



Guidelines for candidates, supervisors and examiners on the format of 'PhD / MA through Creative or Performance Practice'

DCU regulations regarding submissions for PhD and MA by Research awards 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 30,000 words and
- one or more creative or performance-based elements of substantial nature.

MA:

- a written document of at least 15,000 words and
- one or more creative or performance-based elements

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

Disciplines for which a research award on the basis of creative or performance practice is particularly relevant include music, theatre and movement. However, it may also be relevant to cross disciplinary projects involving quite different fields.

Background

In some academic disciplines, making research awards on the basis of scholarly work presented in diverse formats, including a performance or creative work, has become accepted. The UK Arts Humanities Research Board has long since accepted a principle that in some areas of research, performance may indeed be the only appropriate mode of investigation. That notwithstanding, there was considerable discourse around the acceptance and evaluation of such work as research at the time of the introduction of the UK Research Assessment Exercise and for many years thereafter.¹ A particular focus was on the distinction between high quality creative work (however well-researched), and that which makes a significant research contribution, on the role and status of an exhibition or performance and relationship between it and the permanent reference for subsequent scholars, and on guidelines and best practices for evaluation. These DCU guidelines draw significantly from output of a project² called *Practice as Research in Performance* (PARIP) (2000-2005) which looked at such research within academic contexts, and aim to deliver highest standards.

¹ Piccini, Angela and Kershaw, Baz, 2003. Practice as Research in Performance: from epistemology to evaluation. *Journal of Media Practice*: 4 (2): 113-123.

² Nelson, R. and Andrews, S., 2003, *The regulations and protocols governing Practice as Research (PaR) in the performing arts in the UK leading to the award of PhD*, PARIP, http://www.bris.ac.uk/parip/par_phd.htm, accessed Dec 11th 2015.



Although terminology differs slightly, institutions in Ireland including UL, NUIG (film) and UU award Research Degrees based on creative or performance practice, as does QQI. Internationally, many institutions such as the University of London Goldsmiths, University of York, University of Leeds, Royal College of Music and Birmingham City University/Birmingham Conservatoire award Research Degrees on this basis.

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: 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. The work must have separable, demonstrable research findings that are abstractable for subsequent scholars, and not locked into the experience of the performance. A reflective journal which captures all aspects of the performance practice process should be maintained, and it is very important that the written document is approached as an integral part of the creative practice research, progressed in parallel with the performance or creative element.

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 performer.
- The thesis overall may be deemed to fall short of the required standard, even if the works performed attract recognition, awards or success outside the academic arena.



Elements which can be included

Performances and creative practice 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 performance element must be public and substantial, and the particulars of this are dictated by norms in the field. To take music performance as an example: at PhD level, no less than three major public recitals, and two lecture recitals/presentations on work in progress would normally be required; at MA level, two public recitals, and one lecture recital would normally be required. Similar norms will apply in other fields such as Theatre Practice, media installations etc.

Considerations at the 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.

In addition, this type of format should be identified and, in the context of the intended format, student suitability in terms of his/her skill's base should be established at time of admission to the university. In the case of music performance, for example, it would be a prerequisite that the candidate was already at either a professional standard (PhD) or advanced standard (MA) of practice, and could demonstrate this through evidencing a record of achievement at a high level. An interview/audition would also normally be required.

The decision to opt for a research project in this format should be made jointly by an applicant and the proposed supervisors(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) creative or performance work, 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 its examination (which may be considerable), and projects should not be undertaken unless these are available.

As part of the admission process, the candidate should be asked to develop a written statement indicating the topic to be investigated, the research questions and aims of the project the methodologies to be used, the conceptual framework and the proposed outcomes (practice and written). Resources required (space, access to facilities, production



budgets etc.) should also be outlined and the School must consider whether or not it is in a position to support such a project in the appropriate way. Where candidates are suggesting use of their own resources, the adequacy of these to fulfil the aims of the project should be established. The scope, likely timing and location of examinable presentation(s) for the PhD / MA should be planned and agreed.

Particular care should be taken in applying the University *RPL Policy for Research Awards* in such admissions. Experience and expertise in creative or performance practice 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, including interview/audition. 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 performance may have involved other individuals in the production. It is expected that in such cases, the candidate has had full artistic control, 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 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 / MA (research) submissions, and relate to the substance of the original and significant contribution to the field made by the candidate.



Supervision

Students must afford reasonable access to their process to supervisors, who will provide feedback in a manner which parallels that for written work.

In order to prepare to draft a statement of and to evidence a candidate's contribution, it is good practice to maintain a reflective journal over the period of registration which captures aspects of the production or process as they evolve. Interactions and influences of technical and artistic collaborators are reflected in the journal, which may be included as an appendix to the submission where relevant.

Presentation and examination of the various elements of the thesis

1. The presentation of formally examinable practice should not normally be more than one calendar year in advance of the final written submission. The performance(s) or creative works must be public, with access facilitated for examiners.

It is important that examiners have read relevant contextualising comment prior to accessing each element of the 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 performance or creative practice piece, and not to a record of it that must be afforded to examiners and which is examined.

It is nonetheless important that performances 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, and to provide a reference for future scholars. In whatever format, a copy of this record must be included with the written thesis as an appendix.

Subject to resources, technical support may 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.

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

“detail the research questions addressed through the medium of the creative work / performance in the context of existing practice, 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 creative work / performance makes to the advancement of knowledge in the field.”



The minimum length of this element of the thesis is: 30,000 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.

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.

Examiners

These guidelines and the relevant extract from the regulations should be provided to potential external and internal examiners at the first stage of (normally informal) contact, 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 performance-based research, or practice as research, and are in a position to evaluate the work in the context of international norms in the field at the level of the award. There are challenges relating to finding suitable examiners for this format, ensuring continuity across evaluations of elements of the thesis over time, and coordinating opportunities to access process.

It may be necessary to appoint examiners much earlier than is customary for PhD / MA (Research) theses written in the traditional format. In those cases where a *viva voce* examination is planned (all PhD awards and relevant MA awards), and where external examiners meet candidates prior to this final *viva voce* examination, care must be taken to ensure maintenance of an appropriate professional distance.

- Feed-back on any work they may observe which is not formally for examination should be avoided, so that subsequent process is not influenced.
- Any post-presentation discussion of an examined element should be confined to examiner questions on points of clarification about the process and issues concerning the practice itself, reserving more overarching or conceptual questions to the *viva voce* examination.

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. Performances upon which assessment was based must be recorded and archived in digital format, and made available with the e-thesis. Supervisors should engage with the library staff at an early stage to ensure the digital format planned is one which can be accommodated.

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

'Guidelines on the 'PhD / MA through Creative or Performance Practice'		
Graduate Studies Office		
Approved by:	Date	The DCU logo is positioned in the bottom right corner of the table, featuring the same orange and yellow swoosh and blue 'DCU' text as seen at the top of the page.
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