CANDIDATE PROGRESSION & SUPERVISION

Keeping candidates on track

Good progression is not simply monitored.
Good supervision actively creates it.



Progress does not have to be linear — but it does need to be visible.

Progress doesn't just happen

When a candidate isn't progressing, when should we become concerned?

We often notice poor progress when...

- a milestone is missed
- a chapter doesn't arrive
- the end of candidature is suddenly close

But usually the problem started earlier.

Progression is about making work visible, clarifying expectations and identifying drift early.

Monitoring tells us where a candidate is. Supervision helps them move.

What does good progress look like?

Knowledge
Understanding deepens

→

Skills
Capability grows

→

Research
Decisions improve

→

Writing
Ideas become coherent

→

Independence
Ownership increases

→

Thesis
A contribution emerges

A key doctoral trajectory

"Tell me what to do." → **"Here is what I think we should do — and why."**

The thesis matters. So does the development of an independent researcher.

Supervision creates the conditions for progress

CLARITY

What needs to happen next?

REGULARITY

When will we meet again?

FEEDBACK

Is it timely and actionable?

CHALLENGE

Are we expecting independence?

SUPPORT

What is getting in the way?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Do we follow through?

A good supervisory meeting should end with both parties knowing what happens next.

Recognising drift early

The language of drift

“It's nearly finished.”

“I'll send it next week.”

“I just need to do a bit more analysis.”

Other warning signs

- repeatedly rescheduled meetings
- long periods without writing
- perfectionism / endless revision
- constantly changing the question
- avoiding feedback
- increasing dependence

Is this a temporary setback — or is a pattern developing?

When progress becomes a concern

SUPPORT

- What has been completed?
- What is preventing progress?
- What support is needed?

CLARITY

- What remains?
- What is realistic by the next meeting?
- When will we review progress?

ACCOUNTABILITY

“I understand why this has been difficult — and we also need to agree on what needs to happen next.”

FIVE PRINCIPLES FOR KEEPING CANDIDATES ON TRACK

1	**MAKE PROGRESS VISIBLE**	Don't wait for formal milestones.
2	**SET EXPECTATIONS EARLY**	Clarify responsibilities, feedback and timelines.
3	**FOCUS ON THE NEXT STEP**	Turn an overwhelming PhD into achievable goals.
4	**INTERVENE WHEN YOU SEE A PATTERN**	Don't endlessly reset deadlines.
5	**DEVELOP INDEPENDENCE**	The goal is an independent researcher — not only a thesis.

Progress doesn't have to be linear

PhDs are difficult.

Candidates will encounter setbacks, uncertainty and periods of slower progress.

Good supervision means we recognise difficulties early, talk about them openly, and help candidates find a way forward.

while maintaining clear expectations about what a PhD requires.

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