

Queen Mary Ranked in Top Group of Universities

Queen Mary has done exceptionally well in the recent Government assessment of universities' research work, the 'RAE' (Research Assessment Exercise), shooting up the table a massive 35 places since the last RAE in 2001. We have been ranked in the top 10 per cent of UK universities, 11th overall (according to the *Guardian* newspaper's rankings), ahead of some other excellent institutions, including Bristol University, Durham University and Nottingham University. Within London, we were ranked fourth among the large multi-subject colleges, and ten places above King's College (which was 20th).

This is great news for the College and for our students, since it is a major indicator of a university's quality. But what exactly does the RAE assess? How are universities' results graded? And what does it mean in practice, for you, the student?

What is the RAE?

It is a regular Government assessment of universities' research activity held every few years – an important part of universities' work. It is important because it tells us which universities and individual departments are doing the sort of research which is recognised both nationally and internationally; it also has a bearing on universities' funding. The RAE is one of the few 'official' assessments of the actual academic quality of universities' staff.

How does the RAE score universities' research?

The research work submitted to the RAE was assessed by panels of leading academics in all subject areas. The panels spent most of 2008 reading and assessing the research and then graded it with one of four ratings: 4* (world-leading), 3* (internationally excellent); 2* (internationally recognised); 1* (nationally recognised); or 0 (below nationally recognised or not eligible).

As well as being ranked 11th overall, Queen Mary was rated in the top five in the UK for many subject areas, including Linguistics (1st), Drama (1st), Geography (joint 1st with Bristol, Cambridge, Durham and Oxford), Dentistry (2nd), English Language and Literature (2nd), Epidemiology and Public Health (Wolfson Institute of Preventive Medicine) (3rd), Health Services Research (4th), Pre-clinical and Human Biological Sciences (4th) and Cancer Research (5th). Queen Mary also featured in the top 10 for Economics and Econometrics, Metallurgy and Materials, Russian, Slavonic and East European Studies and Iberian languages.

Overall, the RAE showed that the majority of Queen Mary's academic staff (nearly two-thirds) are producing research which is either world-leading or internationally excellent! And 92 per cent of staff 'outputs' were in the top 4*, 3* or 2* categories.

What does the RAE mean for me?

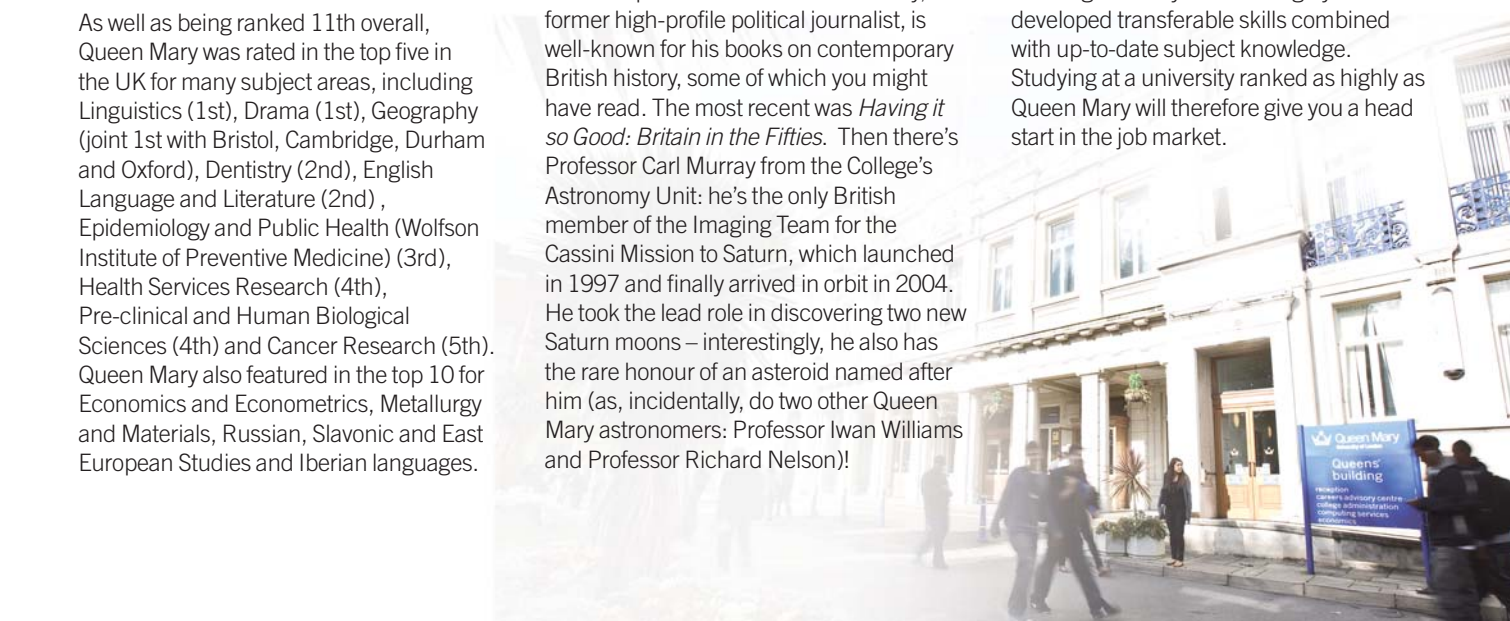
Firstly, if you choose to study at a highly-rated research university like Queen Mary you can be sure that your course will be properly-funded and the department equipped with state-of-the-art facilities.

Secondly, you will be taught by staff who are working at the cutting edge of research in their subjects and whose discoveries are actually pushing forward the boundaries of knowledge. They are finding new ways of looking at the world; are people whose books and papers you might read, whose research is referred to in television documentaries; or whose opinions are regularly canvassed by important policy making bodies, or by the national media. For example Professor Peter Hennessy, a former high-profile political journalist, is well-known for his books on contemporary British history, some of which you might have read. The most recent was *Having it so Good: Britain in the Fifties*. Then there's Professor Carl Murray from the College's Astronomy Unit: he's the only British member of the Imaging Team for the Cassini Mission to Saturn, which launched in 1997 and finally arrived in orbit in 2004. He took the lead role in discovering two new Saturn moons – interestingly, he also has the rare honour of an asteroid named after him (as, incidentally, do two other Queen Mary astronomers: Professor Iwan Williams and Professor Richard Nelson!)

These are just two examples – there are many more academics just as high profile at Queen Mary. Our students get a real buzz from seeing their lecturers on television or quoted in national newspapers and journals.

Most importantly, staff who are actively involved in research as well as teaching students (and at Queen Mary the vast majority of researchers also teach) are up-to-date with their subjects, enthusiastic about their work and very good at explaining it. This might be why the most recent National Student Survey (or NSS), which asked final year students to rate their university and course, showed that 81 per cent of Queen Mary's students found our staff are enthusiastic about what they teach and 87 per cent of students think our staff are good at explaining things.

Finally, many prestigious employers specifically target the top-rated research universities when recruiting graduates, knowing that they will have highly developed transferable skills combined with up-to-date subject knowledge. Studying at a university ranked as highly as Queen Mary will therefore give you a head start in the job market.



The *Guardian* league table places Queen Mary at 11th in the UK out of 130 universities.

Top 20 research universities:

Ranking	University	Average ranking
1	The University of Cambridge	2.975
2	The University of Oxford	2.959
3	London School of Economics	2.957
4	Imperial College	2.943
5	University College London	2.844
6	The University of Manchester	2.823
7	The University of Warwick	2.799
8	The University of York	2.780
9	The University of Essex	2.772
10	The University of Edinburgh	2.747
11	Queen Mary, University of London	2.726
12	The University of St Andrews	2.724
13	The University of Bristol	2.723
14	University of Durham	2.721
15	The University of Southampton	2.715
16	The University of Leeds	2.715
17	The University of Sheffield	2.715
18	The University of Bath	2.711
19	The University of Lancaster	2.711
20	King's College London	2.693

Full rankings can be found at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/table/2008/dec/18/rae-2008-results-uk-universities> and

www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/Journals/THE/THE/18_December_2008/attachments/RAE2008_THE_RESULTS.pdf

For the full results see: www.rae.ac.uk

Case Studies



Professor Julia Shelton is a medical engineer: she works with range of companies to develop new projects – at the moment, for example she's looking at new

designs for surface hip replacements. Last year she even went to the USA to advise the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on whether a product was safe to use on the American population. Like Professor McOwan, she sees her research as vital to keeping her teaching relevant and interesting. In fact, the concepts behind her research are included in a specialised final year MEng module – so graduates from that course are certainly very well-equipped for jobs in the industry.



Professor Peter McOwan's research is in the field of robotics and artificial intelligence. He firmly believes that without a solid research base to build

on, university teaching would very quickly become stale and out of date. His students are very lucky to be taught by someone working right at the cutting edge, and to learn about current and sometimes even controversial applications. Undergraduates' final year projects are often inspired by Professor McOwan's research. For example, some current projects are focused on research which will feed into a large European robotics project he is involved in. And past student research-based projects have resulted in patent applications, papers in top scientific journals, and even news items!



Professor Markman Ellis is a specialist in eighteenth-century literature and history. His acclaimed book *The Coffee House: A Cultural History* is

closely linked with his teaching in the School of English and Drama. His research on the social cultures of coffee-houses has fed into his undergraduate module on eighteenth-century London, giving students the chance to study works that are important but not famous or well-known. In turn, students contribute to his research in ways they may not have anticipated, and he finds their experience of coffee houses today – whether Starbucks or the local cafe – very enlightening!



Dr Alastair Owens's research explores everyday life in Victorian London. He's been working with colleagues at the Museum of London to develop new approaches

to studying Victorian households. These approaches use archaeological remains alongside more conventional historical sources in order to try to better understand experiences of life in the metropolis. As part of his final year module on Victorian London, Dr Owens takes his students to the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre where they get to handle for themselves the objects that our Victorian ancestors left behind. Dr Owens says that his helps to bring the topic to life, he was even asked to make a short documentary about the research for BBC television.



Professor Frances Balkwill is professor of Cancer Biology, and Centre lead in the Centre for Cancer and Inflammation. This Centre's aim is to

translate laboratory research in chronic inflammation and the tumour microenvironment into new treatments for cancer, especially ovarian cancer. Professor Balkwill says, "I think that the next ten years will be very exciting in terms of moving forward our basic knowledge." Cancer research is a leading strength of Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry. This offers students an excellent opportunity to witness exciting and important research up close.



Professor Aine McKnight, Professor of Viral Pathology at the Institute of Cell and Molecular Science, is engaged in the search for an effective HIV vaccine,

along with a number of scientists taking part in a \$25.3 million international research consortium. As new vaccine candidates are created, Professor McKnight and other researchers test vaccines, share data and compare results, so that the most promising vaccines can be quickly prioritised for further development and clinical trials. Students are able to follow research developments as they happen, gaining an excellent understanding of the processes that are involved in research at this level.