

Graduate Research School

Progress Reviews & Managing Mitigating Circumstances

What to do when mitigating circumstances are raised in a Progress Review

All Research Progress Reviews need to address any mitigating circumstances raised by the candidate or supervisor(s). These circumstances may include physical or psychological health issues or adverse personal situations that have impacted on the candidate's progress.

It is the responsibility of the Panel and PGC to ensure that these issues are proactively and sensitively managed and that the candidate is made aware of UNSW student support services and policy options available to them.

? A good place to start is to ask the candidate: How are they currently managing their issue(s)? Have they engaged any of the resources available to them at UNSW?

- [Counselling & Psychological Services \(CAPS\)](#). A free and confidential counselling service offering one on one sessions; programs, workshops and seminars for skill development; self-help resources.
- [Student Development International \(SDI\)](#). Provide personal advice and support specifically for international students. This includes: safety & wellbeing; housing, accommodation & tenancy rights, programs and activities to support living and studying in a new country.
- [ALLY](#) Support network for (LGBTIQ) students and staff.
- [UNSW Disability Services \(previously SEADU\)](#). For candidates with a disability, medical condition, learning disability or who are dealing with a personal circumstance that affects their study. Disability Advisers can arrange to put in place support services to help candidates best manage their circumstances while continuing with their studies.
- [ARC \(advice@arc.unsw.edu.au\)](#) Legal and advocacy unit. Provide advice on university matters, sexual assault & misconduct, discrimination, housing issues etc.
- [Nura Gili](#) Student services for ATSI students.
- [Sexual Harassment, Assault and Misconduct online reporting portal](#)

? How can we use existing UNSW policies to support the candidate?

- **Part-Time attendance.** Are the candidate's circumstances impeding their ability to devote the required 35-40 hrs per week to their candidature? Perhaps a change to part-time attendance would be appropriate. Existing main award scholarship holders need to be aware of their scholarship conditions - part-time scholarships can generally only be approved for significant carer's commitments or medical conditions that prevent full-time study.
- **Program Leave.** In cases where candidates are unable to devote sufficient time to their research to justify either full-time or part-time enrolment, they can apply for Program Leave. Candidates - whether full or part time - are eligible for up to 1 year (2 semesters/4 terms) of Program Leave throughout their candidature. For existing main award scholarship holders, paid sick and parental leave is available after 1 full year of scholarship consumption.
- **Management Plan.** If the Panel believes that the mitigating circumstances need special consideration, then a formal Management Plan should be developed that outlines a clear pathway to completion and ensures appropriate support is in place. The Management Plan must be done in consultation with the candidate, supervisors, and relevant student support services. The plan must be uploaded to the on-line RPR system (GRIS) so there is a permanent record.

The Management Plan may recognise that the thesis cannot be completed within the maximum time allowed for the degree. Subsequent reviews will need to consider the Management Plan and monitor progress relative to this plan.

- **Discontinuation and possible request for re-admission.** If the candidate's circumstances are such that they will require time off, but they are unable to anticipate when they will be able to return to their studies, they could consider withdrawing from their candidature. If their circumstances change in the future, they can apply to the HDC for re-admission, with consideration of their prior research.

International candidates

International candidates may require additional support as they will often not have family available to assist when faced with ongoing health issues or traumatic events. International candidates can also have a hard time adjusting to their new life in Sydney, experiencing isolation and the challenges associated with new cultures and customs. This can sometimes be a contributing factor for candidates who suffer mental health issues or breakdowns in communication with supervisors.

❓ Did you know international candidates may be permitted to take Program Leave or change to Part-Time?

Student Visa Holders must be enrolled full-time. However, under exceptional and demonstrable circumstances, such as serious medical/personal issues or other situations beyond their control, an international candidate may be given approval to change to part-time attendance or take Program Leave. Requests are considered by the Director, Graduate Research School and, if approved, are reported to the Department of Home Affairs. In some cases, the candidate may be permitted to stay in Australia during periods of leave.

All candidates may take leave of up to four weeks per year. These short-term periods of leave can be taken without request from the GRS but do need to be negotiated directly with the supervisor and School.

Failure to attend a Progress Review

❓ Multiple requests to reschedule

Schools may sometimes be put in the situation where a candidate repeatedly requests for their Progress Review to be re-scheduled.

❓ Non-attendance at APR

Where a candidate does not engage with the School to schedule a review, does not complete their section of the form at all and/or does not attend a progress review scheduled in accordance with UNSW policy and procedure, the candidate may be asked to Show Cause.

If these issues arise in your School, please contact your [Faculty's Candidature Management Officer](#) (CMO) at the GRS for advice as soon as possible.

❓ Reporting concerns

If a candidate has stopped communicating with their School, supervisors and colleagues and/or if there is a concern about the behaviour, or period/s of unexplained absence of a candidate, you should refer those concerns to an appropriate senior staff member such as your PGC, Dean or Head of School.

The senior staff member will then decide whether the matter requires referral to either the:

- [Director, Student Life](#) (9385 8939), as per the [Student at Risk Procedure](#); or
- UNSW Security Services (9385 6666), when tragic or traumatic events or situations require an urgent response (can include a missing student), as per the [Student Critical Incident Procedure](#).