



Thesis Committee Guidelines

(to supplement Terms of Reference for Thesis Committees)

1. Introduction

The Thesis Committee model was introduced in Trinity in September 2019 for all research students to enhance the supervisor – research student relationship and to ensure quality supervision practice in line with international best practice.

The Terms of Reference for Thesis Committees (see Appendix 1) provide a reference for staff, students and thesis committee members in relation to the membership, scope and functions, meeting arrangements, reporting requirements and outcomes of formal review meetings of Thesis Committees.

The key functions of Thesis Committees are:

1. Support the academic progress of the student and provide guidance on their development as PhD researchers.
2. Assess and monitor research progress through formal review processes (i.e., annual review and confirmation / transfer process) and agree an appropriate recommendation.
3. Support the student – supervisor relationship and enhance the overall quality and rigor of the supervision process.

Members of the Thesis Committee **cannot have a direct supervisory role** for the student for whom the Thesis Committee is established. While Thesis Committees may guide students to appropriate support services and provide informal support, the Committee does not have a direct responsibility for the provision of pastoral care.

2. Guidelines for the Appointment of the Thesis Committee

1. Thesis Committee members should be proposed by the supervisor in consultation with the student for approval by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate).
2. The membership of Thesis Committees must comprise at least two members who are NOT the student's supervisor or co-supervisor(s). One of the members must be an independent academic member of Trinity staff from within the School and familiar with the student's research area. The other may be an additional academic member of staff from within the university or a recognised external expert in the student's field of study. Such external experts may be affiliated with other universities, but this is not a requirement for the role.



3. There is discretion to select appropriate members to serve on the committee, with regard to the student's best academic interests. Thus, the normal College rules on eligibility for supervision do not apply here. Staff on part-time contracts, senior post docs, staff from cognate disciplines and appropriate external representatives, would all be appropriate to be appointed. The external experts may hold a PhD, but it is not a requirement for their role.
4. The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) has authority to approve membership of Thesis Committee and make any necessary changes. They should ensure that the membership includes at least one independent academic member of staff from within the School, familiar with the student's research area.
5. The confirmation process can be chaired by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) or their nominated representative, who may be a member of the Thesis Committee. In line with Trinity's Equality Policy, Thesis Committee membership should, where possible, strive for gender equality.
6. Once appropriate individuals to serve as members have been identified and approved, the supervisor should invite them to be part of the student's Thesis Committee.
7. The Thesis Committee should be appointed no later than **6 months** after the student's initial (first) registration. The supervisor must confirm to the student who the members of their Thesis Committee are.
8. Trinity staff who serve as members on a student's Thesis Committee are not precluded from acting as internal examiners for that thesis.
9. Any external members on the Thesis Committee cannot act as the external examiner of that thesis.
10. Where Schools or Disciplines wish to operate alternative models equivalent to the Thesis Committee model, the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) should seek permission from the Dean of Graduate Studies.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibilities
Supervisor(s) / Co-Supervisor(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none">a) Propose to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), Thesis Committee members in consultation with the student.b) Ascertain that these members will be willing to serve on committee for four years (six years for part-time students).c) Invite proposed Thesis Committee members to participate in a Thesis Committee.



Role	Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d) After student has completed the required sections on the Annual Review Report template, complete the required supervisor section of the template (Year 1 and Year 3). e) Review annual review and confirmation reports WITH students before submission to the Thesis Committee. f) Attend formal annual review and confirmation meetings where appropriate in line with discipline norms. g) Attend further meetings with Thesis Committee if issues pertaining student's academic progress arise or overall engagement with the project arise. h) Discuss feedback with student once annual review and confirmation process has been completed.
Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Actively engage with supervisor in selection of Thesis Committee members in the first six months following registration. b) Ensure you are aware of your Thesis Committee membership. c) Following consultation with your supervisor, initiate scheduling of your annual reviews in Year 1 and 3. d) Seek guidelines from the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) in your School on the content of the confirmation report. e) Take part in transferable and discipline-specific modules including 'Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era' and trainings to develop a multidimensional skillset. f) Complete the student section of the Annual Review and Confirmation Report templates. g) Agree with your supervisor a timeline for submission of a draft confirmation report to them to enable review and feedback. h) Schedule review with your supervisor to discuss the annual review and confirmation reports before submission to Thesis Committee. i) Attend annual review and confirmation meetings. j) Discuss feedback with your supervisor once annual review or confirmation processes have completed. k) Address feedback from Thesis Committee following each formal review meeting. l) Request further meetings Thesis Committee if issues arise.
Internal Thesis Committee member (Trinity academic staff)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Chair annual review meetings of the Thesis Committee. b) Chair confirmation interview if nominated by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as their designated



Role	Responsibilities
from within School/Discipline)	<p>representative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">c) Ensure all parties have all relevant materials for the scheduled meetings.d) Ensure that time is allocated for the student to speak with Thesis Committee without the supervisor(s) present if required.e) Send the final report with the outcome of a review meeting to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), the student and supervisor(s) within 5 working days of the meeting.
All Thesis Committee members	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Provide guidance on the student's academic development as PhD researchers.b) Assess and monitor research progress through formal review processes (i.e., annual review and confirmation / transfer interview).c) Agree a recommendation following each formal review meeting.d) Complete the Thesis Committee section of the Annual Review and Confirmation Report templates following completion of the formal annual review and confirmation interview meetings.e) If a student is recommended to present for re-assessment or re-interview for annual review or confirmation process provide clear and specific written guidance to the student detailing the additional work to be completed prior to the reassessment or re-interview, including the timeline for same.f) Guide students to appropriate support services and provide informal support if difficulties arise.g) Accept reasonable requests for an informal meeting with the student outside of the formal review schedule.h) Discuss any matters related to supervision practices that arise with the supervisor. If necessary, these can then be raised with the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate).
Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Approve Thesis Committee membership and any necessary changes to the Committee.b) Receive confirmation from the Supervisor and Thesis Committee after the annual review in Year 1 to establish if the student has demonstrated sufficient commitment and degree of promise that it seems reasonable to allow them to proceed.c) Provide guidelines to the student on the content of the confirmation report.d) Chair the confirmation interview or nominate your representative who may be an internal member of the Thesis Committee.e) Discuss any matters arising or difficulties in the supervisory



Role	Responsibilities
	relationship with the members of Thesis Committee. f) Mediate any disagreements between the members of the thesis committee as to whether or not the student should be allowed to progress and escalate to the Dean of Graduate Studies where necessary.
Dean of Graduate Studies	a) Consider requests to operate alternative models equivalent to the Thesis Committee model if permission is sought by a Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate). b) Mediate any disagreements between the members of Thesis Committee as to whether or not the student should be allowed to progress.
School Manager / Administrator	a) Maintain a schedule of formal review meetings and ensure the students, supervisors and Thesis Committee are familiar with the timelines and required action. b) Initiate the student's annual review assessment upon receiving the email prompt from Academic Registry. c) Communicate the outcome/recommendation of a formal review meeting to the Assess and Progress Team in Academic Registry at researchprogression@tcd.ie in the format advised by Academic Registry by the appropriate date provided in the Terms of Reference for Thesis Committees.

4. Formal Meetings of the Thesis Committee

The meetings with the Thesis Committee provide students with the opportunity to present, explain and defend their research (as preparation for the *viva voce* examination at the end of their degree) as well as to highlight any concerns or issues.

a) Format of Review Meetings

The format of the annual review and confirmation interview meetings is at the discretion of the Thesis Committee members, but it is recommended that the format, especially that of the confirmation interview meeting, is reflective of PhD viva norms for the specific discipline.

As such the formal annual Thesis Committee meetings represent excellent preparation for the final PhD *viva voce* examination.

b) Timing of Review Meetings

Figure 1 below outlines the timings of review meetings in the lifecycle of postgraduate research students.



i. Annual Reviews

- Schools should complete the Annual Review process before the deadline of **June 30** for students on the September register, and **January 31** for March registrants.
- Schools may have earlier internal timelines for the completion and submission of the annual review forms and students are encouraged to contact their School Administrator to discuss their School's deadlines.
- Only the outcome of the annual review should be communicated to Academic Registry by email to researchprogression@tcd.ie to facilitate timely registration of their research students.

ii. Confirmation Process

- Confirmation process should be completed no later than 22 months after initial registration in Year 2 for full-time PhD students and 34 months after initial registration for in Year 3 for part-time PhD students.
- The completed Confirmation Report should be returned to a nominated School Administrator by **30 June** for September registrants and by **31 January** for March registrants.
- Schools may have earlier internal deadlines for the completion and submission of the confirmation reports and students are encouraged to contact their School Administrator to discuss their School's deadlines.
- Only the outcome of the confirmation process should be communicated to Academic Registry by email to researchprogression@tcd.ie in the format advised by Academic Registry.
- The Confirmation Process replaces the annual review process in the relevant year of study.
- Please note that students may also request an informal meeting with the Thesis Committee outside of the above formal review meetings, and independent of their supervisor.

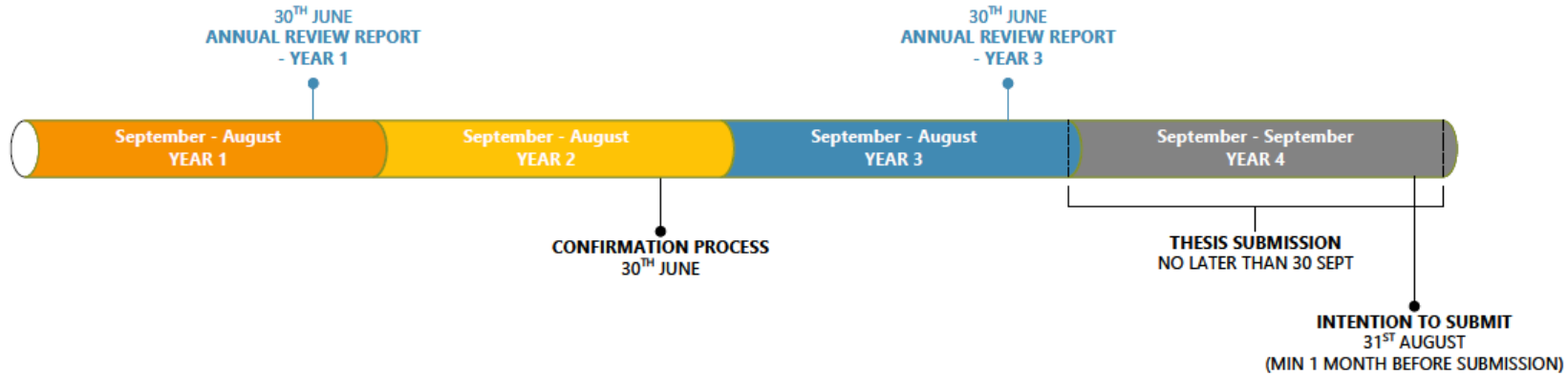


Figure 1: PGR Student Journey Deadlines

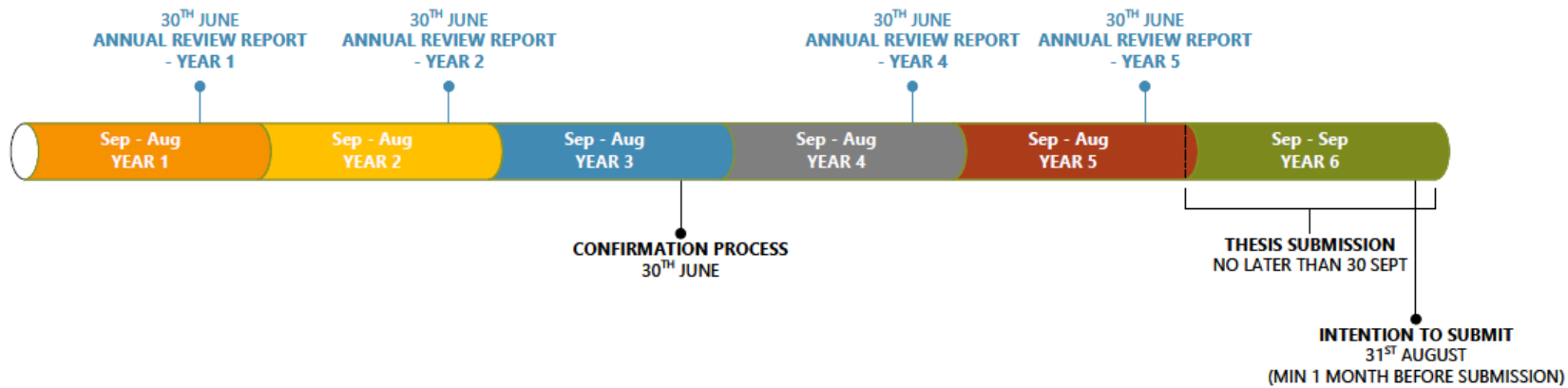
September Registrants

Postgraduate Research Progression Deadlines (Sept Intake)

Full-time PhD students



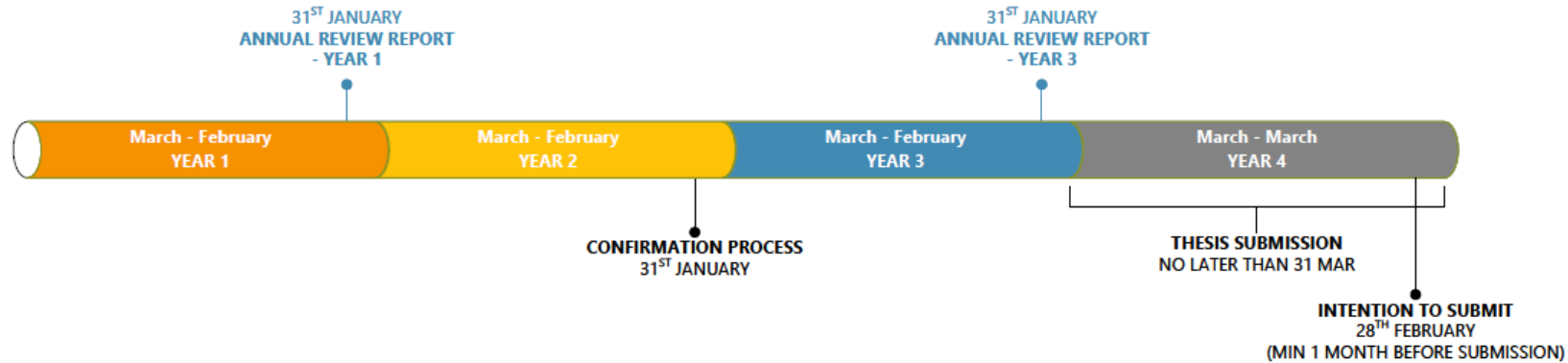
Part-time PhD students





Postgraduate Research Progression Deadlines (March Intake)

Full-time PhD students



Part-time PhD students

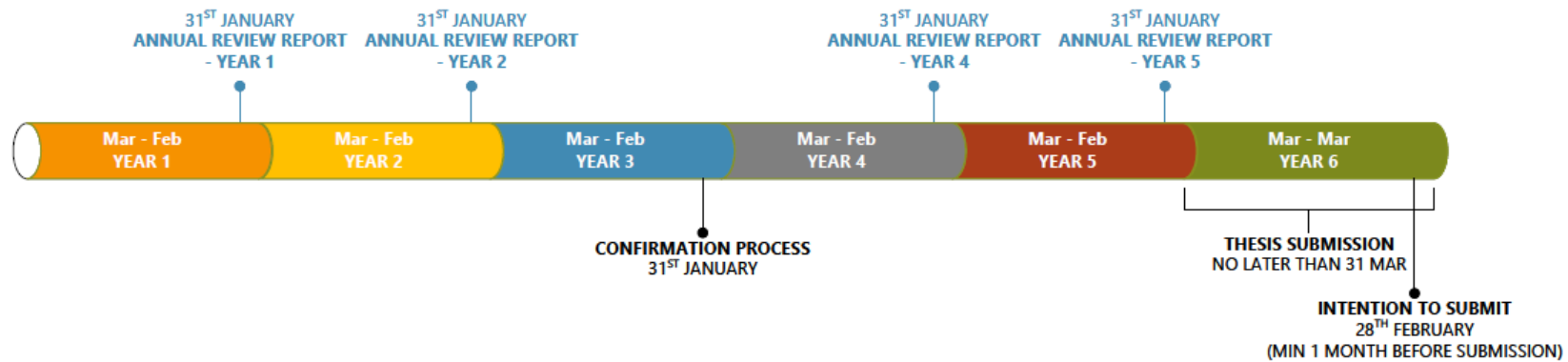




Figure 2: Student Progression Journey (Annual Reviews)

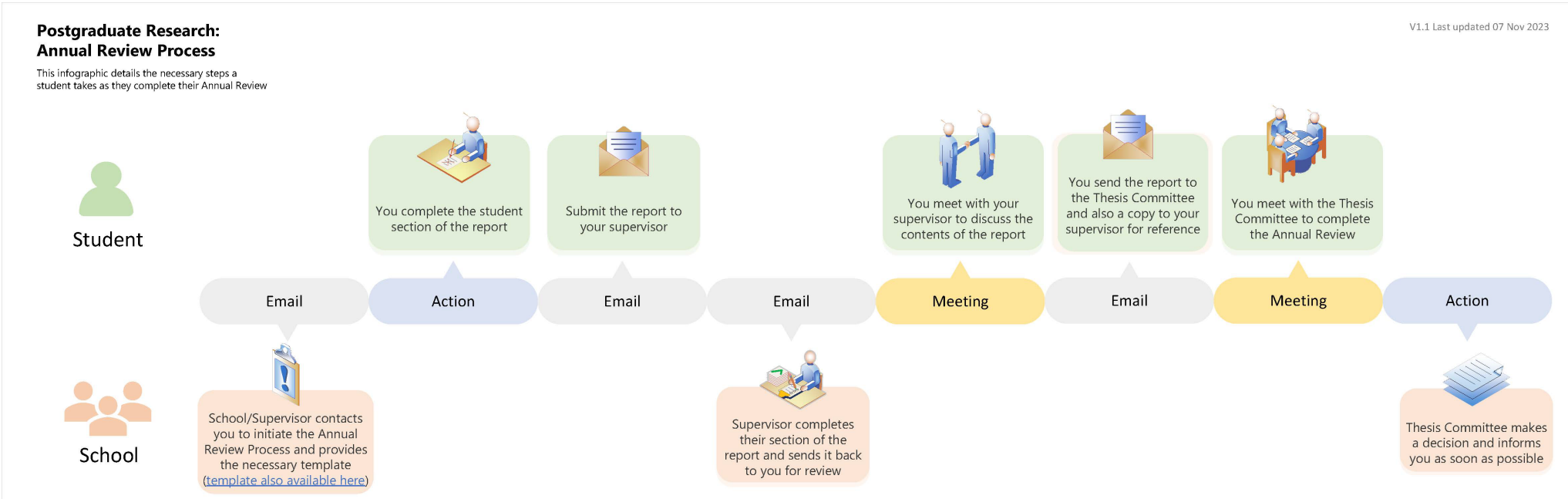
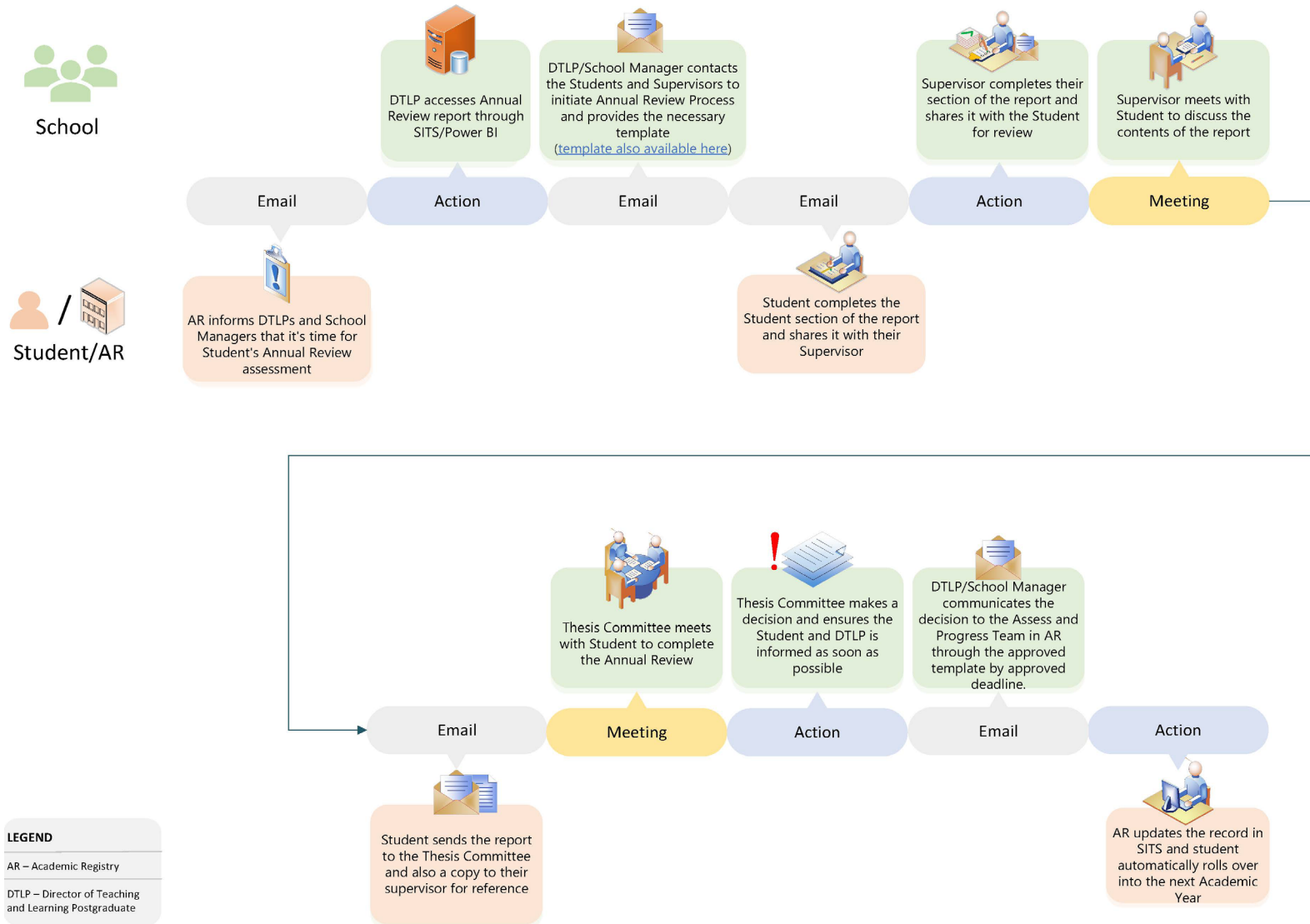




Figure 3: School Progression Journey (Annual Reviews)





5. Closing the Feedback Loop to Students

The annual review process and confirmation interview provide important opportunities for the Thesis Committee to give students detailed feedback.

At a minimum, this feedback should be achieved by:

- a) Sharing the reports with student and supervisor sections completed in advance of the formal meetings.
- b) Orally to the student (and supervisor, if they are in attendance) in the meetings.
- c) Providing the student with the fully completed reports (annual review and confirmation as appropriate) after the outcome is decided and within 5 working days.

6. Resolving Difficulties and Addressing Concerns

1. If at any stage the student and/or supervisor has real and substantial concerns with academic progress, they should seek a meeting with the Thesis Committee to attempt to develop a strategy to move forward before escalation to DTLP where necessary.
2. If the student expresses serious concerns about supervision to their Thesis Committee, these should be relayed to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), whose responsibility it is to investigate.
3. If the Thesis Committee has concerns about quality of supervision or any related concerns with the supervisor then this should be raised either with the supervisor or, if this is not possible or appropriate, then with the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), who should approach the issue as they would any other complaint in relation to supervision.
4. If there is any disagreement between the internal and external members of the Thesis Committee as to whether or not the student should be allowed to progress, then this should be mediated in the first instance by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) or, where appropriate, the Head of School, and, failing this, by the Dean of Graduate Studies.



Appendix 1: Terms of Reference for Thesis Committees

1. Purpose

The Thesis Committee model has been adopted in Trinity to enhance the supervisor – research student relationship and to ensure quality supervision practice in line with international best practice. A Thesis Committee shall be formed no later than six months from the first registration of a PhD student to monitor and advise in relation to the progress of the student throughout the lifespan of the structured PhD.

2. Membership of Thesis Committees

- 2.1. All Thesis Committees must comprise at least two members independent of the supervisor and co-supervisors. One member must be an independent academic member of Trinity staff from within the School familiar with the student's research area. The second may be an additional academic member of staff from within the university or a recognized external expert in the student's field of study. Such external experts may be affiliated with external universities, but this is not a requirement for the role.
- 2.2. Committee membership should be nominated by the supervisor in consultation with the student for approval by the Director of Teaching & Learning (Postgraduate).
- 2.3. Supervisors and co-supervisors cannot be formal members of a Thesis Committee.
- 2.4. The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) has authority to approve membership of Thesis Committee and any necessary changes ensuring that there is at least one independent academic member from within the School represented at all times.

3. Scope and function

Thesis Committees perform three key functions:

- 3.1. support the academic progress of the student and provide guidance on their development as PhD researchers.
- 3.2. assess and monitor research progress through formal review processes (i.e., annual review and confirmation / transfer interview) and agree an appropriate recommendation.
- 3.3. support the student-supervisor relationship and enhance the overall quality and rigour of the supervision process.

4. Functions outside of the remit

- 4.1. Thesis Committee members do not have a direct supervisory role.



- 4.2. While Thesis Committees may guide students to appropriate support services and provide informal support, the Committee does not have a direct responsibility for the provision of pastoral care.

5. Meeting arrangements

- 5.1. Formal meetings of the Thesis Committee will be chaired by a member of the Trinity academic staff.
- 5.2. The Chair should ensure that a meeting agenda is issued prior to each formal progress review meeting.
- 5.3. It is the responsibility of the Thesis Committee to ensure the student has access to the completed annual review report prior to the scheduled meeting.
- 5.4. The following can be in attendance at meetings of the Thesis Committee:
 - a. Supervisor
 - b. Co-Supervisors including adjunct supervisors
 - c. Director of Teaching & Learning (Postgraduate) or designate
- 5.5. The supervisor and/or co-supervisor may be in attendance as observers at the **confirmation interview** conducted by the Thesis Committee as appropriate to local and discipline norms. The Chair should ensure that time is allocated for the student to speak with the Thesis Committee without the supervisor(s) present.
- 5.6. The supervisor and/or co-supervisor(s) may be present at formal **annual review meetings** with students as appropriate to local and discipline norms. The Chair should ensure that time is allocated for the student to speak with the Thesis Committee without the supervisor(s) present.
- 5.7. Schedule of review meetings: the figure below (page 15) presents the timing of review meetings in the student lifecycle of postgraduate research students.
 - Annual Review meetings should be completed no later than the end of June for students on the September register, and the end of January for students on the March register.
 - Confirmation interviews should be completed no later than 22 months after initial registration for full-time PhD students, and 34 months after initial registration for part-time PhD students.
- 5.8. Students may request an informal meeting with the Thesis Committee outside of the above formal review meetings, and independent of their supervisor.

6. Outcomes of formal review meetings

Thesis Committee members should agree a recommendation following each formal review meeting:

- 6.1. Student to progress;
- 6.2. Student to progress after some minor changes have been made to the annual review or confirmation reports;
- 6.3. Student to present for re-assessment or re-interview;
- 6.4. Student to transfer to a lower degree register;



- 6.5. Student does not progress;
- 6.6. A change in supervision should be made.

Where a recommendation is made for a student to present for re-assessment or re-interview, clear and specific written guidance must be given to the student detailing the additional work to be completed prior to the reassessment or re-interview, including the timeline for same.

7. Reporting

Thesis Committees should complete the relevant template following completion of the formal annual review / interview meetings recording the agreed recommendation:

- a. [Annual Review Report Template](#)
- b. [Confirmation Report Template](#)

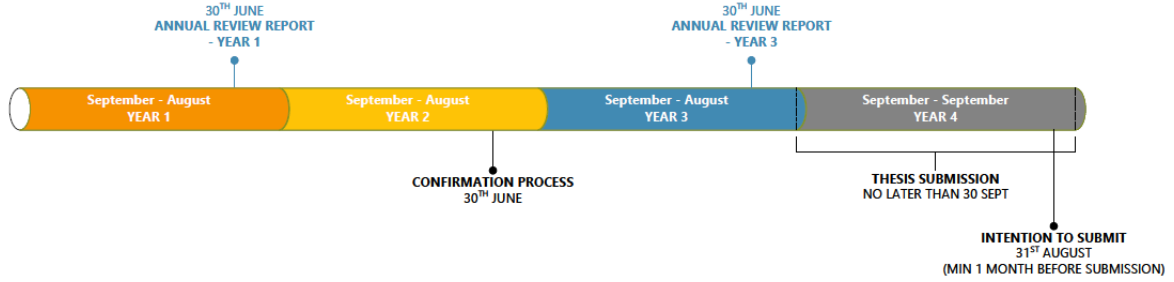
Final reports should be sent to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), the student and supervisor(s) within five working days.



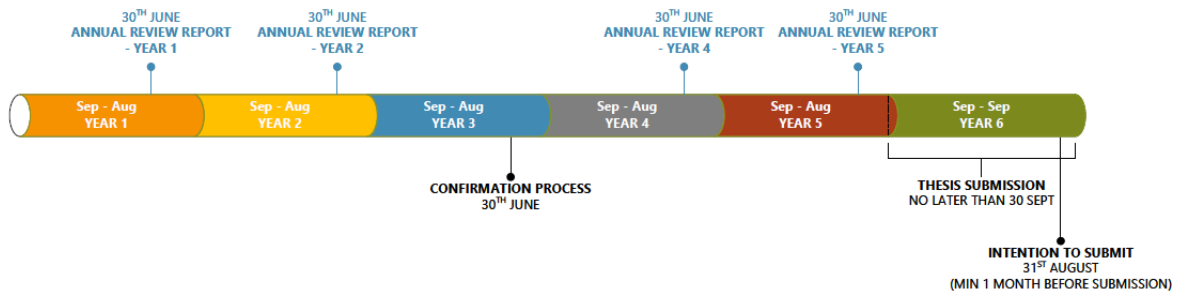
Figure: Timing of Review Meetings

Postgraduate Research Progression Deadlines (Sept Intake)

Full-time PhD students

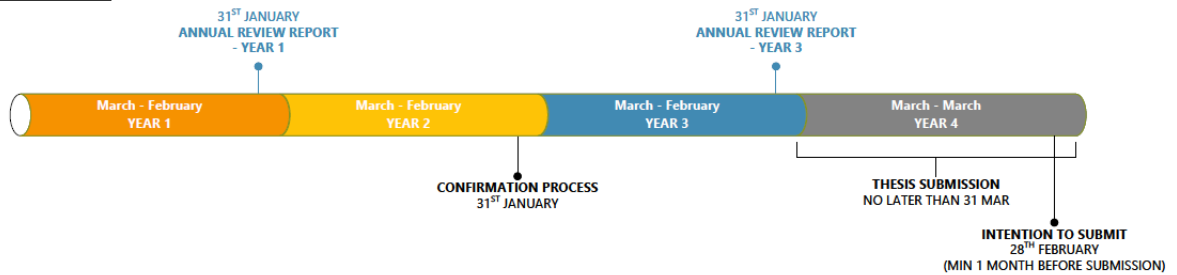


Part-time PhD students

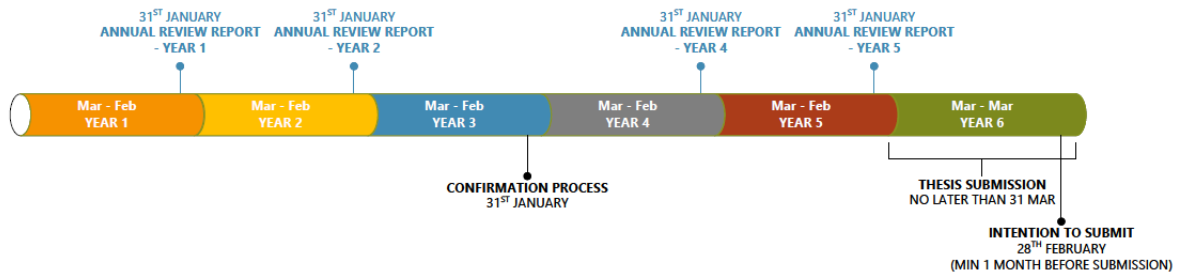


Postgraduate Research Progression Deadlines (March Intake)

Full-time PhD students



Part-time PhD students





Appendix 2: Template for the Annual Review Meeting Agenda

**Trinity College Dublin
The University of Dublin**

Annual Review Meeting

Date, time, location

AGENDA

- 1.** Check-in with the Supervisor before the Student enters the room (*if the supervisor attends the meeting*).
- 2.** Presentation by the student.
- 3.** Review and discuss progress to date.
- 4.** Check-in with the student without the supervisor present in the room:
 - a)** Do you meet regularly with your supervisor(s)?
 - b)** Do you get constructive feedback?
 - c)** Have you completed the required taught components of your structured PhD, including the mandatory module 'Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era'?
 - d)** Have you made progress in developing your research and professional development goals as identified in your Professional Development Plan?
 - e)** Are there any issues you would like to raise?
- 5.** Any other business.