



PhD Round table School of Healthcare Sciences

Professor Rhiannon Tudor Edwards and Professor Dyfrig Hughes

3rd May 2018

This event was coordinated by the Centre for Health Economics and Medicines Evaluation (CHEME) open to all PhD students and early career supervisors across the School

Purpose

Students, funders, supervisors and HEIs benefit from timely completion of PhDs. Whether undertaken full-time or part-time, PhDs can take longer than anticipated. This event was held as an opportunity for students and early career researchers to discuss barriers to timely completion of PhDs, what HEIs can do to help ensure timely completion of PhDs and what students and early career supervisors might do differently in the future. The event was coordinated by Professor Rhiannon Tudor Edwards and Professor Dyfrig Hughes, who offered their perspective based on their experience of acting as external examiners at many HEIs across the UK.

Attendees

The event was attended by 16 delegates - 11 PhD students and 5 early career supervisors.

Reasons for delay in timely completion of PhDs – PGR student views:

- Data collection
- Ethics x3
- Reliance on other researchers/institutions/centres
- Methodological issues
- Family problems
- Motivation
- Inaccessibility of supervisors
- Adequate time for part time PhD/work tasks and admin x2
- Time management and distractions
- Support
- Skills
- Identifying research questions
- Not working hard enough
- Waiting on responses from other teams
- Not knowing what is expected of you
- Anxiety and health reasons
- Failed trial
- Poor analysis skills
- Enthusiasm waning due to other tasks (work after bursary ended)

Reasons for delay in timely completion of PhDs –ECR supervisor comments:

- Unclear of narrative
- Distractions
- Unclear or unmet deadlines – not being told of them
- Poor time-management
- Hands off supervision
- Expectations – poor understanding of how long finishing off takes
- Ethics – unexpected delays x3
- Time – supervisor time to give feedback x3
- Lack of sense of urgency
- Supervisor and student need to have a sense of what they want to achieve
- Lack of time/current workload
- Documents not being circulated in advance
- Procedures within University ie KESS forms
- Breakdown in communication
- Change in research plan/direction
- Procrastination

Reasons for timely progress of PhDs – PGR student comments:

- Committed time – ie not having to work and study
- Self-belief in “you know this” or “my opinion is as valid as any”
- Keep focused on key purpose of study topic
- Routine
- Prioritisation x2
- Reading the literature
- Time management and planning x3
- Formal timelines for outside centres
- Cut off dates for trying new ideas
- Better training to use unfamiliar systems
- Peer support/student network
- Better contact with supervisor
- Be more structured
- Doctorate title
- Be able to progress quicker in academic career
- If supervisor was attentive to personal issues and proactive
- Less detailed planning being required – chapter plans take up too much time
- Flexi working encouraged

Reasons for timely progress of PhDs – ECR supervisor comments:

- Pick a topic that motivates you
- Plan your time
- Write even when you don't want to
- Gantt chart
- Regular meetings x2
- Agreement over turnaround time for drafts and feedback
- Make a plan and stick to it x2
- Don't be afraid to ask for help
- Sticking to deadlines x3
- Peer support
- Regular review of literature
- Presenting work at conferences
- Microsoft project management
- Communication and clarity/honesty of progress
- Better use of supervision – set structure/agenda and purpose of meeting x3
- More frequent drafting and written work
- More student training budget for courses
- Communication

Three things you would do differently after attending this round table event – PGR student comments:

- Analysis plan
- Start introduction
- Read regulations x5
- Set up supervisions for the year ahead
- Keep a log of activities x3
- More detailed chapter plan x2
- Focus on tasks to be completed in year 1
- Be more focused on PhD as a research training programme
- Improve note taking at meetings x2
- Think about examiner process
- Be honest with supervisors
- Stick to promises of sending drafts
- Spend time wisely
- Encourage more engagement from other researchers in PhD
- Try and force a better relationship with supervisor
- Think about linking from one chapter to another
- Attend more courses
- Contact supervisor once a week

Three things you would do differently after attending this round table event – ECR supervisor comments:

- Encourage students to publish as they go
- Ensure comments are returned in a timely manner
- Look out for updated regulations
- Circulate holiday regulations as some colleagues don't know allowance
- Think about potential examiners earlier in the process
- Keep better meeting logs
- More time reviewing early drafts
- Better and clearer communication
- Re-read the regulations
- Encourage student to research their viva examiners
- Request new style of meeting log from student
- Suggest student starts writing up methods earlier
- Make viva preparation part of PhD preparation
- Do not underestimate time to format and print
- Ask student to read and get a proof reader for thesis

Summary comments

Feedback from students and ECR supervisors point to need for continued efforts to improve the quality of the supervisory relationship, managing expectations, sticking to deadlines for both submission of drafts by students and feedback from supervisors. Increased attention to regulations, structure and an awareness of the PhD process as a research training process featured in our discussions. Looking forward students and ECR supervisors seemed keen to build the day-to-day quality of the supervisory relationship introducing learning logs, encouraging publication and ensuring pace with the thesis progression, with an eye to the viva process, practice vivas and a collaborative choice of examiners.