



Senate

Paper Title	Research Environment Update
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to note the update on the Research Environment as at October 2020.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	The purpose of this paper is to update Council on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-opening of campus-based research facilities • The arrangements made to support PhD students whose research was affected adversely by the COVID-19 pandemic • The support being provided for our researchers to mitigate the effects of the restricted access to laboratories from March-June 2020 • Progress and final dates for Research Excellence Framework (REF2020) and KEF submissions.
Questions for Senate to consider	N/A
Regulatory/statutory reference points	n/A
Strategy and risk	9 Increased Research Volume; 10 Research Quality
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	N/A
Authors	Andrew Livingston, VP Research and Innovation Sharon Ellis, Director Research Services and Commercialisation
Sponsor	Andrew Livingston, VP Research and Innovation

Re-opening of campus based research facilities

Access to many laboratories was restricted during the Government-mandated lockdown from mid-March 2020 - most of the campus-based research facilities were closed with the exception of some key labs in SMD that were dealing directly with work supporting the NHS fight against COVID. Other areas were also open for essential time sensitive research and also supporting NHS e.g. BSU, SBCS, SEMS, EECS. From April onwards planning for the re-opening of these facilities started across all campuses, and so when the lockdown was lifted at the start of June, laboratories began to re-open as risk assessments were completed and mitigations (ventilation, distancing, shifts to reduce density of researchers at any one time) put in place.

- QMUL began reopening their labs safely from June 2nd....much earlier than many of our Russell Group peers. This speaks to the desire of researchers at QMUL to

ensure they are progressing grants and positive working between PS and Academics.

- The vast majority of labs were open again by early July and 2m social distancing measures mean that capacity was between 25-40% given building configuration and having early adopters mainly at the start. Shifts have been implemented to maximise occupancy wherever possible
- Lab occupancy rates are now between 50 and 80 % at Mile End, Whitechapel and Charterhouse, as measured over the course of a week. Variations are due to building configuration, ability to do shifts, which work needs lab access vs other elements of the grant, academic desire to be on campus, stage of grants.
- A large amount of work has been done over August to understand building ventilation configurations and to develop a hierarchy of mitigations to enable local decisions to be taken on moving to 1m+ (with mitigations) that should enable increased capacity - but final data for achieved capacity not yet available.

Arrangements made to support PhD students whose research has been affected by the COVID pandemic

The research of many PhD students nationwide has been interrupted and in many cases adversely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Recognising this, and the importance of PhD graduates to the UK, some sponsors (UKRI, Wellcome) offered funded extensions of up to 6 months for final (third) year students. This support covered a significant number of students but many more, including those funded by Queen Mary itself, were not provided for. Hence Queen Mary made a decision, in line with many Russell Group peers, to offer funded extensions of up to three months to sponsored PhD students whose funding was due to end between 1st March 2020 and 31st March 2021, and whose sponsors did not offer funding extensions. Cases were invited for consideration by the Research Degrees Board, and were assessed against a set of guidelines that closely mirrored those used by UKRI. Additionally the proposed process was approved by QM EDI officers.

All cases for funding made by students were verified by the student's supervisor and their local Director of Graduate Studies in writing. Each application was read by three Research Degrees Board members, one per Faculty, before the review meeting; and a QMSU representative also read a sample of applications. All applications were discussed when the Board met. This has been a rigorous process and conducted in accordance with the agreed guidelines and conditions of the Board's membership, and has also passed scrutiny on EDI. Throughout this process cases have been considered in line with UKRI principles of supportiveness, to avoid instituting any kind of two-tier treatment of QMUL's PGR vs UKRI PGRs.

The Board meeting took place 6 August and supported a total of 101 x 3 month extensions, 23 x 2 month extensions, and 6 x 1 month extensions. A small number of late applications were considered thereafter (cases where delays were not the fault of the applicant), and one further 3-month extension was awarded from the allocation. Other late applicants were approved in principle, but their Schools agreed to provide the required funding). So the finally 102 x 3 month extensions were awarded. In addition QMUL will fund extensions for any Match funded PhD students who are part of a UKRI DTP/DTC, whom, if directly funded by the UKRI and not part of our match funding commitment would be eligible for funding. This has been honoured at a cost of £57k, bringing the total support provided to £561K. This will be distributed to applicants over the next academic year as their current funding comes to an end.

Funded Grant Extensions - UKRI COVID-19 Grant Extension Allocation (CoA)

Wherever possible we have engaged with sponsors on the potential for grant extensions. The Wellcome trust has agreed to consider case-by-case requests, as have several other major charities. We have agreed hundreds of contractual changes with funders to enable extensions, some funded, some un-funded, to ensure we minimise as far as we can the non-completion of funded work. At this point, with these mitigations, it appears that most grants can complete successfully.

Nationally, UKRI has introduced the CoA grant to provide resources to sustain UKRI grant-funded research, research and technical staff and research infrastructures during the period of pandemic disruption and its immediate aftermath. The CoA award is based on an algorithmic allocation under which Queen Mary received £2.79M. The Governance Plan for allocating this funding was submitted to and approved by UKRI, and includes two phases of supporting grants with three month extensions – Phase 1 for grants ending before 31 March 2021, and Phase 2 for grants ending before 30 September 2021. In addition we allowed for grantholders to make cases for further discretionary awards based on especially large impacts on specific grants. To date £1.27M has been allocated under Phase 1 and we are now moving onto Phase 2 allocations.

Research Excellence Framework 2020 final dates and submission

Key dates for REF are:

- 31 July 2020, Census date for staff; end of assessment period (the research environment and data about research income and research doctoral degrees awarded)
- 31 December 2020 - End of publication period (cut-off point for publication of research outputs, and for outputs underpinning impact case studies); end of impact assessment period
- 31 March 2022 - Closing date for submissions
- April 2022 – Publication of Results.

Knowledge Exchange Framework 2020 final dates and submission

The date for the final KEF submission of full narrative statements for KEF is now 16 October 2020.