Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards

Final Report 2013

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Acknowledgements

List of acronyms used

AAWP	Australasian Association of Writing Programs
ACDDCA	Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts
ACUADS	Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
ANU	The Australian National University
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ASPERA	Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Audit
COFA	College of Fine Arts (University of New South Wales)
CQU	CQUniversity
CSU	Charles Sturt University
DCA	Doctor of Creative Arts
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DDoGS	Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies
DVA	Doctor of Visual Arts
ECU	Edith Cowan University
ERA	Excellence in Research for Australia
HDR	Higher Degrees by Research
JCU	James Cook University
NACTMUS	National Council of Tertiary Music Schools
NAWE	National Association of Writers in Education
PD	Professional Doctorate
QCA	Queensland College of Art (Griffith University)
QCM	Queensland Conservatorium of Music (Griffith University)
QUT	Queensland University of Technology

SCA	Sydney College of the Arts (The University of Sydney)
SCM	Sydney Conservatorium of Music (The University of Sydney)
SCU	Southern Cross University
RMIT	RMIT University
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UC	University of Canberra
UNE	University of New England
UniSA	University of South Australia
UNSW	University of New South Wales
UQ	The University of Queensland
USC	University of Sunshine Coast
USQ	University of Southern Queensland
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney
UWA	The University of Western Australia
UWS	University of Western Sydney
VCA	Victorian College of the Arts (The University of Melbourne)
VU	Victoria University
WAAPA	Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (ECU)

Executive summary

Creative arts disciplines constitute an important growth area for research higher degrees (HDR) and, in the years since Dennis Strand's landmark study (1998), have developed a body of knowledge and set of practices associated with research and research training. However, there is little empirical or theoretical work that investigates how examiners of creative arts doctorates arrive at the commentary presented in their reports, or how such reports add value to research in these disciplines.

The purpose of this project was to investigate assessment practices, processes and policies, as well as the beliefs and expectations of HDR students, supervisors and examiners in the creative arts. Through a series of roundtables, focus groups and surveys, along with benchmarking of university policies and processes, and the analysis of examiners' thesis reports, we have interrogated:

- whether there is agreement among artist-academics about what it means to undertake a creative arts doctorate;

- how the academy goes about the work of examining creative arts doctorates; and

- whether the creative arts disciplines can establish agreed standards of quality.

We addressed this via a mixed methods approach: individual discussions, focus groups, roundtables, online questionnaires (see Appendix B for details), analysis of examiners' reports, archival research and textual analysis. This allowed us to triangulate the results. It also helped ameliorate a problem sometimes found when researching academics who, because of a combination of effects including high workload and diffused attention, are irregular research participants.

The findings from this project are that:

- the variation across programs and universities is potentially damaging to scholarly rigour and consistency in the field, and yet the differences between art forms and disciplines areas should be preserved;

- there is insufficient support given to examiners, training in examination, or awareness of standards in examination practice;

- the creative arts academic peak bodies should take the lead in promoting training for examiners, acknowledging the value of the work of examination and of research into examination practice;

- there is a very clear need for more research on examination generally, and examination in the creative arts disciplines in particular;

- there is a very significant need for database/s of potential examiners;

- there has been a notable improvement in the quality of creative arts doctoral dissertations, and the quality of examination, in the past decade;

- policies and practices need review and refinement across the nation's universities.

Following the research, and using input provided by the project participants, we produced a booklet that is a handy guide to informing improved examination practices, processes and policies. The booklet is titled *Examining doctorates in the creative arts: A guide*, and is available online with this report on the project website <creativedocexams.org.au>.

Recommendations

1. That the OLT and creative arts peak bodies continue to support research into research training, including issues associated with supervision and with examination practices and policies: to establish agreement on standards and learning outcomes, and to advance knowledge about research education in the arts disciplines.

2. That the peak bodies and the newly constituted ACDDCA work at a national level to clarify the distinction between the various awards, ensure equity and parity for research candidates, and ensure alignment of creative arts doctoral awards with Level 10 expectations as set out in the AQF document.

3. That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on the distinction between the creative PhD and the named (professional) doctorates, and that this is communicated to universities with a clear recommendation designed to align the offerings with the AQF requirements, and clearly distinguish PhD and PD in terms of the conditions of enrolment, program of study, and expected outputs and outcomes.

4. That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on a preferred term or terms for the critical essay, one that more precisely denotes the role and function of this document; and that this is communicated to universities with a clear recommendation that the sector aim to achieve both consistency and clarity of terminology.

5. That the peak bodies establish, maintain and make available a register of examiners, and that they work with university research offices on the provision of training for, and recognition of, doctoral examination.

6. That the peak bodies and ACDDCA consult with each other, and then with the university sector, about strategies designed to ensure succession planning in the creative arts disciplines, with particular attention to the recruitment and training of research candidates and early career academics for both academic and research leadership.

7. That the peak bodies and university research offices negotiate ways of building a database of exemplars of examiners' reports, to support the training of new examiners, provide opportunities for benchmarking across institutions, and contribute to shared understandings of standards in the discipline.

8. That the peak bodies and ACDDCA investigate and consider the possible role of the viva voce process in examination of creative arts doctorates, and communicate their recommendations to university research offices.

Project publications and outcomes

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2012) *Examining doctorates in the creative arts: A guide,* AAWP Publishing, Canberra (20pp A6, ISBN 978-0-9807573-5-4)

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2012) 'Facing the final hurdle: Creative arts PhD programs and examination standards', in the proceedings of *Encounters,* 17th conference of the AAWP

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2011) 'Leading the leaders: Enhancing the examination of creative arts doctoral degrees', *TEXT* Special Issue 12 (October)

D Brien, S Burr & J Webb (2011) 'Ethical examiners: Authority, power and the ethics of examination', in the proceedings of *Ethical Imaginations*, 16th conference of the AAWP

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2012) 'Research training in the creative disciplines', in the proceedings of *Creative Outposts, ACUADS* conference 2012

J Webb, S Burr & D Brien (2013) '"Standards, not standardization": Examining the creative arts doctorate in Australia', in the proceedings of the *Creative Arts Learning and Teaching Network [CALTN] Symposium* 2013

Brien, Donna, J Webb and S Burr 'Examining doctoral writing in the creative arts', *Doctoral Writing* (eds. Louise Ravelli, Brian Paltridge & Sue Starfield), Libri, Faringdon (forthcoming 2013)

Special Issue of *TEXT*, *Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: Process, practice and standards*, in process (forthcoming 2013, ed J Webb, D Brien, S Burr)

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Chapter 1: Introduction and background to the study

In the creative doctorates we're developing people to work as creative practitioners as well as scholars, and we're pulled between these two forces or two fields.
(research centre director)[1]

Background and aims

Higher Degrees by Research (HDR) students contribute intellectual and economic resources, and are trained to become the knowledge workers who will take up positions in the academy, the government and industries. The creative disciplines, though comparative newcomers to the academy, constitute an important growth area for HDR programs: in the past two decades, enrolments in doctorates by creative practice have risen markedly, and an impressive number of theses have been examined in creative writing, dance and theatre, visual arts, new media arts and music.[2] In the early 1990s there were very few enrolments or completions in a creative arts doctorate; by 2003 – in a situation when 20 of the 39 universities offered creative doctorates – there had been well over 400 such doctorates examined and completed in Australia (CAUL 2011). But with this rapid growth comes the need to interrogate how effectively Australian universities manage research training for creative arts practitioners.

This project was conceived in response both to this context and to our own experience in the sector. Over the past decade, the leaders of this project have supervised some 60 doctoral candidates to completion, examined close to 80 doctoral theses, and completed previous research projects in the area of HDR. This experience has provided both systematic and anecdotal indications that doctoral students, recent graduates, supervisors and examiners frequently express anxiety and uncertainty about the examination process and what it means to present creative outputs as part of a research degree. The creative arts are not alone in this unease: existing research exposes uncertainty about the process and outcomes, and the absence of established standards, for thesis examination in other disciplines (see, for instance, Bourke et al 2004; Denicolo 2003).

Scrutiny of research theses assessment did not begin in earnest until the 1990s, as a sector-wide study of examination procedures for higher degree theses (Mullarvey, AVCC: 2003) revealed. What the existing research has exposed is uncertainty about the process and its outcomes, as well as the absence of established standards for thesis examination (see, for instance, Bourke et al 2004; Denicolo 2003). There is even less certainty about examination standards for creative research theses, and this is of special concern as there is not a neat fit between the creative and other humanities disciplines, particularly at the level of research higher degrees (North 2005). The creative disciplines themselves have not paid much attention to this area of their practice. Investigation into assessment practices in non-traditional research degrees has been principally reported by researchers from the visual arts (Dally et al 2003; Dally et al 2004), but there is little from the performance arts or creative writing beyond papers that elucidate views on what the exegesis *should* be like, and offer speculations about how to move toward a more consistent set of examination standards. The dearth of investigation into examination in the creative arts raises significant

questions about how examiners match their own examination practice and standards to university policies (Carey, Webb & Brien 2008). Similar issues were raised at the *Creative and Practice-led Research Symposium*, held at the University of Canberra in October 2010, and attended by academics working on doctoral level assessment and practice in the creative arts. Participants raised concerns about the current small pool of HDR examiners in the creative arts, their competency to examine the diversity of theses presented to them and the lack of training afforded examiners. There was also a great deal of discussion about differences in examination standards and in supervisory practices (Burr 2010).

This project builds on the research undertaken into HDR issues in general, and in the creative arts in particular, in recent years. This includes projects on creative pedagogies (Boulter 2004), practice-led research methods (Carter 2004; Haseman 2007), the relationship between the critical and creative products (*TEXT* Sp Iss 3 2004) and the epistemological status of non-traditional theses (Harper 2005). Some recent research has investigated what standards are applied to creative research products, and what is expected of examiners. The ALTC-funded project, *Dancing between Diversity and Consistency* (Phillips, Stock & Vincs 2009) interrogated forms of assessment in the dance discipline; our earlier ALTC project explored research education in creative writing (Webb & Brien 2008); and Su Baker and Brad Buckley's 2009 ALTC project, *Future-proofing the Creative Arts in Higher Education*, broadly scoped issues of teaching creative arts, including assessment. These publications, and the projects on which they are based, contribute knowledge about the topic from specific perspectives. Our project adds to this body of work by providing a sector-wide focus on assessment policies, processes, practices and standards in relation to doctorate degrees in the creative arts. Nonetheless more work is required.

Recommendation 1: That the OLT and creative arts peak bodies continue to support research into research training, including issues associated with supervision and with examination practices and policies: to establish agreement on standards and learning outcomes, and to advance knowledge about research education in the arts disciplines.

Methodological frameworks

This project is based on a constructivist approach to knowledge-building: the perspective that knowledge is built by researchers interacting with the subjects of their research, rather than being discovered or uncovered. From this basis, we engaged two main threads to inform our research: theory of knowledge; and theory of pedagogy.

The former, theory of knowledge, is fundamental to any research practice, but is of particular concern in the non-traditional research paradigm because it takes a different approach to questions of the nature of knowledge, the role of knowledge domains, and the modes by which it might be possible to determine the validity of any knowledge claims. Non-traditional research does not consistently follow the conventions applied in humanities disciplines, relying often on emergent, 'individualistic and idiosyncratic' approaches based on 'the enthusiasm of practice' rather than a specific research problem (Haseman 2007). In fact, non-traditional research in the creative arts is not significantly different from research conducted in any arts, humanities or social sciences disciplines. These disciplines too are open to uncertainty and contingency, the denial of grand narratives, a tolerance for complexity and confusion, and both willingness and capacity to be led by the data rather than by a predetermined point of view. Where research in the creative arts differs from that

applied in the more established disciplines is in the outputs generated by practice: in the creative arts, these typically include creative artefacts that satisfy aesthetic as well as knowledge standards (see, e.g., Carter 2004; Gray & Malins 2004). In this project, we attempted to build understandings of how this approach might inform the ways in which examiners approach their evaluative work.

The second theoretical line that informed our research emerges from pedagogy, and particularly from the 'communities of practice' model of collaborative interaction (Lave & Wenger 1991). The value of this approach, as stated in the literature and reiterated by the respondents, is that a theoretically informed community of practice approach allows the refinement, communication and shared use of knowledge that is essential to 'the kind of dynamic "knowing" that makes a difference in practice' (Wenger 1998), and ensures sustained viability and the embedding of the project aims (Lesser & Everest 2001: 38). We incorporated a community of practice model in the design of the project, recruiting first a small research team, then a larger reference group,[3] and finally as many members of the arts academy as possible. Each level of this community participated in varying ways: including delivering the data, reviewing the project process, and evaluating the project team's analysis of the data.

Methods and approaches

This project was designed around a mixed-methods approach – that is, with quantitative and qualitative data collected in the same study. The various elements of the research design included:

- A survey questionnaire, circulated across the arts academic community, and targeting two distinct groups: recent graduates as well as supervisors and examiners. This was an attempt to build a broad brushstroke picture of experiences, perspectives and attitudes in the community. It was not, however, intended to be a 'scientific' study, in that respondents are self-selecting and do not comprise a representative sample.

- A series of small focus groups targeting recent graduates and early career academics as well as more experienced examiners, to discuss their views on, and experience of, the process of examination of a creative arts doctoral thesis.

- A series of roundtables targeting experienced examiners and heads of research centres to gather their input on policies, processes, practices and standards related to the examination of creative arts doctorates.

- The collection and analysis of a body of examiners' reports from creative arts doctorates primarily from Australia, with some from the UK.

- The collection of university policies and processes related to the examination of creative arts doctorates for the purposes of analysis and comparison.

- An investigation of the range of creative arts doctoral programs available in Australian universities.

Our intention was that this comprehensive process would involve individuals and

institutions from across the user community in ways that allow a triangulation of perspectives: across examiners, supervisors and students; and across university policies, governmental initiatives (ERA, AUQA, the Bradley review 2008, the Cutler review 2008) and the traditions of knowledge production. It involved documentary research (into policies, publications); field research (through the focus groups and surveys); emergent and collaborative research (through the roundtables and reference group meetings); and the generation and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. Throughout, the aim was to ensure wide consultation across the community of practice, and this was achieved as far possible; Appendix D sets out the universities whose staff and recent graduates participated in the roundtables, focus groups and private conversations.

The project did not unfold precisely as we had anticipated; the factors we considered critical to the success of the project, as well as factors that impeded our progress, are set out in some detail in Appendix A. Overall, however, most of our aims were achieved: Table 1 (below) provides a summary of our expectations, and what was accomplished, at each stage.

Table 1: Project activities and events

Planned activity	Expected data / sources	Actual activity
Network with reference group to analyse university policies and practices on PhD examinations	Higher Education research publications and proceedings Published data and relevant research papers Admission and progress policies for creative arts HDR students Degree content, structure, mode and size of creative arts HDR dissertations Supervisory responsibilities and examination processes	All this was available, to greater or lesser extents, from university websites and as a result of direct appeal to university research offices and other contacts
Public fora: to gather data, share insights, embed community of practice	Roundtable on examination *practice* in creative arts HDR Roundtable on examination *process* in creative arts HDR Roundtable on examination *standards* in creative arts HDR	The 3 roundtables involved 31 individuals from 18 universities
	Focus groups on examination	The 11 focus groups involved 42 individuals from 15 universities
	Online workshop for examiners in creative arts	The examiners' workshop involved 18 individuals from 15 universities

Planned activity	Expected data / sources	Actual activity
Generate, collate and analyse empirical data gathered through surveys, roundtables and focus groups, and archival sources	Numbers of creative arts HDR dissertations examined in the past 5 years across Australia, types of thesis, results of examination, and other outcomes such as publications and exhibitions	Identifying the numbers of HDR dissertations proved to be beyond the scope of this project. See Appendix A for factors affecting the outcome of the project.
	Examiners' epistemological understandings of examination standards, and both axiological and pedagogical frameworks Training, or other advice, examiners have received Relationship between policies, administrative processes, and experiential approaches to examination Supervisors' roles and perceptions: on standards of quality in creative arts HDR dissertations; on helping students prepare for submission and examination; on selecting examiners Candidates' perceptions of quality of and standards for assessment; how they prepare for examination	68 respondents to an online survey questionnaire, exploring experience and expectations. The responses were tabulated and analysed, and are set out in Appendix B. Convening the public fora detailed above, and then transcribing and analysing the proceedings.
	Analysis of a sample of examiners' reports from all universities represented on the roundtables, including the range of art forms Balance of attention paid to generic skills, disciplinary skills, generation of knowledge, intellectual and aesthetic quality	84 examiners' reports were provided by universities across the country and from the UK. Of these, 70 met the criteria of the project, and were analysed through NVivo and by close reading. See Appendix C for details.

Planned activity	Expected data / sources	Actual activity
Generate and disseminate documentation and presentations	Conference presentations / refereed publications on findings	7 publications to date; Special Issue of the journal TEXT is in progress (forthcoming, Oct 2013)
	Benchmarking report referencing all Australian universities with a creative arts PhD cohort	Benchmarking completed, reported through conference and plenary presentations, and summarised in report
	Agreed standards for assessment of creative arts HDR theses from public fora, private discussions, and archival sources	Report submitted to ACDDCA
	Produce a booklet of generally agreed standards and practices	Examiners' booklet produced and distributed (available at http://aawp.org.au/publicati ons-aawp; and also on the OLT website).

Our approach involved an iterative process, which included extensive discussions with relevant groups and individuals, the presentation of findings during the research process, and the incorporation of feedback into the subsequent stages of the project. Interestingly, the positions, concerns and interests of people in each group were not radically dissimilar, despite the differences in their actual knowledge, experience or geographical location. This may attest to the relatively small population of creative arts academics in the Anglophone world, and perhaps indicates a degree of coherence within the field. Research respondents included the 73 participants in the roundtables and focus groups held during 2011-2012, and the 68 examiners and recent graduates who completed the online questionnaires. In addition, we discussed the project with well over 400 creative arts academics in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, and gathered feedback from them wherever possible. Finally, we involved a senior academic as external evaluator, and his report (set out at Appendix E) was instrumental in our final analysis of the project's findings, and especially in our selection of recommendations from the project.

Scope of project

Despite the specialisation inherent in each of the creative arts disciplines, we worked across the disciplines and treated the creative arts as one domain in this investigation. This is in line with our underpinning logic of working as a community of scholars. We therefore attempted to cast a very wide net, and were able to gain input from university-aligned creative arts peak bodies as follows:

- Australasian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP)
- Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH)
- Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools (ACUADS)
- Australian Screen Production Education and Research Association (ASPERA)

- National Council of Tertiary Music Schools (NACTMUS)

- National Association of Writers in Education, UK (NAWE)

We also attempted to recruit participants from all universities that have a creative arts doctoral program, and hosted focus groups in several regional towns as well as capital cities in order to capture as broad a participation as possible. There were limits on our capacity to be truly inclusive; this was mainly due to the unavailability of artist-academics and, in one or two cases, to resistance to the project at institutional (though not at individual academic) level. Overall, the project received input from stakeholders based across the country, from across the spectrum of universities, and from across the art forms (creative writing, design, film, media arts, music, performing arts, visual arts). Project participants came from the ACT (UC, ANU); New South Wales (Newcastle, Sydney, SCA, UTS, UNSW, UWS, Wollongong, SCU); Queensland (QUT, USQ, QCM, CQU, JCU and Griffith); Victoria (VU, Ballarat, RMIT, La Trobe, Monash, Melbourne, VCA, Deakin); South Australia (UniSA, Flinders); and Western Australia (ECU, WAAPA). Despite our efforts, we were unable to generate interest or involvement from the Northern Territory or Tasmania, or from universities in Western Australian other than ECU. Although the relatively small numbers mean our findings should be considered indicative of views in the disciplines rather than generalizable to the population of creative arts academics, they do reflect a broad cross-section of creative arts academics in Australia. The much larger numbers of constituent community members who engaged in project discussion and dissemination activities, and whose opinions we fed back into our research, also means the project, and its aims and findings, had considerable reach.

The creative arts doctorate

The creative arts doctorate takes many forms in Australia, as the list in Table 2, below, demonstrates. Given the very wide range of degree options, it is not surprising that participants of both the roundtables and focus groups raised questions about precisely what is meant by the term 'doctorate in the creative arts', and whether any blanket statements can be made for the study area. As one participant said, *'There are so many different disciplines within the Creative Arts, it's difficult to get a precise definition of any one area'* (research professor).

Table 2: Doctoral offerings in the creative arts in Australia

Name of degree	Requirements (as per university policies)
Doctor of Arts	thesis of 50,000 words
Doctor of Creative Arts	creative arts product/s plus 30,000–40,000 word essay
Doctor of Creative Industries	coursework plus research projects
Doctor of Design	coursework plus research project
Doctor of Fine Arts	creative artifact plus 10,000–15,000 word essay
Doctor of Music	creative project plus 10,000–15,000 word essay; or a significant portfolio of professional work (no essay)

Doctor of Musical Arts	80,000 word thesis; or a public performance plus 25,000–40,000 word essay
Doctor of Professional Studies	portfolio that can include creative arts artifact(s) and dissertation
Doctor of Visual Arts	exhibition or other documentation plus 20,000 word essay
PhD on creative arts topic	75,000–100,000 word thesis
PhD with creative artifact	creative object plus 15,000–60,000 word essay
Professional Doctorate by publication	portfolio up to 80,000 words
Professional Doctorate by research	portfolio comprising dissertation, artifact, or other research outputs

Some responses were that a creative arts doctorate is:

- a creative arts project that is accompanied by a dissertation;

- one where the creative work is the majority of the thesis component;

- one where argument of the thesis is in the creative work.

Participants distinguished the PhD from other doctorate types:

- *A PhD is fundamentally about scholarly practice in a field* (associate dean, research);

- *If it's basically focused on the creative work it really is a DVA. If it's focused on the theory and the methodology and writing a dissertation, it's a PhD* (examiner);

- *The Professional Doctorate would lean more towards industry standard, while a PhD is really a pathway into teaching in the university* (research director).

Regardless of the type of award, all but one of the participants[4] insisted that a doctoral degree must be driven by a research question, underpinned by a methodology, and capable of contributing new knowledge to the field. In this they are fully aligned with the AQF, which states that a doctoral degree:

> qualifies individuals who apply a substantial body of knowledge to research, investigate and develop new knowledge, in one or more fields of investigation, scholarship or professional practice. (AQF 2013: 64)

We can say, then, that both the AQF and the majority of the participants agree that a doctorate in the creative arts involves the candidate either conducting research *into* a field of practice, and presenting that research for examination in the form of a conventional written dissertation; or conducting research *through* creative practice, and presenting for examination a creative artifact and a critical dissertation. The latter is the form typically associated with the term 'creative doctorate', and it is a form that may or may not involve the candidate in coursework study and may require greater or lesser proportions of critical writing, but will always involve the candidate in conducting research through creative practice, and presenting for examination a package comprising a creative artifact and a critical dissertation.

This is a position that is supported by the previous ALTC-funded projects; and researchers in HDR education both within and outside the creative arts disciplines typically agree that the

focus must be on research training and the generation of original contributions to knowledge (see, e.g., Dobson 2012; Powell and Green 2003). We proceeded, on this agreed basis, to explore the role of policy, practice and standards in the examination process of doctorates in the creative arts.

Recommendation 2: That the peak bodies and the newly constituted ACDDCA work at a national level to clarify the distinction between the various awards, ensure equity and parity for research candidates, and ensure alignment of creative arts doctoral awards with Level 10 expectations as set out in the AQF document.

Endnotes

1.   All epigraphs and unacknowledged quotations come from the focus groups or roundtables held during 2011 and 2012. Participants in these consultative fora comprised academics, administrators, senior research managers, and candidates who had graduated in the previous 10 years. The terms of our ethics clearance prohibits the naming of any respondents, or provision of information about respondents that might render them identifiable. All citations are set in italics, to distinguish them from other elements of text in this report.

2.   By 2003, more than 425 theses in or about the creative arts had been completed and examined in Australia, according to Evans, Macauley, Pearson & Tregenza (2003).

3.   The external reference group was comprised of representatives of key organisations and peak bodies in the arts academy (AAWP, ACUADS, ASPERA, NACTMUS; and, in the UK, NAWE and the Research into Practice laboratory). All are practicing academics, and many are also program leaders.

4.   The outlier argued that the first responsibility of a doctorate in the creative arts is to produce a quality work of art.

Chapter 2: The policy framework

If we are going to change practice and rhetoric around creative doctorates then we have to start changing policy. (examiner)

A body of research has investigated issues in relation to the assessment of doctoral-level theses, and this work has resulted in scholarly publications, government reports, and the refinement of policies and procedural statements. Policy outcomes include the *Inquiry into Research Training and Research Workforce Issues in Australian Universities* (House Standing Committee 2008) and the *Report on the Review of Research Degree Programmes: England and Northern Ireland* (QAA, 2007), and the European Council for Doctoral Education (see www.eua.be), among others.

Most public universities in Australia now offer a creative arts doctorate in one or more art forms. While university websites are extremely diverse, and in some cases incomplete and/or difficult to navigate, we have completed as thorough a comparative review of the offerings, expectations and policies as was possible, with input invited from each institution.

Table 3: Creative arts doctoral offerings by university

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
ANU	Doctor of Fine Arts	Visual art	(no detail provided)
ANU	Doctor of Music	Music	(no detail provided)
ANU	PhD	Media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	(no detail provided)
ANU	Professional Doctorate	Architecture; graphic design	(no detail provided)
Bond University	PhD by thesis	Film and media arts	80,000–100,000 words
CQU	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; music and performing arts	(no detail provided)
CQU	Professional Doctorate	Creative writing; design; music and theatre	(no detail provided)
CSU	PhD by artifact and essay	Performing arts; visual art	50,000 word essay
Curtin University	Doctor of Creative Arts	Creative writing; performance studies; scriptwriting	25% coursework studio project & 30,000–40,000 word essay
Curtin University	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Design; media arts; visual art	80,000 words OR studio project & 30,000–50,000 word essay
Deakin University	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; graphic design; performing arts; visual art	(no detail provided)

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
ECU + WAAPA	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	Thesis 75,000–100,000 words OR equivalent ratios of practice and written exegesis OR 80:20% a major creative project and a related theoretical/critical essay, OR a set of essays 15,000–30,000 words
Flinders University	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; performing arts	Creative product no more than 70,000 words and exegesis 25,000–30,000 words
Griffith University	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; music; performing arts	Thesis (50,000–100,000 words), may sometimes include creative output
Griffith University + QCA	Doctor of Visual Arts / Professional Doctorate	Visual art	Written research 20,000 words and photographic or video documentation of no more than ten images of the studio research
Griffith University + QCM	Doctor of Musical Arts / Professional Doctorate	Music	(no detail provided)
JCU	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; creative arts; music; photography; fine arts	(no detail provided)
La Trobe University	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; graphic design; performing arts; visual art	75,000–100,000 words (or a project and exegesis) OR Exhibition and thesis 50,000 words
Macquarie University	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; music; performing arts	Creative work and explicit critical analysis 50,000 words

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
Monash University	PhD by thesis or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; graphic design; media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	100% research thesis 100,000 words OR Creative work and exegesis/ critical commentary 20,000–25,000 words) OR Portfolio and critical commentary and concert program notes OR 120 mins music and exegesis 25,000–30,000 words OR Performance project 60–90 minutes and dissertation 30,000-50,000 words OR Exhibition and documentation supporting and commenting on exhibited work
Murdoch University	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; design; film and media arts; performing arts	Creative Work and written component 40,000–50,000 (max 60,000 words)
QUT	Doctor of Creative Industries	Creative writing; fashion; film and media arts; performing arts; visual art	Integrates coursework with in-depth doctoral-level research
QUT	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	Thesis not exceeding 100,000 words OR artwork and exegesis not exceeding 50,000 words
RMIT	Doctor of Fine Arts	Sound art; visual art	Project and exegesis/ appropriate durable record 10,000–15,000 words
RMIT	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing film and media arts; photography; visual art	Project and exegesis/ appropriate durable record 20,000–40,000 words
RMIT	PhD by thesis or by artifact and essay	Fashion design; graphic design; industrial design; film and media arts	Thesis or by project combined with an exegesis 20,000–40,000 words
SCU	Doctorate by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; music; visual art	(no detail provided)
Swinburne University of Technology	Doctor of Design / Professional Doctorate	Design; digital media	(no detail provided)
Swinburne University of Technology	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; design; film and media arts; performing arts	Dissertation 70,000–100,000 words OR artifact, product or creative work plus dissertation/ exegesis min 20,000 Viva or oral exam also possible

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
Swinburne University of Technology	Professional doctorate by publication	Design	(no detail provided)
The University of Adelaide	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	creative writing	Theoretical work either text or portfolio of publication OR Creative work: 60,000–65,000 words and Exegesis 15,000–20,000 words. Max total 80,000 words
The University of Adelaide	Doctor of Music	Music	Recorded musical performance and exegesis OR exhibition, music composition and exegesis 10,000–15,000 words OR Performance more than 75 minutes or recordings up to 4 hours & Exegesis max 15,000 words
University of Ballarat	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	creative writing; visual art	Creative work plus exegesis 20,000–40,000 words OR Thesis 100,000 words max
UC	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	creative writing; design; media arts	Thesis 100,000 words max ORCreative work & exegesis min 30,000 words
The University of Melbourne + VCA	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	creative writing; design; film and media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	Creative works (up to 50%) and dissertation OR Performance and/or corpus of creative work and dissertation 40,000 words OR Thesis 80,000–100,000 words
University of Newcastle	PhD by artifact and essay	creative writing; design; media arts; music; visual art;	Creative work: exhibition, design project, portfolio, recitals or productions and 'the exegesis', 20,000–35,000 words (40,000 max)
UNE	PhD	creative writing	(no detail provided)
UNSW + COFA	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	art history by exhibition; creative writing; film and media arts; music; performing arts	Creative portfolio, or novel up to 70,000 words and thesis of 30,000 words
UQ	PhD by artifact and essay	architecture; creative writing; design; music; visual art;	Creative project and critical essay/ commentary 20,000–30,000 words
UniSA	PhD by artifact and essay	creative writing; design; visual art	Exegesis not less than 20,000 words and artifact

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
UniSA	Professional Doctorate	A portfolio of exegesis, artifact, or written project	Thesis portfolio comprised of combination of a thesis, dissertation, portfolio of work, exegesis, artifact, published articles or written project
USC	Doctor of Creative Arts	Creative writing; new media	One or more highly original creative arts products and exegesis 30,000–40,000 words
USQ	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and television; visual art	Composite thesis (e.g. a creative component and exegesis) 25,000–30,000 words
The University of Sydney	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; design; film; music; performing arts; visual art	Thesis 70,000–100,000 words OR Dual outcome 40,000–50,000 words OR Thesis 60,000–80,000 words
The University of Sydney + SCA	Doctor of Arts	creative writing; performing arts	Thesis of 50,000 words and 5 coursework units
The University of Sydney + SCM	Doctor of Musical Arts	music	Substantial public performance and thesis 25,000–30,000 words
The University of Sydney + SCM	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	music	Thesis up to 80,000 words ORPortfolio of compositions and exegesis 25,000 words ORThesis and substantial body of creative work
University of Tasmania	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	music; visual art	Visual arts: exhibition and exegesis, OR Theoretical thesis. Music Composition: folio of works and recordings and exegesis of 20,000 words Music performance: recitals and exegesis 20,000 words OR Theoretical thesis and viva
UTS	Doctor of Creative Arts	creative writing; film and media arts	Creative work equivalent to 50,000–70,000 words and 30,000 word dissertation
UTS	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	creative writing; design; film and media arts; music; performing arts	Thesis 80,000–100,000 words OR Thesis and film, video, sound/audio, photography or other formats
UWA	Doctor of Musical Arts	music; performing arts	Compositions plus lecture OR two recitals, plus lecture, plus thesis 30,000–40,000 words

University	Doctoral type	Art form	Expectations
UWA	Doctor of Music	Music	Significant portfolio of compositions or professionally recorded performances
UWA	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; film and media arts; performing arts; visual art	Creative work and exegesis max 80,000 words
UWS	Doctor of Creative Arts	Creative writing; design; film and media arts; music	Creative work and exegesis constructed as a scholarly essay 25,000–30,000 words.
UWS	PhD	Creative writing; media arts	Thesis consisting of a single written work OR Combination of a written work with work in other media (exhibition, performance, novel, film, video, computer program, etc.) OR A series of papers
VU	PhD by artifact and essay	Creative writing; media arts; performing arts; visual art	Creative work and exegesis / critical / analytical / reflective component 30% (18,000–30,000)
Wollongong University	Doctor of Creative Arts	Creative writing; graphic design; media arts; music; performing arts; visual art	Exhibition, performance or publication of creative work supported by written documentation 20,000–30,000 words
Wollongong University	PhD by thesis, or by artifact and essay	Creative writing; graphic design; music; performing arts; visual art	Thesis 80,000–100,000 words OR Combination of scholarly thesis or exegesis and creative work

Some participants considered that the variation in expectations and requirements established by the differing policies is problematic for research candidates, supervisors and examiners, because the expectations, requirements and standards do not transfer readily between universities. Their comments included:

> *External examination is about validation across a field independent of any institution, so it is important standards are broadly comparable.* (associate dean, research)

> *I find that the relative primacy of the creative work and the exegesis, and what the university's expectations are in terms of practice-led research, are very poorly addressed in the university's documentation.* (research professor)

Certainly there is a wide range of names and of degree types; but in fact there are, formally, only two ways to complete a doctorate in the creative, arts or indeed in any other discipline. The AQF defines just two doctorate types: the Doctoral Degree (Research) (or the PhD); and the Doctoral Degree (Professional) (or the PD) (AQF 2013: 65). Of the doctorates by

research, the PhD is the most popular by far in Australia, and the one most often offered. In 2009, 44,292 students were enrolled in PhDs and only 1,465 in PDs in Australian universities (DEEWR 2010). Although many creative arts doctoral awards that are effectively PDs are offered in Australian universities, both offerings and enrolments are considerably higher in the PhD.

We attempted to determine in what ways the PDs and PhDs in the creative arts actually differ from one another. Analysis of university policies showed variations of expectations and outputs across all creative arts doctoral offerings, but the variations did not result in a neat clustering of types; that is, PhDs are not more like each other and less like named doctorates; and the named doctorates do not have more in common with each other than they do with PhD offerings. Whether constituted as a PhD or PD, virtually all the creative arts doctoral degrees require the submission of a creative artifact and a critical essay; so the policies seem to draw very few distinctions between the two types of degrees.

From an AQF perspective, this may initially seem appropriate, because whether PD or PhD, a Level 10 award needs to achieve the same learning outcomes: 'systematic and critical understanding of a complex field of learning and specialized research skills for the advancement of learning and/or for professional practice' (AQF 2013: 18). However, though they are at the same level in the AQF specifications, they are not identical degrees: the AQF states that a PhD 'makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge', while a PD 'makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge in the context of professional practice' (AQF 2013: 63). If a university offers both a PD and a PhD in a creative discipline, and the structure of the two offerings is identical, it is difficult to see how they meet this criterion for differentiation.

One of the project participants described the experience of two candidates, who were colleagues and friends, deciding it was time to undertake doctoral studies. Each had very similar professional and academic backgrounds, but they were instructed by the university in which they were enrolling to take different paths: one was directed into the DCA, and the other into the creative PhD. Once enrolled, they proceeded to follow precisely the same program of research and study. At the end of their respective candidatures, each submitted a major creative artifact and an essay of some 30,000 words, and they had never been able to determine why they were considered to belong to different doctorate types. Nor could they determine why, given that they had been put into these different programs, their experience was identical, apart from the title printed on their testamurs.

This story demonstrates the lack of differentiation at a single university, but it is not an unusual tale. A similar lack of clarity in both policy and practice is seen across universities. Some named degrees require coursework; as do some PhD programs. Some named degrees require shorter essays, but this is not consistent (the DCA at USC, for instance, has a *minimum* requirement of 30,000 words for the critical essay, while the creative PhD at USQ has a *maximum* requirement of 30,000 words).

This sounds, on the face of it, as though there is little or no effective difference between a PhD and a PD in the creative arts. Where a university offers both a PhD with creative product and a creative PD, a point of distinction is often established in terms of entry criteria, with candidates for what is clearly understood as a more professionally-focused doctorate being expected to demonstrate higher-level skills in their art form. The other consistent point of difference between the two modes is that the creative PD *must* include a

major creative component, while the creative PhD *may* include a major creative component. A refinement of university policies, and the communication of those policies to supervisors and examiners, would help clarify their approach to supporting, and evaluating, the work of creative arts candidates.

Recommendation 3: That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on the distinction between the creative PhD and the named (professional) doctorates, and that this is communicated to universities with a clear recommendation designed to align the offerings with the AQF requirements, and clearly distinguish PhD and PD in terms of the conditions of enrolment, program of study, and expected outputs and outcomes.

The critical element of the dissertations also drew attention from our participants who observed that virtually all doctoral awards in creative arts require a piece of critical writing. While many universities use the now-familiar term 'exegesis' for this work, a plethora of other names is used, including:

- analytical comment;
- contextualising document;
- conventional written narrative;
- critical analysis;
- critical commentary;
- critical essay;
- critical explanation;
- critical reflective written work;
- discursive text;
- dissertation;
- documentation;
- durable record;
- explicit critical analysis;
- reflective component;
- reflective dissertation;
- scholarly essay;
- scholarly written work of critical analysis;
- theoretical dissertation;
- thesis;
- written component;
- written documentation;
- written research;

- written thesis; or

- written work.

Given the breadth of terminology applied to the essay component of doctoral theses in the creative arts, it is not surprising that candidates, supervisors and examiners have expressed uncertainty about the nature and function of this document. Some policy documents do attempt to unpack the term, and in many cases examiners' guidelines are reasonably explicit about what is expected of the document. Again, however, these guidelines vary between universities in nomenclature and expectations. As an aside, we note that the participants in this project almost universally expressed a dislike for the term 'exegesis', usually because they consider it does not convey the appropriate meaning for the object itself. As one participant stated, *We really avoid the word exegesis because we don't expect it to be exegetical* (examiner).

Recommendation 4: That the peak bodies and the ACDDCA work together to establish agreement on a preferred term or terms for the critical essay, one that more precisely denotes the role and function of this document; and that this is communicated to universities with a clear recommendation that the sector aim to achieve both consistency and clarity of terminology.

Despite considerable vagueness and diversity across the Australian sector in terms of all education policy, most of the participants considered that policy has an important role to play in the examination of creative arts doctorates. Their comments include the following in relation to standards and procedure:

> *Policies give some consistency across the board; that means everybody is treated in the same or similar ways.* (HDR convenor)

> *Policy helps to guide correct procedure: we've had some difficult postgrad students who have challenged their assessments at the highest levels of the university, and my sense is that policy is really important to ensure transparency and correct protocol.* (examiner)

Policies relating to HDR are also seen as playing an important role for individuals, whether they are HDR candidates, their supervisors or examiners, or the staff who administer these programs:

> *Policies are also a form of de facto training for supervisors, examiners, general staff, and even for students. Particularly for staff who haven't had much experience, policy is one way of alerting them to what's expected.* (discipline head)

> *I rely on policy documents because I need to see how that person's been prepared through that institution so I know how to couch my comments.* (examiner)

Participants did, however, identify variation in how academics actually use policy, whether the policies are associated with the preparation of candidates for examination, or policy expectations as expressed in examiners' guidelines:

> *My colleagues see policy as just another box to tick, or just another imposition. They don't see policy as a help, as guidance or training; it's just another level of work that you do before you get back to your real work.* (examiner)

> *I find that policy problems come with changes in the policy: the biggest issue with*

policy is getting supervisors to comply with the policy changes … we're always dealing with people who don't comply, and that's always problematic. (HDR convenor)

A reason for the concerns in relation to policy expressed by a number of participants in the project was that the range of expectations and types of degrees can cause confusion to examiners and, thus, disadvantage students being assessed:

> We have seen doctoral candidates having to defend their theses robustly against examiners who had expected to see, say, a commercially viable creative work, and who dismiss the work on the grounds that it is not 'publishable' (in conventional terms). We have also seen examiners dismiss the critical work on the grounds that it is insufficiently substantial, apparently not taking into account the difference between a conventional thesis of 80,000 words, and a critical essay of 30,000 words. (Kroll & Webb 2012: 169)

Research indicates a lack of clarity among practitioners, and a lack of consistency in policies, with a consequent diversity of practice (see Bourke et al 2004; Denicolo 2003). Clear examiners' guidelines and good examiner practice should mitigate this problem, and in the next chapter we discuss our findings with relation to the process of examination.

Chapter 3: The examination process

It's quite astounding how little information there is out there and how little research there is into examination. I suppose it doesn't look very interesting until you start looking at it; then you find all these strange anomalies within it. (research centre director)

It is widely acknowledged that not much is known about the actual process of examination of doctoral dissertations (see, for e.g., Holbrook, Bourke, Lovat and Fairbairn 2008). To some extent, thesis examination happens outside the everyday business of the examiner's university – perhaps because at least in most Australian universities, examiners rarely evaluate students from their own institutions. There is very little formal training for examination. Nor is there any real oversight of the examination process other than in relation to such administrative matters as timelines involved and the handling of reports. The results of the examination are also only typically available to a handful of people – the candidate and their supervisor, and the research committee that considers the examiners' reports – and many of our project participants had only viewed a very limited number of reports in their academic careers.

We asked participants for their opinions of the main issues in examination and among the responses were statements calling for shared understandings regarding many aspects of the doctoral degree:

In order to assess a doctorate, we have to understand and share a common idea of what a doctorate actually is. (research leader)

In order to assess a doctorate, we have to understand and have a common idea of what examination is: whether it is, for instance, engaged interaction or judgment. (graduate)

In order to be equitable, we need to develop national parameters for such thesis elements as length, structure and content. (examiner)

Each of these statements raises an important issue, pointing to the problem of diversity that we identify in the preceding chapters. We will return to the issue of national standards and parameters in a later chapter, focusing first here on how the participants considered the process of HDR examination could best operate.

Before the examination begins

We have observed concerns held by participants about the diversity in degree types, university policy and expectations, and knowledge in the field (Carey, Webb & Brien 2008). All these inflect and affect the examination process long before the student's work is presented for assessment. A key element in this, and one capable of mitigating potential problems, is the supervisor, whose task it is to prepare the candidate for examination. This was confirmed in our discussions about examination with our reference group and participants, who identified the role of the supervisor as both central and problematic:

Supervisors don't know how to prepare students until they can use their own

experience based on three or four years of trial and error. (graduate)

The match of the supervisor to the project is critical in terms of preparation. They've got to be familiar with what you're doing and they've got to be interested and expert in the field. (examiner)

It's the responsibility of the supervisor to scaffold the student into understanding how to design a creative research project, how to integrate creative work and how to bring the work into a single dissertation package. (associate dean, research)

We don't have a common agreement across our school, and the standard of supervision, and the quality and quantity, vary considerably. (graduate)

Other concerns dealt with what participants identified as a lack of, or a weakness in, supervisory training and capacity:

I wasn't ever properly trained to supervise. I stumbled into doing it in more or less the way I was supervised and then I realised that some of that was not terribly helpful to the students or to me. (discipline head)

I'm assuming most universities have kind of supervisory training, but I've done them at two universities and found them to be pretty poor and sloppy. And a lot of that training is very much about the policies, and not the processes or practices. (examiner)

Another thing that I think is a real concern is that numbers have grown exponentially, and we don't have enough supervising capacity. (HDR convenor)

The responsibility for the candidate's success or failure was not, however, placed on the supervisors' shoulders; participants also acknowledged the role of the institution in preparing the candidate for examination:

There should be procedures that guide the parameters, even to the practicalities about what meetings are appropriate and who should interface with whom. (graduate)

I think it's actually the school's responsibility to ensure that the PhD is appropriate for the area, and that the candidate has the ability to propose something from the outset, and then take it through to completion. (graduate)

The head of postgraduate studies should at least flick through the thesis before it goes out for examination, and not sign off on it if it's really poor. I don't think the supervisor should have to own the whole problem with a bad thesis. (associate dean, research)

Once supervisor and research office have confirmed that the dissertation is ready for submission, the supervisor has the task of recruiting examiners. In this, our participants had a very clear idea of what is required for the role, and insist an examiner should:

- be a sane and decent human being;

- know what academic rigour means;

- know whether students meet professional and academic standards;

- be a constructive critic;

- be a 'friendly reader': read with an open mind;

- have had experience in examinations;

- be communicative: engage with the university over any concerns;

- give feedback to candidates to give them an opportunity to improve their work;

- have flexibility;

- be ready to be astonished;

- be generous; and

- be professional: read the work, follow guidelines, and examine within the required timeframe.

All are attractive and important qualities for an examiner. The difficulty for supervisors is how to recognise who in the relevant category has these qualities, particularly in a context where finding an examiner who will commit to completing the task at all is widely considered problematic. Supervisors need to find a panel of people who together possess the knowledge, expertise, skill and background to examine, and who are also acceptable to the university, from the comparatively small pool of qualified experienced artist-academics:

> *In the creative areas, it's more difficult to find examiners because you have to match the intellectual thinking and the practice with one person; and that person has to be attached to an institution.* (associate dean, research)

> *If there is not enough supervisor capacity, there is definitely not enough examination capacity, because the two things are hand-in-hand: supervisors are examiners and vice versa.* (HDR convenor)

> *I always regard part of my responsibility as a supervisor to find the right examiner, the person who'll understand the work. But you might end up going to eight or nine people to find the two or three you need.* (examiner)

What makes it even more difficult is that each university has its own regulations for the recruitment of examiners: some of these are formally expressed in policy and procedural statements, and others are a matter of practice. Participants advised that one university, for instance, will not appoint anyone as an examiner who is not already experienced in the role, which means that other universities need to take on the responsibility of initiating examiners into the skills required. At other universities a similar position is taken, though it

is not enshrined in policy. One questionnaire respondent, for instance, recommends that anyone appointed as a doctoral examiner should have examined at least three Masters level candidates; which suggests the need for a staged process of training in examination. Some universities insist that examiners of a doctorate hold a doctorate in their own right (as that respondent noted, 'how otherwise can they be expected to know what is required?'), while some accept the input of professionals without a higher degree provided at least one examiner is formally qualified. Most universities require examination panels to include examiners of international standing, and several participants stated that their research offices interpret this as 'based overseas'. As one questionnaire respondent pointed out:

> equating 'international' with 'overseas' examiners [ignores] national best practice in the visual arts sector that endorses world standard Australian examiners. Potential logistics, costs, and inflexible exhibition timeframes present a complex and potentially risky situations to candidates. (examiner)

Even the number of examiners required per thesis varies between institutions, as is whether each examiner assesses the entire, or only one component (creative or critical), of the submitted thesis.

Respondents to the project were well aware that these variations, inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies exist across the sector. A number identified these as problematic in terms of the equity of the process for candidates, with recent graduates in particular expressing concern about both equity and quality assurance in the examination of creative arts doctorates (see Appendix B, Figure 7). A number of participants asserted that the variations make the examination process more difficult for examiners, with respondents to the questionnaire identifying little confidence in the ability of examiners to find agreement about what constitutes quality work (Appendix B, Figure 6).

Recommendation 5: That the peak bodies establish, maintain and make available a register of examiners, and that they work with university research offices on the provision of training for, and recognition of, doctoral examination.

The examination process

There is more consistency about what is expected of the examination itself. Participants insisted that examination plays a significant role in discipline standards, with one arguing that the role is one of *gatekeepers to our disciplines*, and that examiners also function as *critics of our junior peers' writing*, and act as *judge, analyst, mentor* (associate dean, research). For others, the task revolves around providing formative feedback: *about helping to make the thesis shine more brightly* (head of learning centre). One recent graduate who responded to the online questionnaire offered a similar observation: *I think I only fully understood the relationship between creative and the exegesis after I got examiners' reports. Then it all fell into place*. Certainly the examiners' reports we analysed support this, since most of reports indicate that the examiner had explored what the candidate was doing, and provided commentary that would help put the student's work into a broader disciplinary context.

Participants to the project observed that the examination process is 'shrouded in mystery'. They were, however, willing to 'lift the lid', if only to some extent. The roundtable

participants described their own approach to the process of examining a thesis, as follows:

I start by looking at the abstract; then the table of contents; and then the references; and then I read the acknowledgments, because you find out a bit about who the person is and what their connections are. (head of learning centre)

I skim the introduction and flip through to the conclusion to identify: What are the questions? What are the key findings? (examiner)

I skim read first to get an initial sense of what the deal is between the writer and the reader, and a sense of how confident the writer is. (research professor)

I read the guidelines first, really carefully, because they're all different. I try to assess the thesis within that framework and be a bit generous toward it. (head of research)

I go straight to the creative component and try to see how the work stands, whether there's a question that the artist is asking and addressing, and whether the research question is in the essays and also in the visual work. (head of research)

I want to see whether the attention to detail is there in the creative work: for instance, whether an exhibition is hung properly; whether a novel is properly edited. (research professor)

I bear in mind that I can't evaluate production values as I would in professional practice because students don't have the resources available to professionals. (HDR convenor)

I use a template to gather the kind of information that I need to write the report. There is a section on the questions that the student is asking and another on questions that I would want to ask that student. There's a section on the boring information about footnotes and typos; and I also record the kind of patterns that arise from the work. (examiner)

I write my report and then sit on it for several days so that I go back to it with a much cooler head and revise it. After all, the students don't need to know everything that's wrong with it. (associate dean, research)

When asked what they expect of a doctorate, they responded with the questions they ask. These include:

- Does it offer an original contribution to knowledge in the field?

- Does the thesis as a whole satisfy external needs as well as personal outcomes (that is, advances knowledge and not just practice)?

- Is the work as a whole scholarly, coherent and rigorous? Is there a thorough literature review that engages key and seminal works, and traces the line of thought across the topic area?

- Is there a contextual review that accounts for key works in the same art form and topic area?

- Does the artwork show innovation, a line of argument, technical expertise?

- Is there a synthesis between the artwork and the essay?

- Does the essay use a vocabulary appropriate to the art form?

- Is the written work free of typographical and grammatical errors?

This list was derived from the roundtables and focus groups, most of whose members were comparatively, or very, experienced academics. Interestingly, the relatively less experienced academics who responded to the online questionnaires (see Appendix B, Figure 3) placed greater emphasis on the quality of the creative work.

The relationship between the two elements of a creative doctorate was also a significant concern. While creative practice was considered central to the doctoral endeavour – *It's got to develop the candidate's practice* (examiner) – the roundtable and focus group participants generally distinguished art work per se from a creative doctorate: *It's not writing a book or making an artwork; it's writing a thesis'* (examiner); and *'I have always seen a PhD as being a research training program and not an opportunity to produce great art. Sometimes great work does emerge, but this should not be the driver of a PhD* (examiner). These experienced examiners were committed to the notion that a creative doctorate must result in *an interesting original work* (examiner), but also insist that candidates must *reflect critically on their own practice to extend knowledge for other people* (examiner). Important issues, then, were the need to distinguish a PhD from *just a good piece of art* (associate dean, research); and the ability to differentiate between the quality of the creative/practical work and the written component. Respondents to the online questionnaires, on the other hand, placed a higher value on aesthetic quality, levels of creative experimentation, and the relationship of the creative artifact to professional standards, than on the quality of scholarship and research practice, and the question of contribution to knowledge (see Appendix B for details of the responses, especially Figures 4 and 5). This suggests that the length of time invested in the academy has an effect on the individual's relative commitment to the academy's agenda: research training and contributions to knowledge. This may, in turn, suggest a need to pay attention to succession planning in the creative arts disciplines, since a lack of alignment with central academic imperatives could leave these disciplines in a vulnerable position.

Recommendation 6: That the peak bodies and ACDDCA consult with each other, and then with the university sector, to develop strategies designed to ensure succession planning in the creative arts disciplines, with particular attention to the recruitment and training of research candidates and early career academics for both academic and research leadership.

The results of examination

The literature review and fieldwork both addressed to what extent examiners specified that amendments be made to a dissertation before the award of the doctoral degree. Our preliminary findings indicate that examiners rarely request major revisions of the creative product. They will ask for anything from minor or extensive revisions to complete rewrites of the exegesis, but the creative work tends to be allowed to stand, even when it is judged barely adequate. To investigate this aspect, we attempted to gather as many reports as possible from the examination of creative arts doctorates. After extensive networking, and direct requests for examiners' reports, 84 were provided to the project team.

A number of those approached expressed concerns about whether they had the legal or moral right to make these reports public, even under the conditions of confidentiality and privacy that the ethical clearance promised. This was a consistent issue, expressed by:

- graduates in relation to their own reports;

- examiners about those reports they have produced for other universities;

- supervisors about reports they hold for their own doctoral candidates;

- research officers (who added to their confidentiality concerns the plea that they were too overworked to provide us with the reports anyway); and

- in one case, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research, who expressed doubts about the capacity of the university to provide such materials.

The data is, therefore, limited: there was not a reliable flow of reports from across the universities; and it is also difficult to source older reports because supervisors and examiners move, or do not retain those reports, while candidates often move away after graduation, and their universities lose touch with them. We have treated the results from the analysis of these reports with caution because they were opportunistically gathered and, thus, rather than representative, can only be seen as indicative. The analysis was conducted through close reading, and through data organisation provided by NVivo. Summary tables are presented at Appendix C.

Of the 84 reports provided, 70 met the parameters of this project (final reports for doctoral dissertations in the creative arts within the last 10 years); the other 14 were for masters by research, MLitt or upgrade seminars. Of the 70 reports included in the analysis, 51 were for PhD dissertations, and the remaining 19 for other doctoral types. All art forms were included, although (perhaps because of the project team's personal academic networks), somewhat more were provided for creative writing than for the other art forms.

We compared the length of reports, largely because project participants were very divided on the appropriate length: opinions ranged from the position that all that is required is a few lines stating whether or not a thesis is acceptable, to the view that every solecism should be identified. The reports ranged from a cursory single page, to an expansive 37 pages, with a median length of 4 pages and a mean length of 5.4 pages. Reports on PhD dissertations were longer than those provided for professional doctorates, perhaps suggesting that examiners feel a greater compulsion to engage critically with a more conventionally named research degree.

In terms of evaluation, most of the reports we received were for dissertations that were overall of acceptable quality: 66% were passed with no, or only minor, rewrites. However, the overall failure rate was higher than is indicated is typical. We have been unable to find empirical evidence of HDR failure rates, but Mullins and Kiley, reporting on their own research, suggest a doctoral failure rate of about 3% (2002: 376). This is marginally lower that the overall failure rate of 4% of the reports we analysed, and considerably lower than the 9% of failures in the DCA dissertations we identified in the 70 reports analysed.

Creative doctorates differ from conventional doctorates, of course, in having two (and sometimes more) distinct elements: the creative and the critical objects, and in some cases additional attachments, such as studio diaries or lecture notes. The participants' assertions about examiners' approaches to creative arts examination was very much in line with the findings from our analysis of the examiners' reports. Almost unanimously, the participants asserted that examiners' comments, and their requirements for corrections or amendments, focus primarily on the critical element. As one person said, *I've never known a*

creative component to be re-examined but almost consistently there are revisions that need to be made to the exegesis (research professor). The examiners' reports bear this out (and please see Appendix C for a comprehensive account of the analysis). For reports that required major rewrites of the whole dissertation, only 10% of the reports identified unsatisfactory quality of the creative work, while 23% found the critical work unsatisfactory. For reports that required minor rewrites, only 6% criticised the creative artifact, while a surprisingly high 26% considered the critical work inadequate.

What these data indicate is that the sector as a whole would benefit from greater clarity and consensus about what is expected of the creative artifact and of the critical essay, and of the relationship between the two. Such clarity would be of great assistance to HDR candidates as they attempt to resolve their research questions and their creative practice, and as they try to understand the standards that are expected of them.

The question of standards is the topic of the next chapter, where we discuss the views of the project participants in the light of other research on this issue.

Chapter 4: Standards

We are working within an institution that has its own understandings of what 'a doctorate' means, and, sure, we can experiment with non-traditional processes, but a PhD is a genre that has particular rules it needs to obey; and what I mean by rules is standards. (examiner)

Examination is predicated on the notion of standards and, in relation to doctoral theses, on the relationship between a dissertation and the generally agreed standards in its discipline area. With this in mind, we addressed the question of standards as a key issue in this research project.

Examination standards

We began by attempting to find shared understandings of what is meant by the term 'standards', and this generated keen discussions among participants of our focus groups and roundtables. Many participants observed that a single standard is not possible for a creative doctorate, not least because the dissertation is typically in at least two parts: the creative and the critical. Instead, they argued, the contents of the thesis must meet two discrete standards – academic and professional – which adds a layer of complexity not found in more conventional doctoral dissertations. It also requires supervisors and research offices to construct examination panels with members who, between them, have knowledge about standards in at least one of the two key areas, as well as sufficient expertise to evaluate the dissertation against those standards.

Discussion of this aspect of HDR examination led participants to consider the question of how examiners themselves might meet such standards, and to what extent any of us actually know what standards apply to the process of evaluating doctoral level work. One participant said, *I would like to know if my reports are a good standard; if they're too long or too short; if they're dealing with what everyone else is dealing with* (head of school), a desire affirmed by a number of other participants. It is, however, very difficult to establish such knowledge, and participants were keenly aware of this: *Examination is a slightly 'priestly' sort of mystery, and we don't like to open the mysteries up too much* (head of discipline). As is the case with any mystery, its effect can be to leave individuals feeling anxious and under-informed:

There is fear for the examiners too. First, when I'm handed a thesis I'm scared because obviously the person who's written this actually knows more about the topic than I do. And then secondly, the vagueness of guidelines I'm given creates another element of fear. I think: well what do I need to address in this? The guidelines aren't helpful enough; they seem very generic and very ambiguous. I think if we created guidelines that were more specific, that would erode a fair amount of the fear that's involved in marking. (examiner)

A problem that arises from this lack of knowledge and, perhaps, a lack of confidence on the part of examiners is that candidates may be disadvantaged by erratic examination. As Allyson Holbrook notes, 'All the research points to the fact that examiner reports are idiosyncratic with regard to emphasis and structure' (Holbrook 2001), a factor which can leave candidates uncertain about the strengths and weaknesses of their dissertation and uncertain about how they might improve it.

Another problem is that discipline areas are potentially disadvantaged by the lack of shared standards in examination practice, and shared understandings of what constitutes quality research in creative arts doctorates. As another participant pointed out, *the examiner has a very big responsibility in forcing the field to improve its standards. So examination is actually a powerful tool* (head of research): powerful not simply in terms of improving an individual dissertation, but in terms of shaping the whole discipline's approach to doctoral level work.

The concerns expressed by our participants about the invisibility of the examination process, the high level of confidentiality under which reports are protected, and the lack of knowledge about what really constitutes exemplary, or even adequate, assessment at doctoral level, indicates that considerably more work needs to be done in this area:

> Empirical research into PhD examination has been sparse. The literature is characterised by a lack of cross-disciplinary, cross-national national research studies, an impoverished theoretical base, and a lack of attention to the fundamentals of learning and assessment at advanced levels of study. (Holbrook 2001)

With this in mind, a number of participants suggested that a body of examiners' reports be made available as part of a process of training new examiners in best practice, and alerting more experienced examiners to others' work. One examiner said, *I do think the repository of templates and of different types of PhDs on your website would help to show the variety of theses and of examiners' reports* (examiner). Other respondents reflected on the effect opening up reports for such scrutiny may have on individual examiners and the way they cast their judgments: *If the examiner's report was made public, as you do when writing a review for instance, wouldn't that change how we respond to students' theses?* (examiner).

Nonetheless, there was a sense that examiners do know what they are doing. One participant observed that, after all, *we are all experienced in assessing undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students*, and *in applying professional judgment to creative work* (examiner). Another observed that *the standard of examination has improved* and attributed this to the fact that *university policies are clearer* (associate dean, research). However, there was a general agreement that more information and support should be made available to examiners.

Recommendation 7: That the peak bodies and university research offices negotiate ways of building a database of exemplars of examiners' reports, to support the training of new examiners, provide opportunities for benchmarking across institutions, and contribute to shared understandings of standards in the discipline.

Thesis standards

Turning to standards for the doctoral work itself, we have noted above that there are two main axiological frameworks applied: the scholarly and the professional. Despite Holbrook's observation about the lack of clarity about assessment across the HDR area, there are some agreed standards – albeit loosely framed – for conventional doctorates. These typically establish that the dissertation submitted for examination:

- makes a distinct and significant contribution to knowledge or understanding;
- demonstrates originality;
- demonstrates the capacity for independent critical investigation;
- is well ordered in its presentation; and
- will be suitable for publication.

To some extent, this is relevant also for creative arts doctorates. We do expect that the work will make a contribution to knowledge, be original and independent, be well presented, and suitable for publication. But do we expect this of the work as a whole, the creative artifact only, or the critical essay primarily? Most participants considered that both elements are expected to meet these standards, but also suggested that this was setting the bar very high:

> *The creative component effectively has to meet two standards: it has to meet the standard of professional creative arts practice and demonstrate a level of professional competency as well as demonstrate an original contribution to knowledge in a scholarly context. It's actually serving two masters, and it has to do two things: it has to prove that it's legitimate as art practice and it has to demonstrate that it's producing knowledge. If you accept that not all art practice involves the production of knowledge then that's actually placing a double burden on the creative doctorate.* (associate dean, research)

This may explain the (apparent) higher than average failure rate we identified in our analysis of examination reports.

Most university policies seem to place this double burden on the creative doctorate, but there is some uncertainty in the sector about precisely how one identifies a contribution to knowledge in a creative work. Related to this is the question of whether, and how, an examiner determines the relative attainment of each of these standards by each element submitted for examination. Does 'original' or 'well ordered' mean the same in a scholarly essay and a creative artifact? What does it mean to claim that a creative work is 'suitable for publication', in a field of practice where 'suitable for publication' [or 'making public'] can differ considerably depending on which audience is sought and which venue occupied? Art, after all, covers a spectrum from highly commercial through consecrated to highly experimental. What is 'suitable for publication' at one point of that spectrum might be entirely unsuitable at another, and is not, therefore, an indication of aesthetic or other quality. In addition, a doctoral candidate is unlikely to have all the resources available to a professional artist – this is often true for candidates working in the performing or digital arts. As one roundtable participant asked:

> *How do you judge a postgraduate's work against a work that has a couple of*

hundred thousand dollars behind it? So the examiner can't just come in and tick boxes about, say, good format presentation or artistic standard, but rather has to negotiate those things. For instance, is the concept strong enough to override the lower production values? (research centre director)

This is a very important question and one likely to resonate beyond the performing arts. Although, for instance, creative writing operates under very different principles from performing arts (being a relatively low cost, and typically a sole practitioner activity, presented at arms length to the public), it is not necessarily either feasible or fair to expect that any candidate's work will be suitable for trade publication. Literary novels and poetry produced under any circumstances are, after all, less likely to find a market than are works in popular genres; but does this mean that a doctoral dissertation that includes an experimental literary work should fail to meet the 'suitable for publication' standard, or that a bestselling work of teen vampire romance should be considered to have exceeded the standard?

However, participants were quick to point out that although they do not expect professional production values, they do expect professional quality in the work:

> *I think it's quite reasonable to expect at a doctoral level that the candidate would be competent in the various methodologies that they use. A doctorate is about demonstrating excellence, so there's an expectation that there should be some demonstration of excellence, however that is defined; and if the practice is not excellent that should be noted.* (examiner)

Like many of our project participants, we consider that the standard for creative doctorates should be less about production values and position in the professional marketplace, and more about the concept at the heart of the work. Phillips, Stock and Vincs suggest something very similar in their report on their ALTC-funded project on dance, writing that: 'Above all, our research recognises that examiners play a crucial role in "daring" knowledge to be original and, possibly, confrontational. That as much as their guardianship of standards appears to be a responsibility of their position' (2009: 6). However, it is also important that the standard includes a focus on transferrable contributions to knowledge and understanding. As one of our participants noted: *it's more than just reflection on your practice. It's adding new knowledge. Otherwise you're talking about practice rather than research* (examiner). This does not imply that the work needs to be highly theoretical, or to deal with complex social issues. Many of the participants considered that a creative arts doctorate should ideally address questions of professional practice, or questions of form, rather than the more philosophical or sociological questions that might be addressed in a conventional HASS (humanities, arts and social sciences) candidature; for instance:

> *In terms of producing new knowledge, I think the contribution of our area is really in cultural understanding, and in areas like perception. I expect to see a level of sophistication in their professional practice that was not necessarily there in the beginning.* (examiner)

Our analysis of these reports demonstrates the examiners' commitment to this approach, because of the close and respectful attention they paid to professional and cultural issues.

Maintaining standards

A number of participants raised what they saw as issues with the examination process when they were either not informed about the outcome of a thesis they have examined or are, but then find that their recommendations were not taken seriously. This later issue reflects a concern with disciplinary standards. As one participant said:

> *There often seems to be a gap between what I write in my examination report and what's reported back to me. In many cases where I've said a thesis needs major revisions, I've received a letter from the university, just weeks later, saying the thesis has been passed with minor errors. This concerns me for the discipline and for creative arts at a time when we're all under pressure to show that we are worth our place in the Academy*. (head of school)

The participants were certainly aware of the complex process that is engaged once the examiners' reports are returned to the originating university. They acknowledged too that examiners' reports on the same thesis can vary dramatically, and that all views need to be taken into account because: *The principle is to produce the best thesis at the end because it is going to be the permanent document, so I think you have to take the comments all on board* (graduate). However, they also considered it important that the professionalism of their reports be acknowledged, and that they be kept apprised of the outcome of the process, in order to maintain that standard of examination, because the kind of experience described above (where examiners are not advised of the outcome, or their own recommendations appear not to have been considered) is: *a real disincentive to the process of examining, and examining authentically. You feel you may as well just say, 'fantastic, pass'; if no one is going to take your report seriously* (examiner).

The maintenance of standards was also discussed at the level of the individual creative arts disciplines, when the question of failure in creative arts doctorates was raised. The participants viewed this as a particularly thorny issue, further complicated by the structure and creative content of these types of dissertations. But as the literature shows, the issue of doctoral thesis failure is problematic right across the academy. Few theses that are submitted actually fail (Cantwell & Scevak 2004; Joyner 2003); and generally participants suggested that students whose work is not of a sufficiently high level will withdraw from their candidature before submission. In their first study of the topic, Holbrook and her team examined 300 examiner reports from Australian universities and found none recommended failure (Holbrook et al 2003); and predisposition by experienced examiners to pass a thesis has been reported in other studies (Johnston 1997; Pitkethley & Prosser 1995; Mullins & Kiley 2002). Many of our participants agreed with Joyner's contention that 'if a PhD thesis had been written and submitted, the candidate deserved the degree' (Joyner 2003); and Bruce Barber's work supports this, in his finding that there is a 'deep cultural ambivalence … particularly in the school and university system – especially at the graduate level – against failure' (2009: 55).

Our participants discussed this issue at some length; some suggested that examiners lack the courage to fail theses – '*Who dares to fail the work? I think that's an elephant in the room* (examiner) – and others expressed concern about the high pass rate in terms of disciplinary standards:

> *Is it good for our discipline that people don't fail? It's good for our universities that*

they all pass and they get the money and get a pat on the back as a supervisor, but for our disciplines, should everyone be passing? What does that do to the standard? (head of school)

One reason for the high pass rate raised by participants was the notion that the HDR process has sufficient inbuilt checks and balances to ensure that poor candidates do not get to the submission stage. However, this was another context where participants observed that it is rare for examiners to call for revisions of the creative artifact, and that this is troubling in terms of the standard of this component of the thesis: *By and large, they ask for quite extensive revisions of the exegetical work, but the creative work tends to stand for itself, even if it's only adequate* (associate dean, research).

The answer to this conundrum seems to rest with an understanding of what creative work is in the doctoral (that is, the research) context, and an acceptance and recognition by candidates that creative work is highly experimental, and that failure is, therefore, a possibility:

> *We're all creative practitioners, and we all know that some of our work doesn't work. As a student you are committing four years of your life to a big creative project, and if it just doesn't work, what do we do with that? We can't give them another four years.* (associate dean, research)

Students, however, examiners felt, need to be aware of how successful, or otherwise, their experiments have been, rather than (as was identified as sometimes happening), making grandiose statements about the success of their work.

> *What we hope happens is they recognise the failure. So I would say if that happens in a doctorate and a student tells me it didn't work, and if they can write about why it didn't work and what knowledge generated that process, then perhaps that's the answer.* (examiner)

Discussion also centred on the lack of uniformity among universities discussed above, with the argument raised that standardised guidelines would clarify the pass/fail criteria:

> *Actual failure is a complex question given how final it seems. I certainly think that disciplines need to be proactive in providing criteria that differentiate quality in theses – that is, what a great thesis is, and what a problematic thesis is, and what would be required to bring it up to standard.* (HDR convenor)

The call appears to be for a set of generalised guidelines that would be used in all universities, but that all 'stakeholders' should have some input into establishing the criteria but there also should be generalised 'in principle' guidelines to assist the overall dialogue.

This brings us to the final section of this chapter: the issue of standards, and the idea of standards compared with standardisation.

Standards for examination

> *One interesting thing that I've experienced is examiners coming back to me and asking if there is some sort of rubric to address the assessment of a PhD. We do have guidelines, but they can be interpreted very vaguely. I think the creation of a rubric might actually help; it might give new examiners a bit more guidance and a bit more instruction in how they should go about assessing.* (head of discipline)

This idea of a criteria rubric for the examination of doctoral theses was perhaps the most contentious issue we raised with participants of the project. The first response of virtually all those involved was that 'standards equals standardisation', and standardisation is the death of art. An important point here was the differences expressed between the art forms. The argument mounted in most of the roundtables and focus groups was that it is not feasible to develop a set of standards that can apply across the art forms: the mode of production, the contextual tradition, and the mode of publication are simply too diverse. As a participant argued:

> *Any guidelines for doctoral examination need to have flexibility to allow art form specificity within what is still considered to be a national and an international standard.* (HDR convenor)

> *A rubric would have to be tailored for specific areas. One is the weighting involved in the practical element compared to the exegetical element. There aren't any standard guidelines around that. Another would be how big the project is: for instance, is making a feature film equivalent to doing a photographic exhibition? I think people get very confused dealing with those practicalities.* (head of discipline)

The suggestion was made that each of the art forms develop a rubric, or template, for what constitutes quality work in their areas: how a work is presented, the degree to which either experimentation or traditional craft is expected (or balanced), the sorts of questions that can be explored in that form, and how an examiner might look at the work produced. In relation to this point, one participant stated: *Perhaps more than a set of standards, what we need is a set of really good questions, and understanding about why we're asking those questions, and what are the terms for interrogation* (associate dean, research).

This is, perhaps, as close as the sector can come at this moment to developing standards for examination, or for quality, in the university-based creative arts in Australia. Although initially we had expected that the establishment of a national examinations board would be a project outcome, as Appendix A points out, this was unanimously rejected by participants. Many respondents maintain that there is such diversity in the disciplines that national standards would be unachievable. As one respondent said, *A unified universal Australian standard for examining? I think it would be very difficult because we have disagreements* (examiner); and another pointed out that *There are no standards and you can't assume what happens in your institution happens in another because they're often quite different* (research professor).

Members of the field value this difference; they also mount arguments aimed at protecting the integrity of their own art form against any homogenising impetus. At the same time, these same individuals are acutely aware that institutional imperatives must be taken seriously:

> *I think it's really important, in the context of TEQSA, that we come up with our own*

standards; because if we don't, outside bodies will come up with them for us. From the students' and the supervisors' point of view, there's a real need to set up standards that are not too restrictive, but that prevent us from having to reinvent the wheel for each new project, for each new university. (head of school)

Despite the many concerns about any attempts to standardise creative arts doctorates, participants in the project agreed that it would be both possible and appropriate to develop standards for the following elements of the creative doctorate:

- the contribution to knowledge;

- the presence of strong intellectual inquiry;

- the use of sound and relevant theoretical paradigms;

- the rigorous demonstration of qualitative research and research methodologies;

- the contextualisation of the findings;

- the expected levels of discussion, analysis and conceptual thinking;

- the length of the critical essay;

- the length of the bibliography.

There was similar agreement regarding the feasibility of developing a statement to guide examination practice. This is not something that we, the project team, can set in place, but we do bring to the sector this concern for greater clarity and consistency, and suggest that further work is undertaken in consultation with sector members on this issue.

Chapter 5: Project participants' suggestions

We don't need a set of rigid rules about what a creative thesis is, but what we do, I think, need a set of consistent frameworks about the feel of creative research and the range of possible methodologies. (associate dean, research)

Feedback/suggestions from creative arts academics

An important, although unpredicted, output of this project was due to the quality of the feedback and suggestions made by project participants in relation to doctoral examination processes, practices and standards in the roundtable events. Many of these senior members of the academy (in terms of doctoral examination) mentioned, unprompted, that they had experienced issues, concerns, and opinions which had never before had a forum for discussion. So considered and insightful was much of this input that we analysed it, and then grouped and compiled it under project-related areas. Because we found we not only referred to this material in our analyses, but used it in other ways in both our project work and our discussions with others, we formalise it here as another product for dissemination.

The starting point

- benchmark the entry requirements for creative doctorates across institutions to confirm the content of undergraduate programs and the universities' expectations of the professional experience brought by prospective candidates.

- develop coherent guidelines to confirm the integrity and content of creative arts doctoral programs.

- produce a statement about what a creative doctorate actually is.

- reconsider the nomenclature used to describe the critical element.

Below is the list of what our participants saw as important factors that, if implemented, could help the sector ensure best practice examination of doctoral dissertations. We note that not all points were agreed on unanimously, but overall they describe a very useful set of practices and processes. We drew on these suggestions in developing our overall report recommendations, triangulating these with other data collected in the project.

The structure of doctoral programs

- introduce a standard exegetical model that includes an overarching research question, and a literature and contextual review.

- produce standards pertaining to evidence of scholarship regarding methodology, contextual framework, evidence-based discussion, and bibliography.

- address the relationship of the critical element to the body of work; the strength

of the argument through both artifact and essay; the quality of the creative work; and the professional skills, professional standards and intellectual quality displayed.

The examiners

- require all examiners to be practitioners in the art field being examined, and also to be academics, and not solely commercial/practice-based.

- produce a statement defining and describing examiners' roles and responsibilities.

- establish a national register of examiners.

- institute formal examiner training, through input from the heads of postgraduate research programs, research offices and the peak bodies.

- make examiners' reports available to examiners as a training tool.

The examination process

- produce standardised instructions for candidates, supervisors and examiners.

- establish benchmarks for examination guidelines.

- give more consideration to graduate attributes in the examination process (involves benchmarking of the universities' postgraduate attributes).

- institute a formal moderation processes such as exists for undergraduate assessment.

- consider instituting a *viva voce* process.

The disparity between examiner supply and requirements

- investigate ways to overcome the difficulty of finding practitioners who are both experienced in the appropriate medium and with the necessary theoretical knowledge to examine a doctorate.

- include internal examiners on the panel, as an indicator of confidence in the quality of internal teaching teams and to contextualise the work for external examiners.

- develop mechanisms to encourage staff to become examiners for other universities (e.g., include examination in workloads and position Key Performance Indicators; stress the benefits of examining, including gaining external recognition and demonstrating their capacity as scholars).

- raise the examination fee/honorarium to better reflect the significance and value of this work.

Scholarship on examination

- Hold regular colloquia for examiners and supervisors facilitated by peak bodies at their annual conferences.
- Promote the scholarship of examination through journal and conference paper publication.

These wide-ranging comments cannot, of course, be immediately taken on board or instituted by a single body. However, we note that these are the pressing issues that face doctoral examination, and urge the peak bodies to take up these issues, and either implement them (for example, by holding colloquia, and developing training programs) or lobby individual universities and Universities Australia to take on those that seem appropriate and, at the very least, to spearhead benchmarking and develop definitions. At a more personal level, we hope that individual academics will continue the excellent work that we have observed in the creative arts sector, in the establishment of a strong and vigorous research community in just over a decade, and continue to build it and the quality of its outputs. There is a need for this to be further studied, researched and improved upon.

Oral examination

We would like to draw attention, briefly, to the *viva voce*. This was raised in each roundtable and by both focus groups and questionnaire participants. Many people were in favour of the introduction of a *viva voce*, however, their support was offered with some caution because:

> *What happens with the viva voce is you have other power games; the dominant examiner will still override everybody else. (HDR convenor)*

> *Actually the colloquial term 'thesis defence' for viva voce tells you as a student that you're going to be attacked, so it's not a negotiation or conversation; it's an assault and a response. (examiner)*

Unlike the UK, where the *viva voce* is a standard element in the assessment (Park 2007: 31; QAA 2011), Australian universities rarely include it; but there are issues with the process if it is inconsistently conceived and applied (Park 2005: 192). Su Baker and Brad Buckley's ALTC project report sets out the convention for the *viva voce* in Australian visual art schools and note that only three schools require an oral examination and two have it as an option. The majority, the report notes, do not incorporate it at all (Baker et al 2009: 54).

The participants in Baker and Buckley's study, like the participants in this one, are ambivalent about the viva on the grounds that it is considered likely to produce consensus between the examiners. Baker et al report that:

> One school, which had implemented a *viva voce* several years ago reported that this practice was withdrawn after a short period due to a range of difficulties experienced with this model. (Baker et al 2009: 54)

Australia is not alone in experiencing and expressing concerns about the *viva voce* model.

The main concern in both Australia and the UK seems to be the way in which the contact between examiner and candidate that is required by the *viva voce* can introduce an overly subjective element into the process.

Moreover, writing about the UK context, Hoddell, Street and Wildblood report that 'it is not apparent that the *viva voce* process offers the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate the breadth of their subject understanding and expertise' and they consider it particularly difficult for candidates 'to demonstrate successful acquisition of transferable skills' (2002: 64). This is despite the many apparent benefits derived from oral examination, which include the opportunity for the examiners to understand more clearly the context and concerns of the candidate, to confirm that the work is the candidate's own, to clarify any under-resolved areas of the thesis, and to assess the candidate's presentation skills (see Kiley 2009: 39).

Recommendation 8: That the peak bodies and ACDDCA investigate and consider the possible role of the *viva voce* process in examination of creative arts doctorates, and communicate their recommendations to university research offices.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This project examined, as far as possible given the time scale and availability of participants, the practices, policies and understandings of standards in the examination of creative arts doctorates in Australian universities. Our research has revealed both agreement and contradiction. Nobody, it seems, wants a restrictive code or legislated guidelines for examination standards, but almost everyone who interacted with our project considers there should be clearer and more consistent guidelines to assist examiners in making their judgments and preparing their reports. It was felt that the lack of such guidelines threatens the integrity and content of each discipline's programs, and so institutions should both view and interrogate the policies of other universities, and test their own against these.

There was also considerable interest in improving the standard of examination by providing professional development opportunities for examiners. While training and mentoring were seen as important, of more central importance was the development of a means of sharing information, resources and best practice developments and knowledge. The scholarship of examination was considered an important key to raising examination standards and sector-wide knowledge. It was also advanced as an aspect of the HDR process that could be promoted and disseminated through discipline-related publication and conference papers. The question of the status of academic examination was another important thread, and addressing this was considered a way of increasing the pool of available examiners.

One point that emerged consistently across all the fieldwork, and to which we would like to draw attention, is the confidence in the sector. It is generally believed that the quality of research training is improving and, consequently, the quality of creative dissertations has also improved. This can be attributed to the efforts of the many individuals and teams across Australia who have responded to institutional imperatives in a creative and resourceful way, and to the university and disciplinary processes that have built rich programs, good supervisory practice, and strong national networks. The peak bodies have played an important part in this, and overall the sector seems to be in a good condition, and to have a promising future. In recognising this, we acknowledge the work of all our colleagues in creative arts disciplines across the country, and particularly, in this context, the generous contributions made by the participants of this project.

Our findings from this project point not only to a diversity of processes and standards across institutions, but also to homogeneity in the values and practices that examiners bring to the examination process. This dichotomy is both worrying and reassuring. It is worrying because this lack of a set of standards by which creative arts HDRs in Australian universities are administered and measured leads to questions about the quality of creative arts graduates being produced. It is reassuring because, despite the difficulty of navigating the labyrinth of standards, policies, instructions and requirements, examiners still approach the task of examination both enthusiastically and ethically. Despite the plethora of confusing guidelines and instructions and the different standards and requirements – this maze that examiners, supervisors, candidates and, indeed, Research Office staff must navigate and resolve – our findings point to examiners being extremely ethical in their approach to theses. They are caring, concerned, positive and very mindful of the current and potential status of candidates. As well, they hold and display deep feelings of responsibility towards maintaining standards at individual, discipline, institutional and industry level.

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Appendix A: Project information

Factors critical to the success of the approach

- A well designed research method and approach

- A well designed and maintained calendar of activities, with milestones

- Frequent, open and frank communication between members of the research team

- Research team flexibility regarding communication and project workload

- The interest and generosity of members of the creative academy

- Support from internal research office staff

- The selection of an important topic that is recognised as a 'problem' requiring attention

- A mixed method approach to the research

- Frequent presentation of findings to peers at conferences, workshops and symposia

- A very efficient, informed and gracious project officer

Factors that impeded its success

- Problems recruiting (a) participants and (b) capable research assistants (RAs). The former is an ongoing problem for research involving academics, as is frequently reported anecdotally and in the literature (see, e.g., Bexley, James & Arkoudis 2011). The latter is inevitable because in many cases RAs are actually research students, learning the 'trade'; and the demands on their time are frequently higher than they expected, and cannot be anticipated (e.g., they accept an RA position, but then are offered a semester's teaching). We note, though – with gratitude – that the RAs who undertook work for us were, for the most part, highly professional and capable.

- Problems in managing the work of some of the RAs: we found it difficult to ensure that they would deliver finished polished work to professional standards on time.

- Changing roles of reference group members, affecting their availability for the project.

- Access to software: we had trouble finding a qualified RA who had access to NVivo and was capable of entering the data for qualitative analysis.

- Problems in a few cases where university personnel did not accept the legitimacy of the University of Canberra Ethics Committee, and its approval of the project approach.

- Problems with access to good information: our benchmarking project demonstrated that university websites vary substantially in terms of the information they provide. Details about HDR offerings, policy and examination processes can be difficult to access, and the information is often out-dated or insufficient.

- An almost unanimous rejection by participants of the principle of establishing a National Examinations Board, though there was agreement on the principle of developing shared understandings of standards within the sector.

General lessons learnt

- The value of having conceptualised a project that has intrinsic interest, is capable of verification and has potential to deliver genuinely productive outcomes for a range of stakeholders.

- The value of careful planning and setting of realistic milestones, with continual reference to those milestones and reassessment of priorities as necessary.

- The importance of having a fall-back position in case of unanticipated impediments – good risk assessment processes and a risk management plan in place.

- The frank and open communication that comes from a small project team means it is possible to build trust and a transparent working relationship, and easily overcome the minor difficulties that could escalate to become major impediments to the project's progress.

- The importance of a well thought out budget.

- The importance of flexibility and a responsive, iterative approach: in addressing the responses of research participants; and in accommodating contingencies and changes.

- Thoughtful recruitment of early career academics as research assistants aids considerably in building both their track records and their confidence to engage with the sector.

- The benefits of being able to build a communicative structure with sufficient flexibility to accommodate the needs, imperatives, availability and concerns of the different members of a growing community of practice.

- While it is important to have a clear conceptual framework when conducting such research, it is equally important to be willing to adjust to accommodate emerging findings and topics.

The approach is a standard mixed method research project, and in its fundamentals is readily amenable to implementation by anyone conducting social or cultural research. The outcomes are most appropriate to research offices, research training programs and peak bodies in the creative arts. The recommendations are fairly wide ranging, and need to be framed in terms of a business plan and project proposal so that the various stakeholders can consider the value of taking up some or all of those recommendations.

We acknowledge that full implementation of the findings of this report are beyond the scope of this project and the capacity of the project team; our efforts have been, and will be, limited to disseminating the findings, and encouraging key stakeholders to consider taking up some of the recommendations of this project.

Dissemination

The following papers were presented and/or published:

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2012) *Examining doctorates in the creative arts: A guide,* AAWP Publishing, Canberra (20pp A6, ISBN 978-0-9807573-5-4)

J Kroll and J Webb (2012) 'Policies and Practicalities: Examining the Creative Writing Doctorate', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing* 9.2: 166-78

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2012) 'Facing the final hurdle: Creative arts PhD programs and examination standards', in the proceedings of *Encounters,* 17th conference of the AAWP

J Webb, D Brien & S Burr (2011) 'Leading the leaders: Enhancing the examination of creative arts doctoral degrees', *TEXT* Special Issue 12 (October)

D Brien, S Burr & J Webb (2011) 'Ethical examiners: Authority, power and the ethics of examination', in the proceedings of *Ethical Imaginations*, 16th conference of the AAWP

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J Webb, S Burr & D Brien (2013) '"Standards, not standardization": Examining the creative arts doctorate in Australia', in the proceedings of the *Creative Arts Learning and Teaching Network [CALTN] Symposium* 2013 (in production)

Brien, Donna, J Webb and S Burr 'Examining doctoral writing in the creative arts', *Doctoral Writing* (eds. L Ravelli, B Paltridge & S Starfield), Libri, Faringdon (forthcoming 2013)

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J Webb, D Brien and S Burr (2012) 'Research training in the creative disciplines: the "double doctorate", the "Clayton's PhD", or "a new kind of practice"?' in the proceedings of *Creative Outposts: The changing function of art & design education within Diasporic cultures and borderless communities, ACUADS* conference 2012, http://acuads.com.au/conference/2012-conference

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Also see Project Website: http://creativedocexams.org.au/

How the project outcomes will be shared across the higher degree sector, nationally and internationally:

Dissemination has been, and will continue to be, provided through both engaged and information provision modes.

Engaged:

- The project's outcomes have been shared across the higher education sector in Australia, New Zealand, the UK and to a more limited extent, the USA, through workshops, symposia, personal engagement, meetings and small group discussions.

- Mail-outs and other means of contacting recent graduates, supervisors and examiners in creative arts programs across Australia.

- Contact with peak bodies and key university programs through the recruitment of a reference group of significant members of the creative arts academic community.

Information provision:

- The examiners' booklet has been distributed as widely as possible among Australian creative arts academics, both through the annual peak body conferences, and directly by mail to the various faculty and art school offices.

- The public report to be distributed to the peak bodies, faculty offices and other stakeholders.

- A website that continues to act as a repository of information.

- Conference presentations and scholarly publications, as listed above.

- Seminar presentations at our home universities and at other universities in Australia and abroad.

Evaluation

Formative evaluation was undertaken in a somewhat ad hoc way, primarily in response to the preferences of the project participants. That is to say, rather than using a questionnaire, evaluation was provided through conversation and in some cases email correspondence. The frequent and widespread presentation of project findings to audiences in Australia and abroad was also an important source of formative feedback and evaluation.

At the end of the project, Professor Dugald Williamson, School of Arts, University of New England agreed to conduct an independent evaluation. Professor Williamson is a teacher and researcher, who also provides honours and postgraduate supervision and examination in the humanities. Professor Williamson's evaluation report is attached at Appendix E.

Appendix B: Questionnaire results

Questionnaires directed at (a) recent graduates and (b) supervisors and examiners were developed, approved by the University of Canberra Ethics Committee (Project number 11-81), and uploaded to SurveyMonkey. Information about the questionnaires, including recruitment letters and links to the online surveys, was promoted at the roundtable discussions and the focus groups, by emailing all heads of creative arts faculties, all relevant university research offices, all peak bodies, all members of the reference group and again in the reference group newsletters, links were placed on the project website and paper copies were distributed at the AAWP 2011 annual conference.

Despite this broad dissemination, the response rate was very disappointing with 52 answering the Examiners and Supervisors Questionnaire, and 16 the Graduate Questionnaire. This means that the results are not sufficiently reliable to make any generalisable claims. However many of the responses support findings drawn from other data gathering methods.

i) The majority of respondents to the Examiners and Supervisors Questionnaire were drawn from the Visual Arts with a further strong representation from creative writing (see Figure 1, below).

Main art form in which your work is located (please select only one answer)

Legend:
- Visual art
- Performing art (music,dance,theatre)
- Film production
- Digital media production
- Creative writing
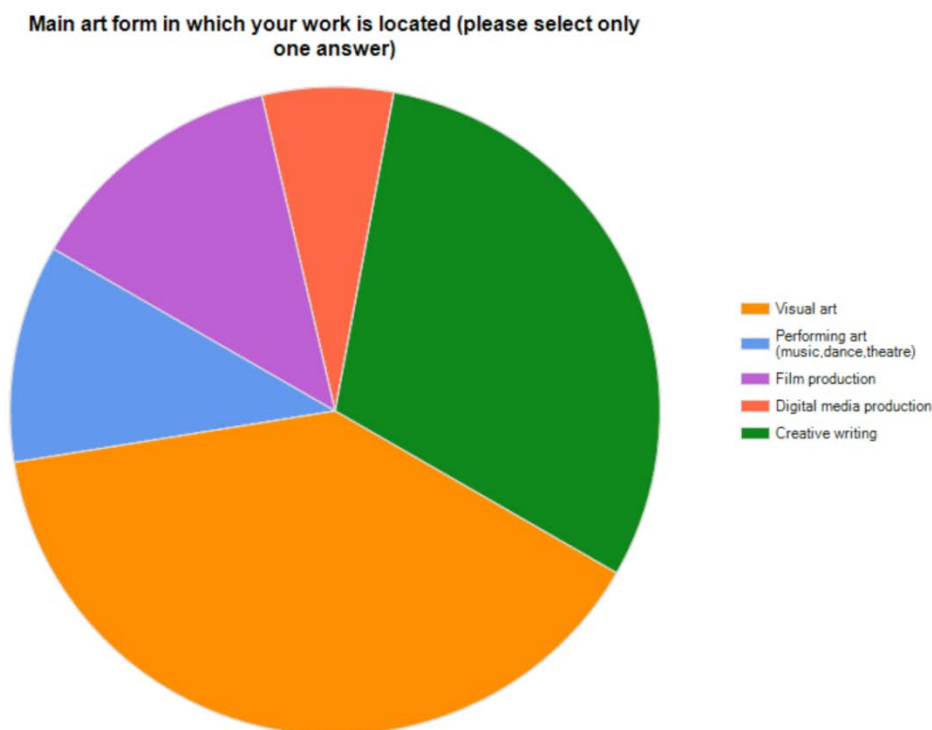
Figure 1. Examiners and supervisors: main art form pursued

ii) The graduates were strongly represented by creative writers, and this disparity may skew the results for comparative purposes.

Main art form in which your work is located:
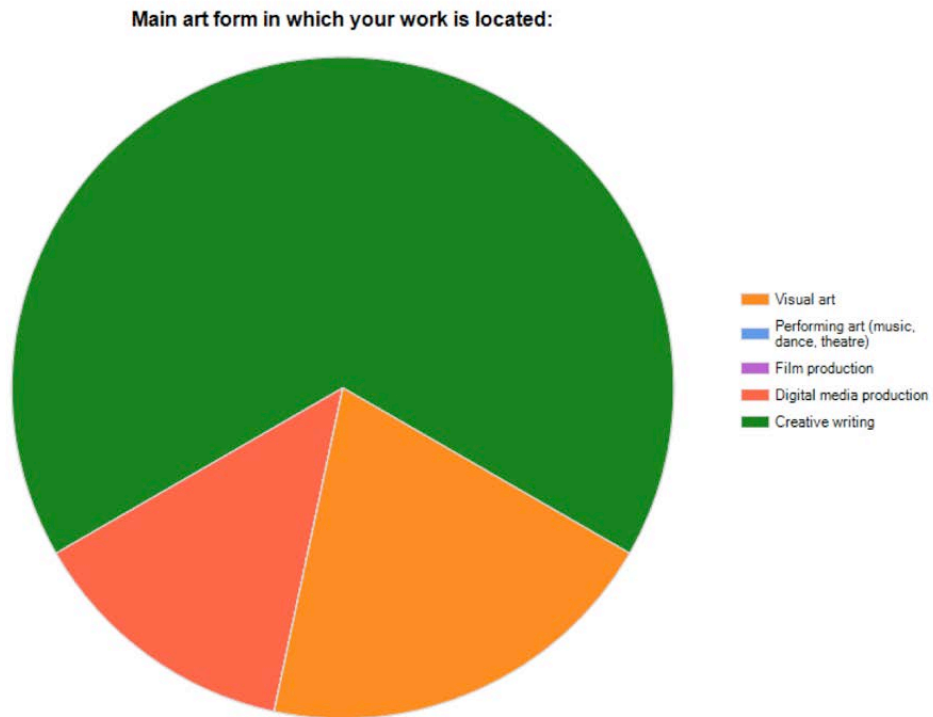
Figure 2. Graduates: main art form pursued

iii) While participants in the roundtables and many of the focus groups were very experienced senior level or mid-level academics, the survey respondents were fairly inexperienced academics, with less than ten years' experience in examination and supervision.

Number of years involved in supervision and examination of creative PhD degrees, if you have been involved in both activities (if you prefer to show supervision and examination separately please respond to either question 2 or question 3)
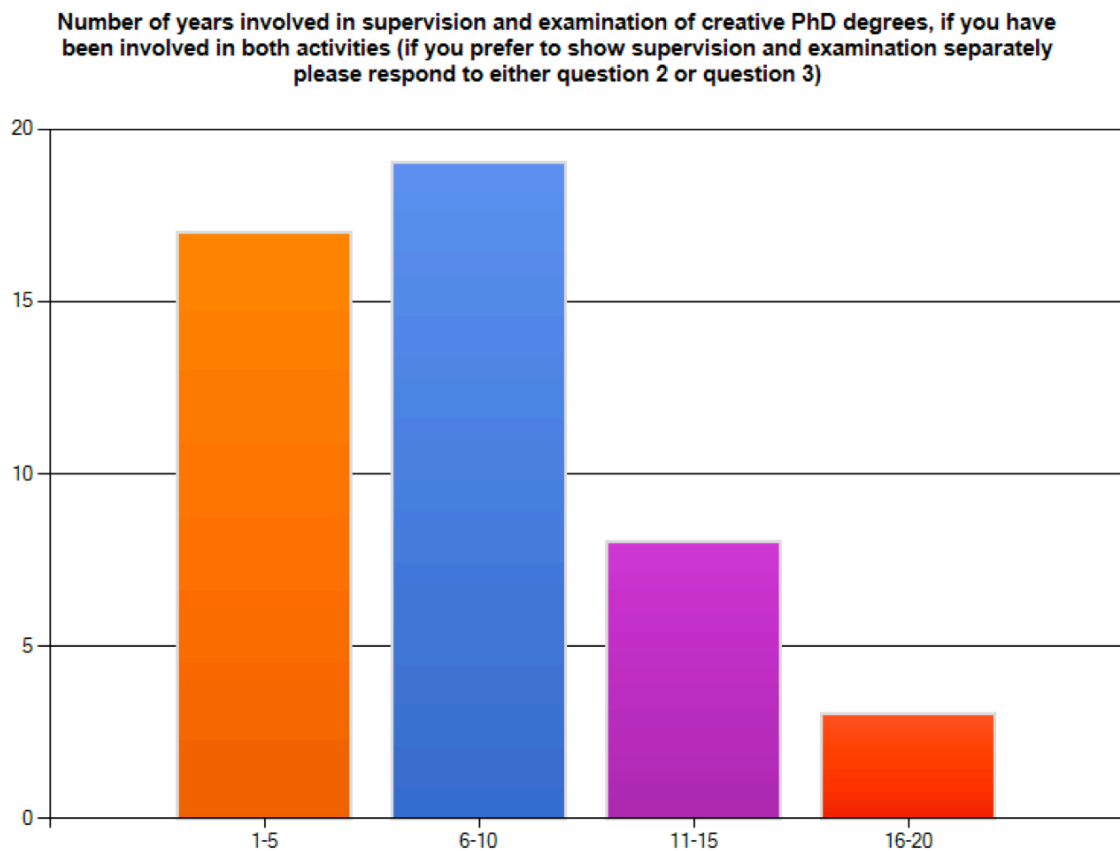
Figure 3. Examiners' and supervisors' experience in examination and supervision

iv, v) There appeared to be some disparity between the expectations of examiners in terms of what a thesis should deliver and those of the graduates. The former valued work that meets or exceeds commercial standards and high aesthetic quality (see Figure 4) while the latter valued high levels of creativity and experimentation in creative and scholarly practice (see Figure 5) and this is certainly an area that calls for further investigation.

In your field, what should a creative postgraduate dissertation deliver, in order of importance (please rank the items listed below, with 1 being most important, and 7 being least important)?
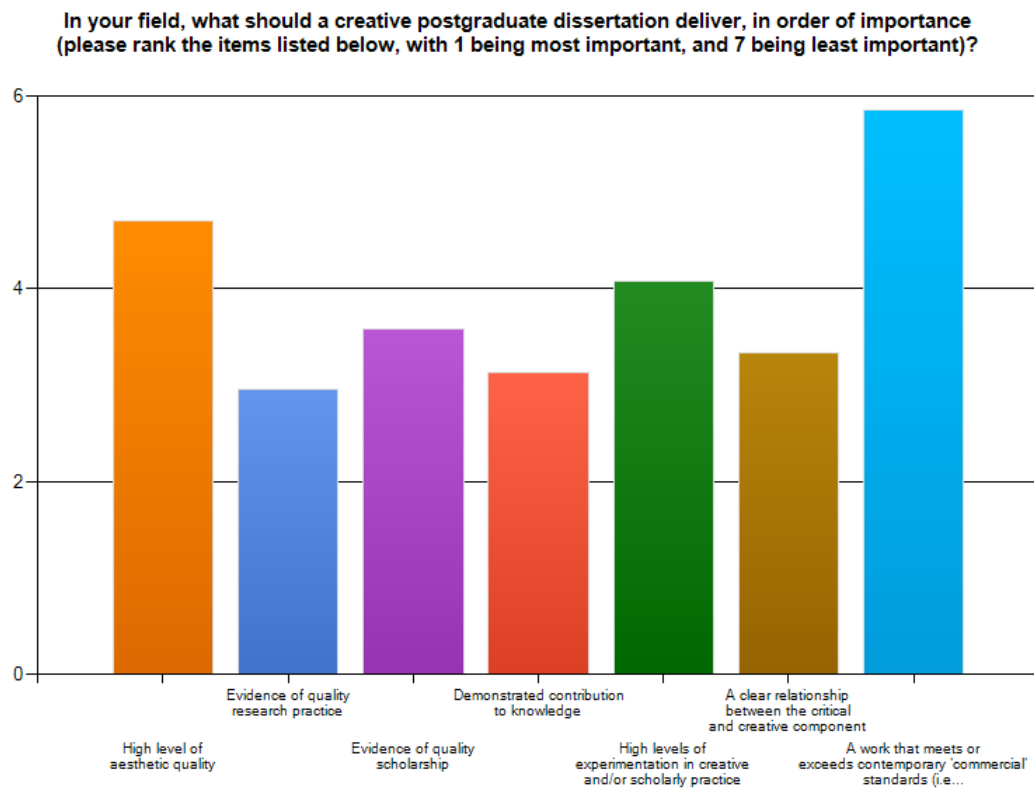
Figure 4. Examiners' and supervisors' expectations of what a thesis should deliver

In your candidature, what did you consider your creative dissertation should deliver, in order of importance (please rank the items listed below, with 1 being most important, 7 being least important)?
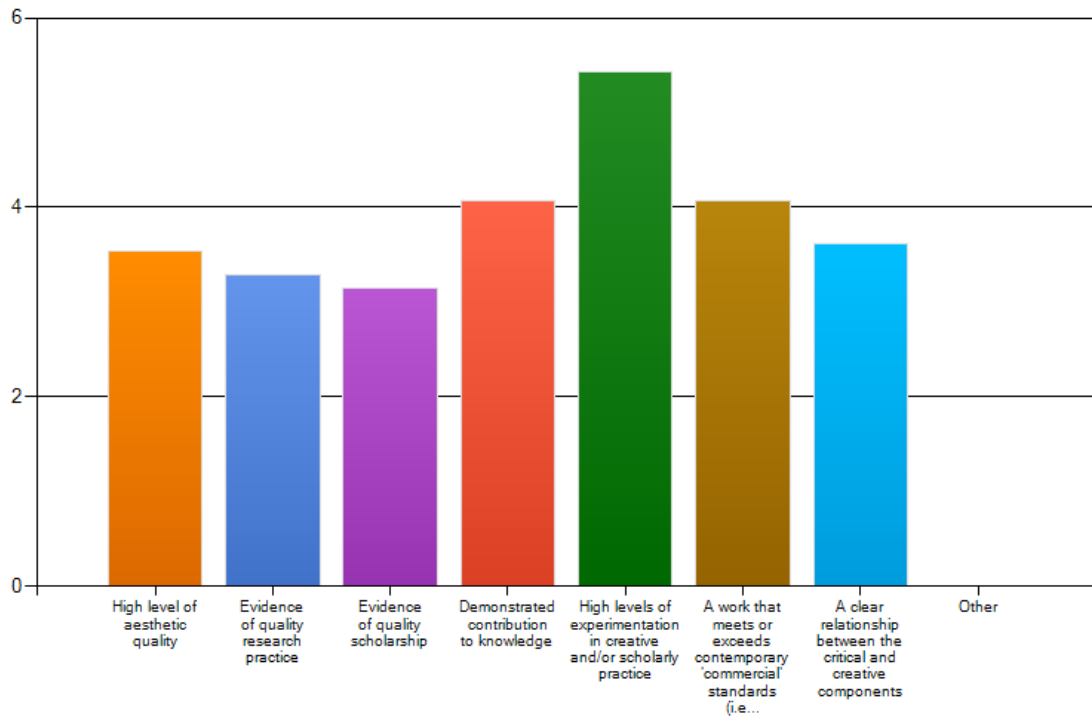
Figure 5. Graduate expectations of what a thesis should deliver

vi, vii) Question six asked a number of sub-questions, and perhaps the most interesting response relates to the fifth of these, about whether balance between the creative and critical components is adequately handled. The supervisors and examiners are almost equally divided on this topic, which may reflect the wide disparity in institutional expectations and requirements as evidenced in our benchmarking process (see Figure 6); but graduates, on the whole, more satisfied (see Figure 7). Graduates also seem more confident than are examiners and supervisors about the quality of assessment in Australia, though they do not consider the process sufficiently equitable.
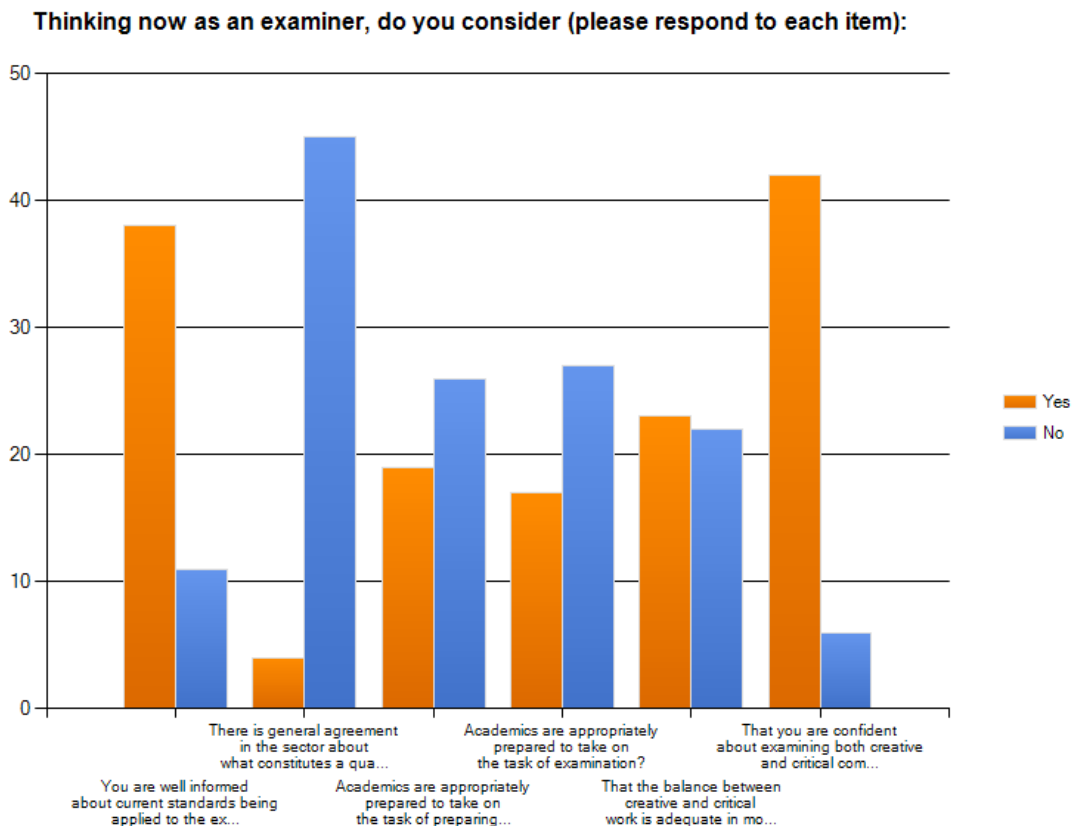
Figure 6. Examiners and supervisors: satisfaction with the balance between the creative and critical components of a thesis

Thinking as a recent graduate, do you consider there is, generally (please respond to each item below):
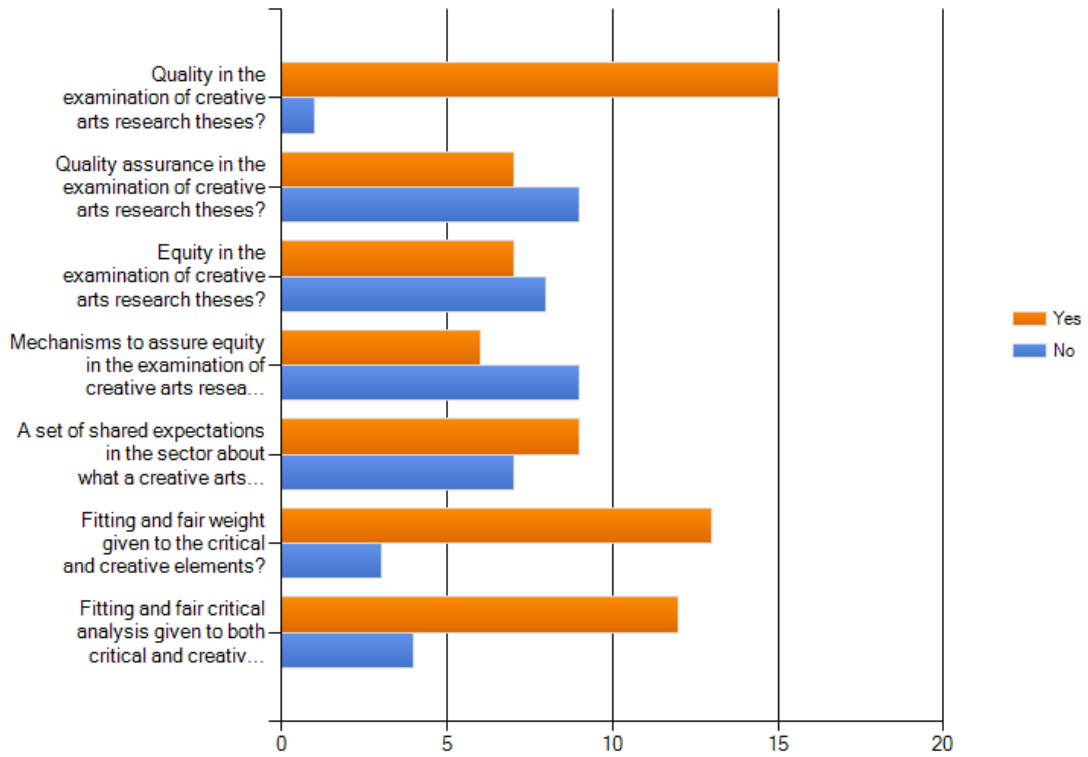
Figure 7: Graduate satisfaction with the balance between the creative and critical components of a thesis

viii, ix) There was a high level of agreement between examiners and supervisors (see Figure 8) and graduates (see Figure 9) in terms of the perceived outcomes of the thesis, although there was evidence of disagreement about outcomes within the former cohort.

As both/either supervisor and examiner, do you consider there is, generally (please tick as many answers as relevant):
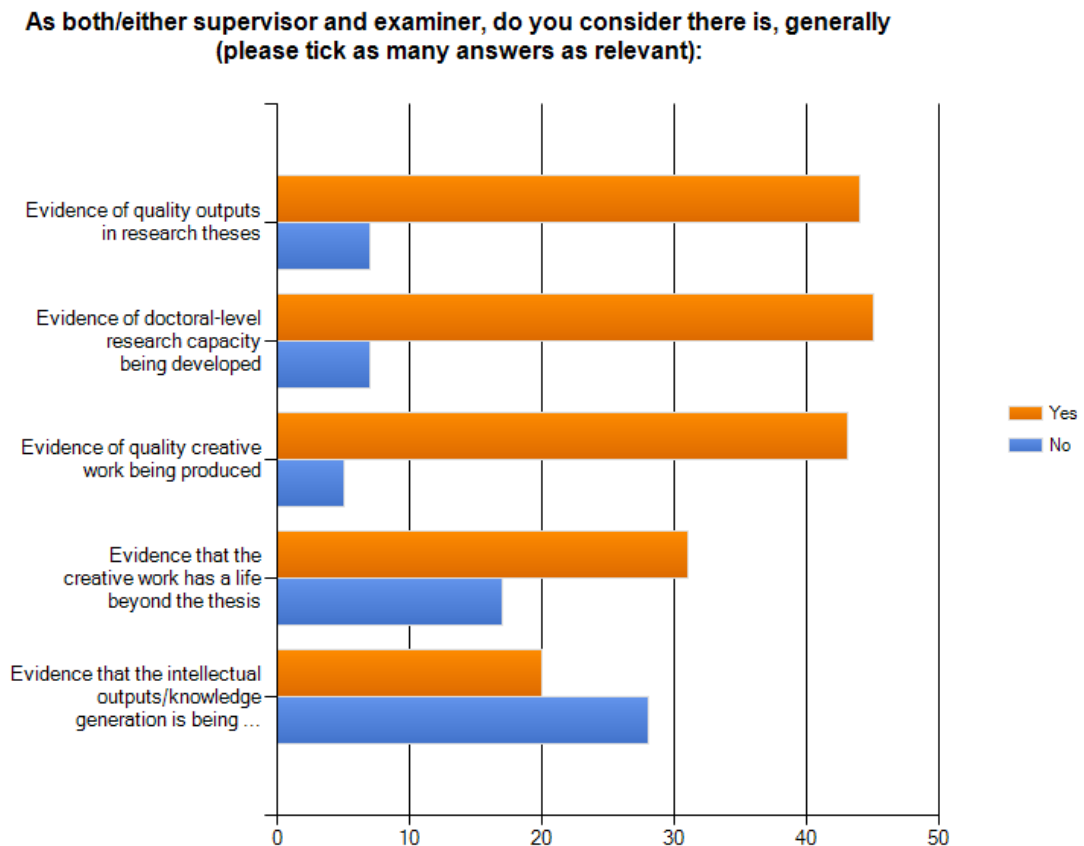
Figure 8. Examiners' and supervisors' level of satisfaction with thesis outcomes

Do you consider that, in the course of your candidature, you achieved (please respond to each item below):
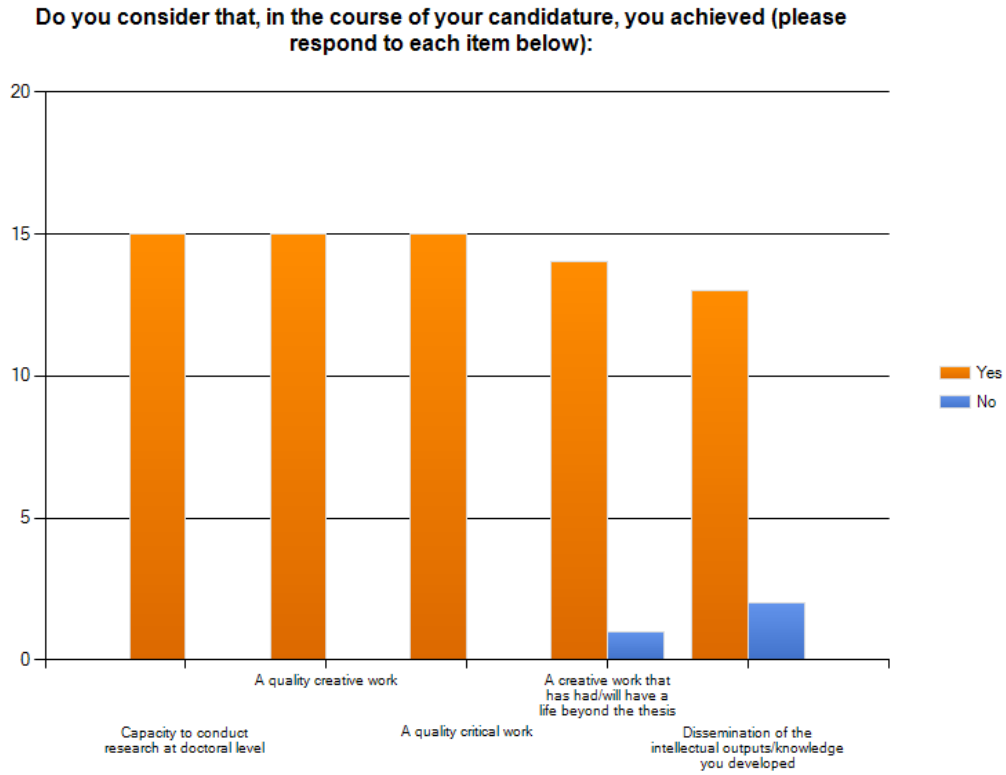
Figure 9. Graduates' levels of satisfaction with thesis outcomes

x) On the whole, graduates were generally positive about events following their candidature, with a significant number having their work published, exhibited or performed, and most feeling that doing a higher degree is worthwhile. The employment outcomes are significant: most have been employed in the university sector, rather than in the creative arts sector or elsewhere.

Following your candidature, have you experienced any of the following (please respond to as many items as relevant):
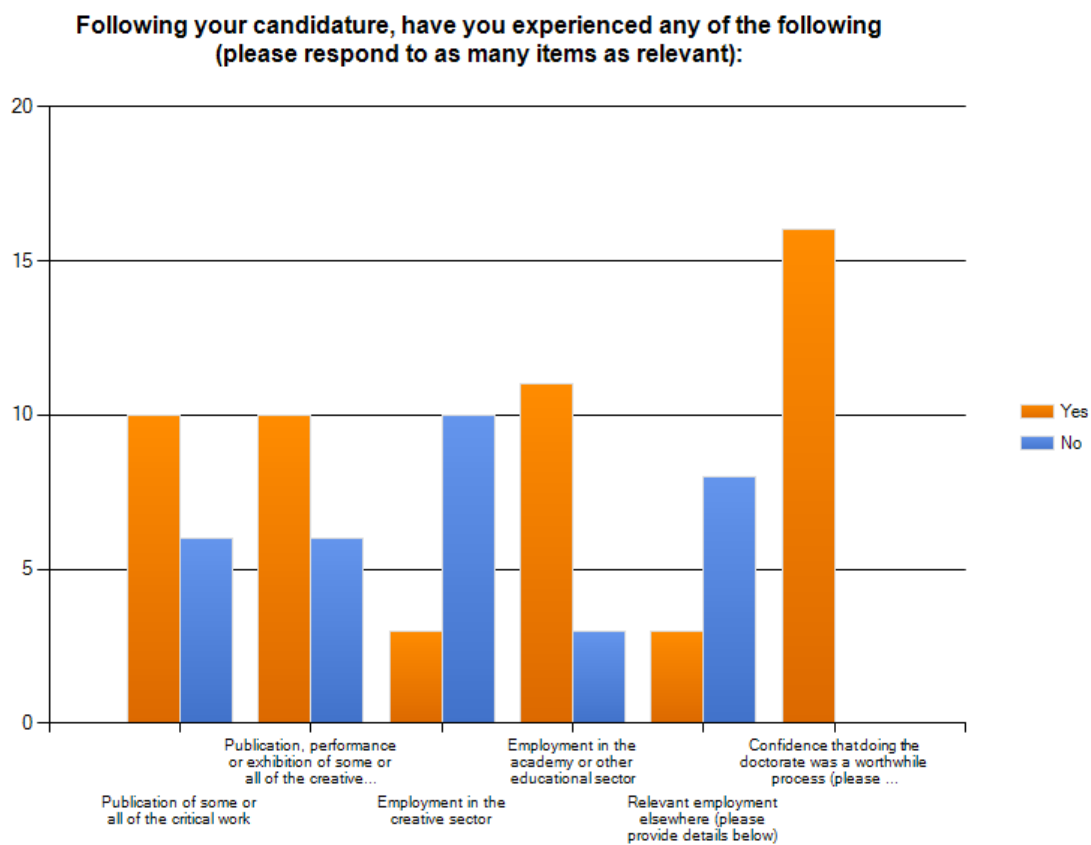
Figure 10. Graduate experiences post completion

xi) Interestingly, and this is further reflected in the main body of data, examiners and supervisors did not feel that there was general agreement in the sector about what constitutes a creative arts higher degree, and while many felt confident about examining and supervising, they did not feel that they had been well prepared for either task. This may be attributable to their overall inexperience in both fields (i.e. less than ten years).

Thinking now as an examiner, do you consider (please respond to each item):
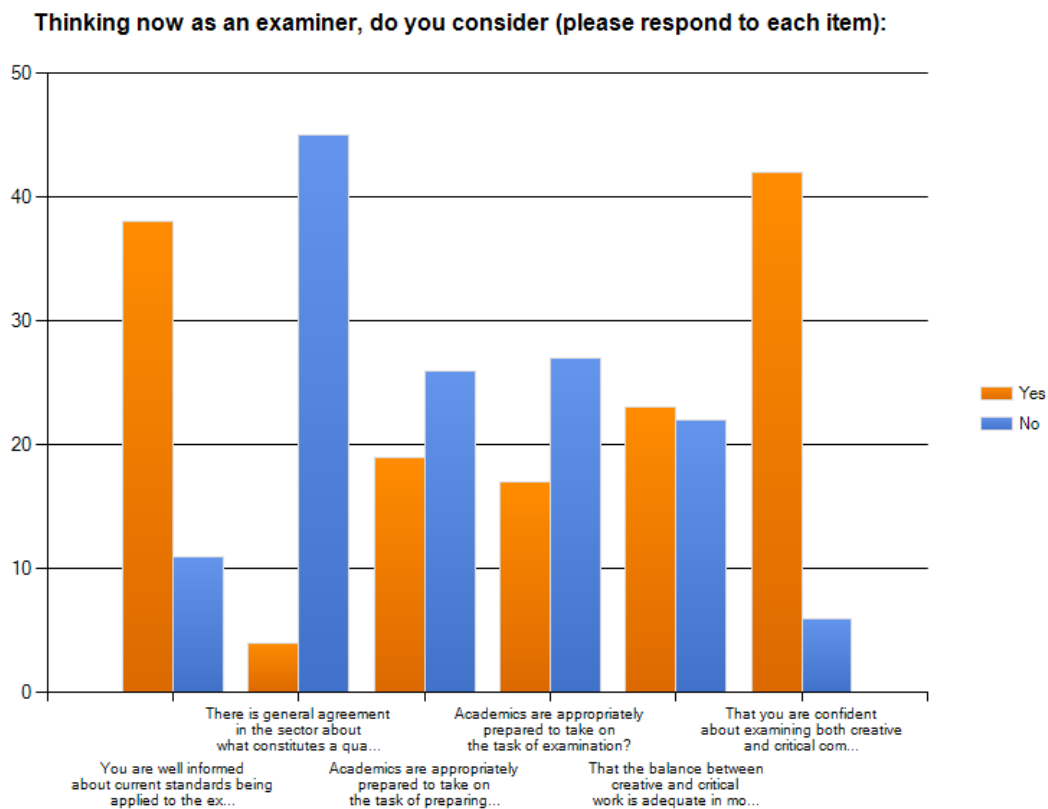
Figure 11. Examiners' and supervisors' opinions about being adequately prepared to examine and supervise Research Higher Degrees

Appendix C: Examiners' reports

After extensive networking, and direct requests for examiners' reports, 84 were provided to the project team. A number of those approached expressed concerns about whether they had the legal or moral right to make these reports public, even under the conditions of confidentiality and privacy that the project promised. This was a consistent issue, expressed by:

- graduates in relation to their own reports;

- examiners about those reports they have produced for other universities;

- supervisors about reports they hold for their own doctoral candidates;

- research offices (who added to the confidentiality concerns the plea that they were too overworked to provide us the reports); and

- in one case, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Research expressed concern over the capacity of that university to provide such materials.

Of the 84 reports provided, 70 met the parameters of this project (that is, final reports for doctoral dissertations in the creative arts); the others were examiners reports for masters, MLitt or upgrade reports.

Table 4: Type and date of thesis/report

| Name of degree	Number	Time span
PhD	51	1999-2011
DCA	11	2002-2009
other (Professional Doctorate, Doctor of Education, Doctorate by publication)	8	2007-2009

The span of years covered by each degree category is instructive, in that it suggests that degrees other than named DCAs or specifically 'creative' PhDs have only recently begun to permit creative artifacts to be included as part of the examined material. This cannot be asserted without further clarification, but it is an interesting point.

No reports are dated 2012 or later, because we sourced them only during 2011. Of the 70 reports that satisfy the project criteria, 57 (81.4%) were dated. The median date is 2008.

Table 5: Span of reports

Year of report	N	%
1999-2006	10	18
2007	7	12
2008	13	23
2009	12	21
2010	8	14
2011	7	12
Total	**57**	**100**

As in other tables, the data needs to be treated carefully; this is opportunistically gathered, rather than representative, and can only been seen as indicative. Limits on this data can be associated with the difficulty in sourcing older reports (supervisors and examiners move, or don't retain the old reports; students move on and their universities lose touch with them). In addition, of course, there are far more doctoral candidates in arts, and more programs offering such places, than there were in 1999.

Table 6: Numbers and lengths of reports by degree type

	Totals	PhD	DCA	Other
N	70	51	11	8
%	100	73	16	11
Length range	1 – 37	1 – 37	2 – 9	1 – 20
Median length	4	5	4	3
Average length	5.4	5.7	4.6	7.2

Table 7: Dual or single reports?

For conventional thesis	7
Separate sections for creative artifact and critical essay	33
Single/integrated	26
Single/creative	1
Single/critical	3

Of the 70 reports that met the criteria, 31 (44%) provided an overall summary, whether or not the examiner had addressed the creative and critical elements independently. This provides some indication of the extent to which examiners are evaluating the dissertation as a holistic artifact, rather than as independent objects.

Art forms included

The list of art forms included, and the relative weighting of reports by art form, is not representative of the numbers of candidates moving through the disciplines; it is, rather, indicative of who sent examiners' reports for analysis. The high proportion of writing projects indicates that the project leaders are better known and better embedded in the discipline of writing than in the other art forms.

Table 8: Art forms

Discipline	Form	Number of reports
performing arts		**9**
	dance	4
	theatre	3
	music	2
digital art		**6**
	documentary	5
	design	1
visual arts		**15**
	curation	3
	printmaking	2
	textile	1
	calligraphy	1
	art therapy	3
	mixed media	3
	art history	1
	photography	1
Writing		**40**

Discipline	Form	Number of reports
	prose fiction	19
	poetry	3
	creative nonfiction	5
	scriptwriting	4
	short fiction	3
	young adult fiction	5
	theory	1
Total		**70**

Research themes

We acknowledge that this section offers only limited reliability, because in determining the themes addressed by each thesis examined, we had to make assumptions based on the descriptive passages of the examiners' reports, and the titles of the doctoral projects. Without full access to each submitted doctoral dissertation, our designation is necessarily speculative.

Table 9: Theme explored in dissertation

Theme addressed	Number of reports
professional/formal issues	17
cultural/knowledge issues	13
other	11
memoir/memory	10
trauma/suffering	9
the body, the self	7
space and place	3
total	*70*

Results of examination

Disparity is apparent only in 3 sets of examiners' reports; otherwise, although they may find different strengths and weaknesses, they make the same overall assessment (several comments may apply to a single report, so totals do not add to 100%).

Table 10: Results recommended by examiner

Result	Concerns raised (of 70 reports)	n	%
Minor rewrites		**34**	**49**

	Scholarship is inadequate		18	26
	Creative work is unsatisfactory		4	6
	High level of typographical errors		11	16
Major rewrites			**18**	**26**
	Scholarship is inadequate		16	23
	Creative work is unsatisfactory		7	10

Table 11: Results of examination, by category, as percentage of total reports in each category

Result	PhD		DCA		Other	
Total in category	51		11		8	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No rewrites	8	16	4	37	0	0
Minor rewrites	27	53	2	18	5	62
Major rewrites	12	23	3	27	3	38
Re-examination	2	4	1	9	0	0
Fail	2	4	1	9	0	0

Table 12: Results by level of pass, and by category of degree

Result	Total		PhD		DCA		Other	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%
No rewrites	12	17	8	15	4	36	0	0
Minor rewrites	34	49	27	53	2	18	5	62
Major rewrites	18	26	12	24	3	28	3	38
re-examination	3	4	2	4	1	9	0	0
Fail	3	4	2	4	1	9	0	0
Totals	70	100	51	100	11	100	8	100

Table 13: Results of examination, by category, and by art form

Result	n	Writing	Visual art	Doco	Music	Dance	Theatre	Design
No rewrites	12	8	2	3	0	0	0	0
Minor rewrites	34	21	4	2	2	4	1	0
Major rewrites	18	10	5	0	0	0	2	1

Re-exam.	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Fail	3	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
Total	70	41	15	5	2	4	3	1

Appendix D: Australian universities represented in the formal project activities

At **reference group** level (includes experienced supervisors and examiners, heads of research, and peak body representatives)
The Australian National University
CQUniversity, Australia
Curtin University of Technology
Deakin University
Macquarie University
Queensland University of Technology
RMIT
Southern Cross University
University of Newcastle
University of South Australia
University of Tasmania
University of Technology, Sydney
Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
WAAPA/Edith Cowan University

At **focus group** level (includes early career researchers and recent graduates as well as more experienced supervisors and examiners
Deakin University
Flinders University
Macquarie University
Monash University
Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University
Queensland University of Technology
RMIT
Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney
University of Canberra
The University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales
University of Newcastle
University of Southern Queensland
University of Technology, Sydney
University of Western Sydney

University of Wollongong
Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne
At roundtable level (includes experienced examiners and supervisors, and research managers)
CQUniversity, Australia
Deakin University
Flinders University
James Cook University
La Trobe University
Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University
Queensland University of Technology
Southern Cross University
Sydney College of the Arts, The University of Sydney
University of Ballarat
The University of Melbourne
University of New South Wales
University of South Australia
University of Southern Queensland
University of Technology, Sydney
University of Wollongong
Victoria University
Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne
WAAPA/Edith Cowan University

Appendix E: Independent evaluator's report

External Evaluation Report on Australian Learning and Teaching Council (Office for Learning and Teaching) Project: 'Examination of Doctoral Degrees in Creative Arts: Process, Practice and Standards'

24 September 2012

Project Principal Researchers/Investigators
Professor Jen Webb (University of Canberra)
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External Evaluator
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1. Evaluation framework

This report is primarily summative, as it is based mainly on project materials (listed in section 5 below) that were provided on 23 July 2012. However, because the substantial work and outcomes of the project are ongoing, it by no means offers a final summation.

I understand that evaluation to this point is sought within the following terms:

- The extent to which the project achieved its aims;

- Project management, including budget, value for money, and the efficiency and probity of project delivery;

- Dissemination of findings among project stakeholders; and

- Potential utility of the project for others/sustainability.

The ALTC (OLT) *Project Evaluation Resource* informs this evaluation, especially Key Elements 1, 3-6 and 8, relating to matters such as the nature of projects, project goals and processes, data collection, project variations, and dissemination among stakeholders and other audiences.

Further context for the evaluation comes from wider disciplinary and policy literature, including the following:

Previous ALTC Project Reports, such as:

Assessing Group Work in Media and Communications (2008)
Australian Writing Programs Network (2008)
Creative Arts PhD: Future-Proofing the Creative Arts in Higher Education (2009)
Creative and Performing Arts: Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement (2010)

General higher education policy and reviews relevant to the project proposal and documentation, such as:

AQF, *Australian Qualifications Framework (2011)*

Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Discussion Paper, *Developing a Framework for Teaching and Learning Standards in Australian Higher Education and the Role of TEQSA (2011)*

The present project builds on related initiatives that seek to articulate compliance requirements in a way that enhances disciplinary knowledge and definitions of standards. So, for instance, it takes up issues about doctoral examination and processes from *Creative Arts PhD: Future-Proofing the Creative Arts in Higher Education* (2009), listed above. It builds systematically on Recommendation 6 of that report, which was to undertake 'further investigation into the various examination models and their relative merits' for the creative arts doctorate, with a view not necessarily to mandating a given model but to generating discussion that might lead to 'more consistent practices'.

2. Achievement of project aims

The project aims relate to the identified need in the higher education sector to undertake empirical and qualitative work on the examination of creative arts doctorates, as specified in the original proposal. This need has been confirmed during the project by documenting the experience of colleagues and candidates. So, for instance, in a survey to which some 50 supervisors/examiners responded, despite a main view that academic creative practice has generated high-quality work, about 90% of responses indicated that there is no general agreement in the sector of 'what constitutes a quality doctorate in the creative arts'. Only 40% indicated that academics are appropriately prepared for the tasks of readying candidates for examination or examining creative arts doctorates. Even though it was almost universally agreed that a creative arts doctorate should include a critical or exegetical component as well as the creative art component, many saw difficulties in the way in which these were related in practice, and only about 10% expressed confidence in examining both components. While this survey itself is only indicative, the project has very

usefully highlighted such underlying issues and helped to make sense of them in an innovative field of higher degree research (HDR).

The stated general aims of the project included the following:

- To undertake national benchmarking and consultation on the examination of creative arts doctorates, including inquiry into understandings and expectations of HDR students, supervisors and examiners;

- To investigate practices, processes and standards in HDR in creative arts; and

- To establish a 'shared understanding' of standards within this field.

The project substantially achieved the first two, interrelated, aims of benchmarking and investigation. Regarding the third general aim, it has promoted discussion about the need to define standards in the field, and it has the potential to support continuing work in this area to deal with identified uncertainties. This point is relevant to two more specific objectives, stated originally:

- To develop a nationally agreed set of examinations standards; and

- To establish a National Creative Arts Examinations Board to monitor standards.

These were ambitious objectives and, in a perhaps unintended development, participants apparently rejected the idea of establishing a Board to oversee examination standards. However, the project team was open to a plurality of views, and the project was progressive in the sense that its methodology allowed objectives to evolve through interaction with a 'community of practice'. Though I have not seen the final project report or analysis of data, arguably the 'achievement of aims' includes the foregrounding of key parameters:

> The HDR creative arts field includes a diversity of art forms/practices and associated disciplinary frameworks, so flexibility is needed to support the different kinds of doctoral programs and evaluate projects. At the same time, some common ground can be established between the diverse areas, because they all involve convergences of, and negotiations between, particular aesthetic practices and certain academic traditions and pedagogic norms, in the construction and evaluation of scholarly knowledge. (Such convergences are not completely new but are complex reconfigurations of instituted practices and interests.)

> Many exemplars of practice-led research, supervision and examination have developed in the HDR creative arts field, which provide a basis for shared understanding and promoting consistent best practice. (Round-table and focus-group transcripts furnish evidence of this basis.)

> Practice in this field involves negotiation of tensions – which can be productive – concerning, for instance, the balance between the 'creative work'' and 'critical work'/'exegesis' (for want of names with which all project participants are comfortable). So, rather than seeking to mandate what participants alluded to variously as some 'single systematic set of axioms' or 'atomised prescription list', the project opens out possibilities of defining standards capable of being 'owned' and optimising informed practice in teaching, learning and examination.

Without pre-empting final analysis, it might be anticipated that the project findings could help to develop discipline-sensitive standards based on collective understandings of what

counts as a contribution to knowledge in scholarly creative practice. The project data and findings have multiple potentials, such as the following:

- To encourage the development of advice to students, beginning at admission to candidature, about the expectations attending a form of higher degree that entails artistic-scholarly research and expression. The project helps to make clear the need to provide candidates with detailed information relevant to their particular disciplinary or interdisciplinary context, including the process of working on an overarching subject or question in different yet complementary ('creative', 'critical') genres or voices.

- To help routinise fair, consistent approaches, whereby examiners evaluate theses in terms that (a) match examination criteria, which institutions have responsibility for formulating, and (b) acknowledge the broader institutional contexts and conditions in which the theses have been produced. It is in these contexts that candidates have received approval and supervision to research and express subjects by using particular art forms and critical modes, and agreements have been reached during the candidature about the nature of the balance between creative and critical components. The proposed booklet setting out considerations for examining doctorates should be an appropriate vehicle to help develop equitable approaches.

In relation to such core concerns, and the changed proposal that the new Australasian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts should sustain work on examination standards (in contrast to the original proposal to establish a national Board as an immediate project outcome), it would be advantageous if crucial project analysis could be communicated to that Council in a form that focused, and helped to preserve the momentum of, key ideas, aspirations and strategies expressed through the project. It is in this sense appropriate that project deliverables take the form of consolidated or new knowledge, capable of further use to inform disciplinary and policy-oriented discussion, rather than proposals for specific sector procedures and policy settings. Also relevant here are the planned interactions with peak bodies for the particular disciplines in the creative arts (Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools, Australasian Association of Writing Programs, etc.), in line with the initial intention to investigate practices and processes through consultation and to present findings to peak bodies for further use.

While I have not seen the material for (e.g.) the planned workshop with examiners or the booklet of advice to assist examiners, the data assembled have the potential to support broader discussions that could help to generate guidelines at the level of policy. The term policy is intended here in the inclusive sense (offered by the British scholar Mark Considine) of the continuing work undertaken by those involved in a community of practice to articulate institutionally, and realise, the things that they value.

The project has usefully identified several strategies and resources to support continuing work on the problems and possibilities that it identifies. Resources that might be consolidated range from exemplars of successful creative arts doctoral theses and of examination criteria and reports through to a register of examiners. While the report has noted the difficulties often involved in creating and maintaining such resources, it has been helpful in keeping such ideas on the agenda for further consideration. More generally, it would be beneficial if ideas for supporting disciplinary learning and teaching, and

articulating and maintaining standards, could be continued beyond the immediate project, through bodies such as those just mentioned and by other means.

3. Project management

In line with the original proposal, a small team with complementary skills formed. On the evidence of materials consulted, I consider that this team implemented and steered the project well. Suitable agendas, questions and materials were developed to assist the necessary consultations with, and contributions by, participants. The team gathered substantial data by following its proposed process of triangulation – considering information from examiners, supervisors and candidates or recent graduates; surveying policies and practices; and observing knowledge traditions. This process helped to identify and investigate specific issues about doctoral examination in the wider disciplinary and institutional context in which they need to be understood and negotiated.

Main methods of consultation were networking and roundtables with the reference group, focus groups, and surveys. While not all universities were directly represented in activities, these methods provided an adequate cross-section of institutional and disciplinary participation.

The roundtables usefully covered key issues, from the nature of the creative arts doctorate and the relation between its constituent elements to the value of standards, policies and resources to encourage fairness and consistency in examination. Supervisors/examiners and candidates from some 17 institutions participated. The documentation of these roundtables captures many tensions (productive ones included), such as different perceptions of the relation between the 'creative' and 'critical' components, and difficulties stemming from the fact that some candidates seek admission to creative arts doctoral programs with a strong interest in an art form but little or no background in the academic discipline deemed relevant, while others have already specialised in that discipline in higher education. This latter tension may need further consideration for doctorates in the context of recent changes to the AQF definition of levels and related pathways, including across Honours and postgraduate programs.

The recommendations from the roundtables could assist discussion of ground-level approaches and practices in particular institutional contexts, as well as formulation of the more general, higher-level expectations and standards. These recommendations include the need to allow diverse ways of striking the balance between 'creative' and 'critical' modes of research and expression, to assist integration of these components, and to address ethics explicitly. The recommendations may help practitioners and institutions to demonstrate compliance of their learning and teaching methods and outcomes with emerging TEQSA standards, while supporting crucial disciplinary diversity. However, in the form in which I have read them, these recommendations could benefit from some further distinctions – for their wider use. At present, some points are ambiguous or seem like records of opinion rather than fully worked recommendations.

Success was also achieved in the planning and management of the focus groups. If I note correctly, this is reflected in detailed transcriptions of nine focus groups, involving some 34 participants. Many key ideas in these discussions, including consideration of how examiners examine and the issues they face, could no doubt inform the design of the examiners'

booklet or other presentations, discussions or supportive resources.

Some difficulties arose in obtaining information such as policies from some institutions, or examiners' reports from 'all' universities as anticipated in the proposal. The team sourced university policies, guidelines for examiners where available, and public statements about offerings and expectations. In the case of incomplete responses to surveys and requests, creative arts departments and research offices were invited to comment on the team's compilation of data, such as the benchmarking table of creative arts higher degree research in Australian universities. The difficulties in recruiting participants and gathering institutional data were overcome by the strategies of detailed consultation.

In the case of examiners' reports, continued efforts resulted in access to a significant number of documents. It would have been interesting to see some analysis of examination criteria as reflected in such reports, and how or how far they were applied. But I realise that there were delays in obtaining these reports and full reports with comments may not have been provided, so that analysis cannot be highly generalised. Overall, adequate information was obtained, in a context where both empirical and qualitative data were generated and brought together. Despite some practical problems in gaining participation and responses, the project team succeeded in generating valuable contributions and qualitative appraisals of how to enhance 'process, practice and standards' in creative arts doctorates and examination.

From considering the relevant documentation, it is my view that the project was conducted professionally, with efficiency and probity. The appropriate institutional ethics approval was sought and granted, and the ongoing communications and interactions with stakeholders and participants were appropriate and transparent.

In terms of 'value for money', this report is in no way an audit, but it seems evident that substantial value has been gained from the expenditure on the core research activities, including the interactions with the community of practitioners. Minor variations in the allocation of funds and the timing of project activities were noted in the progress reports. Overall, the project has made accountable and effective use of the resources and opportunities provided. It is a valuable benchmarking investigation and represents shared concerns and understandings in a way that has the potential to yield further benefits, in line with the granting body's concerns to enhance the understanding of practice in the field investigated and support continuous improvement.

4. Dissemination and utility

The dissemination of information and findings occurs along two related axes, within and beyond the immediate project activities.

Important dissemination of ideas from the project researchers to stakeholders and participants, and in turn from and between participants, has occurred during the project. On the part of the investigators, this has included the use of expert knowledge developed over time especially in the writing area of creative practice, adapted and elaborated to create the agendas, questions and directions for consultations across multiple creative arts. The main forms of dissemination among the immediate stakeholders in the project (for roundtables, focus groups, etc) have been covered in the previous sections, and they have resulted in

productive synergies within and across particular disciplinary areas.

The wider referral of the resulting project information and ideas to the national, combined, creative arts body, mentioned in section 3 above, is potentially a very important measure for sustaining the project's focus and outcomes. The dissemination of project ideas and outcomes through particular disciplinary associations in the creative arts should support this measure. Some presentations are already under way in the form of conference papers or publications in journals or proceedings representing those associations.

Such publications also indicate the use of the project for national, and in some cases international, audiences wider than the immediate stakeholders. The published papers represent solid outcomes to this stage, reflecting several stages of the project and communicating some identified problems, collective understandings, and bases for developing disciplinary standards and examination frameworks. A planned further form of dissemination is the examiners' booklet. This could be supported by the anticipated workshop for examiners. It appears from the June 2012 progress report that the project has already generated positive responses, so perhaps there are also some other formats and activities, beyond the project, through which ideas, findings or analysis could be disseminated for the benefit of candidates and supervisors.

A valuable general outcome of the project is the evidence that it presents of collegial commitments to establishing common ground, while acknowledging diversity, on which to define and sustain disciplinary standards to apply in examining creative arts doctorates. The project has promoted broad, focused discussion of the context and practice of doctoral examination in the creative arts, as intended. It has the potential, with final reporting and wider dissemination of findings, to encourage the embedding of key principles in the examination – and wider management – of doctoral work in this field, and to promote informed and consistent practice. The project makes a valuable contribution to a growing national enterprise to clarify, consolidate and sustain best practice in learning and teaching in higher degree research by creative arts.

5. Materials considered for this report

The following are the project-specific materials consulted in the preparation of this evaluation report.

Project proposal

Fieldwork information

      Ethics application and approval (University of Canberra)

      List of planned round-table participants and reference-group members

Research data

      Survey summaries

Graduates survey summary

Supervisors survey summary

University creative arts doctoral offerings, July (update September 2012)

Examiners reports: data gleaned

Focus groups edited transcripts (nine)

Focus group questions/responses summary

Round tables

Edited transcripts (three)

Key points

Recommendations from round table sessions

Communication

Evaluative email exchanges, supplementing teleconference, round tables, etc.

Emails regarding project processes, obtaining data, ethics framework, etc.

Invitation templates for participants and gathering of data

Reference group newsletters (three)

Project progress reports (June, December 2011; June 2012)

Finance

Statement of expenditure Year 1, to 16 December 2011)

Revised budget, January 2012

Publication outputs

Six articles/papers (Australasian Association of Writing Programs 2011; Australian Council of University Art and Design Schools 2012; *New Writing* 2011 and 2012; *Text* 2011 and forthcoming 2012)