



University of Essex

# DOCTORAL CANDIDATES HIT THE GROUND RUNNING: TIMELINE MODELS IN DOCTORAL STUDY- THE UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX CASE STUDY

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**THE AWARDS**  
2018

Winner  
University of the Year

# TOWARDS A MILESTONE-BASED TIMELINE MODEL FOR DOCTORAL STUDY MODEL: CONTEXTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

- Doctoral study in the UK in early 2010s
- The Salzburg Principles and changes in the UK regulatory frameworks and recommended duration of doctoral study
- Need for a multi-purposed model: sequenced formative assessment, quality assurance mechanism, temporal framework for doctoral candidates, and informal “contract” between the candidate, those who supervise/support supervision, and the university
- To-down and bottom-up approach in consultation, development, and design



# TIMELINE OF ACTIONS

- 2016 - Introduction of Milestones documents
- 2017 – introduction of Completion rate key performance indicator
- 2018 – removal of automatic completion year
- 2021 – Mapping PGR Training (Proficio) to Vitae Research Development Framework
- 2022 – revision of Milestone documents following student feedback and consultation

**Psychology**  
Faculty of Science and Health  
PhD Students

Postgraduate Research milestones are used to ensure students are making sufficient progress during their studies, and to provide a supportive framework to guide students through the various stages of their research. The Milestones should also help to keep students on track to submit within the appropriate period. PGR supervisors should talk through the relevant milestones during supervisory [meetings](#) and they should be referred to on a regular basis.

Supervisory Panels and Research Students' Progress Boards will use the milestones to reflect on the level of progress being made, ahead of making a recommendation. Whilst the milestones are specific for each department and type of course, it is recognised that every research journey is different, and that whilst the milestones provide an overarching framework of expectations, a degree of flexibility should be given, based on the trajectory and scope of research.

Students and supervisors are encouraged to supplement these milestones with individual research plans which take into account the specifics of an individual research project and the individual circumstances of the PGR students

**Year 1 (Full time)**  
**Year 1 and 2 (Part time)**

| Milestone                                    | Requirement   | Term to undertake work |    |
|--|---|------------------------|----|
|  |   | FT                     | PT |
| <b>Ahead of the first Supervisory Panel</b>  |   |                        |    |
| M1   | Assess training needs and knowledge required to undertake research project and complete the thesis.<br><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training Needs Analysis to be completed.</li> <li>Attend Proficio courses and plan for further courses to attend, as appropriate.</li> </ul>  | 1                      | 2  |
|  |   | 3                      | 6  |
| <b>Ahead of the second Supervisory Panel</b> |   |                        |    |
| M2   | Choose/narrow down the research topic and demonstrate significance/impact of research.<br><br>Submit <a href="#">10,000 word</a> report or equivalent including, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Central research problem/questions to be answered.</li> <li>Methodological considerations.</li> <li>Feasibility Report – identifying sources, <a href="#">appsg</a> and ethical considerations.</li> <li>Project plan, outlining objectives for each stage.</li> </ul> | 3                      | 6  |
| M3   | Demonstration of effective project management through the setting of research goals and prioritisation of activities.<br><br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a detailed, realistic plan of work/ timetable for Year 2.</li> <li>Produce Supervisory Panel report written in a clear and self-reflective style.</li> <li>Commence data collection, if appropriate.</li> </ul>  | 3                      | 6  |
| M4   | Demonstration of presentation skills<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present at PGR conference in May.</li> </ul>   | 3                      | 6  |

# WHAT DOES THIS MILESTONE-BASED MODEL DESIGN DO?

- Built on scalar expectancy theory, insights about processing of temporal intervals, and processing of feedback loops
- Ensures accountability
- Enables doctoral candidates to be active participants (with a framework)
- Takes into account discipline-specific requirements and sequencing, concurrent timing in quantitative-qualitative research, and other variables
- Is supported by and interacts with the researcher development framework (Vitae)



# THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING MODELS BASED ON IDEAL TEMPORAL PROGRESSION

- How much can any model, or trajectory, be considered “ideal”, given the vicissitudes of doctoral education?
- How much flexibility to the framework should there be?
- When is it appropriate to be flexible?
- How do we support specific groups of students (disabilities, carers, those with extenuating circumstances, etc.)? When is it appropriate to stretch the timeline?

