

Research Degree Regulations Schedule F

Procedures relating to termination of registration for research degrees on grounds of academic progress or lack of engagement

01 October 2023 – 30 September 2024



**Edge Hill
University**

Research Degree Regulations Schedule F

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1. Preamble

1.1. This document is an appendix to the *Research Degree Regulations* outlining the procedures followed when it is necessary to consider terminating a postgraduate researcher's (PGR's) registration for a research degree where the termination of registration is not the result of a failure to meet the requirements of examination, or of the operation of the procedures relating to academic malpractice by postgraduate researchers (Schedule B of the *Research Degree Regulations*) or the *Research Degree Support to Study Procedures* (Schedule G of the *Research Degree Regulations*).

1.2. The need for the University to consider terminating registration for a research degree is an occasional occurrence that can arise for various reasons, including, *inter alia*:

- failure to meet the requirements of examination (normally addressed through the main *Research Degree Regulations*);
- failure to submit by the end of the maximum period of registration (normally addressed through the main *Research Degree Regulations*);
- failure to pay tuition fees (normally addressed through the main *Research Degree Regulations*);
- some academic malpractice (normally addressed through Schedule B);
- persistently poor academic progress (normally addressed through Schedule F);
- failure to engage with supervision, postgraduate researcher development and/or the Graduate School (normally addressed through Schedule F);
- some cases of long-term mental and/or physical health problems (normally addressed through Schedule G);
- some cases of behavioural problems on the part of a PGR (normally addressed through Schedule G);
- some criminal activity (normally addressed through Schedule G).

1.3. Long-term mental and/or physical health difficulties and behavioural problems related to such health difficulties are normally addressed through the *Research Degree Support to Study Procedures* (Schedule G), which, although primarily designed to support PGRs

and assist them to return to their research wherever possible, can lead to termination of registration in some cases. Academic malpractice is addressed through Schedule B of the *Research Degree Regulations*, and that may also result in termination of registration in certain circumstances. Failure to meet the academic standards required by an examination at the second attempt (project registration, progression or final examination), or of a second failure to meet the standard required to hold a progression viva normally leads to termination of registration through the standard application of the *Research Degree Regulations*. Such cases do not normally require employment of Schedule F. The academic judgement of the examiners is final unless the Graduate School Board of Studies has concerns about the conduct of an examination or it identifies a significant inconsistency between the recommendation made by the examiners and their comments on the submission and the performance of the candidate. Where GSBoS has such concerns it will follow the requirements of the *Research Degree Regulations*. Failure to pay fees is also addressed through the *Research Degree Regulations*. Those regulations state that failure to pay fees will normally result in termination of registration (N5.1). Cases where there is a need to consider termination of registration for a research degree as a result of persistently poor academic progress or a failure to engage with supervision, postgraduate researcher development and/or the Graduate School are normally addressed through the procedures relating to termination of registration for research degrees (Schedule F, referred to here as 'these procedures'). These procedures result in a recommendation to the Graduate School Board of Studies (GSBoS), which, in the absence of additional new and relevant information, and where it does not have any concerns about the operation of these procedures in the case in question, will accept the recommendation. Atypical cases may occasionally arise. In such circumstances, the Graduate School will determine whether the main *Research Degree Regulations*, Schedule B, Schedule F or Schedule G should be employed.

- 1.4. 'Termination of registration' is when the University brings a PGR's registration for a research degree to an end. 'Withdrawal' is when a PGR brings their own registration for a research degree to an end. These procedures are concerned with termination of registration rather than withdrawal.

2. Identification of a cause for concern

2.1. As there are many things that may lead to consideration of termination of registration, there are many ways in which a cause for concern may be identified. Failure to meet the requirements of examination emerges through the standard examination processes and is reported directly to the Graduate School Board of Studies as part of the standard operation of examination processes. Concerns about poor academic progress are most likely to be raised by supervisors, and concerns about engagement may come directly from the Graduate School (which may refer the matter to the Graduate School Board of Studies), or from supervisors, Graduate School Research Degree Contacts or other members of staff. Any concerns raised with the Graduate School that may require consideration of termination of registration will be referred by the Graduate School to the Graduate School Board of Studies, which is the mechanism by which the Graduate School initiates these procedures and maintains oversight of their operation and outcomes.

2.2. Where concern is related to academic progress or a lack of engagement on the part of a PGR, the Graduate School Board of Studies will first make use of the progress review process if that has not already been employed. Where the progress review process has already been employed, the Graduate School Board of Studies is not obliged to repeat that process, although it may, exceptionally, do so where it deems it appropriate. GSBoS will make judgements as to the best course of action by considering the need to provide PGRs with reasonable opportunity to overcome or resolve difficulties that are causing concern, and which could lead to termination of registration while also not prolonging registration where reasonable opportunity to resolve matters has already been given and been unsuccessful. Prolonging registration in the face of evidence that a PGR is not able to return to making suitable progress is not in the best interest of any PGR, including those who wish to be permitted to continue. The Graduate School Board of Studies will not knowingly allow the continuation of registration in circumstances that facilitate academic failure or make it likely. Examination must not knowingly be used to bring about termination of registration.

2.3. Where employment of the progress review process does not address a concern relating to academic progress or a lack of engagement adequately, these procedures should be employed.

3. Procedure for addressing a cause for concern where termination of registration may be necessary

- 3.1. These procedures consist of various stages which will be conducted in as timely a manner as possible but with sufficient time to allow a rigorous assessment, namely:
- determining whether there is sufficient cause for concern to warrant establishment of a panel assessment of the case;
 - establishing a panel for assessment of the case, drawn from a standing panel;
 - review of documentation by the panel and further investigation of the circumstances as deemed necessary by the panel;
 - a meeting of the panel with the PGR and a representative of the Graduate School.

4. Determining whether panel assessment is warranted

- 4.1. Where a cause for concern has been identified, the Graduate School will prepare a short report outlining the nature of the concern. Relevant documentation will be appended to that report as necessary. The role of the Graduate School here is to collate and present the relevant information and documentation. The Graduate School is not making a case for any particular outcome.
- 4.2. The report will be submitted to the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. The Chair of GSBoS will appoint a member of the professoriate who is outside the department in which the PGR is based for supervisory purposes and who is not a member of the supervisory team, to review the case to determine whether panel assessment is warranted.
- 4.3. In cases of a failure to meet the academic standards required by an examination at the second attempt (project registration, progression or final examination), or of a second failure to meet the standard required to hold a progression viva, panel assessment of the need for termination of registration is not necessary. The academic judgement of the examiners is final unless the Graduate School Board of Studies has concerns about the conduct of an examination or it identifies a significant inconsistency between the recommendation made by the examiners and their comments on the submission and the performance of the candidate. Where GSBoS has such concerns it will follow the requirements of the *Research Degree Regulations*.

- 4.4. Where it is determined that panel assessment is warranted, the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies will convene a panel to assess the case. The panel will comprise a chair (a dean or professor of the University) and two research active members of staff nominated by the Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies. No member of the panel will have had any previous involvement with the PGR's supervision, nor will they be drawn from the subject area in which the PGR's research is based. The secretary to the panel will be appointed by the Graduate School.
- 4.5. The member of the professoriate who has established that panel assessment is warranted will normally present the case to the panel.
- 4.6. The panel will receive all the material available to GSBoS in order to complete its deliberations.

5. Panel assessment

- 5.1. The panel will meet as soon as possible and not later than six weeks from the date a concern is formally raised with the Graduate School.
- 5.2. The invitation to the meeting sent by the Chair of GSBoS to the PGR will include a copy of these procedures and a copy of the *Research Degree Regulations*, along with any documentation to be considered by the panel. The PGR will have at least five days' notice of the meeting.
- 5.3. The letter from the Chair of GSBoS will inform the PGR of their right to be accompanied by a 'friend.'¹ In exceptional cases the Chair of GSBoS may agree to a person who is not a member of the Edge Hill community being in attendance to support the PGR.
- 5.4. If the PGR does not attend, and does not request the panel be adjourned, the meeting will go ahead in the PGR's absence. Equally, if the PGR does not give a reasonable explanation for non-attendance or in the view of the Chair of GSBoS the PGR unreasonably attempts to delay or further delay proceedings, the meeting may go ahead in the PGR's absence providing this is authorised directly by the Chair of GSBoS.

¹ See Appendix 23 (of the general Academic Regulations): Role of a Student's Friend in Academic Conduct Procedures for full guidelines.

5.5. The terms of reference for the panel assessment of the case are:

- to *investigate* the appropriateness of termination of registration, having regard to all relevant information;
- to *determine* whether termination of registration is appropriate;
- to determine its recommendations to the Graduate School Board of Studies (see section 6.1);
- to inform Graduate School Board of Studies of its recommendations.

5.6. The Panel will normally conduct its hearing as follows:

- panel's private deliberation;²
- the chair will call for the PGR, 'friend' and the member of the professoriate presenting the case to enter the room;
- chair's introduction:
 - welcome and introduction of persons present
 - outline of the panel's remit
 - outline of procedure for the hearing
- the chair will call for the member of the professoriate who established the case to present the case and invite any persons present to ask relevant questions;
- the chair will invite the PGR to respond and invite any persons present to ask relevant questions;
- when the chair is satisfied that all relevant information has been provided, the chair will explain to the PGR that the panel will deliberate, and the outcome will be communicated to the PGR by the Chair of GSBoS, in writing, within ten working days of the hearing;
- the chair will invite the PGR, 'friend' and the member of the professoriate who established the case to leave the meeting;
- panel's private deliberation: the decision of the panel will be a matter of academic judgement.

² This does not include the member of the professoriate who established the case.

6. Recommendations to the Graduate School Board of Studies

6.1. The following recommendations are available to the panel:

- the PGR's registration should be terminated, or
- termination of registration is not appropriate at present. A further cycle of three reviews of the PGR's progress should be completed and the panel should re-convene to consider the case again following that progress review exercise.

6.2. Where the panel re-convenes to consider the case following additional review of progress, the following recommendations are available to the panel:

- the PGR's registration should be terminated, or
- the PGR's registration should not be terminated.

6.3. The Chair of the Graduate School Board of Studies will confirm the position of the PGR at the earliest opportunity, within ten working days of the hearing.

6.4. PGRs who have their registration terminated have a right of appeal under the Academic Appeals Procedures of the University (see the Academic Regulations, Appendix 22 or Appendix 26 as appropriate).

Endmatter

Information	Ownership/Review
Title	Research Degree Regulations, Schedule F
Policy Owner	Dr Leon Culbertson, Dean of the Graduate School
Approved by	Academic Board
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