

# Multi-Part Thesis Pilot: Guidance for PGRs and Supervisors

## Contents

<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>2</b>
(a)	Current regulations for a thesis submission .....	2
(b)	What is a 'Multi-Part' thesis?.....	2
<b>2.</b>	<b>What is the Multi-part thesis pilot?</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Advice for PGRs outside of practice-led research degrees</b> .....	<b>4</b>
(a)	Criteria for a multi-part thesis outside of practice-led research .....	4
(b)	Application Process for a multi-part thesis outside of practice-led degrees...	5
(c)	Submission for examination stage (GRAD).....	6
(d)	Final eThesis submission stage (WREO).....	6
<b>4.</b>	<b>Advice for Practice-led researchers (AHC only)</b> .....	<b>7</b>
(a)	Criteria for a multi-part practice-led research thesis .....	7
(b)	Process for notification of a multi-part practice-led research thesis .....	7
(c)	Submission for examination stage (GRAD) (for practice-led).....	8
(d)	Final eThesis submission stage (WREO) (for practice-led).....	8
<b>5.</b>	<b>Glossary</b> .....	<b>9</b>
	Multi-part thesis FAQs.....	11

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## 1. Introduction

Graduate Board has approved a 12-month pilot to support applications for the submission of a multi-part thesis for examination. This document summarises the arrangements for the pilot, and the process to be followed if you would like to make an application for the submission of a multi-part thesis. A [glossary](#) has also been included to help explain some of the terms referred to in this document. **The arrangements will differ if you are registered for a practice-led research degree.**

### (a) Current regulations for a thesis submission

For the degree of PhD, candidates must submit a thesis of 100,000 words maximum (approximately 300 pages) on the subject of their research. The expected format of submission for examination will be a single PDF upload to GRAD.

Separate arrangements exist within the regulations for practice-led research degrees in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures to submit an alternative format of thesis which includes a written submission together with body of work which comprises the creative practice. This may already take the form of multiple, different types of files.

The move to e-only submission for examination has opened new possibilities and challenges, and we are starting to see requests for theses outside of practice-led research which are not the usual single PDF format, for example content which would previously have been printed and bound into the hard copy thesis being submitted as additional digital files. To respond to this, Graduate Board has approved a pilot for 'multi-part' thesis submissions.

### (b) What is a 'Multi-Part' thesis?

A ['Multi-Part' Thesis](#) is a thesis in which the **examinable content**<sup>1</sup> consists of multiple elements, and more than just a single PDF submission. Such additional content might not easily be accommodated in a single PDF, and may include a number of different electronic files and formats (for example PDF, jpeg, mp3, mp4). The concept is applied currently to practice PhDs only, but this pilot will explore theses in addition to practice-led which may have additional examinable content over and above the written submission.

A multi-part thesis may include a number of different electronic files and formats and presents opportunities for more flexible and creative presentation and examination of work, providing there is a robust academic rationale for submitting the content in this way. Examples could include (this list is not exhaustive):

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<sup>1</sup> Where we talk about a multi-part thesis, we are referring to ['examined content'](#) which is content that is essential for the examiners in order to examine the work. This is different to ['supplementary content'](#). Both of these terms are explained in more detail in the [glossary](#).

- Content that is not easily accommodated in a single PDF due to its size, for example data or other material that would typically form part of your appendix
- Content that is better presented in its original source format for ease of use
- Computer code
- A video (rather than static images) of an experimental set-up or cell movement
- A visualisation of a weather front
- A visualisation of a 3-D model.
- A portfolio of videos, audio files or other file types illustrating creative practice

## 2. What is the Multi-part thesis pilot?

Graduate Board has approved a 12-month pilot to allow for applications for submission of a multi-part thesis from across the University, extending beyond the current provision for just practice-led theses. The intention of the pilot phase is to build more real-life examples to inform guidance and support, and in turn allow for longer-term recommendations around format of theses to be considered: This pilot will allow Graduate Board to:

- Understand the demand/level of interest for submission of theses in a multi-part format outside of practice-led research degrees.
- Gather information on the types of material/content, thesis format and structure that might be considered for submission.
- Build an evidence base to determine whether a longer-term change in the regulations is needed to support submission of non-practice, multi-part theses
- Identify opportunities to better support the management and sharing of diverse digital materials and enhance the advice and support for all PGRs.
- For practice-led theses, understand the range and nature of material/content for submission to identify opportunities to better support the management, sharing and preservation of diverse digital materials.
- Consider issues such as examinability, technical options, confidentiality/sensitivity of materials, embargo options and how best to capture valuable research materials.
- Review options for individual [DOIs / identifiers](#) for research material.

**The arrangements for the pilot will differ, depending on whether you are registered for a practice-led research degree or not.** PGRs not registered for a practice-led research degree should follow the guidance in section 3 of this document. If you are registered for a practice-led research degree<sup>2</sup>, please follow the guidance in section 4.

If you have any questions you can find contacts in the [FAQs at the end of this document](#).

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<sup>2</sup> PGRs registered for a practice-led research degree will be designated as practice-led in GRAD. The Postgraduate research project type in GRAD will be recorded as “PhD (Practice-led)”. If you are in any doubt, please contact the Graduate School for further advice: [AHCGradSchool@Leeds.ac.uk](mailto:AHCGradSchool@Leeds.ac.uk)

### 3. Advice for PGRs outside of practice-led research degrees

#### (a) Criteria for a multi-part thesis outside of practice-led research

There must be a clear academic rationale for submission of a multi-part thesis. The need for the examiners to be able to assess the core criteria (originality, criticality, publishability) must be balanced against supporting the opportunity to submit in a non-conventional format. Applications will be on a case-by-case basis and must consider the following:

##### Academic support for choice of format

Details of how this choice of format benefits from being in a multi-part thesis format rather than the conventional single PDF submission. The School must be satisfied that the format is adding value, is essential for communicating the contribution to knowledge, and does not detract from evidencing the criteria for award.

##### Length and equivalence

Consideration to the length of the proposed submission and that this allows for the necessary academic depth and rigour – equivalent to a conventional thesis format - whilst also ensuring that the volume/quantity of material submitted remains appropriate, and within the normal expectations for a thesis in the discipline.

##### Navigation

Whereas examiners can easily move between different sections of a traditional written submission, careful consideration must be given as to how the examiners will navigate and examine a multi-part thesis, and how they may need to e.g. reference which parts need reworking in the event of corrections.

##### Accessibility

Material must be well designed, created and accessible. Information on the format and content of the files will be required, including any additional software required to open the files. Accessibility and preservation should be considered when choosing file formats.

##### Confidentiality and sensitivity of materials

The School must assess whether any of the additional files include sensitive or highly confidential data or materials. If so, the School must provide confirmation that the University guidelines for the handling and storage of data have been followed and sharing of this content with the examiners (and longer-term as part of the thesis in [WREO](#)) is consistent with the approach outlined in ethics review and any contractual agreements.

##### Long-term preservation

The University will require a permanent record of the complete thesis on which any award is made, and all content/files will need to be deposited to [WREO](#). Consideration should also be given to the accessibility of the thesis to a wider audience. Please [see further advice later in this document](#). Depending on the nature and format of the intended

submission, advice may need to be sought from the Library to support the eventual archive of the final thesis (after examination). If you feel it might be necessary to [redact part of a multi-part thesis](#) before deposit to WREO please [contact the Library](#) and [Doctoral College Operations](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission.

### Examination

Confirmation that the examiners are aware of the non-conventional format for submission, and are happy to examine in this format will be required. It would be open to the examiners to require that the thesis be re-worked into a conventional thesis format as part of any corrections to the thesis, and which may be within the scope of what examiners could require under a referral recommendation. The examiners will be asked to provide an assurance in their final report that they were able to reach an evidence-based conclusion given the unconventional format for submission.

### (b) Application Process for a multi-part thesis outside of practice-led degrees

Submission of a multi-format thesis is subject to approval of both the School and the Graduate Board's Progression and Examinations Group, via the following process.

#### Preliminary stage

**Form needed:** None

Academic support from the Supervisory team and Director of Postgraduate Research Studies is required for a multi-part thesis submission. You should first discuss this with your Supervisors well before the planned date for thesis submission. It is recognised that a multi-part doctoral thesis may not be appropriate in all disciplines and that, in some subject areas, the traditional, single PDF thesis will remain the recommended and expected format for the thesis. Supervisors will be best placed to advise their PGRs on such matters, considering both the expectations in the discipline and the application criteria above.

#### Application for a Multi-Part thesis stage

**Form needed:** Application for a Multi Part thesis (non-practice led)

Where supported by the Supervisors and Director of PGR Studies, an application for a multi-part thesis should be completed. An application form for this purpose is provided. The completed form must be returned to Doctoral College Operations at least 6 months before the intended submission date of the thesis. Earlier applications are strongly encouraged to ensure that there is sufficient time before the intended submission date to consider and resolve issues, and if necessary revert to a traditional thesis submission. In-principle applications at earlier points in the candidature can also be considered. All applications will be considered by the Progression and Examinations Group. Consultation with the [White Rose Etheses Online](#) (WREO) team will also be undertaken so that, if approved, advice on long-term preservation and archiving of any material can be provided.

### (c) Submission for examination stage (GRAD)

**Form needed:** Multi-Part Thesis Index File

Where a multi-part thesis has been approved, the thesis should be submitted for examination to GRAD. A Multi-Part Thesis Index File must be submitted alongside the thesis files. This index file will be shared with the examiners alongside the thesis and associated files to assist them with navigation of materials. If any of your additional files (outside the PDF written thesis) are very large please consider hosting it elsewhere and providing a link to the file to Doctoral College Operations using OneDrive or SharePoint<sup>3</sup>. The link will be shared with your examiners.

### (d) Final eThesis submission stage (WREO)

**Form needed:** Multi-Part Thesis Index File

The complete, final, corrected thesis must be uploaded to [White Rose Etheses Online](#) (WREO). A Multi-Part Thesis Index File must be submitted to WREO alongside the eThesis. This index file will help other researchers understand the thesis structure.

The University will require a permanent record of the complete 'thesis' on which the award will be made; this means that in addition to the written PDF, all examined content and files will also need to be deposited to WREO in an appropriate format (e.g. pdf, jpeg, mp3, etc.). It will not be possible at this stage to deposit (or embed within your thesis) links/URLs that lead to such material, as content hosted externally (e.g. via youTube, Vimeo, websites, etc.) cannot be relied upon for long-term preservation. Exceptionally, links to University-managed systems which use permanent identifiers will be considered. The proposal should be included in the pilot application and requires agreement from the Doctoral College and Library. You will have the option of setting an embargo for each individual uploaded file, if necessary and supported by your supervisor. PGRs will be placed on the pass list only once it has been confirmed that suitable files for have been successfully deposited to WREO

Consideration should also be given to the accessibility of the thesis to a wider audience. Open formats should be used where possible. If files require proprietary software, an additional open format version should be supplied where feasible e.g. .xlsx could also be .csv. Files in a non-proprietary format increase chances of long-term access and preservation.

The Library team will be happy to provide advice and support to help you in your planning. Please [contact the Library](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission.

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<sup>3</sup> Google Docs, Dropbox and other file sharing platforms should not be used, as we have no agreement with them to handle University data.

## 4. Advice for Practice-led researchers (AHC only)

### (a) Criteria for a multi-part practice-led research thesis

It is not necessary for PGRs registered for a practice-led degree to apply for special permission to submit a multi-part thesis. Separate arrangements already exist within the regulations for PGRs registered for practice-led research degrees to submit an alternative format of thesis which includes a written submission together with body of work which comprises the creative practice. This may already take the form of a multi-part thesis. **Practice-led PGRs are, however, still included in this pilot to help us better understand the range and nature of material/content being submitted, and to support you with the management, sharing and preservation of these materials.**

### (b) Process for notification of a multi-part practice-led research thesis

Examination Entry Stage (for practice-led)

**Form needed:** Notification of a Multi Part practice-led thesis

During this pilot phase, practice-led PGRs will be asked to complete and submit a notification of a multi-part practice-led thesis form at examination entry<sup>4</sup> to confirm the intended format of their thesis submission. This form will collect information on:

#### File types

Information on the format and content of the files, including any additional software required to open the files. Accessibility and long-term preservation should be considered when choosing file formats. If you will need to submit anything in physical format, please indicate this on the form so that Doctoral College Operations can contact you to discuss arrangements. Depending on the nature and format of the intended submission, advice may need to be sought from the Library to support the eventual archive of the final thesis.

#### Confidentiality and sensitivity of materials

The School must assess whether any of the files include sensitive or highly confidential data or materials. If so, confirmation must be provided that the University guidelines for the handling and storage of data have been followed and sharing of this content with the examiners (and longer-term as part of the thesis in [WREO](#)) is consistent with the approach outlined in ethics review and any contractual agreements.

#### Long term preservation

In addition to the written commentary in PDF, all examined practice material must eventually be deposited to WREO in an appropriate format. For the eThesis, it will not be possible to deposit links/URLs that lead to practice material, as content hosted externally

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<sup>4</sup> Where Examiners are required to view live practice the examination entry workflow must be completed at least 3 months before the date of the first live practice. Where there is no examined live practice event, the workflow must be completed at least 3 months before thesis submission.



(e.g. via YouTube, Vimeo, websites, etc.) cannot be relied upon for long-term preservation. Consideration should be given to the accessibility of the thesis to a wider audience. Open formats should be used where possible. If files require proprietary software, an additional open format version should be supplied where feasible e.g. .xlsx could also be .csv. Files in a non-proprietary format increase chances of long-term access and preservation. Exceptionally, links to University-managed systems which use permanent identifiers may be considered. The proposal should be included in form and requires agreement from the Doctoral College and Library. If you feel it might be necessary to [redact part of a multi-part thesis](#) before deposit to WREO please [contact the Library](#) and [Doctoral College Operations](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission. The Library team will be happy to provide advice and support to help you in your planning. Please [contact the Library](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission.

### (c) Submission for examination stage (GRAD) (for practice-led)

#### **Form needed:** Multi-Part Thesis Index File

The thesis (the written commentary and any associated practice files) should be submitted for examination to GRAD. A Multi-Part Thesis Index File must be submitted alongside the thesis to confirm the different files which form the complete thesis. This index file will be shared with your examiners to assist them with navigation of materials. If any of your files (outside the PDF written commentary) are very large please consider hosting it elsewhere and providing a link to the file to Doctoral College Operations using OneDrive or SharePoint<sup>5</sup>. The link will be shared with your examiners. If links will be embedded within the thesis itself, please indicate this on your index form.

### (d) Final eThesis submission stage (WREO) (for practice-led)

#### **Form needed:** Multi-Part Thesis Index File

The University requires a permanent record of the complete 'thesis' on which the award will be made; this means that in addition to the written commentary in PDF, all examined practice material will also need to be deposited to WREO as separate files in an appropriate format (e.g. pdf, jpeg, mp3, etc.). You will have the option of setting an embargo for each individual file uploaded to WREO, if necessary and supported by your supervisor. A Multi-Part Thesis Index File must be submitted alongside the eThesis. It will not be possible to deposit links/URLs that lead to practice material, as content hosted externally cannot be relied upon for long-term preservation. It may have been exceptionally agreed at the point of examination entry that links to University-managed systems which use permanent identifiers will be used. Please [see the long-term preservation section above](#) for further guidance. PGRs will be placed on the pass list only once it has been confirmed that suitable files for both the written commentary and the examined practice have been successfully deposited to WREO.

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<sup>5</sup> Google Docs, Dropbox and other file sharing platforms should not be used, as we have no agreement with them to handle University data.



## 5. Glossary

### **Multi-part thesis**

A Multi-Part Thesis is a thesis in which the **examinable content** consists of multiple elements e.g., more than a single PDF containing the written submission. Such additional content might not easily be accommodated in a single PDF, and may include a number of different electronic files and formats (for example PDF, jpeg, mp3, mp4). The concept is applied currently to practice PhDs only, but this pilot will explore theses in addition to practice-led which may have additional examinable content over and above the written submission

### **Examined content**

Examined content is defined as any material that is essential reading for the examiners for them to reach a considered evaluation of the work. This is the body of work, submitted for examination, evidencing the quality and quantity of original research results, independent critical ability and matter suitable for publication, and must read and assessed by the examiners. Where we talk about a multi-part thesis, we are referring to 'examined content'.

### **Supplementary content**

Supplementary content is defined as additional data and materials which it may be useful for examiners to have access to but there is no requirement for the examiners to refer to the supplementary data/material in order to examine the work. The thesis must stand alone and be understandable without the supplementary data/material. The examiners may access the supplementary material if they wish, but may choose not to do so. Separate arrangements already exist for the submission of supplementary material, and are not covered by this pilot.

### **Practice-led thesis**

Separate arrangements exist within the regulations for practice-led research degrees in the Faculty of AHC to submit an alternative format of thesis which includes a written submission together with body of work which comprises the creative practice, and which make take the form of a multi-part thesis submission

### **eThesis**

The thesis in its final, corrected form which represents the body of work on which the research degree award was made – either as a single PDF or a collection of electronic files. This must be submitted in appropriate electronic files to WREO (see below) after successful examination and approval of any corrections before the award of a research degree can be made. The Library team will be happy to provide advice and support to help you in your planning. Please [contact the Library](#) as early as possible in advance of

making your submission.

If you feel it might be necessary to [redact part of a multi-part thesis](#) before deposit to WREO please [contact the Library](#) and [Doctoral College Operations](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission.

### **White Rose Etheses Online (WREO)**

WREO is White Rose Etheses Online, an Institutional repository for eTheses for Universities of Leeds, York and Sheffield. All PGRs are required to deposit their thesis in WREO once it has been examined and corrections have been made. The requirements are set out in "[Guide to the thesis examination process](#)". A [step by step submission guide](#) is on the Library website.

### **Redacted eThesis**

A "redacted eThesis" is one with material redacted (removed or obscured) and replaced with a statement e.g. *"This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for [copyright] reasons"*. It may be necessary in some cases to redact part of a multi-part thesis for third-party copyright or other reasons. Redacting a content from a written thesis is relatively straightforward whereas redacting parts of a video (either a block of time; or specific areas of the screen), whilst also possible, would be more involved. If you feel it might be necessary to redact part of a multi-part thesis before deposit to WREO please [contact the Library](#) and [Doctoral College Operations](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission. A complete eThesis (all files) **MUST** still be supplied but will not be made available online. After the end of any embargo period placed on the thesis only the redacted version of any eThesis will be made available for access.

### **Digital Object Identifier (DOI)**

A unique, persistent identifier associated with an online landing page containing information about a digital object. The DOI is managed through a registry and so continues to work, or 'persists', even if the landing page URL changes.

## Multi-part thesis FAQs

### **How long is the pilot period?**

This will be a 12-month pilot, and will run from September 2023 – August 2024.

### **I am not expecting to submit my thesis in the next 12 months but am interested in the submission of a multi-format thesis.**

We would still like to hear from you, so that we can gauge the level of potential interest and gather information on the types of theses that might be coming through in the next few years. You should still have a preliminary discussion with your supervisory team, and if there is academic support, can submit an application for in-principle consideration. Final approval in these cases would be made on a case by case basis, with reference to the stage of the pilot.

### **What if a multi-format thesis is approved but my thesis submission is then delayed?**

If a multi-format thesis is approved and your submission is unexpectedly delayed beyond the end of the pilot period (e.g. due to an extension of studies), you can still submit your thesis as a multi-format thesis, even after the end of the pilot period.

### **I am registered for a Masters by Research – can I be considered for a multi-format thesis?**

Yes. As long as there is an academic rationale which is supported by your Supervisors and Director of PGR Studies, you can submit an application for a multi-format thesis.

### **I am a practice-led researcher and my thesis will be in multiple files – do I need to submit an application for a multi-part thesis?**

Separate arrangements already exist within the regulations for practice-led research degrees in AHC to submit an alternative format of thesis which includes a written submission together with body of work which comprises the creative practice. This may already take the form of multiple files. You do not need to make an application for permission to submit a multi-part thesis but are still included in the pilot so we can understand and support the range of file types you may need to submit. You will be asked to submit a form at the point of examination entry to notify the University of your multi-format submission and the form you expect this to take.

### **I have supplementary data which I think it might be helpful for my examiners to see – do I need to submit an application for a multi-part thesis?**

No - Separate arrangements already exist for the submission of [supplementary material](#), and are not covered by this pilot. The pilot is looking at submission of examined content

only. You should instead complete the separate supplementary data form and submit this to GRAD alongside your thesis for examination. If material is suitable for open sharing and you wish to obtain a DOI so the material can be readily cited, you may wish to deposit the material with a research data repository. Contact the Research Data Leeds team in the Library for advice.

### **Are there any file types that I cannot upload to GRAD?**

Certain file types are blocked from being uploaded to GRAD. The following are the allowed file types: .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .gif, .pdf, .doc, .docx, .key, .pages, .numbers, .ppt, .pptx, .pps, .ppsx, .odt, .xls, .xlsx, .zip, .mp3, .m4a, .ogg, .wav, .mp4, .m4v, .mov, .wmv, .avi, .mpg, .ogv, .3gp, .3g2. Any other types will be refused, and you will see an error message. If you encounter this you will need to zip/compress the file to upload it.<sup>6</sup> You may submit file types other than those listed but may not be able to upload these to GRAD, and may need to share via a link. If you have a very large file (or files not covered by GRAD) please consider hosting it elsewhere and providing a link to the file using OneDrive or SharePoint (Google Docs, Dropbox and other file sharing platforms are not permitted by the University as we have no agreement with them to handle University data).

### **Some of my material is sensitive/confidential – what should I do?**

If any of the additional files include sensitive or highly confidential data or materials, the School must provide confirmation that the University guidelines for the handling and storage of data have been followed and sharing of this content with the examiners is consistent with University data management guidelines, and the approach outlined in ethics review and any contractual agreements.

The thesis is submitted to the examiners on the basis that they will treat the contents as strictly confidential in the periods before, during and following the examination, until such stage as the work may be published in accordance with normal academic custom. The School concerned must advise the examiners of any specific confidentiality undertakings that are required as a result of commercial agreements. Examiners are instructed to delete copies of the work and any correspondence generated in relation to the work once the examination process has been completed, or upon request from the School. Wherever possible, DCO will share a thesis with the examiners via OneDrive, with password protection. For some files, depending on the file type, it may not be possible to add a password. DCO will advise the School in these cases. The internal examiner may also access the thesis in GRAD.

PGRs and Supervisors should assess the handling of sensitive data or research materials when depositing the final thesis and any other material into a repository. It is possible to

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<sup>6</sup> For instructions please see the following guides: [Windows OR Mac OR Linux \(Red Hat\)](#) Depending on the operating system and version you are running instructions for your device may vary

set separate embargoes for individual files. Information on research data management, including good practice when handling sensitive data, is available on the [Research Data Leeds website](#). Advice and support are available from the Library's Research Data team. Contact them **well before** you submit your thesis: [researchdataenquiries@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:researchdataenquiries@leeds.ac.uk).

### **I have other research materials in addition to my thesis.**

PGRs and Supervisors should also consider and agree what other research data/materials generated during the candidature should be kept, and the arrangements for deposit of such material. This will normally be covered by your data management plan. The Guide to the thesis examination process includes more detailed advice. Information on research data management is available on the [Research Data Leeds website](#).

### **Where can I get further advice?**

PGRs who wish to explore the submission of a multi-part thesis must first discuss this with their Supervisory team at an early point.

Advice on the thesis examination is available from the [Progression and examination team in Doctoral College Operations](#).

The Library team will be happy to provide advice and support to help you in your planning. Please [contact the Library](#) as early as possible in advance of making your submission.

Information on research data management, including good practice when handling sensitive data, is available on the [Research Data Leeds website](#). Advice and support on research data management are available from the [Library's Research Data team](#). Contact them well before you submit your thesis: [researchdataenquiries@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:researchdataenquiries@leeds.ac.uk). Please also [see the Doctoral College Website](#).

Information on thesis embargo arrangements can be found in the [Guide to the thesis examination process](#).

### **What will happen at the end of the pilot period?**

At the end of the pilot period a report on findings will be presented to Graduate Board on the demand for submission of theses in a multi-part format and the types of thesis format and structures submitted. This will help with consideration of whether a longer-term change in the regulations is needed to support submission of non-practice multi-part theses and areas where enhanced guidance and support would be beneficial. The information gathered during the pilot will also help identify challenges and opportunities to better support the management and sharing of diverse digital materials and enhance the advice and support.