

## The PhD with practice at Ulster University

### Introduction

The PhD at Ulster University can take the form of either a standard thesis-based PhD or it can incorporate an element of practice. What follows is some additional guidance on what a practice-based PhD at this University consists of and must be read in conjunction with the general regulations for PhD.

The understanding of a PhD with practice is based on the principle of 'practice as research (PaR) according to which practice is regarded as a 'methodological process of research inquiry and a mode of dissemination of research in its own right'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, creative or performance practice on its own, irrespective of the quality and standard which it demonstrates, will not be admissible for the award of PhD.

The practical element must be accompanied and complemented by written documentation the purpose of which is to:

- provide a critical review of existing literature and practice relevant to the project
- contextualise the practical component within this existing area of theory and practice
- establish a clear research question
- demonstrate an appropriate practice methodology
- critically evaluate the research findings

### Practice-based research within the University

Practice-based research is integral to much of the research carried out in the University but it is particularly prominent in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. Here the practice can range from all areas of Design, Applied and Fine Arts to creative writing, media technology, photography, musical composition and performance. The Faculty can provide further guidance on the exact nature and scope of the practice element within a practice-based PhD project.

### Recruitment and Admission

The nature of the substantial practical work must be specified in the proposal for the PhD with practice doctorate.

Applicants for admission to undertake a PhD with practice must be able to provide evidence of the requisite skills, knowledge and experience to enable them to carry out the project or the capacity to acquire them to the appropriate standard within the scope of the project.

Applicants must indicate as part of the project proposal an outline of the balance of the elements that will make up the final submission. Any assessment of the project proposal

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Nelson (MMU) and Stuart Andrews (PALATINE) 'Practice as Research: Regulations, Protocols and Guidelines' <http://78.158.56.101/archive/palatine/development-awards/337/index.html>

should take account of the facilities and resources required and ensure the award is possible on the basis of the outcomes proposed and resources available.

### Review and monitoring

As with all research programmes, practice-based PhD projects at Ulster University are subject to rigorous scrutiny and regular monitoring. In particular the relationship between the practical component and the written commentary must be approved at the recruitment stage and reviewed at subsequent stages such as the Initial Assessment of Progress (three to four months after registration) and the Confirmation of Registration at the end of year one. At Confirmation stage, a practice element will be a mandatory submission requirement. This could be a contained performance, a small installation or a concept to demonstrate practice. The student will be required to demonstrate the ability to contextualise and justify the proposed practice through the written analysis.

### Resources

The provision of appropriate resources for any practice-based PhD project must be agreed at the admission stage and will be reviewed as part of the routine assessment processes in year one (Initial Assessment Viva and Confirmation Viva). At the Confirmation stage there must be a formal agreement of the resources available to undertake any project.

### Supervision

The supervisory team will include staff with relevant experience in a field cognate with the practical work. Their role will be to guide the candidate in the development of the project, ensuring that the practice is research-led and also ensuring that there is a close intellectual relationship between the research-led practical work and the written submission.

### What you submit

A PhD with practice submission will consist of a practice element, where appropriate supported by documentation, and a written commentary as outlined in the Introduction (above). It should also indicate the project's originality and contribution to the discipline or interdisciplinary field.

A practice-based PhD submission must meet the established generic criteria of 'making a contribution to knowledge' or 'affording substantial new insights'.

The relationship between the practice and the written element of the submission will have been agreed in advance of any final submission, normally at the Confirmation viva, and certainly no later than the end of year two.

In constructing this agreement, it will be agreed by all parties what elements of practice are to be directly experienced by the examining team (and, if applicable, what practice events will not be directly experienced).

All submissions must provide a retainable record of the practical component, stored in a way that makes it accessible and retrievable (e.g. in the form of photographs, scores, drawings, CD-ROM, DVD or other recorded material).

The written documentation and the practical component of your PhD will together form 100% of the examined submission and both are of importance in pursuing the research question. The written documentation for PhDs that include a practical component will be within the range of 20,000 to 60,000 words. Individual faculties may set specific limits within this range depending on the nature of the practical component.

### Assessment

The assessment of the PhD with Practice is exclusively on the basis of the thesis, including practice, and a viva voce.

Arrangements will be made for the practical component to be considered by the Examiners and the practical component must be accessible to the Examiners prior to the oral examination.

### PhDs involving live practice

In those cases where the PhD project involves live practice, normally the Examiners will experience that live practice. This may mean appointing the Board of Examiners at an earlier stage, in advance of the final submission. Such witnessing of the practical component is not, however, part of the formal assessment of the PhD. This must be done solely on the basis of the submission, i.e. the written thesis and the practical component presented in retainable form. There should be no formal contact between any examiner and a candidate on the occasion of a practice event that will form part of the final submission, nor will examiners attending practice events offer comment to the candidate or the supervisors, following the experience of a practice event. It is important that appropriate attention is given to the documentation of practice as a record of the project making it accessible to future scholars. Normally, this should be agreed through the confirmation process.