



Procedure for Monitoring and Review of Research Degrees

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1. Purpose

This procedure supports *AQAE011 Research Degree Policy* which articulates the principles, standards and requirements for the monitoring and assessment of research degrees at Atlantic Technological University (ATU). The purpose of this document is to describe and outline the procedures for monitoring and review of Master's Degree (Research) at Level 9 and Doctoral Degree at Level 10 at ATU. The procedure details the steps involved in completing these processes.

2. Scope

This procedure applies to any student registered on a programme of study in ATU leading to the award of a Master's Degree (Research) at Level 9 or Doctoral Degree Level 10 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), as defined in the *AQAE011 Research Degree Policy*. The procedure also applies to those responsible for the management, review and assessment of research degrees in ATU, including supervisors and examiners.

This document does not apply to the Structured Research Masters in ATU. *AQAE066 Procedure for Monitoring and Examination of Structured Research Master's Degrees* describes the procedure for the monitoring of Structured Research Master's degrees in ATU.

3. Reference Documents

- National Framework for Doctoral Education Revised (2023)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) *Framework of Good Practice for Research Degree Programmes* (2020)
- Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) *Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Providers of Research Degree Programmes* (2017)

4. Procedure

4.1 Research Calendar

An annual Research Calendar is prepared by the office of Chief Officer Research, Innovation and Engagement and is communicated to all research degree students, supervisors and Faculty offices. It outlines important dates relating to the planning for and progress of research degree students. It provides key dates for monitoring and review processes including annual progress review dates, confirmation assessment dates, *Viva Voce* dates Postgraduate Research Examination Board dates and Conferring dates.

4.2 Research Degree Programme Requirements

Within three months of commencement of the research degree, the student and the supervision team meet to discuss the research question(s) and proposed research design. Skills and training that the student may require in implementing the proposed research design are agreed. Consideration of the acquisition of skills and required credits at appropriate times is advised.

The training schedule should take account of any future professional needs, industry placement if required and career aspirations of the student. The research team agree a Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP) using the *AQAE058_001 Research Professional Development Form*. This provides a framework for monitoring the progress of the research and is reviewed as part of the Annual Progress Review Process.

ATU requires research degree students to complete taught modules to accumulate ECTS to fulfil the requirements for the particular research degree they are undertaking. Please see section 4.3 of *AQAE011 Research Degree Policy* and the Approved Programme Schedule (APS) if applicable for the number of ECTS/modules required.

As taught modules are completed, results are recorded on the Exam Broadsheet and considered at the subsequent Exam Board in the relevant Department. The recording of the accumulation of ECTS is managed in the Student Record System by the Faculty office. The student receives certified proof for all taught modules completed during the programme of study *following* the conclusion of the final examination of the research degree at the relevant postgraduate exam board. The Research Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator will track the completion of ECTS of students to ensure they are obtained prior to submission of their final thesis.

4.3 Annual Progress Review

In addition to regular scheduled meetings between the supervision team and the student, all registered students complete an Annual Progress Review. The Annual Progress Review, convened by the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement will take cognisance of the Research Calendar, duration on the research register, full or part-time registration status and, where applicable, the programme schedule approved by ATU. Monitoring and review of progress in relation to training should be an element of the regular scheduled meetings between the supervision team and the student and a key component of the Annual Progress Review.

The *AQAE058_002 Annual Progress Review Form*, is compiled separately by the student and the principal supervisor (in consultation with the wider supervision team as required). The

student and principal supervisor are advised to meet to discuss and review their respective forms prior to submission.

Areas addressed in the Annual Progress Review Form include: the RPDP; work schedule; data management plan; level of satisfaction with progress; any emerging issues/barriers and mitigation steps; frequency of meetings.

The student and the principal supervisor (in consultation with the supervision team) must confirm whether they consider progress to be one of the following:

1. Satisfactory, and sufficiently supported by the supervision team and University to warrant continuation on the Masters or Doctoral register.
2. Unsatisfactory, but redeemable through interventions agreed between the student and the supervision team, and therefore warranting continuation on the Masters/Doctoral register.
3. Unsatisfactory, and requiring mediation independent of the supervision team.

Selection of option three by either the student or the principal supervisor will trigger an independent appraisal of progress by a Progress Review Panel (see section 4.3.1 below).

The renewal of registration for a Level 9 Master's Degree (Research); a Level 10 PhD; and during Phase 2 of a Level 10 Professional Doctorate is dependent on a positive outcome of the Annual Progress Review.

The AQAE058_002 *Annual Progress Review Form* will initially be reviewed by the Research Quality Assurance and Enhancement Coordinator who will forward the outcomes to the relevant faculty office and to PRAC. It will also be considered at the next available Examinations Board and recorded as a pass or incomplete (at this stage).

4.3.1 Progress Review Panel

A Progress Review Panel (PRP) will be convened by the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement. The PRP is independent of the supervision team and will appraise progress identified as unsatisfactory by the supervision team or by the student through the annual progress monitoring process, *or* at the request of the supervision team or the student outside of the annual reporting schedule.

Having regard to conflicts of interest and gender balance the PRP will normally comprise:

- Head of School in the research degree student's discipline (or nominee)
- Registrar & Chief Academic Officer (or nominee)
- Senior Research Manager with responsibility for postgraduate research development (nominated by the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement)
- Research-active academic staff member in a cognate research area.

The PRP will have specific responsibilities to:

- review Annual Progress Reports submitted by the student and the principal supervisor
- discuss the Annual Progress Reports with the student and the supervisors separately
- consider any mitigating circumstances declared by the student, and
- consider issues of supervision/student performance.

Following the appraisal, the PRP will recommend one of the following:

1. a recommendation to continue on the Master's or Doctoral register.
2. the research is deemed not to be progressing satisfactorily and a clear outline of remedial action to be taken should be provided to the student by the principal supervisor (in consultation with the wider supervision team as required). The student is required to report again for a progress review normally within three months.
3. the research is not satisfactory for the level of the award being sought and a recommendation that the student be transferred to a lower register at the request of the supervision team.
4. recommendation to discontinue the student's registration as the research and student progress is deemed unsatisfactory, and the student not re-registered
5. recommendation to change the supervision arrangements.

The decision of the PRP will be notified to the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation and Engagement and to the faculty office (*AQAE058_003 Progress Review Panel Report Form*). The relevant Assistant Registrar will notify the student and the principal supervisor of the decision. The Head of School/Head of Department will be copied into all correspondence. A summary report of the outcomes of PRPs will be forwarded to the Postgraduate Research Advisory Committee (PRAC) for noting.

4.4 Confirmation Assessment

The Confirmation Assessment is a separate, additional process to the Annual Progress Review for PhD students. The purpose is to establish that sufficient progress has been made, and that the PhD student has the competence and capacity to complete the proposed research. The process of confirmation takes place between 18-24 months (full-time) or between 30-48 months (part-time) from the date of registration.

Confirmation Assessment is undertaken by a panel comprising of a Chairperson (Chair) and two academic/research staff who may be internal or external to ATU. The makeup of the panel depends on the nature of the project and whether the PhD student is a member of ATU staff. Panel members must declare any conflicts of interest in relation to the project, supervision team or student. The principal supervisor forwards panel nominees to the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement for approval and appointment.

The panel must:

1. Be independent of the research project, the PhD student and the supervision team (for example, a panel member cannot be a co-supervisor on another PhD project nor a line manager).
2. Hold a Level 10 qualification.
3. Have expertise in the broad area of the research study.
4. At least one member of the panel must have successfully supervised to completion at Level 10 and/or examined at PhD level.
5. Where any of the above (1-4) cannot be facilitated within ATU, an external panel member (s) will be appointed.
6. Where the PhD student is a member of ATU staff, at least one member of the panel must be external to ATU.

An independent Chair will be appointed for the Confirmation Assessment by the Dean of Faculty. Criteria for appointment of Chair of the CAP are as follows:

1. Be a full-time, experienced member of ATU academic/research staff.
2. Hold a Level 10 qualification.
3. Have experience of successfully supervising students to an award at Level 10.
4. Have experience of examining at Level 10.

4.4.1 Confirmation Assessment Process

A nominee of the Chief Officer Research Innovation & Engagement will send notification of CAP dates to each principal supervisor and PhD student and will liaise with the Chair, the panel, the principal supervisor and the PhD student and agree a date and time for the assessment. Normally, the Confirmation Assessment will take place online.

The principal supervisor and the PhD student forward the *AQAE058_004 Notice of Intention to Present for Confirmation Assessment Form* to the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement and the Head of Department four weeks in advance of the date of Confirmation Assessment. The form includes information on agreed mandatory milestones, including taught components. Appended to the form, the PhD student submits a report with a maximum word count of 7000 words which must contain:

- a comprehensive description of the research work carried out to date. This will include *inter alia* a contextual introduction, the aims, formulation of the research questions, theoretical/conceptual aspects of the research, proposed methodology, and ethical issues.
- a statement of progress; the RPDP; training completed; conferences attended; outline/abstract of draft thesis chapters; details of any publications to date; timeline to completion; reflections on any challenges to date.

The Chair manages the Confirmation Assessment Process to ensure that it is undertaken in a rigorous and fair manner, and in accordance with ATU regulations. Before the Confirmation Assessment, the Chair should ensure that the panel have had the opportunity to confer.

The Confirmation Assessment meeting will normally take place within one month of submission of the work presented. The supervision team can be in attendance but do not take part. Normally, the confirmation assessment will commence with a 15-minute (maximum) presentation by the PhD student. Following this the panel will ask questions of the PhD student on topics including progress of the work to date, the aims, objectives, and justification for the research project and related areas.

The Confirmation Assessment Panel will assess the quality and progress of the research work to date and the quality and feasibility of the proposed programme of work for the award sought and make one of the following four recommendations:

1. Progress sufficient to continue on the Doctoral register.
2. Progress insufficient. Remedial action required. Return for Confirmation Assessment within three months.
3. Progress unsatisfactory. Research degree student recommended to apply for transfer to the Master's Register.
4. Recommend that the research degree student's registration be terminated.

The Chair forwards a report (*AQAE058_005 Confirmation Assessment Report Form*) of the decision to the office of Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement and to the Faculty Office. The relevant Assistant Registrar will notify the student and the principal supervisor of the decision. The Head of School/Head of Department will be copied into all correspondence. The summary outcomes of Confirmation Assessment Panels are reported to PRAC by the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement.

4.5 Transfer between Registers

ATU allows for transfer from a Level 9 Master's Degree (Research) to Level 10 Doctoral Degree (PhD). A request for transfer can only be initiated following the successful completion of the first Annual Progress Review and in consultation with the supervision team. The applicant must be a registered student. For a full-time student, normally an application for transfer may be made no earlier than 12 months after admission to the Master's Register and not later than 18 months after commencement. For a part-time student, an application for transfer should normally be made no earlier than 24 months after admission to the Master's Register and not later than 36 months after commencement.

A Transfer Assessment is undertaken by a panel convened by the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement according to the same criteria outlined for

Confirmation Assessment Panels in section 4.4 above. The same panel may be convened for both processes (CAP and Transfer).

4.5.1 Transfer from Level 9 to Level 10

The principal supervisor and the student forwards the *AQAE058_006 Request for Transfer between Research Registers Form* to the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement and the Head of Department. Included with the form is a written report to include:

- abstract (300 words) summarising the progress and achievements with respect to the original work plan (append copy of original Masters Research proposal),
- a maximum 7000-word report on the research carried out to date,
 - This will include *inter alia* a contextual introduction, the aims, formulation of the research questions, theoretical/conceptual aspects of the research, proposed methodology, and ethical issues,
 - a statement of progress; the RPDP; training completed; conferences attended; outline/abstract of draft thesis chapters; details of any publications to date; proposed timeline to completion; reflections on any challenges to date, and
- any resource implications for aspects such as fees and stipend.

The assessment will focus on the quality and standard of the work completed by the student to date and of the potential for completion of the work at Level 10 PhD standard.

The Transfer Assessment meeting will normally take place within one month of submission of the work presented. The supervision team can be in attendance but do not take part in the transfer assessment process. Normally the transfer will commence with a 15-minute presentation by the student. Following this the panel will ask questions of the student on topics including progress of the work to date, the aims, objectives, and justification for the research project and related areas.

The Transfer Assessment Panel will make one of the following three recommendations:

1. Progress insufficient. Remain on the Level 9 Master's Register.
2. Remedial action required. Return for Transfer Assessment within 3 months.
3. Progress sufficient for Level 10. Transfer to the Level 10 PhD Register.

The Chair forwards a report (*AQAE058_007 Transfer Assessment Report Form*) of the decision to the office of the Chief Officer Research Innovation & Engagement and to the Faculty office. The relevant Assistant Registrar notifies the student and the principal supervisor. The Head of School/Head of Department will be copied into all correspondence. The summary outcomes of the Transfer Assessment are reported to PRAC by the office of the Chief Officer Research, Innovation & Engagement. A student who successfully completes a Transfer Assessment is not required to complete a Confirmation Assessment.

4.5.2 Transfer from Level 10 to Level 9

Candidates on the Doctoral Register who are unable to or decide not to complete the approved programme, may apply for transfer to the Level 9 Master's Register. An application can be made at any time during the Doctoral programme. The research degree student and the principal supervisor submit *AQAE058_006 Request for Transfer between Research Registers Form* to the office of the Chief Officer for Research, Innovation & Engagement. The faculty office should be copied on this correspondence. The application is reviewed by PRAC, and a recommendation forwarded to the Chief Officer Academic Officer & Registrar for approval and updating of the Research Register.

4.6 Appeals Procedure

Decisions of the Annual Progress Review, the Transfer Assessment and the Confirmation Assessment (PhD students only) can be appealed through the formal appeal procedure *AQAE033 Procedure for Recheck, Review and Appeal*.

5. Documents Related to this Procedure

5.1.1 Policies

- *AQAE011 Research Degree Policy*
- *AQAE009 Recognition of Prior Learning Policy*
- *AQAE005 Marks & Standards Policy*

5.1.2 Procedures

- *AQAE033 Procedure for Recheck, Review and Appeal*
- *AQAE066 Procedure for Monitoring and Examination of Structured Research Master's Degrees*

5.1.3 Forms

- *AQAE058_001 Research Professional Development Plan Form*
- *AQAE058_002 Annual Progress Report Form*
- *AQAE058_003 Progress Review Panel Report Form*
- *AQAE058_004 Notice of Intention to Present for Confirmation Assessment Panel Form*
- *AQAE058_005 Confirmation Assessment Report Panel Form*
- *AQAE058_006 Request for Transfer between Research Registers Form*
- *AQAE058_007 Transfer Assessment Report Form*
- *AQAE058_008 Request for an Extension to Registration*
- *AQAE058_009 Request for a Change in Supervisory Team*

6. Measurement of Effectiveness of this Procedure

The procedure will be reviewed every three years to assess trends in research degree admissions, confirmations, and transfers across the University.

7. Revision History

Revision No	Description of Change	Approval Date
000	New Procedure/ Approved by Academic Standards and Policy Committee of Academic council on 20 May 2025	20/05/2025