

Examination Considerations for Staff

The protocols around examination of artistic doctorates vary across fields, contexts, and institutions. One of the main challenges is how practice should be presented and experienced by examiners. This is not only a question of timing, but also of context: if a project was conceived in-situ or as part of a festival / event, should the examiner experience it in that context or should it be re-staged for the examination team close to the Viva? How relevant is the context of the work? Then there is the question of timing: whether the work should be experienced before or after submission.

In *Practice as Research in the Arts*, Robin Nelson discusses the time lapse between experiencing practice and the Viva voce at length, arguing for a maximum of 6 months as appropriate, and 12 months as the ultimate limit, as the examiners must be able to remember and reflect on the practice in relation to the written thesis (2013). He suggests that the ideal procedure is to submit the written thesis prior to the experiencing of the work by the examiners. Candidates may stage the work beforehand – for the public and for documentation purposes – but would then re-stage the work for the examiners the day before the Viva voce. This allows the student to be rested on the Viva day, and the examiners to have the practice fresh in their minds, with time for reflection and minimal time lag (2013). This model simplifies logistics as it requires only one visit from the external examiner, and ensures that the practice experienced is relevant in the context of the thesis. Nonetheless, the candidate may incur extra expenses to re-stage the work, with the added pressure of preparing the oral examination and the examiners' experience of the work simultaneously.

Alternatively, the examiner may experience the work as the candidate presents it to the audience place months before the Viva. In this model, a short conversation between examiner and candidate should take place after the showing: not a critical discussion but an opportunity to understand the context of the work and clarify any questions the examiner may have (Nelson, 2013). When the practice is viewed by examiners well before hand, such as a year before submission, there is the risk that the candidate's thinking has evolved substantially.

Both approaches present positives and negatives and might be suitable for different kinds of projects. In considering the institution's regulations in this matter, the main question is ensuring that the work can be effectively experienced by examiners and that whichever model you work with, both examiner and candidate are well aware of its logistics and pitfalls.

These practical seemingly simple things actually mitigate against a good experience. Because we are not putting the resources in to reflect the nature of the work that's taking place. Now what does it mean if your examiner needs to travel multiple times to see the work? How is that resourced by the institution so that it doesn't always fall, in many cases you fall out of the budget norms for paying for an examiner. These things shouldn't be the concern of the candidates. It is something as institutions we need to look after better. (Vida Midgelow, Artistic Research Doctorate Examination, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020).

In Ireland, there is a variety of formats operating in different institutions and across fields. At the University of Limerick, in the Arts Practice Programme, the examiner attends one performance live, experiencing the live event in advance of the Viva. At Technological University Dublin, in the DMus programme for example, the performance and the Viva take place in the same day, although other formats may occur as appropriate.

In the *Share Handbook for Artistic Research Education*, Henk Borgdorff and Johan A Haarberg argue that in creative and performing arts 'each individual artistic research project might convey, to a certain extent, its own criteria for assessment' (2013, p. 233). The authors conclude that '[c]riteria could and should always be in-becoming, emerging, as in the work of art, out of a tension between the internal logic of the work itself and external standards or judgments' (Henk and Haarberg, 2013, p. 237). They suggest that each project requires its own examination framework, an essential approach for advancing Artistic Research (Henk and Haarberg, 2013). This leaves us with the following proposition: to develop examination criteria which allows space for various forms of Artistic Research to emerge and to thrive, open enough to enable innovation and strong enough to guide evaluation parameters. As one of our research participants poses, '[w]e are really looking for the same things [as traditional PhDs], intellectual rigour, does it advance knowledge, does it contribute to knowledge, is the work sufficiently original, is it free from plagiarism. Those standards that we would apply to the written piece would be applied to the practice as well' (staff member).

The dual [theory/practice] context of research in the creative and performing arts is also reflected in some of the formulations of national and international qualification frameworks set up to support the assessment of research. Thus,

while some doctoral models employ a split (practice/reflection) approach and others employ an integrated (demonstration of the contribution to knowledge) paradigm, all doctoral educations in Artistic Research are faced with the challenge of ensuring that the work produced is able to claim the status of art as well as that of research (recognised within a formal educational setting). (Henk and Haarberg, 2013, p. 230, emphasis added)

The nature of Artistic Research as often collaborative between distinct areas of expertise should mean that more collaborative PhDs would emerge (Nelson, 2013). In the first example, Lee'n'Bob's PhD, different examination teams conducted separate Vivas, and a Viva together to establish the workings of the collaboration. One resulting 'book' with supporting DVD materials has both candidates' names and an exhibition of documentation of the works took place before the Viva (2013). A collaborative Viva is uncommon and other challenges around that are yet to emerge.