

University of Essex

Postgraduate Taught Programme Credit Framework

Academic Year 2025 - 2026

1. What programmes are covered by the Postgraduate Taught Credit Framework?

The Postgraduate Taught Programme Credit Framework covers the following awards: Masters degrees, PG Diplomas, PG Certificates, Integrated Masters degrees (Final Stage only).

For Graduate Diploma and Graduate Certificate which take place subsequent to undergraduate study but are not postgraduate in Level see the [Undergraduate Principles and Framework](#).

2. Principles of the Credit Framework

The Rules of Assessment operate from a framework of higher education qualifications, which work on fundamental underlying principles. These principles can be explained as follows:

2.1) Levels of Study

Levels (defined in the National Qualifications Framework) are an expression of the intellectual demand placed on the learner at different Years of study, or the difficulty of the concepts to be engaged with and skills required at each Year. Level descriptors are guides that help identify the relative demand, complexity and depth of learning and learner autonomy expected at each Level, and also indicate the differences between the Levels.

If qualifications share the same Level this means that they are broadly similar in terms of the demand they place on the learner. Information in Programme Specifications and modules will be expressed in terms of Levels.

Level 7 equates to Masters' Level outcomes.

2.2) Learning Outcomes and Assessment

These identify what a successful student is expected to know and understand, together with the skills that they should be able to demonstrate on successful completion of the award. Learning outcomes can be attached to both modules and awards. It is the achievement of the learning outcomes that is important for the award of credit, not how or where the learning took place, nor how it was assessed, nor how long it actually took. Students usually demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes of a module, programme or qualification by completing one or more pieces of assessed work. To be awarded the credits, a student must reach the minimum standard, known as the pass mark. The pass mark is published in the Rules of Assessment for the award.

2.3) Credit

Credit is an indicator of equivalence of workload. Credit value attaches to learning outcomes, and the achievement of these outcomes (evidenced by gaining at least a pass mark in the required assessments) allows the award of credit. For this reason, a credit rating is attached to each module, and these accumulate to allow awards (evidence of both volume and Level of study) to be made. Credits are transportable and can be transferred between institutions, according to their rules of assessment. The credit lifetime for any module is six years.

Some modules have variations to the generic rules which must also be achieved to be awarded the credit. These variations could for example, take the form of a higher pass mark or have an additional requirement to pass individual parts of assessment such as an exam. In such cases, the additional requirement(s) must be met for credit to be awarded.

Students usually demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes of a module programme, or qualification by completing one or more pieces of assessed

work. To be awarded the credits, a student must reach the minimum standard, known as the pass mark. The pass mark is normally 50 at Level 7, but any variations will be set out in the Rules of Assessment for the programme. The pass mark for Level 5 and 6 modules on the Graduate Diploma and Certificate is 40, as these awards are not at masters' Level. Any variations will need to be approved and will be published in the Rules of Assessment for the programme.

2.4) The amount of credit which is required for Postgraduate Qualifications

Programmes must comprise the following number of credits. Any variations would need approval:

Award	Credits Needed
Masters' degree	180 Level 7 credits Where students are taking Programmes which include modules with different credit weightings (see 2.5 below), an upper level of 185/190 Level 7 credits will be permitted).
Integrated Masters (4 years)	120 Level 7 credits (and 360 credits at Undergraduate Levels – see Undergraduate Credit Framework).
Integrated Masters (5 years)	120 Level 7 credits (and 480 credits at Undergraduate Levels – see Undergraduate Credit Framework).
PG Diploma	120 Level 7 credits.
PG Certificate	60 Level 7 credits.

The University has also approved programmes at Masters' Level which comprise the following number of credits:

Award	Credits Needed
MRES degree¹:	360 Level 7 credits
MFA degree²:	300 Level 7 credits

Details of the permitted amount of condonement of failed credits are stated in the Rules of Assessment.

A full-time Masters programme comprising 180 credits is normally 12 months long (ie. not an academic year of only three terms)³ Variations would need approval.

2.5) Credit Weightings of modules

The University's preferred model is:

Full-year modules: 30 credits

Half-year modules: 15 credits

When the Credit Framework was introduced in 2007/08 departments were permitted to opt for an alternative model which had to be applied to all programmes run by the department:

Full-year modules: 40 credits

Half-year modules: 20 credits

The workload for a 40 credit modules must be greater than for a 30 credit modules (the same applies for 20 and 15 credit modules).

¹ This is an example of a programmes approved in Government.

² This is an example of a programmes approved in East 15.

³ Full-time professional Masters' programmes in Health and Human Sciences are 24 months long.

10-credit modules are also permitted in departments which are operating the 20/40 credit model, but the Deputy Dean (Education) is required to give approval for their inclusion in programmes.

Departments running 20/40 credit modules (including those offering 10 credit modules) must ensure that if a programme's structure permits students to take an option from another department with 30/15 credit modules, a minimum of 180 credits will still be undertaken.

2.6) Credit Weighting of the Dissertation or equivalent

All Masters' programmes must comprise a dissertation or equivalent element which must be passed. Dissertation or equivalent credit weightings must normally be between 60 credits (one third of the total) and 90 credits (one half).⁴

2.7) Exit Awards

Students who register for an award but have to withdraw from the University, or who do not meet the requirements for the main award, may be considered by the Examination Board for an exit award. Depending on the structure of the programmes, and the elements they have passed, the student might be eligible for a PG Diploma or a PG Certificate if they are enrolled on a Masters programme. If they are enrolled on a PG Diploma, or in the Final Stage of an Integrated Masters' programmes, they might be eligible for a PG Certificate.

The title of the exit award will be the same as for the main programmes, unless a different title has been approved in order to meet Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body requirements.

⁴ Requests to introduce dissertations outside of this credit range would need to be approved as part of the process for introducing new courses and modules or making changes to academic provision. These would not be treated as variations to the Rules of Assessment.

Students can be considered for the award of a Distinction and Merit for an exit award.

2.8) Professional Body Requirements

On programmes which are subject to professional body regulations it should be noted that more stringent requirements may be imposed by the professional body for the purposes of professional qualification and accreditation.

2.9) Maximum Period of Study

The maximum period of study is set from the date a student is first admitted to a taught postgraduate programme. This is the longest period of time that a student can take to complete the award. It is based on the normal length of the course plus one or more additional years. Unless there are exceptional reasons, periods of intermission will count towards the original maximum period.

Table 2.1 (next page) sets out the maximum periods of student for all postgraduate taught awards.

2.10) Modular Study

The Postgraduate Rules of Assessment are only applied to students once they have registered on a programme leading to an award.

Students studying for an individual module(s) may have one second attempt at assessment per module taken. Once a student registers on a programme of study, the limits on the volume of credits in the Rules of Assessment relating to second attempts are applied. Condonement of failure cannot be applied at the module Level; modules are either passed and credit awarded, or failed and no credit is awarded. Once a student registers on a programme of study, the Rules of Assessment relating to condonement may be applied from that point onwards.

The maximum period for completion of modular study should be a period of six years for a master's degree (normally five years to complete all taught elements and a further one year to complete the dissertation or equivalent). The maximum period of study would be measured from the point at which a student first registered for a module that was being used towards the award.

Table 2.1: Maximum Periods for Postgraduate Taught Awards

Qualification	Credits required	Normal length of programme	Maximum period of study
Masters' degree	180 Level 7 credits Where students are taking courses which include modules with different credit weightings (see 2.5 below), an upper Level of 185/190 Level 7 credit credits will be permitted)	12 months (full time)	2 years (full time)
Masters' degree	180 Level 7 credits	18 months (full-time)	3 years (full-time)
Masters' degree	180 Level 7 credits	18 months (part-time)	3 years (part-time)
Masters' degree	See individual programme rules of assessment	24 months (full time)	4 years (full time)
Masters' degree (24 months, part time)	180 Level 7 credits	24 months (part time)	4 years (part time)

Masters' degree with a professional placement	300 Level 7 credits	24 months (full time)	3 years (full time)
Masters' Top-up degree	90 Level 7 credits	12 months (part time)	2 years (part-time)
Masters' degree (36 months, part time)	180 Level 7 credits (and 120 credits at Undergraduate Level for some programmes)	36 months (part time)	5 years (part time)
Masters' degree (48 months, part time)	180 Level 7 credits (and 120 credits at Undergraduate level)	48 months (part time)	6 years (part time)
MRES degree (12 months)	180 Level 7 credits	12 months (full time)	2 years (full time)
MRES degree (24 months)	360 Level 7 credits	24 months (full time)	4 years (full time)
MFA degree	300 Level 7 credits	24 months (full time)	4 years (full time)

Integrated Masters (4 years)	120 Level 7 credits (and 360 credits at Undergraduate Levels – see Undergraduate Credit Framework)	4 years (full time)	6 years (full time)
Integrated Masters (5 years)	120 Level 7 credits (and 480 credits at Undergraduate Levels – see Undergraduate Credit Framework)	5 years (full time)	7 years (full time)
PG Diploma	120 Level 7 credits	9 months (full time)	2 years (full time)
PG Certificate	60 Level 7 credits	9 months (full time)	2 years (full time)

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