Higher Degrees by Research Progress Procedure

Section 1 - Summary

(1) This Procedure outlines the process for formal Unsatisfactory Progress.

Section 2 - Scope

(2) This Procedure applies to domestic and international students and candidates and University employees.

Section 3 - Policy/Regulation

(3) Higher Degrees by Research Policy

Section 4 - Procedures

Part A - Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
Graduate Research School (GRS)	Provide relevant administrative support for unsatisfactory progress proceedings.
Research Institutes	Provide relevant administrative support for unsatisfactory progress proceedings. Attend unsatisfactory progress hearings.
VU Global (VUG)	Distribute and process the bi-annual progress reports for international candidates.

Part B - Bi-annual Progress Reports – International Candidates Only

Submission and Timing of Bi-annual Progress Reports

(4) Sponsored (ie: government sponsored including Australian government) international candidates are required by VUG, in accordance with the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (Cth) to submit a Bi-annual Progress Report and will be advised each year by VUG at what time of year these reports are required.

(5) The Bi-annual Progress Report will specify a final submission date for Bi-annual Progress Report based upon the sponsor's requirement. If a candidate requires an extension to the due date to submit the Bi-annual Progress Report they must apply for an official extension to VUG at least one week prior to the due date.

(6) The candidate will be advised in writing by VUG of the decision regarding the official extension and the new

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submission date of the Bi-annual Progress Report(s) required by their sponsor, if applicable.

(7) Evidence of submission of the Bi-annual Progress Report by the candidate to the Principal Supervisor will be considered to constitute submission of the report in cases where difficulty is being experienced in gaining Principal Supervisor sign off.

Part C - Unsatisfactory Progress

Grounds for Unsatisfactory Progress

(8) Unsatisfactory Progress is when a candidate is not making satisfactory academic progress in their research degree. Unsatisfactory Progress is initiated by the Research Institute in which the candidate is enrolled and grounds for initiation are:

a. Not achieving an average of 70 per cent in the required coursework component in a higher degree by research;
b. Not achieving 70 per cent in the Year One Thesis of the PhD (Integrated) and not taking the offer of an alternative exit degree or withdrawing from the degree;
c. Not presenting for a Candidature Milestone Review within the set timeframes (refer to Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure) for:
    i. Confirmation of Candidature;
    ii. Mid-Candidature Review; or,
    iii. Towards Submission.
d. Not achieving a Candidature Milestone Review;
e. Not responding to or attending invitations to scheduled meetings with supervisor/s;
f. Repeatedly not meeting agreed timelines set in conjunction with supervisor/s;
g. Not submitting thesis for examination or re-examination in a timely manner or by an otherwise approved deadline;
h. Inability, as deemed by the Research Institute, to complete a thesis of appropriate quality within the required timeframe.

Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings

(9) Where the relevant Associate Director, Research Institute or nominee recommends the commencement of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings, they must inform the GRS in writing:

a. the basis of the Unsatisfactory Progress recommendation (see clause 13); and
b. confirmation that the candidate’s Principal Supervisor supports the commencing of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings; or,
c. justification if the candidate’s Principal Supervisor does not support the commencement of Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings.

(10) When the GRS receives notification in writing, the GRS will collate evidence (e.g. copies of transcripts, candidature milestone outcomes, email/letter correspondence) and prepare the documentation for review and outcome by the Dean, Graduate Research. The outcome will be either:

a. Unsatisfactory progress proceedings approved; or,
b. Unsatisfactory progress proceedings not approved and the matter referred to the relevant Associate Director, Research Institute or nominee who will be responsible to monitor the candidate's progress.

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(11) The Dean, Graduate Research may seek further clarification/documentation from the candidate and/or supervisor prior to providing an outcome for Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings.

Unsatisfactory Progress Hearings

(12) If Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings are invoked, the GRS will send the candidate written notification by registered mail to the current semesster address of the candidate as recorded in the University student system, as well as to the VU @live email account.

(13) The written notification will include the Request for an Unsatisfactory Progress Panel Hearing form, the time and date of the Hearing, which will be scheduled no more than 15 University business days from the date of notification. If a RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend recipient, the candidate will be informed that the stipend will be suspended from the date of written notification (clause 12) and include a link to Student Welfare - refer to Higher Degree by Research Scholarships Procedure.

(14) If the candidate wishes to attend the Hearing, they must lodge the Request for an Unsatisfactory Progress Panel Hearing form within 5 University business days from the date of written and email notification.

(15) If the candidate does not respond to the notice within five University business days from the date of written and email notification, the Dean, Graduate Research will determine the candidate is deemed to be making Unsatisfactory Progress. The GRS will send written and email notification to the candidate that their enrolment will be discontinued within 20 University business days from the date of notification. RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend recipients will be informed that their stipend payments will not be reinstated and cease effective from the date of the course discontinuation – refer to Higher Degree by Research Scholarships Procedure.

(16) The Panel for a Hearing shall be comprised of:

a. the Dean, Graduate Research School or nominee to act as the Chair of the Panel;
b. the relevant Associate Director, Research Institute or nominee from the candidate's enrolled Research Institute.
c. the Dean, Graduate Research School or nominee may nominate an independent level 3 registered supervisor (as required).

(17) The Panel will be supported by the GRS to take minutes and provide other necessary administrative support.

(18) The candidate will be offered an opportunity to submit a written statement (no more than three pages) addressed to the Chair of the Panel at least five working days prior to the Unsatisfactory Progress Hearing. The statement should outline all relevant issues and special circumstances affecting academic progress and where possible, must be supported by relevant independent documentation.

(19) The candidate's Principal Supervisor must attend and participate in the Hearing unless on extended leave whereby the Acting Principal Supervisor would attend. Associate Supervisors are invited to attend, but this is not mandatory.

(20) The candidate may bring one support person or advocate(who is not an Australian legal practitioner except by leave of the Chair) to the Hearing. This person will be an observer only and will not participate in discussions. Support is available from Student Advocacy.

(21) All persons attending a Hearing will be subject to the orders and direction of the Chair of the Panel.

(22) Unsatisfactory Progress Proceedings require in person attendance. In the event that any person required to attend a Hearing is unable to attend in person (illness, absence abroad/interstate or other compelling reasons), they may participate via telephone or teleconference and/or nominate a representative (who is not an Australian legal practitioner except by leave by Chair) to attend the Hearing on their behalf. Support is available from Student

Advocacy.

(23) After consideration of all available evidence submitted to the Panel including hearing the candidate's verbal statement, the panel will decide regarding the candidate's progress and ongoing candidature.

(24) With reference to clause (23), the Panel may make one of the four following recommendations to the candidate:

a. Discontinuation of Enrolment
    i. If after receiving formal notification of the Panel's decision for discontinuation of enrolment and the candidate has not voluntarily discontinued their enrolment within 10 University business days, the GRS will notify the candidate that the University will discontinue their enrolment after 20 University business days.
    ii. If after receiving formal notification of the Panel's decision for discontinuation of enrolment but the candidate wishes to lodge an Appeal (see Student Appeals Procedure), they must do so within 20 University business days. The candidate will remain enrolled until an outcome regarding their appeal is determined. Failure to maintain continuous enrolment will result in the candidature lapsing and the appeal becoming inactive.
    iii. RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend recipients will be informed that their RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend payments will not be reinstated and cease, effective from the date of the course discontinuation.
b. Conditional Continuation of Candidature
    i. If the Panel makes a decision for Conditional Continuation of enrolment the candidate will be advised in writing of the condition(s) to be fulfilled.
    ii. No less than 10 days prior to the cessation of their period of Conditional Continuation of enrolment, the candidate is required to make a written submission to the Chair of the Panel, via GRS, documenting the progress that has been made in meeting the conditions of their enrolment. The Panel will reconvene (either electronically or in person) to make a determination about whether the conditions have been met.
    iii. If the candidate fails to submit the required documentation as per clause 28(b)ii, GRS will notify the Chair of the Panel and candidate may have their candidature discontinued and this will take effect after 20 University business days.
    iv. If the Panel determines that any condition has not been fulfilled, then the Panel has the authority to recommend discontinuation the enrolment. GRS will advise the candidate that their enrolment will be discontinued, and will take effect after 20 University business days.
    v. If the Panel determines that all of the conditions have been met, the candidate's enrolment will be changed to Continuation of Candidature.
    vi. Scholarship recipients will be informed that their RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend payments will be reinstated from the date of acceptance of the conditional continuation of candidature - refer to Higher Degree by Research Scholarships Procedure.
c. Continuation of Candidature
    i. The Panel deems that progress is either marginal or satisfactory.
    ii. RTP stipend or VU sponsored HDR stipend recipients will be informed that their stipend payments will be reinstated from the date of acceptance of enrolment - refer to HDR Scholarship Procedure
d. Course Transfer
    i. Where a transfer may be subject to ongoing conditions or monitoring requirements. Refer to Conversions between course type – Higher Degrees by Research Pre-Candidature and Candidature Procedure.

Notification and Records

(25) Following the conclusion of the Unsatisfactory Progress Hearing, the candidate will be advised of the outcome in writing via email notification within five University business days. International candidates will be informed that the University will only report unsatisfactory progress to the Australian Government in accordance with the ESOS Act.

(26) A record of the candidate's Unsatisfactory Progress will be retained on the University's record management system. For international candidates, a copy will also be included on the candidate's file at VUG.

(27) A report of all Hearings and outcomes will be included in the Annual Course Monitoring Report, prepared by the GRS for the Dean, Graduate Research School for presentation to the Research and Research Training Committee of the Academic Board.

(28) The GRS is responsible for all notifications and ensuring that any course discontinuation is recorded on all University student systems.

(29) A Panel's decision in relation to Unsatisfactory Progress can only be appealed in accordance with the University's Student Appeals Regulations 2019 Clause (5).

Section 5 - HESF/ASQA/ESOS Alignment

(30) HESF: Standard 1.3 Orientation and Progression; 4.2 Research Training; 7.2 Information for Prospective and Current Students.

(31) ESOS Act: Part 3 Division 2; Part 5 Division 2. National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 – Standard 8 and Standard 9.

Section 6 - Definitions

(32) Academic Progress - means a student's/ candidate's progress towards successful completion of the HDR in which they are enrolled, including all candidature milestone reviews within the required time limits and to the required standard, and any prescribed additional program content.

(33) Elapsed candidature time - The total amount of time a candidate has been enrolled in their research degree. This is expressed in full-time enrolment (EFT).

(34) Timely duration - The normal period of time, deemed by the Commonwealth, for the degree level to be completed (subject to degree type).

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