

**University of St Andrews - School of Medicine Handbook**  
**POSTGRADUATE STUDENT POLICY AND ASSESSMENT**

1. **Introduction.** This document is intended to set out PG policy and assessment procedures in the School of Medicine. Students should:

1. Familiarise themselves with this document and check periodically for updates;
2. Follow School-specific instructions on training and progress review;

2. This is designed for student's benefit. If used effectively it should help to make time as a St Andrews postgraduate research student more productive.

**IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

3. Upon arrival it is important that as soon as you have been issued with a university email account that you supply this information, along with your phone extension (if applicable), to the **Postgraduate Secretary**, Ms Karen Ross (kr16). This will ensure your name is included on email lists within the School and that you are also listed on the School website.

4. **Generic Skills Development.** The University places great importance on providing research students with a stimulating learning environment within which you can improve the depth of knowledge of your chosen field, work to complete your degree successfully within the allocated time, and develop personal and professional generic skills to enhance your future employability and career development. The University's GRADskills programme provides a wide range of generic skills training courses and other opportunities specifically for research students that are complemented by subject-specific programmes within individual academic schools. In line with national Research Council recommendations, the University expects that each research student should spend approximately 10 days each year focusing on their generic skills development. Improving your level of competency in a range of generic skills is most likely to be achieved through a combination of these formal training courses followed by the practical application of the skills you have been taught. Your **Supervisor** and other staff will be able to advise you about opportunities available at St Andrews to help you enhance your skills as you progress through the different stages of your degree.

5. **Development Needs Analysis.** Postgraduates start their doctoral degrees with widely differing levels of generic and research skills and so it is important that you review those skills with your Supervisor before drawing up a plan for your skills development. Following the general and subject-area-specific induction sessions at the start of the semester, you will meet with your Supervisor to discuss this analysis and to formulate the most appropriate programme for your own personal development. To help you achieve this goal, you should start by looking at the GRADskills website: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/capod/gradskillsprogramme/> and the courses offered by CAPOD.

6. CAPOD offers a comprehensive suite of development opportunities, tailored careers support and a single point of contact for postgraduate researcher development. This is likely to include elements drawn from courses provided by GRADskills and your School, and other courses and activities as deemed necessary to help you complete your degree. (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/capod/students/pgresearch/>).

7. You are required to complete a brief self-assessment of your Skills training at the end of each year (see below). This should be discussed with your supervisor. Your annual thesis review committee meetings will also consider your self-assessment, and comment on your progress, what training you have completed and identify future needs.

8. Failure to meet your training requirements agreed with the School will be reported to the appropriate Pro-Provost who may refer the matter to the Faculty Business Committee for action.

9. **Annual Self-assessment of Generic Skills Training.** The DNA requires you to assess your capabilities in the following areas of Generic Skills:

1. Research Skills
2. Research Environment
3. Research Management
4. Personal Effectiveness
5. Communication Skills
6. Networking and Team working
7. Career Management

10. Prepare a short report (no more than two typewritten pages) which addresses the following issues:

1. List the activities you have been involved in this year which have sought to address these Areas of Generic Skills Training
2. Reflect on the Generic Skills Training you have undertaken. How has this helped you improve your skills in some or all of the above areas? Give specific examples.
3. How do you aim to continue your development in the next year?

11. On-going self-assessment following talks. In addition to annual self-assessment, we would encourage you to reflect on the various research talks that occur throughout the year. Students attending seminars should aim to write 200-300 words after the event, based on the following questions:

1. In your own words, what were the main findings described in today's talk?
2. Which part of the research did you find most interesting?
3. Which parts of the talk did you find difficult to understand?
4. Were there any aspects of the research described (subject matter or methodology) which you can learn from for your own project?
5. If you had the opportunity to ask the speaker one question, what would that have been? Why?

12. Students giving WiP talks should aim to write 200-300 words after the event, based on the following questions:

1. What is your overall impression of how your talk went?
2. What aspect of your talk had you been most concerned about and how do you think it went?
3. What questions were asked of you, and is there anything you can learn from them?
4. If you were asked to do the talk again tomorrow, what would you change in order to improve it?

We encourage you to present and discuss these self-assessment items with your supervisor and also your thesis review committee at your annual meetings.

### Postgraduate Research in the School of Medicine

13. This part contains information on the administration of postgraduate research in the School of Medicine, the process for reviewing your progress and the School Postgraduate Training Programme.

14. The **Director of Postgraduate Studies** is Dr Paul Reynolds, who has overall responsibility for the administration of postgraduate research matters in the School. The **School Postgraduate Secretary**, Ms Karen Ross, supports postgraduate administration. Their contacts are:

Dr Paul Reynolds: Medical and Biological Sciences Building, Room no. 206,  
Tel: 463555, Email: [par10@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:par10@st-andrews.ac.uk)

Ms Karen Ross: Medical and Biological Sciences Building, Room no. 337  
Tel: 463601, Email: [pgmed@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:pgmed@st-andrews.ac.uk)

15. The information contained below gives:

1. Details of the School of Medicine Progress Review process
2. The timetable for your Progress Review meetings
3. Details of the School training programme
4. Sections for you to record the training that you have completed

16. It is your responsibility to:

1. Complete the necessary preparations for your Progress Review
2. Attend your Postgraduate Review meetings
3. Complete your agreed training requirements
4. Keep a record of training that you have completed up-to-date

## PhD Supervision in the School of Medicine

17. All students are registered with a Supervisor who is a member of Academic staff and is your primary contact with the School and is responsible for helping you to direct your PhD studies

18. All students are registered with a Second Supervisor, who is a member of Academic staff. The role of a Second Supervisor may vary depending on a number of factors and whether you are registered with more than one School. If the second supervisor is a co-supervisor (joint supervisor), then they will have an active day-to-day role in the research. In most cases, the second supervisor (pastoral advisor) is there as a source of advice, much in the same way as your Thesis Review Committee Postgraduate Tutor. Dr Simon Powis and Dr Paul Reynolds are often pastoral advisors as second supervisors in this context. You should ask your supervisors at the start of your PhD studies what is going to be the case for you.

## Considerations for part-time PhD students working remotely

19. Our experience is that the combination of doing a PhD both part-time and remotely is very challenging. We are still prepared to consider such arrangements but in this case require both the supervisor and the student to lay out a clear and agreed plan for supervision in advance. This must involve regular contact, the setting of agreed and realistic targets and the spending of an appropriate amount of time in St Andrews. The latter is felt to be important in terms of allowing participation in appropriate GRADskills classes and in experiencing other post graduate opportunities e.g. participating in Work in Progress Talks. Students who for personal or employment reasons intend to work in this way are encouraged to talk to their proposed supervisor in the first instance. Supervisors are advised to discuss the circumstance and proposed supervision plan with the Director of Postgraduate Studies.

## Ethics considerations in the School of Medicine

20. Some projects may require ethics approval before work starts. All Ethics Applications should be received by the Ethics Admin Assistant, Julie Anderson (room 337) both electronically (to [medethic@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:medethic@st-andrews.ac.uk)) and as hard copy with appropriate signatures and all relevant paperwork, by 5pm on the Friday ten days before the next meeting. This allows 5 full working days for scrutiny prior to the meeting. Your supervisor will advise you whether you need to seek ethics approval. Julie Anderson will be available to assist and advise in the preparation of ethics proposals.

21. If ethics approval is required to undertake the research work described in the thesis, then it is University policy that a copy of the ethics approval forms be bound into the thesis as an appendix when it is submitted to Registry.

## VISA issues for non-EU students

22. To comply with current UK government Visa regulations, all students who are not European Union (EU) citizens must be registered as full-time students.

## Electronic Lab Books

23. The School of Medicine encourages the use of new technologies to record project data, subject to supervisor approval and subject to the adherence to any relevant procedures to maintain data safety and security.

## Electronic Thesis Submission

24. To comply with current University policies regarding electronic thesis submission, students should at the time of submission follow current guidelines, e.g. <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/library/resources/collections/theses/>

## MD by Research

25. Candidates for the postgraduate qualification of “MD by research” will follow the policies and procedures for PhD students except in respect of the length of studies. An MD by research is 2 years full-time study or 4 years part-time study.

## School of Medicine Progress Review of Postgraduate Students

26. Each postgraduate student in the School of Medicine is allocated a Thesis Review Committee, the remit of which is to:

1. Monitor your progress throughout the period of your studies
2. Recommend on entry into your second year of studies and the degree for which you should be registered
3. Provide constructive feedback to you and your supervisor(s) on your progress

27. Your Thesis Review Committee normally consists of two people:

1. **Convenor:** The Convenor of your Thesis Review Committee, who will normally have a related specialist interest and will usually go on to be your Internal Examiner. The Convenor will arrange each meeting.
2. **Postgraduate Tutor.** A member of Academic staff who need not have specialist knowledge in the particular research discipline, but is available in a support role both to the student and supervisor. The Postgraduate Tutor is available as a confidential point of contact and source of information throughout your period of study and will act as a liaison between student and supervisor if any problems arise.

Thesis Review Committee staff are encouraged to discuss with the student Work in Progress (WiP) talk attendance and performance at each meeting, alongside the discussion on generic skills training.

## Progress Review Timetable

28. Review of your progress is implemented by a series of deadlines and meetings, as outlined in the following timetable. The requirements for each of these are given in below (full-time students). Remember that meetings with your Thesis Review Committee are a supplement and not an alternative to the regular meetings you will have with your Supervisor, who will be the first line of enquiry for any queries or problems you may have. If you feel the need to discuss matters with another person, your Postgraduate Tutor will be available to you at any time.

29. Part-time students will be reviewed annually and will have extra review meetings if the equivalent ones detailed below are more than a calendar year apart.

## First year deadlines and meetings

30. The first year of your PhD (or MPhil) is an important and busy time. This section gives you details of your review requirements and deadlines, with which you must comply. During your first year, you need to prepare and submit two reports ahead of the two Thesis Review Meetings, the first after 4 months of study and the second after 10 months. You must submit an electronic copy to the Postgraduate Secretary. It is your responsibility to ensure that your reports are submitted before the deadlines.

### Initial meeting with Thesis Review Committee

31. The purpose of your initial meeting with your Thesis Review Committee is two-fold. Firstly, it is an opportunity to meet your Convenor and your Postgraduate Tutor, and to raise with them any questions you may have. Secondly, it is the forum at which your training needs, which you will have previously discussed with your supervisor, will be agreed. This is important because it will be your responsibility to complete the agreed training programme and present a record of this at your first year review meeting.

32. **4 month Report.** Your 4 month Report should consist of these sections in the following order:

1. The overall goals of your project
2. Background/ literature review in the context of your project goals
3. Planned experimental approaches
4. Anticipated outcomes

Item 2 should be around 4,000 words. Items 1, 3 and 4 together should be around 1-2 sides of A4.

### 4 month Thesis Review Committee meeting

33. Your report will be assessed by your Supervisor and will then form the focus of your Thesis Review Committee meeting. The aim of the meeting is to assess your progress in the first few months of your studies and to give you the opportunity to raise any issues of concern. The assessment forms completed by your supervisor and your Thesis Review Committee are included in the staff handbook.

### 10 month Report

34. Your 10-month Report should be based on work completed to date. It should not normally be longer than 5000 – 10000 words, plus appropriate figures and tables. The length of the report should be discussed with your supervisor and will vary according to the subject area. It should include specific aims and hypotheses, and a plan of work for the remainder of your first year and for your second and third years. It will be assessed by your Supervisor and then form the focus of the following first year meeting of your Thesis Review Committee.

### First year Thesis Review Committee meeting

35. The first year Thesis Review Committee meeting is very important. As well as generally assessing progress and giving you the opportunity to raise any issues of concern, a required outcome is to recommend whether your registration should be transferred from General Research Student to either MPhil or PhD. Although a recommendation to re-register as a PhD student is the norm for students who are planning to do a PhD, it is not automatic.

36. Transfer to a PhD programme will depend upon:

1. Meeting deadlines for the submission of reports
2. Satisfactory assessment of reports and performance in the laboratory
3. Satisfactory completion of your Training Programme

37. To meet this final requirement, you will need to present your record of training that you have completed, to your Thesis Review Committee at your first year meeting. Completion of all agreed parts of the Training Programme is normally required. If for exceptional reasons (e.g. illness) you have had to miss a training session, then the reasons must be documented. More details on the requirements of your training programme are given below.

### **Second year deadlines and meetings**

38. Your second year is typically a time of data collection, processing and analysis. Towards the end of the year, you will have a short meeting with your Thesis Review Committee.

39. You should prepare for this meeting as directed by your review committee but you should:

1. Produce some figures and/or tables of results that you intend to include in your final theses. You can use these to explain and discuss your results at the meeting;
2. Produce a timetable for your third year work, indicating when laboratory/field work will be completed, and giving target dates for writing up.

40. You may not need to submit these prior to the meeting, but you should prepare these ahead of time in case you are asked by your thesis review committee to submit them before your meeting.

### **Third year deadlines and meetings**

41. In your third year the emphasis should be on the completion of practical work and data analysis, and on planning and writing your thesis. It is the policy of the School that all PhD students should aim to complete their theses within three years, but it is recognised that many students will need some extra time for writing up. The University allows you a continuation year for this purpose but you are strongly encouraged to complete your thesis within three years or as soon as possible thereafter. Remember that it is University policy that you must complete your thesis within four years.

42. Towards the end of your third year, you will have a short meeting with your Thesis Review Committee. No formal report is required but you should have available at the meeting a brief thesis plan indicating the status of each chapter, deadlines for completing unfinished chapters and a target date for submission.

### **School of Medicine Research Awayday**

43. Once a year, usually in November, the research active staff, postdocs and students have a one day research conference. At this meeting all PhD students and postdocs are expected to present their current research in the form of a short presentation. In your first year you will be expected to give a short overview of your planned PhD studies, essentially indicating the questions you intend to address and why it is important. Information will be circulated about this conference ahead of the event.