



University of
Sheffield

Administrative Milestones to Support On-Time Completion

November 15th 2023

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Background

- Strategic aim to increase the number of students submitting in their funded/fee paying period, to support wellbeing, avoid unfunded working, and transparency
- Programme length can vary
- Aim to do this by supporting, not enforcing
- Lots of approaches: increasing length of University scholarships to 3.5 years, better defining criteria for PhD, improving project scoping, focus on writing alongside research...
- Biggest challenge is culture change with students and supervisors



Submission Review

- New compulsory milestone for all PGRs
- 6 months before the end of their tuition fee paying period
- Light touch, structured conversation
- Tool for departments to reinforce expectations

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rpi/pgr/manage/submission-review>



The process

- Student submits plans for the next 6 months
- Supervisor or an independent reviewer leads discussion and completes form
- Straightforward questions: is the student on track to submit on time, or do plans need to change? Are there any barriers we can mitigate, is any additional support required?
- Form approved by departmental PGR Director (not monitored/policed centrally)

SUBMISSION REVIEW FORM
Note: a copy of this form will be sent to the student's University email account following Faculty approval

The Submission Review should be completed by the supervisor and/or independent reviewer, in collaboration with the student, and should include a detailed consideration of the student's progress and a plan to ensure that all research is completed, and the thesis is submitted within the tuition fee-paying period. Prior to the submission review meeting, students should be asked to complete the Gantt chart showing their plans to complete any remaining work and submit.

STUDENT DETAILS - FOR COMPLETION BY THE STUDENT													
Surname							First Name						
Registration Number							Department/ Programme						
Current end of fee-paying period:							Current time limit:						
Activities	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	
<i>e.g. completion of final results chapter</i>													
Signature:							Date:						

REVIEW OF THE STUDENT'S PROGRESS TOWARDS THESIS SUBMISSION – FOR COMPLETION BY THE SUPERVISOR AND/OR INDEPENDENT REVIEWER
Where possible please elaborate, e.g. *x has already produced their materials and methods and their first results chapter*

1. a) Has the student started to write up their research in an appropriate academic format?

1. b) If not, when will they start to write and prepare their thesis?

2. a) Is the student on course to complete active/core research by the end of their tuition fee-paying period? Yes / No

August 2023



Permission to continue active research

- After the funded/fee paying period ends, students enter the Submission Pending period (the “writing up period”)
- If Submission Review identifies that active research will be required beyond the end of the funded/fee paying period, into the Submission Pending period, permission must be sought from the department
- This is granted where further research is required to submit a PhD-worthy thesis, and department has the capacity to support it
- Supporting departmental oversight, and additional opportunity to reinforce expectations

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rpi/pgr/manage/su-pending#active-research>



Implementation at the Faculty of Engineering

- Information on Submission Review sent to academic departments, who were asked to assess how the SR would fit into their milestone plan.
- A Town Hall/Workshop was organised to discuss SR in detail and present the departmental proposals of SR milestone incorporation. Departments then able to make revisions to their plan based on these discussions and sharing of best practice.
- Implementation “live” as of February 2023.

Typical milestone set up for 3rd year onwards

Milestones in year 3: Submission Review

Fee Paying Period 3 years

- 30 months – Submission Review
- 36 months – Thesis submission.

Fee Paying Period 3.5 years

- 30 months - Oral presentation (Department or external event), initial thesis plan.
- 36 months – Submission Review
- 42 months – Thesis Submission

Fee Paying Period 4 years

- 30 months - Oral presentation (Department or external event), initial thesis plan.
- 36 months – Thesis progress report and plan for submission. End of experiments.
- 42 months – Submission Review
- 48 months - Thesis submission

Challenges and successes

Challenges

- Yet another form! (or two)
- Fitting into existing processes
- Cascading information down
- Monitoring compliance
- Timing of follow up process
(Permission to continue research)

Successes

- Not as strong push back as expected.
- When communicating rationale to students, they are generally on board.
- Milestone was somewhat seamlessly fit into existing processes.

A hand holding a pen over a document with a teal overlay. The document contains some faint text and a logo. The overall image has a teal tint.

Q&A