Alternative format doctoral thesis - summary of proposed changes

1. Proposal
1.1 That all students registered for a doctoral degree are permitted to submit a portfolio as an alternative to the traditional thesis format.

2. Purpose of changes
- Reduce time spent rewriting material from thesis chapters into papers.
- Enhance the writing for publication skills of early career researchers.
- Increase competitiveness of graduates upon entering the academic job market.

3. Sector benchmarking
3.1 Other higher education institutions which accept the inclusion of papers ‘written as if for publication but not necessarily published’ into a DPhil or PhD thesis include Oxford University (Biology Department), University of Birmingham and the University of Ulster. More commonly permitted is a compilation thesis consisting of submitted, accepted or published papers. Examples are found at Kings College, Oxford University (Geography Department), LSE, Durham University, University of Lancaster, and many international institutions from Australia, Denmark and Sweden where this practice is industry standard.

4. Current practice
4.1 Regulation 16.1(i) specifies which format of work should be submitted for each doctoral degree programme; a thesis, a portfolio or a collection of published works for examination, but not what is meant by each term. Currently the PhD is examined by thesis, while the professional doctorates utilise a mixture of thesis, portfolio, or published works options (appendix).

4.2 The Postgraduate Research Framework (S11/12-174) defined what was meant by the terms thesis, dissertation, portfolio and a collection of published work. These definitions were approved by Senate, but have not as yet been incorporated into the regulations or code of practice:
- **Thesis:** The submission of a doctoral thesis at the University of Bath may take the form of a dissertation, a portfolio, or a collection of previously published work. In all cases the thesis shall include a statement of the extent to which the submitted work has been produced jointly with others and shall indicate, where it incorporates material already submitted for another degree, the extent of that material and the degree, if any, obtained. The length of the thesis in its entirety shall not normally exceed 100,000 words.
- **A Dissertation** shall normally include an exposition of the subject of research; a critical review of literature, research and knowledge in the field; a series of investigative chapters; and a conclusion.
- **A Portfolio** shall normally consist of a body of work (normally a series of papers), together with a commentary. The commentary shall include a critical review of literature, research and knowledge in the field together with a summary and critical analysis of the submitted work demonstrating its contribution to the field. The body of work will normally have been completed during the period of registration for the degree for which it is submitted.
- **A collection of Published Work** shall normally consist of a series of published books or papers which have not been previously presented for the award of a degree of this or any other university, together with a commentary. The commentary shall include a critical review of literature, research and knowledge in the field together with a summary and critical analysis of the published work demonstrating its contribution to the field. It shall also include an indication of reviews and citations, and the standing of journals in which any of the submitted
works have appeared and publishers of any books included in the submission. The majority of the work, excluding the commentary, shall normally have been completed outside the period of registration for the degree for which it is submitted.

5. **Proposed changes**

5.1 That where a ‘thesis’ is currently specified in regulation, students may now present their work in either one of two formats:

1 A traditional research enquiry dissertation incorporating an exposition of the subject of research; a critical review of literature, research and knowledge in the field; a series of investigative chapters; and a conclusion.

Or alternatively

2 A research enquiry portfolio incorporating a series of academic papers on a focussed theme of research, prepared as for publication, but not necessarily yet published; together with a commentary. The commentary shall include a critical review of literature, research and knowledge in the field together with a summary and critical analysis of the submitted work demonstrating its contribution to the field. The body of work will normally have been completed during the period of registration for the degree for which it is submitted and must be closely related in terms of subject matter and form a cohesive research narrative.

5.2 That the Framework definitions are adopted into regulation 16, incorporating the variation in the text defining portfolios shown above (italicised).

6. **Expectations**

6.1 Doctoral students from all disciplines would be permitted to submit their thesis in either format, and would discuss this with supervisors at an early stage in the studentship. Choice of thesis format would be indicated at confirmation.

6.2 At confirmation, a student would present the equivalent number of draft chapters/draft papers for consideration that is currently specified by each department.

6.3 The length and number of publications to be included in the thesis would be determined by the supervisory team.

6.4 All material would be the work of the student, however, joint or collaborative papers may be included as is current practice.

6.5 The thesis would have uniform formatting throughout, it is not intended that materials formatted to meet specific journal publication requirements would be included.

6.6 The primary consideration would be that the content and scope required for the award of each doctoral degree remains as prescribed in Regulation 16 (appendix).

7. **Questions for consideration**

A. Is this approach to the thesis format acceptable in principle?
B. Are the proposed expectations appropriate and sufficiently clear?
C. Could co-authored material be included, with author contribution clearly indicated?
D. Might one format form the default expectation for each doctoral award, with that at least one other available subject to negotiation between the student and supervisory team?

For further information or to comment on these proposals please contact Caroline McMurray, Quality Enhancement Officer for Doctoral Studies

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Appendix

1.1 Regulation 16.1 (j) specifies in which of the three formats work should be presented, but not what is meant by each term.

1.2 Regulation 16.1 (j) PRESENTATION OF THE THESIS/PORTFOLIO FOR THE DEGREES OF MPhil, PhD, DBA, DClinPsy, DHealth, DPRP, EdD, EngD, MS and MD Candidates shall present a thesis or portfolio as follows.

(i) Two (three in the cases of MS and MD) copies of the thesis or, in the case of the degrees of MS, MD and MPhil/PhD by Staff Method B only, submission of published or other works, in a format as specified in instructions issued to candidates, or in the case of the degrees of EngD and DClinPsy, a portfolio, must be lodged with the appropriate Graduate School/Division. The candidate shall keep a third (fourth) copy, identical to the submitted copies, for reference before and during the examination process. Theses/portfolios shall embody at the beginning a summary of the work not exceeding 300 words in length. After completion of any viva voce examination, and approval of the outcome of the examination, one paper and one electronic copy of the thesis/portfolio shall be retained in the University Library.

1.3 Regulation 16.4-16.16 further specifies which format may be submitted:

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<th>Submission method permitted</th>
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<td>thesis or publications</td>
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<td>portfolio</td>
<td>DClinPsy</td>
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1.4 The text concerning the award of the degree is uniform across all higher degrees and outlines the standards expected of the work submitted to qualify for a doctoral degree at the University of Bath. This text is to remain unchanged under this proposal.

1.5 Regulation 16.4(m) EdD, 16.5(n) PhD, 16.12(m) DBA, 16.14(m) DHealth, 16.15(o) EngD, and 16.16(l) DClinPsy use the same text when outlining the award of the doctoral degree.

AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF xxx

The Degree of Doctor of xxx shall be awarded to a candidate who shall have:

(i) pursued a programme of study as prescribed under Regulation 16.4(b) above; and
(ii) presented a thesis/portfolio on the candidate’s advanced study and research which satisfies the Board of Examiners as:

(a) making an original and significant contribution to knowledge
(b) giving evidence of originality of mind and critical judgement in a particular subject
(c) containing material worthy of peer-reviewed publication
(d) being satisfactory in its literary and/or technical presentation and structure with a full bibliography and references
(e) demonstrating an understanding of the context of the research: this must include, as appropriate for the subject of the thesis, the scientific, engineering, commercial and social contexts

(iii) passed a viva voce examination conducted by the examiners on the broader aspects of the field of research in addition to the subject of the thesis/portfolio.