



## **Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes**

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## Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes

### Introduction and scope

1. This Code of Practice provides a framework of procedures and practices to support research students and their supervisors. It outlines the commitment made between Queen Mary and research students for the provision of programmes leading to the research degrees of MPhil, PhD, MD (Res), MDS and DrPS. Application of the key principles of the Code of Practice is mandatory.
2. The Code should be read in conjunction with the Academic Regulations for Research Degrees, available at [www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research\\_degrees/regs\\_resdegs.html](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research_degrees/regs_resdegs.html) and with related procedures approved by Senate or its delegated authority. In any issues of interpretation of the Code, the Regulations always take precedence.
3. The Code follows the recommendations of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and Research Councils UK (RCUK). It incorporates the precepts outlined in the QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education (Section 1: Postgraduate research programmes), available at <http://www.qaa.org.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/section1/postgrad2004.pdf>.

### Framework for governance and quality assurance of research degrees

4. The Vice-Principal for Research & International Affairs is responsible for providing leadership to the management of post-graduate research programmes. Senate is responsible for the academic standards of awards and the approval of regulations.
5. The three Deans for Research (Humanities and Social Sciences, Science and Engineering and Medicine and Dentistry) have particular responsibility for monitoring student progression, and co-ordinating research, supervisor and skills training. The Dean for Research may nominate a named individual to whom they delegate their authority for decisions, typically a faculty lead for postgraduate research studies<sup>1</sup>. In such situations, the delegation cannot be transferred further to another individual. The Research Degrees Examinations and Awards Board has delegated authority from Senate to approve the appointment of examiners and the award of degrees following the completion of the procedures for these processes.
6. At School/Institute level, the Head of School/Director of Institute is responsible for the quality of the student experience. Each School/Institute has a designated individual who takes responsibility for research and PGR matters, typically a Director of Research. The Director of Research may nominate a named individual to whom they delegate their authority for decisions, typically a School/Institute Director of Graduate

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this Code, where reference is made to the Dean for Research, this may also apply to a nominated delegate.

Studies<sup>2</sup>. In such situations, the delegation cannot be transferred further to another individual.

7. Policy matters and day-to-day issues, including management of the examination process, are handled by the Research Degrees Office in conjunction with the Deans for Research and VP For Research & International Affairs. Policy documents, guidelines and other information can be found at [www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research\\_degrees](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research_degrees).
8. Research studies programmes that involve collaboration with other institutions or organisations are governed by any additional requirements for collaborative provision.

## **Research Environment**

9. Students will only be accepted onto research studies programmes in Schools/Institutes that provide a sufficiently supportive and active research environment. Schools/Institutes wishing to accept research students must satisfy the following criteria:
  - [a] At least five research-active staff (academic staff, Principal Investigators or post-doctoral researchers)
  - [b] A critical mass of research students
  - [c] A target of a 4-year thesis submission rate of 85%.
10. New research studies programmes should be initiated and developed within Schools/Institutes that fulfill the above criteria.
11. The Deans for Research are responsible for identifying any Schools/Institutes within their faculty that do not conform to these requirements and working with the Head of School/Director of Institute to develop the appropriate environment.

## **Selection and admission of students**

12. The Academic Regulations for Research Degrees specify the broad admissions requirements for research degrees, including the required level of competency in English. Regulations for an individual research studies programme may detail specific admissions requirements for that programme.
13. Admissions procedures for research studies programmes are also governed by Queen Mary's general Admissions policies.
14. Schools/Institutes are responsible for selecting students for admission to research studies programmes, with reference to the requirements outlined in the Regulations. Decisions to offer places to students will be made by at least two research-active academic staff, with appropriate expertise and experience, who will normally conduct either a face-to-face or remote interview and obtain at least one academic reference.
15. The Head of School/Director of Institute will, through the Director of Research, ensure before recommending an offer that the topic identified is appropriate for a research degree, that the necessary research facilities and research training can be

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this Code, where reference is made to the Director of Research, this may also apply to a nominated delegate.

provided, and that proper supervision (see 25-32 below) can be guaranteed as far as possible for the expected duration of the programme.

16. Formal offers of admission can only be made by Queen Mary's central Admissions Office. Offer letters will include the following information:

- [a] the programme, mode and expected duration of study;
- [b] the total annual fees (including bench fees if appropriate);
- [c] details of funding arrangements;
- [d] arrangements for registration and enrolment;
- [e] name of principal supervisor;
- [f] information required for Academic Technology Approval Scheme (ATAS) clearance where necessary;

and will refer the student to other information relevant to their research studies and their responsibilities, including this Code of Practice and School handbooks. Offer letters will also clarify that the terms of the letter are binding on Queen Mary and the student upon acceptance.

17. Correspondence between Queen Mary, the Dean for Research and/or School/Institute and the applicant between offer letter and enrolment will be properly recorded.

## **Student Induction**

18. Students must register and enrol in accordance with the College's requirements and those specified in the Academic Regulations. Research students will be given copies of the Academic Regulations for Research Degrees and this Code of Practice.

19. Responsibility for student induction is shared between the School/Institute and the Deans for Research with input from the faculties and Research Degrees Office. The balance of their roles in the induction process may vary between faculties but will include:

- [a] Introduction to the structure and research portfolio of the School/Institute and wider faculty;
- [b] Introduction to research and professional/technical support services in the School/Institute;
- [c] Introduction to the structure of the research studies programme and arrangements for the monitoring of progression;
- [d] Introduction to the support available from the Research Degrees Office;
- [e] Details about opportunities and requirements for research and transferable skills development;
- [f] Expectations on attendance, hours of work and holiday arrangements;
- [g] Arrangements in the event of inadequate progress;
- [h] Who to contact in the event of a problem or complaint;
- [i] Health and safety procedures;
- [j] Advice on personal safety and security;
- [k] Introduction to Queen Mary's policies and procedures on research ethics;
- [l] Introduction to Queen Mary's policies and procedures on plagiarism and research misconduct; and
- [m] Advice on Queen Mary services including central library and computing services, and support services such as Advice and Counselling, the Disability and Dyslexia Service, and the Careers Service.

20. It is expected that Schools and Institutes will also provide appropriate and complementary induction activities for research degree students.
21. Information related to Induction may be included in a School handbook for research students.
22. Students will have an initial meeting with their principal supervisor as soon as possible following the beginning of their programme. This meeting will cover:
  - [a] the nature of the supervisory relationship and composition of the supervisory team, including responsibilities and expectations (see 25 -32 below);
  - [b] discussion of the research topic proposed, initial routes of enquiry and objectives;
  - [c] identification of initial training needs and formulation of a training plan; and
  - [d] how the student's progress will be assessed.

### **Attendance**

23. All full-time students are expected to undertake a full working week on their research degree programme.
24. All part-time students should reach an agreement with their supervisors at the start of their registration as to the proportion of time they will spend on their research degree programme. The Academic Regulations for Research Degrees state that the workload of a part-time student is deemed to be 50% of that of a full-time student. Any arrangement agreed should not compromise submission time within the prescribed period. Transfer between full-time and part-time status is approved by the Dean for Research.
25. All students should agree their holiday periods, between a minimum of four weeks and up to a maximum of eight weeks per year inclusive of public holidays and Queen Mary closure dates, with their supervisor. Excessive absences must be reported to the Head of School/Institute and the Dean for Research, if appropriate, via normal progress report procedures.

### **Supervision**

26. The School/Institute's Director of Research is responsible for establishing supervision arrangements for each student that conform to this Code, and may be required to report on these arrangements to the Dean for Research.
27. Each research student will have an identified principal supervisor, who is their main point of contact with the School/Institute and Queen Mary and must be a research-active member of academic staff at the College. All students will have at least one additional/secondary supervisor or advisor.
28. Each supervisory team must include at least two research-active academic staff, one of whom may be employed at another higher education institution and act as an external supervisor. Additional members of the supervisory team can include members of post-doctoral research staff, industrial partners or other external collaborators. The division of roles and responsibilities between members of the supervisory team will be clearly set out at the start of the research programme (see 21 above).

29. All new supervisors must undertake the training for this role provided by the Learning Institute at Queen Mary. All supervisors should undertake 'refresher' training – which may be provided at faculty or School/Institute level – every five years.
30. If the principal supervisor identified for a student has not previously been part of a successful supervisory team (supervising a student to completion) then the other academic supervisor must act as a co-supervisor and jointly undertake to ensure that responsibilities of supervisors are met (see 33 below).
31. Supervisors will have a maximum of 8 and normally not more than 6 research students for whom they act as principal supervisor. Allocation of supervisory responsibilities will take into account other duties and professional commitments.
32. The principal supervisor's contract period will normally extend to cover at least the expected duration of the student's research programme. If a supervisor leaves Queen Mary, the Director of Research will ensure that a suitable replacement is identified. If this proves impossible, a departing principal supervisor may continue as an external member of the student's supervisory team, but a replacement primary supervisor must be nominated to act as the main point of contact with Queen Mary. Temporary arrangements will be made to cover periods of sabbatical leave or other prolonged absence (over 8 weeks) on the part of supervisors.
33. Any problems with the operation of the supervisory team or the supervisory relationship in general should be reported to the Director of Research in the first instance.

### **Responsibilities of supervisors**

34. Principal supervisors will:
  - [a] Be knowledgeable in the student's area of research.
  - [b] Meet the student according to a mutually-agreed schedule, to monitor progress to date and review the programme for future work. Formal supervisory meetings for full-time students should take place at a minimum frequency of once every two months (for part-time students once every four months) during the entire period of registration, but the frequency of meetings will naturally vary over the duration of the programme. Meetings should normally take place in person, but may take place via other means if all participants are in agreement.
  - [c] Give advice on scheduling work so that the thesis will be submitted within the four-year timeframe, and provide advice and help when difficulties occur.
  - [d] Request written work as appropriate according to an agreed timetable, and return such work promptly with constructive criticism, either orally or in writing. Written work should normally be returned within a month of submission, and students should be advised at the time of submission if other responsibilities will prevent this being achieved.
  - [e] Assist the student in identifying research and other training needs at the beginning of the research programme, and in reviewing these needs over the course of the programme's duration.
  - [f] Advise the student on the necessity of obtaining research ethics approval or undertaking a risk assessment before the research in question is undertaken.

- [g] Advise the student on discussing work with third parties (bearing in mind the need to maintain confidentiality), and introduce him/her to other scholars in the field.
- [h] Monitor the student's progress and inform him/her if it is not satisfactory, and make regular (at least annual) reports on student progress to the School/Institute graduate studies committee.
- [i] Inform the School/Institute, the Research Degrees Office, the Dean for Research and any funding body if the student ceases to attend regularly, or fails to progress over a prolonged period.
- [j] Nominate potential internal and external examiners for the student's final examination and arrange a mutually convenient date and place for the oral examination.

### **Responsibilities of students**

35. Students will:

- [a] Work diligently on the programme of research and aim to complete the programme and submit the thesis within the agreed time frame.
- [b] Take overall responsibility for the research and the work produced.
- [c] Take a pro-active role in discussing with the supervisory team the type of guidance and comment that is most helpful at different points in the progress of the research.
- [d] Agree a schedule of meetings with the supervisory team, and attend these promptly.
- [e] Maintain a record of topics discussed at supervisory meetings and the actions agreed, and of any relevant training undertaken/courses attended.
- [f] Submit written material as required in sufficient time to allow for comment and discussion, and respond constructively to comments and suggestions (although this does not alter the student's overall responsibility for the work).
- [g] Attend any programme(s) of subject-specific and generic training, taught classes and research seminars, in accordance with the policy of the School/Institute and/or faculty, and as agreed with the supervisory team.
- [h] Submit an application for ethical approval for their research where necessary.
- [i] Inform the supervisory team of any problems or difficulties when they arise.
- [j] Submit reports for assessment and other work to inform decisions about his/her progress as required (see 34 - 37 below).
- [k] Enrol as a student of Queen Mary at the beginning of the programme of study, and re-enrol subsequently at the start of each academic year.

## **Responsibilities of Directors of Research**

33. The Head of School/Director of Institute delegates responsibility to the Director of Research who will:
- [a] Appoint a Director of Graduate Studies as appropriate.
  - [b] Oversee the admissions process for research degrees, and ensure that students are admitted for a research degree only where suitable supervision and the necessary equipment and facilities are available.
  - [c] Ensure that an appropriate principal and second supervisor or supervisory team is appointed for each student.
  - [d] Ensure that all staff appointed as supervisors are appropriately trained for their role.
  - [e] Ensure suitable alternative supervision arrangements in the case of breakdown of relations between a supervisor and the student or where a change of supervisor is desirable. In case of absence or the departure of the principal supervisor, ensure that adequate arrangements are made for the student's continuing supervision.
  - [f] Chair the Graduate Studies Committee, and oversee the monitoring of student progress in accordance with the Regulations and the Code.
  - [g] Sign off formal progress and status transfer reviews on behalf of the School/Institute before approval by the Dean for Research..
  - [h] Receive and deal with student complaints and problems in the first instance.

## **Progression and review**

34. The supervisor is responsible for regular informal reviews of student progress (see 31 above) and will inform the student if progress is not satisfactory.
35. The supervisor will report on the progress of each student at least annually to the Graduate Studies Committee in the School/Institute.
36. The Academic Regulations for Research Degrees outline the parameters for student progression and transfer to writing up status. Additional formal progress reviews may be required by the Deans for Research, who will publicise the timings and procedures to be followed. It is the responsibility of the Director of Research to ensure that students' progression is assessed in accordance with the Regulations and published procedures.
37. The outcomes of formal reviews will be reported to the relevant Dean for Research and to the Research Degrees Office so that the student's central record may be updated appropriately

## **Termination of registration**

38. The Academic Regulations outline the reasons for which a student's registration may be terminated. Schools, Institutes and the Dean for Research may recommend that a

student's registration be terminated on the grounds of insufficient academic progress. This recommendation may follow a formal progress review but may also be made at other points during the programme of study. Such a recommendation should only be made after the student has been given at least one written warning that they are at risk of de-registration unless specified objectives are met within a clear timeframe.

39. Recommendations for termination on the grounds of insufficient academic progress must be made by the School/Institute's Graduate Studies Committee and must be communicated to the Research Degrees Office.
40. The formal procedures for de-registration, and for appeals against decisions to de-register a student, are outlined in the Academic Regulations and related policies/procedures.

### **Interruption, suspension and extension of registration**

41. The Director for Research is responsible for receiving and considering student requests for interruptions and extensions. Decisions to grant an interruption or extension of study are also approved by the Dean for Research.
42. Interruptions to the course of study may be permitted in accordance with the Academic Regulations for a number of reasons: illness, maternity/paternity leave, personal and family reasons, employment (apart from during the writing up period), and teaching commitments. The Deans for Research may also grant interruptions for other reasons they consider acceptable. Interruptions must not be granted solely on the grounds of lack of progress.
43. Research degree students are permitted to interrupt their studies for whole months only and must return to their studies at a designated re-enrolment point.
44. Students must not continue to work on their research during interruptions of study. They should only have limited contact with academic staff during a period of interruption.
45. In cases of illness or injury, the student is expected to inform the supervisors and the School/Institute of absences of more than two weeks and provide a medical certificate. Where a student is expected to be absent for more than two months, whether consecutively or cumulatively, arrangements should put in place to interrupt the course of study where appropriate.
46. All interruptions and extensions should be notified to the Research Degrees Office in advance of their commencement. Interruptions cannot normally be applied retrospectively.

### **Research training and skills development**

47. All students will have access to training in appropriate research methods and other relevant and generic skills. They are required to attend appropriate courses provided by their School or Institute, faculty and The Learning Institute. The individual programme of research training will be discussed at the initial meeting with the supervisory team, and reviewed during the course of the programme, particularly at formal progress reviews.

48. Schools or Institutes will offer, where appropriate, a collective research training programme for their students. This may include seminars that all students will normally be expected to attend and participate in on a regular basis.
49. Students may be given the opportunity to contribute to teaching through lecturing, demonstrating practical classes, project supervision, marking and taking tutorials. All students must receive appropriate training before commencing any teaching.
50. Students will be given advice by supervisors and/or the Director for Research on the use of Queen Mary's mechanisms for recording personal development activity (Personal Development Plans).

### **Collaborative arrangements**

51. Collaborative arrangements for the supervision and award of research degrees are approved in accordance with the policy and procedures established by Senate for that purpose.
52. Students may study at an accredited host institution under the Public Research Institute/Industrial Research Laboratory Schemes in accordance with the Academic Regulations. Arrangements will be put in place for such students to ensure that the requirements of this Code are adhered to, particularly regarding supervision arrangements and progression monitoring.

### **Feedback mechanisms**

53. Students will be advised during the induction period of the mechanisms for providing feedback to the School/Institute, including opportunities for representation on relevant committees such as Staff Student Liaison Committees.
54. Feedback from recent graduates is sought via a questionnaire to be completed at the end of the examination process.

### **Examinations**

55. The criteria for assessment of research degrees are outlined in the Academic Regulations and the Guidelines for Research Degree Examinations.
56. The procedures for examination entry and the examination process are outlined in the Procedures for Research Degree Examinations.
57. The Research Degrees Examinations and Awards Board will monitor issues arising from reports from research degree examiners and recommend appropriate action. Directors of Research will provide a summary report on examinations in their sector on an annual basis, to be supplemented by statistical information from the Research Degrees Office.

### **Complaints and appeals**

58. Students who wish to make a complaint about any aspect of their research programme should use Queen Mary's Student Complaint Policy, available on the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat website.

59. Students who wish to appeal against the outcome of the recommendation of examiners or the outcome of a progression review should refer to the College Appeal Regulations (available on the Academic Registry and Council Secretariat website), which outline the procedures to be followed.

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Updated for 2010-11 to take account of role title changes and the new governance arrangements.