Benchmarks for Review of Postgraduate Progress in Research only Degrees

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Prologue

This document aims to set up time-lines for MA and PhD research degrees in the School of Humanities that will give students and supervisors a useful map of where they ought to be. The rates of progress are meant to be indicative of average progress rather than definitive of minimum standards. They are meant as an aid to visualising "normal" progress over the course of a thesis, not as a body of statutes designed to compel conformity.

Actual satisfactory progress will not always conform to this "normal" model. Indeed, I'm prepared to bet that no-one will conform precisely to this model. No research project is entirely "normal". Every research project will take its own precise form and proceed at its own speed, and nearly every project will diverge from these guidelines at one or more points. There will usually be good and compelling reasons for this, and they will normally be covered in the rapport that builds up between a student and her/his supervisors over time.

However, significant divergences from this model will need to be explained (through the annual reporting process) and may be used as grounds for defining progress as unsatisfactory.

This document contains these sections:
1. MA timetable
2. PhD timetable
3. Upgrading from MA to PhD
4. On giving papers and getting published

This document is designed for postgraduates in the School of Humanities, but it may be of interest to students in other areas. Check what the actual requirements in your area are, however.
MA TIMETABLE

(part-time students should progress at approximately half this pace)

6 months/1st review

Your topic and plan should be worked out and agreed to with your supervisors. Particular attention needs to be paid to defining the feasibility and scope of the project.

Note: this topic will inevitably be subject to revision and will not be binding, though very substantial changes of direction will require Faculty approval.

An extensive survey of bibliographical and other resources should have been done (the sooner you spot problems with availability of important texts, etc, the better). A longish bibliography should be made in the first few months, but it will not be anything like a complete one, and it will contain many references to texts you have not yet read.

You should have generated a goodly pile of notes, and some students may have started preliminary drafts of a chapter (this is certainly not required at this stage and, depending on your style of work, may even be inadvisable).

6-12 months: Students will present a thesis proposal to their School and/or Cluster

For details of this see the accompanying document.

18 months/2nd review

You should have a thoroughly defined topic and a clearly articulated plan of the thesis.

Research should be substantially complete (with only a couple of clearly defined holes to fill).

You should have 30000+ words in draft form (e.g. 2-3 fairly complete chapters, and some other substantial parts of chapters).

You should have presented one paper, either to the staff/postgraduate seminars, or at a conference, or in some other seminar series.

21 months

Notification of intention to submit.

Examiners should be lined up—students may object to any potential examiners, but may not otherwise interfere formally in the selection of examiners.

24 months

Completion of thesis, in accordance with all the statutes.

A MA (research only) thesis will normally be 35000—50000 words long.
PhD TIMETABLE

(part-time students should progress at approximately half this pace)

6 months/1st review

As per MA.

6-12 months: Students will present a thesis proposal to their School and/or Cluster

For details of this see the accompanying document.

18 months/2nd review

The topic should be thoroughly worked through and finalised or nearly finalised (subject to minor modifications).

The structure of the research should be clearly defined and substantially underway.

Approximately 20000 words should be drafted.

One seminar paper should have been presented.

30 months/3rd review

The research should be substantially complete.

60000 words should be drafted, and some of this should be in revised form (close to finished product).

You should have a very clear plan for the structure of the thesis.

A second seminar paper should have been presented (preferably at an external venue, such as a conference).

36-42 months

Examiners lined up, 3 months' notice given, final revisions made, the notes and bibliography completed.

It is time to murder your identity as a postgraduate student and submit the thesis, which should be a work of 70000—100000 words.
UPGRADING FROM MA TO PhD

Upgrading should normally take place at some time between the first and second reviews (in practice, this is likely to mean at some time between 9 and 16 months into the project). It may take place within the thesis proposal process (see above).

The crucial requirements for upgrading are that you need to provide evidence:
- that you are capable of working at doctoral level, and of producing a doctoral thesis;
- that your project is of doctoral scope and value.

The final judgment on these matters rests with the Research Higher Degrees Committee on the advice of the supervisors and the Head of School.

The process will normally involve a student presenting a package of material to an independent reader (not one of the present supervisors, but normally from within the School of Humanities) for assessment.

That package can include various sorts of evidence, such as:
- Drafts of chapters (20000 words is a desirable target).
- An articulated thesis plan that demonstrates how the project will be of doctoral length (such a plan will necessarily be subject to subsequent review, but it is important to demonstrate that you can conceive of an 70000—100000 word project).
- A print-out of your bibliography (divided into read and unread sections), so that the breadth and depth of the research can be assessed.
- Notes that you have made may be taken into account (e.g. if the work is heavily archival a great deal of note-taking may need to be done before writing up is feasible).
- Copies of any seminar papers you may have given or articles prepared (or even published).

ON GIVING PAPERS AND GETTING PUBLISHED

MAs should do a minimum of 1 seminar paper in the course of their candidacy, PhDs a minimum of 2. You have a right to give at least one paper to the staff / postgraduate seminars in the School, but it is up to you to apply to the convener of the series in time to get onto that semester's programme.

PhDs should aim to give at least 1 paper in a forum outside the school (e.g. to a conference—check through your supervisor and the staff and postgraduate noticeboards for information about conferences).

You should also look into ways of getting parts of your thesis accepted as articles for journals (be they general journals or journals devoted to postgraduates). Doing this is definitely not a compulsory part of progress, but is a very useful discipline in writing at doctoral level.

You might also wish to look into various ways of publishing or corresponding with other scholars on the Internet.

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