Guidance on Extension of Time for Postgraduate Researchers

Policy Name – Guidance on Extension of Time for Postgraduate Researchers	
Version number: 2.2	
Policy Owner	**Policy Author/Reviewer**
Professor Sonja McIlfatrick Dean of the Doctoral College	Gwen McCracken/Dr Patrick Dunlop Doctoral College
Approving body	**Date of approval**
Doctoral College Board	04 November 2024 (implemented from September 2025)
	Equality Screened
	Yes
	Next Review date
	September 2028
Queries relating to this document should be directed to the Policy Owner – Professor McIlfatrick (sj.mcilfatrick@ulster.ac.uk) This document can be made available on request, in alternative formats and in minority languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.	

Guidance on Extension of Time for Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) (Updated June 2026)

1.0 Introduction and Background

1.1 Postgraduate Research Study

Ulster offers a series of Postgraduate Research degrees with associated Regulations available on the Doctoral College website. Many Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) receive funding to undertake their studies via a fixed term Studentship, with provision of stipend, tuition fees and research budget. Ulster offers PGR Studentships supported by the Northern Ireland Department for Economy (DfE), central UKRI schemes, and both public and private sources. Opportunity for self-funded study is available, and the University can support members of staff to undertake part time study. Updated DfE Studentship Terms and Conditions include an extended range of funded and flexible provision (part-time study, enhanced maternity arrangements, flexible study and family leave) with Ulster procedure accordingly reviewed.

1.2 Support for PGRs During Their Programme of Study

Research topics and projects are developed by academic supervisors with the understanding the project will be completed within a specified time frame. PGRs are recruited to study on approved research topics and projects through advertisement of the opportunity and associated Studentships. Positions are formally offered by the University under the relevant Regulations and Studentship Terms and Conditions, as outlined in a letter of offer. Supervisors and Faculty staff proactively mentor, review and discuss PGR progress against an agreed timeline at frequent intervals. Formal monthly meetings should be undertaken with notes maintained within the University records system, PhD Manager. Any circumstances impacting PGR progress can be recorded during the Supervisory Meetings, at periodic assessment points, and within Annual Reports – with records placed securely on PhD Manager. Should additional guidance or support be required outside of the Supervisory Team, PGRs have access to dedicated Faculty staff (Research Director, Postgraduate Tutor) and to staff within the Doctoral College. Where a period of personal, medical, family or caring leave is required, Regulations permit PGRs to take a leave of absence. PGRs with a Studentship can avail of a financial support package and flexibility during a period of leave, described within the Regulations and the Studentship terms and conditions. The initial project end date is extended to take into consideration the duration of any approved leave.

1.3 Extension of Time

At the end of the normal registration period, PGRs should submit a thesis for examination. Should thesis submission not be possible, the University supports PGRs to project completion by a process to extend the thesis submission date - termed ‘Extension of Time’ (EoT). Upon submission of a progress report and a

schedule of work for the project, all PGRs are issued with an initial 6-month extension of time. In line with the PGR Studentship terms and conditions, stipend payments are not continued during EoT, however, the University supports PGRs with tuition fee exemption for this 6-month period. Subsequent EoT can be applied for in periods of 6-month duration with an associated fee, as defined in the Fees Schedule. Fee waivers may be considered by Faculty for various reasons, including, personal, physical resource and wellbeing matters. If at the end of the first period of extension the project has not been completed, a Review of Progress Against Deadline (ROPAD) meeting is required to assess academic progress and support PGR wellbeing. Following ROPAD Faculty staff can recommend the PGR apply for a subsequent EoT; or where circumstances necessitate a break in studies, a Leave of Absence (LoA) can be sought. The maximum duration for LoA is normally 12-months.

2.0 Aims, Purpose and Scope

This document aims to guide Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs), Supervisors and Faculty staff through the Extension of Time procedure, and support transition from September 2025. Both Extension of Time (EoT) and Leave of Absence (LoA) processes are intended to operate fairly and flexibly, recognising the differing needs of PGRs and associated differential impacts on progress.

3.0 Workflow for Extension of Time Applications

Progress towards thesis submission will naturally be discussed more frequently during Supervisory meetings in the final year of the programme and at appropriate assessment points. Where a thesis cannot be submitted by the initial programme end date, an application for Extension of Time can be submitted via PhD Manager (see process flow diagram). Appendix 1 shows step by step workflow for PGRs, with Appendix 2 detailing workflow for Supervisors.

First extension of time: Following review of the EoT application Faculty approval by Supervisor and Research Director (or nominee) can award the EoT for a period of 6-months, including an automatic fee waiver. A Review of Progress Against Deadline (ROPAD) meeting is not a requirement for the first extension, but may be used if deemed appropriate by Supervisor, Research Director (or nominee).

Subsequent extensions of time: Should further additional time be required, PGRs can apply for a further extension to their submission date. PGRs are supported in their decision-making through a structured Review of Progress Against Deadline (ROPAD) meeting arranged with Research Director (or nominee) and their Supervisory Team.

4.0 Review of Progress Against Deadline Meeting

If thesis submission is not possible following the first extension of time, a ROPAD meeting is required and associated notes must be completed on PhD Manager prior to application for EoT and LoA. In essence a ROPAD is an expanded Supervisory Meeting which includes the Research Director (or their nominee) and seeks to confirm PGR progress, to establish a thesis completion schedule and assure PGRs wellbeing. ROPAD meetings should be arranged in a way that supports accessibility and wellbeing with reasonable adjustments (for example, meeting format, timing, or communication methods) agreed in advance.
Step by step ROPAD PhD Manager workflow guides (for both PGR and Supervisors) are included within the Appendix, along with ROPAD Checklists for Supervisors and Faculty Approvers.

Starting the ROPAD workflow: Prior to the programme end date PGR requests ROPAD via PhD Manager. A system notification and task will be generated for the Chair of the Supervisory Team. Supervisor should agree the date for the meeting with the Research Director (or their nominee) and the PGR, action the task by entering the date and time for the meeting onto PhD Manager, and ensuring the form is submitted. In preparation for the ROPAD meeting, the PGR should develop a short summary of the current status of the project and a thesis submission plan (to include a timeline for completion of each outstanding aspect of the thesis). These could be submitted to Supervisors by email prior to the meeting. A ROPAD checklist for Supervisors is provided within the Appendix 3.

ROPAD content and format: At the ROPAD meeting, attendees should discuss the progress made by the PGR to date and confirm that the thesis submission plan (including submission of remaining work to Supervisors and a schedule for supervisor review and feedback) is achievable. The thesis submission plan could form the 'timeline for submission' to be uploaded within the workflow for an EoT. Discussion by Research Director (or nominee) should ensure they are satisfied that 1) progress is being made, 2) a realistic timeline to submission has been documented and agreed with the Supervisory team, 3) any wellbeing matters and exceptional circumstances (additional note below) are considered to confirm that an EoT is appropriate, 4) a position of EoT fees should be agreed. If a PGR is not in a position to progress with their studies, parties should consider the option of taking a Leave of Absence (LoA) instead of EoT.

Recording the ROPAD meeting: As with the workflow for a Supervisory Meeting, PGR completes the ROPAD meeting notes on PhD Manager and submits for approval of Supervisor. It is recommended this step be undertaken at the end of the ROPAD, where Supervisor can subsequently add notes, complete the approval and submit the task. Research Director approval is not required. Notes should include key considerations and the ROPAD outcome.

Summary of ROPAD outcomes:
1) Submission of a 6-month EoT, with the PGR liable for the associated University tuition fee (see note 1). PGRs are supported by the University Fees Office with a range of flexible payment options and associated advice.

2) Submission of second 6-month EoT, with fee waiver. If exceptional circumstances necessitate (see note 2), the Research Director (or nominee) may submit a Faculty tuition fee waiver for consideration by the PVC Executive Dean.

3) If the ROPAD identifies circumstances requiring the PGR to take a break from study, a Leave of Absence (LoA) can be applied for as opposed to EoT (see note 3). There is no fee associated with LoA and PGR will be permitted to re-engage with their studies returning via EoT.

Note 1: The amount of annual fees payable for extension of time has not been modified during review of the Procedures, however, the fee payment schedule has been updated to 6-monthly payment intervals, calculated pro-rata. Support and advice remain available from Fees Office to help spread the costs of the payments, in line with Regulations and Studentship conditions.

Note 2: If a PGR wishes to describe exceptional circumstances impacting progress (described previously or not), they can raise such matters with Supervisors and Research Director (or nominee) during ROPAD. Exceptional circumstances may include, but are not limited to, disability or long-term health conditions, pregnancy or parental responsibilities, bereavement, caring responsibilities, or other personal or structural factors that have adversely affected progress. Each case will be considered during the ROPAD on its own merits. During the ROPAD meeting the Research Director (on nominee) should give opportunity for discussion of exceptional circumstances and consider if the subsequent extension with tuition fee could have disproportionate impact on the PGR, particularly where delays relate to circumstances associated with equality. If further guidance is required, please contact the Doctoral College.

Note 3: Where ROPAD confirms application for Leave of Absence, an application can be
submitted by the PGR through PhD Manager (to include supporting evidence). Approval is required by Supervisory Team and Research Director (or nominee), and by Head of Doctoral College. PGRs are expected to return from LoA and re-engage with their studies on the date agreed. The maximum period of LoA is normally 12-months. In-keeping with the Regulations, where a PGR does not return to their studies within the agreed period, they will be withdrawn. Doctoral College can provide specific guidance on taking or returning from LoA.

5.0 Actioning the ROPAD outcome – Application for EoT or LoA on PhD Manager

1) EoT - PGR completes the EoT request on PhD Manager. Brief notes from the ROPAD may be included; the thesis submission date must be confirmed and the agreed thesis submission plan submitted (this can be converted to a Gantt chart, if

appropriate). Approval by Supervisor, Research Director (or nominee) and Head of Doctoral College is required. Research Director (or nominee) should refer to the 'Checklist for approval of post ROPAD decision' in Appendix 4.

2) LoA - PGR completes the LoA request on PhD Manager. Brief notes from the ROPAD may be included; the reason for LoA should be stated and supporting evidence uploaded. The agreed return date should be confirmed. Approval by Supervisor, Research Director (or nominee) and Head of Doctoral College is required. Research Director (or nominee) should refer to the 'Checklist for approval of post ROPAD decision' in Appendix 4.

EoT and LoA data (by number, duration, and outcome) will be periodically reviewed by Doctoral College to identify any emerging trends or differential impacts across PGR cohorts.

6.0 Communication, Implementation and training

The procedure has been considered and approved by Doctoral College Board and will be disseminated by Doctoral College to PGRs, supervisors and Faculty contact points by email and via the Doctoral College website. Training will be arranged for supervisors via the Supervisor Development Programme.

7.0 Complaints Procedure

If PGR studies have been discontinued by the University during the registration period (either following an interim assessment or on the basis of a lack of progress), or if they do not succeed in attaining the award for which they registered, PGRs may choose to appeal. This is known as A Request for a Review of the Decision and must be received by the Doctoral College within one month of the notification of the recommendation.

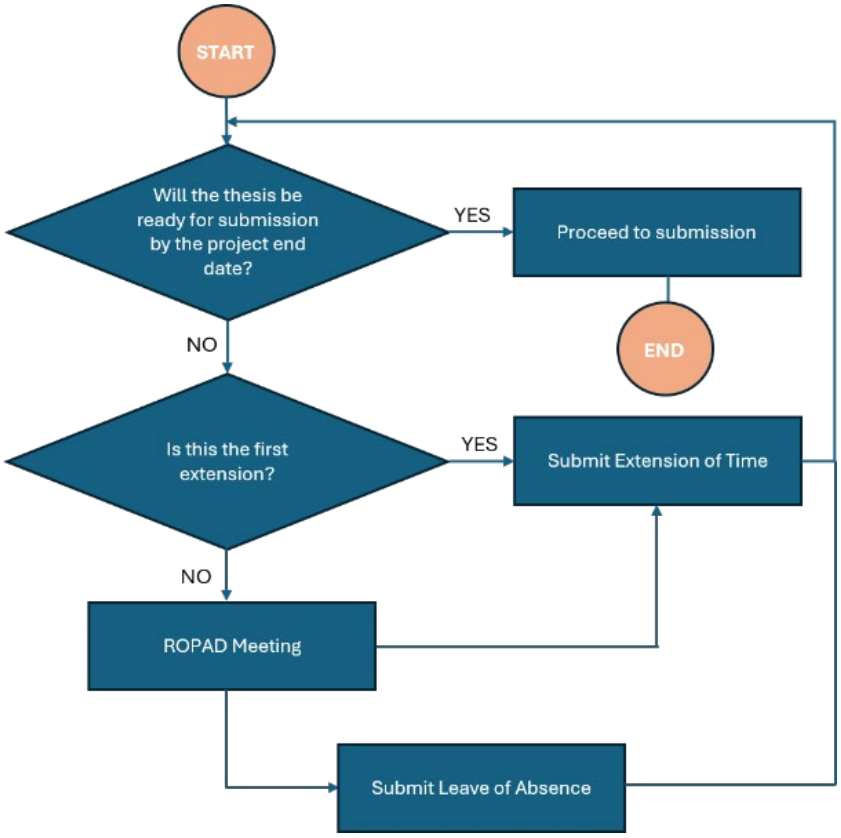
- Procedures for the Review of Decisions Regarding Faculty Interim Assessments and inadequate progress
- Procedures for the Review of Final Decisions (post oral examination)

The Student Complaints procedure is available to current students and those who have recently left the University (up to two months after your award has been conferred or you exit the University). To initiate a complaint, select 'Complaint Stage 1' from the appropriate drop down menu within the SAAT Online Reporting Form.

8.0 Contacts for Further Information and Support

For further information, please contact Doctoral College Managers or Heads of Doctoral College.
If PGRs require additional support, Student Wellbeing services are available 24/7 and the UUSU Advice Bureau is available to offer free, confidential independent advice.

9.0 Process Flow Diagram for PGR Extension of Time



V2.2 June 2026 PD GMcK

List of Appendices:

Appendix 1 - PhD Manager Workflows for PGRs

Appendix 2 - PhD Manager Workflows for Supervisors

Appendix 3: Checklist for Supervisors relating to Review of Progress Against Deadline (ROPAD) meeting

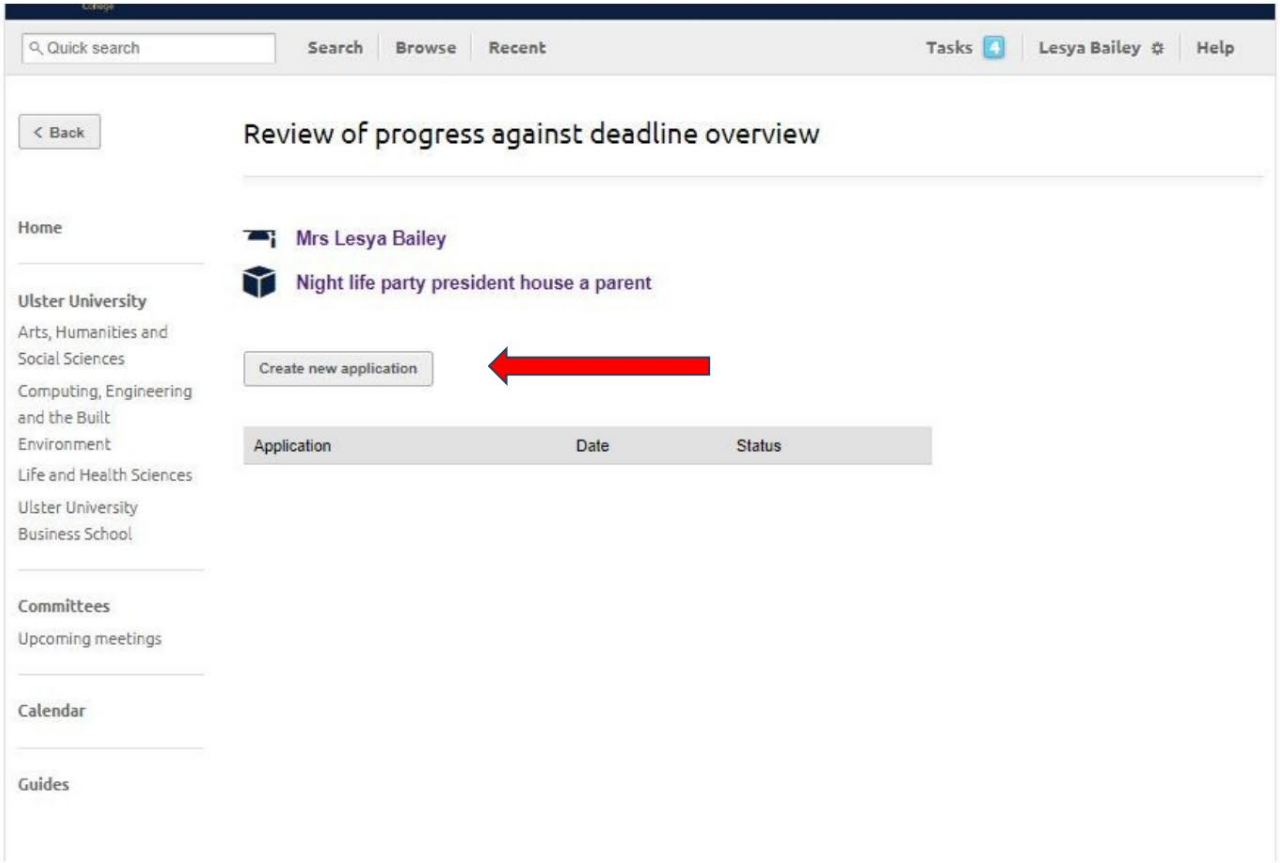
Appendix 4: Checklist for approval of post ROPAD decision (EoT or LoA) by Research Director (or nominee)

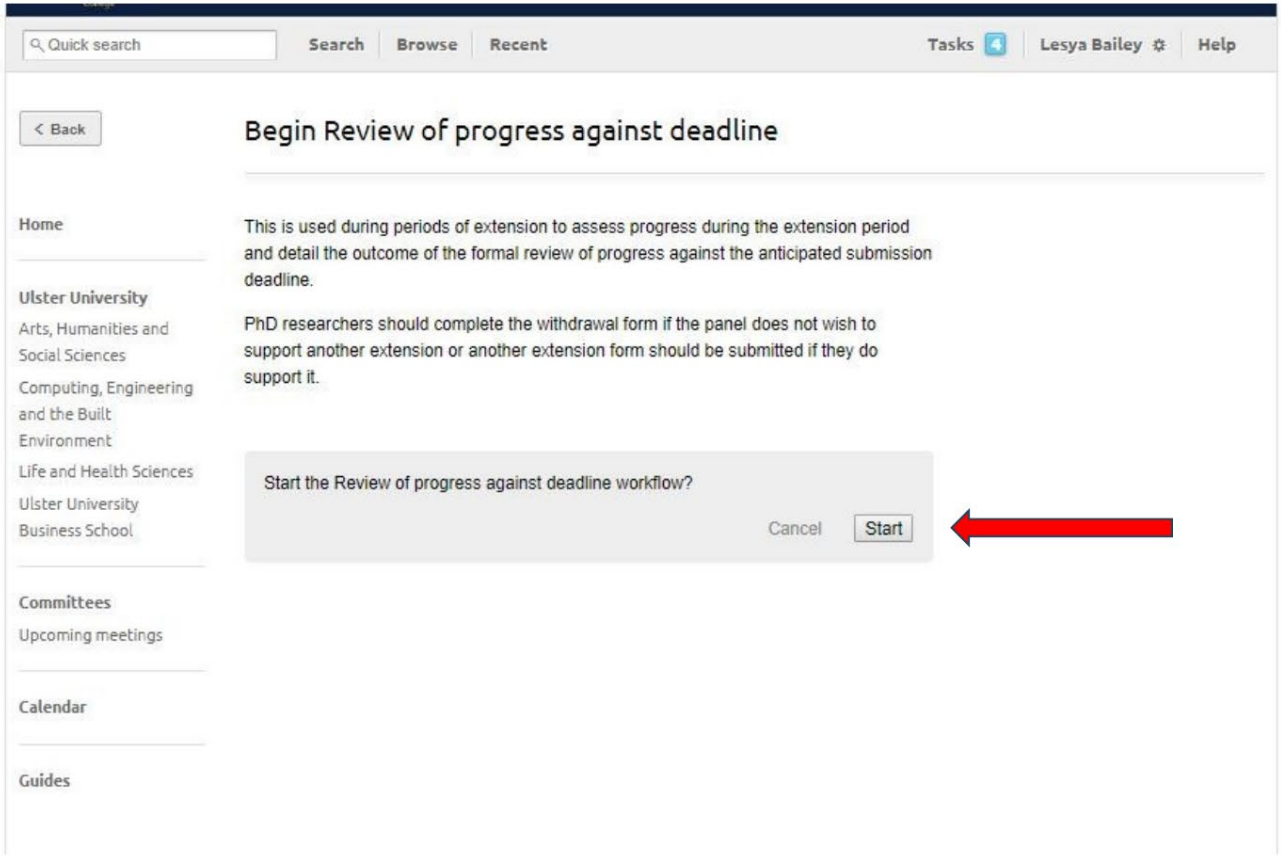
Review of Progress Against Deadline

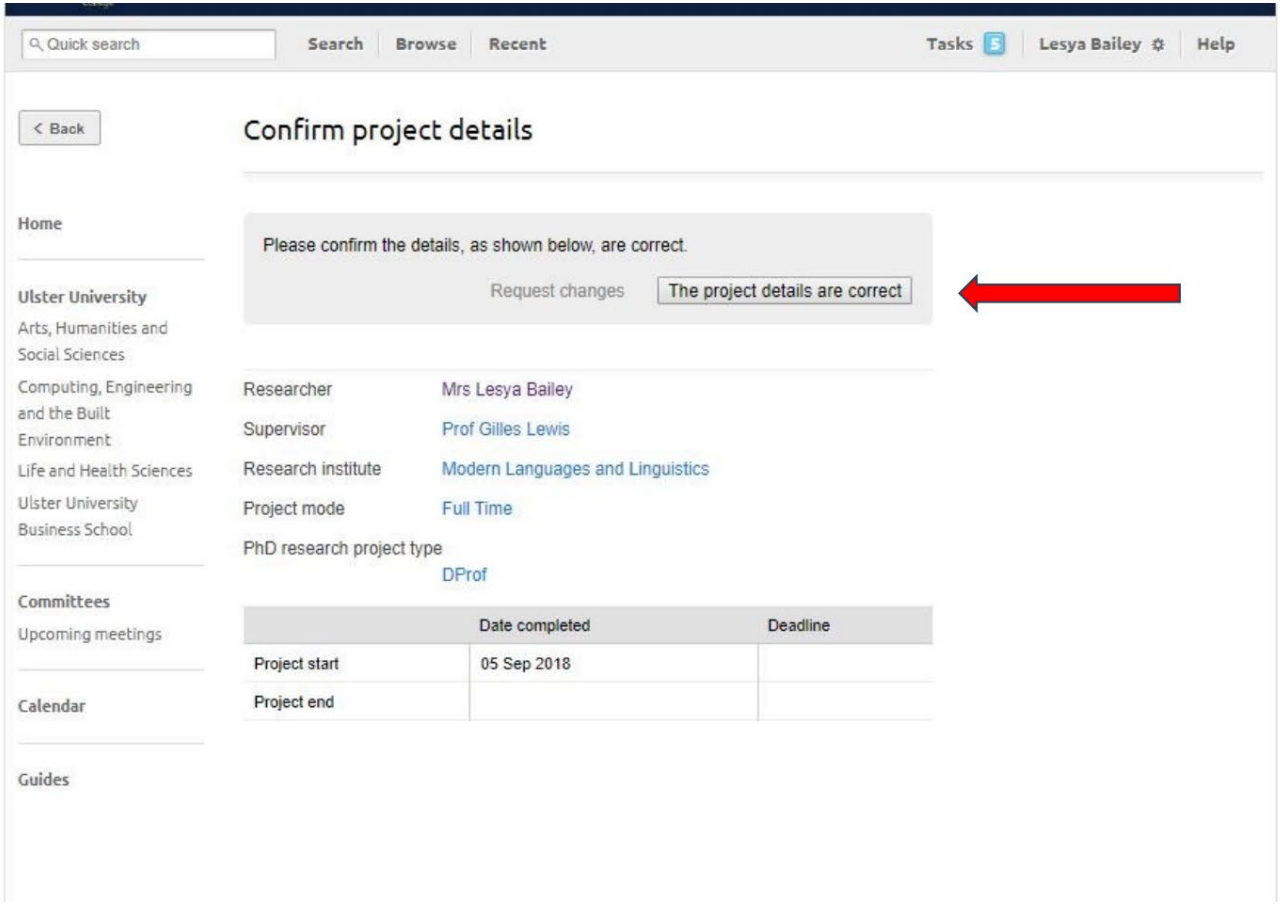
PhD Researcher Step-by-Step Guide

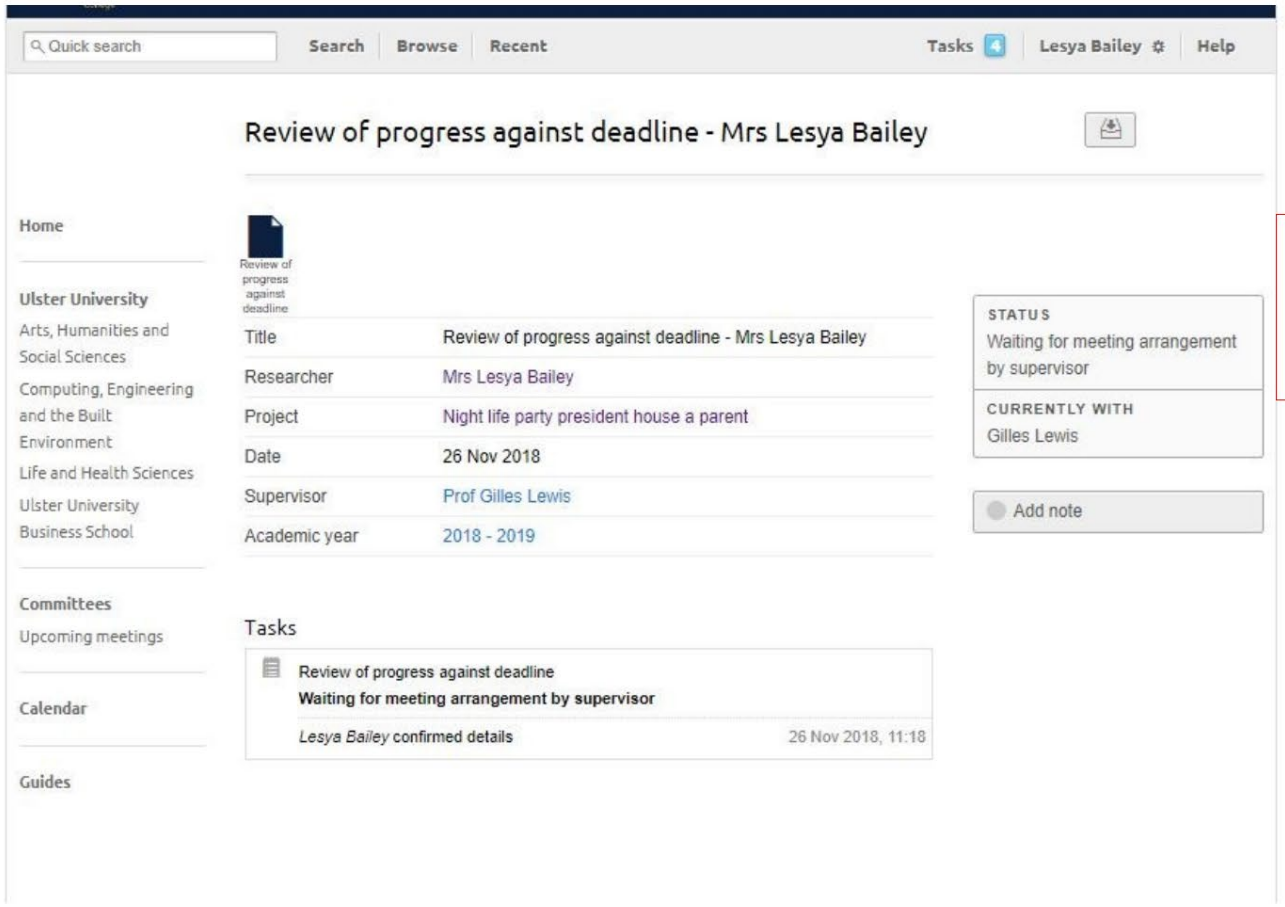
Review of Progress Against Deadline

- A Review of Progress Against Deadline must be completed before any second (or subsequent) Extension of Time is requested.
- The process is initiated by the PhD researcher and is managed between the PhD researcher and supervisor.
- To begin the process, from your project record, click on the ‘Review of progress against deadline’ button on the right-hand side.

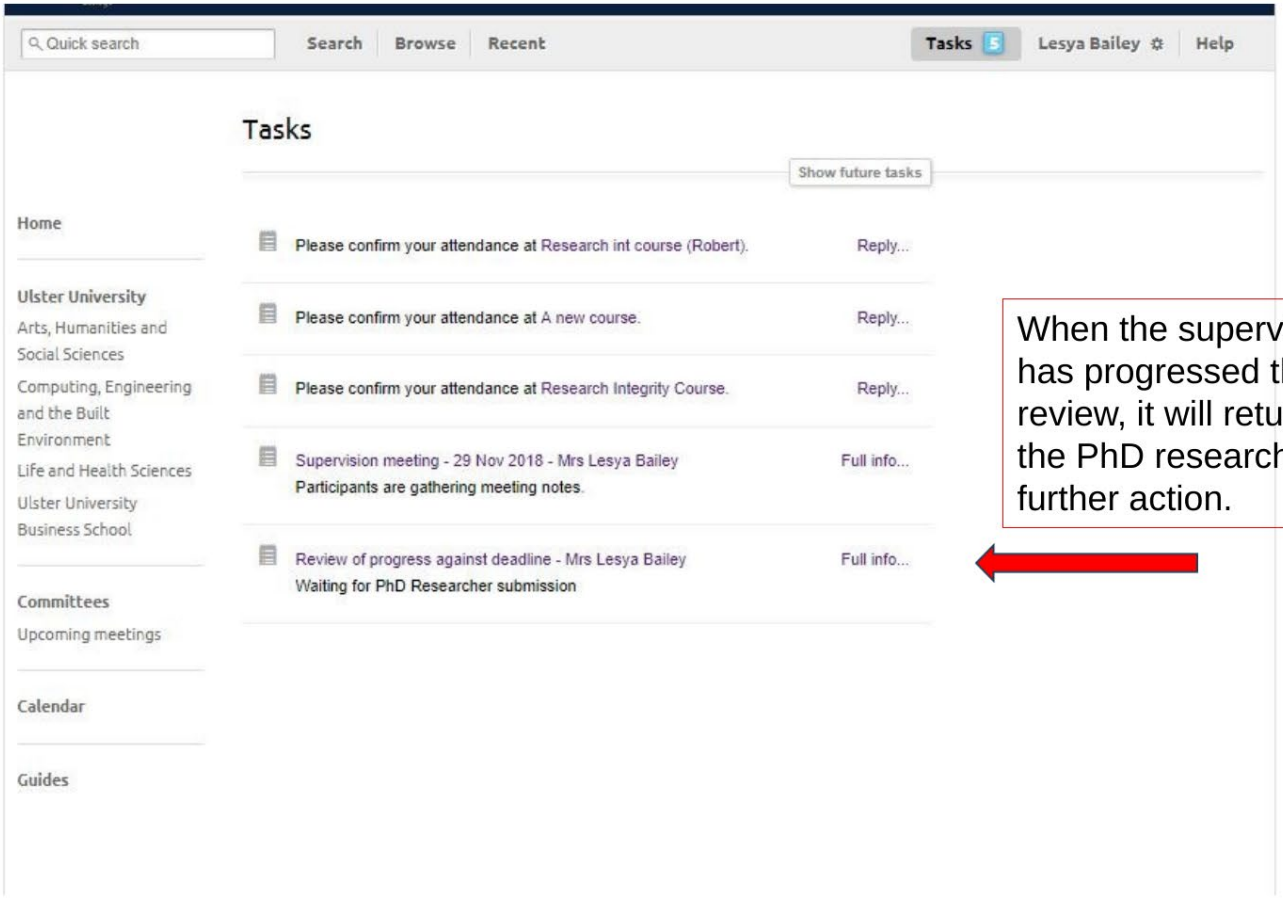

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This is used during periods of extension to assess progress during the extension period and detail the outcome of the formal review of progress against the anticipated submission deadline.
PhD researchers should complete the withdrawal form if the panel does not wish to support another extension or another extension form should be submitted if they do support it.
Start the Review of progress against deadline workflow?
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Start

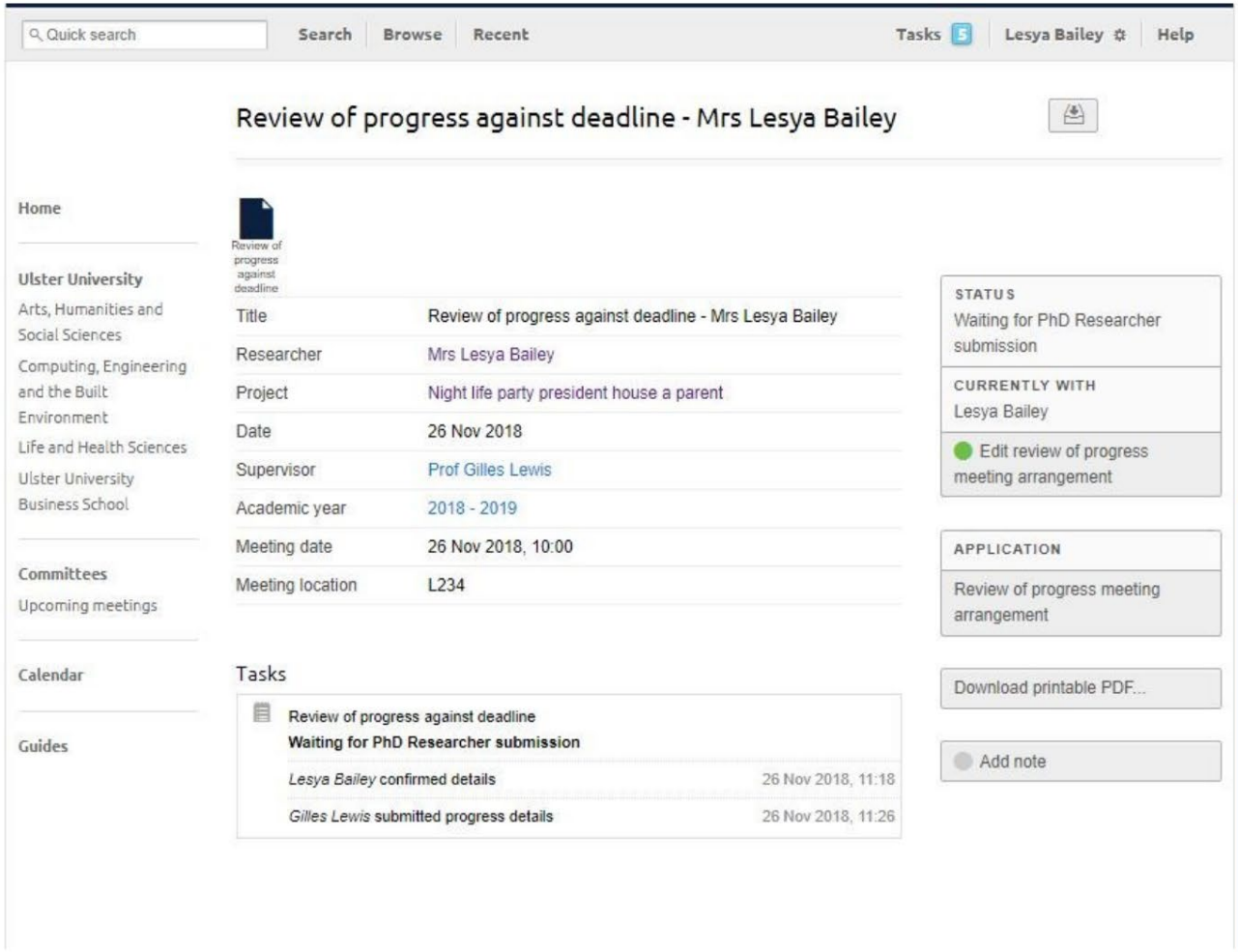

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Confirm project details
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Ulster University Business School
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Guides
Please confirm the details, as shown below, are correct.
Request changes
The project details are correct
Researcher
Mrs Lesya Bailey
Supervisor
Prof Gilles Lewis
Research institute
Modern Languages and Linguistics
Project mode
Full Time
PhD research project type
DProf
Date completed
Deadline
Project start
05 Sep 2018
Project end



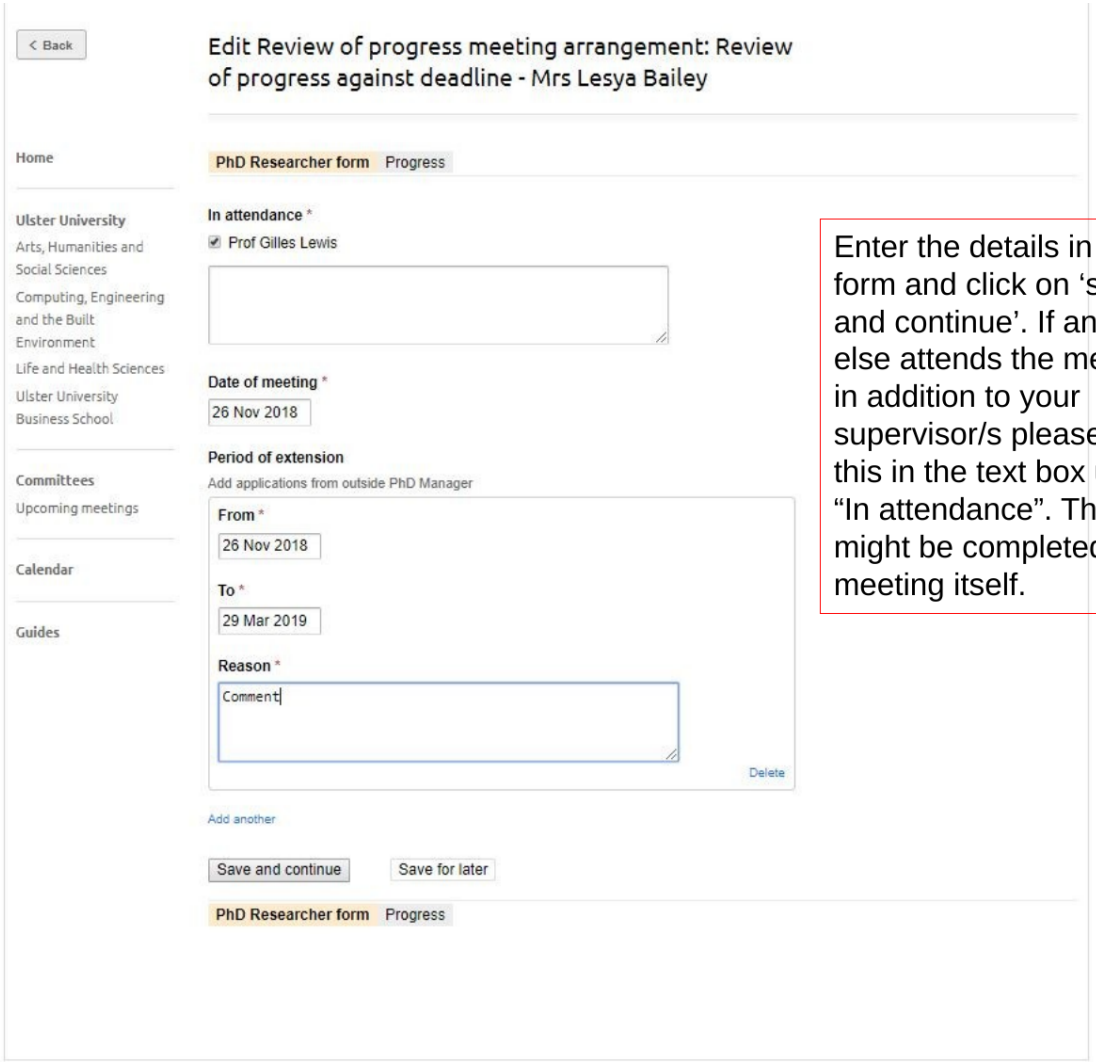
The request then goes to the supervisor to progress



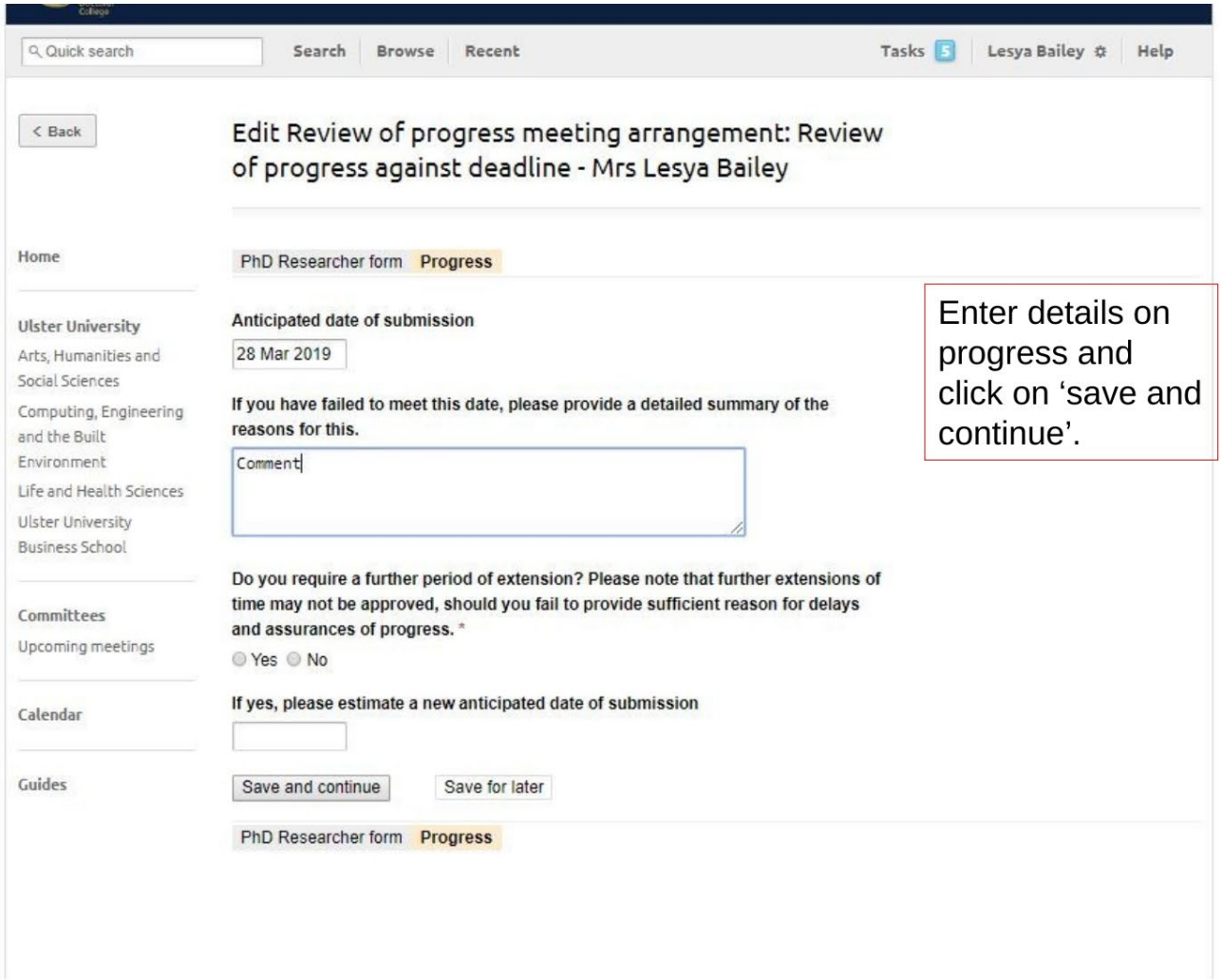
When the supervisor has progressed the review, it will return to the PhD researcher for further action.



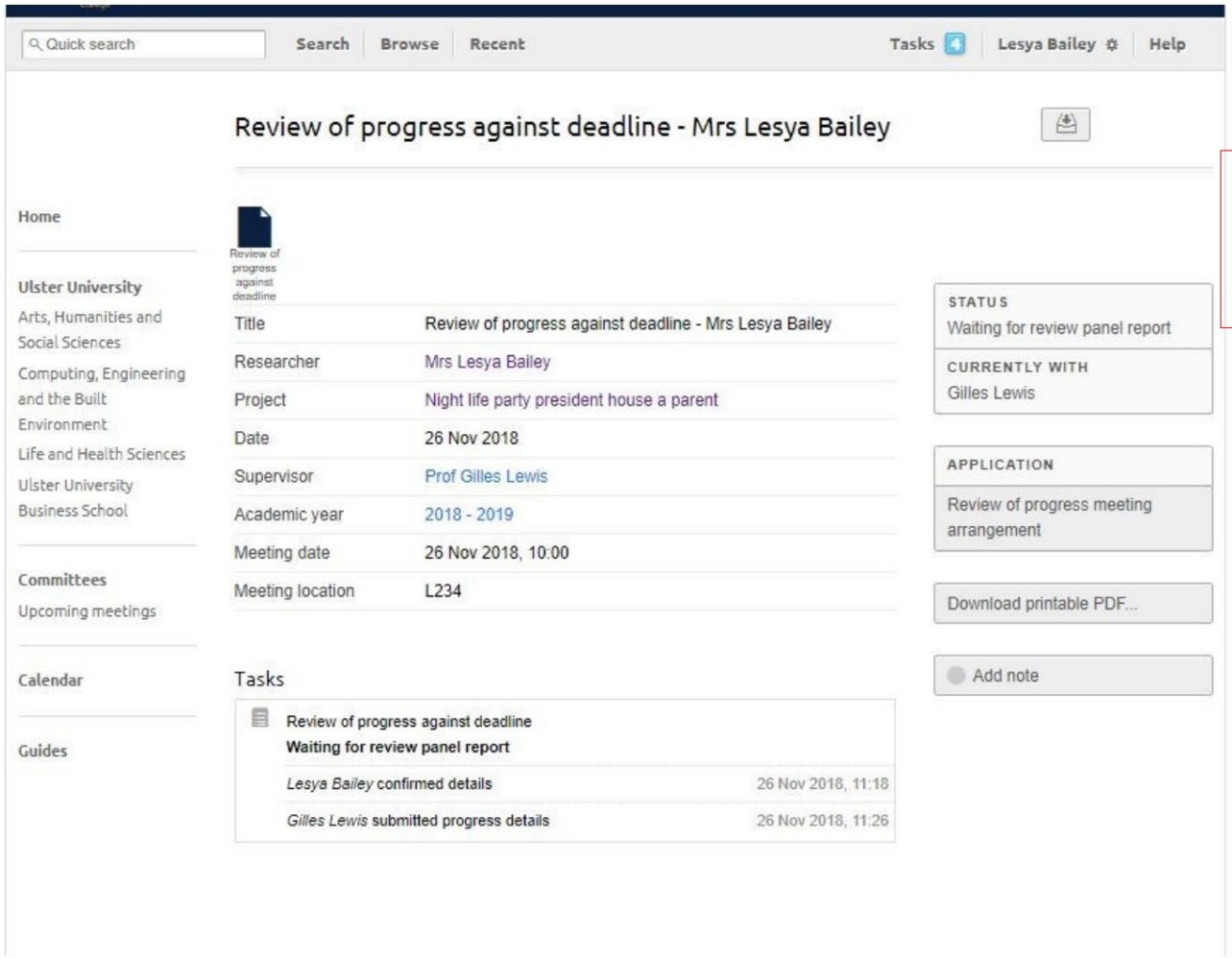
Before the meeting, the PhD researcher should develop a short summary of the current status of the project and a thesis submission plan (to include a timeline for completion of each outstanding aspect of the thesis). These should be shared with Supervisors and anyone else attending the meeting prior to the meeting e.g. by email.



Enter the details in the form and click on ‘save and continue’. If anyone else attends the meeting in addition to your supervisor/s please note this in the text box under “In attendance”. This part might be completed at the meeting itself.



Enter details on progress and click on ‘save and continue’.



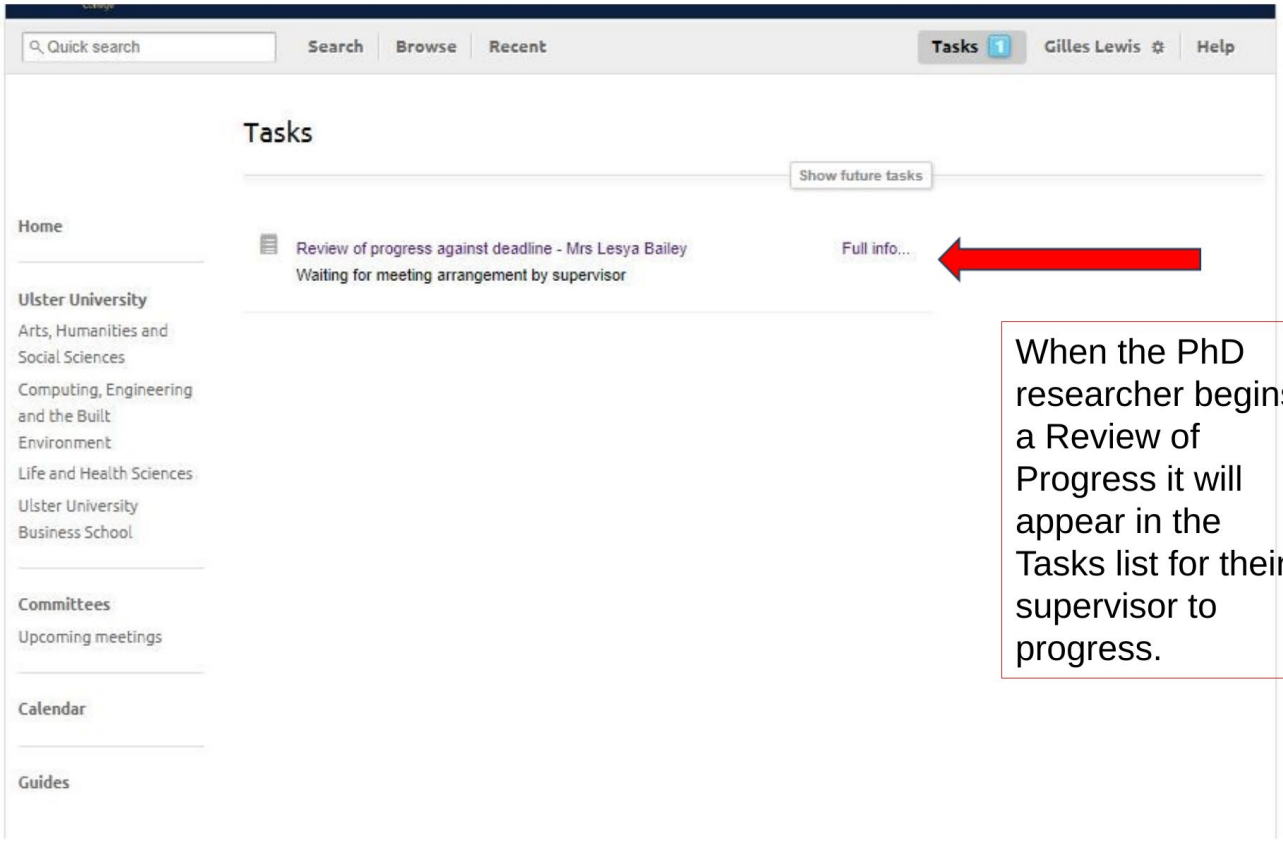
The Review will return to the supervisor to progress

Review of Progress Against Deadline

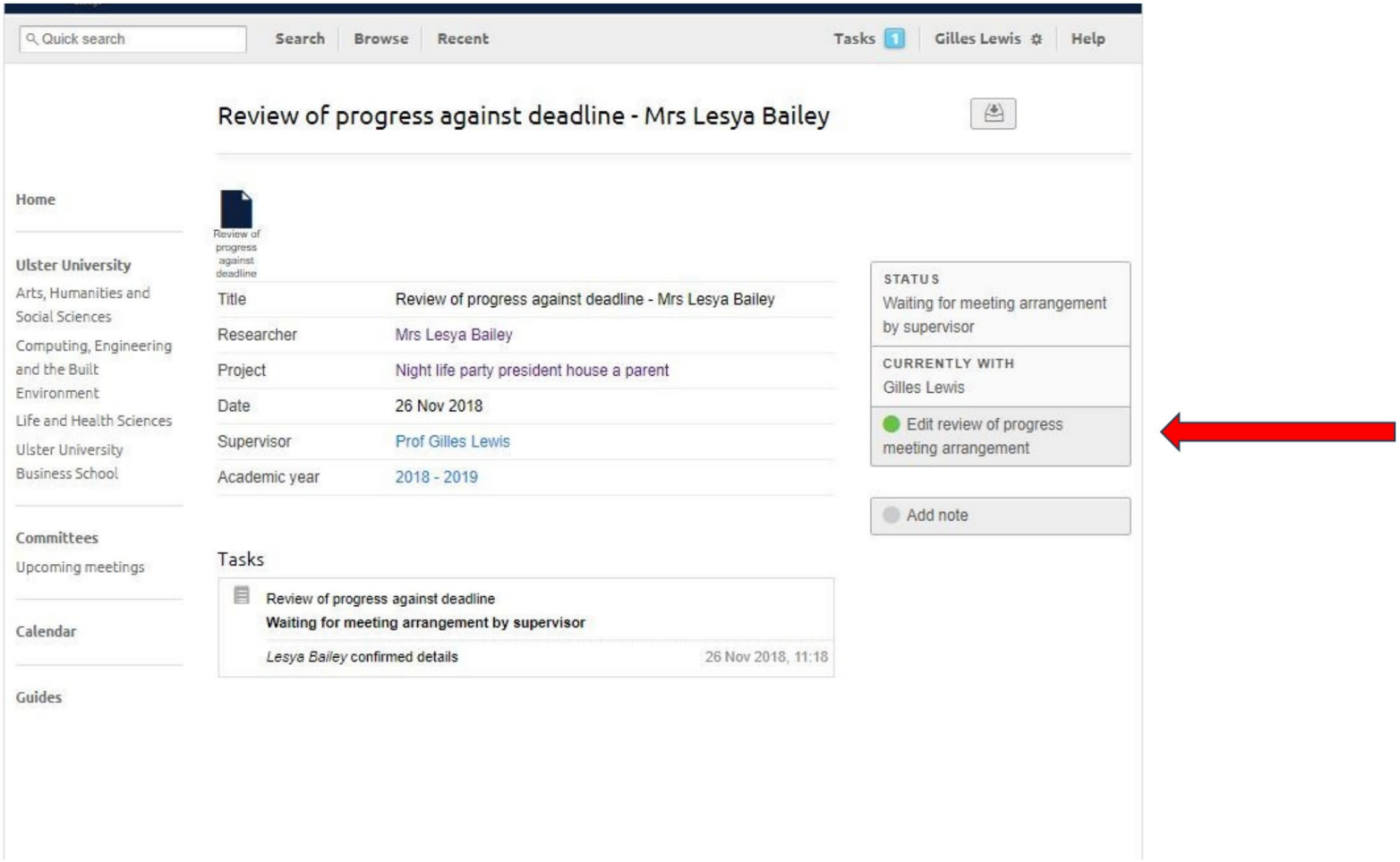
Supervisor Step-by-Step Guide

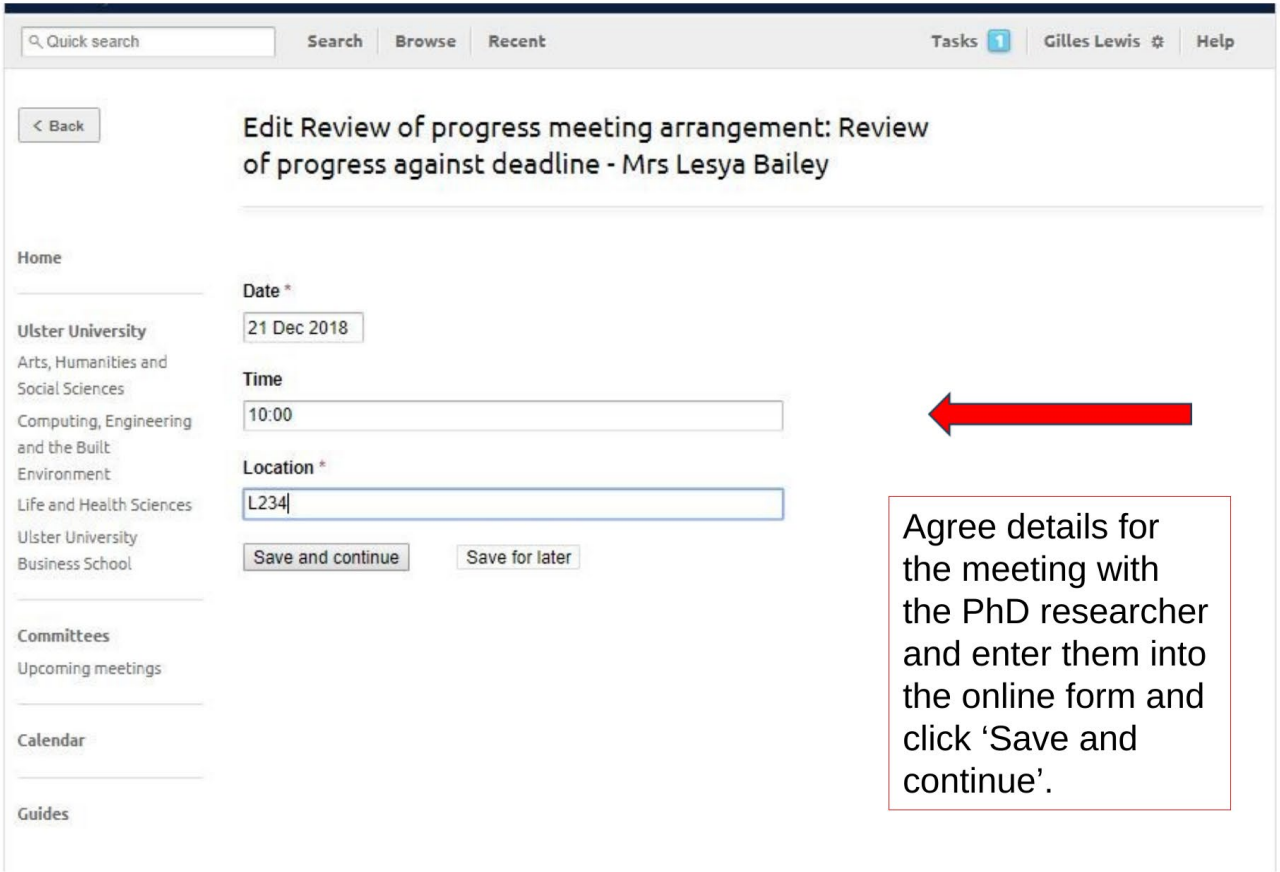
Review of Progress Against Deadline

- A Review of Progress Against Deadline meeting must be completed before any second (or subsequent) Extension of Time is requested.
- The process is initiated by the PhD researcher and is managed between the PhD researcher and supervisor/s. Other staff may also attend the ROPAD meeting e.g. Postgraduate Tutor or Research Director.

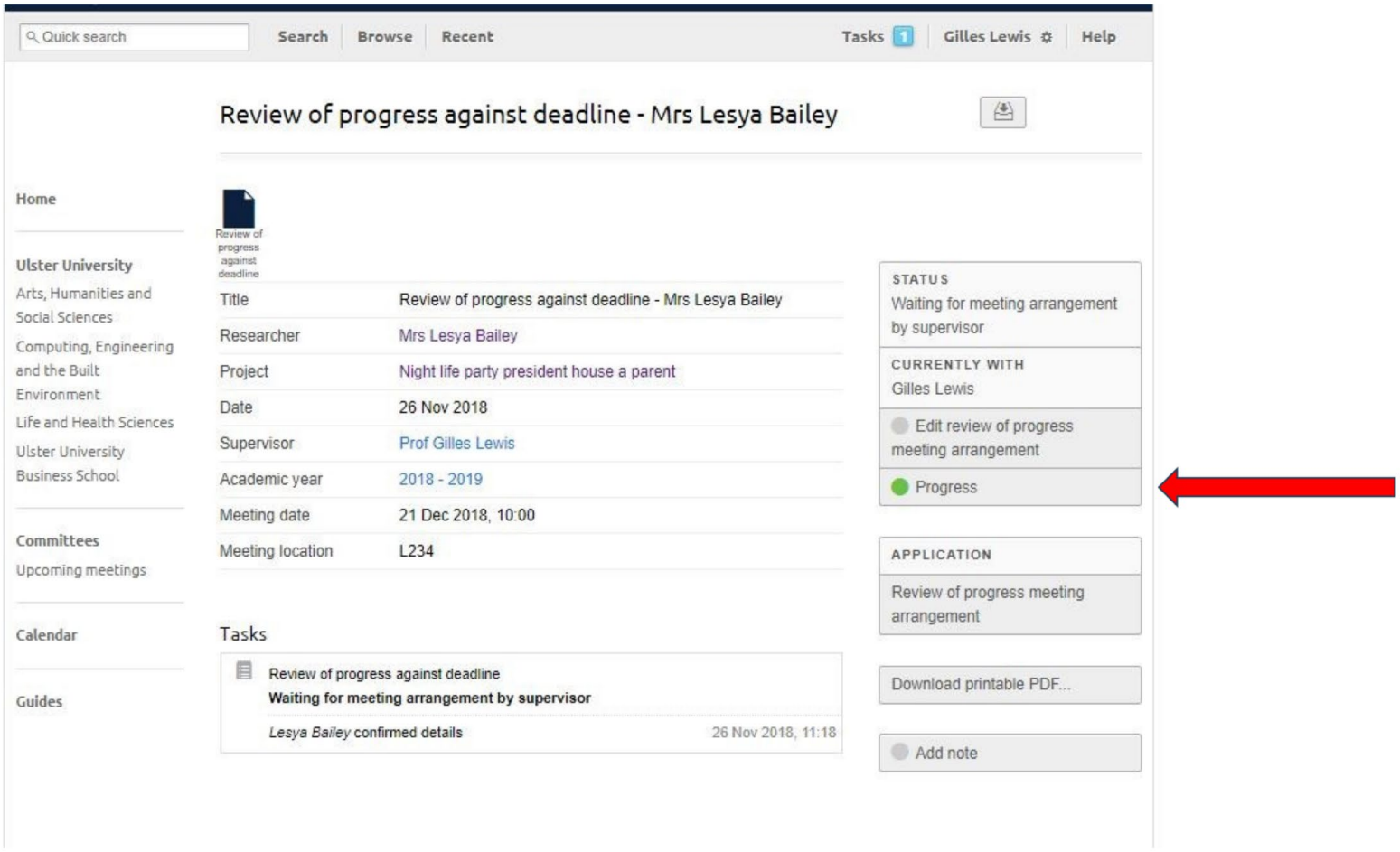


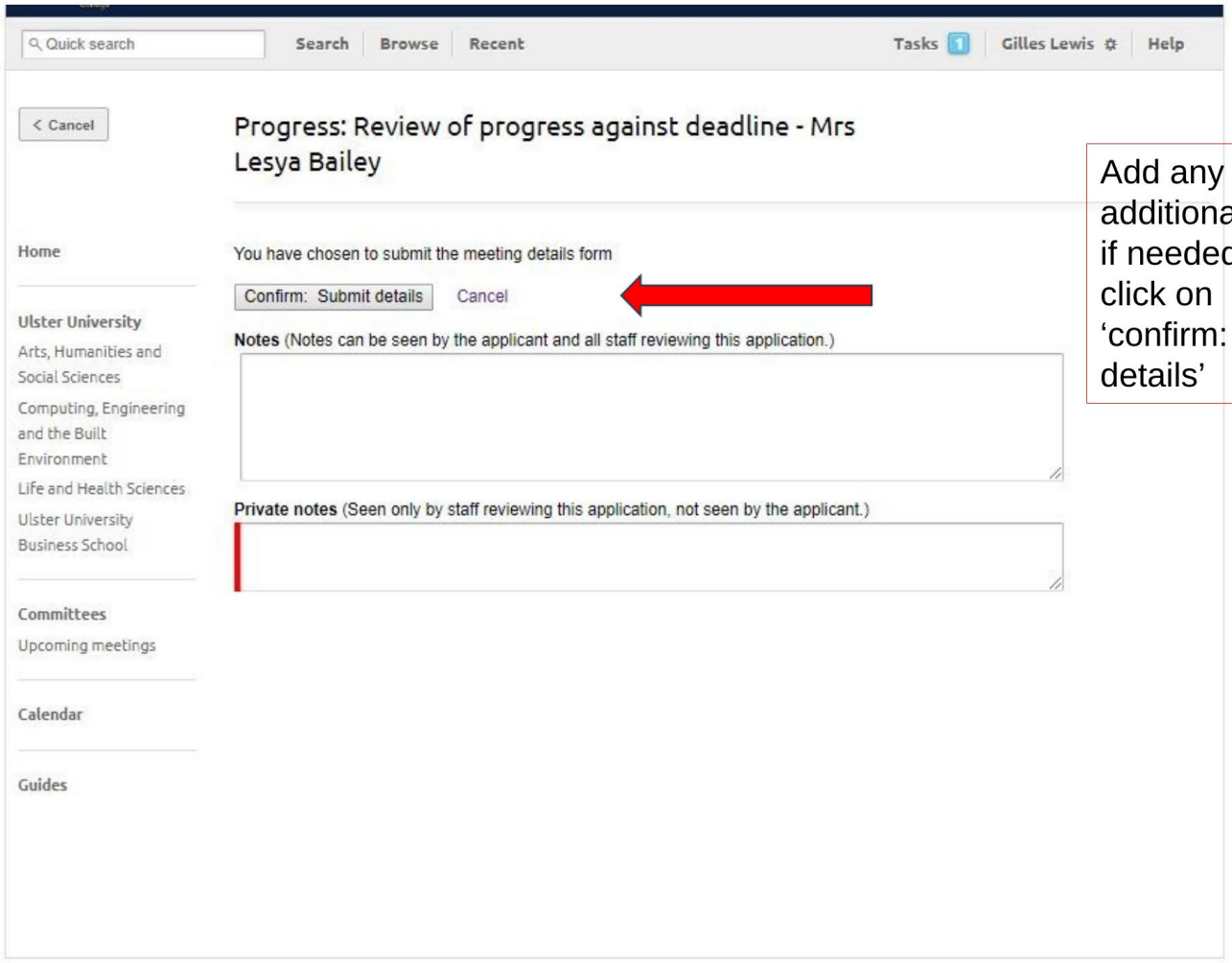
When the PhD researcher begins a Review of Progress it will appear in the Tasks list for their supervisor to progress.


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Title
Review of progress against deadline - Mrs Lesya Bailey
Researcher
Mrs Lesya Bailey
Project
Night life party president house a parent
Date
26 Nov 2018
Supervisor
Prof Gilles Lewis
Academic year
2018 - 2019
STATUS
Waiting for meeting arrangement by supervisor
CURRENTLY WITH
Gilles Lewis
Edit review of progress meeting arrangement
Add note
Tasks
Review of progress against deadline
Waiting for meeting arrangement by supervisor
Lesya Bailey confirmed details
26 Nov 2018, 11:18

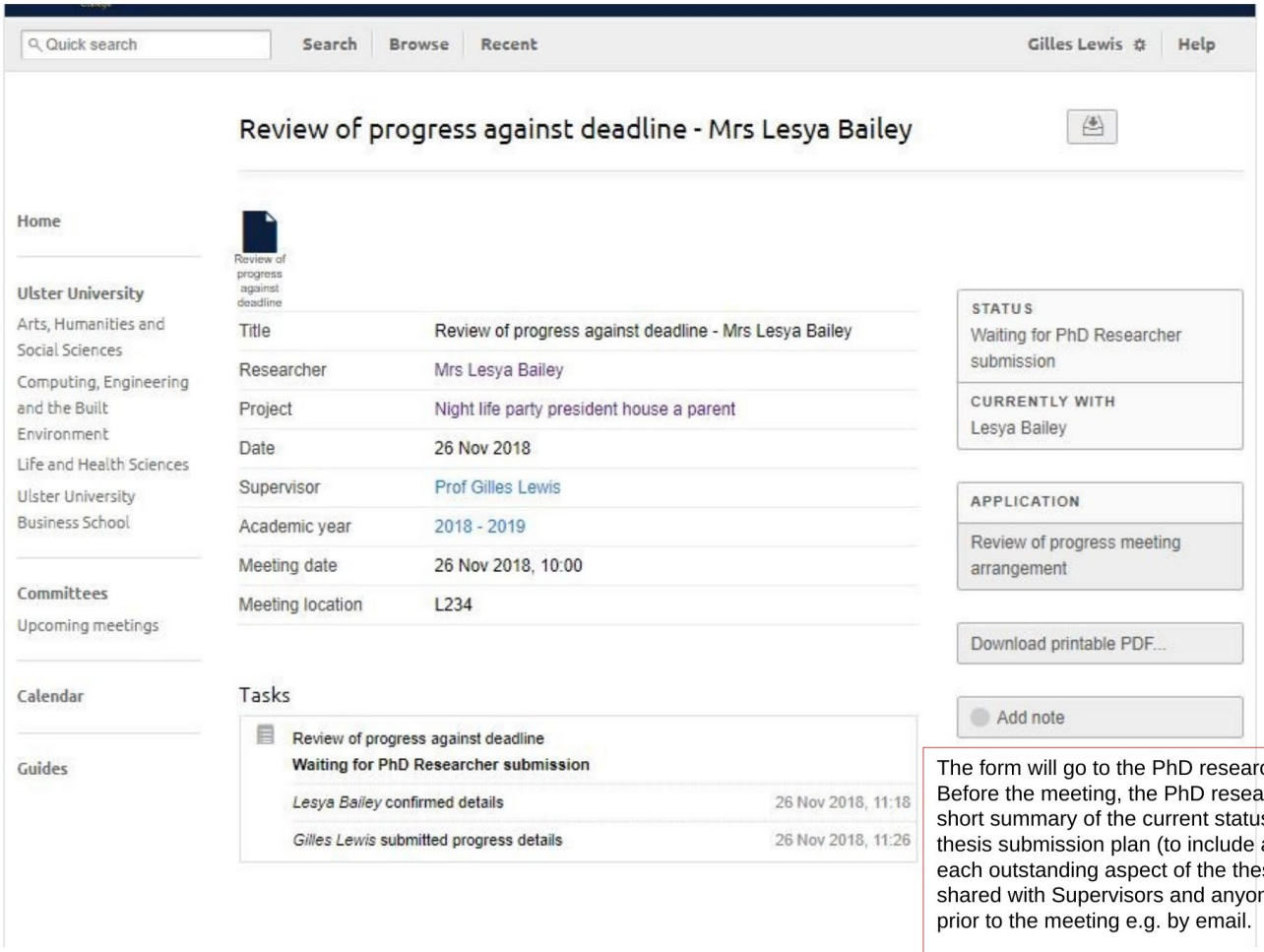


Agree details for the meeting with the PhD researcher and enter them into the online form and click ‘Save and continue’.

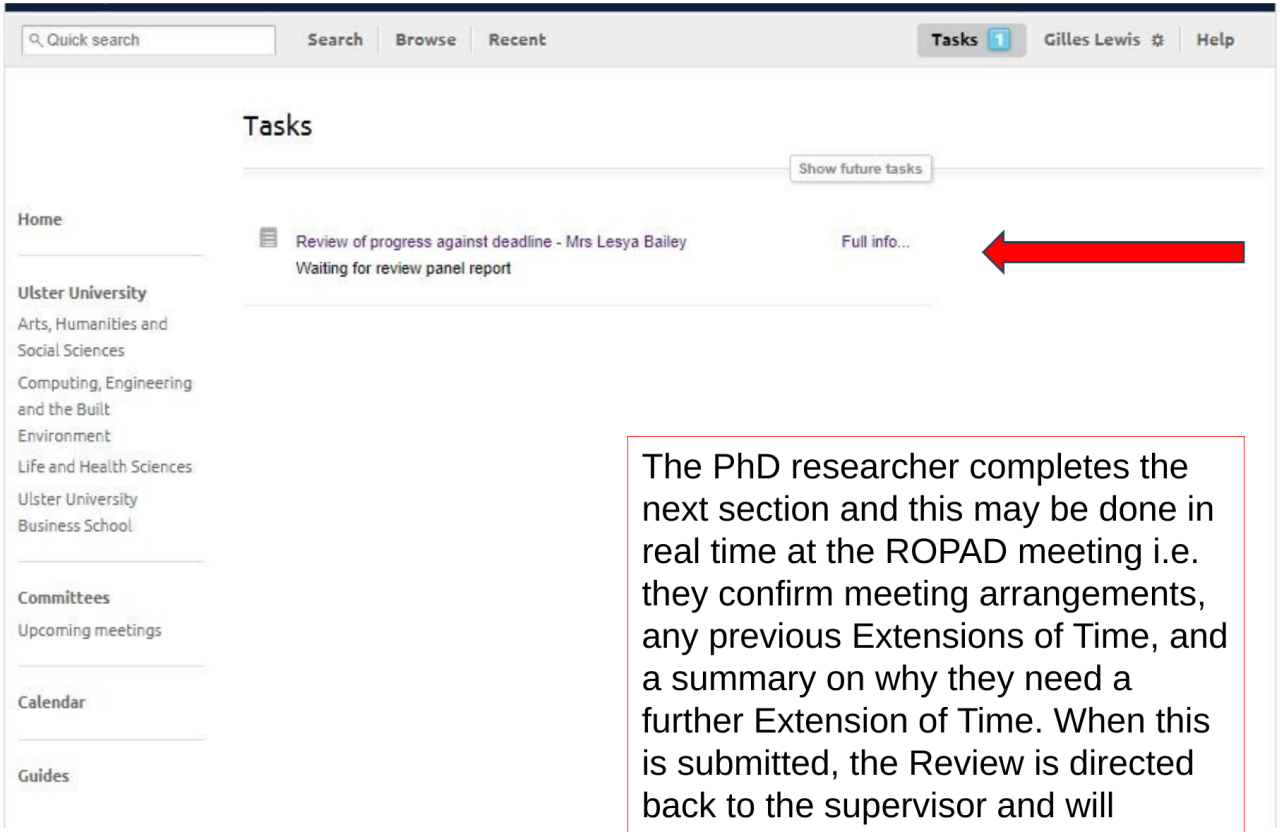

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Date
26 Nov 2018
Supervisor
Prof Gilles Lewis
Academic year
2018 - 2019
Meeting date
21 Dec 2018, 10:00
Meeting location
L234
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Waiting for meeting arrangement by supervisor
Lesya Bailey confirmed details
26 Nov 2018, 11:18
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APPLICATION
Review of progress meeting arrangement
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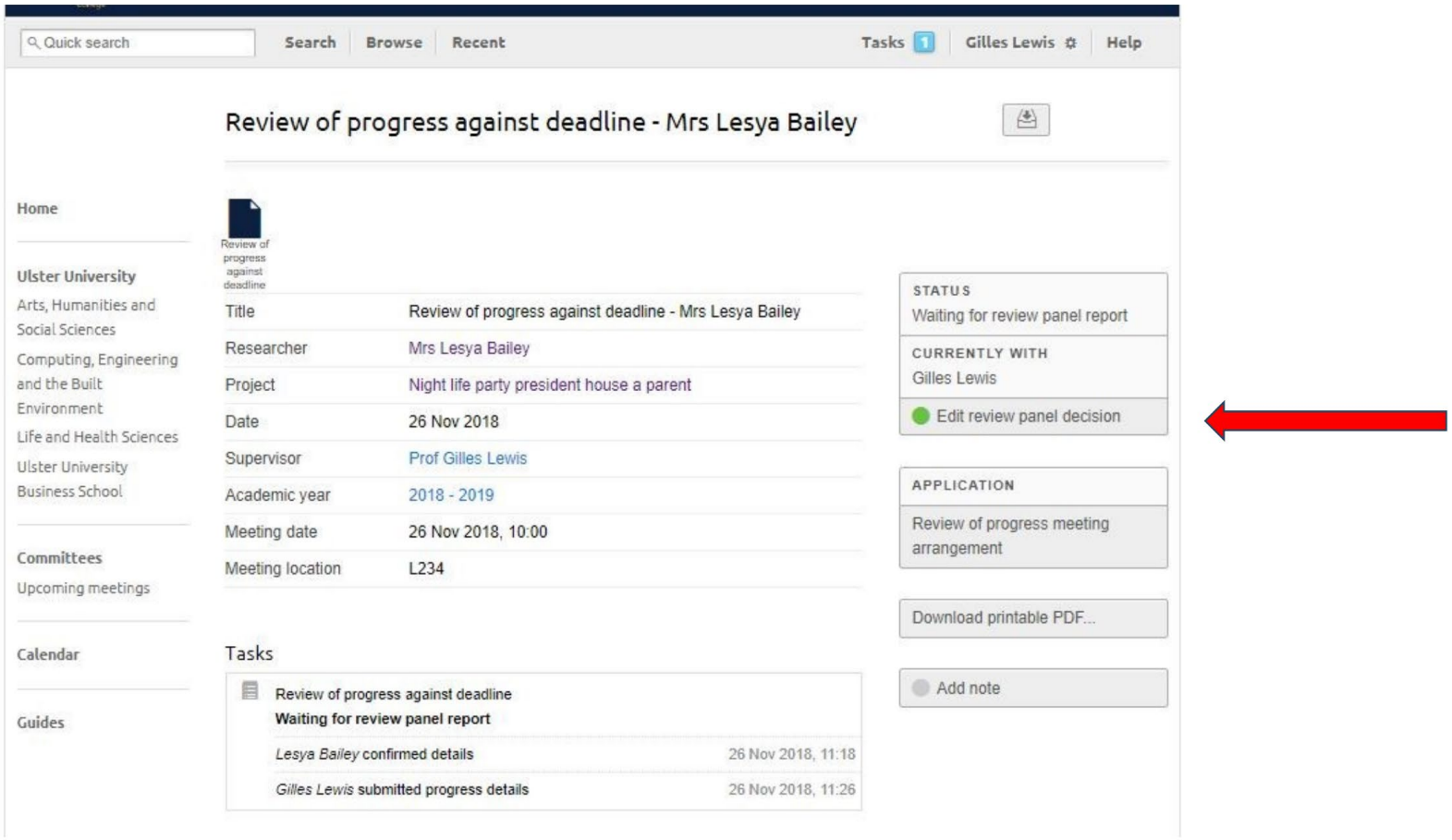
Add any additional notes if needed and click on ‘confirm: Submit details’

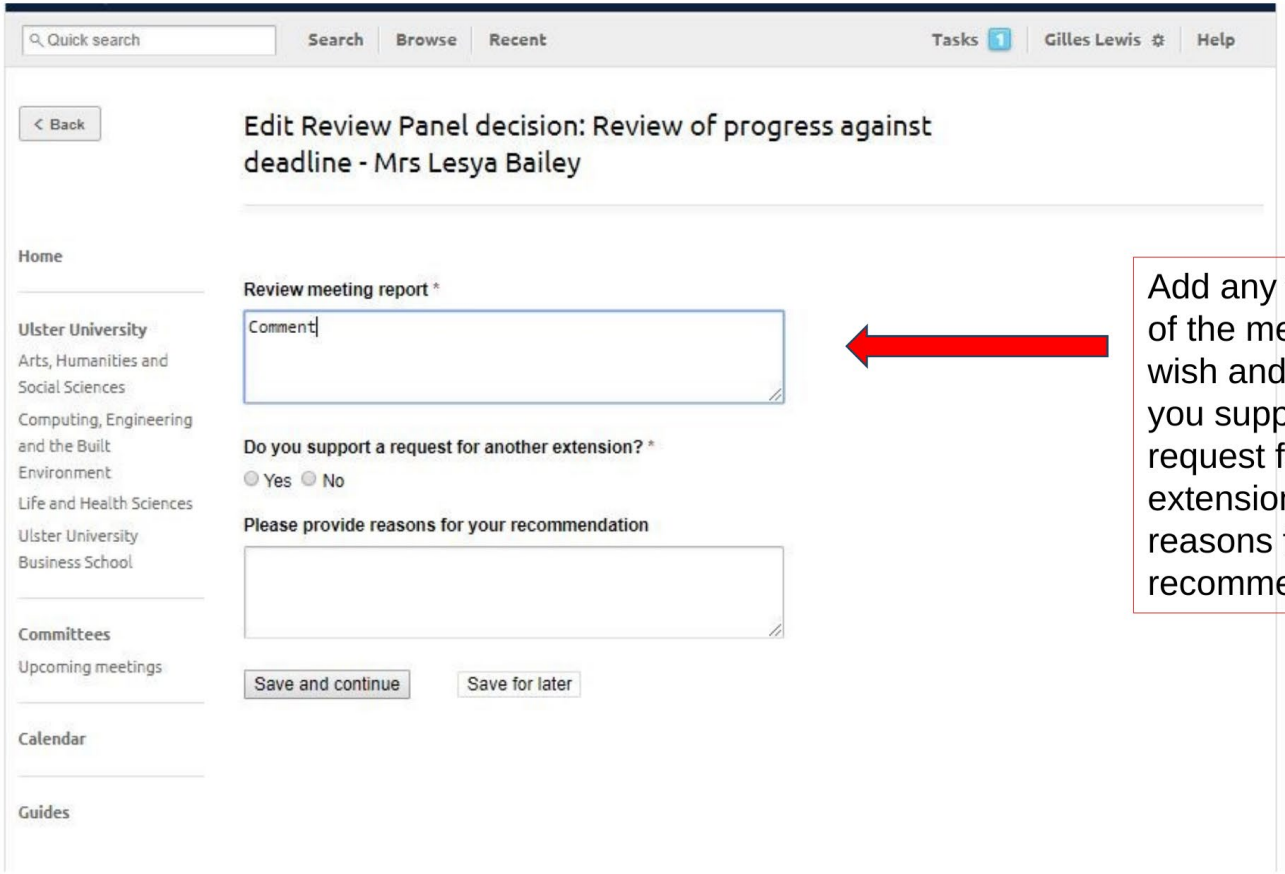


The form will go to the PhD researcher to progress further. Before the meeting, the PhD researcher should develop a short summary of the current status of the project and a thesis submission plan (to include a timeline for completion of each outstanding aspect of the thesis). These should be shared with Supervisors and anyone else attending the email prior to the meeting e.g. by email.

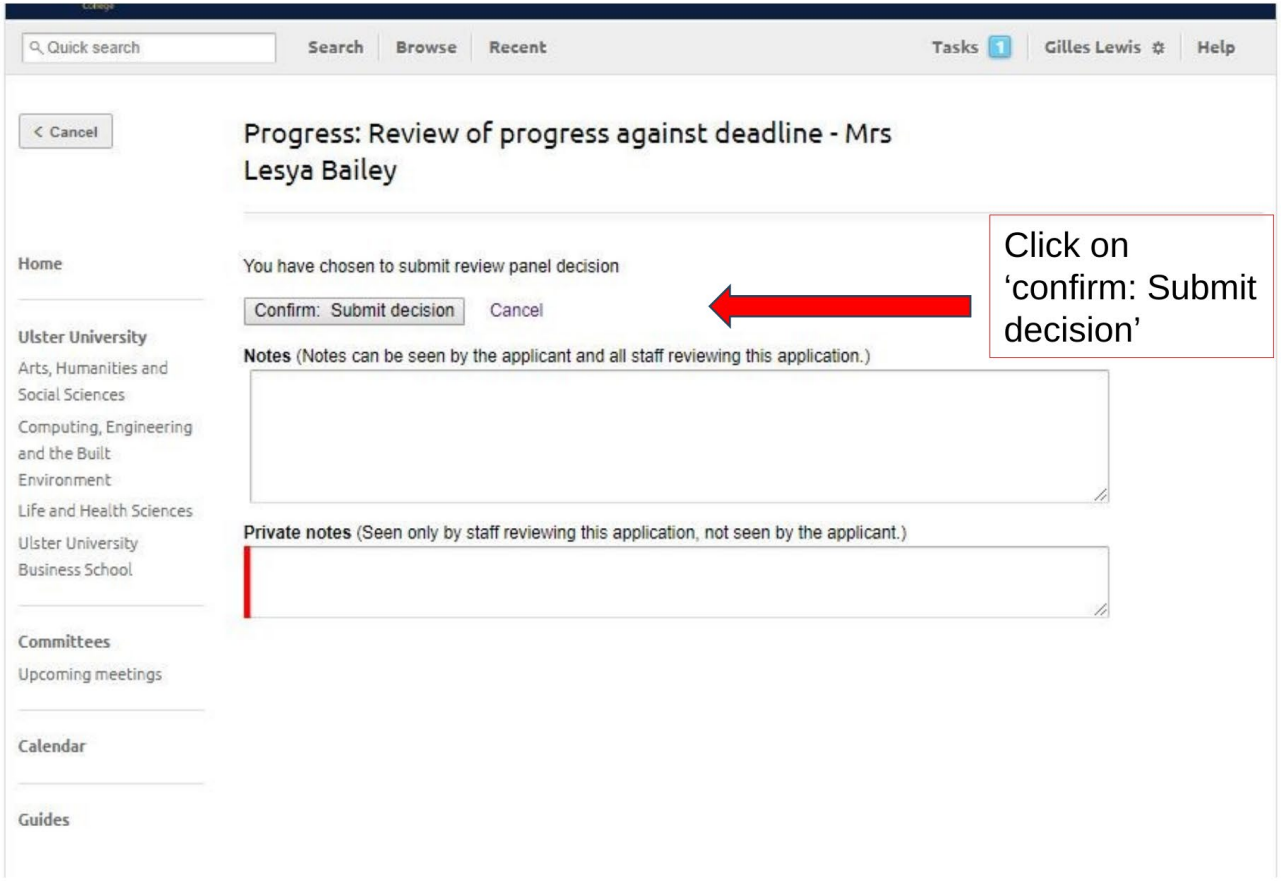


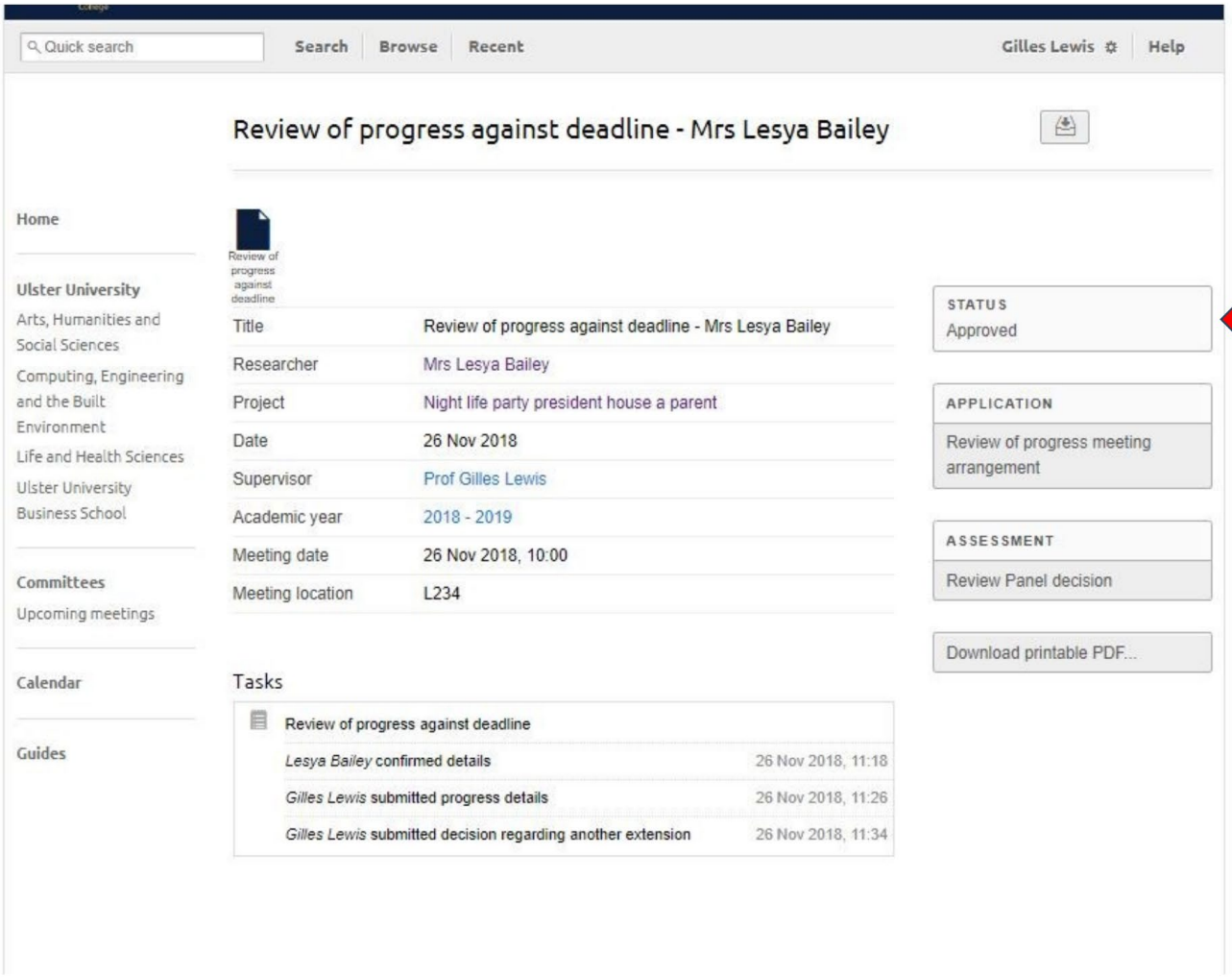
The PhD researcher completes the next section and this may be done in real time at the ROPAD meeting i.e. they confirm meeting arrangements, any previous Extensions of Time, and a summary on why they need a further Extension of Time. When this is submitted, the Review is directed back to the supervisor and will appear in the supervisor's Tasks list to progress.


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Review of progress against deadline - Mrs Lesya Bailey
Researcher
Mrs Lesya Bailey
Project
Night life party president house a parent
Date
26 Nov 2018
Supervisor
Prof Gilles Lewis
Academic year
2018 - 2019
Meeting date
26 Nov 2018, 10:00
Meeting location
L234
Tasks
Review of progress against deadline
Waiting for review panel report
Lesya Bailey confirmed details
26 Nov 2018, 11:18
Gilles Lewis submitted progress details
26 Nov 2018, 11:26
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CURRENTLY WITH
Gilles Lewis
Edit review panel decision
APPLICATION
Review of progress meeting arrangement
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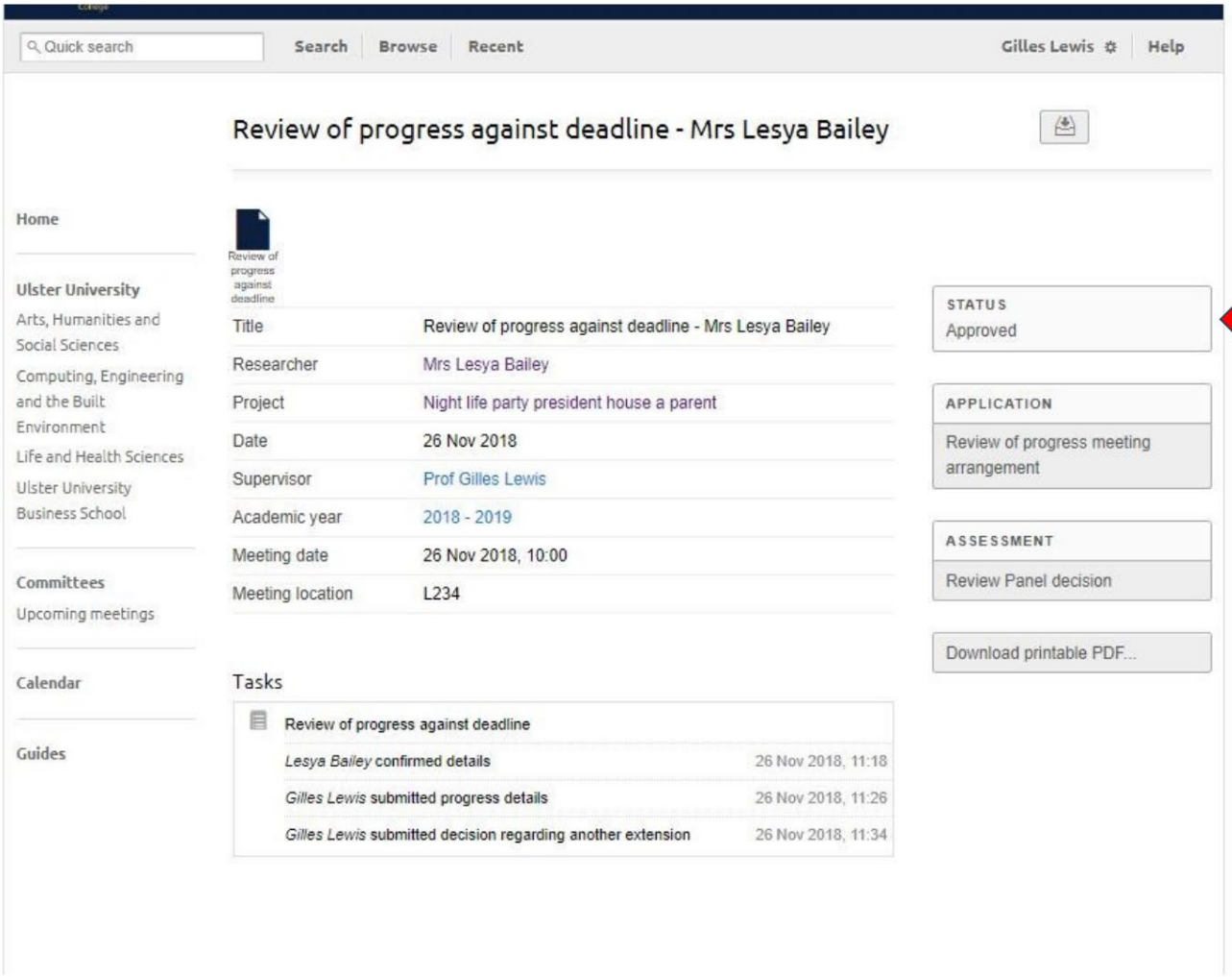


Add any further notes of the meeting if you wish and indicate if you support the request for another extension with reasons for the recommendation.


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You have chosen to submit review panel decision
Confirm: Submit decision
Cancel
Notes (Notes can be seen by the applicant and all staff reviewing this application.)
Private notes (Seen only by staff reviewing this application, not seen by the applicant.)
Click on 'confirm: Submit decision'



The process is complete and the PhD researcher will receive a notification of the outcome.



When the supervisor submits a decision, the process is complete.

Appendix 3: Checklist for Supervisors relating to Review of Progress Against Deadline (ROPAD) meeting

A) Before the ROPAD Meeting

☐ Has the meeting been scheduled with reasonable notice and at a time that takes account of PGR caring responsibilities, health needs, or religious observance, where known?

☐ Has the PGR been asked if any reasonable adjustments are required (e.g. meeting format, length, breaks, remote attendance)?

☐ Has the PGR been given clear information about the purpose of the ROPAD, possible outcomes (EoT, LoA), and any financial implications?

☐ Have relevant supervisory meeting notes, annual reports, and assessment outcomes been reviewed to understand the context of progress?

B. During the ROPAD Meeting

1. Progress and Timeline

☐ Has progress been discussed in relation to the original programme of study or last agreed project plan, recognising that progress is not always linear?

☐ Is the proposed submission timeline realistic and proportionate, taking account of circumstances that have affected progress?

2. Wellbeing and Circumstances

☐ Has the PGR been given the opportunity to discuss any circumstances impacting progress, without pressure to disclose personal information?

☐ Where applicable, have potential impacts related to disability, long-term health, mental health, caring responsibilities, pregnancy and parental responsibilities, or any other personal circumstance been considered?

3. Equality and Fairness

☐ If exceptional circumstances have been described, have these been taken into consideration with respect to progress, timelines and deadlines?

☐ Are you confident that similar cases are treated consistently within the Unit and Faculty?

4. Fees and Financial Impact (where subsequent EoT is recommended)

☐ Has the University EoT fee been discussed transparently?

☐ Have you considered if the fee could have an impact on any disclosed exceptional circumstances?

☐ If concerns have arisen, have you signposted the PGR to further advice (Student Wellbeing, Fees Office, or Doctoral College)?

5. Considering EoT vs LoA

☐ Has LoA been actively considered as an alternative where progress is not currently possible?
☐ If LoA is proposed, has the PGR been informed of expectations on return, duration of leave, implications of not returning within the agreed period?
☐ Where withdrawal could become a risk, has this been flagged with Research Director (or nominee) and advice sought from Doctoral College?

C. After the ROPAD Meeting
☐ Are the key points, agreed actions, and rationale for decisions clearly recorded on PhD Manager?
☐ Would the recorded notes clearly explain the ROPAD decision if reviewed by a third party?
☐ Does the PGR understand what they need to submit on PhD Manager (EoT or LoA), by when, and who will approve it?

D. Final Reflection
Before approving or recommending approval,
☐ Are you content the ROPAD decision as fair, reasonable, and proportionate?

In communication of the decision with the PGR, please share:
"If any of the circumstances we've discussed change, or if you feel that additional support or adjustments are required, please raise this with your Supervisory Team, Research Director (or nominee) or the Doctoral College."

Appendix 4: Checklist for approval of post ROPAD decision (EoT or LoA) by Research Director (or nominee)

Before approving the request, Research Director (or nominee) should confirm the following:

A) Progress and Process

☐ Progress has been reviewed in context, with reference to supervisory records, internal assessments and the ROPAD meeting discussion and notes.

☐ The proposed thesis submission timeline is realistic and proportionate.

B) Circumstances and Wellbeing

☐ The PGR has had the opportunity to raise any circumstances affecting progress.

☐ Where relevant, circumstances linked to health, disability, caring responsibilities, pregnancy and parental responsibilities, or other personal factors have been appropriately considered.

☐ Where relevant, support for Wellbeing has been considered and University services signposted.

C) EoT vs LoA

☐ LoA has been considered where progression is not currently feasible.

☐ The recommended route (EoT or LoA) is appropriate to the PGR circumstances.

D) Fees (where applicable)

☐ EoT fee implications have been discussed and considered as part of the ROPAD outcome.

☐ I am satisfied that the University EoT fee is appropriate and proportionate. **Or**

☐ I am satisfied that an application of a fee waiver is appropriate and proportionate. (Research Director to then complete and submit Faculty Tuition Fee Waiver)

E) Transparency and Equality

☐ I am satisfied the recommendation is consistent with comparable cases within the Unit and Faculty.