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 School of Biological Sciences. It is the end of August (see timetable for exact date).
- A word limit of 20,000 words has been set by the School of Biological Sciences for the dissertation. This includes references, 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 submitted to Royal Holloway Research Degrees (researchdegrees@royalholloway.ac.uk) two months before the submission of the dissertation. This allows time for the examiners to be approved and invited before the dissertation is submitted. Research Degrees will seek approval of the nominated examiners by the Faculty Dean and issue the invitations to examine.

Submission of the dissertation

- The dissertation should be submitted by the end of August (see timetable for exact date)
- Two securely bound copies of the dissertation and form should be submitted to the Postgraduate administrator in the School of Biological Sciences.
- Two hard copies of the Declaration of number of words form, signed by the candidate and the supervisor, should be submitted with the hard copies of the dissertation to the Postgraduate administrator in the School of Biological Sciences.
- In addition, an electronic copy of the dissertation should be emailed to researchdegrees@royalholloway.ac.uk (except in cases where agreement is in place for a restriction of access for reasons of confidentiality, commercial sensitivity or patents).

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.

If an oral examination is required:
- this will be organised by the candidate’s supervisor
- the candidate must bring a copy of the thesis with them which is identical in format to the thesis submitted to the department for assessment.

Outcome of the assessment

The following outcomes are available to the examiners:
- Pass
- Pass subject to minor corrections (to be submitted within 6 weeks of the official outcome)
- Resubmit within 6 months
- Fail (required level not reached and candidate is not permitted to resubmit)

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.

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 first to the candidate’s Director of Programme and then to the Faculty Dean for approval of the award.

The date of the award is the 1st of the month following the Dean’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 Dean 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 Research Degrees (researchdegrees@royalholloway.ac.uk) if they have any queries regarding this process.