All research students on PhD, MD, PsyD, or MPhil programmes are registered on probation for the first part of their degree. To continue with their research degree these students must successfully complete a probation review.

The probation period for research students on MD, PsyD, or full-time PhD or MPhil programmes is one year; for research students on part-time PhD or MPhil programmes the probation period is two years. The probation review must be completed before the end of the probation period.

This Guidance is designed for use by probation review panels, Postgraduate Tutors, and other departmental staff involved in research student support.

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Assessment Criteria

The purpose of the probation review is to review the initial progress of research students, provide them with useful feedback on this, and to initiate an appropriate intervention where the research student’s progress is unsatisfactory.

The research student should be deemed to have successfully completed the probation review if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student's overall performance demonstrates appropriate progress to date
- there are no serious doubts about the research student's ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered

That academic judgement should be made in the context of the award descriptions included in appendix one of this guide and on the basis of the standard of the research student's probation report and the research student's performance in the probation review meeting (including any separate presentation session).

To ensure consistency, the research student's performance is assessed across a number of defined aspects:

Skills Development

- research and other skills appropriate for research degree level study
- appropriate standard of spoken and written English language skills

Personal Performance

- the ability to defend their research ideas and plans
- the ability to accept constructive criticism
- satisfactory attendance at formal supervisory meetings

Research Management and Progress

- the conception and development of a viable research topic or, if they are working on a pre-determined research topic, an appropriate contribution to the development of the research project
- a standard of work appropriate for research degree level study – including appropriate progress to date and the ability to plan and manage their own work within the supervisory framework
- appropriate knowledge of relevant literature and/or source materials and an ability to reflect critically on these
- appropriate use and referencing of relevant literature and/or source materials
- the development and/or application of appropriate research methodology
- the development of a viable plan for completing and submitting the thesis within the maximum registration period specified in in appendix two of this guide
- appropriate ethical approval has been sought (where needed)
- the potential to make an original contribution to knowledge (not applicable on MPhil programmes)
Weaker performance in one or more of these respects may not automatically result in the research student being deemed to have failed to complete probation. The research student may still be deemed to have successfully completed probation if, overall, it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that the research student has demonstrated appropriate progress and an ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered.

Where there is weaker performance across multiple areas, the probation review panel may wish to consider recommending continuing the probation period or transferring the research student to a lower degree - please note though that:

- continuation of probation is appropriate only if the research student has demonstrated sufficient progress that the panel is satisfied that the research student could complete probation successfully within an additional period of no more than six months

- transfer to a lower degree is possible only for research students registered for the degree of PhD and is appropriate only if the research student has demonstrated sufficient progress and an ability to achieve the degree of MPhil

Any areas of weaker performance must be noted in the probation panel's report and, ideally, there should be some guidance on what the research student should do to address this in each case.
Format of the Probation Review

The probation review process comprises two parts:

- a written probation review report by the research student
- an in-person probation review meeting between the research student and the probation review panel

The probation review panel’s assessment of whether the research student has successfully completed probation should be based on their performance in both of these components.

Probation Review Report

In advance of the probation review meeting, the research student will submit to their department a probation report. It is expected that this probation report will have been prepared with appropriate guidance from the research student’s supervisory team.

The probation report should comprise four parts:

- a 5,000-10,000 word written report on the research student’s progress to date
- a work plan for completing the thesis over the remaining part of the relevant maximum registration period
- a record of skills and career development activities completed to date
- written records of all formal supervisory meetings held to date

The progress report is the most important component of the probation report. In some departments the report is likely to take the form of a technical report on research and other work completed to date; in other departments the report may take the form of a chapter of the thesis. Usually though it will involve a statement of what it is that the student’s research will address and how they intend to do this together with a literature review that establishes the context for their work.

In all cases the report should be an extended piece of writing - normally of 5,000 to 10,000 words.

The Department may choose to allow - or may require - the progress report to be accompanied by relevant supporting research outputs or other appropriate material, such as practical work, lab books, etc.

In response to the research student’s probation report, the supervisory team will prepare its own probation statement which includes:

- a discussion of the research student’s progress to date
- a discussion of the feasibility of the research student’s proposed work plan
- recommendations for any further training that may be required

In advance of the probation review meeting, members of the probation review panel will be provided by the department with copies of both the research student’s probation report and the supervisory team’s probation statement.
The supervisory team may in the probation feedback indicate whether or not they feel the research student has successfully completed the probation period; however, the probation review panel is not bound by the supervisory team's opinion and must make its own academic judgement in this respect.

**Probation Review Meeting**

The probation review meeting should provide the research student with the opportunity to discuss their research, their findings so far, and their plans for completing the thesis. To facilitate this there should be a probation review meeting attended by the research student and the probation review panel. The probation review meeting must be conducted in person and should normally be held at the University, including appropriate University Hospitals of Leicester sites.

The probation review meeting must take place before the end of the research student’s probation period. In most cases it is anticipated that the probation review meeting will take place eleven months after initial registration (MD, PsyD, and full-time PhD or MPhil programmes) or twenty-two months after initial registration (part-time PhD or MPhil programmes). However, Departments may vary and the meeting may take place earlier or a little later – provided that it can still be completed before the end of the probation period.

The essential requirement of the probation review meeting is that the research student must give a verbal presentation and defence of their work in the presence of the probation review panel. The probation review panel may ask the research student questions on any relevant matters as needed to form an opinion on the student’s progress to date and their ability to complete the degree within the relevant maximum registration period.

It is recognised that the format of the probation review meeting may vary between Departments according to different academic practices. In most cases the probation review meeting will take the form of an oral examination and/or a presentation followed by questions:

- where the probation review meeting includes an oral examination, this should normally be under normal viva voce examination conditions – that is, a closed meeting attended by the research student and the probation review panel
- where the probation review meeting includes a presentation, this should be attended by the probation review panel but may also be attended by other students and staff as appropriate

Members of the research student’s supervisory team may attend that student’s probation review meeting, including any separate presentation, as observers. If members of the supervisory team are in attendance, the research student must be given the opportunity to discuss privately with the probation review panel any other relevant matters that they may wish to raise.
Outcomes of the Probation Review and the Probation Review Panel’s Report

At the conclusion of the probation review meeting, the probation review panel may ask the research student to leave the room so that the panel can discuss its recommendation. It is expected that in most cases it will be possible to make a decision immediately after the conclusion of the probation review meeting and that at that time the research student will be informed of the recommendation that the panel will make.

The probation review panel may make one of the following recommendations:

- that the research student should be allowed to continue with their research degree programme
- that the research student should continue on probation for a period of no more than six months and complete a further and final probation review before the end of that period
- that the research student should be transferred to a lower research degree programme
- that the research student's registration should be terminated

Successful Completion of Probation

The research student should be deemed to have successfully completed the probation review if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student’s overall performance demonstrates appropriate progress to date
- there are no serious doubts about the research student's ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered

If the research student successfully completes probation, they will be allowed to continue with their research degree programme.

Continuation of Probation

The research student's probation period should be continued if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student has not fully met the requirements for successful completion of probation
- the research student has demonstrated sufficient progress and ability to complete probation successfully within an additional period to be specified by the probation review panel and of no more than six months

If the research student's probation period is continued, they will be allowed to register for the next year of their degree programme but will remain on probation. Before the end of the continued probation period they will be required to complete a further and final review.

This final probation review will follow the same format as the original review - that is, the research student will be required to complete a probation report and attend a probation meeting. Normally this will be with the same probation review panel.
Following the final probation review meeting, the probation review panel will make one of the following recommendations:

- that the research student should be allowed to continue with their research degree programme
- that the research student should be transferred to a lower research degree programme
- that the research student’s registration should be terminated

**Transfer to a Lower Degree**

This outcome is possible only for research students registered for the degree of PhD. The research student should be transferred to a lower degree if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student’s overall performance does not demonstrate appropriate progress to date
- there are serious doubts about the research student’s ability to achieve a doctoral degree
- the panel agrees that the research student has demonstrated sufficient progress and ability to achieve the degree of MPhil

**Termination of Registration**

The research student should have their registration is terminated if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student’s overall performance does not demonstrate appropriate progress to date
- there are serious doubts about the research student’s ability to achieve the degree for which they are registered
- transfer to a lower degree is not possible (research students registered for the degree of MD, PsyD, or MPhil) or there are serious doubts about the research student’s ability to achieve a lower degree

**Probation Review Panel Report**

At the end of the probation review meeting the probation review panel is encouraged to provide the research student with a brief explanation of the reasons why they have made their recommendation and this is particularly important if the panel is recommending that the student has not successfully completed probation. The probation review panel must prepare a brief written report indicating their recommendation and the reasons for making this. The probation panel report must be prepared using the probation panel report form:

[www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/zone/staff/early-stage/probation-review/after/panel-report](http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/gradschool/zone/staff/early-stage/probation-review/after/panel-report)

The probation panel report should indicate the research student's performance against the probation criteria. Probation panels are encouraged in the report to comment on any issues that the research student should address following the review.

In the first instance the probation review panel’s report should be submitted to the Head of Department for approval. The Graduate School Office will then formally notify the research student in writing of the outcome of the probation review. Please note that copies of the probation review panel’s report will be provided both to the research student and the supervisory team.
Further Questions

What if there are difficulties in scheduling the probation review meeting?

The probation review must be completed within twelve months (MD, PsyD, or full-time PhD or MPhil) or twenty-four months (part-time PhD or MPhil) of the research student’s initial registration. There are no exceptions to this requirement.

It is not possible to extend the research student’s probation period on the grounds that it has not been possible to hold the probation review meeting. If the Department anticipates any difficulties in being able to hold the probation review meeting on time – for example, owing to difficulties in staff availability – it should take appropriate action to ensure the probation review is not delayed. Such action may include the appointment of a new probation review panel.

Should there be a “lead” member of the probation review panel?

It is not a requirement that there is formally a lead member of the probation review panel. However, probation review panels may find it helpful to choose one member who will take the lead in the probation review meeting and take responsibility for completing the probation review panel’s report and ensuring that this is submitted to the Head of Department.

What weight should be given to the supervisory team’s probation statement?

The supervisory team may in the probation feedback indicate whether or not they feel the research student has successfully completed the probation period; however, the probation review panel is not be bound by the supervisory team’s opinion and must make its own academic judgement in this respect.

The probation review panel should make a decision as to whether the research student has successfully completed probation on the basis of their performance in the probation review report and the probation review meeting. Where the decision of the probation review panel is contrary to an explicit indication from the supervisory team as to its view, this should be acknowledged and explained in the probation review panel’s report. In such cases the probation review panel is encouraged to contact the Graduate School Office to discuss its recommendation before this is revealed to the research student and before the probation review panel’s report is submitted.

Who arranges the probation review meeting?

Departments are responsible for arranging the probation review meeting. Departments are encouraged to make sure that the venue, date, and time of the probation review are agreed and communicated to the research student as early as possible.

In advance of the probation review meeting, the Department must provide the probation review panel with copies of the research student’s probation report (including the accompanying work plan, supervisory meeting records, and training record) and the written probation feedback of the supervisory team.
Can the probation review panel request additional time if it is unable to decide on a recommendation at the conclusion of the probation review meeting?

If the probation review panel needs further time to discuss its recommendation, the research student should be advised of this and given some indication as to when and how they can expect to be informed of the recommendation that the panel will make.

What should the probation review panel do if it cannot agree on a recommendation at the conclusion of the probation review meeting?

If the probation panel is unable to agree a recommendation or feels that it needs guidance in order to ensure the appropriate recommendation is made, it should seek advice from the Graduate School Office.

How should cases of suspected academic dishonesty be handled?

The probation review panel should be alert to any evidence of academic dishonesty in either the research student’s probation report or in their verbal presentation/defence in the probation review meeting.

If the probation review panel has reason to suspect academic dishonesty in the research student’s probation review report:

1. the probation review process should be suspended
2. the probation review panel should provide the Head of Department with a written statement outlining its concerns and highlighting the grounds for its suspicions
3. the Head of Department should initiate an investigation

If the probation review panel has reason to suspect academic dishonesty in the research student’s verbal presentation/defence in the probation review meeting:

1. the probation review meeting should be completed and the probation review panel should ask appropriate questions to try to ascertain whether academic dishonesty may have occurred
2. the research student should be informed of the probation review panel’s concerns and advised that the panel will not make a recommendation until such time as these concerns have been investigated
3. the probation review panel should provide the Head of Department with a written statement outlining its concerns and highlighting the grounds for its suspicions
4. the Head of Department should initiate an investigation

Where academic dishonesty is proven, penalties will be applied as specified in accordance with the University’s Regulations.

How should the probation review panel respond in cases where the research student’s English language skills are weaker than might be expected?

As part of the review criteria, probation review panels are asked to consider whether the research student has demonstrated an appropriate standard of spoken and written English language skills – i.e., English language skills that are of a level needed to write a thesis and defend this in a viva voce examination.
If the probation review panel has concerns about the research student’s spoken and/or written English language skills, it is important that these are be acknowledged probation review panel’s report. In the case of full-time research students, the probation review panel may recommend that the Department should require the student to complete further in-sessional English language training. In the case of part-time and distance learning research students, the probation review panel may encourage the student to make use of in-sessional English language training if possible or make use of the online resources provided by the English Language Teaching Unit.

Can the probation period be continued a second time?

The research student’s probation period should be continued if it is the academic judgement of the probation review panel that:

- the research student has not fully met the requirements for successful completion of probation
- the research student has demonstrated sufficient progress and ability to complete probation successfully within an additional period to be specified by the probation review panel and of no more than six months

Following the second probation review a final decision must be made as to whether the research student has successfully completed probation – the probation period cannot be continued a second time. Where the probation review panel continues to have significant concerns regarding the research student’s ability to complete the degree for which they are registered, it should either recommend a transfer to a lower degree or a termination of registration.

Can a research student appeal the outcome of the probation review?

The research student has the right of appeal if the probation review panel has recommended that they have not successfully completed probation. The research student must submit an appeal as soon as possible following receipt from the Graduate School Office of formal notification of the outcome of the probation review.

The Graduate School Office will formally notify the research student in writing of the outcome of the probation review on receipt of the probation review panel report. If the research student has not successfully completed probation this notification will include advice on the student’s right of appeal.
Appendix One – Award Descriptions

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

To be awarded the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the research student must satisfy the examiners by means of a thesis which makes a distinct and original contribution to knowledge in the discipline and contains work which is considered to be worthy of publication.

The research student must demonstrate a broad knowledge and understanding of their discipline and its associated research techniques and show that these have been successfully applied. For research students registered for the degree of PhD and who will submit a practice based thesis, both components of the thesis must form a coherent whole which meets the requirements for the award of the degree.

Doctor of Medicine (MD)

To be awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine, the research student must satisfy the examiners either:

1. by means of a thesis in any branch of medicine, surgery, or medical science, which has been specifically composed for the purpose, includes a review of the relevant background literature, contains a critical account of original laboratory-based or clinical research, carried out personally by the research student, that constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge, and contains work which is deemed worthy of publication

or

2. by submission, with the approval of the MD Degree Board of Studies, of collected inter-related published works or clinical case studies embodying original work, of which a substantial proportion has been carried out personally by the research student, and that constitutes a significant contribution to knowledge

Doctor of Psychology (PsyD)

To be awarded the degree of Doctor of Psychology, the research student must satisfy the examiners by means of a thesis which has been specifically composed for the purpose, includes

- a critical literature review (the topic normally being relevant to the research question addressed in the main study)
- a self-contained research paper which reports on the main study and which conforms to the requirements of a peer-reviewed journal appropriate to the research topic
- a reflective critique of the work
- and a service evaluation or audit report based on the student’s area of practice or service setting

and constituting a significant contribution to knowledge.
Master of Philosophy (MPhil)

To be awarded the degree of Master of Philosophy, the research student must satisfy the examiners by means of a thesis which demonstrates a satisfactory record of research, a broad knowledge and understanding of the field of study and associated research techniques, and shows that these have been successfully applied.

The thesis must present evidence of a critical survey of knowledge in the discipline but does not need to make a distinct and original contribution to knowledge in the discipline or to contain work which is considered to be worthy of publication. For research students registered for the degree of MPhil and who will submit a practice based thesis, both components of the thesis must form a coherent whole which meets the requirements for the award of the degree.
## Appendix Two – Maximum Periods of Registration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Degree</th>
<th>Maximum Registration Period</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Full-Time</td>
<td>Four Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Part-Time</td>
<td>Seven Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Medicine (MD) Full-Time</td>
<td>Four Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Medicine (MD) Part-Time</td>
<td>Five Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Psychology (PsyD) Part-Time</td>
<td>Five Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Full-Time</td>
<td>Two Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Philosophy (MPhil) Part-Time</td>
<td>Four Years</td>
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