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Guidance for students and supervisors in respect of withdrawing, or early exit from research programmes

All research students and members of supervisory panels should read this document.

Full and accurate documentation, and timely procedures, are particularly important in the context of withdrawal/early exit and significant financial issues can arise in this context. Please direct any questions about this guidance to the Graduate Studies Office, graduatestudiesoffice@dcu.ie

1. Situations where a student wishes to discontinue their studies

While it is relatively rare, there are circumstances when a research student does not wish to continue studying for his/her intended research award. Given the likely investment of time and effort up to this point, it is important that such a decision is not taken lightly, and that it is done in close consultation with the supervisory panel¹, and knowledge of the Head of School. It is in the student's interest that the issue be addressed promptly, and a course of action agreed.

- Depending on the context, it may be that there is a possibility to complete a research thesis for a lower degree than the one for which the student originally registered. A change of registration status, appropriately approved and notified to Registry, may be needed in this case.
- Alternatively the student may qualify for a deferral of a semester or academic year. If such action is deemed appropriate to assist the student's continuation of their research degree the supervisory panel and Head of School may support an application via Registry for this.
- If unforeseen personal circumstances have created issues with the student's ability to regularly be on campus/to attend DCU frequently, some flexibility can be afforded (or alternatives explored), but in accordance with the regulations appropriate agreements must be put in place to monitor any such arrangement.
- In situations however where withdrawal is sought by the student and deemed the most appropriate course of action, it is very important that it is the student who formally actions this, via completion of a withdrawal form to Registry, otherwise on-going fee liability against the student may accrue².

In the context of funded research students, there is an obligation on the student to maintain contact with the funder should they be deferring or withdrawing (and to seek approval where necessary). Students should also comply with local processes of withdrawal from a project, (which may involve return of resources and local access swipe cards etc.) or seek clarification on same from their supervisor(s) if they are uncertain).

Relevant forms:

R-27 [Notification of Withdrawal from a Course](#) (PDF)

R-32 [Application for Deferral of Academic Year](#) (PDF)

¹ In all instances 'supervisory panel' can be read as 'supervisor(s)' for students first registered in 2010/11 or earlier

² DCU does not refund fees, once paid for an academic year

2. Situations where adequate progress is not being made and progression is not approved

All postgraduate students registered at DCU for an award by research and thesis must make appropriate progress towards their degree. If progress is not satisfactory and a student fails to meet the required standard, his/her registration will be ended before he/she submits a thesis for the intended award. Every effort will be made by supervisory panel members and Heads of School to assist students through difficult times during their research degrees and a decision to end registration early will not be taken lightly. It is not possible to provide a complete list of contributory reasons for a student's early exit from a degree programme because each case is treated individually. However, the following are some of the reasons why a student's progress may be found to be unsatisfactory: academic performance not meeting the required standard, research misconduct, contravention of health and safety or ethical practices, failure to make timely progress towards degree completion.

- DCU does not have partial or time-limited registration, and a clear recommendation to progress to the next year of registration for the full academic year is required by the end of each academic year. This necessitates that evaluation and management of progress is actively addressed by supervisor(s) in an on-going way throughout the academic year in order that any issues that arise have been worked on prior to the student's end of year assessment of progress.
- While supervisors assess their students' progress regularly throughout the degree, it is particularly important to monitor progress during the first six months of a research project.
- Students have a responsibility to bring to the attention of supervisor(s) reasons outside their control which are limiting progress, and to contribute to the resolution of such difficulties.
- Poor academic performance should be addressed promptly in a structured way. If a student is failing to meet the required academic standard and make progress, the supervisory panel should inform the student of this in writing and the supervisor(s) develop a plan to assist the student to meet the standard. Students on a stipend should be reminded at this stage of their obligations under the terms of their funding agreement & that they run the risk of scholarship payments being stopped if satisfactory progress is not achieved. Clear milestones and deadlines should be agreed through which the student can demonstrate clearly that his/her performance has improved to an acceptable level.
- The supervisory panel will review the case apropos such deadlines, and at the end of the academic year, and if satisfactory progress is achieved, the student remains on the research award register and progresses. If the situation is not resolved, the student and Head of School should be notified.
- A student may, where appropriate, be offered an opportunity to complete a research thesis for a lower degree, than the one for which s/he originally registered. A change of registration status, appropriately approved and notified to Registry, may be needed in this case. The student will be allowed to progress to the next year of full registration where this recommendation has come at the end of year review.
- The supervisory panel may sign off on a recommendation not to continue registration (PGR2), and the student's registration will cease at the end of that academic year. No new student fee liability will accrue beyond then.
- Students have the right to appeal a negative recommendation regarding progression, through the procedure described in the academic regulations.
- Staff members in Student Support and Development and, where relevant, the International Office, are available to provide support to students when they leave in this context. On confirmation that a negative progress recommendation is not going to be challenged, and in cases where an appeal is not upheld, GSO will issue an invitation to the student to make contact with SS&D. The student will be provided with the opportunity to discuss career options and, where relevant, welfare and visa issues which arise as a result of their studies ending.

3. Implications for Stipend Payments; statement of Terms and Conditions

It is important to note that payment of a scholarship or fellowship requires that a student be registered, and payments will be stopped should a student defer or withdraw.

Continuing, or active registration is no guarantee of on-going payment of a stipend, and all funded students should have a statement of the *Terms and Conditions* of their specific scholarship. This should clearly state that payment is linked to them maintaining specific progress toward the degree, and compliance with significant University regulations and policies. The *Terms and Conditions* should be specific as to when progress is reviewed for the purpose of scholarship (e.g. it could be linked to continuing registration, or to quarterly reviews etc.).

Every student’s progress is monitored regularly and formally reviewed annually, but in very rare cases a supervisory panel may wish to recommend ending a student’s engagement with research at a time other than the usual annual review period. The PGR2 form may be used for this purpose, and such recommendations can be appealed through the same mechanism as applies to any negative PGR2 recommendation.

Cessation of scholarship payments will only be done where there are very clear grounds that the student is not fulfilling his/her obligations under the scholarship. Academic decisions concerning progress take priority, and decisions regarding monetary / funding issues always follow in terms of chronology. Students should however be given due notice that they run a risk of scholarship payments being stopped, at the initial stage of a supervisor notifying them of unsatisfactory progress. The Head of School should be copied on any such notice, and clear grounds should be given. A deadline for a decision on on-going engagement with the research, and therefore also payments (no shorter than a month) should be set, aligned with the deadline for demonstration of improvement of performance to an acceptable level. Payment may be stopped immediately after this deadline, following notification to the Graduate Studies Office, should the Supervisory Panel and Head of School agree that performance has not improved to the required level. Other units where the decision is of relevance (Finance, Registry, Faculty Office) should be notified.

In cases where this decision is disputed, a student cannot be cut-off without due process within the University. However, the University also has to guard against abuse of process, and in this context a maximum period of 2 further months is deemed appropriate during which a funder may, depending on the circumstances, be required to continue payments. This situation will arise rarely and, in the context of the overall investment in the project and student, this 2 month period is considered proportionate. In cases where the grant is held by the principal supervisor(s) s/he or they shall have responsibility for ensuring such funds as are required for this period are made available. In cases where the principal supervisor is not the grant holder, this responsibility moves to the grant holder. For externally funded fellowship students, the Dean of Graduate Studies will discuss the situation with the external funding body, the relevant Executive Dean, RIS and the Finance Office as necessary. No funder will be asked to meet a new fee liability during this period. New fee liability is clarified in the context of the outcome of due process.

A template Scholarship Terms and Conditions letter is available at: www4.dcu.ie//graduatestudies/info-supervisors.shtml#

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