

To: All Masters and PhD students
From: Andy Pitman
Subject: Thesis by papers

Dear All,

During the interviews hosted by Geoff Humpreys, a few of you asked for clarification regarding the Department's view on the submission of theses by papers. It is very hard to specify any ground rules for this new approach because it's new and because every Masters/PhD project is (by definition) different. However, the following are general guidelines: they are in no way prescriptive; they do not guarantee success and your supervisor is the source of specific advice.

The number of papers should be of order 3+ for a Masters and 5+ for a PhD. All other information on this is a question of risk minimization:

- Go for *good international journals* (ask your supervisor for the most suitable journal for your work);
- Accepted is as good as published but submitted is not unless you already have a decent track record of your work being accepted;
- You can include conference abstracts and non-refereed conference papers but I think this would very significantly increase your risk. Include them *in addition to* the major works not instead of the major works.

The expected authorship of papers is important. An examiner will not expect all your papers to be single authored, or even that you would be first author on everything. I suspect most examiners would expect you to be the first author on several of the papers though and these would be the principal papers which describe your methods and or results.

Thesis format: The thesis must be a coherent body of work (so the papers must be on common theme that you can weave into a single story). I think it is essential to include a major Introduction chapter and a chapter on Discussion and Conclusions. These are *much more* important in a thesis by papers than a traditional thesis because (i) you must be able to link the papers together and (ii) it may be the only part of the thesis written by just you and you have to be able to demonstrate *your* understanding of the context and significance of your work. You may (and probably would) include appendices. Each paper would include details on your contribution and statements (1 page or so) detailing your contribution. If you have not written a paper on a part of the thesis (e.g. Methods) this chapter would appear in full in the normal way. If your Methods appear in each results paper they will be abbreviated in the papers and, again, a full version would probably appear in the thesis. The thesis should be set out in a sensible way. I'd advise A4, double sided and 1.5 spacing **but this is advise which may not be appropriate in all cases.** Talk to your supervisor.

How to set out the contribution from authors. This is easy: **detail explicitly** the contributions from all authors to all aspects of the work including the **idea** (the originality of the ideas are of primary concern and you must demonstrate that they belong to you), data collection, data analysis, writing, compilation etc. It would be wise to get co-authors to sign off on this.

I want to emphasise that these guidelines are non-prescriptive and are very general. Each student planning thesis by papers needs to talk it through early with their supervisors. Not all projects lend themselves to this mode of submission. There are also major risks: PhD/Masters theses rarely fail, but if a journal rejects your first three papers then you may not have any accepted papers to bring into the thesis.

Andy Pitman, 12 May, 2000