

Guidelines for candidates, supervisors and examiners on the format of 'PhD / MA by Artefact'

Background

In some academic disciplines, making research awards on the basis of scholarly work presented in diverse formats has become accepted. There is, for example, a long-established tradition of doctoral awards for music composition, stretching back to the medieval university, a format that is currently undergoing expansion worldwide. The increase in engagement with scholarly ideas through film, music composition and various forms of media including innovative technologies has led to the recognition of these as forms of high level scholarly enquiry.

DCU regulations regarding submissions for a PhD / MA award are given in the *Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis* ('the regulations'), and they allow for submission in a format which includes two substantial elements:

PhD:

- a written document of at least 20,000 words and
- a substantial artefact or portfolio of artefacts.

MA:

- a written document of at least 15,000 words and
- an appropriately substantive artefact or portfolio of artefacts

Candidates who consider submitting using this format should consult the regulations as well as these guidelines.

Disciplines for which a research award on the basis of artefacts is particularly relevant include: music composition and music technology, theatre practice, film, sound, multimedia, arts based works or communications studies. However, it may also be relevant to cross-disciplinary projects involving quite different fields such as computer science, so this list is not exhaustive.

An artefact may be, for example, a musical score, theatre script, or a substantial piece of practice-based research via a media or art production, always accompanied by a sustained exercise in critical study.

The standard of a PhD / MA

Irrespective of the format for PhD / MA submission, the standard by which the work is evaluated remains exactly the same as Research Degree awards through other formats: through other formats: in the case of a PhD, a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the field; in the case of MA by Research, scholarship which makes an apt contribution to knowledge in the discipline. The examination will seek to establish originality, rigour and substance of contribution at a scholarly level appropriate to the award. While the creative or performance practice element(s) constitute(s) the main body of the thesis, and this/these in itself/themselves must contribute significant (appropriate to the level of the award) knowledge to the field, candidates

must also be aware that the examiners' judgement of the entirety of the submission is the sole determinant of the outcome.

At PhD level examiners will consider the coherence of the entire work and the quality of the candidate's defence of the thesis at *viva voce* examination. This includes the appropriateness of methodologies used, the rigour of critical thought and analysis, the quality of argument, and of presentation, the significance of the contribution to new knowledge, and where collaboration has been necessary as part of the production, the candidate's particular contribution to this aspect of the submission. The accompanying analytical commentary is therefore an equally important element in ensuring that examiners are convinced that the work presented as a whole meets the standard of the research award, especially with regard to articulating the coherence of the work and the role the candidate played in work which was produced collaboratively. For these reasons, it is very important that the written document is approached as an integral part of research, progressed in parallel with the development of the artefact.

The award of a doctoral degree, and that of MA (research), is based solely on the work presented for examination and carried out during the period of registration with the University for the research degree.

- There is no question of the academic award being made simply in recognition of creative work which has received popular or critical acclaim, or of a research award being 'due' to a recognised composer/ director/ collector/editor.

- The thesis overall may be deemed to fall short of the required standard, even if the artefact(s) attract(s) recognition, awards or success outside the academic arena.

Artefacts which can be included

Artefacts which can be included in the submission are limited to those which are based on work undertaken, under supervision, during the student's period of registration. Work produced prior to this is excluded.

The format of 'artefact' is broadly interpreted, and examples may include creative works, media productions or art (e.g., music compositions, film, digital media, music technology/software, photographs, arts based works etc.). It also includes definitive texts such as critical editions. The artefact, or collection of artefacts must be substantial, and the particulars of this are dictated by norms in the field. Some examples are noted here for illustrative purposes. In music composition, at doctoral level the compositions must be no less than 90 minutes in duration, with at least one element that is an extended work; at MA level the compositions must be in the region of 45 minutes in duration. For media productions in linear form, at doctoral level this may be audio-visual material to a maximum of 1 hour (documentary film or mixed media production); at MA level the normative length is approximately 45 minutes. For responsive media productions, at doctoral level a minimum of 40 minutes of user engagement is a useful guideline; at MA level 25 minutes is a guide. For theatre practice, at doctoral level the portfolio of artefacts would normally be equivalent to two full-length plays; at MA level a portfolio equivalent to one full-length play is a useful guide.

Considerations at time of admission

Prospective students should first seek the support of a member of staff qualified to supervise a research award in this format and have demonstrated their capacity at this level through a review of their recent work in this area. Normal minimum admission criteria for research degrees apply as do expectations regarding readiness for academic and analytical writing. This is of key importance, and students applying for MA (Research) award should meet the University entry regulations, while those applying for doctoral study should also meet the University entry regulations or have gained a Master's degree in a cognate or creative discipline. In addition, the type of PhD / MA format should be identified and, in the context of the intended format, student suitability in terms of his/her skills base should be established at time of admission to the university. Students must be able to provide evidence of their ability and skills to conduct practice-based research. In the case of composition, for example, it would be a prerequisite that the candidate was already at an advanced level of composition and could demonstrate this through scores and publically performed works. In the case of media productions evidence could be in the form of a creative portfolio including examples of filmmaking, photography, phonography, multimedia projects or other appropriate creative practice.

The decision to opt for a research project in this format should be made jointly by an applicant and the proposed supervisor(s). It is important that the supervisor has directly relevant scholarly output, and is familiar with standards internationally for this format. Supervisors must provide guidance with regard to the expected academic level, and the scope within the proposed topic to make a contribution at the level of the award. Both applicant and supervisor should consider the potential risks inherent in this approach, and the likely timeframe the work might take to complete. Candidates may not have a good understanding of these aspects and have unrealistic expectations based on past successes, or related (but not necessarily academic) writing composition or media production, so supervisor advice is crucial at this stage. It is also important to consider the availability of resources which will be required to support the research, and project should not be undertaken unless these are available.

Particular care should be taken in applying the university *RPL Policy for Research Awards* in such admissions. Experience and expertise in composing or film production, for example, while vital, does not necessarily imbue the requirements for writing at a scholarly level. All RPL-based applications should be considered using the process outlined in the policy, and equivalence of prior learning to the Level 8 or 9 award, usually required for admission onto the register, rigorously assessed. There are two aspects to the submission, and there is an onus on the University to ensure a candidate can have a reasonable expectation to successfully execute both.

Subsequent to admission, the intended format should be taken into account in identifying developmental opportunities for the student, setting of milestones and monitoring of progress. At the confirmation or transfer stage, the intended format should be reconfirmed, and again noted on the 'intention to submit' stage.

Student contribution to the work

It is recognised that some aspects of the submission may have involved other individuals in the production. It is expected that in such cases, the candidate, the originator of the work, has had at least a director/producer level role and that the candidate includes a signed statement of their contribution to the work and the specific contribution of others, both to be independently verified in all cases. Where possible and practicable this should be done by the principal supervisor and all collaborators / support personnel signing off on their agreement with the candidate's statement. However, in some cases, due to the number of such people, or the nature and/or

organisation of the work, it may be more appropriate for the verification to be given by both the principal supervisor, and by another person external to the University who was in a position to verify the detail. 'Sign-off' in this case may be via electronic means.

In drafting such a statement as evidence of a candidate's contribution, it is best practice to maintain a reflective journal (or equivalent record) over the period of registration which captures aspects of the production or process as they evolve. Interactions and influences of technical and artistic collaborators is reflected in the journal, which may be included as an appendix to the submission where relevant.

There is no 'formula for success' in terms of the work included. The criteria candidates and their supervisors should use in judging whether the work is sufficient are the same as the criteria applied to all PhD submissions, and relate to the substance of the original and significant contribution to the field made by the candidate.

External examiners

These guidelines and the relevant extract from the regulations should be provided to potential external examiners at the first stage of contact (normally informal), so that they can evaluate whether they are comfortable with undertaking the task of examination of a thesis in this format. It is expected that all examiners of a submission of this type have a strong record of scholarly output relevant to the format of artefact, and are in a position to evaluate the work in the context of international norms in the field at the level of the award.

Presentation and examination of the various elements of the thesis

As described in the regulations, the overarching critical document should:

"detail the research questions addressed through the medium of the artefact(s), set the artefact(s) in the context of existing literature, give a detailed overview of the theme(s) common to all elements included, argue the coherence of the submission and justify the methodology adopted. It should evaluate the contribution that the research presented in the submitted artefact makes to the advancement of knowledge in the research area."

The minimum length of this element of the thesis is: 20,000 words for PhD award; 15,000 words for MA award. However in many instances it may be significantly longer than this. Students should, at an early stage, familiarise themselves with the norm in their field. The standard of presentation of the written thesis should be commensurate with those for a PhD / MA (Research) monograph.

Compositions should be presented in the printed format of a musical score using conventional notation or extended and novel notational formats where appropriate. The analytical commentary should follow the usual format and style for thesis presentation. A student may choose to include CD recordings within the inside cover of the thesis but this is not a requirement.

Artefacts which do not 'lie flat in an A4 format', i.e. are non-textual in nature, must be presented in a way which facilitates appropriate access to examiners. This may take the form of a live event (an exhibition or a performance) or a production, but it very much depends on the artefact. It is important that examiners have read the written part of the thesis prior to accessing work in this way. Poor sequencing or timing could undermine the examination process. It is also important to note that it is direct access to the artefact, and not to a record of it that must be afforded to examiner and which is examined.

For PhD award: examiners must have time to reflect on both elements of the thesis submission prior to holding of a *viva voce* examination. The submission as a whole will be the subject of the *viva voce* examination.

For MA award: standard DCU regulations apply.

It is also important that such artefact(s) are captured in some digital format for the purposes of being archived with the written aspects of the submission. This may require recording of an exhibition, installation or performance. It is very important to note that this record is not the basis of the examination, and is done simply to provide a complete record of the work for which the research award was made. Subject to resources, technical support may be available in the relevant School or Faculty to facilitate such recording. It is required to be of a standard fit for archiving purposes, but to exclude post-production which would detract from or disguise elements of the student’s work evaluated.


Costs relating to examination (which may require 2 or more visits to the university or another venue) should be discussed by the relevant School/Faculty with Registry.

Archiving of theses submitted in this format.

In line with university policy, PhD / MA theses submitted in this format will be made available on the DCU DORAS electronic repository, subject to the same procedures as monographs. In terms of text-based elements, the electronic version has to be exactly the same as the printed corrected version finally submitted. Elements which cannot be presented as a PDF must be archived in another digital format, and made available with the e-thesis. Supervisors should engage with the library staff at an early stage to plan how this will be done.

It is important that any issues relating to Intellectual Property and Copyright are resolved prior to submission of the thesis just as for monograph-format submissions. An embargo can apply to theses submitted in this format, as it can for the traditional monograph, should there be valid reasons to apply this.

Note:- This document should be considered in conjunction with the Academic Regulations for Postgraduate Degrees by Research and Thesis

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