

Supervision Challenges

Artistic practice brings several challenges which you might encounter in the supervision process:

- **Managing a joint-supervisory process.** Joint supervision can be incredibly rich and provide a sounding board to test out ideas. Nonetheless, different understandings of what an Artistic Research PhD is can raise tensions: a supervisor may not be well aware of the institutional requirements, or of the particular challenges / possibilities / constraints of Artistic Research and the depth and value that artistic practice can bring to the project. This may create tensions and difficulties in staying within the doctoral programme framework, and in appreciating the scope for innovation, knowledge, and sophistication that the practice brings. Open communication between supervisors is key to create a productive environment for the student.
- **Supporting the candidate to integrate the various strands of the project into a coherent submission.** As an evolving process with many strands – [creative practice](#), [writing](#), [performing / screening](#), publishing – one of the challenges is the successful and meaningful articulation of the various project components into one clear, strong argument.

I know talking to colleagues that that seems to be the dilemma, it's how all of these research outputs, and they can be varied, [can be put] together, to become a whole. (...) I have no answers to that question because I think it is messy the whole time and just as long as it is on the agenda and you have reflected on it and thought through. (...) But I think we are in a much better state now, there is an understanding that an artistic project has lots of different research outputs. (...) But I still find it a challenge. (staff member, 2020)

Ultimately, it is the candidate's decision how and what they include in the final submission. Encourage the student to think about how the different parts of their project interrelate and what each item contributes. See [Synthesis and Integration](#) for more on this.

- **Balancing different registers between theory and practice.** The balance and articulation between theory and practice is sometimes not clear, particularly for supervisors with a

theoretical background, for example. It is therefore of critical importance to build in co-supervisory sessions where the integration of the distinct strands of the project and the synthesis into one coherent argument is developed and discussed. By strong validation of arts practice as a distinctive form of intelligence and of academic thinking as another, students can be supported in seeing the lively connections between the two. Consider for each project how the intertwined relationship between theory and practice can unfold productively and encourage the student to explore this throughout their degree.

I think it's that space of being able to work with the abstract ideas and compute them into their arts practice. (...) So, for me I think recognising how your creative artistic work can inform your PhD research is a really important connection to make for people. Otherwise, it's almost like being an imposter experience where one is one thing and the other is another thing. Doing a PhD is serious, but if you bring creativity into the experience you can actually move something on quite profoundly. (staff member, 2020)

- **Upholding writing standards.** Artistic Research students are expected to uphold the same standards as written dissertation only PhDs, a challenge for candidates who struggle with writing and critical thinking at doctoral level. This should be identified as early as possible in the PhD study, and specific supports / training put in place to develop the candidate's writing and critical thinking skills. For an understanding of the expected writing standards, encourage your candidates to review PhDs in the field.
- **Ensuring the student submits one PhD.** When the nature of the submission format is unclear, there is a risk of students completing a double PhD: a lengthy dissertation accompanied by a full portfolio of practice. In 1997, the UK Council for Graduate Education proposed a balance between writing and practice of 50/50, suggesting the benchmark between 30,000 to 40,000 words as a key standard from which to consider possible variations according to distinct needs (Nelson, 2013). Regardless of the regulations in your institution, ensure that students submit one PhD only. Writing and practice contribute to the same thesis in distinct ways, and the process of [synthesizing and integrating](#) the distinct elements into one coherent argument helps to unravel that.
- **Working with external organisations.** Sometimes external organisations become strong partners in the project, such as a broadcaster in an artistic doctorate in film. This has several

advantages: the candidate gets a myriad of experiences, enhances career prospects, and develops networks and skills in negotiating. However, external organisations may have strong views on what can or cannot be published or shown, which raises questions and concerns around protecting the integrity of the research. For example, a broadcaster may not want a part of the material published. The team can negotiate where and when to do so and agree to publish a distinct section of the study. Ethical concerns may also arise in managing the research needs and the industry requirements. All parts will need to make compromises and reach a consensus. It is advised to draw an agreement of expectation between the candidate, the institution and the organisation in advance (with clarity on publications and research dissemination), and to keep lines of communication open throughout the project. If particular areas are challenging to manage, the candidate can document their decisions which may provide fertile ground to address in the thesis.