

1. Context

- 1.1 This guidance document should be 'read in conjunction with the [Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice](#)'; the '[Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures \(HWSSP\) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses](#)'; and the '[University of Exeter Policy and Procedures for Fitness to Practise \(FtP\)](#)'. In cases where students are registered on programmes where the '[University of Exeter Policy and Procedures for Fitness to Practise \(FtP\)](#)' apply, this temporary guidance must necessarily always be superseded by those procedures.
- 1.2 In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the University adopted a policy intended to support postgraduate research students to continue with their research and academic progress, as far as reasonably possible. It was acknowledged that this progress might well be impacted by an individual's personal circumstances such as illness (physical or mental health issues), or caring or childcare responsibilities, or project-specific issues such as access to facilities or the inability to conduct fieldwork or data collection. In these cases, students have been encouraged to continue to liaise with their supervisors to develop manageable plans, where possible, and to keep a record of the impact on their research, while only applying for an interruption of study where they are unable to make any progress at all or in cases where their specific personal circumstances make it advisable to do so.
- 1.3 The procedure for students to apply for an extension to their period of study where their progress has been impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak and associated restrictions will be articulated in the temporary policy governing extensions. There is also a temporary policy under which students can apply to defer internal deadlines such as upgrade, which can be found with the [Doctoral College's temporary policies](#).
- 1.4 In addition to these policies, it has become necessary to identify how the procedures for Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement will be applied within these circumstances where deferrals and extensions are insufficient to address a student's progress. In an effort to manage student progress without causing undue pressure or detriment, the following approach will be implemented. This temporary policy will be kept under ongoing review and will be formally reviewed every 3 months for as long as it is in effect.
- 1.5 The Home Office has introduced a number of immigration concessions for students with regard to attendance monitoring requirements of key contact points, the flexibility of which supports the introduction of this temporary policy, however, should the Home Office's policy change this will require review of this guidance.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Normally, it is supervisors who make the judgement of what constitutes sufficient progress and engagement and who set specific deadlines for the student in order to maintain that progress. Within the context of the current situation, the definition of "unsatisfactory progress" must be reconsidered.
- 2.2 In considering student progress, the distinction should be made between the *quantity* of work produced and *quality* of the work produced.
- 2.3 For the duration of the application of this temporary policy, where the quantity of the student's output is less than expected, then the procedures in 3.1 Academic Progress below should be implemented without penalty to the student, regardless of the reasons for the delay.
- 2.4 For the duration of the application of this temporary policy, where the quality of the student's work is considered substandard to that required for their programme of study, then the procedures set out in 3.2 Academic Quality below should be implemented.
- 2.5 These procedures should be applied to new cases of unsatisfactory academic progress. For existing cases for which Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement procedures had been instigated prior to the COVID-19 crisis, the series of formal warnings will be temporarily suspended and replaced with the procedures laid out in section 3 below. When the temporary policy is rescinded and the University reverts to the full procedures laid out in the TQA Manual code, then the formal warnings will be reinstated at the level previously reached, where the last action taken under the '[Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice](#)' took place within the last twelve months.

- 2.6 Application of this temporary guidance should not mean that matters of concern with a student's progress should not be given consideration: absence or non-engagement may flag issues that it is important to address, for example, where a student may need to be referred to Wellbeing Services for additional support.
- 2.7 The responsibilities of supervisors, PGR Pastoral Tutors, students and the College set out in the '[Supervision of postgraduate research students: code of good practice](#)' remain in force, although they may need to be carried out differently under the current circumstances. These emphasise the importance of communication between students and their supervisory team, including keeping the student supervision agreement updated when work patterns and hours change and when a student is experiencing any issues impacting on their studies. It is important that students continue to be signposted to relevant support and advice in writing and that supervisory teams refer students to PGR Pastoral Tutors for support, where appropriate.
- 2.8 In considering what constitutes satisfactory progress, supervisors should take into consideration how much time the student has left in their period of study, including any extension the student is granted due to the impact of Covid-19.
- 2.9 Full records of all steps taken to raise concerns with a student's progress should be made in order to ensure that should further issues arise in the future, they can be addressed appropriately.

3. Procedures

3.1 Academic Progress

- 3.1.1 In order to set reasonable milestones within the current climate, the supervisory team should agree in discussion with the student how long they will need in order to produce the necessary work, taking into consideration access to necessary materials as well as the personal situation of the student. The deadlines should be aspirational but indicative so that in the case of an individual being unable to meet the deadline due to the impact of COVID-19-related issues, the normal series of formal warnings are suspended temporarily.
- 3.1.2 Where students find themselves unable to meet the agreed deadlines, a further discussion should take place to re-evaluate the student's current time capacity and revise the deadline accordingly. This action is not intended to be punitive, but rather to support the student in maintaining their work as well as possible within their particular situation, acknowledging that previous work schedules may have been significantly altered because of the current situation. Consideration should be given to whether other adjustments beyond the revision of deadlines might be needed to support the student.
- 3.1.3 These progress deadlines will be articulated in a Progress Check document, prepared in consultation with PGR Support and to be revised at each subsequent progress discussion. These Progress Checks can be used at a later date in support of the student's application for extension to their programme of study, if required. Should a student's circumstances change subsequent to the receipt of their Progress Check document, they may apply to [defer the deadlines](#) articulated in that document.
- 3.1.4 In the event that a student is unresponsive to requests for discussion, please refer to section 3.3 Student Engagement, below.
- 3.1.5 Other deadlines that a student will need to meet include, but are not limited to:
- [Upgrade](#): Deadlines in relation to the upgrade process.
 - [Extensions to periods of study](#): Under normal circumstances, the granting of extensions, where necessary, would be issued with an initial warning to ensure satisfactory progress is maintained. While these temporary arrangements are in force, such initial warnings will be replaced by the procedures herein.
 - [Deferrals](#): Where a student does not submit work by the deadline required (whether this is the original deadline or a deferred deadline) and has not been granted a period of deferral. Where it is appropriate to do so, this should be followed up in accordance with section 3.3 Student Engagement, below.
- 3.1.6 While it is recognised that the quantity of output may be adversely affected under the current circumstances, it will not be considered appropriate for progress to be delayed indefinitely. Should the student's output be deemed insufficient to enable them to complete within the maximum period of study permitted, or should it continue to be insufficient after the cessation of this temporary policy, then action will be initiated or escalated through the [Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice](#), in consultation with PGR Support. Action might otherwise be taken under the '[Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures](#)

[\(HWSSP\) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses](#)’ (see section 4, below) where there is evidence to suggest that it would be more appropriate.

3.1.7 Where it becomes clear that a student is not able to make any or only limited progress on their work under the current circumstances, such that they are unlikely to be able to complete within their period of study, it should be considered whether an interruption or change of mode of attendance would be appropriate.

3.2 Academic Quality

3.2.1 While it is anticipated that the quantity of a student’s output might be adversely affected to a greater or lesser extent by the COVID-19 crisis, it is expected that there should be less of an impact on the quality of any work that is produced. That work should therefore normally be of a standard appropriate to the relevant programme of study. However, in reaching that standard it is acknowledged that students may have needed to adjust their work plans or even the direction of their research more broadly, and this should be taken into account when judging the point at which it is reasonable to expect students to demonstrate work of an appropriate standard.

3.2.2 In cases where an outcome of either a first or a second attempt at upgrade would normally have included a recommendation of initiation or progression of a case under the [‘Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice,’](#) the student’s upgrade outcome communications should be supported by a Progress Check document, with additional follow up with the supervisory team as needed.

3.2.3 Where a supervisory team is concerned about the quality of the student’s work, this should be addressed with the student in a meeting. The expectations of the supervisory team in raising the quality of the work should then be articulated in a Progress Check document, prepared in consultation with PGR Support. The document should give details of agreed deadlines for improvement, based on the time capacity of the student and their particular personal situation. At all times, the personal situation of the student and the potential impact of the COVID-19 crisis on them and their work should be considered. Should a student’s circumstances change subsequent to the receipt of their Progress Check document, they may apply to [defer the deadlines](#) articulated in that document.

3.2.4 Where a student fails to meet the agreed deadline, and is unresponsive to requests for discussion, the lead supervisor should refer to the process laid out in 3.3 Student Engagement, below.

3.2.5 Where a student meets the deadline but the quality of the work produced is a matter for concern, it should be considered whether the student has been impacted by COVID-19-related issues or any other issues more broadly that might hinder their progress. There should be a further meeting between the supervisory team and student with expectations articulated in a Progress Check with further agreed deadlines. Should a student’s circumstances change subsequent to the receipt of their Progress Check document, they may apply to [defer the deadlines](#) articulated in that document.

3.2.6 If, after receiving two such Progress Check documents, the academic quality of the student’s work remains insufficient, and if this is not due to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, then the student should be referred for an initial warning under the [Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement](#) procedures in consultation with PGR Support. Action might otherwise be taken under the [‘Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures \(HWSSP\) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses’](#) (see section 4, below) where there is evidence to suggest that it would be more appropriate.

3.2.7 Should the quality of the student’s output be deemed insufficient to achieve a satisfactory standard within the student’s maximum period of study, or should it continue to be insufficient after the cessation of this temporary policy, then action will be initiated or escalated through the [Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement: Code of Good Practice](#)’ in consultation with PGR Support. Action might otherwise be taken under the [‘Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures \(HWSSP\) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses’](#) (see section 4, below) where there is evidence to suggest that it would be more appropriate.

3.3 Student Engagement

3.3.1 If at any time a student does not respond to a request for a supervision discussion to address potential issues of insufficient progress within the procedures laid out in 3.1 and 3.2 above, then the supervisor or PGR Pastoral Tutor should attempt to make contact again, normally after no more than 2 weeks.

- 3.3.2 If the student remains unresponsive after two attempts, a Progress Check document will be raised in consultation with PGR Support and the case will be referred to the PGR Education Welfare Advisor.
- 3.3.3 Should the student fail to address the engagement concerns raised in the Progress Check, then they should be referred for an initial warning under the [Unsatisfactory Student Progress and Engagement](#) procedures in consultation with PGR Support. Action might otherwise be taken under the '[Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures \(HWSSP\) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses](#)' (see section 4, below) where there is evidence to suggest that it would be more appropriate.
- 3.3.4 In the case of other progress deadlines, such as upgrade, where a student does not submit work by the deadline required (whether this is the original deadline, or a deferred deadline) and has not applied for a deferral where it is appropriate to do so, this should be followed up in accordance with this guidance.
- 3.3.5 Where a student fails to maintain their MyPGR supervisory contact events, this should be followed up in accordance with this guidance.
- 3.3.6 Where a student fails to engage with their supervisory team or the University more broadly, for example to report sickness absence, it is important that this is raised with the PGR Support team to follow up.

4. Health and Wellbeing

- 4.1 It is expected that a comparatively large proportion of students may be suffering from higher than usual levels of stress and anxiety brought about by uncertainty, delay and any personal impact caused by the COVID-19 situation. Students should be referred to the support services offered by the University to help them cope with this. In addition to the support offered by PGR Pastoral Tutors, there are links to a [comprehensive range of help on the Doctoral College web pages](#).
- 4.2 Where there is significant concern about a student's health or wellbeing, regardless of the cause, and this is having a serious detrimental impact on their progress, students should be referred to the PGR Education Student Welfare Advisor, on welfare.PGR@exeter.ac.uk. In those circumstances it may be appropriate to instigate the procedures detailed in Section F of the University Calendar: [Health Wellbeing and Support for Study](#). Where this is deemed useful, it will be conducted in consultation with PGR Support.
- 4.3 Where a student does not engage with the wellbeing support and processes recommended, action will be initiated and escalated through the Health Wellbeing and Support for Study Procedures (HWSSP) – Exeter and Penryn Campuses.

5. Concerns with Application of the Process

- 5.1 The College Director of PGR will be responsible for the application of this guidance in their College and should be consulted where appropriate in complex cases.
- 5.2 If a student has any concerns with the application of this temporary procedure, they will be invited to raise it with the PGR Support team when a Progress Check document is prepared. Such concerns should be raised in writing by a deadline provided, normally within 10 working days of the Progress Check letter being issued. PGR Support will liaise with the relevant staff to ensure that a response is provided.
- 5.3 Students may also contact the Students' Guild or the Students' Union for advice should they wish to discuss their warning with someone outside of their College.

APPENDICES: Guidance Notes for Support Staff & Flowchart