Graduate Research Progress Policy

Section 1 - Key Information

Policy Type and Approval Body	Academic – Academic Board
Accountable Executive – Policy	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)
Responsible Manager – Policy	Senior Manager, Graduate and Global Research
Review Date	23 May 2027

Section 2 - Purpose

(1) In accordance with Section 4.2 of the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, La Trobe University supports all graduate research candidates through the provision of an appropriate research environment, resources to support candidates and their research projects and regular monitoring of candidate progress.

(2) This Policy outlines the key measures for monitoring and supporting the progress of all candidates. The associated procedure is:

a. the Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure

Section 3 - Scope

(3) This Policy applies to:

a. All campuses
b. All higher degrees by research
c. All staff of the University
d. All candidates for a higher degree by research

(4) The University will adhere to the National Code 2018 in its assessment and processing of any applications to vary candidature. International students on a student visa are advised to check the requirements of their visa and consult with Recruitment & International Operations before submitting any application for a variation to their candidature.

Section 4 - Key Decisions

Key Decisions	Role
Evaluation of candidate's progress	Progress Committee
Approval of minimum progress milestone requirements	Board of Graduate Research (BGR)

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Key Decisions	Role
Approval of appointment of Progress Committee Chair	School Director of Graduate Research
Proceed to Show Cause where progress is unsatisfactory	Chair, BGR
Approval for postponement of progress milestone	Chair, BGR

Section 5 - Policy Statement

Progress Reporting and Milestones

(5) Progress Committees will assess the progress of candidates at regular milestone meetings and submit progress reports by designated dates.

(6) The following milestones apply to the respective higher degrees by research:

Degree	Required milestones		
Masters by Research	Confirmation	N/A	Pre-submission review
Doctoral Degrees	Confirmation	Mid-candidature review	Pre-submission review

(7) The general requirements for each milestone in each degree type will be approved by the Board of Graduate Research. Specific requirements will be determined at the disciplinary or school level.

(8) Candidates enrolled in a joint degree where La Trobe is the host institution will normally follow the progress monitoring requirements of their home institution. Any requirements to complete La trobe progress milestones will be communicated to candidates upon enrolment in the joint PhD.

(9) Where a candidate fails to meet the progress requirements of their degree after appropriate intervention strategies have been exhausted, the Board of Graduate Research will request that the candidate show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated according to the Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure.

Section 6 - Procedures

(10) All timeframes are given in calendar weeks/months/years and are not adjusted for part-time candidates unless stated otherwise.

Part A - Supporting and Defining Progress

(11) The progress of higher degree by research candidates will be supported and monitored throughout candidature by supervisors, school and department-based staff with research training responsibilities, and the Graduate Research School.

(12) The progress of candidates will also be evaluated at designated points in candidature by Progress Committees through a progress reporting system based around milestones with specific written and oral submission requirements.

(13) Progress is evaluated against these specific requirements for each milestone and the likelihood of the candidate submitting their thesis by their expected work submission date (see section on progress reporting and milestones).

(14) An evaluation of candidate progress can result in the following progress statuses:

a. satisfactory progress

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b. at risk (of unsatisfactory progress)
c. unsatisfactory progress

(15) The progress of a candidate will be deemed satisfactory where it is considered that:

a. the status of the research project and other requirements of the degree are as anticipated for the designated stage of the degree; and
b. all requirements will be completed by the candidate's expected work submission date

(16) Progress will be deemed 'at risk' if the candidate:

a. is experiencing progress difficulties and requests a Progress Support Plan at any point in their candidature
b. fails to meet agreed project goals or produce work at the request of their supervisor during candidature
c. fails their first attempt at required coursework or clinical placements
d. fails to meet requirements at a first milestone attempt
e. fails to submit their thesis by the expected work submission date (or by the end of the grace period where applicable)

(17) Progress will be deemed as unsatisfactory if the candidate:

a. fails to meet agreed goals in a Progress Support Plan
b. fails their second attempt at required coursework or clinical placements
c. fails for a second time to meet the requirements of any milestone

Part B - Progress Reporting and Milestones

(18) Progress reporting dates and frequency vary according to the degree in which the candidate is enrolled and are set at intervals from the candidate's date of enrolment, as outlined in Table 1 below. Milestone meetings will be scheduled prior to progress reporting dates.

(19) Candidates who transfer from an approved Bachelor (Honours) or Masters by coursework degree at La Trobe to a Masters by research degree will be admitted directly to confirmed candidature.

Table 1 Normal Progress Reporting and Expected Work Submission Dates (full-time equivalent in months)

Degree	Confirmation	Mid-candidature review	Pre-submission review	Expected work submission date	Maximum period of candidature
Masters by research	9*	N/A	18	20	24
Masters by research with one or more semesters of full-time coursework	12	N/A	18	20	24
Doctoral degree with no more than one semester of full-time coursework	12	24	36	39	48
Doctoral degree with more than one semester of full-time coursework	15	24	36	39	48

*Not applicable for candidates transferring from an approved Bachelor (Honours) or Masters by coursework degree at

La Trobe.

Part C - Minimum Requirements for Milestones

(20) The Board of Graduate Research approves the broad requirements for each milestone. For each milestone all candidates will be required to:

a. submit a Progress Report completed by the candidate, Principal Supervisor and Chair of the Progress Committee
b. submit written research plans and outcomes of research as specified in the Milestones Requirements Schedule
c. give an oral presentation
d. meet with the Progress Committee

(21) Each School may have additional requirements that are agreed at school or discipline level.

(22) All requirements for milestones must be available to all enrolling candidates and will be detailed in the Milestones Requirements Schedule.

Part D - Progress Support Between Milestones

(23) Between milestones, supervisors and candidates will hold regular meetings to guide the candidate in making satisfactory progress, provide feedback and suggest ways of addressing problems.

(24) At any time, candidates, supervisors or Graduate Research Coordinators may request an ad-hoc Progress Committee meeting to review the candidate's progress. If the Progress Committee considers that the candidate is unlikely to meet the requirements of the next milestone, at-risk status may be applied so that additional support may be provided. The Chair of the Progress Committee will advise the Graduate Research School of the change in status. The Progress Committee will then discuss and agree a Progress Support Plan (see below).

(25) Candidates who do not maintain regular interaction with their supervisory team or who do not respond to reasonable attempts to communicate from the University, will be considered absent without leave (AWOL) from candidature (see the Absent Without Leave section of the Graduate Research Candidature Policy).

Part E - Composition and Appointment of Progress Committees

Composition

(26) A candidate's Progress Committee will consist of:

a. all members of the candidate's supervisory team
b. an independent Chair (see below)
c. where desirable and feasible an additional independent member, who may be external to the department, school or University.

(27) The Chair of the Progress Committee must:

a. be a senior La Trobe academic with significant experience as a supervisor
b. have had no direct involvement with the research project
c. have no actual or potential conflict of interest, as outlined in the University's Conflict of Interest Policy, with the candidate or any other member of the Progress Committee.

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(28) It is desirable that the composition of the Progress Committee remain stable throughout candidature wherever possible.

Appointment of Chairs and Additional Independent Members

(29) All graduate research candidates must have a Progress Committee Chair appointed prior to enrolment.

(30) The Director of Graduate Research is required to approve the appointment of Progress Committees for candidates in their School, and must consider the requirements for the Chair as outlined above, as well as the availability of progress committee members to attend progress meetings to support the candidate's progress.

(31) Before confirming the membership the Director of Graduate Research will consult the supervisors and nominated independent members concerning any known or potential conflicts of interest. Progress Committee members must inform the Dean or Director of Graduate Research of any potential conflicts of interest which may arise in supporting a particular candidate.

(32) Graduate research candidates may apply to vary the Progress Committee Chair or other independent members of their progress committee at any time, with the endorsement of their current principal supervisor and Dean or Director of Graduate Research.

(33) The candidate or any member of the Progress Committee may raise a concern about the Committee's membership at any time with the Director of Graduate Research, Dean or the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research). Advice may also be sought from the Graduate Research School at any time.

(34) Changes to any form of committee members must be done in consultation with the candidate.

Part F - Notification of Progress Report Due Dates and Organisation of Milestone Meetings

(35) Approximately three months prior to the due date of a Progress Report candidates, their supervisors and local Graduate Research Coordinators will receive a reminder of the progress reporting date and the requirements for the candidate's next milestone.

(36) The candidate is responsible for initiating a discussion with their Principal Supervisor concerning the arrangements for the milestone meeting. The Principal Supervisor will assist the candidate as necessary to make arrangements for the meeting.

Part G - Preparation for and Conduct of Milestone Meetings

Prior to the Meeting

(37) Candidates and Principal Supervisors will ensure that all materials for the milestone are distributed to all members of the Progress Committee at least five working days prior to the meeting.

Milestone Meeting Format and Attendees

(38) Meetings of Progress Committees may be flexible in format and should take advantage of communication technologies where it is not practicable for all members to be at the one location at the required time.

(39) While all effort should be made to include each member of the supervisory team, where necessary the meeting may proceed without one or more co-supervisors being in attendance.

(40) The Principal Supervisor must normally be in attendance. In exceptional circumstances where the Principal

Supervisor is not able to be present at the meeting, either physically or via an electronic link, the meeting may proceed, subject to their permission and their input being included in the candidate's Progress Report prior to the meeting.

(41) The Chair must normally be in attendance. In exceptional circumstances where the Chair is not able to be present at the meeting, either physically or via an electronic link, the Graduate Research Coordinator may appoint a substitute Chair. The substitute Chair must meet the standard requirements of a Chair as specified above.

(42) All candidates may request the presence of a support person at the meeting. A support person may not be a legal practitioner or person with a law degree and may not normally speak during the meeting unless the candidate is registered for disability support. A support person may take notes of the meeting.

(43) Where a candidate is registered for disability support the support person may assist the candidate with their oral presentation and/or discussion.

Oral Presentation

(44) Candidates are required to make an oral presentation to fulfil the requirements of each milestone. The oral presentation should be made in an appropriate La Trobe University forum, either as an adjunct to the milestone meeting or within a reasonable time period before the meeting.

(45) At least one member of the Progress Committee must be in attendance when the candidate makes their oral presentation. The date of the presentation must be recorded in the Progress Report.

Order of Proceedings

(46) Following a meeting with the candidate the Progress Committee will convene to discuss the candidate's submission and the recommendation. The Chair should ensure that the candidate has the opportunity to privately discuss any matters as required with the Chair and any independent members, either prior to or during the meeting.

(47) Where a consensus cannot be reached, the final recommendation will rest with the Chair and any differences should be detailed in the Progress Report.

Part H - Outcomes of First Milestone Attempt

(48) A candidate may make a total of two attempts at any individual milestone.

(49) After a candidate's first attempt at a milestone the Progress Committee will select from the following recommendations:

a. Satisfactory - the candidate has met milestone requirements (for the current degree, or the target degree to which a candidate is seeking a transfer). This determination can be subject to making minor amendments to any written submission and/or the completion of any other requirements (training, ethics approval, etc.) to the satisfaction of the Chair within a negotiated time frame.
b. At risk - the candidate has not met milestone requirements and should make another attempt.

(50) Where the recommendation is satisfactory:

a. The Chair of the Progress Committee will submit the completed Progress Report to the Graduate Research School. The Report should be submitted as soon as possible and need not be delayed by any minor amendments that may be required in the candidate's submission.
b. The Graduate Research School will update the candidate's status on the student database and send the candidate a final copy of the report.

(51) Where the candidate has been placed at risk:

a. The Progress Committee and candidate must agree on a Progress Support Plan as described below and set a date for the second attempt at the milestone
b. The Chair of the Progress Committee will submit the completed Progress Report (including the date for the second attempt at the milestone) and the Progress Support Plan to the Graduate Research School.
c. The Graduate Research School will notify the Graduate Research Coordinator of the new date, update the candidates staus on the student database and send the candidate and all members of the Progress Committee a final copy of the report including the Progress Support Plan.

(52) Where a candidate is to make a second attempt at a milestone the candidate, supervisor and Chair will complete a new progress report for the second attempt.

Part I - Outcomes of Second Milestone Attempt

(53) Where a candidate has made a second attempt at a milestone the Progress Committee will select from the following recommendations:

a. Satisfactory - the candidate has met the requirements of the milestone. This determination can be subject to making minor amendments to any written submission and/or the completion of any other requirements (training, ethics approval, etc.) to the satisfaction of the Chair. The 'at-risk' status can be removed.
b. Unsatisfactory - the candidate has not met milestone requirements and should be asked under the provisions of the Academic Progress Statute 2010 to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

(54) Where the recommendation is Satisfactory:

a. The Chair of the Progress Committee will submit the completed Progress Report, including the updated Progress Support Plan to the Graduate Research School.
b. The Graduate Research School will update the candidate's status on the student database and send the candidate a final copy of the report.

(55) Where the recommendation is Unsatisfactory:

a. The Chair will submit the Progress Report to the Graduate Research School.
b. The Graduate Research School will then submit the report to the Graduate Research Coordinator, who may provide additional comments.

(56) The Graduate Research Coordinator will then submit the report to the School Director of Graduate Research, who may provide any additional comments before submitting the Report of the Chair to the Board of Graduate Research.

(57) Where the progress in the current degree is Unsatisfactory but the Progress Committee deems that the project is of sufficient quality for another research degree, they may also recommend that the candidate transfer to that degree, either before or following the outcome of any show cause proceedings for the current degree.

(58) Where the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research is satisfied that appropriate interventions have been made they will ask the candidate, under the provisions of the Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure, to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

Part J - Requesting to Postpone a Progress Reporting Date

(59) Where possible, progress meetings should be arranged so that the report can be submitted to the Graduate

Research School by the due date. Where this is not possible candidates may submit their report within a grace period of 8 weeks for Masters by research degrees and 12 weeks for doctoral degrees, subject to the following conditions:

a. the candidate's principal supervisor agrees to the delay;
b. the candidate's progress has not been marked at-risk at the previous progress meeting;
c. the progress reporting date has not already been postponed
d. the candidate has not already used up the total maximum postponement period available throughout their candidature (see Adjustment of Submission Dates);
e. the revised meeting date will be within the candidate's maximum period of candidature.

(60) Where issues such as illness, carer responsibilities, or difficulties with supervision threaten progress, candidates should take the appropriate action, such as applying for a leave of absence, or negotiating any appropriate changes in supervision. As candidates are not permitted to engage in research while on leave of absence such applications may not be used to gain time to prepare for a milestone.

(61) A candidate's progress report due date will also be postponed where required to enable a repeat at an attempt at a milestone (see Outcomes of a Second Milestone Attempt). The due date for the repeat attempt must be within 8 weeks (full-time equivalent) for Masters by research degrees and 12 weeks (full-time equivalent) for doctoral degrees unless otherwise approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).

(62) Where a candidate has failed their first attempt to satisfactorily complete compulsory coursework that is a prerequisite to any milestone, the Course Coordinator must advise the relevant Graduate Research Coordinator. The new timing of that milestone will then be recommended by the Graduate Research Coordinator in consultation with the candidate and the Principal Supervisor.

(63) The Graduate Research School will provide Graduate Research Coordinators with a summary of any progress reports that have not been submitted by the due date or grace period.

(64) Graduate Research Coordinators are responsible for following up any progress reports that have not been submitted by the due date or grace period for candidates in their discipline, centre or department.

Applications and Approvals

(65) Candidates wishing to complete their progress review within the grace period do not need to submit a formal request and should consult with their supervisor to agree to a revised meeting date.

(66) Candidates applying to postpone their progress report due date must follow the instructions on the Graduate Research School website.

(67) Applications for a postponement of milestone for a full-time candidate will be actioned by the Graduate Research School following the approval of:

a. the Principal Supervisor
b. the Director of Graduate Research
c. the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).

(68) Applications for a postponement of milestone for a part-time candidate will be actioned by the Graduate Research School following the approval of:

a. the Principal Supervisor
b. the Director of Graduate Research

c. the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) if more than 16 weeks (Masters by research) or 24 weeks (doctorate).

Part K - Failure to Undertake a Milestone Attempt

(69) Where a candidate is not AWOL but fails to make an attempt to meet milestone requirements by the conclusion of the grace period without prior approval they will be asked to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

(70) Candidates who submit their thesis/exegesis early are encouraged to complete their milestones early; however, if the milestone due date is after the date of submission, completion is not compulsory.

Part L - At-Risk Status and Unsatisfactory Progress

Progress Support Plan

(71) Where a candidate is placed 'at risk' (either between milestones, after an attempt at a milestone, or after failing to submit by the expected work submission date or by the end of the grace period where applicable) the Progress Committee will discuss and agree on a Progress Support Plan with the candidate.

(72) The plan will document agreed actions and timeframes for all parties to recover the progress of the research or the other requirements of the degree.

(73) Where the at-risk status has been applied as an outcome of a first milestone meeting the progress support plan will be reviewed at the repeat attempt at the milestone.

(74) Where the Progress Committee has met independently of a milestone attempt and agreed to apply at risk status, the Progress Committee will meet to review the status of agreed tasks at the conclusion of the resulting Progress Support Plan. At this meeting the Progress Committee may make the following recommendations:

a. the candidate has made satisfactory progress and the 'at-risk status' can be removed; or
b. the candidate remains 'at-risk' and the plan is amended;
c. The candidate has made unsatisfactory progress and should be asked under the provisions of the Academic Progress Statute 2010 to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

Coursework Requirements and Unsatisfactory Progress

(75) Where a candidate fails to attain the required grades in either compulsory coursework or clinical placements for a second time, or withdraws after the census date on a second attempt, a meeting of the Progress Committee will be called.

(76) In these circumstances:

a. the candidate will be deemed to have made Unsatisfactory Progress in the current degree and a recommendation will be made that the candidate be asked to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated;
b. the Chair will submit an updated Progress Report to the Graduate Research School;
c. the Graduate Research School will then submit the report to the Graduate Research Coordinator, who may provide additional comments;
d. the Graduate Research Coordinator will then submit the Report to the Director of Graduate Research, who may provide any additional comments before submitting the Report to the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research.

(77) Where the Progress Committee deems that the project is of sufficient quality for another research degree the

Committee may also recommend that the candidate transfer to that degree.

Approvals

(78) Where the Chair of the Board of Graduate Research is satisfied that appropriate interventions have been made they will ask the candidate, under the provisions of the Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure, to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated.

Part M - Adjustment of Submission Dates

(79) The total maximum period available to candidates to request a postponement of Progress Reporting dates throughout their candidature is normally 16 weeks (full-time equivalent) for Masters by research Degrees and 36 weeks (full-time equivalent) for doctoral Degrees.

(80) The Graduate Research School will adjust the timing of any subsequent progress reporting dates and a candidate's expected work submission date when:

a. a postponement of a Progress Reporting date is approved (to delay or repeat a milestone);
b. an application for leave of absence or change of study rate is approved;
c. there is notification from a Graduate Research Coordinator that a candidate has failed to meet any pre-milestone requirements such as the completion of compulsory coursework or a clinical placement at the required level.

(81) Where possible candidates should submit their thesis by their expected work submission date. Candidates who are not able to submit their thesis by their expected work submission date, may submit their thesis within a grace period of 8 weeks for Masters by research degrees and 12 weeks for doctoral degrees, subject to the following:

a. the candidate's principal supervisor agrees to the delay;
b. the candidate has not already used up the total maximum postponement period available throughout their candidature;
c. the revised expected work submission date will be within the candidate's maximum period of candidature.

(82) Where valid reasons have delayed progress and the thesis cannot be submitted by the expected work submission date (or within the grace period where it applies), the candidate may apply to postpone their expected work submission date up to their maximum completion date by following the instructions on the Graduate Research School website. Candidates who have exhausted their allowable postponement time will already have had their expected work submission date adjusted to the maximum completion date.

Applications and Approvals

(83) Candidates wishing to submit their thesis within the grace period do not need to submit a formal request and should consult with their supervisor to agree on a revised submission date.

(84) Candidates applying to postpone their expected work submission date must follow the instructions on the Graduate Research School website.

(85) Applications for a postponement of expected work submission date for full-time candidates will be actioned by the Graduate Research School following the approval of:

a. the Principal Supervisor
b. the Director of Graduate Research
c. the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research)

(86) Applications for a postponement of expected work submission date for part-time candidates will be actioned by the Graduate Research School following the approval of:

a. the Principal Supervisor
b. the Director of Graduate Research
c. the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) if more than 16 weeks (Masters by research) or 24 weeks (doctorate).

Part N - Where a Thesis is Deferred

(87) Where a thesis is classified as deferred after examination, as per the Graduate Research Examinations Policy, the candidate will continue to be supported by their Progress Committee during the revise and resubmit period. The Advisory Panel may include specific recommendations in its report relating to the Progress Committee membership, frequency of meetings and role in developing revision guidelines.

Part O - Review of Decisions

Finding of Unsatisfactory Progress and Show Cause

(88) A candidate who has been deemed to have made Unsatisfactory Progress and who has been asked to show cause as to why their candidature should not be terminated may request an appeal following the outcome of show cause proceedings under the provisions of the Academic Progress Statute 2010 (see Sections 11 and 12 of the Statute) and the Graduate Research Show Cause Procedure.

Other Progress Outcomes

(89) In any other circumstances other than unsatisfactory progress and show cause, where a candidate is dissatisfied with an outcome or decision associated with their progress, or believes that university policies or procedures have not been correctly followed, they may in the first instance approach the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) for a review.

(90) Where a candidate is dissatisfied with a decision made by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) outside show cause proceedings they may pursue a complaint through the Student Complaints Management Policy or the office of the University Ombudsman.

(91) Students are also eligible to lodge a complaint with the National Student Ombudsman. For further information on complaints considered by the National Student Ombudsman, go to Making a complaint | National Student Ombudsman (NSO).

Section 7 - Definitions

(92) Nil.

Section 8 - Authority and Associated Information

(93) This Policy is made under the La Trobe University Act 2009.

Status and Details

Status	Current
Effective Date	21st September 2022
Review Date	23rd May 2027
Approval Authority	Policy Advisor
Approval Date	21st September 2022
Expiry Date	Not Applicable
Responsible Manager - Policy	Rebecca Lubansky Senior Manager, Graduate and Global Research
Enquiries Contact	Graduate Research School

Glossary Terms and Definitions

"staff" - Staff means any person employed by the University as per the definition in the La Trobe University Act 2009 (Vic).