Handbook & Regulations: Developing Clear Policies for Students

I think that what has come up repeatedly is how critical regulations are and how perhaps one of our major jobs is to engage with the regulations around PhDs in our universities and acknowledge and try to find ways to shift those regulations to take account of Artistic Research doctorates. (Jools Gilson, Artistic Research Doctorate Examination, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020)

The student handbook (or the course regulations) outlines expectations, learning outcomes, doctorate aims, milestones and other key information. The following key points support Artistic Research PhD students by providing clear expectations about their unique form of doctoral study:

- **Defined key learning outcomes of the PhD**. Clear articulation of the benchmarks that students should aim to demonstrate at the end of the programme. In Ireland, the learning outcomes should be in line with the Level 10 of the National Framework of Qualifications.

- **Programme worldview**. Outline the programme views in relation to the discipline, the context, and worldview.

- **Artistic Research and the relationship between theory and practice**. Outline the course ethos and position on Artistic Research. If you have specific views on how practice and theory integrate, their roles and functions, make those clear. If there is scope for distinct approaches, outline for the students what they might be. Suggest how practice and theory might inform one another and suggest students discuss this with their supervisory team at the start of their research.

- **Role and function of the dissertation in the research**. Outline the role of the dissertation and the various components it should cover, from contextualising the research to arguing the methodological approach.

- **Role and function of the practice in the research**. Outline the role of the practice and how it articulates with the writing. For example:

> *The first and main focus of the PhD will be a body of practice-based work designed for exhibition. This may consist of a substantial, original, high quality film or of a coherent portfolio of practical film and screen media work (possibly including video installation, archival/curatorial work or projects involving the use of moving images in an educational capacity) and should make a contribution to the dissertation that could not have been made in words. (PhD Film & Screen Media [Creative Practice], University College Cork Handbook 2020, p. 6)*

- **Define key milestones throughout the programme.** Clarity about progress milestones relieves anxiety in PhD students and offers clear structure for supervisory and administrative staff. It helps students / staff keep focus and measure progress. Lack of milestones and of student understanding of expectations can be mitigated by a suggested word count submitted / presented to a Graduate Studies Committee each year as part of an Annual Review combined with clear requirements about elements of practice being shared either as part of the Annual Review or at other key moments. See Developing Course Milestones.

- **Progression requirements**. Outline clear requirements for progression as appropriate, which can be based on the key milestones. This is often called an Annual Review and involves a larger administrative structure of the Department / School – normally a Graduate Studies Committee / Head of Unit. Keeping clear records of these processes, especially the decisions of committees to allow students to progress or not is critical to be able to fully respond to all eventualities and ensuring a positive student / staff experience.

- **Modes of submission – length of written component and scope of practice**. Clearly indicate the expected submission modes, particularly if more than one is possible. Include benchmarks for dissertation word length, and benchmarks for quality/quantity of practice. If you do not wish to be specific to allow distinct forms to emerge, give several examples of what would be considered appropriate so students can gauge their project against that.

- **Specifications on submission formats.** Include your institutional requirements for any digital submissions and hard-bound materials such as portfolio books or audio/visual documentation. Indicate the acceptable lengths/formats. Increasingly, PhD submissions are entirely digital, but older formats include DVDs, USB sticks, and paper.

- **Documentation of practice / process**. Include whether documentation should be submitted with the thesis and how this should be shaped. Indicate expectations, acceptable formats for submission of documentation, and support available. Critical here is the valuation of live performance / installation elements that cannot literally be uploaded, and the institutional acknowledgement and accommodation of that difference.

- **Examination criteria**. The criteria will in a large part be similar to doctorates submitted by written dissertation only, but it should include specific criteria in relation to the practice.

- **Examination arrangements**. The key difference between traditional PhD and Artistic Research PhD examination is the creative practice. It is normally necessary or a requirement that Examiners have the opportunity to experience some aspects of the creative practice directly. Consequently, Examiners for Artistic Research PhDs need to be appointed sooner than for conventional PhDs, in order for them to be invited to view / watch / experience the practice first hand. Alternatively, a presentation of practice / performance / screening / exhibition can be shared close to the formal Viva Voce examination. If that is the case, particular care should be taken to ensure that the student is not overwhelmed with the combined pressures of production and examination. Outline examination arrangements including Viva Voce and the examiners' experience of practice. Provide information on when examiners should be appointed and by whom, the role of the student in this appointment, and logistics around the experiencing of practice (when it takes place, in what format, how and what student should prepare), and the Viva Voce. See Examining Artistic Doctorates for more on this.

- **Attribution of work**. Requiring a Statement of Attribution when students work collaboratively helps to ensure that the work submitted for examination is the candidate's own work: a signed statement by everyone involved in the projects detailing their specific contribution allows this to be verified. A reflective journal can also capture different contributions and how decisions were made, evidencing the nature of the collaborative processes. This may be included in appendices as appropriate or used as a basis to draft the attribution statement.

- **Resources available.** Specify which resources students have access to, and how they can access them.

- **Funding.** Outline existing funding opportunities and provide instructions on how to avail of them.

- **Other discipline-specific information.** Outline any other discipline specific information.

GENERAL DOCTORAL GUIDELINES

Your guidelines should also clearly outline the following general information for doctoral study:

- **Admissions**. Indicate requirements for students to be admitted and outline the admission process. See [Recommendations for Enhancement](#) and [Writing an Artistic Research PhD Proposal](#) for more on this.

- **Length and modes of study**. Indicate minimum and maximum length of the degree, and modes of study (part-time/full-time). Outline extension periods: if those include or not institutional support, fees payable, duration, and how to request extensions.

- **Graduate Studies Committees**. Outline roles, duties, and responsibilities of Graduate Studies Committees and how they support students. This helps students know how their degree works behind the scenes, whom to go for when issues arise, and what the procedures are in different circumstances. You might also include the structure within the Department / School and the broader University / College.

- **Responsibilities of student and supervisor**. Clearly outlining who is responsible for what helps students know how to manage the progress of their degree, what the institution expects of them, and what they can expect of their supervisors. Include, in 'Student Responsibilities' for example, expectations around defining their area of studies, training needs and schedule of meetings in consultation with the supervisory team, what to do when encountering difficulties, whether specific forms need to be submitted and when (such as supervision records or annual reports), etc. In 'Supervisor Responsibilities', include distinctions between supervisor and co-supervisor if appropriate, recommendations around progress, requesting and providing feedback to student work, etc.

- **Supervision arrangements**. Indicate expected supervision arrangements including number of supervisors and their roles, supervision hours per year (which may be divided into direct contact and indirect contact such as administration and feedback), and how supervision meetings should be arranged and recorded. This transparency helps to manage students' expectations and provides students with a benchmark against which to measure whether their arrangements are appropriate. A process of documenting the meetings which are lodged centrally allows for clear records, which can be of critical importance if any challenge

or difficulty arises in the supervisory arrangement. It is also helpful for students / supervisors to be able to quickly see a record of when supervisory meetings took place and what they covered. These are normally written by the student and approved by the supervisors.

- **Training offered.** Indicate training available, how to access it, and the training aims for each course offered. Provide information on school, department, or university wide training that the student may avail themselves of, and how to access it.

- **Employability.** Outline how the course supports employability and indicate any other sources of support in this area so students can prepare for their future careers from the start of their degrees.