

# Progress reviews

**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 Some of our information regarding these processes might be outdated.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 – frequently asked questions](#)

The University of Sydney requires that every higher degree by research (HDR) student, whether full time or part time, has a **progress review (PR) at least once every twelve (12) months**. Students who re-enrol for a period of more than six (6) months to revise and resubmit must also participate in a progress review.

The progress review involves a face-to-face interview with academic staff. Until recently this was known as an **annual progress review (APR)**, and you are likely to still come across this term.

It's best to approach your PR as an opportunity to constructively discuss your achievements, areas of concern, or any challenges you are facing; to ensure you are heading in the right direction in your candidature; and to receive beneficial feedback.

## Keep your own records and documents

We recommend that you keep your own personal file that includes: copies of all progress reports, medical certificates, research plans, meeting minutes or your own notes of meetings; and all emails or other documents (both academic and personal) that relate to or discuss your progress. Remember to record dates of events.

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

## Progress plan

Your progress plan is probably **the most important task to complete within your probation period or first year of candidature**. The progress plan records all of your project activities, compulsory milestones and completions, with timelines, and provides your faculty with an objective assessment of your research progress. There are [progress plan templates for each faculty](#).

**You should regularly review your progress plan with your lead supervisor and certainly before a progress review.** Variations to your plan may include: going part time; taking leave or suspension; achievement or failure in a milestone. Your research project may have changed; you may have experienced unexpected health issues; or require academic adjustments due to a short-term or permanent disability. Remember, a clear and updated progress plan that is agreed upon by your lead supervisor will make for a smoother PR and will help you maintain your confidence in a timely completion.

## First year milestone integrity check

Your first progress review will include your 'first year milestone integrity check'. The University conducts this integrity check for **all HDR students within the first year of your degree**. It may sound daunting, but it's best for you to approach this check as an opportunity to ensure that your research and writing practices are at the standards required by your faculty and the University. This includes: correct referencing; academic honesty; ethical practices; and written expression. If the check identifies that you have not met the standards, your lead supervisor will work with you to make improvements, for example by referring you to complete a course or training.

For the integrity check, you will be required to submit a substantial piece of writing, negotiated with your lead supervisor, to Turnitin. [Turnitin will compare your work](#) to text from the internet, published works, and other students' work (from any university). When you are close to finishing your degree, your final thesis will also be submitted to Turnitin and checked in the same way. Find [further information specific to your faculty](#) about this process.

## Your progress review: what is the process?

There are two parts to your progress review: **an online form and an interview.**

### Progress review form

For each PR all postgraduate research students must complete a PR form, which will also be completed by your lead supervisor. **HDRAC will notify you when your PR form is due.** HDRAC will provide instructions on completing the PR form online and uploading relevant support documentation, such as your progress plan and thesis abstract. This form will then go to your lead supervisor to complete and should come back to you so **you can read the comments made by your supervisor prior to your interview.** It is your right, and an advantage, to understand your supervisor's view of your progress prior to the interview. If you don't receive your supervisor's comments in time we recommend you contact your postgraduate coordinator and seek their assistance.

Your **progress review panel** will read your PR form and documentation before your interview. The completed PR form is an important part of your performance evaluation and provides a record of your work progress, so it's important that you read the PR form to make sure that it is correct and contains no surprises to you.

The University provides [more faculty-specific information](#) about your form and supporting documents.

### Progress review interview

Your interview will typically be for **15 – 30 minutes**, and will be conducted by **your progress review panel.** The interview will focus on your progress plan and any required variation to the plan as presented by you or your lead supervisor. The interview is an opportunity for you to demonstrate your level of knowledge relating to your research and your degree.

**Your progress review interview is usually conducted without your supervisors being present.** Any of your supervisors may be invited to attend an interview, but you will be notified if this is the case. If there are or will be variations to your progress plan, the panel may need to interview your lead supervisor. But

you must also be given the opportunity to speak with the panel without any of your supervisors being present.

**Don't only rely on the PR form.** Your PR interview is important for you to demonstrate your ownership of the project, especially if there were unexpected delays in progress, or problems with essential resources or supervision. If you don't raise critical issues or requests for changes at your progress review interview, it may be difficult for your faculty to provide the required support for you. [Contact us](#) if you require assistance in preparing for your PR interview.

At the end of your interview the panel will discuss and evaluate your performance and prepare a written report for your postgraduate coordinator. **You will have an opportunity to respond** to the panel report and **if you disagree with the panel's comments we strongly recommend you respond in Section 6** of the form, before the postgraduate coordinator determines the final outcome. The deadline to provide a response will be listed on the PR form online. HDRAC should send you the panel report within 1 to 2 weeks of the interview; if this does not happen we recommend you contact HDRAC for the report.

## Progress review panel

Your PR panel is appointed by your postgraduate coordinator and will consist of at least two academics. Each member will have at least one of: disciplinary expertise; supervisory experience; or relevant specialist knowledge. PR panel members do not include any of your supervisors and may be from outside the faculty or school.

## Confidentiality and raising your concerns at your progress review interview

If you are having an issue with your supervisors or any other University staff, or if you are experiencing a personal difficulty, you may want to raise the issue for discussion at your progress review interview. You may raise sensitive issues by writing to your panel chair, or your postgraduate coordinator, to **arrange a confidential discussion at the interview**. Be aware that complaints about supervision should be raised in a professional manner and, if possible, with evidence. We advise that you [contact HDRAC](#) first for advice on how your faculty manages requests for confidentiality in your progress review interview. If you are going to bring up a serious issue, you may want to [seek confidential](#)

[advice from us](#) first. **Remember that anything you write on your PR form will not be confidential.**

You have the right to **bring a support person to your interview**, and this could be one of our caseworkers. **You will need to notify HDRAC or the postgraduate coordinator prior to your interview that you will be bringing a support person.**

## Preparing for your progress review interview

Some students may feel anxious, nervous or even overwhelmed by their progress review, and particularly the interview. Remember this is not an examination; it is a review of your progress.

Our tips for a successful interview:

- Know your rights and responsibilities by reading our article [Supervision: your rights and responsibilities](#), as well as the relevant University policies
- Know [the process](#) for your progress review.
- Get support if you need it, such as having a support person at your interview.
- Think of your progress review as a way to gain support and feedback.
- Review the responses you wrote in the PR form and prepare examples of achievements, or reasons for any difficulties.
- Practice speaking about your research and progress plan.
- Break down your progress plan into **what, how** and **why**, and prepare a concise and developed answer for each area.
- Demonstrate interest and passion in your research project and don't be afraid to tell the panel what you find exciting, or even disappointing.
- If you are asked a difficult question, take your time to respond and refer to your notes if relevant.

- Bring support documents, especially if you have experienced delays and have not made the progress you want (these include medical certificates, draft papers, emails, etc.).
- Ask for additional resources, like training or other assistance, if you need them.
- Raise sensitive issues by writing to your panel chair prior to your interview to arrange a confidential discussion at the interview.
- Be aware that complaints about supervision should be raised in a professional manner and with evidence – your supervisor will be informed.
- Please [contact us](#) if you require advice or support.

## Outcomes of your progress review

There are 3 possible outcomes:

1. progress meets or exceeds objectives
2. marginal progress
3. unsatisfactory progress

Most students will receive an outcome of **progress meets or exceeds objectives**, and this means the faculty is satisfied that since your last PR you have completed, or are close to completing, your milestones and are on track for submitting your thesis on time.

If it is decided that you have made **marginal progress**, you will be given some required actions and deadlines. Your lead supervisor will be responsible for overseeing completion of the required actions. You will also need to do an extra progress review between 2-6 months from the date of this review. A marginal progress decision is considered satisfactory for continuation of a scholarship (where the terms and conditions of the scholarship are under the University's control). A marginal progress rating will **not** mean that you have to Show Good Cause.

If it is decided that you have made **unsatisfactory progress**, the associate dean of research education may allow you to continue and set conditions for your continuation. You will be required to meet the same conditions as for a marginal progress outcome, but your scholarship may be suspended. However, the postgraduate coordinator may also recommend to the University that your scholarship be terminated, and recommend to the associate dean that you be asked to Show Good Cause as to why you should be allowed to continue your candidature. If this is the **second time in consecutive progress reviews** that you have received an unsatisfactory progress rating, you will be asked to [Show Good Cause](#).

## Right to appeal

If it is decided that you have made **marginal progress** or **unsatisfactory progress**, you have the right to appeal to the faculty. The conditions and time frame for making an appeal will be in your outcome letter.

If your faculty decides against your appeal or to exclude you for not [showing good cause](#), you have a right to either a faculty-level appeal or appeal to the Student Appeals Body. The conditions and time frame for making an appeal will be in your outcome letter. If you appeal to your faculty and this appeal is rejected, you still have the option to appeal to the Student Appeals Body (SAB). Remember that a decision to bypass the faculty and instead to appeal to the SAB allows you a slightly longer period to submit an appeal but it is also your **final level of appeal**. [Contact us](#) for assistance with your appeal.

## If you are enrolled on a probationary basis

Some students may be enrolled in a master's degree by research or PhD on a probationary basis, for up to four research periods. If this is you, there is a lot to get done within this period so please read our article: [Starting your PhD](#). After your probationary period, you will participate in a progress review and the associate dean will either confirm your candidature or ask you to [Show Good Cause](#) as to why your candidature should not be terminated.

## Relevant University policies:

All University of Sydney policies can be found at the [University Policy Register](#).

- [Progress Planning and Review for HDR Students Policy 2015](#)
- [University of Sydney \(Higher Degree by Research\) Rule 2011](#)
- [University of Sydney \(Student Appeals Against Academic Decisions\) Rule 2006](#)