DDCA

The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts

Sep 3, 2025

SUBMISSION

Consultation Draft - New Australian Research Council Research Insights Capability

1. What is the value of research evaluation to you?

The DDCA supports the ARC's proposed change in direction away from ranking, scoring and rating institutions and towards a renewed set of intentions for openly sharing knowledge, promoting positive practices, strengthening connections, and identifying needs and capabilities to meet those needs.

In this context, research evaluation can provide a useful and necessary snapshot of the state of the sector and the performance of an individual university (and its component research concentrations). This is helpful because: a) a university/research concentration helps reflect on what in their research ecosystem is and is not working, driving internal process and support improvements to bolster outcomes; and b) discipline peak bodies (and similar) can use this information towards meaningful development of their disciplines, including investment to help their members.

Evaluation as a type of 'snapshot' is a useful benchmarking activity. It is valuable to compare the rate, quantity, quality, and engagement and impact factors of institutional research/knowledge production across the sector. Done well, research evaluation enables research disciplines to identify and reflect on research accomplishments as well as needs, and to use that process to inform improvements and future strategic research planning.

2. What questions about the research sector would you like a Research Insights Capability to answer?

- Which universities are focussing on which types and aspects of research?
- How does each State and Territory look when research insights are gathered (e.g., are there particular focus areas or flavours at a State/Territory level)?
- What does such an exercise tell us about the core concerns of the nation – and are they in line with, or purposely different to, international concerns?
- Who is producing research, and what does this tell us about current and future workforce needs?
- Are there particular areas of research, or modes of research (e.g., creative practice), that set us apart on an international stage?
- Where should future investment be directed – themes, people, modes?
- What are the current research trends in each discipline, where have they been, and where are they heading?
- Where, institutionally and in disciplinary contexts, is research funding concentrated?
- What is the percentage of creative/practice research and in what disciplines are these outputs concentrated?
- Are Creative/Practice Research Outputs diversifying and/ or being submitted across increasing disciplinary areas?
- What are the publishing practices and trends for creative practice researchers?
- What *types* of outputs are being produced by creative practice researchers?

3. Do you see value in the outputs of the proposed Research Insights Capability?

Yes. The proposed Research Insights Capability is likely to yield critical, valuable and 'real time' digitally accessible infrastructure that will inform internal processes and external, disciplinary and peak body-level strategising. This will largely depend on the questions asked, the data gathered, and how that will be presented and accessed. It is important to note the last ERA was seven years ago. Since then, particularly for arts researchers, a research governance void has opened up relative to the production, evaluation, benchmarking, and overarching advocacy of–and for–creative/practice research. In this context, the DDCA saw a need to undertake extensive sector-level work in this space, culminating in a set of recommendations toward a Research Evaluation Framework that we submit along with this response. This framework represents a 'ground up' approach to defining, evaluating, and championing practice research in the creative arts, which, given the reorientation of the ARC's approach to research

evaluation, we see as critical in informing internal university processes which will feed into the new ARC agenda. We look forward to discussing this further with the ARC and how our findings can inform the new Research Insights Capability.

The value of the insights the Capability offers will depend on its capacity to collect data relevant to creative practice research. It is imperative that the ARC has direct input from creative practice researchers to ensure this to be the case. The DDCA would be a valuable resource, particularly as the organisation represents disciplinary peak bodies that fall under the creative practice research umbrella and have specific and diverse sets of needs.

4. Do you have data that could be shared with the ARC, or are you aware of a data asset, which could be useful to the ARC? =

The DDCA has been working over the past couple of years to champion better understandings of creative practice research evaluation and excellence. For example, in our publication, *Creative Matters*, we have started to trial expanded ways of disseminating creative research outputs/artefacts, with longer and more flexible research statements (for example, see Showcasing + Reporting Creative Practice Research Outputs, 2023). This can also be seen in discipline-based creative journals that we have been involved in over the past decade, including TEXT (AAWP) and *Sightlines: Filmmaking in the Academy* (ASPERA). The DDCA in the last 12 months has set up Towards a New Evaluation Framework resources page on our website which catalogs our recent activities on this topic – including two forums, a special issue *Creative Matters* and contributions from the sector. Based on this material, including consultation with the sector, as mentioned, the **DDCA has recently produced the first set of recommendations toward a new research evaluation framework for creative practice research, which we include with this submission.** We would very much welcome the opportunity to speak to the ARC at more length about our findings.

Members of the DDCA also have institutional-level data related to the evaluation of practice research, examples of best practice, and working group findings that may be useful to the ARC.

Generally, it is important to note that there is a dearth of data relating to many aspects of creative practice research which is otherwise established and available in other research disciplines, such as repositories and datasets that enable those disciplines to have valuable insights into the state of their field. We would very much welcome an opportunity to discuss ways in which we might begin to collect this type of data specific to creative practice research, in order to inform a robust and representative Research Insights Capability for Australia.

DDCA

The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts

New designs on research evaluation:

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on a review of literature; several survey studies in the last decade on the subject of evaluating creative practice research (Gibson & Webb, 2019; DASSH, 2020; Knowles, 2023; ANU, 2025); a review of available university research reporting guides; and sector consultation undertaken by the DDCA across a range of activities: DDCA National Online Forum 2024; *Creative Matters* 7; DDCA National Online Forum 2025. Based on these the DDCA put forward a draft set of recommendations for sector consultation (including peak bodies) via an online survey as well as written submissions. All material is published on the dedicated DDCA webpage Towards a New Evaluation Framework. Based on the survey results, the DDCA submits the following recommendations as endorsed by the majority of the sector. Attached is an Appendix that provides a more granular background and rationale for each of the recommendations.

The recommendations cover certain foundational positions that cohere the sector; create parity across universities; confirm previously contested spaces; and state further work that needs to be undertaken toward the goal of designing evaluative measures appropriate to the creative arts disciplines.

1. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES

As a sector we recognise the importance and overarching contributions of Indigenous Knowledges in the production of practice research. It is imperative to focus the needs of this research as it pertains to evaluative frameworks and this requires Indigenous Knowledges researchers and researchers who research Indigenous Knowledges to play a key role in the further development of the framework as a matter of priority.

Note: our survey collected the details of parties interested to participate in further development in this area.

2. CEASE THE USE OF 'NTRO'

The categories 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' are no longer appropriate designations for research artefacts. Reflecting current practices and attitudes, we recommend that no matter the type of artefact, **all artefacts are in the first instance simply called 'research'.**

Some artefacts might be the result of ***creative practice research*** which is an important distinction to make as there are elements that distinguish it from other types of research in important ways. **Artefacts that result from creative practice research are particularly concerned with aesthetics; audiences; and where and how the knowledge can be encountered.** These distinctions are important to make and a creative practice researcher requires the opportunity to articulate these aspects via a research statement.

3. THE RESEARCH STATEMENT

The purpose of the discursive statement is to **guide an assessor or another researcher in their *encounter* with the creative work** so that they can access the knowledge/contribution claim the researcher is making.

We recommend the following areas be addressed in a research statement of 400-600 words in length:

- Context (disciplinary; social, political etc.; and if relevant, the researcher's broader program of research); intention; process (methodological approach);
- Form and content (the significance of this relationship to the knowledge gleaned);
- Insights and knowledge gained and shared (from process, to formal innovation, to subject matter);
- Potential for relevance;
- Relative scope and/or scale;

- Relevance of dissemination platform;
- List of references (theoretical/community of practice);
- Evidence/supporting documentation (the details of which to be determined).

4. 'PEERS' IN PEER-REVIEW

Academic peers from a closely aligned disciplinary field are best-placed to assess the *research* dimensions of an artefact – intentions, aims, and research design. Industry peers and other professional markers can demonstrate certain aspects of esteem or quality, as well as depth and quality of engagement and impact. These markers can be taken into account, but these are not necessarily markers of research quality. **Industry markers can be used as one kind of marker alongside other evidence. At the same time, in some cases industry markers may not be appropriate in the assessment of the quality, excellence, esteem or significance of a creative practice research artefact – therefore they are not the *only* possible markers in the assessment of the above.**

5. SIZE AND SCALE

The size and scale of a creative practice research artefact are not appropriately used as proxies for excellence, impact, significance, or classification of a work as 'major' or 'minor'. **Other, more nuanced markers need to be developed to help determine the above.**

6. 'WORLD STANDARD' Reconsider this as a marker, or redefine what it designates and how it is evidenced for creative practice research.

This marker does not necessarily speak to the quality or excellence of the research in creative practice research disciplines. **We recommend a reframing of this marker as *international benchmarking.* This would enable cultural differences and the diversity of dissemination pathways in creative practice research to be properly recognised.**

7. REPRESENTATION

To date, creative practice research has not had adequate representation in formal national discussions that influence the sector. **The majority of the sector would like to see the DDCA, together with the peak bodies it represents, formally endorsed by the Government and DDCA member institutions to represent the sector.** This is the only way to fairly reflect this portion of Australia's research ecosystem.

FURTHER WORK

The work conducted by the DDCA has revealed areas that require further discussion and sector consultation, such as: the subject of datasets and repositories; the subject of size and scale given that there is infinite diversity in what a creative practice research artefact might look like. Other findings from our work are suitable to inform a guide to assessors on how to approach the evaluation of creative practice research artefacts, which we envisage to be a key agenda item for the sector in the near future.

DDCA

The Australian Council of Deans and Directors of Creative Arts

APPENDIX

1. INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES Indigenous practitioners and researchers to participate in the writing of this framework is crucial.

Whilst there are process and protocol documents that researchers can use to demonstrate their appropriate, ethical and relational engagement with First Nations Knowledges – for example the University of Melbourne, Doctor of Philosophy – Indigenous Knowledge; NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities – there are no such considerations in regard to the evaluation of research that is classified under the First Nations field of research code.

There is some input needed from researchers who are involved in Indigenous research, whether they are Indigenous or not, and for all Indigenous researchers, regardless of whether they are undertaking Indigenous-specific research, is required to develop the new National Framework.
Indigenous research is embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, which come in many forms and often differ from Western research approaches. It is important that any framework of evaluation, as well as processes of reporting and dissemination of creative practice research outputs, enables and honours what is deemed to be appropriate to Indigenous knowledges and scholars.
For this reason, it is imperative to have Indigenous practitioners and researchers participate in the writing of this framework.

2. CEASE THE USE OF ‘NTRO’

The categories ‘traditional’ and ‘non-traditional’ are not appropriate designations. ‘Tradition’ is a somewhat relative term in the context of scholarship and the development of disciplines (see Knowles, Creative Matters 1, 2023; Butt, 2018), and insensitive and inaccurate in the context of Australia’s colonial legacy.

Non-traditional is a definition already situated in opposition to and is thus marginalised. Given the development of the creative practice research field over the past 30 years, this opposition and marginalisation does not speak to the state of things as they are now. Not only this, but other disciplines outside of the ‘creative’ ones are expanding their research practices and methodologies, which are yielding research outputs outside of the scholarly paper, report or monograph.

The increasing emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration, as well as research that speaks directly to non-academic communities, also points to the unhelpful way the designations 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' divide research teams and their collective work, as well as a potential shift away from the 'peer-reviewed journal article' as gold standard, towards other types of 'output'.

Related to this is the use of 'creative practice', which typically speaks to 'artistic' practices, but which may unduly exclude other types of practice from other, 'non-artistic' (or 'non-creative') disciplines; for example, Astrophysicists that design telescopic lenses which progress knowledge in their discipline. Academics working in the creative practice research field are also increasingly not identifying as 'artists', and instead 'practitioners'. Equally, there are some 'artist-academics' for whom the emphasis on 'artist' is vital in maintaining an important difference and space for scholarly work that is dedicated to artistic methodologies and the expansion of the artistic disciplines.

The nomenclature we use needs to reflect the changes in the ways research is conducted, in how people identify (for reasons related to the growth and support of their disciplines and important epistemological and methodological differences), and be capacious enough to include ongoing changes in this space. At the same time, it is important to maintain that 'creative' (in the sense of creative arts, not generally 'creative thinking') and/or 'artistic' is a particular type of knowledge production – with particular methodologies and methods. Working as a creative practice researcher is not the same as creating a scientific instrument, for example, even if the outcome might look the same (e.g., the creation of a research-enabled artefact). What is distinct about these practices is that one of them is explicitly concerned with the aesthetics and poetics of their practice, where these play an integral role to the insights gleaned via the practice and resulting artefact. These types of artefacts also typically require an audience/participants to encounter the artefact and it is in this encounter that the knowledge contribution can be gleaned. There is precedence for this framing in the western philosophical tradition (from Beaumegarten to Hegel, Gadamer and others).

Other types of 'practices' are not necessarily engaged in aesthetics and/or poetics and its 'output' is a utilitarian object/instrument which is put to use by end-users for certain effects. This distinction is important to maintain, and we ought to be careful about conflating all types of practices into the same category and assessment approach.

For some in the creative practice research community, terms such as 'artist-academic' and 'artistic research' are important as an identifier; a way to make this distinction in terms of art practice being able to generate distinct kinds of knowledge. For others, the use of 'creative' also serves this purpose.

Given these differences in 'identity' – which ultimately speak to deeper issues around the important distinctions in methodologies, epistemologies and knowledge contributions – the nomenclature we choose needs to be specific enough to maintain the differences that are important to maintain, as well as brave enough to include the diversity in that category of 'difference'.

In other words, there needs to be room for people to call themselves what they feel most important and suitable: practitioner, creative practitioner, artist-scholar, artistic researcher, researcher, and so on. At the same time, all of these identities and practices need to be held together by something in common – this is broadly and typically around methodology; around the concern with aesthetics and poetics and the type of research artefact that emerges from these processes and concerns. This intention has informed the proposed reporting pathway, below.

In summary, we have avoided using 'traditional', 'non-traditional' and 'output'. Instead, we recommend using 'artefact' for all types of knowledge contribution.

There will be times when a distinction will need to be made between the aesthetic/art/creative artefact and the artefacts that are not concerned with aesthetics, and which do not require audiences but rather 'end-users'. In these instances, we recommend the continued use of 'creative practice research', which is most commonly used in Australia, as an umbrella term.

3. THE RESEARCH STATEMENT

The purpose of the discursive statement is to guide an assessor or another researcher in their encounter with the creative work so that they can access the knowledge/contribution claim the researcher is making.

If the knowledge claim for the artefact does not happen in the encounter with the work, then the research is likely practice-enabled knowledge. When the knowledge is accessed in the encounter with the work, this is most likely research-enabled practice. An assessor of the work as a research artefact may need to be guided in a discursive way by the researcher to fully glean the knowledge claim. This is the work of the research statement.

The aesthetics, the materiality, the formal processes and choices must play an integral part in the knowledge discovery and these are to be articulated.

The practitioner may not want to control or prescribe the experience of their work for their audiences in the gallery or for their peers; however, for their intellectual peers this is the requirement because this is

the claim being made for the work: that it is a knowledge artefact – and knowledge created within the university needs to be shared. The research statement articulates the part that is not just about subjectivity, but is rather the part that is not open for interpretation or beautiful ambiguity. The statement does not interpret the work for the assessor, it guides them in accessing the knowledge claim, which can then have further effects/affects in the world.

Outside of producing the artefact, the discursive work is intentioned to 'add to' the 'impact' of the researcher's work; that is, the potential for larger dissemination and influence of the knowledge contribution.

The research statement does not presuppose that the researcher started with a question or a predetermined methodology. The genre of writing should capture the radically experimental and emergent nature of creative practice. At the same time, clear guidance on how this genre of writing is not simply an 'artist statement' but rather articulates how and what new knowledge was generated, is needed.

The role of the researcher

The researcher should be clear about what their contribution is on a given project, and how this contribution relates to their expertise and knowledge of their field. For example, a producer of a film who is not involved at all in the aesthetic choices of the work, but is involved in grants and partnerships, is not likely to be eligible for submitting the film as their research output. Their contribution would be in grants and partnerships, and whatever knowledge they are contributing to this field is unlikely to be gleaned from encountering the film. It is conceivable that a researcher could participate in the research design of the project so that their contribution and research in producing may be part of an aesthetic/material/formal contribution, but this inquiry needs to be embedded and authentically investigated in the process of the research/making of the film.

The following are areas that a research statement ought to address:

- Context (disciplinary; social, political etc.; and if relevant, the researcher's broader program of research); intention; process (methodological approach);
- Form and content (the significance of this relationship to the knowledge gleaned);
- Insights and knowledge gained and shared (from process, to formal innovation, to subject matter);
- Potential for relevance;
- Relative scope and/or scale;

- Relevance of dissemination platform;
- List of references (theoretical/community of practice)
- Evidence/supporting documentation (the details of which to be determined).

The recommendation is for a longer research statement (something in the vicinity of 400-600 words) to enable researchers to address the above.

4. 'PEERS' IN PEER-REVIEW

For the creative practice researcher, their 'peers' are potentially always a diverse group of people, both academic and artistic/industry/creative/professional. Responding to the demands, fashions and priorities of both industry and university – which are sometimes misaligned – in order to achieve success, impact, relevance and/or recognition is a reality for the creative practice researcher.

We need to make certain distinctions around the industry and academy relationship in terms of evaluation, such as: what are we assessing for, and who are the experts best-placed to make that assessment? What role does industry play in/for the assessment process, and for what purpose?
We need to be clear that different artefacts are created for different reasons – recognition within the academy for research; for assessment within industry (prizes, exhibitions, performance); for impact as a process within a community context. Not all artefacts are applicable across all domains, and academics/practitioners make decisions about the purpose of the work.

The agility to move between these different contexts and respond to various priorities is to be supported and celebrated (indeed, is a distinct feature of the work of the creative practice researcher). It is also sometimes evidence that the 'scholarly' and 'artistic' quality/value is incommensurable. This is why a nuanced approach to assessment is required where a distinction between the 'peers' needs to be clearly made.

Industry peer recognition, including prizes and standing of the places of publication/exhibition/broadcast, demonstrates industry recognition of quality and relevance, but it does not necessarily demonstrate scholarly contribution. For example, a novel that has won a literary prize shows a certain type of esteem, but it may not necessarily say anything about the value of the knowledge contribution of the prize-winning work.

Academic peers from a closely aligned disciplinary field are best-placed to assess the research dimensions – intentions, aims and research design.

Both types of assessment are valuable and should play a part in establishing the quality of the work/research. A way to capture these, and capture them as different, serving different ends, should be supported in the reporting approach.

5. SCALE / SIZE / IMPACT

Scale, size and impact are at times used interchangeably or as proxies for one another. A clearer distinction between these markers and how they are used as indices for 'excellence' needs attention and clarification.

At some institutions, internal evaluation guidelines specify particular 'weighting' awarded to works depending on their 'size' – for example, how does a two-minute song compare to a thirty-minute documentary? The works are then classified as 'minor' or 'major'. This classification may seem to use size as a proxy for 'scale', 'impact' and/or 'significance'. Presumably these measures use the scholarly article and/or monograph as their yardstick, which are also classified according to 'minor' or 'major' works. The scale of a work is typically assessed according to audience size, which in turn has been used as another indicator of 'impact' and/or 'significance'.

Whilst the conversation around quantity vs quality is somewhat behind us, and we have (apparently) dutifully landed on the side of quality, we would like to put forward another point of view: quantity is sometimes directly commensurate with quality and sometimes it is not. The length of a work is sometimes commensurate with the audience sizes they can reach (due to industry standards), and this is sometimes commensurate with the impact the work can make. Though sometimes it is not.
Size can matter, and it can be directly related to quality as well as significance and impact. And sometimes the 'minor' (after Deleuze) is very significant indeed.

A single, one-size-fits-all approach cannot work because 'it depends'. One has to understand the context of the work, the intentions of the creator, and their audiences in order to make this assessment. Some narrative around this is necessary from the practitioner in order for a fair assessment to be made.
The below recommendations speak to the increasing demands for 'engagement and impact'; an expansion of the breadth of a researcher's activities from simply publishing in peer-reviewed journals and producing monographs.

The activities and participation of a researcher in society are changing, therefore the evaluation frameworks need to expand to understand and value this diversity of activities. Whilst it is important to be able to distinguish between activities, it is also important to understand them in concert with one another as a body of work/a program of research.

Recommendations

6. ‘WORLD STANDARD’

Either a clearer definition of what this actually designates, or a removal and rethinking of how excellence is measured.

Further engagement with literature from around the world might benefit this conversation, for example, the work of Lewandowska (2020; 2022; 2023), which shows such an inconsistency across the world in the way creative practice research is evaluated that the notion of ‘world standard’ might appear incomprehensible.

We also need to consider the western-centric ideals being expressed with this designation.

7. REPRESENTATION

Creative practice research is not explicitly represented in the Learned Academies as other disciplines are (e.g., Australian Academy of Humanities, Australian Academy of Social Sciences). These Academies support research excellence in their respective disciplines, offering a range of development opportunities as well as advocacy for their particular interests and needs. Creative practice research disciplines would also greatly benefit from such a body.

The DDCA in part provides some of this function, but it could do more, including being more formally organised and funded in line with these aims. The DDCA could provide the platform to publish case studies, continue to develop resources and guidelines, provide training for peer reviewers, and continue the work of establishing comprehensive guidelines in consultation with the research community.
Note that, following one of the most comprehensive reviews of the reporting and assessment processes for creative practice research in Australia, Jenny Wilson’s 2017 book, Artists in the University: Positioning Artistic Research in Higher Education, also made this recommendation.

The role of discipline-based Peak Bodies
Disciplinary Peak Bodies have a very important role to play in this conversation – to provide the disciplinary specificities and differences that may need to be taken into account in any evaluation framework and reporting process. Peak bodies ACUADS, ASPERA, AAWP and IDEA are members of the DDCA, and we intend to continue our collaboration with these members in establishing the new framework.

This is a matter of proper representation, and to this end we think it responsible that all research evaluation committees and review panels require creative practice research representation. It is not adequate to have a 'humanities' representative who in many cases would not have any experience with creative practice research.

FURTHER WORK

DATA

The intentions of the ARC to institute a data-driven evaluation process needs to be carefully considered for the creative practice research disciplines. Whilst it will alleviate peer-review fatigue, which is a serious issue across the sector (including our industry colleagues), there are some aspects of assessment and evaluation that are not suited to this treatment for the creative practice disciplines.

The now-well-known phrase that came out of the DASSH survey, 'it depends', needs to be taken seriously because it is an accurate reflection of the need for individual assessment of artefacts in context of a number of factors. There needs to be careful consideration of how data and peer-review are used in concert with one another specific to creative practice research for fair and accurate assessment and evaluation.

Creative practice researchers in collaboration with data experts and technologists can start to think about what type of data might be helpful and to what ends; and how we might collect that data (i.e. what type of platform/repository can maintain records that are useful?).

Early findings of a research project currently being undertaken (Glisovic & Batty) show that researching creative practice research using scholarly methodologies such as Systematic Literature Reviews or Scoping Literature Reviews, are ineffective for our disciplines because there are no standard repositories where one might find this literature. The issue is compounded when trying to research creative practice research artefacts, which arguably impedes the development of the disciplines – it is much harder to have a sense of 'the field' when the research works are so dispersed and this means we are also far less likely to reference one another's research given the inconsistencies in search options and methodologies.

A single repository that is fit for purpose – particularly for creative practice research artefacts – and which can service multiple needs would be a place where people can disseminate their research; be discoverable by other researchers; input relevant and consistent data; and be able to present the work in

effective ways for evaluation purposes. This recommendation also addresses the ARC's intentions to move toward more systematic and data-driven assessment processes where we give proper consideration to what type of data is collected to what ends, as well as using peer-review in relation to that data.