

# CONTEXTUAL REVIEW AND PROJECT FINDINGS

Alongside the broad contextual framing of postgraduate supervision of creative practice projects outlined in the literature review in Chapter 3, local factors such as the processes and practices of schools, HDR administration, supervisors, and HDR students impact on postgraduate supervision in all fields, including creative practice. This contextual review presents the project's findings, which are primarily derived from focal research conducted at the five partner universities in this project: Queensland University of Technology, The University of Melbourne, Auckland University of Technology University, University of New South Wales, and University of Western Sydney.

This collection of universities represents a range of diverse contexts, from 'sandstone' to 'technology' to 'regional' universities, with additional variations in both scale and relative 'youth'. They have commonalities too, which are important considerations for this project. Each has been offering creative practice as research HDRs for a decade or more, and all are compliant with the AQF framework and guided by the DDOGS statement from 2008 (or New Zealand equivalent) regarding best practice for doctoral degrees. We might consider this sampling—in all of its diversity—to be representative of the diversity of creative practice programs across the sector.

The twenty-five supervisors recruited for interviews for this study are also diverse. They represent a range of disciplines, including visual arts, performing arts, music and sound, interior design, fashion, graphic design, design, creative writing, film and new media, and they reflect a range of experience levels from early advocates, architects and methodologists of creative practice research degrees—who by now have double figure completions—to very new supervisors, who have recently completed their own PhD in creative practice. Again, we might consider this broad sampling to represent the spectrum of creative practice supervisors.

Through surveys of creative practice HDR convenors and administrators across the partner universities in the project, we have gained insights into a wide range of contextual factors, process, and practices surrounding the supervision of creative practice postgraduate degrees. And our interviews with supervisors have provided rich perspectives on experiences, insights, challenges and exemplary practices. This chapter brings these two perspectives together. It presents a summary of findings from the surveys and interviews and makes comparisons with the literature and previous OLT/ALTC project findings and recommendations, before making recommendations that are specific to supervisory practices, academic development for supervisors, and support for supervisors at local levels.

## 4.1 A Snapshot of Procedural Issues in the Supervision of Creative Practice HDRs

Through the analysis of publicly accessible information (on websites, and in published materials), as well as survey responses received from HDR coordinators/administrators at the five partner universities, the following contextual factors were identified. Each is specific to postgraduate research in creative fields. The following themes highlight the unique issues and challenges of the field.

### Access to data

It is important to note at the outset of this section that while all institutions in this study were able to provide figures on HDR supervision and candidature in creative arts disciplines overall, data around creative practice HDRs is not differentiated from traditional projects in creative disciplines. None of the institutions in the study report centrally on creative practice projects as a distinct field, and they therefore do not collect separate figures around admissions, completions, and attrition rates. As one informant advised,

we have no figures at all regarding creative practice PhDs ... we don't even really have precise numbers about how many there are... this kind of fine-grained detail is a complete mystery!

This lack of transparency around creative practice HDR numbers echoes the findings of Baker and Buckley in *Future-proofing the creative arts in higher education* project report (2009). Acknowledging that access to accurate data was a limitation of their study, the final report cautions, “[inconsistencies in data figures] along with difficulties encountered in distinguishing specific creative arts disciplines mean that the statistical data within the report should be considered as providing an informed impression.” (: 15) This problem can perhaps be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, Fields of Education (FOE), defined by the Australian Government for reporting purposes, do not distinguish creative practice from other research approaches; secondly some schools/institutions are relatively new to creative practice higher degree research; and thirdly local contexts, histories and reporting structures make parity of reporting challenging (for example, faculties or schools that have recently been amalgamated into a university may be separately located, and have their own cultures, but may be clustered with other disciplines within an overarching administrative structure and regulatory environment.

Like Baker and Buckley, we would argue that supervisors and managers would benefit from more fine-grained data gathering, given that a PhD creative practice project requires a significant and unique type of commitment from both the supervisory team and the institution in terms of workload, resourcing and infrastructure provision.

### Supervisor profiles and completion rates

Our surveys of administrators and course convenors have revealed that the number of candidates supervised by a principal supervisor differs widely across creative practice areas. However, on average, the number of candidates supervised by a principal supervisor at one time is between three and five. However, there are a small number of individual supervisors who are seen as 'experts' within a discipline and highly experienced supervisors, and they have a much longer supervision list.

The majority of principal supervisors in partner institutions are at the senior lecturer level (Level C). However, in at least one university, the majority of supervisors are in the A-B lecturer band, largely due to practitioners who have recently entered the university system as supervisors. The data reveals interesting information about the qualifications of supervisors. The majority of interviewees have a PhD (17 of the 25 interviewees), although the type of PhD varies, with the majority of the 17 (10) holding a 'conventional' PhD and seven holding a practice-led PhD. Others hold a Doctorate of Creative Arts, are still completing their PhD, or are accredited as supervisors on the basis of equivalence (their experience and reputation in the field). Some interviewees mentioned their supervisions of Masters projects as important aspects to their training and experience.

Irrespective of their qualifications or the form of their own PhD, most of the interviewees supervise across both creative and written aspects of a project. And they often supervise across different disciplines. Disciplines/faculties appear to have taken the pragmatic approach of combining supervisors with different backgrounds, disciplinary expertise, and experience levels on supervision teams until they have built supervisory capacity. However, interestingly, the interviews revealed that experienced supervisors do not consider supervising PhD projects that are different (in form or area of specialisation) to their own training, to be a particular challenge, nor an impediment to their capacity to supervise effectively.

This is borne out by data collected from schools that shows that experienced supervisors (based on three or more completions) complete around 50% of candidatures, while new supervisors (in the Lecturer A-B band) complete considerably less—20% of candidatures. This may be influenced by the attributes of 'early adopter' supervisors, who have evidenced considerable commitment to driving forward this new field, but it also appears to suggest that experience is of benefit to supervisors/supervisions/candidates. It also suggests that the insights gained by experienced supervisors may be of particular value to new supervisors in the form of mentoring, providing exemplars of good practice, or leading academic development.

### Intake philosophy, enrolments, and admission structures

Decision-making around intake is influenced by a combination of the strategic demands of a university, availability of supervisors, and a discipline's resourcing capacity. However, while there are growth targets for HDR enrolments across the board at some institutions, in creative disciplines there appears to be a shift (reported in qualitative responses to surveys) to emphasising the importance of

'quality candidates', and an emphasis on standards of creative work over higher growth. What 'quality candidates' means varies between institutions however. There are differences in intake priorities, which relate to differing expectations around professional creative experience and the academic record of candidates. In one institution, successful candidates tend to have between 10 and 15 years experience in their field as professional practitioners, while in others, applicants tend to move from undergraduate to postgraduate study and grade point average (GPA) is a significant factor. This difference between the representative backgrounds of candidates, and the immediacy of their professional and academic experience, provides an important contextual factor for supervision, and this varies institution by institution.

The processes of admission are similar amongst the partner institutions. Supervisors or staff members in a school or discipline tend to be approached first by a candidate, and local information provision and discussion occurs prior to the formal submission of an application. Some institutions ask applicants to be interviewed by a local panel, while others rely on the prospective supervisor to assess the applicant (then a discussion between them and a head of discipline or school would usually take place). Given local intake philosophies, coupled with supervision capacity, the emphasis tends to be on 'goodness of fit'.

After 'local' assessment, the application zigzags between distributed and centralized administration teams until an offer is made and accepted. The candidature journey therefore begins with a series of interactions with, and between, local and faculty level representatives before formal processes begin, and decisions around supervision are made locally. As one of our respondents comments,

The decision around who is best to supervise is made at the local department level and takes into account load, their practice, needs, and the topic area of the candidate.

There is a preference among supervisors and schools to maintain this localised process. Given the length and depth of supervisory relationships and resourcing and infrastructure requirements of an average four-year candidature, agency around decision-making on admissions is crucial.

#### The form of the creative practice PhD

While all of the universities that partnered in this project require the submission of a combination of practical and written (exegetical) components for examination, the proportion of practice to theoretical aspects varies between institutions, with some internal variation providing choice for candidates. One institution requires at least 30% of the assessment to be placed on the written/critical component and limits the creative practice to 70%; one sets the range between 66% and 33% for each component; another mandates a 50% split between the areas but states that the creative practice is primary; and another has no formal demarcation between components (examiners are advised to consider the interdependency of the various aspects of the project and the importance of the practice). However, all of the partner institutions recommend that the 'dissertation/exegesis' component and the creative component be integrated and examined as one, conceptually coherent project.

For supervisors, this coherence presents one of the greatest challenges to candidates. Supervisors spoke of the difficulties of creating a project that not only demonstrates excellence in creative practice *and* written research outcomes, but also integrates them into a unified whole.

The extent to which innovation in the form and presentation of the exegesis varies, with a great deal of experimentation at AUT (where the medium of the practice tends to influence the approach to the exegesis), while at another university innovation is encouraged in the creative practice, but is discouraged in the exegesis. (The other three universities sit somewhere between these two poles.)

#### Milestones and examination processes

Research managers increasingly see milestones as a critical aspect of HDR candidature and they have been embedded into most doctoral frameworks. Confirmation of candidature (referred to instead as a D9 at AUT University for local reasons) occurs after one year of full time study. Progress on the creative practice as well as the critical material tends to be reviewed at this point, through a confirmation document as well as an oral presentation. In one institution, the presentation emphasises the project design aspect of the project and its potential contribution, as the practice may be less developed at this stage. Another requires an examination of oral and written materials and a greater emphasis is placed on the practice. Again, this may vary between disciplines, projects, and candidates.

Some partner institutions also require a range of additional, internal milestones. However, the form and timing of them varies. One university sets a milestone after the first three-months, which requires setting out the scope of the project and its approach (an extended project proposal), which is assessed at multiple levels (supervisor, internal evaluator, faculty evaluator and graduate studies committee). Others incorporate an online annual progress review, which involves evaluation by the supervisor and HDR manager. At other institutions, candidates must appear in person before a review panel on an annual basis.

The universities in this project usually review the creative and written component around the end of candidature. At one university, creative production work and the written component are considered by a panel (comprised of the supervisors, two members of faculty, and a chair) three months prior to submission for examination, with feedback and advice offered from a range of perspectives. Another university holds a European-style Viva or 'Defence' at the point of examination, with the supervisors and examiners in attendance (examiners have already read the document and attended the exhibition of work in advance of the Defence, but have not yet provided their report).

Representatives at all partner institutions commented on the challenges involved in the examination of creative practice projects. The process was variously described as 'lengthy' and 'complex.' Supervisors often must negotiate layers of internal administration around the examination process. In one

institution, for example, four levels of management oversee the examination of a creative practice project.

In addition, external examiners are considered vital to maintaining excellence in creative practice research. Due to the nature of creative work (its form, scale, and the importance of experiencing/interacting with it first hand), examiners may need to visit the host institution as part of the examination process, and this may be logistically difficult (as well as costly) to arrange. Moreover, because the field is in its formative stages, it is often difficult to source the required number (between 1 and 3) of appropriately qualified external examiners, who are available to travel at the time.

Given that the criteria for PhD examination varies between institutions, and that examiners may not have assessed projects at doctoral level before (given the newness of the field and the issues around securing examiners mentioned above), familiarity with local processes, conventions and expectations cannot be assumed. Faculties therefore tend to provide guidelines to examiners. In general, these include several common aspects—in particular examining the exegesis and creative component as one integrated project. However, the point of examination of the theoretical and practical components might not occur at the same time. For example, one institution allows three months between the examination of the creative component and the submission of a final document for examination (to allow time for reflection on the exhibition and reception of the work).

The preparation of candidates for milestones and examination and negotiating the processes of examination are clearly important issues for supervisors. However, given that an OLT project entitled *Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts* (Webb, J., Lee Brien, D., and Burr, S.,)<sup>1</sup> is currently under way, this project has not set out to cover this ground in detail.

## 4.2 Supervisors' attitudes, experiences and training

In the formative years of creative practice higher degree programs, supervisors were required to be flexible, adaptable, and open to new and sometimes unanticipated challenges. Along with their students, supervisors have functioned in a changing environment that is increasingly subject to academic pressures relating to completion rates and questions of rigour, as well as public pressures relating to professional recognition in the creative arts.

Nonetheless, the most striking impression created by the interviews with supervisors was the level of commitment and enthusiasm they bring to this new area of learning and teaching. Far from being daunted by the challenges they encounter, supervisors find the potential for innovation, experimentation, and

---

<sup>1</sup> See the forthcoming OLT project report and recently published project outcome: Webb, J.; Lee Brien, D.; & Burr, S., *Examining Doctorates in Creative Arts: A Guide* [http://aawp.org.au/files/Examiners\\_booklet\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://aawp.org.au/files/Examiners_booklet_final_0.pdf). This booklet sets out an 'Examiners Checklist' drawn from roundtables and focus group discussions and recommendations for the examination of creative arts PhDs.

invention fulfilling and invigorating for both themselves and their disciplines. Many believe that creative practice research has breathed new life into higher degrees by research, as well as into their discipline's course offerings. And there appears to be a genuine sense of pleasure involved in being at the forefront of a new and emergent field, and being involved in practices that sit at the nexus of teaching and research. Supervisors overwhelmingly welcome the opportunity to engage with a more diverse, cross-disciplinary higher degree research community--both within their institution and beyond it. And practitioner-supervisors often commented that the process of supervision strengthens their own practice, while theorists report gaining a deeper understanding of creative arts practice by supervising creative practice HDRs. All of the supervisors we interviewed take their role very seriously and report working hard with candidates to support and encourage them and to help them navigate the uncharted territories of this new field. They are personally committed to their candidates and their project outcomes.

#### The differences between management and leadership

The language that supervisors used in the interviews around management and leadership reveals firmly held attitudes to the role of supervision, to the field, and to institutional contexts. For example, supervisors do not tend to talk of 'managing' students, their projects, or their progress. The term 'management' tends to be reserved for discussions relating to the formal processes of candidature (admissions, milestones, formal processes, examination). Instead, they tend to speak of their supervisor-candidate engagement in terms of 'student-colleague' relationships. In addition, content analysis of the supervisor interviews revealed that the term 'leadership' is associated with 'experienced supervisors' or 'disciplinary experts', rather than managers/administrators of the HDR environment. There appears to be a chain of 'advice' from these local leaders, rather than a chain of 'command' in regard to procedural matters.

While most supervisors said there was no 'consensus' in their work area on approaches to creative practice supervision, a common mode of supervisory behaviour appears to be facilitated by the adoption of effective approaches. Supervisors tend to refer to colleagues when challenges arise and interviewees spoke readily of the informal networks that operate in relation to discussions around supervision. This suggests that there is a form of distributed leadership that has arisen in local contexts, in which innovators and experienced practitioners advise and support their colleagues in informal networks. Recognising the importance of such local, informal relationships in the network of higher degree supervision and enabling them is pivotal to expanding and enhancing leadership capacity in postgraduate supervision.

It is also important to note the resistance that was voiced around the potential imposition of prescribed models, 'standards' and formats for creative practice research. As one experienced supervisor points out:

What we need is new but not absolute models. New critical and insightful models ... They must remain flexible because the learning mode is discovery based. I think this is the flaw when people try to systematise models for creative practice PhD. They don't understand the fundamental

premise that it is discovery based.

That is, supervisors hold their relationships (with their students, peers and local networks) in higher regard than institutional 'management', and they hold the potential for innovation and experimentation as having higher value to them than systems, standardisation or prescriptive models.

### Training

Supervisors also draw a distinction between training and academic development. Training is seen as institutionally imposed, generic, functional, and focussed on process. The term 'model' is also associated with institutional oversight, and the imposition of 'standards', rules, and limitations. The term academic development, on the other hand, is used in a more open (and welcome) way to refer to workshops, case studies, and mentoring.

Most institutions offer introductory supervisor training, and there is a move in some institutions to make it compulsory. In general, this training is generic and offered by a central division (such as graduate school or research students centre). The resources are well developed and are usually available, along with a variety of support materials, on universities' websites. However, there appears to be no consensus around online training. Once again, each institution is subject to local conditions and histories.

In addition to university level training, three of the five partner universities are involved in a network of online supervision training called *fIRST* (for Improving Research Supervision and Training). It offers a range of accessible, well-developed resources (although there are no creative arts specific resources). Another university is a member of 'Alliance,' a group of universities offering online supervisor forums and workshops within the group.

At some universities, initial and/or ongoing accreditation, registration, or membership of a graduate supervisor register requires the completion of either an online or in-situ training program (as well as the endorsement of the supervisors' line manager). However, the level of development of accreditation programs appears to be influenced by the 'newness' of the faculty. Some making their registration lists (including renewal status) publicly available.

While most supervisor-respondents recognise the value of centrally offered supervisor training for understanding 'process', some are resistant to it, while others are ambivalent. Comments suggest that supervisors may not attend face-to-face courses or complete online modules, or even be aware of them. Some supervisors commented that although programs exist, attendance is not mandatory. Others believe that it is compulsory but not 'policed'. As one respondent notes,

There is a 'new supervisor' training course that is compulsory, but many staff have not done it.

This is not unique to creative practice supervisors. Indeed, it echoes the conclusions of Hammond et al.'s broader 2010 study, *Building research supervision and training across Australian universities*, which concludes that,



“there is considerable resistance from supervisors to compulsory, centralised and formal training programs. There is also considerable cynicism about the value of such programs” (: 15). Whether or not the supervisors in our study appreciated centrally offered face-to-face and online training modules, a clear aversion to ‘didactic’ delivery was voiced.

### Academic Development

On the other hand, however, we found considerable interest in decentralized, contextually targeted academic development opportunities. There was much discussion in the interviews about the unique aspects of creative practice research, and the need for programs that are targeted, local and organic and address the particular frameworks and issues that supervisors of creative practice HDRs encounter. As one respondent proposed,

It would be great if there were [academic development] opportunities available to supervisors that focus on creative practice in particular. The university does not have the expertise in many ways to offer this [support]; however, we do have a few very good higher-level academics in our faculties who do support the more up and coming supervisors.

Many new supervisors commented upon the value of opportunities to learn from experienced peers, both formally or informally in local, discipline level workshops on supervisory practices and processes, peer-to peer dialogues, sharing contextually relevant exemplars of good practice, and other informal approaches. Working within a ‘small’ community to undertake academic development that includes opportunities to hear and voice practices and discuss in-common issues is preferred by the majority of supervisors we interviewed. Again, this echoes Hammond et al.’s (2010) findings across a broad range of disciplinary fields

While none of the partner institutions currently offers systematic and regular discipline or faculty-specific supervision training, supervisors would clearly prefer such local programs.

### Local leadership and mentoring

Supervisors frequently discussed mentoring as a positive experience—whether as mentors or mentees. They commonly reported seeking the advice of their immediate colleagues or a ‘recognised mentor’, who acts as a fulcrum and referral point in the discipline, before engaging with institutional processes at faculty or university level. Besides the influence of their own PhD supervisors (which was persistently mentioned), they commonly noted the influence of experienced colleagues, and reported that they value and ‘trust’ the advice and modelling they provide.

Many supervisors commented that mentoring provides an important part of training and provides an opportunity to learn effective strategies. As a new supervisor relayed,

It is useful to hear of other supervision methods. Such as the student making a record of the discussion and considering the recording and checking that material.

Moreover, pleasure and relief was conveyed at being able to talk about issues as

they arise with those with peers with more experience. Again, a conversational approach was identified as a preferred model for learning.

Mentors mentioned using supervision exemplars: often ones they have developed personally, along with previous examples of (successful) creative practice PhDs. As one mentor explained,

I use examples of exegeses with supervisors and colleagues, as they are tangible evidence when used in conjunction with the story. Back-story is important; [it might be] an example of risk taking, but in needs to be based on deep working knowledge and lived experience with the context [of the student].

When managed well, mentoring can be an integral and successful part of supervisor development. One emerging supervisor describes mentoring at her institution as “The strongest aspect of the program”. She elaborates,

I have had really good mentorship as a supervisor [in both] supervisor arrangements [and] leadership of the program. It is a strength of the school.

Some universities have developed a mentoring system that pairs experienced supervisors with emerging ones (with the experienced supervisor in an associate role—although in one university they assume the principal role). This co-supervision is seen as a form of ‘apprenticeship’, which allows the associate to ‘learn the ropes’ before taking on their own principal supervision. Of course, this approach can be, and often is, undertaken informally without formal endorsement of (or even knowledge of) the discipline, which makes it difficult to evaluate the extent of the practice. While there is not always a desire to formalise a mentoring relationship, emerging supervisors tend to prefer some level of formal arrangement and structure in the early stages of their supervision careers in all forms of training, including mentoring. As one emerging supervisor suggests,

I think a formalized relationship would be of great benefit rather than only informal: an acknowledgement of an apprenticeship of sorts, with conversations after [meetings], etc.

Clearly, local leadership by early innovator supervisors is present in the schools we visited, if not necessarily evident from other ‘tiers’ of leadership. Such approaches are clearly valuable in acknowledging and increasing leadership in this area of learning and teaching. It is therefore a recommendation of this project that such leadership be recognised, nurtured, and harnessed. Some universities provide recognition and reward for the leadership that experienced supervisors provide. For instance, one partner university has recently introduced a tiered accreditation system that recognises levels of experience through titles conferred (Level 1 New Supervisor, Level 2 Experienced Supervisor and Level 3 Mentoring Supervisor), and it recommends that workload be allocated for mentoring new supervisors in a formal arrangement. Two partner universities have an award for Postgraduate Research Supervision, with one offering a medallion and cash payment.

There may also be other ways to achieve these goals and, given the clear value that mentoring provides, this initial investigation into the potential, design and recognition of mentoring strategies for supervisors should be investigated further.

#### Resources such as case studies and exemplars

Some institutions offer links to external resources on aspects of supervision. For example, one partner is a member of the ATN (Australian Technology Network), which has online supervisor training course in Creative Arts, Media and Design and offers resources and ideas, as well as copies of regulations at other ATN universities. However, other than this, few resources exist for creative practice supervision.

Alongside mentoring, an overwhelming majority of supervisors in our study expressed interest in the idea of capturing and sharing case studies and access to other resources that are specifically designed for creative practice research. A number of interviewees called for increased access to creative practice supervision exemplars from 'outside' their own institution. In this regard, academic development in a 'small community' does not necessarily mean 'local'; it can also mean a community of disciplinary colleagues who work in the same creative field.

A project to capture and circulate contextually relevant case studies and targeted resources is therefore a strong recommendation of this project, but these must be provided as a range of exemplars and good practices—as possibilities, which can be adapted to suit the supervisor's own context and situation rather than as standard templates. For that reason they should include a 'back-story' and provide insights and potential strategies, rather than prescribed guidelines.

#### Communities of practice and dialogue

In the interviews, supervisors often stated a preference for informal and collegial support and conversation over formal supervision mechanisms. Supervising in a relatively new field can be an isolated experience in the absence of a community of supervisory practice. Due to local circumstances and accreditation requirements, some supervisors are the only ones in their discipline taking on a supervisory role. There was an often-stated desire to engage in conversations with others around new discoveries, experience, insights, and practices. Yet this is not often afforded. Opinions such as "we don't get the chance to talk" and "a supervisor role is such a cloaked affair compared to other contexts" were frequently voiced.

Supervisors clearly recognize the value of reflection and they appreciated the opportunity to talk about their practices in the interviews. The opportunity to voice their hard-won tacit knowledge, when it had never been voiced before, often created powerful reactions. A key aspect of this was that the two project leaders—both experienced supervisors of creative practice themselves—conduct the interviews. This allowed for empathetic dialogue to develop on common ground.

That is, it is not just new and inexperienced supervisors that benefit from passing on insights that experienced supervisors have gained. It is mutually beneficial. As a supervisor noted, “The best academic development is talking things through,” and another said, “there’s a sense of peer sharing that works for me—a multiplicity of voices, keeping things open rather than closed.”

Again, the desire to belong to a community of supervisory practice does not necessarily mean a local, internal community of supervisors. It simply means a community in which supervisors working in a similar context (however that might be defined) can share issues, experiences, strategies, and practices in a supportive environment, with peers. For some this means peers in their faculty, for others it may mean that peers in their disciplinary field, who may not be co-located.

Therefore, new models for enabling connections and dialogue between supervisors within schools are needed and for connecting supervisors in similar fields across universities. This is a key recommendation of this project.

### 4.3 Insights from Supervisors: Principles for Effective Supervision

Interviews with twenty-five new and experienced supervisors from across the partner universities brought to light many other contextual factors and issues surrounding supervision in this relatively new field of postgraduate research. From a content analysis of these interviews, and the identification of persistent topics and themes, twelve key principles for the effective supervision of creative practice research were identified. Each was presented with a contextual framework, the principle itself, and representative and illustrative quotes from supervisors. They were collected and developed into a resource for use by supervisors, which contains supervisor-to-supervisor advice illustrated by case studies and scenarios from their experience.

It was formatted as a booklet, *12 Principles for the Effective Supervision of Creative Practice Higher Research Degrees: Dispatches from the field*. It was printed in hardcopy (700 copies) for distribution to universities across Australia. It appears in Appendix 3 of this report, and it is also available as a PDF version on the project website:

[www.supervisioncreativeartsphd.net](http://www.supervisioncreativeartsphd.net)

In summary, these principles are:

#### 1. Adopt a student-centred approach

A student-centred approach involves recognising each student’s unique attributes, needs and capacity. The lynchpin of this principle is support with respect—for the research student and their ideas and creative passion; for the integrity of their research question(s); for their chosen mediums of expression

and how they approach their work; and for their capacity as practitioners and researchers. Supervisors emphasise the importance of providing space for questioning, and it is worth noting that many supervisors are reluctant to determine what a student's thesis should look like in form.

## 2. Embrace diverse projects, practices, and working methods

Agility in supervision expertise continues to be important in creative fields because of the many forms of PhD outcomes that constitute viable and valuable contributions, because interdisciplinary projects are commonplace, and because supervisors continue to face shifts in the field in terms of form and practices. While the core principles of research design are central to PhD supervision, it is also important to acknowledge the differences in methodologies and processes of different fields and not seek to impose familiar approaches across disciplines and projects.

## 3. Ensure your students believe in the validity of creative practice research and its experimental nature

While some supervisors are very confident in the validity of creative practice as research (indeed some of those we interviewed were fundamental in establishing and defining it), others raise concerns that differences between traditional frameworks and creative practice as research may still be misunderstood and its value questioned by both universities and candidates. However, many supervisors argue that it has advantages for the discipline (and more broadly) because it allows for a different mode of answering the same question that a traditional research project might pursue and because it necessarily produces different outcomes—not just in form but also in new knowledge. While establishing rigor around methodologies, outcomes and new knowledge creation, supervisors need to be confident in the validity of creative practice research as well as comfortable with its undefined boundaries and continued experimentation.

## 4. The theory and practice need to speak to each other

Although naming conventions differ across institutions and local contexts, there is broad agreement amongst supervisors that the written component/exegesis/thesis/explication is an integral (if sometimes difficult) component of the higher degree by research. There is consensus that its role is to articulate the research problem and creative practice methodology and to contextualise the outcomes in relation to them. To this end, experienced supervisors advise that the exegetical/written work must engage with relevant theory as well as with the existing field (through a contextual and/or literature review). Some supervisors, though not all, argue for the inclusion of reflection on the practice. Supervisors agree that some form of interweaving or integration of the practice and the writing is necessary to best articulate the contribution of the

research.

5. The theory and practice might not be done simultaneously, despite the need to work together in the completed work

Supervisors overwhelmingly agree that the theoretical and practical work must be of a similarly high standard and they recognize the importance of their integration. However, they also recognise the tension between theoretical and practice processes, and acknowledge that it is often difficult to work on them simultaneously. Some supervisors suggest that the practice should lead while others propose that theoretical and contextual research drives the practice (this depends largely on their discipline perspective). However, none suggest that continuously working on both simultaneously is crucial, and supervisors are often acutely aware of the difficulties of balancing creative and theoretical progress.

6. Balance the big picture and attention to the detail

With an eye on timely completion and the rhythms of candidature, supervisors emphasise the importance of a student-tailored approach that combines a sense of routine and regularity but also allows students who prefer to work independently to be able to do so (within the constraints of the degree). To generate a routine for the student, most supervisors believe that regular meetings and shifting between the big picture and attention to detail are crucial. Besides helping to ensure relevance, 'zooming in and zooming out', as one supervisor describes it, helps to contain scope and maintain momentum. Some supervisors provide a roadmap for completion, with clear points of focus along the way, some keep an eye squarely on the central research goal and question, and others encourage a gradual 'resolution'.

7. Provide frequent, constructive feedback

Concern about quality and integrity often prompts discussions on the role of academic writing in creative practice higher degrees by research. Supervisors – both new and experienced – acknowledge the importance of the written component in "helping the student do justice to the work they have done." However, academic writing is an area in which support may be needed. It is sometimes necessary to provide a great deal of academic writing support and it is always necessary to interrogate the writing at a close level.

8. A supervisor should also attend to the practice in the studio

Some supervisors reflect that the focus of their attention can tend to be pulled towards the written work, particularly when candidates are established practitioners and are less familiar with academic writing requirements. It is important to remember however that, regardless of a student's ease or

enjoyment of it, the practice requires full attention. As an experienced supervisor advises, “Be very involved with the creative product as well as the exegesis”.

#### 9. Milestones are time consuming, but ultimately rewarding components of the journey

While the terminology, processes and timing of PhD milestones are not consistent across the sector, their role is fundamentally similar – to ensure progress, rigour and timely completion. Some supervisors believe that milestones need to be carefully managed in order to be useful. Many others see them as fundamentally important to progress and an opportunity to pull together components of the research and practice. It is important to ensure that students understand the necessity of milestones in the institution, and for supervisors to assist them to utilise them in the most practical and meaningful way. One experienced supervisor for example uses them to help their students to “get into the academic space” and a fundamental part of strengthening the final product before examination.

#### 10. Provide support while managing interpersonal relationships

As yet, there are few formal processes for managing creative practice higher degrees by research and the supervisory ‘relationship’ (unless there is an escalating problem). Some institutions have candidate-supervisor agreements, but some supervisors reject this ‘management’ because it is important to consider the candidate as a newcomer to the field with individual working styles, strengths, and support needs. Supervision necessarily involves a tailor-made approach to support, which is attuned to each candidate. Supervisors need to be aware that candidates are often balancing other stresses in their lives alongside (or exacerbated by) their degree. However, supporting a student through milestones and supporting them through their life are distinct concepts (though they may overlap). Support involves balancing ‘tea and sympathy’ with pragmatic support like frequent meetings, being attentive to the work, modelling rigour and honesty in feedback.

#### 11. Don’t feel limited by boundaries as a supervisor, but be aware of regulations

Supervisors are conscious of formal institutional requirements and that the candidate’s work must conform with PhD regulatory frameworks in order to ensure smooth entry, milestones, and examination. As one experienced supervisor counsels, “With the shrinking timeframes, as supervisors we are more aware of our responsibilities to the candidate and the way we report it as research to our school.” On the other hand, supervisors emphasise that they enjoy their students having freedom to experiment and want them to be able to shape their projects according to their individual goals and contexts. Perhaps what is most important then is to assist candidates to navigate their way through process, while being open to experimentation; and to support them to reach a balance

between allowing the work to find its own performativity and identity and conforming to the requirements of the degree.

#### 12. Reflect, discuss and share your practices with colleagues

One of the most pronounced, yet unanticipated, outcomes of the interviews was the effect on supervisors who participated in the process. For some supervisors it had a profound impact in terms of confidence in their position, willingness to progress conversations with other supervisors in their school, and to present at conferences. The value to supervisors of all experience levels in articulating process and practices, concerns, experiences and strategies for success is clear. Reflective practice is of considerable value to supervisors and, given the broad resistance to 'generic' central training, participating in dialogue with other supervisors is an important component of supervisors' professional development.

ß