

# Masters by Research Assessment Process

## Guide for Candidates on the MSc Biological Sciences by Research Programme

### Assessment

- Dissertation – 180 credits
- Taught components – must be passed by 50% overall in order to qualify for the award

### Dissertation requirements

- The deadline for the submission of the dissertation has been set by the Department of Biological Sciences. It is mid-September (for 2024/25 the deadline is 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2025).
- A word limit of 20,000 words has been set by the Department of Biological Sciences for the dissertation. This includes in-text citations, footnotes and endnotes but excludes the bibliography and appendices etc.
- Details of the required format can be found in the [Guidance on the Format of the Masters by Research Dissertation](#).
- The dissertation should:
  - (a) synthesise knowledge from the subject or discipline and apply it to suitable research problems, hypotheses or research questions;
  - (b) provide a critical discussion of relevant major theories, debates and concepts;
  - (c) demonstrate the capacity to design and carry out an independent research project using appropriate research methods and utilizing suitable skills and techniques;
  - (d) undertake a clear analysis of the results of the project, and show informed and critical use of theories and concepts to interrogate these results/findings;
  - (e) provide a reasoned and coherent account of the main findings and their significance;
  - (f) display good presentation and referencing skills.

### Entry to the examination of the dissertation

The entry form for Masters by Research examination should be completed and signed by the candidate, the supervisor and the Director of the Programme and then forwarded to the Director of Postgraduate Education in the School of Life Sciences and the Environment two months before the submission of the dissertation. Once the entry form is approved, then the Director of Postgraduate Education will send it to the Doctoral School. This allows time for the examiners to be approved and invited before the dissertation is submitted.

### Submission of the dissertation

- The dissertation should be submitted by mid-September (for 2024/25 the deadline is 22 September 2025).
- An electronic copy of the dissertation should be emailed to [doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk) (except in cases where agreement is in place for a restriction of access for reasons of confidentiality, commercial sensitivity or patents).
- A [Declaration of number of words](#) form, signed by the candidate and the supervisor, should be submitted with the dissertation.

### Assessment of the dissertation

- A random sample of dissertations will be submitted to Turnitin to check for originality before being dispatched to the examiners.
- The dissertation will be examined by both an internal examiner, who may have acted as the dissertation supervisor for the candidate, and an external examiner.

- It is expected that an oral examination (viva) would not normally be required for a Masters by Research. However, the examiners do have the option to request this if deemed appropriate. A viva is a requirement if the examiners are considering a 'Resubmission' or a 'Fail' outcome.
- If an oral examination is required:
  - this will be organised by the candidate's supervisor.
  - the candidate must bring a copy of the dissertation with them which is identical in format to the dissertation submitted to the department for assessment.

### Outcome of the assessment

- For first submissions, there are 3 possible outcomes:
  - Pass
  - Pass with corrections within 6 weeks
  - Resubmission within 6 months - a viva is required before this outcome can be handed
- a) If your examiners decide you should complete some minor corrections before the Masters by Research can be awarded, the Doctoral School will contact you upon receipt of your outcome to inform you. The Doctoral School will confirm your 6-week deadline and the nominated examiner to check your corrections, as well as forwarding your list of amendments.

NB. Please note that if your supervisor was your internal examiner, they won't be in charge of checking your corrections.

By your deadline, please forward your amended dissertation to your nominated examiner with an accompanying document explaining how you have undertaken the corrections (copying in the Doctoral School and your supervisor).

Your examiner is expected to confirm whether you have completed all the necessary corrections to their satisfaction within 2 weeks. If they are unable to do so, the Doctoral School will let you know when to expect to hear their decision.

If, after minor corrections, the dissertation still fails to meet the requirements of the Masters by Research degree, the examiners will normally recommend offering the candidate the option to resubmit the dissertation within 6 months for a second and final time.

- b) If your examiners are considering a resubmission as an outcome, then we will contact your supervisor so that they can organise a suitable time for the viva. NB. the viva will be recorded.

If following the viva your examiners decide to ask for a resubmission, your outcome will be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Education in your School for approval. If they approve, then we will inform you of the outcome officially, confirming your 6-month deadline.

By your deadline, please forward your amended dissertation to your nominated examiner with an accompanying document explaining how you have undertaken the corrections (copying in the Doctoral School and your supervisor). A resubmission fee of £155 will be charged.

Following resubmission, the following outcomes are available to the examiners:

- Pass
- Pass with corrections within 6 weeks
- Fail - a viva is required before this outcome can be handed

Students who fail to submit or resubmit the dissertation by the required deadline will normally have their registration with the College terminated. The College Board of Examiners will not follow the formal warning procedure.

The taught components must be passed in order to qualify for the award.

### Award process

- On confirmation from the examiners that the requirements of the Masters by Research dissertation have been met and that the taught components have been passed, the examiners' reports on the candidate's dissertation will be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Education in the School of Life Sciences and the Environment for approval of the award.
- The date of the award is the 1st of the month following the Director of Postgraduate Education's approval.
- The candidate will receive an award letter and a copy of the examiners' final joint report on their dissertation.
- The degree certificate should be issued within 3 – 6 months of the award date.

### Graduation

- To be eligible to attend the Winter Graduation ceremony, the award must have been approved by the Director of Postgraduate Education by 1 November. To be eligible to attend the Summer Graduation ceremony, it must be approved by 1 June.

Candidates are advised:

- to read this document in conjunction with the Royal Holloway [Postgraduate Research Regulations](#) (appendix 1).
- to contact the Doctoral School ([doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk)) if they have any queries regarding this process.