

**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 be unable to complete all their references. Students at an earlier stage of their research, on the other hand, may have 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,](http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/media/arcs/policyzone/academic/Academic-Regulations-2020-21-FINAL.pdf) 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 summarize briefly how their work was affected by Covid-19. The Outcome of Research Degree Examination form (RD03) 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 will apply to allQueen Mary postgraduate research students until further notice. We anticipate that it will continue at least until all 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 – submit their theses. It will be reviewed annually.
7. Please contact the Research Degrees Office with any queries: [researchdegrees@qmul.ac.uk](mailto:researchdegrees@qmul.ac.uk)

For further information please see the information for examiners of research degrees

<http://www.arcs.qmul.ac.uk/research-degrees/research-degree-examiners/>