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Guidelines for Candidates, Supervisors and Examiners on PhD/MA by Artefact or Creative/Performance Practice

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

1. Overview

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 mediaeval university, a format that is currently undergoing expansion worldwide. The increase in engagement with scholarly ideas through film, music composition, theatre, 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'). Candidates who consider submitting using this format should consult the regulations as well as these guidelines. A PhD/MA by Artefact or Creative/Performance Practice includes two substantial elements:

- PhD:
 - a written document of at least 30,000 words and
 - a substantial artefact or portfolio of artefacts or creative practice, or performances
- MA:
 - a written document of at least 15,000 words and
 - an appropriately substantive artefact or portfolio of artefacts or creative practice, or performances

Disciplines for which a research award on the basis of artefacts or creative performance or practice is particularly relevant include: music composition, music performance, conducting, music technology, theatre practice, film, sound, multimedia, arts based works, radio productions, documentaries, mixed media (including digital and responsive media) etc. However, it may also

be relevant to cross-disciplinary projects involving quite different fields such as computer science, so this list is not exhaustive.

In all cases, the work must include a sustained exercise in critical academic study and must make a significant research contribution, with appropriate reference to existing scholarship.

2. The standard of the 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. In addition, the candidate will be expected to make an argument to support the approach to the research questions via artefact or creative/performance practice as opposed to more traditional research methods and the monograph format. While the artefact or creative/performance practice constitutes the main body of the thesis and must contribute significant knowledge to the field (appropriate to the level of the award), 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 academic 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, and the significance of the contribution to new knowledge.

Where collaboration has been necessary as part of the artefact production or creative practice, the candidate's contribution must be explicitly documented. It is expected that the candidate will be responsible for most of the effort, even if some collaboration is involved.

The accompanying analytical commentary is therefore an equally important element in ensuring that examiners are convinced that the work presented meets the standard of the research award, which, as stated, is expected to be equivalent to that of a conventional PhD or MA by Research. It is very important that the written document is approached as an integral part of the research, progressed in parallel with the development of the artefact or creative/performance practice.

3. Eligibility

Normal minimum admission criteria for research degrees apply as do expectations regarding readiness for academic and analytical writing.

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, under supervision, for the research degree.

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

4. Elements which can be included

The format of 'artefact' is broadly interpreted, and examples may include creative works, media productions or art (e.g., music compositions, new musical critical editions, film, digital media, music technology/software, photographs, arts-based works, original literary writing etc.). The artefact, or collection of artefacts must be substantial, and the particulars of this are dictated by norms in the field. For example, for image-based work, the contribution could include a published work or an exhibition, the level of which for doctoral vs masters would be determined by norms in the field. For theatre, 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.

The format of the performance or practice-based elements are also dictated by norms in the field. Some examples are noted here for *illustrative purposes* only. 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. In music performance, no fewer than three major public recitals and two lecture recitals on work in progress would be expected at doctoral level, with adjustments as appropriate for master's level. For media productions in linear form, at doctoral level this would normally be audio-visual material of at least 1 hour's duration (documentary film or mixed media production); at MA level the audio-visual material would normally be at least 30 minute's duration; 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.

5. 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. At least one member of the proposed supervisory team should demonstrate prior experience in the proposed domain of practice or artefact. It is important that the supervisor has directly relevant scholarly output and is familiar with standards internationally for this format.

Prospective candidates should be able to demonstrate previous work in the proposed area and provide evidence of their ability and skills to conduct the proposed type of 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 publicly 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) at the time of application. Pivoting to this format later in the PhD cycle is not recommended.

Supervisors must provide guidance about the expected academic level for both the written and artefact/practice/performance aspects of the thesis, 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 all stages. A risk assessment and contingency plan should be put in place upon candidate acceptance and should be monitored regularly throughout each year. It is also important to consider the availability of resources (financial, material, space etc.) which will be required to support the research, and the 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. As with all research students, training in academic writing should be encouraged by supervisors where applicable. Direct guidance should be given on the taking of relevant Graduate Training Elements including, but not limited to, research methods. Students undertaking this type of PhD should receive explicit guidance on applying for research ethics approval, as is the case for other PhD formats.

After admission, the intended format should be taken into account in identifying developmental opportunities for the student, setting of milestones and monitoring of progress.

6. Presentation, timing, 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) [or practice/performance], set the artefact(s) [or practice/performance] 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 [or practice/performance] makes to the advancement of knowledge in the research area.”

The Application for Transfer to OR Confirmation on the PhD Register takes place between month 12 and month 21 of full-time registration (with appropriate adjustment for part-time registration). At this point in the PhD by Artefact or Creative/ Practice Performance process, the examination panel should ensure that the research questions are clear, the candidate can articulate how the artefact/practice is set in the context of existing literature, outline an appropriate methodology and have a convincing view of the coherence of the entire body of work. Significant progress towards creation of the artefact or performance should be evident at this stage as well as future plans and timelines. The student will submit a written component that should be assessed for its scholarly robustness and appropriateness, as is the case for a traditional PhD.

For candidates who register directly on the PhD Register and for whom a Transfer/Confirmation exam is not required, similar expectations regarding progress between the 12-21 month window can be expected and should equally be monitored by the supervisory team.

The minimum length of the thesis, upon completion, is: 30,000 words for PhD award and 15,000 words for MA award. However, the work may be 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.

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.

Examiners should read the relevant contextualising comment *prior to accessing work* in this way. Poor sequencing or timing could undermine the examination process. The examiner must have direct access to the artefact or performance, not only a recording of it. The performance or creative work must be public and this is what is examined.

At the same time, it is important that all artefact(s) or practice/performance(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 each 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.

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.

Registry has responsibility for reviewing and processing expenses associated with the *viva voce* examination. Any additional costs relating to examination (e.g. additional visits by the examiners to the university or another venue) should be discussed at School level. See comments below under "External Examiners".

7. 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 has made most of the contribution to the artefact/practice/performance components.

Candidates are required to complete a separate Declaration of Contribution form for each discrete element submitted for examination as part of thesis for a MA/PhD by Artefact or Creative/Performance Practice. This form sets out the candidate's contribution to the work(s) and the specific contribution of others which is to be independently verified in all cases. Where possible and practicable, the candidate's contribution should be verified by the principal supervisor(s) and all collaborators / support personnel signing off on 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 is in a position to verify the detail.

These forms should be signed using a digital image of handwritten signatures and included in the appendices of the electronic copy of the thesis submitted for examination. The forms included in the final version of the thesis should only use typed signatures.

To ensure a full and accurate record 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 academic contribution to the field made by the candidate.

8. 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.

Selection

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 or performance/practice, appropriate supervision and examination experience, as well as practical experience in the format. Examiners must be able to evaluate the work in the context of international norms in the field at the level of the award.

Timeline

A PhD by Artefact or Creative/Practice Performance might not follow a linear progression comparable to a traditional PhD format. Exhibitions or performances, for example, may take place in any year of the PhD and it may be desirable to request examiner attendance at such events, if they are not being recorded (see "Presentation and examination of the various elements of the thesis" below). This may require nomination and appointment of the external examiner(s) earlier than is expected for a traditional PhD. The PGR4 form ("Notice of Intention to Submit for Examination") may consequently need to be submitted for approval at an earlier stage so that examiners can be approved before attendance at related events. It may even be desirable to discuss nomination of examiners at the time of Transfer/Confirmation (normally held between months 12-21 for full-time students, adjusted appropriately for part-time students).

Supervisors should note the following important points:

- (i) With the relatively early appointment of examiners, supervisors should ensure that the appointees are committed to, and available for, a longer period of appointment. Swapping out examiners due to later unavailability is undesirable.

- (ii) If external examiners have to travel to exhibitions and/or performances, the School must be willing to co-fund the additional travel expenses. The principal supervisor should discuss and agree this with the Head of School at the very start of the doctoral process.
- (iii) Points (i) and (ii) should form part of the risk assessment/contingency planning recommended above.

Guidelines for examination

External examiners are asked to consider the following *guiding* questions when examining a PhD by Artefact or Creative/Practice Performance. They should also refer to the PGR6 Form, in which they report formally on the work and the viva voce.

- Does the body of work submitted as a whole make a significant, original and coherent contribution to knowledge, at the level expected internationally for a PhD or MA by Research award?
- Is the quality of the work in keeping with international expectations for the award of a PhD/MA by Research?
- Is the candidate's contribution and effort, as set out in the contribution declaration form, clear and equal to what is normally expected of effort towards a PhD/MA by Research?
- Is the artefact/documented creative/ practice performance submitted for consideration of substantial enough scope for the award being sought?
- Are the accompanying chapters written in a scholarly manner, as would be expected of a traditional PhD?


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

9. 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.

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