

Your Research & Professional Development Plan (RPDP) Frequently Asked Questions

The questions below cover general queries concerning your Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP). For a more comprehensive explanation of the RPDP and all its integral parts, please refer to the RPDP project website, www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/rpdp.

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General Questions

1. What is the RPDP?

The Research and Professional Development Plan (RPDP) is an integral part of the Structured PhD programme at UCD. It has been designed to help PhD students in the planning, monitoring and completion of their PhD. The RPDP comprises a set of tools to help develop a student's research and professional skills. It is owned by the student, but is intended to be beneficial to both PhD student and supervisor.

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2. Why have a RPDP?

The RPDP will play a major role in planning the direction of the PhD research and in the student's training and development as a researcher. It provides a means of effectively planning the PhD research, will be a useful resource when it comes to writing up, and will also help the student develop key skills which will be invaluable to both the current research and the student's future career prospects. Finally, the RPDP will be an important document in the student's Transfer Assessment at the end of the first year at UCD and in determining when the student is ready to submit his/her thesis.

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3. Who is it aimed at?

The RPDP is an integral part of the PhD programme for all research graduate students starting doctoral studies at UCD from September 2007.

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4. Where do I get my copy of the RPDP?

All new PhD students starting at UCD from September 2007 will receive two copies of the RPDP. There is a hard copy version in a folder and an electronic PDF version on a USB disk key. All students will receive their folders and their USB disk key when they start doctoral studies at UCD. This will be at one of the induction events, alternatively you can contact the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Training in the UCD Research Building next to the Tierney Building, on 01 716 4046, or at rpdp@ucd.ie.

The RPDP is also available on the web at www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/rpdp. You can choose to use whichever version of the RPDP suits you best. The PDF version on the USB key and on the web is writeable and is easy to navigate by using either the tabs on the right hand side of the document or the bookmarks. To see the bookmarks in Adobe Reader, go to View, Navigation Panes and select Bookmarks from the list.

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5. What is the structure of the RPDP?

The RPDP comes in two parts; one for STAGE 1 of a student's PhD Programme and the other for STAGE 2. The RPDP for STAGE ONE will help the student through the first year or so of his/her PhD at UCD, culminating in the Transfer Assessment. The RPDP for STAGE TWO will help the student through the final years of his/her PhD at UCD.

Each Stage of the RPDP comprises 5 main sections, each of which has a specific objective in terms of a PhD student's research and professional development:

Student Summary

This is a short section in which the student can record relevant details about themselves, their programme, their area of research and any pertinent funding details.

Research Plan

The purpose of the Research Plan is to enable the PhD to establish a baseline for his/her research programme, against which the research can be measured and managed. It is made up of a series of questions which are intended to help the student think about and prepare for the major aspects involved in planning, implementing, and disseminating his/her research.

Professional Development Plan

The Professional Development Plan enables the student to identify current skills and to plan for development of others in relevant areas. Employers, both in academia and outside, are placing an increasing emphasis on skills and their development. It is therefore important for students to be able to demonstrate that their skills have been actively developed over time. By developing these skills students will not only be more productive researchers, but will also be much better placed to compete for employment opportunities after completing their PhD.

Meetings

The RPDP process involves the formal documentation of a series of regular meetings between student and supervisor. These meetings are to review the student's progress on the research and the professional development plans. They are held at important times during the student's PhD, although the student will probably be meeting with the supervisor more often than these formal meetings. The meeting reports will help the student capture decisions reached during these important meetings. These reports should be completed by the student and then approved and signed by the supervisor. The student should keep the original hard copy and submitted additional hard copies to the School Office and the supervisor. Members of the Doctoral Studies Panel may also want copies.

Skills Development Record

The Skills Development Record is the culmination of the RPDP. Here the student can record all the things he/she has achieved during their research programme at UCD (e.g. modules/training courses attended, publications, seminars, conferences). It should be updated regularly and reviewed during the regular meetings between student and supervisor. The Skills Development Record will be a valuable resource for the student when it comes time to apply for jobs after completing the PhD - both in terms of CV writing and at interviews.

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6. What do I have to do with the RPDP...?

a. I am a PhD student

Your RPDP is owned by you, the student. As such, it is your responsibility to fill in the sections and keep all the details up-to-date. The Research Plan and the Skills Development Plan are to be completed by you, but this will be following discussions with your supervisor. It is also your responsibility to complete the meeting reviews and have your supervisor approve and sign them. You should keep the original hard copy for your records, and then submit additional hard copies to your supervisor and School Office. Your Doctoral Studies Panel may also want copies.

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b. I am a PhD supervisor

The RPDP is owned by the student. As such, it is the student's responsibility to fill in the sections and keep all the details up-to-date. However, we ask that the supervisor encourage the student to complete the RPDP and to see its value. The supervisor has the responsibility of reviewing the student's RPDP, specifically their Research Plan and Skills Development Plan, and to sign-off the student's review of the formal meetings.

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Questions about the Research Plan

7. What if I can't fill out all the parts of the Research Plan?

The purpose of the Research Plan is to enable the PhD to establish a baseline for his/her research programme, against which the research can be measured and managed. It is made up of a series of questions which are intended to cover all the major aspects in the planning, implementation, and dissemination of research. Depending on what stage the student is at, different parts will be the most appropriate to complete and, as the student progresses, previous parts may need to be up-dated or re-written. If a certain section is not relevant to the research itself, or the stage the student has reached, the student just needs to indicate this and move on to the next section.

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8. What happens if the direction of the research changes?

The Research Plan is a dynamic document and should be updated regularly to reflect changes in the direction of the work. Each time there is a change in the research, the student can create a new electronic version. Having a record of previous plans will help the student write-up and prepare for the viva, as it will explain the reasons why certain decisions were made and clarify any changes in direction.

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Questions about the Professional Development Plan

9. What's the difference between the Skills Self-Assessment section and the Skills Development Plan?

The Skills Self-Assessment is designed to provide a profile of the student's current skill base at a particular time and used to inform the Skills Development Plan. For example if the student has identified a range of software packages which are of value to his/her work, in this section the student can log whether he/she is already up to speed or whether he/she requires some form of training. The Skills Development Plan can be used to identify where the needs can be met and how this activity can become part of the student's PhD programme.

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10. What is the difference between the list of development areas in my Skills Self-Assessment and the list of development areas in my Skills Development Plan?

Once the student has completed the Skills Self Assessment, he/she can use it to identify areas for development over the course of the research programme. The Skills Development Plan is used to highlight a few areas which the student wishes to develop in the coming year.

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11. What do I do if I want to develop more skill areas in my Skills Development Plan?

The Skills Development Plan is designed to encourage a student to prioritise skills development activities into a few select areas. However, if a student needs to develop additional skills (e.g. specific technical skills related to the research work), then obviously these activities need to proceed as required. In the document templates for each review meeting, there is a section where the student records 'Agreed Skills Development Activities', and this is where the student should document detailed skills development activities that he/she plans to carry out (e.g. training courses, seminars, etc.).

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12. How do I record that I have carried out the activities in my Skills Development Plan?

The Skills Development Record should be used to record all of the individual skills development activities that a student completes (e.g.: training courses, publications, seminars, conferences). This builds into a log of all such activities over the course of a student's research programme.

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Questions about the Meetings Section

13. Do I need to complete any sections of the meeting template before I meet with my supervisor?

The purpose of the Initial Supervisory Meeting is to discuss the Student Summary, Research Plan, Skills Self Assessment and Skills Development Plan. Therefore, it is intended that the student will draft these, in consultation with his/her supervisor in the period prior to this meeting. [return to main menu](#)

The RPDP is intended to be a developing document, with the Research Plan and Professional Development Plan changing as the student progresses. It is the student's responsibility to keep both of these documents up-to-date, and also to fill in the relevant sections of the Skills Development Record when necessary. In advance of subsequent meetings with the supervisor, the student is expected to complete the 'Research Progress' and 'Skills Development Progress' sections and circulate them to the supervisor to review prior to the meeting. [return to main menu](#)

14. Do I have to complete a meeting template for every meeting with my supervisor?

The RPDP process incorporates nine formal meetings between the student and supervisor over the course of a 4 year PhD programme. The outcome of these meetings should be recorded in the document templates provided. However, there will be many other meetings between the student and supervisor. The RPDP contains a Generic Meeting template to provide a structure for documenting the outcome of these meetings. The template is generic in nature, so that it can be used for most types of supervision meetings that will take place. You can choose to use this generic template for these meetings if you wish. [return to main menu](#)

15. What do I do with the review meeting documents once I have completed them?

After each Review Meeting, the student should complete the relevant Meeting documentation. The supervisor will then need to approve and sign it. The student should keep the original hard copy for his/her records and submit additional hard copies to the supervisor and School Office. Members of the student's Doctoral Studies Panel may also want copies. [return to main menu](#)

Questions about Modules

16. Where can I find out about modules to support my RPDP?

The best way to find out what modules are available is to go to www.ucd.ie/students and click on the "Course Search" tab. Then click on the top choice to "2007/2008 Modules" and tick the level 4 and level 5 options in order to search for graduate level modules.

In addition to the research modules, there are also several Transferable Skills Modules and Workshops available which may be of interest. These may be of particular help in developing your transferable skills, as identified by your Skills Self-Assessment. To see a list of these modules and workshops, please visit

www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/transferableskills. [return to main menu](#)

Questions about using the RPDP

17. What are the different formats of the RPDP?

The RPDP is available in different formats:

- Printed out as hard copy in a folder.
- Electronic PDF version on a 1GB USB disk key.
- On the web at www.ucd.ie/graduatestudies/rpdp.

You will receive your hard copy folder of the RPDP and your PDF version on a disk key at one of the inductions events when you arrive at UCD. Alternatively, you can contact the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Training on 01 716 4046 or rpdp@ucd.ie.

To use the electronic version of the RPDP from the web or your USB disk key, please make sure you have the latest version of Adobe Reader on your computer. This is available to download for free from www.adobe.com/products/reader.

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18. Which format should I use?

You can use whichever version of the RPDP you prefer. The PDF version is fully writeable so it may be easiest to fill in and save multiple versions of this throughout your PhD programme. However, if you prefer you can write on your hard copy version in the folder, or print out copies from the web or your disk key to fill out.

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19. How do I navigate the electronic version of the RPDP?

The PDF version of your RPDP is easy to navigate. You can use the tabs on the right hand side of the document itself or by using the bookmarks. To see the bookmarks in Adobe Reader go to View, Navigation Panes and select Bookmarks from the list. Simply click on the bookmark of the section you wish to see.

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20. How do I print out the electronic version of the RPDP?

To print out copies of your RPDP, go to File, Print. In the Print Range box select the pages you require. In the Page Handling box leave the Page Scaling set to "None" and uncheck "Auto-Rotate and Centre". Also make sure that, under Properties in the Paper/Quality tab, the size is A4 in the Paper Options box.

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How to Comment on the RPDP

21. I have a question about the RPDP, who can I ask?

If you have any questions about the RPDP, as either a student or a supervisor, you can contact your Graduate School Office or Dr. Claire Rosten (claire.rosten@ucd.ie) from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Training.

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22. How can I comment on the RPDP scheme?

Comments on the RPDP are always welcome and can be made to your Graduate School Office or Dr. Claire Rosten (claire.rosten@ucd.ie) from the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Training.

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