the other supporting documentation available on the [Graduate School webpages](#).

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1 Introduction to milestones

1.1 What are milestones?

Each Research Degree has formal milestones that a student must complete in order to progress to the next year of the programme. The purpose of these milestones is to support ongoing progress and provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate how their project has developed, to celebrate this and receive formal recognition.

Progression through milestones is managed via SkillsForge, the University's system for postgraduate research student administration. All students and staff involved in postgraduate research degrees should ensure they have access to the system and regularly check their University email account for notifications.

1.2 Format of milestones

Each milestone comprises three stages:

1. **Written submission.** This includes a submission of written work via an online form in SkillsForge. The contents of the submission will vary by discipline and over the length of the project. For more details on the submission, see [Appendix 1](#).
2. **Panel Review Meeting.** At this meeting, the student will present their work to a panel of academic reviewers and discuss progress. For more information on the format of the panel review meetings, see [Appendix 2](#).
3. **Confirmation of outcome.** Following the meeting, the panel will agree an outcome which will then be communicated to the student. For information on possible outcomes, see the Milestones Key Information and Appendix 3.

1.3 Number and timing of milestones

Research degree programmes vary in duration and therefore the milestones also vary for different programmes and full-time (FT) and part-time (PT) routes. This summary table highlights which milestones are applicable to individual programmes.

The first deadline for each milestone is the submission of a student's report via SkillsForge. Following a panel review meeting, the outcome of the milestone will be confirmed by the completion deadline. For example, the report for the First Formal Annual Review (FT) is submitted at 9 months into the period of supervised study and the outcome of the milestone is confirmed by 12 months.

Each student will have exact deadlines for their milestones available in SkillsForge. The below table is indicative of the usual timeframe:

1.3.1 Milestones summary table

Milestone \ Programme	PhD		MPhil		Professional Doctorate Phase B (PT) ¹	Master's by Research	
	FT	PT	FT	PT		FT	PT
Initial Project Review Submission Completion	Week 10 Week 16						
Annual Check-in Submission Completion		Month 9 Month 12		Month 9 Month 12	Month 9 Month 12		Month 9 Month 12
First Formal Annual Progression Review Submission Completion	Month 9 Month 12	Month 21 Month 24	Month 9 Month 12	Month 18 Month 24	Month 18 Month 24		
Annual Check-in Submission Completion		Month 33 Month 36		Month 33 Month 36	Month 33 Month 36		
Second Formal Annual Progression Review Submission Completion	Month 20 Month 24	Month 40 Month 48					
Final Formal Review Submission Completion	Month 30 Month 33	Month 60 Month 66	Month 20 Month 24	Month 40 Month 48	Month 40 Month 48	Month 10 Month 12	Month 18 Month 24

Each milestone has specific requirements to align with student progress over their degree. The following section outlines key information for each milestone.

¹ For EdD and Professional Doctorate in Health and Social Care the milestone timetable starts from the beginning of Phase B, after the completion of Phase A.

2 Milestones key information

This section provides an overview of each milestone. For more detailed information on the report submission, panel review meeting, and the possible outcomes, see the appendices.

2.1 Initial Project Review

The Initial Project Review takes place early into the student journey. It is an opportunity to review the development of the research project, to ensure that the student is aware of the steps they need to take to progress their research and has the support required to do this.

Applies to	All Research Degrees
Timescale	Submission: week 10, Review Panel by week 16 (this will be adjusted to cover periods of University Closure e.g. Christmas, if appropriate)
Submission	2000-2500 words (excluding ancillary data such as footnotes, bibliographies, diagrams and references)
Meeting format	Presentation: 10 minutes Discussion: 30 minutes Panel consideration and feedback to student: up to 20 minutes
Review Panel	Two Reviewers and an independent Chair. The Head of Faculty Research Degrees may approve a panel with two Reviewers, one of whom also fulfils the role of Chair, or a panel with a third Reviewer, if deemed academically appropriate.
Outcomes	Progress Progress with programme of support Instigate Procedure to Support Postgraduate Research Progress

2.2 First Formal Annual Progression Review

The First Formal Annual Progression Review is a formal review point to assess whether the student is on track to complete their planned project and meet the degree outcomes in the time available. At this stage, students are expected to be able to clearly articulate progress and a clear project plan for the remainder of their project.

Applies to	MPhil, PhD, Professional Doctorate
Timescale	Submission: Month 9 FT, Month 21 PT Confirmation of outcome: Month 12 FT, Month 24 PT
Submission	Approximately 6000 words (excluding ancillary data such as footnotes, bibliographies, diagrams and references)
Meeting format	Presentation: 15 minutes Discussion: 30-40 minutes Panel consideration and feedback to student: up to 20 minutes
Review Panel	Two Reviewers and an independent Chair. The Head of Faculty Research Degrees may approve a panel with two Reviewers, one of whom also fulfils the role of Chair, or a panel with a third Reviewer, if deemed academically appropriate.
Outcomes	Progress Resubmit Transfer to lower degree (PhD and MPhil only) Withdraw

2.3 Second Formal Annual Progression Review

The Second Formal Annual Progression Review is a formal review point to assess whether the student is on track to complete their planned project and meet the degree outcomes in the time available. At this stage, students are expected to be able to clearly articulate progress and a clear project plan for the remainder of their project.

Applies to	PhD
Timescale	Submission: Month 20 FT, Month 40 PT Confirmation of outcome: Month 24 FT, Month 48 PT
Submission	Approximately 6000 words (excluding ancillary data such as footnotes, bibliographies, diagrams and references)
Meeting format	Presentation: 15 minutes Discussion: 30-40 minutes Panel consideration and feedback to student: up to 20 minutes
Review Panel	Two Reviewers and an independent Chair. The Head of Faculty Research Degrees may approve a panel with two Reviewers, one of whom also fulfils the role of Chair, or a panel with a third Reviewer, if deemed academically appropriate.
Outcomes	Progress Resubmit Transfer to lower award (PhD and MPhil only) Withdraw

2.4 Final Formal Review

The Final Formal Review is the final milestone before submission and is the mechanism through which the academic panel recommends whether the student will be ready to submit their thesis at the end of their period of supervised study. The focus of the report and milestone is to review work outstanding and progress towards the degree outcomes, and to ensure the student understands the steps needed to prepare for submission.

Applies to	All programmes
Timescale	Submission: determined by programme length (see 1.1.1) Confirmation of outcome: determined by programme length (see 1.1.1)
Submission	Thesis submission plan
Meeting format	Presentation: 10 minutes Discussion: 30 minutes Panel consideration and feedback to student: up to 20 minutes
Review Panel	Two Reviewers and an independent Chair The Head of Faculty Research Degrees may approve a panel with two Reviewers, one of whom also fulfils the role of Chair, or a panel with a third Reviewer, if deemed academically appropriate.
Outcomes	Progress to submit Progress to writing up Transfer to lower award (PhD and MPhil only) Withdraw

2.5 Annual check-ins (part-time students only)

Annual check-ins occur for part-time students in the years where no other formal milestones are scheduled. They are designed to ensure that students are on track and that appropriate support can be provided at an early stage if challenges have been identified.

Applies to	Part-time students on all programmes
Timescales	Year 1 and Year 3: see 1.1.1
Submission	Up to 1,500 words (excluding ancillary data such as footnotes, bibliographies, diagrams and references)
Meeting Format	Presentation: 10 minutes Discussion: 20 minutes Panel consideration and feedback to student: up to 20 minutes
Review Panel	Two Reviewers and an independent Chair. The Head of Faculty Research Degrees may approve a panel without a separate Chair, with either one or two Reviewers, if deemed academically appropriate.
Outcomes	Progress Instigate Procedure to Support Postgraduate Research Progress

3 Exceptional Factors

Milestone deadlines and panel meetings are part of a student's formal progression monitoring and can only be moved in exceptional circumstances via the [Exceptional Factors Procedure](#). Students cannot continue with their registration if they do not successfully pass milestones. Failure to submit may result in withdrawal from the programme of study.

Milestones are an important progress check for an academic panel to assess whether the completed and remaining work are sufficient to meet the degree aims and realistic in the timeframe. As this is an academic judgment based on the stage and level of the research degree, there is not a prescribed level of progress that is required for a student to submit or pass their milestone. Delays to research progress or data collection will not be treated as exceptional reasons to postpone the milestone, but should be clearly indicated in the written submission with a proposal for adapting to the delay.

4 Complaints and appeals

A student may submit a complaint or appeal and request a review of an examination decision (for further information see the [Student Complaints Procedure and University Academic Appeals Procedure](#)).

5 Student support

Students can get further support from the following University services:

- [Students' Union Advice Centre](#), s.u.advice@mmu.ac.uk, +44 (0)161 2476533
- [Student Hubs](#)
- [Disability Service](#), disability.service@mmu.ac.uk, +44(0)161 247 3491
- International Office, international@mmu.ac.uk, +44 (0)161 247 2000 (students should provide their Manchester Met Student ID number in any correspondence).
- [Counselling Service](#) +44 (0)161 247 3493

Appendix 1: The written submission

For each milestone students are required to complete a SkillsForge submission form, including an uploaded written report. The deadline for submitting the form will be visible to each student in SkillsForge. The form cannot be submitted until all sections, including the supervisory statement, are completed.

5.1 The SkillsForge Form

5.1.1 Supervisory record

The form includes a record of all RD9 Supervision forms in Skillsforge. Students should ensure these forms are completed following each meeting with their Principal Supervisor.

5.1.2 Training and development

Training information which has been recorded in SkillsForge will be included on the form.

Further information on training and development can be found in the [Research Degrees Handbook](#). Students can also view the dedicated [PGR Development Hub](#) on Moodle.

5.1.3 Student report

The student report should be uploaded to SkillsForge and will be made available to Reviewers once the Review Panel date is confirmed to the Graduate School. Further detail on the content of the report for each milestone is provided in section [5.2](#).

The student should also prepare and upload a timeline for the full project which should be sufficiently detailed to show what the student plans to achieve by the next formal milestone.

A separate presentation should also be prepared for the Panel Review Meeting and submitted at least one week prior to the meeting date. This should be sent directly to the Review Panel by email, copying in the [Graduate School](#).

5.1.4 Collaborating establishment

Where a collaborating establishment is involved, it is important that this is disclosed at this point even if the student thinks that the University is already aware of the relationship. A collaborating establishment is an external organisation that is actively involved in or supporting the research by providing facilities such as studio space, laboratories or other resources, which may also include supervision. The Faculty must assure itself that any facilities provided by a collaborating establishment to enable the research project to be conducted and completed are available. The name of the collaborating establishment should be given and confirmation of approval and details of the facilities being provided by a collaborating establishment must be uploaded to the application.

The involvement of an external supervisor does not necessarily mean that the institution is a collaborating establishment.

5.1.5 Ethics

It is important that students are aware of their responsibilities in terms of ethical approval. Depending on the milestone, students will have different ethics considerations. Ethical approval must be in place before any data collection commences. For questions about research ethics or applications for ethical approval, students should consult the [Research Degrees Handbook](#) and contact their Principal Supervisor or the [ethics team](#) for their faculty.

For the Initial Project Review, the expectation is that early conversations about when ethical approval will be required have started.

At each milestone, the student should give a brief overview of ethical considerations, outline the timeline and details of data collection, and provide an update on the status of their application for ethical approval.

Students undertaking any work involving live subjects must ensure that ethical approval is applied for and received at an early stage. This is particularly the case when any respondents may be considered vulnerable. If further research not covered by the initial application is required, a further application can be made.

Where ethical approval is also required from an external body e.g. the NHS, the student must ensure that enough time is built into their project plan to account for the review and approval process. Research involving the NHS may mean that the student needs to obtain a Research Passport. Students should ensure they seek advice from their Principal Supervisor.

Once approval has been granted, the student is required to submit the letter of Ethical Approval to the Graduate School. This must be submitted at the latest by the Final Formal Review. Students will confirm via SkillsForge that the research has been conducted in a way which is consistent with the ethical approval granted.

5.1.6 Research and fieldwork outside the UK

It is important that the University has on record any plans that students have to travel to undertake their research. Students should upload any documentation they have relating to any non-UK based research or fieldwork and highlight what activities will be taking place overseas e.g. "interviews with participants planned for Dec 2022". This may be for fieldwork, to collect data or use facilities. If an overseas visit is included in their research degree, this should be indicated in this section of the form.

Students undertaking research or attending any academic events such as conferences overseas will need to ensure that they follow all the procedures required for insurance cover.

5.1.7 Student experience

The student will answer a set of self-reflective questions on student experience and development. The responses will be discussed at the Panel Review Meeting.

5.1.8 Supervisory statement

Once the student has completed their section, the Principal Supervisor is required to complete a statement and sign the form before it can be submitted.

5.2 The Milestone Student Report

The milestone report is a sample of work which will provide the Reviewers with an accurate understanding of the progress that the student has made to date, the rationale for the work, and how progress to date fits with delivery of the thesis project plan. Contents of the research proposal may vary between disciplines, and may differ depending on the stage, progress and research approach of the project.

Milestones are intended to assess student progress at the point of submission and should not be treated as standalone pieces of work. Much of the report content could form drafts of sections of the final thesis. Before submission, students should discuss the content of the report with their supervisory team.

Prior to submitting the report, students should submit their work to Turnitin (via Moodle) and ensure that any issues have been addressed. The final Turnitin report should be included with the report.

5.2.1 Initial Project Review

The report for the Initial Project Review is likely to be an updated version of the thesis proposal submitted by the student when they applied for the programme. It is expected that students work with their supervisory team to further develop this proposal into a 2000-2500 word report.

The content and style of the report may vary between disciplines, but it may include the following:

- i. Abstract
- ii. Research Project aims
- iii. A critical literature review of the findings of other workers in the field of enquiry
- iv. A full description of the methods and/or methodology used
- v. Details of any results obtained and/or research aims achieved
- vi. Discussion of the work already undertaken, and conclusions drawn at this stage of the work. The relative extent of discussion and conclusions will vary considerably from subject to subject.
- vii. A full description of the intended further work
- viii. Details of the significant contribution to knowledge/practice/policy which is expected (for PhD)

If a project involves creative work where a performance or an installation is to be included as part of future milestones and the final examination this needs to be recorded so that appropriate support and procedures are in place for assessment and examination. Where applicable, students should highlight this within the body of their written report.

5.2.2 Annual check-in (PT students only)

For the annual check-in, students are required to submit a short report of up to approximately 1500 words, covering the work completed and planned in the period between formal milestones.

5.2.3 First and Second Formal Annual Progression Review

All students are required to submit a 6000-word report which clearly articulates their progress against the project plan or timeline and any changes that might have been made since the last formal milestone. Progress should also be clearly mapped onto the [degree outcomes](#), highlighting what work is outstanding to meet the outcomes for the degree.

The content, structure and style of the report may vary between disciplines and is an academic judgment to be made by the student in consultation with their supervisory team. The report is not intended to be a standalone piece of work and may include, for example, draft sections of the thesis or ongoing project work, with supporting narrative as required.

Students undertaking practice-based research can submit a report which is a balance between practice work and critical, contextual or reflective text. The practice-based part of the report should constitute no more than 50% of the overall intellectual contribution of the submission. This will be an academic judgement to be made in consultation with the supervisory team; however, the text-based part should be a minimum of 3000 words.

It is expected that research projects change and evolve. In some projects, it may not be possible to adhere exactly to the plan envisaged at the start of the programme. Minor variations are normal and the project title is a working title which may be amended at any point up to submission. If, however,

there are substantial differences between the original project and the project which has emerged, an explanation should be included in the report, and the Changes in Approved Programme of Study (RDCP) form must be completed (See the [Guidelines for Postgraduate Research Supervision](#) for further details).

The requirements for the Second Formal Review are the same as for the First Formal Review, with the expectation that progress is demonstrated since the last milestone.

5.2.4 Final Formal Review

The report for the Final Formal Review should take the form of a submission plan, outlining the following information:

- **Written progress:** Percentage completion of each thesis chapter
- **Degree outcomes:** Indication of which of the degree outcomes have been met and which are outstanding, including details of the work required to meet all outcomes
- **Embargo:** Whether a thesis embargo will be requested. Further information can be found
- **Thesis format:** Whether the submission is wholly thesis-based or whether a performance or artefact will be included as part of the examination. If the latter, this should include the percentage which is performance or practice based, how any performance will be captured and confirm that the balance of practice and critical text has been discussed with the supervisory team and agreed to be appropriate.
- **Viva format:** Confirmation of preference for oral examination in-person or by videoconference.

Prior to submitting the submission plan report, students should submit their draft thesis to Turnitin and confirm that any issues have been discussed with their supervisor and addressed.

5.2.4.1 Notice of Intention to Submit/Writing-up

Whether the student expects to submit at the end of their standard registration period or to move into the writing-up period should be clearly conveyed in their submission plan. At the meeting, the panel will make the recommendation for whether the student progresses to submit or writing-up.

If the student expects to submit by the end of their standard registration period, they will also need to submit the NITS form. Further details can be found in the [Guidance on Thesis Submission](#).

Appendix 2: The panel review meeting

At each milestone the student's work is assessed by a Review Panel. Review Panel meetings are an opportunity for students to both present their work and discuss any circumstances that may be impacting on their research, such as the frequency of supervisory meetings, their Training Needs Analysis or Training and Development Plan.

The role of the Review Panel is to assess the progress of the student. Following the meeting, the Panel Chair submits a written recommendation to the Research Degrees Committee for review. Possible outcomes for each milestone are detailed in Appendix 3.

The dates for Review Panels are fixed as they are similar to formal examinations. Students will only be able to request changes to these dates through the [Exceptional Factors Procedure](#). The review meetings will vary in duration depending on which milestone is being undertaken.

5.3 Review panel members

Members of the Review Panel are nominated by the [Research Degrees Coordinator or PGR Lead](#), and where possible and academically appropriate will remain the same across all the student's milestones. The panel will normally be made up of a Chair and two Reviewers. With the approval of the Head of Faculty Research Degrees, one of the Reviewers may also fulfil the role of Chair, or an additional Reviewer may be included. Annual check-ins may be conducted by a single Reviewer if required. In all cases, the student will be made aware of the panel in advance.

5.4 Meeting format

The Chair will open the meeting, introduce everyone and ensure the student is comfortable.

The student will then give a presentation on their research. This may be in whichever format the student feels best represents their work, in consultation with their supervisory team. This may include slides, performance or installation. Presentations for the First and Second Formal Annual Progression Reviews are expected to last 15 minutes. For all other milestones the presentation is expected to last 10 minutes. Students may be stopped if they go past this time.

The panel will then ask any questions relating to the presentation. A general discussion should then follow.

The panel should ask the student about:

- Attendance at any training courses, and plans for training and development
- Involvement in their University Centre for Research and Knowledge Exchange
- Planning for publications and other knowledge exchange activity from their research
- Fieldwork plans or attendance at conferences or seminars outside the university
- The project plan and timeline
- Ethical approval
- Career planning

At the Final Formal Review, Reviewers should also satisfy themselves that the student's submission plan is sufficiently detailed and realistic.

It is expected that at least one member of the supervisory team would be present as an observer during the presentation and discussion sections. There may be additional observers present for the presentation and discussion, including the supervisory team and other research students. This

should be considered as being in the spirit of the development of a supportive research culture. Specific arrangements for observers may vary across Faculties.

Observers should leave the meeting after the presentation and main discussion, leaving opportunities for the student and supervisor(s) to each speak separately to the panel in confidence. The Chair should facilitate these separate discussions by asking the student or supervisors to temporarily leave the meeting.

5.5 Outcome

The student, supervisor(s) and any observers will be asked to leave the room so that the panel are able to discuss the presentation and other elements of the submission, including any potential points relating to student wellbeing that may have been raised

The student will be invited to return for the recommended outcome. The supervisor(s) may be invited to return if the student agrees.

The possible outcomes for each milestone are outlined in Appendix 3.

The Chair should clarify that the outcome is a recommendation and subject to approval by Faculty Research Degrees Committee. Following approval a formal notification will be sent via SkillsForge.

Appendix 3: Overview of milestone outcomes

At the end of the milestone panel meeting, the panel will recommend an outcome from the permitted options indicated below. Different milestones have different possible outcomes.

The Panel Chair is responsible for completing the Outcome Report in SkillsForge. The outcome will then be ratified by Faculty Research Degrees Committee and communicated formally to students via SkillsForge, usually within 5 working days.

	Initial Project Review	Annual Check-in (PT)	First/ Second Formal Review	Final Formal Review
Progress. The student has made sufficient progress to indicate they are on track to meet the required standards , and may continue with their studies.	✓	✓	✓	
Progress with additional support in specific areas. The outcome report should indicate where this is required.	✓			
Instigate Procedure to Support Postgraduate Research Progress. The student is not currently on track to meet the degree outcomes and a formal support plan is recommended.	✓	✓		
Resubmit. The student is not currently making sufficient progress to indicate they are on track to meet the required standards to continue with their studies. The student is required to revise and resubmit their milestone report. The student is given three weeks (full-time) or six weeks (part-time) to resubmit. Upon resubmission the available outcomes are progress, transfer to lower award, or withdraw.			✓	
Transfer to lower award. The student has not made sufficient progress to indicate they are on track to meet the required standards and it is recommended that they transfer from the current degree to a lower award. This is only applicable to PhD or MPhil students.			✓	✓
Withdraw. The student is not on track to meet the required standards for the current or a lower award, and it is recommended that the student is withdrawn from the University.			✓	✓
Progress to Submit. The student has made sufficient progress to indicate they are on track to meet the required standards within the standard registration period. The NITS form should be submitted if it has not already.				✓
Progress to writing up. The student has made sufficient progress to indicate they are on track to meet the required standards by the end of the writing up period. The time allowed for writing up periods is based on the maximum				✓

period of registration as defined in the [regulations for the postgraduate research programmes](#).

The panel should clarify whether there is a need for small amounts of further research, which may be permitted if necessary to meet the proposed degree outcomes.

At write up stage, research students are expected to focus on preparing their thesis for submission. A student in the writing-up period is not expected to require the same level of supervision as during standard registration period. Use of Faculty facilities such as labs and studios will require the written permission of the Head of Faculty Research Degrees and should be indicated in the report.