



**MACQUARIE**  
University

### **Making satisfactory progress: an overview and guide for supervisors**

Macquarie University regards HDR candidates as crucial to the research success of the University and as such has a commitment to a culture of quality. On time completions demonstrate the candidate's skill in designing, managing and completing a major research project effectively, without over-burdening supervisors and stretching university resources. Hence it is important for candidates, supervisors and the University to closely monitor that key milestones are met and that progress is at the level expected for the period of enrolment, and to take prompt action if the candidate is not making the progress expected in a research degree. Progress can be measured as the quality, originality and amount of research completed, by evidence of appropriate levels of independent thinking and problem solving, as well as the ability of the candidate to communicate research findings at the level expected for the period of enrolment. If supervisors are concerned about progress they should first discuss their concerns with the candidate. Given the common goal of a successful completion, supervisors and candidates are encouraged to resolve any progress issues promptly and by informal methods in the first instance, while retaining all documents, and a record of discussions.

If the quality of candidate's research or progress in the research suggests to the supervisors that performance is not satisfactory, a revised candidate action plan (template provided in this toolkit) should be implemented and performance against agreed objectives closely monitored. Additional support may be recommended. The Faculty Commencement Program and Annual Reports are formal regulatory hurdles used to assess a candidate's progress in developing a viable research program and satisfactory progress. Evidence of unsatisfactory progress may come from

- a failure to adhere to the CAP,
- an Annual Progress Report (or similar),
- a failure to submit an Annual Progress Report or to attend and complete events deemed compulsory (such as the Faculty Commencement Program),
- from performance at required presentations to an academic panel such as a Faculty Commencement Program,
- from a notification by a supervisor or other academic, or
- for another reason.

Breaches of the Macquarie's codes of Conduct

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/category.html%23research> or of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/r39> or of other University policies or procedures <http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/index.html> may be deemed as evidence that a candidate is not making satisfactory progress.

Candidates may then be issued with a notification to provide evidence to a Formal Review panel. The task of the Formal Review panel is to determine if the candidate has a viable research program, has made satisfactory progress relative to stage of candidature against that viable plan and is able to complete degree requirements within the period allowed. A Formal Review can happen at any time during enrolment. The outcome of a Formal Review Panel may be a recommendation that candidature is terminated, so there is a great deal at stake for the candidate.

### **Guide for supervisors:**

#### **Several resources have been developed to support supervisors if they feel a candidate is not making satisfactory progress and help to manage the situation**

##### 1. The Supervisor Decision Tree

If you feel a review of candidature may be necessary please consult the Supervisor Decision Tree.

Outside the formal requirements such as confirmation of candidature and Annual Progress reports there is considerable variation in what records are kept of meetings and other interactions with candidates. Supervisors need to be aware that a Formal Review Panel will need to be given evidence that the candidate has been advised of all the identified problems and that the candidate has failed to meet agreed timelines and milestones despite the efforts made to overcome identified difficulties. This evidence should include a previously implemented candidate action plan (template provided in this toolkit) ] with deadlines which if met would have ensured that progress was on track, feedback on that plan, and any other available documents (e.g., meeting notes showing a previous discussion of progress against agreed timelines, feedback on work submitted, emails, logs of phone calls or of Skype meetings, notes of advice to contact Wellbeing or complete HDR Learning Skills workshops [http://hdr.mq.edu.au/information\\_for/HDR\\_support\\_and\\_development](http://hdr.mq.edu.au/information_for/HDR_support_and_development) ] or other academic support. You must identify all the issues that are known. Prompt and constructive criticism of academic work is expected for all candidates but is especially crucial if it is felt that a candidate is not making satisfactory progress.

If the precipitating issue is a breach of a code of conduct the relevant office (e.g. [http://www.research.mq.edu.au/research\\_integrity](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/research_integrity)) must be notified.

Supervisors can seek advice and support from the Department Director, HDR, the Head of Department, the AD, HDR. Check the supervisor enhancement program for any sessions relevant to the situation you are managing.

[http://hdr.mq.edu.au/information\\_for/HDR\\_support\\_and\\_development](http://hdr.mq.edu.au/information_for/HDR_support_and_development)

2. Early warning signs of conflict in a supervisory relationship that may impact on progress and the need to have a difficult conversation:

A recent discussion paper released by the NSW Ombudsman notes the following may be early warning signs of tensions in the supervisory relationship (taken verbatim)

- Failing to set regular appointments to monitor progress;
- Not meeting agreed-upon deadlines;
- Ignoring advice they are given by the other party;
- Failing to interact with one another in a responsive and respectful manner;
- Bad mouthing one another in conversations with other staff or students;
- Showing irritability or aggravation;
- Exchanging bad-tempered or overly emotional communications;
- Feeling their rights are being undermined.

It is important if you have doubts about aspects of candidature such as the above that they are discussed. A guide to having difficult conversations can be found in the ToolKit

3. A Candidate Action plan has been included to help supervisors set expectations, monitor progress and provide feedback
4. There are processes and timelines associated with a Formal Review of Candidature and University Appeals to yearly schedule of appeals committee). You should be aware of due dates for submission of documents and when you might have to present in person at a Formal Review to discuss the progress of a candidate.