

Guidelines for PhD by Published Work

The University regulations for MPhil/PhD awards allow members of staff and certain other individuals to become candidates for PhD awards on the basis of published works. The precise wording of the regulations is as follows:-

3. PhD by Published Work

- 3.1 *A member of staff of the University or a person who, although not employed by the University, has made a substantial contribution to the academic endeavour of the University, shall be permitted to be a student for the degree of PhD by published work. Such a student shall submit published work in place of the thesis. The submission of published work shall be accompanied by a commentary which establishes, in a way that can be assessed by oral examination, that the published work constitutes a coherent body of work and that the student fulfils all other requirements for the conferment of the degree of PhD. The commentary shall be between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length.*
- 3.1.1 *The Faculty Research Degrees Board shall determine the period of enrolment for a student for the degree of PhD by published work. The period of enrolment so determined by the Faculty Research Degrees Board may be shorter than periods of enrolment specified in Section 5 of these regulations. In addition, the Faculty Research Degrees Board shall determine whether the student is required to undertake research and professional skills training and, if so, the arrangements for research and professional skills training.*
- 3.1.2 *Save in respect of the submission of a thesis and the period of enrolment, a candidate for the degree of PhD by published work shall satisfy all other requirements of these regulations.*

General Guidance on the Operation of PhD by Published Work

The purpose of the PhD by Publication route is to enable individuals who are associated with the University and have conducted published research at a level commensurate with a PhD to obtain doctoral recognition for such work where it has not previously been considered for such an award. The award is strictly for staff or those individuals who have made a substantial contribution to the academic endeavour of the University. Faculties are expected to be able to confirm that candidates who are not members of staff are formally associated with the University in some other recognised and documented capacity, for example as a Visiting Professor or Visiting Fellow.

The regulations for the PhD by Publication award are deliberately flexible in order to allow Faculty Research Degrees Boards to determine what is and is not acceptable as a submission for this award taking into account the nature of the discipline in which the research lies. In all cases the candidate is required to produce a written commentary that accompanies the published work(s). In all cases, examiners and Faculty Research Degrees Boards must satisfy themselves that taken as a whole, the published work(s) and associated commentary demonstrate that the candidate meets the essential criteria for a PhD award of the University as specified in the regulations. These criteria are as follows:

“A successful candidate for the degree of PhD shall demonstrate through the presentation of a scholarly thesis and by oral examination:

(a) a systematic and critical understanding of the body of knowledge at the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or creative domain to which the research relates;

(b) a detailed understanding of research techniques consistent with advanced academic enquiry in the relevant academic discipline, field of study or creative domain to which the research relates;

(c) the ability to conceive, implement and, where appropriate, modify a plan of research capable of creating new knowledge at the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study or creative domain;

(d) an original contribution to the body of knowledge of an academic discipline, field of study or academic domain in a way that extends the forefront of that academic discipline, field of study or creative domain and which would warrant publication in the judgement of peers;

(e) the ability of the candidate to undertake further research without supervision, such research being of the kind that would warrant publication in the judgement of peers.”

In relation to the PhD by Published Work, the reference in the regulations to “scholarly thesis” must be interpreted as referring to the combination of the published works plus the commentary.

As part of the process of determining whether a submission of published works and commentary meet the requirements for a PhD as itemised in the criteria above, the Faculty Research Degrees Board would be expected to assure itself that:

- The published work or works represent an original contribution to research and scholarship in the field and are not simply texts that present pre-existing knowledge, albeit in a new format. The published works should have been subject to a peer review process. This will be implicit where such works are articles that have been published in recognised academic journals or are books published by well known academic publishers. In the creative domain, the concept of “published works” may be taken to include exhibitions or performances which are disseminated.
- The volume of work represented by the published works is broadly equivalent to at least that which might be achieved by a PhD student undertaking three years of full time research. It is not possible to define how much published work would be acceptable. However it is unlikely that a submission of less than 4 peer reviewed journal articles, or exhibitions or performances in the creative domain, would be considered equivalent to three years of full time research unless they are of exceptional quality and substance as judged by the highest academic standards in the field. The value of the published works, or exhibitions or performances, in terms of equivalence to a period of full time research should be assessed by the examiners.

- Where any of the publications have been co-authored, that the individual contribution of the candidate can be verified.
- The published works demonstrate a contribution to research that has current value in the field of study, i.e. is normally “at the forefront of the academic discipline” as described in the PhD criteria. Although no formal time limit is set, it is unlikely that publications older than 10 years before the date of submission for the award would normally be considered to have current value. The current value of the published works, or exhibitions or performances, should be assessed by the examiners.
- The commentary is of sufficient length to explain the significance and contribution of the published work(s) in relation to other work in the field of study and also to explain the coherence of the published work(s). The commentary shall be between 5,000 and 10,000 words in length.

In submitting the “thesis”, a candidate for a PhD by Published Work should ideally submit the commentary and publications (or appropriate evidence of exhibitions or performances etc in the creative domain) bound together in one volume, where this is physically possible and permitted by the relevant publishers, with appropriate acknowledgments to copyright holders. However it is recognised that in some cases it will be impossible to produce such an integrated volume and the bound volume may consist of the candidate’s commentary plus copies of abstracts or contents lists of the published works. In such cases, however, the candidate is expected to provide full copies of the published works for the examiners.