

Progress Reports: Frequently Asked Questions

On 20th February, we held an 'open' meeting with research students concerning progress reports so that we could hear the concerns of students regarding our plans to monitor the regular submission of reports. It was agreed that rather than a set of notes of the meeting, a 'FAQ' document was a practical way of briefing the student body on all the issues that arose during that meeting. Please find our FAQ document below, if you have any further questions, please contact the Graduate School Office at researchstudents@dmu.ac.uk.

Q: I'm not sure how many progress reports I should submit, I'm a full time student, can you clarify what I should be doing?

A: So that we can assure that regular active engagement is taking place between student and supervisor, we request that full time students submit 10 progress reports a year, corresponding to 10 separate months, signed off by the supervisor and then confirmed by the student. If you submit two or more reports in a single month, only one will count towards your total. We allow students to 'miss' 2 reports a year, this allows for time away from research and covers the month when there is either the annual review or the transfer/formal review exercise.

Q: and for part time students?

A: Part time students are required to submit a progress report every other month but can miss 1 report so the requirement is for 5 reports per year. Therefore, any student who has missed more than 7 reports in one academic year will be contacted by the Graduate School Office.

However, the purpose of progress reports is to ensure regular contact between student and supervisor so if a part time student had missed 3 consecutive meetings or engagements with their supervisor this would equate to a 6 month gap with no evidence of supervision which would not be satisfactory. This will also be monitored for the current academic year, so starting from October 2012.

Q: How do you monitor who has or hasn't submitted a progress report?

A: On the 1st day of each month, we will run a monitoring report for all students for the current academic year (which starts from October 2012). The report identifies those full time students who have more than 2 reports missing. We will then write to those students and ask that they submit the missing progress reports within 21 days or give a reason why there are more than 2 reports missing. It is very important that you respond to this request and don't just ignore it.

On 21st day of each month, we will run the monitoring report again. If you have still not either contacted the Graduate School Office or submitted the missing progress reports, you will be contacted again to be informed that the University intends to begin the process of closing your registration.

Q: I'm going to be away for a while and I won't have access to the internet to submit my progress reports, what do I do?

A: Let the Graduate School Office know when you are going away and for how long, we can then make a note of the reason why you aren't submitting progress reports. You must also make sure your supervisor knows when you are going to be away.

Q: I'm in the writing up stage, do I still need to submit a progress report?

A: Yes, you are still considered to be an active student, throughout the writing up stage, please submit your progress reports regularly as usual, even if they are brief. Your supervisor will still take an active interest in the progress of your work during this time.

Q: I'm carrying out some field work overseas where the internet connection is really unpredictable because of regular power cuts; it's going to be difficult to submit progress reports during this time. What should I do?

A: We understand that sometimes your research will require you to leave the UK to undertake field work; however, you are required to make every effort to submit progress reports during this time. If you envisage difficulties, please notify the Graduate School Office before you travel and this will be taken into consideration when assessing your engagement with progress reports throughout this period.

Q: Contact by phone with my supervisor whilst I'm working internationally is made difficult because DMU's phone system appears to prevent outgoing international calls after 6.00pm UK time, what should I do?

A: A member of academic staff can get their international calling permission extended beyond 6.00pm simply by asking their Faculty Manager to write to the ITMS service desk.

Q: I've had my viva voce examination and I'm working on my corrections, do I still need to submit a progress report?

A: Yes, because you are still an active student registered at the University, you will need to continue to submit progress reports, although they can be quite brief.

Q: I don't meet with my supervisor every month, can I just skip the report for that month?

A: You are allowed to miss 2 reports each academic year if you are a full time student. However, you don't need to meet face to face with your supervisor to submit a report, we accept that you may have Skype, phone or email engagements with your supervisor in place of a face to face meeting. In this case, please submit a brief progress report, otherwise you will appear as a 'non submitting' student on our audit

report. Remember, your progress reports are intended to monitor your progress in your research project, not just a list of dates when you met your supervisors.

Q: I'm dealing with some personal matters at the moment and I've got a lot on, do I still have to submit a report?

A: Of course we accept that sometimes there are more important matters to deal with than keeping on top of both your research and your progress reports. In this case, we advise you to contact the Graduate School Office so that we can make a note of why you are unable to submit a progress report. However, if you are really struggling, you might want to consider taking a period of interruption from your research degree. You should talk with your supervisor about the situation.

Q: I've tried to submit my progress report but the system has deleted it, what shall I do?

A: If you are having any technical problems in submitting your progress report then contact the Graduate School Office and notify us, we will then ask that colleagues in the ITMS team investigate the matter for you.

Q: Is there a specific date that I have to submit my progress report?

A: No, the progress report is submitted when it is convenient to you and normally following on from either a face to face, Skype or email interaction with your supervisor. However, you must submit reports on a regular basis describing the progress made in each month; it's not acceptable to submit 10 reports in one month.

Q: I know my supervisor is extremely busy and doesn't always promptly confirm my progress report, but that isn't my fault, what shall I do?

A: As long as you have submitted your reports, you will have fulfilled your responsibilities and will not receive any letter from the GSO. However as part of this process we are also monitoring progress report sign off by supervisors. The supervisor has 21 days to confirm the progress report and we will prompt supervisors who have delayed their sign off, for whatever reason. You won't be held responsible for this.

Q: I'm finding this a bit of a hassle to do every month, surely there's some other way the University can evidence regular engagement with research students?

A: All Universities in the UK are required to evidence regular engagement with all their students regardless of their mode of study or their fee status, this is a responsibility that we accept and take seriously and the submission of progress reports via MyDMU is the only objective method accessible to all students by which we can achieve this. We believe that submitting 10 progress reports each year for full time students and 5 progress reports a year for part time students is a reasonable request. If there is a reason why you can't submit a progress report, we will always take account of that. Please note that evidence gathered from other universities confirms that DMU's progress reporting requirements are considerably less onerous than the vast majority of the sector.

- Q:** I'm in regular email contact with my supervisor, can't the emails be used as evidence of regular engagement? Why do I have to submit a progress report as well?
- A:** The progress report system was originally designed to help maintain a log of academic progress for research degree students, so we believe it is the right system to evidence regular engagement. We would not be able to keep records of emails between student and supervisor as a form of evidence in this context as it would be quite unworkable as a monthly system and virtually impossible to summarise correctly, as well as being a breach of your privacy.
- Q:** I sometimes have a lot of interaction with my supervisor at particular times of the year, can I just submit all my progress reports in a short space of time, like all in one month or do they need spacing throughout the year?
- A:** We accept that at some times of the year you will meet more frequently with your supervisor than at other times. However, we do require a progress report to be submitted once per month for 10 or 5 separate months (for full time and part time students respectively).
- Q:** Does my second supervisor see my progress reports?
- A:** Yes, when you have submitted the report, an email is automatically sent to your first and second supervisors. Your second supervisor can therefore sign off your report if your first supervisor is away from the university.
- Q:** Yes, but what if my second supervisor no longer works at DMU?
- A:** You should talk to the Graduate School Office.
- Q:** The content of the progress reports should be between me and my supervisor, I don't really want any other University staff to read them.
- A:** The staff in the Graduate School Office do not see the contents of the progress reports, they just monitor that the reports have been submitted.
- Q:** What happens during July and August, I plan to take some time off and I know my supervisor will too?
- A:** We do allow for 2 missed reports per academic year and one of these could take into account a vacation period.
- Q:** I'm not an international student and UKBA policies don't impact on me, why do I still need to do this?
- A:** De Montfort University, as a British higher education institution, has a number of responsibilities and accountabilities to the UK Government's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and this includes the need to evidence regular engagement between students and their supervisors. The QAA regularly audit the University in this regard.