

## **PhD by Published works – guidance on acceptance criteria**

### **Introduction**

This guidance aims to assist academic leads, applicants and potential supervisors in understanding the Warwick Medical School (WMS) approach to assessing applications for PhD by Published works. It is purely advisory, and WMS follows University guidance and procedures for PhD by Published works. Further information on these can be found here:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/research/phdbypublishedwork> <https://warwick.ac.uk/services/dc/pgrassessments/gtehdr/requirements/#three3> (Section 3.4)

Interested parties should consult the University of Warwick Doctoral College webpages for current guidance on admissions policies for PhDs in general, and PhDs by Published works specifically.

### **Assessment of suitability for admission**

Formally, admission to PhD by Published works depends on the Chair of the relevant Faculty Board assessing whether the Works submitted by the candidate are of ‘the appropriate standard’. In practice, the Chair will rely on departmental advice for this assessment. At WMS, we ask PGR academic leads to take on this role, based on information provided to them by candidates prepared with the help of their potential supervisor(s). Academic leads may seek support from academic staff who are subject experts.

University guidance sets out what information should be submitted by the candidate to inform this assessment. This should include 3-8 publications, together with appropriate contextual information regarding the publications (journal profile, the individual contribution of the candidate, citations, impact and significance of the published work). The publications form the intellectual basis of the examination if the candidate is admitted.

The key question is – what is ‘the appropriate standard’? Section 3.4 of the University Requirements for the Award of Research Degrees notes that the submitted material must contribute a ‘substantial original contribution to knowledge’. This is exactly the same requirement as that for PhD by thesis (Section 3.3) except that the latter also requires that a thesis be ‘in principle, worthy of peer-reviewed publication’. This requirement will have already been satisfied in the case of a PhD by Publication. It is important to note that it is the examiners who determine whether the submitted material meet the criteria.

### **Application of guidance by WMS**

The ‘appropriate standard’ is inevitably a matter of judgement. At WMS, the guiding principle we recommend be applied is that of ‘strong equivalency’. The degree awarded, PhD, is the same whether the submitted material is a thesis or a suite of publications. Therefore, potential supervisors and academic leads should put themselves in the role of PhD examiner and ask ‘if the intellectual

and research work contained in these publications were submitted as a thesis, would I be comfortable passing the candidate?’

When asking this question, supervisors and academic leads may wish to note from Section 3.3 of the Regulations that ‘the Board of Graduate Studies has resolved that a thesis submitted for the degree of PhD should be an **original investigation** characterised by **rigorous research methodology** and capable of making a **significant contribution** to knowledge **commensurate with the normal period of registration** for a full-time or part-time student’ (emphasis added). Occasionally, PGR Academic leads may seek support from academic staff who are subject experts for their initial evaluation.

When requesting admission to a PhD by Published Works at WMS, candidates will complete a specific application form ([link](#)), inclusive of a supportive statement from the proposed supervisor(s), and provide a CV, which includes a full publication list.

Candidates need to be aware that there are no specific thresholds for impact or significance that determine acceptance. Instead, these principles suggest that the following factors need to be considered in judging an application:

- The cohesion of the submitted works
- The individual intellectual achievement of the candidate demonstrated in the submitted works
- The nature of the submitted works (i.e. their originality, research design/methodology, and contribution to knowledge).
- The current relevance of the submitted works. The publications presented as part of a PhD by Published Works application should be assessed in relation to the time of submission. A PhD by Published works is not awarded in recognition of excellent research completed in the past which is not currently impactful, relevant or significant. Taken as a whole, the set of publications being examined should, instead, make a contribution to original knowledge at the time in which the submission is being examined.

Applicants need to be aware that acceptance is not a guarantee that a PhD will be awarded, and that this will be determined through examination by independent examiners. The examiners will be experts in the specific content area or methodology of the submission which the PGR Academic leads may not be. Hence, examiners’ judgement on whether the submission is worthy of being awarded a PhD may be different from PGR Academic leads. One can make an analogy between the assessment made by the Academic leads and the assessment made by a journal editor as to whether they send a paper for independent peer-review. Whilst the editor will only send a paper for review if they think the paper has a reasonable chance to be accepted, sending a paper for independent peer review would not guarantee acceptance of the paper in the journal.

The purpose of the rigorous application process is to determine the likelihood that the submitted works will be successful at viva. Therefore, we recommend that candidates are only put forward where there is strong confidence that the conditions described above will be judged to have been met.

It should also be noted that the intellectual content being assessed is solely the individual intellectual achievement documented in the submitted works. However, a particular issue for WMS is that many candidates will be health professionals rather than researchers by profession. The works submitted may therefore reflect a strong applied and clinical focus. In such cases, the candidate may wish to use their ‘covering document’ to reflect on the research methodologies

**relevant to their work, in order to assist the examiners in assessing the methodological rigour of their submitted works. Such candidates should bear in mind the caveat that the examiners may not be convinced that their works, irrespective of their impact or clinical importance, are of the appropriate nature and standard deserving of a research degree (PhD).**

**Professor Jason Madan**

**Director of Graduate Research Studies**

**Warwick Medical School (WMS)**

**21 Oct 2020**

**Updated by Professor Domenico Giacco**

**PhD by Published works lead in the WMS Postgraduate Research Committee**

**1<sup>st</sup> March 2023**