

Strategies for Artistic Research PhD Supervision

Supervising Artistic Research PhDs comes with challenges inherent to the artistic process. Some strategies are:

- **Allow the process to unfold.** The process often drives itself:

My own experience of doing a PhD was that it was this bubble of information that needed to come out somehow. And it kind of knew its own way even though I was floundering and confused and it was kind of driving itself. Even though I was in all kinds of anxiety about different things, so I trust that for the candidate - that this thing is moving through them as well and that they may not be able to articulate it at all times or understand the edges of it but that actually it has got its own trajectory and its own timeframe, and it will get there. (staff member, 2020)

- **Hold space, steer and guide.** You are a facilitator of a process which involves deep dives into the unknown. Allow the candidate agency to find their way but do so actively. Give the students the diving tools but let them decide where and how to dive. See [Advancing Supervision Mind Map](#) for an understanding of different potential approaches in supervision.

When you sit there as a supervisor you sometimes feel there is this massive moveable feast you are trying to contain and support without dampening and without steering it in the wrong direction. The challenges can be about how you hold that for the person and how you give them agency and they can direct things, but you can guide as well. And sometimes I might have made the wrong call on something or that isn't the right suggestion to make. And there's always that kind of anxiety about that. (staff member, 2020)

- **Create space and time for the student to unpack the creative process/practice.**

So, you just have to create some space for them to be able to unpick it a little bit. That has implications for time as well. I sometimes think you really need a lot of time, when you've done a creative process and you need to now unpack that and write about it. It can be really hard to do that in a short period of time. Even moving away from the practical work and then starting to think about it. Sometimes that takes quite a while to be able to make that shift in perspective. And it is to do with time so from a supervision point of view it's about maybe creating that space. So, they can unpack. (staff member, 2020)

- **Follow your hunches.** You have a wealth of experience, even if it is in a different area than the candidate, which enables you to identify concerns, explore lines of inquiry, and raise difficult questions.

If a question comes up in me about something, I just trust that and say well if I have a question about it somebody else will and so we should look at that. So, if there is something niggling, I try to be relatively instinctive about that. (staff member, 2020)

- **Support the student in negotiating their way within the institution.** Some students come from the creative industries or have been working outside the academic environment for some time. They are unaware of the protocols and policies governing the institution's operation. From understanding the structure of the system to whom to go to for different issues, it can take some time to grasp how academia works.
- **Embed the practice element of the research into the supervision process.** Whilst at the start discussions may be around the research question, literature, settling in, and project plans, keep the conversation on the practice and its role open. Schedule some sessions as studio visits to encourage the candidate to articulate what they want to explore in the practice, what its role is, and how it relates to the project's theoretical or philosophical underpinnings.

In [Reconsidering Research and Supervision as Creative Embodied Practice](#) Jane Bacon and Vida Midgelow (2019) suggest several exercises for students and supervisors to explore practice in the research. They propose a set of attitudes and attributes for Artistic Research supervisors with a focus on dance and movement practices, adapted below to include performing arts and film:

What it takes to be an Artistic Research supervisor:

- A willingness to reconsider and approach your supervisor/mentor/facilitator practice – perhaps, changing and challenging your own expectations of candidates
- An ability to apply and be self-reflexive in relation to artistic practice
- Knowledge of your own strengths and weaknesses
- Interest and commitment to embracing criticality
- Willingness to both challenge and champion
- An understanding of the different time requirements and inherent tensions between artistic practices and university regulations
- An understanding of artistic practice in your field and commitment to the logics of practice
- A capacity to hold rigour and clarity of purpose as potentials in the candidate rather than imposing them
- An interest in the practice of the candidate and the candidate themselves
- Field-specific knowledges and specialist insights
- An ability to stay attuned to wider contexts, working together with micro and macro, zooming in and out.
- An ability to track progress while allowing an openness and trust in the process
- An awareness of, and ability to challenge if needed, the institutional regulations.

(Adapted from Bacon and Midgelow, 2019, page 11, with permission.)