

School of Geography. Policy on Alternative Thesis Format (adapted from the CSSL Research Degree Guidance)

The Academic Regulations states that: 'Where a School has made suitable arrangements to examine theses presented in alternative formats, a candidate may be examined on the basis of: (i) a collection of papers of publishable/peer reviewed standard describing a coherent programme of research, accompanied by a critical and theoretical overview of the work presented in the papers. (ii) a substantial collection of original creative material, together with a written thesis which contextualises the work within an academic framework.'

In compliance with this, and with the College Guidelines, the School of Geography adopts the following policy, for the alternative thesis format (PhD by papers).

Published papers themselves may not be included in the body of a thesis as they stand but may be adapted to form an integral part of a thesis and thereby make a relevant contribution to the main theme of a thesis.

A thesis in an alternative format such as a collection of publishable/peer-reviewed papers must be considered equivalent (in terms of quality and original contribution to knowledge) to the already existing traditional PhD monograph, when the same requirements of scholarly substance and rigour are acknowledged by the relevant assessing panels.

A minimum equivalent of three papers as either sole or lead author must be submitted to be considered equivalent to a traditional PhD monograph. Where papers are co-authored, a definitive statement outlining the precise contribution of each of the co-authors must be submitted with the thesis for examination.

At the time of examination, some of these papers may still be accepted, in pre-publication, under review or in preparation for submission, but at least one must be already of publishable quality. The examination of the thesis is independent from the outcomes of the peer-review processes that the papers undertake, although students are encouraged to consider very carefully the critiques and suggestions that they receive from their papers' peer-reviewers for the development of their research.

A thesis in an alternative format must address a common set of research objectives. It is a single, integrated programme of supervised research whose outputs are the publication of a series of thematically integrated papers which cumulatively address a set of core research questions. To this end, it is essential that the final work is logically and consistently constructed.

For students pursuing the alternative thesis format, the thesis must include a separate substantial discussion that provides an overview of the thesis as a whole. Typically, this will (where appropriate to the discipline) describe the context of and rationale for the research, a literature/theory chapter contextualising the research, a supplementary methods chapter outlining in greater detail the overall research design and analysis framework, and conclusion.

The decision as to whether a student pursues a traditional PhD monograph or an alternative thesis format rests with the assigned supervisor(s) in consultation with the Research Studies Panel (RSP), not later than in the second RSP meeting. This decision must be then approved by the Stage Transfer Panel.

The thesis examination committee have the final say on equivalence within the context of the guidelines issued by the University.