

## Challenges in Artistic Research Doctorates Examination

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*Artistic Research PhDs all innovate methodologically in some way now and one of the key challenges for an examiner is to ensure that the examiner remains generous to the process and project while remaining critical to the PhD process.*  
(Yvon Bonenfant, Artistic Research Doctorate Examination, Visioning the Future Seminar, 2020)

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Whether you are examining or preparing your candidate's examination, you may come across the following challenges:

- **Distinct views on what Artistic Research is.** As examiners may come from different academic traditions, supervisors, examiners and the institutions involved in the process may have significantly different ideas about what Artistic Research is. An international examiner's distinct approach may come across in the Viva: ensuring that the examiners are well briefed and having a conversation beforehand on how things operate within the institution can level the ground.
- **A stronger practice than the written thesis or vice-versa.** The submission is examined as a whole. Instead of considering the dichotomy between practice and theory, focus on what is missing, or what is not at the appropriate level. Has the student not demonstrated a high level of criticality in their discussion of their sources? Focus on the examination criteria to guide your assessment. Equally, a stronger written thesis than the practice may also present challenges.
- **Practice may inform the work but not be assessed.** The artistic practice may inform the research but not constitute a core component of the submission and therefore of the examination. This may be appropriate for distinct types of projects / students who aim to focus on theoretical / philosophical explorations. See this [Visioning the Future seminar](#) where two choreographers discuss the reasoning behind their choices in their PhDs – one arguing the importance of focusing on the written thesis, the other expanding on how the practice was absolutely critical to their doctorate.

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*The other thing that is possible is that a student could end up writing a traditional length 80.000 words thesis based on the research they have undertaken by practice, for example working on intergenerational films and writing up that process. There are ways that practice may not form the final piece of assessed work, but it may be inherent to the process and the traditional thesis still remains what is assessed. (staff member, 2020)*

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- **Lack of support of the graduate school.** Examining Artistic Research often incurs extra administration and expenses, with two potential examiner visits. It is important that the Graduate School is well briefed, recognises the value of Artistic Research, and is supportive of the supervisory team and of the process.
- **Lack of resources for the candidate to present practice.** The candidate may need to apply for external funding to secure the necessary resources to complete and show the creative practice, which can bring additional challenges to the process.

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*Say that they are minding an ambitious video installation, they would need to find funding to cover that, and that may not necessarily be something that they can get quite easily. We don't want to be in a position where the candidate says I have this great idea for my practice I just can't get the resources to make it happen. (staff member, 2020)*

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- **Clearly determining ownership and credit.** When students work collaboratively, there must be a clear articulation of which work was completed by the candidate and by their collaborators. This should be outlined in the thesis, and a written agreement between all parts involved detailing the role of each team member may be the best solution should queries arise.
- **International differences and variations in regulations.** Vivas operate differently in distinct academic cultures, ranging from an open 'public defence' model, used in the US, Canada, France, Finland and some German speaking areas, to a small private affair with two examiners and a chair (UK, Ireland). Allied to geographic variations in regulations across fields and institutions, a diversity of approaches makes it challenging for an external

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examiner to respond appropriately to the institution they are coming into. To counteract this, ensure external examiners are properly briefed in and aware of local examination procedures. See [Enhancing Regulations](#) for briefing strategies.