

# Progress reviews – frequently asked questions

**Please note:** in February 2021 a new digital system, **Research Education Candidature System (RECS)** was launched to allow HDR candidates to manage many administrative tasks that were previously the responsibility of HDRAC or Sydney Student. Some of our information regarding these processes might be outdated. We are currently in the process of updating it.

If you have difficulties with RECS contact HDRAC for assistance.

Related articles:

- [Progress reviews](#)

## Q. What is the purpose of a progress review?

A. Progress reviews are important in supporting your candidature. Your faculty wants to know how you are progressing and what can be done to improve your potential for success.

Your review will be part of the process to assess whether:

- you have adequate support and resources
- your supervisory arrangements are satisfactory
- your current progress plan is feasible
- your current timeline is feasible
- you are getting the support you need.

## Q. How often do progress reviews happen?

A. You will have a **probationary review** in the first 6 months of your candidature. This first review includes your **first year milestone integrity check**, where any issues with academic honesty, plagiarism or research integrity can be picked up and resolved. This will also help you and your supervisors improve your research and writing practices by recommending appropriate development courses.

Following your first meeting, progress reviews happen on an annual basis. If your progress is deemed as marginal or unsatisfactory at your review, you may be

asked to come to a follow up progress review in 3 – 6 months rather than annually.

## Q. How does a progress review work?

A. When progress reviews are due the Higher Degree by Research Administration Centre (HDRAC) will send you a link and instructions on completing an online form with different sections to be completed by you, your research supervisor, and the postgraduate coordinator in your faculty.

You will be asked to upload a copy of your thesis abstract and your current progress plan, with any supporting documents such as your literature review, milestones, or timeline towards completion. **Each faculty has their own [progress plan templates](#).**

After this form is completed by both your supervisor and you, you will be asked to attend an interview with a panel of academic staff to discuss your research progress. Your supervisors are not part of this panel but may be invited to attend a separate interview. Your interview should take about 15 – 30 minutes. When the review process is completed all parties will be sent the panel's report.

The postgraduate coordinator determines the final outcome, unless that outcome is unsatisfactory. In this case, they must refer the outcome to the associate dean as a recommendation and the associate dean will either confirm or make a different outcome. The review must be conducted in accordance with the [Progress Planning and Review for Higher Degree by Research Students Policy 2015](#).

## Q. Who will be on my academic panel? I am worried they may not understand my research project.

A. The panel for your progress review must comprise three academics that collectively have relevant disciplinary expertise, supervision experience, and other relevant specialist knowledge. They can be from outside your faculty. At the time of the review if you believe the panel lacks understanding for your project you may write this on the report form, at Section 6, when it is sent back to you.

Q. I am worried that I have not made sufficient progress before my review date. What can I do?

A. It is normal to feel anxious about your progress review but we recommend that you use the review as a timely opportunity to discuss achievements as well as difficulties in your candidature. **Speak with your supervisor early on if you have concerns about progress and regularly review your progress plan with your supervisor.** If you are unwell at the time of your progress review you may request a new date from the postgraduate coordinator.

Below are some tips for a successful progress review:

- review the responses you wrote in the online form and prepare examples of achievements, or reasons for any difficulties
- practice speaking about your research and progress plan
- demonstrate interest and passion in your research project and don't be afraid to tell the panel what you find exciting, or even disappointing
- ask for additional resources, like training or other assistance.

Q. At my review can I mention variations or changes to my research plan or candidature?

A. Yes. Your progress review is a good time to mention things that have impacted progress in your research project. These may include: change to part time candidature, leave or suspension, unexpected failure in a milestone, extension, or other unanticipated barriers or major changes to either the research project or in your life such as health issues, or requirement for academic adjustments.

Q. I am close to submitting my thesis for examination. Do I still need to have a progress review?

A. Yes. This is a good opportunity to discuss any final steps in your progression.

Q. Can I bring a support person to my progress review meeting?

A. You have the right to bring a support person to your review. This is a person of your choosing and could be one of [our caseworkers](#). You will need to notify

HDRAC or the postgraduate coordinator prior to your review meeting if you are bringing a support person.

## Q. What are the possible outcomes of a progress review and what do they mean?

A. There are 3 possible outcomes of a review:

- meets or exceeds objectives
- marginal progress
- unsatisfactory progress.

If it is decided you have made **marginal progress**, you will be given required actions and deadlines and your supervisor is expected to continue supporting you with these actions. A marginal progress decision is considered satisfactory for continuation of a scholarship.

If it is decided you have made **unsatisfactory progress**, the postgraduate coordinator must specify required actions and due dates, set a supplementary progress review within 3 to 6 months, and refer the panel report to the associate dean. In certain cases the postgraduate coordinator may also recommend to the University that your scholarship be terminated and/or recommend to the associate dean that you be asked to [show good cause](#). Your supervisor is expected to continue supporting you.

If this is the second time in consecutive reviews you have received an unsatisfactory progress rating, the recommendation to the associate dean will be to ask you to [show good cause](#) as to why you should be permitted to continue with your candidature.

## Q. I disagree with the outcome of my progress review. What can I do?

A. You have the right to appeal the outcome of your review, including a marginal progress outcome, to your faculty associate dean. The conditions and time frame for making an appeal will be in your outcome letter.

If your faculty rejects your appeal or you are appealing an outcome of termination or exclusion you have an option to appeal to the dean of the faculty, or to the [Student Appeals Body](#) (SAB), which is your final level of appeal.

If you require assistance or advice on any aspect of your progression, especially on appealing a progression outcome or exclusion, please [contact us](#).

Q. My review is complete, but I don't agree with the details of the report. What can I do?

A. At the end of your review meeting the panel will discuss and evaluate your progress and prepare a written report for your postgraduate coordinator. **You will have an opportunity to respond to the panel report** under Section 6 of the form before the postgraduate coordinator makes a recommendation to the associate dean. The deadline to provide a response will be listed in the review form.

Note anything you write on your review form will not be confidential. If confidentiality is necessary, you should [contact HDRAC](#) first for advice on how your faculty manages requests for confidentiality in your progress review process.

Q. I read my supervisor's assessment of my progress and I don't agree with their comments. What can I do?

A. It is okay if your assessment of your progress is different to your supervisor's assessment. You can note any differences on your section of the progress report after reading your supervisor's comments. You can also note the reasons for any discrepancies during your review meeting. If you have ongoing concerns about your supervisor's assessment, you have the right to raise these with your postgraduate coordinator.

Q. I'm having difficulties with my supervisor and these are reflected in my progress review. What can I do?

A. The University expects students to report concerns about supervision as they come up and if you feel you require assistance to resolve them. Complaints about supervision should be raised in a professional manner and, if possible, with evidence.

To raise an issue:

- if you have a good working relationship with your supervisor, you can raise concerns about your progress with them directly
- you can request a confidential meeting with the postgraduate coordinator in your faculty to discuss any concerns and explore your options (if there is a conflict of interest with your postgraduate coordinator, you can also ask the

associate dean, research education in your school for a confidential meeting)

- you have the right to change your supervisory arrangements – consult your faculty postgraduate coordinator on the steps for this process
- if your concerns are not resolved, or you feel unsafe in raising concerns within the faculty, [contact us](#) for assistance

## Q. Where can I get copies of my progress reviews?

A. You will receive a copy of your completed progress review report. Contact HDRAC if you require an additional copy of your reviews.

## Q. I'm feeling stressed and anxious about my progress review. Who can I ask for help?

A. Talking about the things making you feel anxious with a counsellor may be helpful in preparation for your progress review. Access free counselling with the University's [Counselling and Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#), by phone or Zoom. To book an appointment you can either call **8627 8433** or complete the [CAPS online booking form](#). If you're in Australia, you can also contact the University of Sydney's mental wellbeing support line 24/7 on [1300 474 065](#).

These services external to the University also provide mental health support:

- [Lifeline Australia \(13 11 14\)](#)
- [Beyond Blue \(1300 224 636\)](#)
- [eheadspace \(1800 650 890\)](#).

## Q. My research progress has been impacted by COVID-19. Is my progress review going to be fair?

A. The University acknowledges that HDR students and research projects have been impacted in various ways by the pandemic and have announced a range of support measures. Progress review meetings will go ahead as scheduled and will be conducted via Zoom or other online tools. Since everyone has been impacted this year, HDR students are encouraged to approach their progress review with honesty about their progress under COVID-19 conditions. Research periods and their dates remain unchanged.

Q. I'm behind in my research plan because of COVID-19. Can I ask for a longer candidature?

A. All HDR students will be granted an extension of candidature of a minimum of 1 research period due to COVID-19, if making satisfactory progress. Submit your request through [Sydney Student](#). Go to **My studies, Research details**, then select **Request candidature extension** next to your latest completion date. Additional extensions will be considered on a case by case basis. If you have already received an extension beyond the latest submission date, and prior to COVID-19, further extension is subject to academic approval.

Q. Is the University providing any financial assistance to HDR students due to COVID-19?

A. HDR students currently receiving a centrally funded University scholarship are eligible to apply for 3.5 years of scholarship support. International students are guaranteed an international fee waiver for the extension of one research period. [Apply to HDRAC](#) at least two months before your expected completion date.