

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE  
**PGR MONITORING OF PROGRESS**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE PAPER**

*This paper presents a proposal to change PGR regulation 27 to annual monitoring of progress.*

**2. PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION BY /FURTHER APPROVAL REQUIRED**

	<b>Board/Committee</b>	<b>Date</b>
Previously considered/approved by		
Further consideration/ approval required by	QAC	11 Dec 2024

**3. RECOMMENDED ACTION**

The Academic Policy and Regulations Group is invited to discuss and approve the change to the frequency of PGR monitoring.

**4. DISCUSSION**

- 4.1 The QAA advice and guidance for Research Degrees (Guiding Principle 5) expects annual review of progress by a review panel.
- 4.2 Within the University, research degree regulations (GR 27) currently articulate the requirement for bi-annual monitoring of student progress and development. At present, for University of Aberdeen PGRs, this involves the Six-Month Review (at months 6, 18 and 30) and the Annual Progression Exercise (APE1, typically undertaken at month 9 and APE2 undertaken at the end of month 24). The six-month review is coordinated, issued and reviewed by the PGR College and the APE is coordinated, issued and reviewed within Schools. The six-month review exercise is designed to inform and complement the APE. Successful completion of the APE permits progression to the next academic year.
- 4.3 The six-month review was designed to provide a check-in point for both PGRs and supervisors to raise pastoral and/or academic concerns and/or training and development needs and to provide an opportunity for early intervention to ensure required support structures can be put in place for students and to bring projects back on track ahead of the APE. Whilst this is important there are also challenges associated with bi-annual monitoring.
- 4.4 Extensive discussion within and outwith the PGR committee over several years has discussed and explored the benefits and challenges of our institutional approach citing significant concerns about: i) academic workload for supervisors undertaking the review; ii) confusion from PGRs about the purpose of the six-month review; iii) concern from PGRs that they feel consistently under review and can lead to sustained stress and anxiety; iv) PGR workload, particularly for students holding a visa who are also required to undertake monthly monitoring that includes a review of progress. Often the issue of the exercise at 6 and 18 months by the PGRC happens at the same time instruction for the APE is also being issued leaving students confused about how to prioritise these activities. This is particularly important in APE1 whereby the deadline for completion is month 12 that cannot be moved,

meaning that students need appropriate time (recognising any inclusive adjustments) to complete.

- 4.5 Following discussion within the PGRC and across Schools, it is proposed to move to an annual review of progress, in line with the QAA requirement and across the sector (the University of Aberdeen is unique within the sector with the requirement for bi-annual monitoring). In addition, this request is timely to address the consistent and well documented (see Workload assessment report) impacts on academic workload that detracts from critical supervisory time. The six-month process has been refined over several years to streamline the process and frequency, however the workload and concerns remain.
- 4.6 **Mitigations:** There are a number of mitigations in place to support the removal of the six-month exercise including:
- 4.6.1 The PGR College (formerly PGR School) has been in existence since 2017 and in that time has created a well-recognised support structure for PGRs and supervisors to seek advice and guidance about progression, pastoral issues, training and development. The reach and reputation of the PGR College structure is such that supervisors and new and current PGRs know to make contact when there are concerns or queries.
  - 4.6.2 Introduction of an Researcher Development Audit (RDA) – PGR training and development will be guided by an audit of skills and development needs that will be reviewed at the APE. This RDA has been approved by the PGR Committee and the template provided on approval of this proposal.
  - 4.6.3 Improved PGR orientation events and resources to signpost support structures, provide guidance for how to establish the supervisory relationship, how to plan for development and how to navigate the PhD journey are in place with orientation having taken place on 03 October. In addition, a suite of resources are in development to be available year round to ensure information is always available for PGRs.
  - 4.6.4 Regular supervisor training is in place with PGR College indicating to schools when the five-year refresher is required.
- 4.7 Together the above mitigations provide assurances that there is always support, advice and guidance available to supervisors and PGRs when required. The APE remains in place to formally review and assess progress each academic year with appropriate timescales built in for mitigating actions to be implemented where appropriate

## 5. RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 The APRG is invited to discuss and approve the recommendation to amend GR27 and move to annual assessment of PGR progress.

## 6. FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information is available from Stuart Piertney, Dean for Postgraduate Research ([s.piertney@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:s.piertney@abdn.ac.uk)) and Lucy Leiper, Postgraduate Research School Manager ([l.leiper@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:l.leiper@abdn.ac.uk))

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**Freedom of Information/Confidentiality Status:** Open