ACADEMIC PROGRESS

Progression reports and review process

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Click here for PhD Progression Review Folders (Student submission and...

Click here for MSc Progression Review Folders (Student submission and...

Staff: These links should take you to folders for your students (supervisees and review teams).

Students: These links should take you to a folder with your name on in which you can find a PDF containing key information (your review submission date, and the names of your review team) and you should put your report in this folder for your review team to access.

Save your file as something sensible - including your name, the month and year (as your previous years reports will also be there).

Please also email your review team to say it is there - ideally include the link to this page as a reminder of where to look for it:(https://durhamuniversity.sharepoint.com/teams/ChemistryPostgraduates/SitePages/Progression-reports-and-review-process).

IMPORTANT - we are updating these for students who started after September 2024 still - they will be ready in good time. If you can't see your folder and started before this please email chemistry.pg@durham.ac.uk , but please check again if you are in your first year nearer the submission date.

Policy on progress reviews (Progression, Confirmation and Completion)

All students engaged in research degrees at Durham University are required to undertake a series of formal progress reviews on an annual basis. The purpose of these is to ensure that students are making sufficient progress in developing their knowledge and completing their research tasks for them to successfully continue their planned studies and submit for their intended degree according to the agreed schedule.

At Durham, ***all PhD students are expected to submit their thesis within their period of supervised study***. For some students (depending on funding) there may be recorded a different formal "thesis submission deadline", however you will be required to pay concession fees beyond your supervised study period so this is the date you should focus on (with a 3 month "Grace period" to allow for minor issues that may arise - see Concessions and Extensions for more information).

Progression and confirmation reviews are a good chance for you to understand how your work is progressing, write material that will form the basis of your final thesis and discuss with those outside your immediate supervision team the work you have been doing. Equally, failure to keep pace with review deadlines or having to resubmit components is an important signal that you may not finish your studies on time (with consequent funding/living cost implications). In the first instance it may flag situations in which supportive steps can be taken to address this. In more complex situations it may help evaluate if the PhD is right for all involved before investment of more time and money. Completion reviews help ensure thought is going into the timeline for the production of the final thesis. In all cases these reviews are also invaluable in preparing students for the job of writing their final thesis.

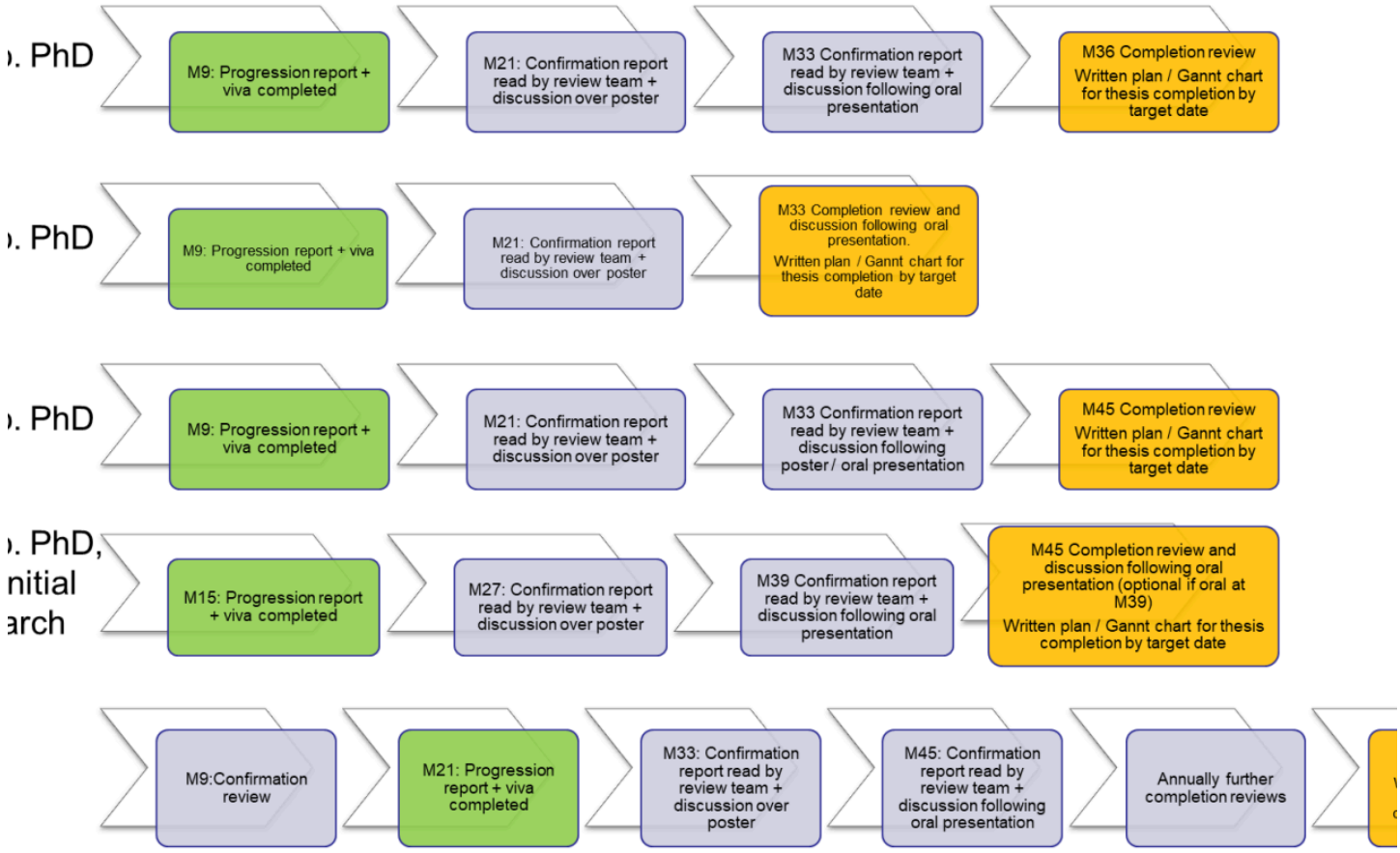
It is expected that these reviews are undertaken annually, with the first review meeting being completed within approximately 9 months of starting your studies. More info on different scenarios is given below, noting that different students now have different supervised study periods (for funded students this is usually your funding period, but for all students will be agreed in your offer information, or contact chemistry.pg@durham.ac.uk if unsure of this date).

There is a great deal of information about the review process in Chemistry on this page, and candidates are urged to read it carefully.

Definitive guidance on the requirements of the University for the review process can be found in the Learning and Teaching Handbook linked from the Chemistry Postgraduates Homepage (tiles on right near top) and additional useful advice may also be found at faculty and university level, but with less chemistry specific detail.

Timelines for progress reviews

Depending on the length of your supervised study period you will have a slightly different schedule of reviews. The most common scenarios are outlined below, but if you are uncertain contact chemistry.pg@durham.ac.uk to clarify which applies. *For most students starting in October there will be a deadline in mid-May to submit your report* so your viva / review meeting can be held by the end of month 9 - for others this timeframe will shift depending on start date. Subsequent reviews should take place annually after this with the deadline at the same time of year as the 9 month review (unless you have to break from your supervised studies by concession - *e.g.* an extended period of approved sick leave). Students are expected to complete within their supervised study period, but students who are in continuation should submit a further revised completion review at the annual deadline for reviews.



Types of reviews

There are two types of main review (*progression review* and *continuation review*), and a more light touch *completion review*. The first and most comprehensive one, the *progression review*, occurs during your first year of study (or at 18 months if part-time) designed to see how things are going, get on top of your introduction writing for your thesis (you should be in a good place to tackle this by this time) and presenting your first few key results. It is accompanied by a formal oral viva (a mini version of what your will experience at the end of your PhD), again defined to help your prepare. In other years (and around 9 months for part time students) you should submit a more light touch *continuation review* report - in these you should aim to make your experimental detailed and present results you have, again giving you material that should translate into your final thesis. *Completion reviews* occur near the end of your studies and comprise planning your timeline and content for production of the final thesis.

Links to sections below on each type of review:
Progression review
Continuation review
Completion review

Progression review (a.k.a. 9 month / 1st year viva / report)

For a full-time student this review meeting is expected to take place 9 months into the supervised study period (or research period if a training period occurs prior to research as in the case of some CDTs), and is an important milestone / reality check in the PhD process. It is very important to meet the hand-in deadline advertised in

order that the viva with your review team can take place by the end of month 9. Should you need to re-submit or be re-viva'd this allows the process to be completed before the end of first year and you to progress to second year (failure to do this may mean not being allowed to progress and therefore have funding implications).

This report is should provide an introduction to your project, and a thorough overview of its relevance and relationship to published research. A discussion of the results to date should usually be accompanied by detailed information about experimental methods and data (of the standard required to publish in the top journals in your field). The exact format will depend to some extent on your area of research and you should ask the advice of your supervisory team about this at the outset.

Your report should not normally be longer than 60 or 80 pages at most. In addition to the body of the report you should include the following two pages at the end of the report:

- a list of the seminars you have attended during the year together with a 250 word summary of two that you have attended.
- a statement about the training needs analysis you have done at the start of the year, accompanied by a list of optional training activities you have undertaken (beyond your research group, but not required of all postgraduates).

At an appropriate point (usually near the beginning of the report with acknowledgements and declarations) from 2024 forward, you should also include a brief statement about the use of AI in the production of your report along the lines: "*During the preparation of this work the author used* [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] *in order to* [REASON]. *After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the report.*"

Typically this written account will contain some of all of the following sections:

- Title Page
- Declarations (Be clear about others input; include AI statement)
- Copyright Page (maybe)
- Abstract (up to a page? Really important! Says what is in document, not just more introduction)
- Dedication, Acknowledgements, and Preface (each optional)
- Table of Contents, with page numbers (automate!)
- List of Tables, List of Figures, or List of Illustrations, with titles and page numbers (for most chemists, optional, but consult supervisor)
- List of Abbreviations
- List of Symbols (if applicable)
- Introduction: (1) quantify state of the art; (2) finish up with aims and objectives that match conclusions.
- Methodology / experimental (may put experimental at end too – give enough details someone else can repeat your work). Refer to data guidelines for RSC journals (as an example) here: https://www.rsc.org/journals-books-databases/author-and-reviewer-hub/authors-information/#prepare-article
- Results chapters and discussion (together or separate?)
- Conclusions – try a bullet point list to start with.
- Future work – from the next steps to what you'd do with £10,000,000 to advance the field?
- Appendices (if applicable)
- References – neatly formatted in a "in field" style – usually RSC or ACS? Maybe include titles… Should focus on primary literature over reviews!

Some hints and tips from the outset and to revisit when preparing for your 1st year report:

- Don't leave it until the last minute! Start planning well in advance.
- Get familiar with scientific literature in your research field from the start of your studies. It takes time to read scientific papers, particularly when you're starting out. It gets easier as you learn how to distil out the most important information.
- Find your way around the Library, both the building and all the associated web resources. Science journals and databases are staggeringly
  expensive, but the University is fortunate in being able to subscribe to a large number relevant to us as chemists. Most journal content is now
  electronic only. Use the Library's webpages to find your way around: durham.ac.uk/library

- Very occasionally, you might need to consult journals to which we do not have a subscription. You should note some older journals only exist as hard copy. Many older journal editions and a good deal of useful complementary access to journals is provided by membership of the UK professional body for chemist, the RSC, and their virtual library offering (with significantly reduced fees for postgraduate students) https://www.rsc.org/journals-books-databases/research-tools/#virtual-library-expand. The University offers a Document Delivery Service through a national scheme, but it is paid for so check with your main supervisor first, before requesting articles through this means.
- Set up a system for organising literature that you are likely to need. There are many software packages available to help you such as Mendeley, Zotero or Endnote (available on apps anywhere).
- Don't simply stop once you're familiar with some of the older literature. You'll need to keep abreast of developments so that you know the state-of-the-art in your field when your final viva comes round. Try to set aside some time to peruse relevant journals on a regular basis. You should also set up alerts for relevant papers from databases like Web of Science, for example, or use Twitter paper aggregators, or get tables of contents sent to you by signing up for messages from the journals themselves.
- Don't write too much before asking for feedback! We might think we know what we should be including or how the report should look, but it's best to get some commentary early on, so that you can change tack if necessary. Use your peers and group members for an initial screen to maximise the benefit of input from your supervisor.
- There is no virtue in being verbose or long-winded. The assessment is based on the quality of your report … and not on how much the document weighs! Be comprehensive but concise.
- And finally, note that all of these points will apply equally, indeed even more, to the preparation of your final PhD thesis. The process of the 1st year report is good preparation for that.

To submit your report please use the big link to the "PhD progression review folders" at the top of this page to upload your report to your folder. In addition you will need to answer some questions in the Banner Self-Service system of the university. You will receive email reminders (and these may contain an incorrect link), but the correct link is this one: https://ban-ssb.durham.ac.uk/ssomanager/saml/login?relayState=/c/auth/SSB Late submission will trigger a departmental warning, with a timeframe for addressing the lack of submission before a university Academic Progress Notice is issued (which may ultimately require change of programme or withdrawal). You are therefore strongly advised to raise anything that could contribute to late submission in advance with the Director of Postrgraduate Studies, although significant extensions will only be permitted in highly exceptional circumstances.

The review process then takes place by two assessors from the Department (or occasionally from a closely allied subject such as Biological Science of Physics), known as your "review team" who have been nominated by your supervisory team earlier in the year. They are independent of the supervisory team. At least one member of the review team will read your account fully, and then arrange an oral examination in which both members of your review team will discuss your work with you, referring to your report. This will typically be for around 1-2 hours. They will also discuss your supervisory arrangements and training needs. Their assessment of your report and progress to date should determine that you:

1. have a primary research objective;
2. understand the relevant background motivations and related literature to that objective, including being able to identify the novelty/unique research contribution this would make;
3. have the aptitude to complete the degree programme based on your development of a technical understanding of the subject area.

The Review Team will provide feedback to the student through the review report and viva process, possibly including guidance on the following questions:

1. Has the student presented a formal research objective?
2. Has the student clearly demonstrated the context of their research, including novelty and significance
3. Has the student demonstrated sufficient technical capability and independence to pursue their research objective?
4. Is the standard of the written report appropriate, including structure, formatting, and use of English language?
5. Is the standard of the formal presentation and general oral communication appropriate?

Some hints and tips for the first year oral examination:

- Bear in mind that you should be prepared to answer questions on anything that you've written about. That's also important when writing: it's usually best to only write about what you feel you understand. The oral

examination should be regarded as a discussion between interested scientists. It is in no way meant to be an intimidating event. Reviewers are not out to trick you with hard questions, but rather they will be seeking to ensure that you understand what you have written and can communicate your thoughts about it clearly.
- Expect some questions about background knowledge of relevant chemistry and techniques. You might need to remind yourself of some principles you learnt as an undergraduate in advance of the examination.
- Remember that in terms of the work that you have actually done and are doing, you are (or soon will be) the world expert. There may not always be a "right" or "wrong" answer to questions that come up, but it's important to be able to reason and to defend or justify what you have written.
- Typically, the oral examinations will be quite similar in "feel" to what you can expect in the final PhD oral examination or viva voce. Regard it as
good preparation for that purpose.
- If you don't understand something you are being asked, seek clarification before trying to answer, it may be that the review team member has struggled to ask the question in a clear way.
- Where specific reasonable accommodations would make the make the viva process more accessible, you should flag these clearly in advance or get your supervisor to do so. We will always be keen to accommodate these in so far as possible without compromising the process or targeted outcomes.

The Review Team will report on your achievements and suitability for progression to the next year of research tuition using the progression report form (see below) and by completing the questions on the Banner Self-Service system of the university (the correct link is https://ban-ssb.durham.ac.uk/ssomanager/saml/login?relayState=/c/auth/SSB). The report is reviewed by the Director of Postgraduate Studies in Chemistry.

In the event the review team are unhappy these criteria are met, for the progression review this automatically instigates a process whereby the student may be transferred to a master's-level programme and be required/given the opportunity to be assessed for a second attempt before a decision to resume doctoral studies, continue towards a master's level programme or withdraw is reached. Full details of this process are given in the University's Learning and Teaching Handbook (linked from Chemistry Postgraduates Homepage), although this is uncommon in Chemistry.

Confirmation review (occurs annually after progression review)

Confirmation review reports are normally written annually after your first year report (for full-time students). It is typically a shorter document and aims to serve two important functions. Firstly, it updates your review team on your progress and new results and plans. Secondly, it allows you to write up thoroughly all your new results as needed for papers or your final thesis, making sure everything is written up and appropriately detailed experimental methods are written down. With this in mind it is expected to be lighter touch than the progression review, and should normally include as a minimum:
- a short (10-20 page) report of work undertaken during the year since the last review;
- all relevant experimental details in a format they might subsequently appear in the final thesis;
- a concise work plan for subsequent progress towards the final thesis (3-5 pages maximum).

If the first two items are being incorporated into a research article for publication, then a draft of the article *that is primarily the student's own work* may be submitted in their place. You should discuss the format and level of detail expected with your supervisor, but keep in mind being thorough now will be invaluable in writing your final thesis.

In addition to the body of the report, you should again include the following two pages at the end of the report:
- a list of the seminars you have attended during the year together with a 250 word summary of two that you have attended.
- a statement about the training needs analysis you have done at the start of the year, accompanied by a list of optional training activities you have undertaken (beyond your research group, but not required of all postgraduates).

At an appropriate point (usually near the beginning of the report with acknowledgements and declarations) from 2024 forward, you should also include a brief statement about the use of AI in the production of your report along the lines: "*During the preparation of this work the author used* [NAME TOOL / SERVICE] *in order to* [REASON]*. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the report.*"

The written second year account is (and subsequent annual reports where relevant are) also assessed by your Review Team, but normally no formal oral examination is carried out (except if deemed necessary or a recommendation of the first year progression review). In some cases it may be felt advantageous for this to happen as it provides training for the viva-style environment.

To submit your report please use the big link to the “PhD progression review folders” at the top of this page to upload your report to your folder. In addition you will need to answer some questions in the Banner Self-Service system of the university. You will receive email reminders (and these may contain an incorrect link), but the correct link is this one: https://ban-ssb.durham.ac.uk/ssomanager/saml/login?relayState=/c/auth/SSB Late submission will trigger a departmental warning, with a timeframe for addressing the lack of submission before a university Academic Progress Notice is issued (which may ultimately require change of programme or withdrawal). You are therefore strongly advised to raise anything that could contribute to late submission in advance with the Director of Postgraduate Studies, although significant extensions will only be permitted in highly exceptional circumstances.

Following progression from first year, normally in June each year you are also expected to present your work in a department-wide forum at the Departmental Postgraduate Symposium Gala. This is an excellent opportunity to share your work with others, and get their input (and ideas from outside your own subject silo). Your review team will usually aim to meet with you (if you have a poster) or else attend your talk and discuss informally after as part of the review process. This is expected to be a poster presentation in your second year and an oral presentation in your final year. For students with longer supervised study periods, there may be some flexibility to present a poster or oral presentation in any additional years. It is understood some cohort model PhDs (e.g. CDTs) or research themes may offer additional opportunities to present, but it is anticipated most students will be excited to share their work at this event. In exceptional circumstances where the outcome of sharing your research has been met in other ways and separate arrangements with the review team to hold a discussion can be reached, alternative arrangements can be made by consultation with the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

In the event a student fails to satisfy the review team of meeting the criteria a departmental warning or (if a warning has already been issued) an Academic Progress Notice (APN) will be issued that clearly states the issues that must be addressed to proceed with the degree programme. A departmental warning will usually require a second meeting with the review team not less than 4 weeks following the initial review to determine whether prior concerns have been addressed. An APN will usually detail requirements with a deadline, and may result in the recommendation that a student be transferred to a lower degree programme (if available), suspend studies (if deemed beneficial) or withdraw entirely. Again the full process for this is detailed in the University's Learning and Teaching Handbook (linked from Chemistry Postgraduates Homepage).

Completion review (occurs ~ 3 months before thesis submission expected)

This is intended to be a light-touch update for the review team that confirms things are on track and provides a detailed final plan. Normally, as a minimum it must contain a clear and specific timeline for steps to complete the thesis and where progress is currently for each / a timeline for achieving them by the end of your scheduled study period that is realistic. You may also want to provide additional experimental or results, but should check with your Supervisory team what their expectations are.

The purpose of the Completion Review is to determine whether the student (1) has completed major components of their research programme and (2) has a clear and specific plan leading to submission of their thesis in advance of their final submission deadline. If these requirements are not met, it may instigate academic progress warnings or an Academic Progress Notice as above and further meetings with the review team as supportive measures to keep things on track. You will also be given the opportunity to raise any extenuating circumstances and discuss how to manage any expected overrun, the extent to which this is viable (as normally additional funding is not possible).

To submit your report please use the big link to the “PhD progression review folders” at the top of this page to upload your report to your folder. In addition you will need to answer some questions in the Banner Self-Service system of the university. You will receive email reminders (and these may contain an incorrect link), but the correct link is this one: https://ban-ssb.durham.ac.uk/ssomanager/saml/login?relayState=/c/auth/SSB Late submission will trigger a departmental warning, with a timeframe for addressing the lack of submission before a

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Continuing Students - Progress Records
(For students who have used this system previously).

Banner Self-Service - your historic blog records

Progression Report Forms (for staff only)

Please complete the “Progression review form” or “Confirmation review form” [MS forms] (1 per student after discussion with the other member of the review team on behalf of other review team members).

Progression review form (use for "1st year viva") review

Confirmation review form (use for non "1st year viva") annual reviews

Completion review form (for students nearing end of supervised study or in...