

## MSc Biological Sciences by Research Guide for Department

The MSc Biological Sciences by Research programme fall under the [Postgraduate Research regulations](#) (see appendix 1).

**Start Date:** Standard September start date only

**Duration:** One year full-time / two years part-time.

### Structure of a Masters by Research programme

#### Dissertation

- The dissertation carries 180 credits.
- 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.
- Students have the option to present in a form other than a monograph (as per the main PGR regulations).
- 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.

#### Research Skills taught components

- There are taught components which must be passed by 50% overall in order to qualify for the award.
- The Department of Biological Sciences will record the individual marks for the taught components.
- The students should be registered on this taught component on Banner
- An external examiner is not required for this component (as it is not credit-bearing)

### Examination of the dissertation

#### Prior to submission

- The following emails regarding the submission deadline will be sent by the Doctoral School:
  - Approx. 4 months prior to deadline – clarification of deadline to students, supervisory team, Programme Director and academic School.
  - 2 months prior to deadline – reminder to students who have not submitted their entry form (cc supervisory team, Programme Director and academic School).
  - 1 month prior to deadline – deadline reminder to all students (cc supervisory team, Programme Director and academic School).

- The [Entry form](#) for the Masters by Research examination should be completed and signed by the candidate, the supervisor and the Director of the Programme and forwarded to the Director of Postgraduate Research Education in the School of Life Sciences and the Environment for consideration two months before the submission of the dissertation. Once this has been approved, the Director of Postgraduate Research Education will forward the entry form to the Doctoral School for processing. This allows time for the examiners to be approved and invited before the dissertation is submitted.
- As part of the entry form, two examiners need to be nominated - one internal examiner (who may have acted as the dissertation supervisor for the student) and one external examiner.
- The Doctoral School will issue the invitations to examine:
  - Alongside the invitation to examine the dissertation, the examiners will be sent guidance on the examination process and a link to the University regulations.
  - For dissertation examiners who are not Royal Holloway members of staff, the examining fee for 2024/25 is £130, paid by the Doctoral School.

#### Submission of 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.
- Details of the required format of the dissertation can be found in the [Guidance on the format of the Masters by Research dissertation](#).

#### Dispatch of dissertation

- The dissertation will be dispatched by the Doctoral School to the examiners once they have both accepted the invitation to examine.
- The following paperwork will be included with the dissertation:
  - a copy of the Declaration of Number of Words;
  - Preliminary Report form - to be completed by each examiner separately before they confer on the outcome (if no viva required) / before the viva (if a viva is required). These reports will not be made available to the students unless specifically requested by the examiners;
  - Final Joint Report form - to be completed and signed by both examiners at the end of the assessment process to indicate the outcome and to explain how the outcome has been reached;
  - List of Amendments form – to be completed and signed by both examiners if the outcome is 'Pass subject to minor amendments';
  - The candidate will receive a copy of the Final Joint Report with their Award letter at the end of the process.

#### Assessment of dissertation

- It is expected that an oral examination would not normally be required for a Masters by Research unless the examiners are considering a 'Resubmission' or 'Fail' outcome. However, the examiners do have the option to request this if deemed appropriate.
- Examiners are asked to return their reports on the student's dissertation to the Doctoral School within 6 weeks of the dissertation being dispatched to them.
- If an oral examination is not required, the examiners should ensure they complete their Preliminary Report and send it to [doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk) prior to conferring with their co-examiner about the outcome.
- If a viva is required:
  - It is the responsibility of the supervisor to organise the viva.
  - it is essential the Doctoral School is informed of the date of the viva as soon as possible so that they can ensure the Preliminary Reports are received prior to the viva.

- the candidate must bring a copy of the dissertation with them which is identical in format to the dissertation submitted.
  - an audio recording must be made of the viva.
- 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
- The outcome should be indicated and explained on the Final Joint Report form. If the candidate has passed subject to minor corrections, the List of Amendments should also be completed.
- The forms should be signed by both examiners and submitted to the Doctoral School for processing.

#### Processing of dissertation outcome

- If the outcome is 'Pass', the Doctoral School will:
  - ensure that confirmation has been received from the Director of the Programme that any compulsory taught components have been passed;
  - send the outcome and the examiners' reports to the Director of Postgraduate Education in the School of Life Sciences and the Environment to approve on behalf of the CBEC;
  - process the outcome on Banner once it has been approved;
  - send the official award letter with a copy of the examiners' Final Joint Report to the candidate;
  - send a copy of the award letter and all the reports, including the Preliminary Reports, to the supervisor (cc Director of the Programme).
- If the outcome is 'Pass subject to minor corrections', the Doctoral School will:
  - contact the candidate (cc supervisor and Director of the Programme) to provide them with the list of required corrections and make them aware of their corrections deadline (6 weeks from the date of this official notification of the outcome);
  - contact the examiner who has been nominated to check the corrections to inform them of the process and to ask them to submit a 'Satisfactory Completion of Amendments' form to [doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk) once they have been checked (If the candidate's supervisor is the internal examiner, the external examiner must be nominated to check the corrections);
  - The candidate should not liaise directly with the nominated examiner. If there are any queries, the supervisor should contact the examiner on the candidate's behalf;
  - On receipt of the signed off 'Satisfactory Completion of Amendments' form, the Doctoral School will process the award (see above);
  - 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 (see below).
- If the outcome is 'Resubmission within 6 months', the Doctoral School will:
  - send the outcome and the examiners' reports to the Director of Postgraduate Education of the School of Life Sciences and the Environment to approve on behalf of the CBEC;
  - process the outcome on Banner;
  - send the resubmission letter with a copy of the examiners' Final Joint Report to the candidate;
  - send a copy of the resubmission letter and all the reports, including the Preliminary Reports, to the supervisor (cc Director of the Programme);
  - The candidate will have 6 months to resubmit from the date they are sent the resubmission letter and will be billed a flat rate resubmission fee (£155; £295 if a second viva is required).

#### Resubmission of dissertation process

- Entry form: An entry form for Masters by Research resubmission should be completed 2 months prior to the resubmission.
- Nomination of examiners: It is expected that normally the same examiners as the 1<sup>st</sup> submission will be nominated, in which case the examiners do not need to go through a re-approval process. However, if it is necessary to nominate new examiners, a section is provided on the entry form to explain the reason for this

and the new examiners' details will be sent to the Director of Postgraduate Education in the School of Life Sciences and the Environment to approve on behalf of the CBEEC.

- The following processes are the same as for the 1<sup>st</sup> submission:
  - Invitation of examiners;
  - Resubmission of dissertation;
  - Dispatch of dissertation.
- Assessment of dissertation: Same as for the 1<sup>st</sup> submission except for the outcome options. A further resubmission is not permitted so the options are:
  - Pass;
  - Pass subject to minor corrections (to be submitted within 6 weeks of the official outcome);
  - Fail - a viva is required before this outcome can be handed
- Processing of outcome: Same as for the 1<sup>st</sup> submission (except that a further resubmission is not an option).

#### Graduation

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

If you have queries about the Masters by Research Assessment process, please contact [doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk](mailto:doctoralschool@royalholloway.ac.uk).