

## CODE OF PRACTICE ON POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES: APPENDIX 4

### PROCEDURE FOR MONITORING THE ACADEMIC PROGRESS OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) is committed to providing a high quality educational experience for all students, with appropriate academic support, administrative structures and good welfare services and facilities. This procedure is Appendix 4 of an inter-related framework of procedures under the *Code of Practice on Postgraduate Research Degrees*.
- 1.1. This procedure provides the framework within which PGR students embark on their research programme and by which their academic progress is monitored and assessed. It also provides procedures for dealing with circumstances where students are not demonstrating satisfactory progress or where their engagement with their programme is not in accordance with LSTM requirements.
- 1.2. The progress of students registered on postgraduate research (PGR) degree programmes is carefully monitored with systems to ensure prompt feedback and triggers to help identify areas where the student may need additional support or actions. Whilst what is considered to be ‘satisfactory academic progress’ may vary according to the individual research project, there are common criteria that all students will be required to meet. Specific targets will also be agreed between the student and supervisory team and progress will be reviewed taking these into account. Academic judgement will be exercised by the supervisory team and the members of the Progress Assessment Panel (PAP) when considering whether or not a student’s academic progress is deemed satisfactory. These judgements will be subject to confirmation by the LSTM Director of Postgraduate Research (DPR).

#### 2. Scope

- 2.1. This procedure applies to all current PGR students registered with LSTM, whether based on-site, off-site or split-site, and studying full-time or part-time.
- 2.2. The procedure covers examination of a thesis leading to one of the following awards:
  - Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
  - Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
  - Doctor of Medicine (MD)
- 2.3. LSTM is responsible for the academic quality and standards of all study within PGR degree programmes, including those offered under a collaborative arrangement with an institutional partner. Where, under a collaborative arrangement, progress procedures differ from those set out in this procedure, this will be specified in the relevant collaborative agreement.

#### 3. Registration and Induction

- 3.1. All PGR students are required to register via the LSTM student information system (SIS) when they first arrive at LSTM. Students will normally be registered on either 1<sup>st</sup>

October or 1<sup>st</sup> January but students can be registered to on the first day of any month if circumstances dictate. Students are expected to provide and update their contact details as part of the annual registration process. LSTM will communicate with students only using the addresses recorded in the LSTM SIS and/or their LSTM email address.

- 3.2. Students will be permitted to re-register annually on the anniversary of their first registration subject to successful fulfilment of annual progression requirements and payment of all outstanding fees. Failure to pay fees within the required timescale may result in the student being financially suspended.
- 3.3. Registration ensures that students are fully insured to carry out research on LSTM's premises or at the premises of any agreed off-site location, and provides the student with access to research facilities, library and computing facilities and student support services. When a student has registered as 'submission pending' they will not be insured to conduct experimental research.
- 3.4. The PGR Degrees Administrative Team will arrange for mandatory induction events to coincide with the October and January intake dates. Alternative arrangements will be made on an individual basis for students who miss these events. Induction events will be broadcast on-line to allow participation by students based off-site. Supervisors are expected to arrange induction to the student's department and research group as appropriate.

#### **4. Annual Progress Monitoring**

- 4.1. All PGR students are subject to a formal annual progress monitoring process. This includes students who are 'submission pending'. The process comprises the following compulsory elements:
  - 4.1.1. Completion of a development needs analysis and attendance at mandatory training events (Section 5).
  - 4.1.2. Preparation in Year 1 of a project plan (Section 6)
  - 4.1.3. Completion of the Record of Supervisory Meetings (Section 7)
  - 4.1.4. Annual review by an independent Progress Assessment Panel (Sections 8 and 9)
- 4.2. Information relating to Sections 5 – 9 will be collated in the SIS as an Annual Progress Monitoring Report (APMR). This will be reviewed and, if satisfactory, signed off by the DPR and the student will be allowed to register for the next year of study. Students whose APMR is deemed unsatisfactory will be subject to the procedure in Section 10.

#### **5. Researcher Development Programme**

- 5.1. All students must within one month of registration complete a development needs analysis (DNA) using the online tool in the SIS. The DNA should be discussed with the supervisor(s) to produce a plan for the student's immediate and future research training needs and should be reviewed annually.
- 5.2. LSTM provides to PGR students a broad range of development training opportunities using a flexible, choice-led approach. Whilst most training is optional, there are a small number of mandatory elements that will be monitored as part of annual progression (e.g. research integrity).
- 5.3. Students will be given institutional access to the VITAE Researcher Development Framework (RDF) Planner through which they can log their personal development activities.

- 5.4. Students do not need to formally submit their DNA but will be expected to provide it to their annual Progress Assessment Panel (PAP) along with details of personal development activities logged in the previous year.

## **6. Project Plan**

- 6.1. In consultation with their supervisor(s), all students (full and part-time) must within 3 months of registration submit a project plan that defines the scope of their research project and outlines the objectives to be achieved in the first year.
- 6.2. The project plan should be no more than two sides of A4 and should be signed and dated by the supervisors and the student as an indication that there is clarity by all parties about the project aims.

## **7. Record of Supervisory Meetings**

- 7.1. PGR students will be supervised in accordance with the *Procedure for Supervision of Postgraduate Research Students*, which requires all students to meet regularly with their supervisor(s) and to keep a formal record in the SIS of the outcomes of such meetings.
- 7.2. A student who fails to complete satisfactorily the Record of Supervisory Meetings in the SIS may be prevented from re-registering for the following academic year and their studies could be terminated on the grounds of unsatisfactory progress.
- 7.3. LSTM will consider failure to engage with the Record of Supervisory Meetings as evidence that a student is not engaging appropriately with their programme and could lead to LSTM's withdrawal of immigration sponsorship for a student studying at LSTM in Liverpool under the Tier 4 points-based immigration system.

## **8. The Progress Assessment Panel**

- 8.1. The PAP will normally comprise two members of LSTM academic staff who are not members of the student's supervisory team. No external assessor should be present.
- 8.2. Students should arrange an informal meeting with their PAP members within 3 months of registration to discuss their project plan (Section 6) although this meeting is not part of the formal assessment procedure.
- 8.3. Students are required to meet annually with their PAP nine months after initial registration / re-registration in each year of study.
- 8.4. Students whose studies are suspended are required to attend a meeting with their PAP as part of the re-registration process.
- 8.5. The onus is on the student to approach their PAP to agree a time and date for the annual review meeting and to inform the PGR Administrative Team. If the student is based off-site the meeting can take place over the phone or video call.
- 8.6. In advance of the annual review meeting, the student's Primary Supervisor will be required, for the information of the PAP, to complete a report on the student's progress using the online tool in the SIS. The Supervisor will not normally attend the PAP meeting. However, if exceptional issues have affected the student's progress, the Supervisor may be invited to attend part of the PAP meeting to speak on these issues only.
- 8.7. Students are required to submit the following information at least three weeks in advance of their PAP annual review meeting to allow the PAP to assess the progress of their research:

- 8.7.1. Year 1 students must submit a project report and give a 15 minute presentation. The structure of the report is flexible and can be adapted to suit the individual project but it would normally be expected to contain a review of the literature; a statement of the research question and the aims and objectives of the study; description of the methodology to be employed; discussion of results obtained to date; and plans for future work. There is no strict word limit but the report would normally be approximately 25 pages in length and must be formatted following the guidelines for an LSTM thesis.
- 8.7.2. Year 2 students must submit an update of their project report highlighting data generated and analyses conducted plus a timeline for data collection and completion of studies. Students may submit a draft thesis chapter in place of the report provided this includes analysis of original data and is not purely methodological.
- 8.7.3. Year 3 full-time students must submit a draft chapter of their thesis (a different chapter to that submitted in Year 2 if applicable) plus a detailed timeline for thesis completion and submission
- 8.7.4. Part-time students must comply with the requirements of Year 1 and Year 2. They should then continue to submit updates of their project report and timeline until their final year of study (normally Year 6), at which point a draft chapter and timeline for thesis completion is required.
- 8.8. In addition to reviewing the student's academic progress, the PAP will discuss with the student the number and frequency of supervisory meetings in the formal Record of Supervisory Meetings and their attendance at training events identified in their DNA.
- 8.9. Students may use the opportunity of the PAP meeting to highlight any personal, financial, family or health-related issues which they believe have impacted on their ability to undertake research and make good progress.
- 8.10. The PAP may make the following recommendations:
  - 8.10.1. That the student has made satisfactory progress and should be permitted to re-register.
  - 8.10.2. That the student's initial PhD registration is downgraded to MPhil and they are permitted to re-register under the revised qualification aim.
  - 8.10.3. That the student has not made sufficient satisfactory academic progress but is permitted a further period of time under review and their academic progress will be assessed further by the PAP.
  - 8.10.4. That the student has not made satisfactory academic progress, and that their studies be terminated.
  - 8.10.5. That the student has been found guilty of serious academic malpractice (in accordance with the Procedure on Academic Integrity for Postgraduate Research Programmes. In such circumstances the PAP may decide, depending on the gravity of the offence, to issue a formal warning, a suspension of studies or termination of studies.
  - 8.10.6. The PAP members will provide feedback by completing a jointly written report within two weeks of the meeting using the online tool in the SIS. The report will be reviewed by the DPR and normally will be made available in full to the student and Primary Supervisor. The confidential section of the report will be

omitted from circulation and appropriate action, if any, will be taken by the DPR.

## **9. Procedure for Dealing with Unsatisfactory Academic Progress**

- 9.1. If a student is deemed not to be making satisfactory academic progress at any point during the academic year, the student will be formally warned of the situation in writing by the DPR.
- 9.2. The written warning will set out the reasons for concern and provide clear targets for improving performance. The student will be informed that the letter constitutes a formal warning and that the consequences of either not responding or not meeting the required targets may lead to termination of studies. A realistic timescale for achieving the improvements will be set, which should not be less than two months for a full-time student. It will also identify who will be evaluating the student's efforts in achieving the improvements and how the evaluation will be undertaken. Normally, this would be through the PAP. If the initial PAP meeting took place off-site (Section 8.5), a student whose progress is giving cause for concern will normally be required to attend any follow-up PAP meeting in Liverpool.
- 9.3. When the PAP is content that the student has demonstrated improvement within the required timescales, the DPR will confirm this in writing to the student.
- 9.4. When a student does not satisfactorily meet the targets set or otherwise gives continued cause for concern, the student will be invited to a meeting of a meeting of the PGR Progress Panel. The Panel is chaired by the DPR and includes two other members of academic staff who are not members of the student's supervisory team. The student's Primary Supervisor will be invited to attend the meeting but will not be a member of the Panel. A member of the PGR Administrative Team will act as Secretary to the Panel.
- 9.5. The student will be given at least ten working days' notice of the meeting and will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend or supporter. The student will be invited to make a written statement setting out the reasons for continued unsatisfactory progress and asked to submit this to the PGR Administrative Team at least three working days before the meeting. Relevant documentation will be circulated to all parties by the PGR Administrative Team at least two working days before the meeting. The student will be made aware that if they do not attend the meeting then a decision will be made in their absence. If a student suspends studies before a PGR Progress Panel is held, they will be required to attend a meeting of the Panel on their return to study.
- 9.6. At the meeting, the student will be invited to explain any reasons for the lack of progress, where possible supported by documentary evidence, such as medical certificates.
- 9.7. The possible outcomes of the PGR Progress Panel meeting are that:
  - 9.7.1. The student is permitted to continue on the research programme with a final opportunity to improve performance. The PGR Progress Panel will, in consultation with the supervisory team, provide a set of agreed targets and revised timescales and is responsible for monitoring the student's performance against these targets. The decision will be confirmed to the student in writing by the DPR, including a warning that failure to meet the targets will lead to termination of studies.

- 9.7.2. The student should be deemed not to be made satisfactory progress and their studies be terminated with immediate effect. The Academic Registrar will write to the student, confirming the decision of the Panel and giving details of how to appeal.

## 10. The Deemed Withdrawn Procedure

- 10.1. LSTM will deem a PGR student to have withdrawn and terminate their studies under the following circumstances provided the appropriate procedures have been followed:
  - 10.1.1. Failure to return to studies as expected following a period of suspension of studies
  - 10.1.2. Failure to attend as expected or failure to be in contact with LSTM (via the supervisor or other staff as appropriate) for one month or more
  - 10.1.3. Non-completion of annual progress monitoring requirements (Section 4) by the specified deadline
  - 10.1.4. Non-submission of thesis by last permitted submission date
  - 10.1.5. Non-completion of modifications or non-resubmission required by Examiners following the *viva voce* examination within the specified period of time.
- 10.2. Where there has been no engagement by a student as outlined in Section 10.1, the Primary Supervisor should try to contact the student using their term-time and home addresses recorded in the SIS. This communication will indicate to the student that they are required to contact LSTM within ten working days and should provide the contact details of the person (normally the Supervisor) with whom contact should be made. If there is reason to believe the student is not able to respond within this timescale with good reason, then this may be extended to twenty working days.
- 10.3. If the student does not respond to the actions in 10.2, a formal letter will be issued by the DPR indicating that this is the final attempt at making contact, that the student is required to respond within ten working days and that, if no response is received, the decision will be taken to deem the student withdrawn. Should the student continue to not make contact or if any reasons presented by the student for the previous failure to engage are not deemed to be satisfactory by the DPR, the Academic Registrar will write to the student informing them that their studies are terminated. The letter should include the reasons for the decision and the circumstances leading up to the termination. This communication will be sent to the student's LSTM email address and to their home and study addresses recorded on the SIS. The letter will also include information about the student's right to appeal.
- 10.4. For students registered on off-site degrees, the off-site supervisor is responsible for monitoring students' expected engagement. If a student does not engage as required, the off-site supervisor should, in the first instance, try to make contact with the student. Should there be no response, he or she should contact the Primary Supervisor and the DPR who will take steps as outlined in 10.2 and 10.3.
- 10.5. For students registered on a research degree offered in partnership, the responsibility for monitoring and contacting the student will be in accordance with subsections 10.2 and 10.3 when the student is resident at LSTM. When the student is resident at the partner institution, it is the responsibility of the partner to monitor engagement and, where there is cause for concern, staff of equivalent role and function as the LSTM DPR should carry out the responsibilities in accordance with the procedures set out above.

## 11. Right of Appeal

- 11.1. Students have a right to appeal against the following decisions of the PGR Progress Panel but only on the grounds detailed in Section 11.2:
  - 11.1.1. To transfer their registration from PhD to MPhil.
  - 11.1.2. To terminate studies on the grounds of unsatisfactory academic performance.
  - 11.1.3. To deem them withdrawn (termination of studies) on the grounds that they have failed to engage adequately with LSTM procedures.
- 11.2. The grounds on which a student may submit an appeal are:
  - 11.2.1. That the student's case has not been considered fairly as a result of some material procedural irregularity.
  - 11.2.2. That performance/engagement was adversely affected by illness or other significant factors which, for valid reasons, the student was unable to divulge before the decision by the PGR Progress Panel.
- 11.3. Students may not appeal on any grounds which challenge academic judgement, or which have been considered and not upheld under any other procedure (e.g. the *Student Complaints Procedure*).
- 11.4. Students may not appeal on the grounds of inadequate or poor supervision. Complaints about supervision should be raised using the *Student Complaints Procedure*.
- 11.5. Students must submit an appeal within ten working days of receiving the formal outcome letter of the decision to terminate studies or transfer to another degree. The appeal will be heard by the Research Degrees Appeals Board (RDAB) as constituted in the *Procedure for Dealing with Academic Appeals (Research Degrees)*.
- 11.6. The Academic Registrar will convene a meeting of the RDAB according to the following procedures and timelines:
  - 11.6.1. The meeting should be convened as soon as possible and normally no longer than thirty working days after receipt of the student's appeal, unless there are exceptional reasons for a longer period, in which case the student must be informed.
  - 11.6.2. The student will be given notice of at least ten working days of the date of the meeting and will be invited to make representation in person. This communication will be sent to the student's LSTM email address and to their home and study addresses recorded in the student information system.
  - 11.6.3. The student has the right to be accompanied by another member of LSTM staff (who must not be a member of the supervisory team) or by a friend or supporter. The student must give the name of any accompanying person to the Academic Registrar at least five working days before the meeting and is responsible for giving the accompanying person details of the meeting and for securing their attendance. Students are not permitted to bring legal representation to the meeting but are entitled to seek legal advice at their own expense and their statements can be compiled on their behalf by persons legally qualified.
  - 11.6.4. All members of the RDAB and the student will receive all papers presented at least two working days before the appeal hearing. Tabled papers will not be accepted under normal circumstances.

- 11.6.5. If the student does not attend the meeting, the RDAB may proceed in their absence provided the Academic Registrar has made every reasonable effort to inform the student that the meeting is taking place.
- 11.6.6. The Director of Postgraduate Research may be invited to attend the RDAB in order to provide information on the background to the student's case but will not play any role in determining the outcome.
- 11.7. The RDAB will determine whether or not the student has grounds for appeal and, if grounds are found, whether or not the circumstances had a material effect on the decision made. Students should be aware that if they do not attend the meeting then a decision will be made in their absence.
- 11.8. Where the appeal is heard under Section 11.1.1, the possible outcomes are:
  - 11.8.1. To reject the appeal, in which case the decision stands.
  - 11.8.2. To uphold the appeal, in which case any conditions for the student to remain on the PhD programme will be determined by the PGR Progress Panel.
- 11.9. Where the appeal is heard under Sections 11.1.2 or 11.1.3, the possible outcomes are:
  - 11.9.1. To reject the appeal, in which case the decision stands.
  - 11.9.2. To uphold the appeal, in which case any conditions for the student to continue on their studies will be determined by the PGR Progress Panel, including any follow-up actions and monitoring.
- 11.10. The decision of the RDAB will be formally communicated to the student in writing by the Academic Registrar within ten working days after the meeting. This communication will include information about the student's further right of appeal and will be sent to the student's LSTM email address and to their home and study addresses recorded on the SIS.
- 11.11. If an appeal is upheld but a student does not subsequently meet the requirements of the follow-up actions, a PAP may recommend to the DPR that their studies be terminated on the grounds of unsatisfactory progress. In such cases, the procedures in Section 9 will be followed and the student will have a right of appeal against any decision taken according to Section 11.
- 11.12. If an appeal is upheld and the student has submitted evidence of ill health, disability or other personal circumstances not previously disclosed, the evidence will be held on the student's file after the hearing unless the student explicitly requests otherwise. Where the student has disclosed a condition which may constitute a disability under the Equality Act 2010, the Academic Registrar, in informing the student of the decision of the RDAB, will remind the student that they should contact the LSTM Student Experience Officer if they consider that they require additional support or reasonable adjustments to be made to their programme in order to be able to progress successfully.
- 11.13. A student may appeal against the decision of the RDAB only on the grounds that there was a procedural irregularity that prevented the student from having a fair hearing. The written appeal must be received by the Academic Registrar within ten working days of receipt of the written decision of the RDAB and will be considered by the Chair of the LSTM Board of Trustees. If the appeal is upheld, the RDAB will be asked to reconsider the student's case taking into account the impact of the procedural irregularity. If the



appeal is not upheld, the Academic Registrar will inform the student in writing, giving reasons, and issue a Completion of Procedures letter.

- 11.14. If a student has been issued with a Completion of Procedures letter and is dissatisfied with the outcome of their appeal, further appeal may be made to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). Further details and advice on how to do this are available from the OIA website [www.oiahe.org.uk](http://www.oiahe.org.uk).