

**POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENT APPRAISAL
GOOD PRACTICE GUIDELINES**

Introduction

The College is committed to a system of annual appraisal of all students registered for higher degrees (MPhil, PhD, DVetMed and DProf). This applies to all full-time and part-time research students. This good practice document should be read in conjunction with the RVC's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees.

The objectives of appraisal are:

- To evaluate student progress so that the College can be assured of the quality of research degree programmes and can identify any weaknesses in a timely fashion;
- To provide objective feedback to students and their supervisors on progress;
- To give the student experience of the processes by which research degrees are evaluated (writing a report and an oral defence of the work).

PhD students who are registered 80% part-time should follow the same system of appraisal as full-time students except that the full appraisal should take place 14-15 months after the start date of the studentship and at 14-15 month intervals thereafter.

DProf students will be appraised annually in the same way as other part-time students. The first appraisal should take place one calendar year from the date on which they complete Methods of Enquiry 1 and can begin their research.

	Full-Time Students		Part-Time Students	
Year 1*	Full Appraisal Appraisal will consist of a 5,000 word report and an oral with 2 assessors to discuss the project* Good or Excellent *Weak or very poor		Light touch Appraisal Appraisal will consist of a two page progress report to be reviewed by 2 assessors	
Year 2*	Appraisal will consist of a two page progress report, a 20-30min presentation and associated oral with 2 assessors to discuss the project Good or Excellent	Appraisal as above *Weak or very poor	Appraisal will consist of a 5,000 word report and an oral with 2 assessors to discuss the project <i>Performance at this appraisal will determine the format of the appraisal at year 4</i> <i>DProf students must demonstrate completion of 120 credit taught modules</i>	
Year 3* (4y F/T students only)	Appraisal as above	Appraisal as above	Light touch Appraisal	
Year 4*	Submission		Performance at excellent / good Appraisal will consist of a 2 page progress report, a 20-30min presentation and associated oral with 2 assessors to discuss the project	year 2 appraisal: *weak / v poor Appraisal as in year 2 <i>Performance at this appraisal will determine the format of the appraisal at year 6</i>
Year 5*			Light touch Appraisal	
Year 6*			Performance at excellent / good Appraisal as in year 4	year 4 appraisal: *weak / v poor Appraisal as in year 2
Year 7*			Light touch Appraisal	
Year 8*			Submission	

NOTE: At each appraisal for full- *and* part-time students, supervisors will complete a progress appraisal form (Form 1), students will complete a comment form (Form 4) and assessors will complete a recommendation form (Form 5).

*If in any year of appraisal a student does not satisfy their assessors, remedial action may be needed, the nature of which will depend on the individual.

*A "satisfactory" performance at appraisal could result in a requirement for *either* a 5,000 word report *or* a short report and presentation + oral at the next full appraisal.

*iCASE students are required to submit a placement plan and objectives (normally) at the year 1 appraisal. A reflective practice document written by the student will be considered at the appraisal following completion of the placement.

Full Appraisal

The first full appraisal consists of evaluation of a 5,000 word report (excluding references and appendices but including figure legends and footnotes) and an interview with the student. The content of the report and the students' progress with their research and skills development training will be discussed. Students also have the opportunity to raise any issues relating to their programme of study. The appraisal is conducted by two assessors, who are members of academic staff not directly involved in the project. The primary supervisor is expected to be present, but not to participate unless invited to do so. The assessors evaluate the student's report and performance in the interview by completing appraisal documents. These a) record recommendations to the Graduate School on student progress and b) provide written and verbal feedback to the student and their supervisors on progress and any areas for attention and future development. Supervisors also provide feedback on the student's development as a researcher. Upgrade to PhD registration will be considered for students at the year 1 appraisal (year 2 for part-time students and 14-15 months into the studentship for those registered 80% part-time) and a recommendation made about the format of the next year's appraisal.

If a student performs well during their first full appraisal, the next full appraisal will consist of a short written summary of their progress over the past year to be submitted to their assessors in advance of the appraisal interview, together with a PowerPoint presentation about their work which will be discussed with their assessors at the interview. As in the first full appraisal, a set of forms will be completed by all the relevant parties and returned to the Graduate School. A recommendation about the format of a subsequent full-appraisal will be made based on the student's performance at the second full appraisal.

Light Touch Appraisal

Part-time students will be appraised at the end of each year of study (for DProf students this will be one year after completion of Methods of Enquiry 1) but in years 1, 3, 5 and 7 (if relevant) the appraisal will consist of a short written progress report which should include research plans for the next year. This will be sent to the assessors for review, together with the supervisors' assessment form and the students' comment form. Assessors will be asked to recommend to the Graduate School whether the student should be allowed to continue with their studies and/or if any remedial action is required. They are not expected to meet with the student but may ask to do so if they think it is necessary. In years 2, 4 and 6 (if relevant), the appraisal process will be as described above for full-time students.

Practical Arrangements and Responsibilities

Supervisors

- Supervisors are responsible for identifying assessors.
- Supervisors are responsible for organising with the student and the assessors a suitable time, date and place for the appraisal to take place.
- Supervisors are responsible for clearly indicating to the student the scope and length of the appraisal report/presentation and the necessary preparation time. They should give appropriate guidance on format/style/content before and during preparation.
- Many supervisors find the writing of the student report is assisted by the student's familiarisation with the relevant background papers and asking students to write a literature review on which they receive feedback at the beginning of their studies.
- Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the assessors receive the student's report and the appraisal documents at least 10 days prior to the meeting. *Note that for supervisors of iCASE award studentships this will*

include the placement plan and objectives agreed with the student and the supervisor at the partner organisation to be considered (normally) at the year 1 appraisal.

- Supervisors should attend the assessment although the interview is conducted by the assessors. Supervisors are present to support the student and are not expected to actively participate. It is valuable to see how their students perform in order to offer advice and it is also important that they inform the assessors of any special circumstances and that they see the assessment is fair.
- Supervisors should ensure that both they and the student have completed form 1 before the meeting and should make the form available to the assessors at the end of the interview.

Students

- The student is responsible for producing their report/presentation in a timely fashion and ensuring there is sufficient time for supervisors to comment and for revisions to be made before the report is sent to the assessors.
- Students should come to the interview prepared to discuss their work and its wider context. They should bring the completed form 4, a copy of their report, their Student Log and the photocopied pages of the log indicating their attendance at seminars and training. *iCASE students should additionally be prepared to discuss their placement plan and objectives (normally at the year 1 appraisal) and the reflective practice document (which they should send to their assessors for consideration at the appraisal following completion of the placement).*

Assessors

- The departmental assessor and non-departmental assessor should be carefully chosen for their experience of examining or appraising postgraduate research students. It would be expected that both would have postgraduate research degrees. At least one of the assessors should have the detailed knowledge and/or skills to appraise the student on the topic of their project. It is important is that at least one appraiser is experienced in the RVC appraisal process. New academic staff should be encouraged to take part in appraisals alongside an experienced RVC individual. Where an assessor from outside the College is used they should be experienced in the process or paired with an assessor from the RVC who is.
- Assessors should complete the assessment of the written report on form 2 or form 3 before the interview
- The length of the appraisal should be sufficient for a thorough review but not so long that it becomes a marathon. No more than two hours would seem appropriate.
- At the appraisal, the assessors must review the skills the student has or needs to develop to assist them in their progression and future plans, and must enquire about the broader learning issues such as attendance at the College seminars, giving talks, attending and participating in meetings, and skills development.
- At the appraisal the assessors must give adequate time (usually towards the end) for the student to talk freely about their supervision in the absence of the supervisor. It is normal to ask the supervisor to leave the room for the duration of this discussion and be invited to return when it is over. It is important that the student feels comfortable to do so. Assessors should also provide supervisors with an opportunity to discuss their student's progress without the student being present.
- The assessors should discuss their conclusions with the supervisor and with the student at the end of the interview. Where they are proposing a further appraisal in less than a year, or where they have reservations about progress, they must explain their reasons and indicate clearly what their expectations are. A summary should be written on the appraisal form or provided as a separate document.
- The departmental/RVC assessor is responsible for ensuring that all the paperwork is completed at the end of the interview and sent to the Research Degrees Officer in a timely manner.

The Graduate School

- The Head of Postgraduate Administration and/or Head of the Graduate School will review the report and notify the student of the outcomes
- Copies of the documents are returned to the student, the supervisors and the Head of Department.