



Senate

Paper Title	Research Degrees Programmes and Examinations Board Executive Summary June – September 2024
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to note the executive summary of business considered by the Research Degrees Programmes and Examinations Board (RDPEB).
Points for Senate members to note and further information	This paper summarises business considered by RDPEB at meetings held in June – September 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• changes to terms of reference and membership;• review of guidance to examiners on taking account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in examining a thesis;• project to develop online workflows in SITS/MySIS for change of circumstances processes;• award of posthumous degree of Doctor of Philosophy;• Queen Mary funded research student stipend rate for 2024-25;• research student funding system.
Questions for Senate to consider	Senate is asked to note the report.
Regulatory/statutory reference points	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Queen Mary Strategy 2030• Queen Mary Academic Regulations• Queen Mary Code of Practice for Research Degrees Programmes• Office for Students regulations and policies <p>RDPEB has oversight of quality and standards issues relating to research degree programmes.</p>
Strategy and risk	
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	
Authors	Mary Childs, Research Degrees Office
Sponsor	Professor Tim Warner, Dean for Postgraduate Research Director of the Doctoral College and Chair of the Research Degrees Programmes and Examinations Board

RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMMES AND EXAMINATIONS BOARD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY June – September 2024

Meetings and membership

1. The Research Degree Programmes and Examinations Board meets monthly. The membership comprises:
 - Dean for Postgraduate Research (Chair)
 - Faculty Deputy Deans for Research (PGR)
 - One additional representative (a school/institute Director of Graduate Studies) from each Faculty

The Head of the Doctoral College is in attendance.

The secretariat is provided by the Research Degrees Office.

Examinations Business

2. The Board:
 - considers and approves nominations for internal and external examiners for research degrees;
 - considers and approves outcomes of research degree examinations and reviews all examiners' reports;
 - considers and makes decisions on applications to interrupt studies and extensions to the thesis submission deadline;
 - approves awards for research degrees on behalf of Senate;
 - considers and advises on processes and policies for research degrees.

Decisions are recorded in the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Board.

Terms of Reference and Membership

3. At its meeting in September the Board conducted the annual review of its terms of reference and membership, taking into account comments from the review of academic governance in 2023-24 covering Senate and the boards of Senate. The Board recommends several changes to its terms of reference to make clear its delegations from Senate and reporting mechanisms to Senate and links to other governance structures/groups.
4. The recommended changes are to:

- make clear the delegated responsibilities from Senate to the Board;
 - provide a copy of the Board's reports to Senate at the subsequent meeting of the Board for information;
 - include a link to the Senate webpage on the Board's agenda sheet;
 - annexe to the terms of reference the delegations from Senate to the Board and other roles responsible for research degrees.
5. The Board's amended terms of reference and membership are reported to Senate in a separate paper.

Review of guidance to examiners on taking account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in examining a thesis

6. In July 2020 the Board approved guidance to examiners on how to take account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in their approach to examining the thesis for a research degree award. This guidance is sent to all examiners (internal and external) with the thesis and it is included in the examination guidance notes. In their joint report examiners are asked to include a statement summarising the discussion with the candidate of how their work was affected by Covid-19. The policy is annexed at A.
7. The Board reviews the guidance annually in September. No changes are proposed. In September 2023 the Board decided to clarify that the guidance does not apply to students who enrolled with effect from 1 August 2022 in the 2022-23 academic year, after which time the university was open fully for study.

Project to develop online workflows in SITS/MySIS for Change of Circumstances processes

8. This project is to develop online workflows in SITS/MySIS for change of circumstances processes for all levels of study. Change of circumstances includes interruption of study, change of programme and mode of study, withdrawal from studies, and extension of the period of registration for research degree students. Forms will be replaced by online MySIS workflows to simplify processes and to enable students and staff to be able to view and track the status of an application.
9. Phase 1 of the project to introduce MySIS workflows for interruption of studies and withdrawal from studies requests has been completed and went live in September 2024. Phase 2 development includes the research student extension of registration process and change of programme requests (between full-time and part-time study and to change programme of study/department).

Award of a posthumous degree of Doctor of Philosophy

10. New guidance has been introduced for the approval of posthumous degrees. This now includes specific guidance for the award of posthumous research degrees. The Board approved, with the agreement of the Principal, the award of a posthumous degree of Doctor of Philosophy for research in Physics.

Queen Mary funded research student stipend rate for 2024-25

11. The Research & Innovation Board agreed that Queen Mary funded research student stipends would be paid to match the UK Research & Innovation (UKRI) stipend rate in 2024-25. The stipend rates are:

- full-time stipend rate £21,237;
- part-time stipend rate £10,618.50;

The rates are based on the UKRI minimum full-time stipend of £19,237 per year for living costs plus £2,000 for London weighting.

Research Student Funding System

12. The new research student funding system has been introduced this semester, a development within the student records system. It provides an enhanced repository with reporting on information about the sources of internal and external funding for research student stipends and fees, and a new process for paying research student stipends managed by Queen Mary. The new system generates the research student stipend transactions list for transfer to Agresso for payment. This has facilitated the change from payment of stipends on a quarterly basis to monthly stipend payments. The first monthly stipend payment was for October 2024.

Mary Childs, Research Degrees Office, Registry Services

Research Degrees Programmes and Examination Board

Guidance to examiners on taking account of the disruption caused by Covid-19 in examining a thesis

1. Covid-19 has impacted on research students' work in a wide variety of ways since early 2020. Students submitting their theses during periods of library and/or laboratory closure, for example, may have been unable to complete all their references. Students at an earlier stage of their research, on the other hand, may have had to revise the scope and methods of their project.
2. It is appropriate to take these circumstances into account when examining a thesis. This is in line with a principle articulated for PhD theses in [Queen Mary's Academic Regulations for Research Degree Programmes](#), Appendix 1, section 5: "The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after three or at most four years of full-time study". Similar formulations are set out in relation to other research degrees: MPhil (para. 2), MD(Res) (para. 17).
3. What can "reasonably be expected" of a thesis submitted by a student whose work was disrupted by Covid-19, *whether or not the student was granted additional time to complete their thesis because of that disruption*, is not the same as what can be expected of a thesis completed in different circumstances.
4. There is no expectation that the "standard" of work done by students should have been compromised by studying through the Covid-19 crisis, rather that the volume of work, referencing etc. may have been affected.
5. For this reason we would ask examiners to consider the disruption experienced by students when making their decisions. In some cases, students may include a brief statement in their thesis to explain the impact of their disruption (e.g. a footnote in their introduction and/or conclusion to explain missing references, further fieldwork or experiments that would have been carried out if circumstances permitted, etc.). However, such statements may not always be present. Examiners must therefore ask a student, during their oral examination, to summarise briefly how their work was affected by Covid-19. The Outcome of Research Degree Examination report requires examiners to confirm that this matter was discussed. Examiners will also be prompted to include a statement in the joint report that they produce after the oral examination.
6. This policy applies to all Queen Mary postgraduate research students who enrolled before March 2020 – when UK universities and other research facilities began a period of closure, and when research travel was not possible – and who had not submitted their thesis for examination at that time. The policy does not apply to students who enrolled with effect from 1 August 2022 in the 2022-23 academic year, after which time Queen Mary was open fully for study. It will be reviewed annually.
7. Please contact the Research Degrees Office with any queries:
pgrexaminations@qmul.ac.uk