

Changes to Research Degree Process 2018

Frequently Asked Questions

Initial Review / Probationary Review

Why has the Initial Review been changed to the Probationary Review this year?

The University reviews its programmes regularly as part of a commitment to ensure they are fit for purpose, efficient and consistent with sector practice. The change to the Initial Review forms part of a larger evaluation which has been undertaken to streamline the research degree journey and assist you in the timely completion of your research degree. Replacing the Initial Review with the Probationary Review reflects that this is the first academic progression point after you have had the advantage of having worked with your supervisory team for a number of weeks. In addition, the previous process had included both submission and completion deadlines whereas the new process has only a submission deadline, which eliminates any confusion.

What is the purpose of the Probationary Review?

The Probationary Review is designed to be a light touch review which provides the opportunity for you to consolidate their research plan and explore the feasibility of their proposed milestones and timeline to submission. It is also the point at which to confirm that the supervisory team is a good fit and that supervisory arrangements are well established. It provides a structure for considering your training needs and for you to complete an induction checklist to ensure that all the key aspects of your research project have been discussed.

What are the differences between the Initial Review and the Probationary Review?

From September 2018 onwards the name of first academic progression point will be changed from “Initial Review” to “Probationary Review” and the timing of submission will be brought forward to three months full-time or six months part-time. The word count for the Probationary Review has been reduced to be “up to 2,000 words or equivalent” whereas previously it as 3,500 words, and assessment will be via a verbal presentation and subsequent discussion with a Faculty panel. The outcomes of the Probationary Review have been revised and simplified.

This is a summary of the changes:

| | Probationary Review | Initial Review |
|----------------------------------|---|---|
| For PGRs who: | Enrolled from September 2018 | Enrolled prior to September 2018 |
| Expected submission date: | 3 months post-enrolment (6 months for part-time) | 4 months post-enrolment (8 months for part-time) |
| Report template: | Available on ResearchPAD | Available on ResearchPAD |
| Word count: | Up to 2000 word or equivalent | Up to 3,500 word or equivalent |
| Report content: | Outlined in Section 7.4.2 | Outlined in Section 7.4.3 |
| Procedure: | Outlined in Section 7.4.2 | Outlined in Section 7.4.3 |

| | | |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Assessment: | Verbal presentation and discussion with Faculty Panel | Review by Independent Academic |
| Outcomes: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progression; • Probationary period extended by 1 month; • Transfer to MRes; • Withdrawal. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continues their research and works towards the Transfer; • Undertakes further work on the Initial Review to clarify certain aspects of the proposed research (within 1 month FT or 2 months PT); • Does not continue with the programme of research and is withdrawn from their programme of study. |

How do I know what is required for the content of the Initial Review?

Detailed instructions as to what is required for the content of the Initial Review are provided in [Section 7.4.3](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the process involved in the Initial Review?

Detailed instructions as to what the process is with regard to completing the Initial Review are provided in [Section 7.4.3](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the content of the Probationary Review?

Detailed instructions as to what is required for the content of the Probationary Review are provided in [Section 7.4.2](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the process involved in the Probationary Review?

Detailed instructions as to what the process is with regard to completing the Probationary Review are provided in [Section 7.4.2](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

Is there any advantage in taking the Initial Review or the Probationary Review?

No, the changes have been introduced to streamline the process, but there is no academic advantage, or disadvantage in choosing between the Initial Review or Probationary Review.

Do I have a choice whether I take the Initial Review or the Probationary Review?

For PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018, we have asked that you let your Faculty Postgraduate Research Administrators know whether you have chosen to undertake the Initial Review or the Probationary Review by 1st October 2018.

However, if you are new to BU from September 2018 you will automatically undertake the Major Review.

Is there a cut-off date for deciding whether to take the Initial Review or Probationary Review?

For PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018, we have asked that you let your Faculty Postgraduate Research Administrators know whether you have chosen to undertake the Initial Review or Probationary Review by 1st October. However, if you are new to BU from September 2018 you will automatically undertake the Probationary Review.

Can I use ResearchPAD for the Initial Review?

Yes; for PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018, you have the option of following the Initial Review process and completing and uploading the Initial Review form which is still available on ResearchPAD.

Select Milestones and scroll down to the Probationary Review sub-menu. Complete all fields within the PGR Report section which includes the Initial Review form template. Download the template and upload your completed report. Further detailed instructions are provided in the [ResearchPAD manual](#).

The screenshot shows a 'Documents' section with the following text: 'Please click on one of the following links to download the appropriate template:'. Two links are listed: 'Initial Review Form template (pre-Sept 2018)' and 'Probationary Review Form template (Sept 2018 onwards)'. The first link is highlighted with a red box and a red arrow points to it from a callout box. Below the links, there is a text prompt: 'Save the form as a document and, when you have completed it, click it.' followed by a file upload icon and a 'load' button. The callout box contains the following instructions:

- Download the report template
- Click  to upload your completed report
- And, if applicable, upload your Ethics Approval form*

**If your research at this stage requires [Ethical Approval](#) (e.g. data collection for a pilot study), please remember to attach a copy of your Ethics Checklist Approval form.*

Can I use ResearchPAD for the Probationary Review?

Yes; for PGRs who enrolled from September 2018, you will follow the Probationary Review process which on ResearchPAD involves completing and uploading the Probationary Review Form.

Select Milestones and scroll down to the Probationary Review sub-menu. Complete all fields within the PGR Report section which includes the Probationary Review form template. Download the template and upload your completed report. Further detailed instructions are provided in the [ResearchPAD manual](#).

Documents

Please click on one of the following links to download the appropriate template:

[Initial Review Form template \(pre-Sept 2018\)](#)

[Probationary Review Form template \(Sept 2018 onwards\)](#)

Save the form as a document and, when you have completed it, click



- Download the report template
- Click  to upload your completed report
- And, if applicable, upload your Ethics Approval form*

**If your research at this stage requires Ethical Approval (e.g. data collection for a pilot study), please remember to attach a copy of your Ethics Checklist Approval form.*

What if I already undertook the Initial Review – will the outcome I received still be retained on ResearchPAD?

Yes it will. The previous outcomes have been retained even though they are no longer live options for the Probationary Review.

What are the Outcomes from the Probationary Review if you are undertaking an MRes?

If you are undertaking an MRes, the possible Outcomes are:

- Progression;
- Probationary period extended by 1 month;
- Withdrawn

Transfer Examination / Major Review

Why has the Transfer Examination been changed to the Major Review this year?

The change from Transfer Examination to Major Review forms part of a larger evaluation which has been undertaken to streamline the process and assist PGRs towards timely completion of their research degree. Previously, PhD students would first register on to an MPhil research degree and “transfer” to a doctoral research degree once they had passed the Transfer Examination. However, this was changed in 2013 and PhD students now register directly on a doctoral research degree from the start and therefore no longer “transfer” from one programme to another at this point. In addition, as PGRs do not receive a certificate or qualification following their Transfer Examination, this has caused confusion in some cases; in order to be awarded an MPhil, PGRs must still submit a thesis and undertake a *viva voce* final examination. The Major Review retains all the advantages of previous Transfer Examination including academic rigour, independent academic oversight, confirmation of potential to complete, experience of mirroring a *viva*-type situation, but without interrupting progress.

What is the purpose of the Major Review?

The Major Review is a formal key academic progression point, which provides the opportunity for a review of your work and progress to date, in order to ensure that you are on track for a

successful and timely completion. 3.2 The Major Review is an important milestone to be completed by 18 months (full-time study and 36 months part-time equivalent), the purpose of which is to assess the quality and timeliness of your work to date; confirm the scope of the research project to fulfil the requirements of a PhD; confirm your capability of satisfactorily completing their PhD in a timely manner. It is also an opportunity for you to indicate whether you wish to submit an integrated format or traditional thesis, as outlined in [Section 10.2](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

What are the differences between the Transfer Examination and the Major Review?

The most important change is that this key academic progression will no longer comprise a formal examination. The process for assessing progress at the Major Review has been streamlined and will now focus on a 3,000 word briefing paper which is assessed via discussion with an independent panel, rather than a 10,000 word report which is formally examined. The timing of this remains unchanged. This is a summary of the changes:

| | Major Review | Transfer |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| For PGRs who: | Enrolled from September 2018 | Enrolled prior to September 2018 |
| Expected submission date: | Up to 18 months post-enrolment (36 months for part-time) | Up to 18 months post-enrolment (36 months for part-time) |
| Report template: | Outlined in Section 7.7.2 | Outlined in Section 7.7.3 |
| Word count: | Up to 3000 word or equivalent | Up to 10000 word or equivalent |
| Report content: | Outlined in Section 7.7.2 | Outlined in Section 7.7.3 |
| Procedure: | Outlined in Section 7.7.2 | Outlined in Section 7.7.3 |
| Assessment: | Verbal presentation and discussion with Faculty Panel | Formal Examination via assessment of Transfer Report and <i>Viva Voce</i> |
| Outcomes: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass • Resubmission (within 1 month) • Resubmission with re-assessment panel discussion (within 3 months) • Transfer to MRes / MPhil • Withdrawal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfers and becomes registered onto the programme of PhD; • Transfers and become registered onto the programme of PhD subject to specific recommendations of the Transfer panel (within 1 month full-time / 2 months part-time); • Does not transfer but remains registered at MRes/MPhil to carry out further work to resubmit the Transfer Report (within 2 month full-time / 4 months part-time); • Does not transfer but continues to work to the submission of an MRes/MPhil; • Does not transfer and is withdrawn. |

Do I have a choice whether I take the Transfer Examination or the Major Review?

For PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018, we have asked that you discuss the matter with your supervisors and let your Faculty Postgraduate Research Administrators know whether you have chosen to undertake the Transfer Examination or the Major Review by 1st October 2018.

However, if you are new to BU from September 2018 you will automatically undertake the Major Review.

How do I know what is required for the content of the Transfer Report?

Detailed instructions as to what is required for the content of the Transfer Examination Report are provided in [Section 7.7.3](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the process involved in the Transfer Report?

Detailed instructions as to what the process is with regard to completing the Transfer Examination are provided in [Section 7.7.3](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the content of the Major Review?

Detailed instructions as to what is required for the content of the Major Review are provided in [Section 7.7.2](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

How do I know what is required for the process involved in the Major Review?

Detailed instructions as to what the process is with regard to completing the Probationary Review are provided in [Section 7.7.2](#) of the *Code of Practice for Research Degrees*.

Is a Literature Review required as part of the Major Review document?

The details of what is required in a Major Review document should be discussed with your supervisors. But on the whole, a Literature Review would be an element of the Major Review document; although not specifically mentioned in the guidance, it would come under “evidence of progress to date” and also “outline of proposed original contribution to knowledge likely to emerge from final thesis” – the latter includes identifying where the gap in knowledge occurs which your research is addressing.

Is there any advantage in taking the Transfer Examination or Major Review?

No, the changes have been introduced to streamline the process, but there is no academic advantage, or disadvantage in choosing one route over the other.

Is there a cut-off date for deciding whether to take the Transfer Examination or the Major Review?

For PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018, we have asked that you let your Faculty Postgraduate Research Administrators know whether you have chosen to undertake the

Transfer Examination or the Major Review by 1st October. However, if you are new to BU from September 2018 you will automatically undertake the Major Review.

Can I use ResearchPAD for the Transfer Examination?

Yes; for PGRs who enrolled prior to September 2018 and have opted to choose the Transfer Examination route you are required to complete and upload your Transfer Report and Abstract.

Select Milestones and scroll down to the Major Review sub-menu. Complete the PGR Report section and tick the Transfer Report and Abstract checkboxes and upload your Transfer Report and Abstract. Further detailed instructions are provided in the [ResearchPAD manual](#).

Can I use ResearchPAD for the Major Review?

Yes; for PGRs who enrolled from September 2018, you will follow the Major Review process which on ResearchPAD involves completing and uploading the Major Review Report and Abstract.

Select Milestones and scroll down to the Major Review sub-menu. Complete the PGR Report section, tick the Major Review Report and Abstract checkboxes and upload your Major Review Report and Abstract. Further detailed instructions are provided in the [ResearchPAD manual](#).

If you take the Transfer Examination and fail, will you be awarded an MPhil?

No, in the unlikely event that you have chosen to take the Transfer Examination rather than the Major Review but failed at that point, you would not be awarded an MPhil. In order to qualify for an MPhil research degree, you would be required to submit a thesis of an MPhil standard and undertake a *viva voce* final examination in order to qualify for the award.

Who can I contact for more information?

Email the Doctoral College at doctoralcollege@bournemouth.ac.uk with details of your enquiry. Please provide as much information as possible as this will enable us to address your query promptly and thoroughly.

Additional Questions for Supervisors

If you were previously an Examiner on a Transfer Examination, will this still count as examination experience?

Yes; the Examination Approval Panel for PGRs will continue to regard previous experience as an Examiner on a Transfer Examination as evidence of previous examination experience at an appropriate level to qualify for an Examiner on a *viva voce* examination.

If you are an Independent Assessor on a Major Review Panel, does this still count as examination experience?

Yes; the Examination Approval Panel for PGRs will regard experience as a member of an assessment panel for a Major Review as evidence of previous examination experience at an appropriate level to qualify for an Examiner on a viva voce examination.