

School of Law

PGR Annual Review – Supplementary Guidance – Law & Criminology

The Frequently Asked Questions document provides general guidance about the Annual Review process. These notes provide additional points to help you to prepare for the review and to decide what material you should submit to the reviewers to show what work you have been doing in the current year.

Context

The PhD is a three year programme (or six years for part-time students). The expectation is that you will have researched and written your thesis during that period. Exceptionally, where that does not prove possible, the writing of the thesis may be completed during a submission pending period, but being able to do that cannot at all be assumed, and you will need to seek permission (details available from the PGR Office).

The length of the programme sets the parameters for the project. The thesis represents what can realistically be achieved, in terms of scale and scope, over three years of full-time work or six years of part-time work. In line with your supervisors' advice, you are expected to plan a project for the period of your degree programme and devise a timetable of work. The annual review enables the School to see whether you are keeping on track and meeting expectations for each year of the programme.

Expectations are described below with reference to each year of the full-time programme. Those expectations apply proportionately to part-time students, at the second, fourth and sixth calendar years. However, part-time students do have an annual review meeting each calendar year.

Year One

At the end of the first year of the programme, students can be expected to have completed the following tasks:

- Surveyed the field and appraised the key bodies of literature that are likely to be relevant to the thesis.
- Refined the research question(s).
- Critically identified a set of tasks to answer the question(s).
- Critically identified appropriate methods to carry out those tasks.
- Prepared for the tasks.
- Decided how the tasks will be timetabled over the next two years.

For all projects, preparing for the tasks will include the organising of appropriate research training. For empirical projects, where sources are restricted in some way, preparation will also include obtaining access to materials and subjects, and securing ethics approval.

By the time of the first year annual review, nine months into the programme, students can be expected to have a clear idea of what they want to achieve in conducting the research and writing the thesis.

Students can also be expected to be writing draft material, in line with their supervisors' advice. That may consist of their own critical notes about themes discovered in the literature, or perhaps briefing papers requested by supervisors, or in some cases passages intended in due course to form early chapters in the thesis (such as a literature review or a discussion of methodology). At the end of the first year, the expectation is that 25,000 words of material will have been drafted for use in the ultimate thesis.

At the first year annual review, reviewers will be looking for evidence that you are on track to meet these expectations.

Therefore, in the first year, it will be helpful for the 5,000 word sample of work to include a narrative which deals with the following:

- A summary of what you want to achieve.
- An explanation of your research questions.
- Your provisional timetable for dealing with the various tasks needed to complete the project.

The narrative might take (roughly) 1,000 words. If you wish, it could include some reflection on what has and has not gone well up to now. You can then illustrate the work that you have been doing by supplying one or more samples of the writing drafts described above. There is no need to write anything especially for the review. But if you provide more than one sample of writing, it would be useful to link them together with a brief explanation.

Year Two

In the second year, the expectation is that students will be building the foundations of their argument, by working through the tasks they have set themselves in their timetable. For empirical projects, this is also typically the year in which data collection is conducted and its analysis started.

Reviewers will be looking for evidence that, by the end of the year, you will have completed a proportionate number of the tasks identified in your timetable and will have drafted a further 30,000 words to reflect that. Crucially, in line with your supervisors' advice, they will be expecting you to show that you are aware of the requirements of a PhD (originality, independent critical judgement, and an addition to knowledge) and are reflecting those in your critical analysis.

Your 5,000 word sample of work should therefore consist of a brief indication of the progress with your timetable, again including (if you wish) some reflection on what has and has not gone well over the year, together with one or more draft passages (with short, linking explanations, if more than one) which illustrate(s) your analysis.

Year Three

In the final year, the expectation is that students will continue to work through the remainder of the tasks that they have set themselves. In line with their supervisors' advice, they will also be assembling the thesis more explicitly, by reviewing the outcomes of their tasks and articulating the steps and sequence of their argument. By the end of the year, the expectation is that a maximum of 80,000 words will have been written and the thesis completed.

Reviewers will be expecting you to show the same kind of analysis as in the second year, but with greater maturity. They will also be expecting you to explain how all the work is coming together to demonstrate (in the words of the criteria that will be used by your examiners):

- How successful you will have been in achieving your aims and objectives.
- How the results of your research, as reported in the thesis, will show evidence of originality and independent critical judgement.
- How the research will constitute an addition to knowledge.

Your 5,000 word sample may take the same form as that for the second year.

In addition, it will be helpful if you can now provide a draft abstract of the thesis.