

Recommendations for Enhancement of Artistic Research Doctoral Programmes

Visioning the Future analysed doctoral regulations across Irish institutions, conducted a series of interviews with staff and students, and hosted a series of online seminars on doctoral topics. Through this research we identified a number of areas which would benefit from further support. Some of these may have been fully addressed in your institution and others may benefit from reflection and action. We invite you to consider the following recommendations and how they might enhance provision to further support your students.

- **An admissions process which takes into consideration the specificities, logistics and necessary support for the practice.** A full consideration of the technical, human and management resources necessary to complete a PhD research project is a critical part of the admissions process. Students should be admitted only when there is a commitment that their resource needs can be met. Identify submission format at admission stage; take into consideration the requirements of practice; ensure that the programme can offer the necessary conditions for practice to develop; ensure students' expectations match what the department offers; and ensure that students are aware of potential complex logistics in making work. See the guidance for students [Applying for an Artistic Research PhD](#) and [Writing an Artistic Research PhD Proposal](#), which you can introduce in your institutional protocols.
- **Orientation for faculty and students.** Research students often slip through the net of the normal orientation processes for new Undergraduates and MA students. Developing a bespoke orientation in your Department / School or including new students in established processes makes material difference to how PhD students feel as they begin their studies. It helps them to understand the hierarchies of the system; the policies, aims and functioning of the research degree; and to know who to go to for different issues – such as administrator, library, student support services, equipment hire, support with funding applications and research dissemination. This can also be appropriate for new supervisors. See [Induction Day](#).

Assume [the] student is fully ignorant of processes and policies and structure training to resolve that in the initial meetings. (survey respondent, 2020)

- **Clear milestones for degree progression.** Within the *Visioning the Future* research, several students mentioned difficulty in understanding whether they were on track and which milestones they were expected to reach each year. With an open, iterative and non-linear creative process this becomes even more challenging. See [Road Mapping](#) (for students) and [Developing Course Milestones](#) (for staff) for suggestions on how you might include milestones, expectations and offer students a road map.

I wish I understood better what the road map is, specially being an international student and not knowing Ireland's educational system. A road map of how and when we get evaluated - what are the different landmarks along the way? (...) That kind of thing that might be already known to Irish students, but they are not known to me – you know the Viva, everything leading up to it and all the different steps. (Miriam Phillips, PhD student, 2020)

- **Clarity on Artistic Research for students and supervisors.** The *Visioning the Future* project identified a need for a better understanding of what Artistic Research is and entails, including theory, sources, examples of practice, and case studies on different types of projects. Consider integrating an Artistic Research seminar/course as part of doctoral training. See [Why pursue an Artistic Research PhD](#), [What is Artistic Research](#), and the [Visioning the Future Online Seminar Series](#) for support in building in Artistic Research expertise within your programme, as well as the rest of this resource.

In some ways I was really missing that one person I could go to for Artistic Research resources. (...) Like more examples of what Artistic Research is. A class where you did case studies on different types of Artistic Research. Even if it was like multi-disciplinary. Even if it was not just for music but just for all Artistic Research. That would have been really helpful to get a sense of what are the possibilities. (PhD student, 2020)

- **Supervision protocols that support both students and supervisors.** See the [Supervision Agreement](#), which actively supports students and staff to have clear agreed protocols about how the supervisory process should work.

- **Equality of access of support with practice.** Consider carefully whether you are able to offer access to the resources (equipment, facilities, spaces, etc.) that the project requires. [Artistic Doctorates in Europe](#) recommends that institutions review the project needs before taking on a candidate, as students should have access to technical support, and the kinds of spaces and the facilities needed to complete their research. Programmes strive to provide candidates with support with the writing process (computer access, office space, library support), and the same equality of access to support to develop the practice should be in place when taking on candidates.

We work hard to make sure that there is equality of access for all our students. This is not always the case on the practice side. Questions we need to ask ourselves are, do our candidates have equality of access to high quality performance space, rehearsal space, recording equipment, editing expertise. The standard of the performative or artistic element deserves the same level of concentrated detail and equality of access for students. (Helen Phelan, Artistic Research Doctorate Examination, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020)

- **Clarity on the challenges and risks of engaging with practice.** Often students are not aware of potential research costs, challenges and limitations of engaging with practice. Ensure students have realistic expectations in relation to resources provided, spaces and equipment they can access, and logistical challenges in the context they are in. Students should discuss a plan to develop their practice early on so additional requirements can be outsourced or adapted.
- **Budget provision for practice.** Whilst it is common for institutions to provide a small research budget for students to attend conferences and training each year, budget for covering the costs of developing practice is not the norm. However, there is usually an associated cost in engaging in Artistic Research. Consider how existing budgets might support students in developing Artistic Research. To mitigate against expectations not being met, an outline of practice can be part of the admissions process. A more detailed budget / production plan can be developed early in the research process, preferably during the first year, in consultation with the supervisory team. This helps students to gain awareness of potential challenges, ensure the project is realistic, and consider their project costs.

- **Clear protocols for attribution of work.** Artistic Research in performing arts and film / screen media often involves working collaboratively with other practitioners. Strategies for attributing work can be included in the course regulations, see Handbook & Regulations for a suggestion on how to address this.
- **Clarity on submission formats in relation to practice.** Inform students at the start of the degree of the final PhD submission frameworks the programme works with. This may involve digital formats only, analogue materials, or a mixture of both. See Handbook & Regulations for further details.
- **Community building.** Several doctoral students reported lack of community as one of the things they felt was missing in their programme. Further, isolation is common in doctoral degrees with studies showing high levels of mental health issues amongst PhD candidates. See Building Community to create ways of coming together as part of the degree to support students develop and strengthen a community of peers.

I feel that there is a certain level of isolation. (...) I feel there is a way in which I am kind of isolated out there. I wish there would be more, systems of ways of coming together. I felt that even before the pandemic. (Miriam Phillips, PhD student, 2020)

- **Peer-network discussions.** Encourage peer facilitated discussions, presentations, and sharing of practice in your course, institution, or across institutions.

It would be great if there were more PhD discussion groups that were facilitated by departments. I think there are some discipline specific conversations that would be really useful. (PhD student, 2020)

- **Supervisory network in your field.** A supervisory network arranged in collaboration with other institutions in the same field provides a space for support and focussed exchange for supervisors in Artistic Research. This can operate as a closed and confidential space for supervisors to meet regularly to discuss and ask questions in a safe environment, and gain insights on how their peers have addressed similar concerns.

I think a lot of that [training for supervisors] happens informally, but it would be great to formalize it. It would benefit students and it would give support to supervisors because it can be a very lonely journey even with a team of two [...] and the responsibility for somebody's PhD Project is huge. So, I think anything that formalises supports and obviously doesn't have to be within an institution it can be in a wider field. (staff member, 2020)

- **Strategies to support examiners.** It is good practice for examiners to experience / view practice outputs or processes before the final submission of work and the Viva Voce. Consider how examiners experience practice and provide clear guidelines to ensure examination fit. Additionally, examiners need to understand and have experience in examining Artistic Research PhDs and be fully briefed on your institution's regulations and ways of approaching Artistic Research doctorates, as they may come from a distinct tradition. See Examining Artistic Research PhDs for more on this.