

# Creative Arts Research: A long path to acceptance

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The majority of tertiary practice-led creative arts disciplines became part of the Australian university system as a result of the creation of the Unified National System of tertiary education in 1988. Over the past two decades, research has grown as the yardstick by which academic performance in the Australian university sector is recognised and rewarded. Academics in artistic disciplines, who struggled to adapt to a culture and workload expectations different from their previous, predominantly teaching based, employment, continue to see their research under-valued within the established evaluation framework. Despite a late 1990s Australian government funded inquiry, many of the inequities remain. While the Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) exercise has acknowledged the non-text outputs of artist-academics in its evaluation of 'research outcomes', much of the process remains resolutely framed by measures that work against creative arts researchers.

## Introduction

Late in the 1980s, the Australian university sector assumed responsibility for the majority of tertiary creative arts education through governmental mandated reforms rather than through mechanisms that were premised on considered pedagogical, educational concerns or market-led choices. Over 15 per cent of institutional mergers realised through the creation of the Unified National System (UNS) in 1988 by the then Federal Labour Government (Dawkins 1988) included discipline specific colleges of visual or performing arts (AVCC 2004). Moreover, many more artist-academics joined the university sector through amalgamations between universities and Colleges of Advanced Education that were also participants in this reform. Yet, having mandated these institutional amalgamations, little in the way of government research policy or its implementation was directed to support these crea-

tive arts researchers within the frameworks that both support and reward research, or to acknowledge the significant scope of change, from their former, predominantly teaching based work, that was required to meet their new university employment.

While individual universities may have sought to give effect to the 'notion that all academics should be treated equally' (Coaldrake & Stedman 1998, p.88), these institutions were mindful that to deviate too far from national performance measures, heavily skewed towards scientific definitions and expectations of research, could have significant financial implications. As one commentator noted, the government had 'conveniently left the decision of what they [the creative arts] were worth up to the individual university' (Lancaster, 2003, as cited in Roennfeldt 2007 p.9), by arguing that: 'Universities are autonomous institutions that make their own decisions about research funding priorities between, and within, disciplines. A Government initiated investigation

into the possibility of bias against certain disciplines ... would be contrary to Government policy and funding arrangements' (Strand 1998, p.178).

Yet, the Australian Government played, and continues to play, a major role in this valuation. It is responsible for a large proportion of the funding programmes that support academic research and it is the government who determines the criteria by which university research activity will be evaluated and financially rewarded institutionally. Moreover, despite reminders from independent government-sanctioned reports and academic literature, emerging frameworks have consistently failed to redress the issues with parity of support for, and recognition of, creative arts research.

### Research in the creative arts: The Strand Report

Following concerns raised by the Australian Senate (Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 1995) and a campaign by two major peak bodies for tertiary arts academics, the Australian Government funded an inquiry into research in the creative arts (Strand 1998). The Strand Report, as it became known, was published in 1998 and remains the only comprehensive review into the nature and status of research undertaken by academics in visual and performing arts disciplines employed within the Australian university sector. It focused upon key issues of recognition, funding and support for creative arts research in an effort to achieve an appropriate and equitable place for creative arts researchers within the existing definitions, sentiments and practices associated with research as an element of academics' work, and the existing frameworks that evaluate and reward university based research. In this way, it sought to respond to confusion in government and higher education institutions as to exactly what constituted research in artistic disciplines. It also sought to differentiate carefully, but not comprehensively, between arts as a research subject or tool that could be used to contribute to knowledge in other disciplines, and as research for the furtherance of its own artistic disciplines. It clarified these differences as: 'research *into* the arts such as musical criticism, history of drama and visual analysis; research *through* the arts including materials research, action research and industrial design; and research *for* the arts, the most complex kind which includes painting and composition' (Strand 1998, p.84).

Acknowledging that the boundaries between these typologies can be unclear, it focused particularly upon

those areas of creative arts research undertaken by arts practice and 'published' in non-text formats, 'the most complex kind' (Strand 1998, p.84) which sat less easily with traditional scholarly expectations and measures. In this way, it positioned creative arts research in ways analogous to existing institutional practices. It also evaluated claims of marginalisation, described the mechanisms by which this was occurring and through an extensive consultation process, provided a model by which creative arts research outputs could be equated with traditional text based research publications. Although the notion of research equivalency has not enjoyed universal approval in the creative arts community, and debate continues as to the extent to which artistic practice fits with contemporary descriptions of research (Nelson 2009; Jewesbury 2009; Svenungsson 2009; Coryn 2006; Sullivan 2006), The Strand Report sought pragmatically to include creative arts research, and seek funding parity, within the accepted research frameworks without undue upheaval to the existing structure.

The Report's recommendations, were directed at government, institutions and creative arts researchers, and fell broadly into three categories:

- Equal recognition of creative arts research outputs within performance and quality evaluation procedures.
- Equity of funding opportunity and evaluation of creative arts research income.
- An improved administrative environment to support creative arts researchers to achieve parity.

In short, The Strand Report provided a way forward as agreed by the academic creative arts community, by which government and institutions could address inequities and marginalisation within their respective spheres of operation. However, over twelve years since its release only limited progress has been made and many of the same concerns remain. That is, the creative arts continues to 'stand on the periphery of Australia's main research game', (Bourke, Haseman & Mafe 2005, p.1) with claims of inequitable treatment identified in relation to:

- Funding (Buckley & Conomos 2004).
- Recognition of research practice (Haseman 2006).
- Staffing levels (Wissler 2005).
- Evaluation measures and procedures (Bourke, Haseman & Mafe 2005; Schippers, 2007) and
- Exclusionary and inappropriate university policy environments for creative arts practice (Draper, Hall & Wilson 2005; Australian Academy of the Humanities 2006).

This unease connects with a broader issue within the community. The suitability of comprehensive universities as sites for artist academics to further their disciplines, and for the tertiary education of future artists, remains the subject of public and government discussion (Parliament of Victoria 2010; Fitzgerald 2006). There is concern that the regulation, evaluation and recognition of creative arts activities by standards designed for non-artistic disciplines, produces goal-displacing behaviours that divert their research activity away from intellectual inquiry led by artistic concerns, towards matter more easily accepted by national research priorities (Nelson 2009; Jewesbury 2009; Woodrow 2005; Elkins 2004; Fitzgerald 2003), and results in the production of 'graduates who are mute as ... artists' (Buckley 2007 p.32).

Certainly, artistic practice was positioned as a legitimate research endeavour in the short-lived and now defunct Research Quality Framework (RQF) preparations (Butler 2008) and has been subsequently within the current Excellence in Research in Australia (ERA) exercise. Indeed, in 2008, on launching the Government's Innovation Policy, Senator Kim Carr, the Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, said of the creative arts: 'We should support these disciplines because they give us pleasure, knowledge, meaning, and inspiration. No other pay-off is required.' (Carr 2008).

It is against this backdrop that the current research environment is critically appraised within the three categories that encompass the recommendations of The Strand Report, to explore the extent to which the model designed to achieve equity for creative arts research, has progressed.

## Equal recognition of creative arts research outputs

The Strand Report (Strand 1988) recognised that research undertaken by arts practitioners was of equal worth but of a different kind from that more easily recognised within existing research support and recognition frameworks. It proposed a detailed model of 'research equivalence' by which:

... the research methodologies, the forms of publication and the outcomes of creative arts research will be different from, but equivalent to, research in other disciplines, removing the necessity of having to artificially 'shoehorn' some kinds of creative arts research into a traditional research model. (Strand 1998, p.xvi).

It recommended that research equivalence be adopted: (i) for the purposes of research performance recognition and allocation of research funds; (ii) in definitions of publication; (iii) for considering publication track records in ARC applications; and (iv) in institutional data collection, performance recognition and internal funding distribution. However, in seemingly absolute contradiction to these proposals, from 1999 to 2007, the Howard Government began to shape the national research and innovation system around prioritised Science, Technology, Engineering and Medical (STEM) research endeavour. It was these disciplines and their practices that became the measures by which research activities and outcomes came to be defined, recognised and rewarded (Haseman & Jaaniste 2008). As the then Director of the Council for Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences noted in 2007: 'My worry about Australia's innovation system is that its most systematic feature is its exclusion of the humanities, creative arts and social sciences (HASS)' (Cunningham 2007, p.28). While many HASS disciplines faced similar funding challenges from this policy direction, the consistent 'scripto-centric focus' (Conquergood 2002, p.147), combined with reduced funding opportunity to widen the gap between those scholars those whose research is 'published' in traditional scholarly text outlets and those whose research is communicated through performance and artefact rather than written critique or commentary.

Efforts to include artistic output as legitimate research outputs for the calculation of institutional research quantum (Categories H & J) were short-lived and did little to alleviate the long-term problems for artist academics (Taylor 2000). The then government insisted that these research quantum categories, were 'proxies only' and not designed to inform internal funding distribution (O'Toole 1998). However, governmental measures continued to increase national rewards and funding for research that contributed to highly science biased National Research Priorities (Nelson 2002), which were closely aligned to the outputs of scripts. Influenced by a combination of financial insecurity and isomorphism (Marginson & Considine 2000) many institutions began to moderate institutional support for creative arts research, resulting in a double disadvantage for artist academics (Bazeley 2006).

Not surprisingly, creative arts researchers looked to the government that had commissioned the Strand Report to redress this kind of inequity. Indeed, the 2010 ERA exercise has acknowledged the limitation of

scripts (i.e. books, book chapters, journal articles and refereed conference papers) as the only format capable of recognising research activity for funding purposes. Hence, the research returns for 2010 included a range of artworks, performances, exhibitions, film and sound recordings to be considered as 'legitimate' research outcomes. (ARC 2009a). It is to be hoped that the ERA exercise does not represent a reprise of the earlier fleeting experiments to include non-text output (Taylor 2000). The earlier withdrawal of broad output categories in favour of a narrow range of script focused categories was due, in part, to problems with collection of institutional data and its accuracy (Bennett, Wright & Blom, 2009; Marshall & Newton 2000) and claims that their inclusion makes little difference to the financial contribution made to individual universities. As one commentator explained: '... they are so messy and difficult to collect data on and don't affect the final number much...' (O'Toole 1998 p.3).

At the time of writing, the financial impact of including creative arts research outputs in the 2010 ERA exercise is unknown, but there are indications that the 'messiness' remains, and may mitigate against long-term inclusion unless adequately addressed. For some institutions, the ongoing collection, storage and evaluation of non-text research outputs may pose challenges, particularly in relation to electronic storage costs, legal and intellectual property ownership and licence issues, and in performing arts, the difficulties of accurately representing time-based work as evidence for ERA evaluation still exists (Leahy 2009). It remains to be seen whether the inclusion of creative arts research outputs in the ERA process represents a sea change in Australian research policy and practices, particularly as there are other aspects of the ERA evaluation programme that remain resolutely science framed, as is discussed in the next section.

### **Equity of funding opportunity and evaluation of creative arts research income**

A key rationale behind the Strand Inquiry (1998) was to increase funding available to support creative arts research. It recommended that universities and the government implement measures to: (i) improve competitiveness of ARC applications for creative arts researchers; (ii) have representation by artist-academics in ARC deliberations to better explain the nature of creative arts research; and (iii) include Australia Coun-

cil Grants in the National Competitive Grant Index and the Research Infrastructure Block grant allocations.

It recognised that access to research funding and the use of research income as a measure of research performance were major inhibitors to achieving equitable status for creative arts research. Consequently, it is noteworthy that, although artistic work can be counted as eligible research outputs, ERA 2010 still retains the use of research income as an evaluative measure to inform decisions on research activity and research quality. It has categorised and 'ranked' income according to funding sources:

- Category 1: Australian Competitive Grants
- Category 2: Other Public Sector Research Income
- Category 3: Industry and other research income
- Category 4: Cooperative Research Centre Research Income

As has been recently observed in relation to humanities and social sciences: '... the relative funding model, now 20 years old, privileges research income over research output....consolidating the advantage of those who already had most of the research dollars: typically, the biological sciences' (Turner 2010, p.1).

While discrepancies undoubtedly exist for many non-science disciplines, the creative arts research is arguably positioned most poorly in these kinds of arrangements. If we consider the highest ranked Category 1 funding, while a limited number of recognised schemes offer opportunities for humanities and social science disciplines, out of 66 funding agencies listed in the Australian Competitive Grants register for 2010 (DISR 2010) only one funding agency, the Australian Research Council (ARC), is likely to fund research in artistic disciplines. The Australia Council, Film Financing agencies and various other competitive arts funding agencies' schemes are excluded from this list. Some may be appropriately excluded as they specifically exclude funding for research, yet others are in more less certain territory. For example, while ERA recognises Australia Council grants as a measure of esteem, the income that is provided through this nationally competitive scheme is excluded from consideration as Category 1 funding. This exclusion was a problem noted by The Strand Report in 1998.

The Strand Report specifically targeted improvements in ARC grant performance for creative arts research in its recommendations, stating that:

Overall, the visual and performing arts received 1 per cent of the grants and 0.6 per cent of the total funding.... in 1997 the creative arts as a sector

receives about the same share of ARC grants that it did prior to 1992. This is despite an increase in the proportion of visual and performing arts staff, an increase in postgraduate qualifications held by them, and the development in many places of a more mature research culture. (Strand 1998, p.xviii)

The Strand Report was informed by the relative funding success between creative arts research and other disciplines. Four of its recommendations were aimed at the ARC and institutions to improve performance through inclusion of representation of artist-academics on ARC panels, support for improving the quantity and quality of applications and the recognition of practice based research for investigator track records. In response to these criticisms, the ARC appointed panel members with an understanding of artistic method, and made slight revisions to its major scheme guidelines to remove the eligibility prohibition on any project that would produce work of art, and apply the exclusion to those that would lead solely to the creation of a work of art (ARC 2009).

Consideration of ARC grants awarded for funding in 2010 (ARC 2010a) shows that its revision has achieved little improvement to the percentage of grants awarded for creative arts research. Analysing publicly available data on the total awards made, with those awarded in the fields for creative arts research (410000 and 190000 respectively), 1.5 per cent of total grants announced by

the ARC for funding in 2010, were awarded to applications in the disciplinary codes for creative arts which comprised 1.2 per cent of total funding awarded under these codes. Two schemes, Super Science Fellowships and the Special Research Initiative announced were specifically directed at Science, Technology, Engineering and Medical (STEM) disciplines, and the funding allocated through the Linkage Learned Academies programme is directed only towards existing Academies, namely: Science; Social Sciences; Technological Sciences and Engineering; and the Humanities. The latter, while encompassing the scholarly study of artistic disciplines, is unlikely to select an arts practice-led programme as its submission for funding. The six remaining schemes are open to applications from all academic disciplines, and while the percentage of grants awarded under the ARC's broad Humanities and Creative Arts panel categorisation may appear equitable compared to its other disciplinary panels, when the awarded grants are considered against the specific categories dedicated to the creative arts, the picture changes. The confidentiality of the evaluation process prevents exploration of the quality of applications submitted in this particular round, however, the number of grants awarded to the creative arts Field of Research code in the 2011 Discovery Projects scheme - nine out of 931 total grants awarded (0.9 per cent) - implies that the 2010 findings may not be an anomaly (ARC 2010b).

**Table 1: ARC Grants announced for Funding in 2010**

ARC Scheme	Total Grants announced for funding in 2010		Grants awarded to Studies in Creative Arts and Writing FoR code 190000 And The Arts RFCD code 410000	
	Number grants awarded	\$ value of grants announced	Number of grants awarded	\$ value of grants awarded
Australian Laureate Fellowships	15	35,541,053	0	0
Super Science Fellowships	24	\$13,920,000	0	0
Future Fellowships *	200	\$143,760,941	2	1,344,242
Discovery Projects	925	\$325,575,289	15	4,045,570
Discovery Indigenous Researchers	9	\$1,809,820	0	0
Linkage Projects (Round 2)	218	\$66,753,570	4	934394
Linkage Projects (Round 1)	211	\$66,827,891	2	702366
Linkage Infrastructure	71	\$79,009,305	2	\$2,322,630
Linkage Learned Academies Special Projects	5	\$1,439,000	0	0
Special Research Initiative: Research in Bionic Vision Science and Technology	2	\$50,000,000	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1680</b>	<b>784,636,869</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>9349202</b>

\* announced in 2010 for funding in 2010

Imputed from this table is that in the eighteen year period considered and reported in The Strand Report, creative arts research appears to have achieved 0.48 per cent increase in number of grants and 0.59 per cent increase in total amount of funding awarded through ARC schemes. However, a more detailed consideration of one of the ARC major funding programmes indicates that percentage of funding for research in artistic disciplines may have actually decreased from the levels identified by Strand in 1997 and the preceding five years that was considered in its investigation. This may be influenced by two pertinent administrative revisions.

First, there has been a change in categorisation for research undertaken in creative arts. In 1998, the Research Fields, Courses and Disciplines codes used predominantly focused on visual and performing arts. The Field of Research code now used as the disciplinary classification for ARC grants has been expanded to specifically include journalism, professional writing and creative writing, formerly classified within their own disciplinary Research Fields, Courses and Disciplines code. While these changes do not allow for accurate comparison they raise the prospect that increases in funding to visual and performing arts research is due to increased success by academics in journalism and associated disciplines. Second, despite applications being assessed upon the extent to which they 'will advance the knowledge base of the discipline' (ARC 2010c) some of the awards made for creative arts research may fit equally, or better, within another disciplinary research code.

A closer examination of the titles and summaries of the 15 grants awarded under the ARC Discovery Programme in 2010, suggests that it is not clear whether all those awarded will deliver benefits primarily *for* the artistic disciplines or for artistic aspects of education, technology, cultural theory or history, in other words, research *into* or *through* the arts. This may reflect concerns about loss of agency that artist-academics experience and is succinctly expressed in recent research reported by Bennett, Blom and Wright (2009) which concludes that: 'There has been a big assumption in the university that *we* are involved in the real knowledge business, and *we* will

describe and research *you* artists...'. (Bennett, Blom & Wright 2009 p.6)

While the reforms to research evaluation may offer some progress in terms of recognising research outputs through the ERA exercise, challenges remain for creative arts researchers conducting research that is of direct relevance to furthering their artistic disciplines and who seek parity with disciplinary colleagues in research income evaluations. This applies both in terms of the granting schemes that are recognised as eligible for category 1 and success in securing funding from the only scheme included in the ACG Grants Register likely to provide research funding to these disciplines. In 2011, the ARC has removed its exclusion on the creation of art works and modified its definition of

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research used in its Discovery funding guidelines to better encompass creative arts research. (ARC 2011) While a promising step forward, it remains to be seen whether this will be a sufficient response to the concerns highlighted above.

### **An improved administrative environment: better data collection and scholarly representation**

The Strand Report (1998) also contained two recommendations aimed at improving the environment for creative arts as research:

- i. better statistical information on staff and students in creative arts disciplines to allow meaningful analysis in the future, and
- ii. the establishment of a national body to represent the research and policy interests of the creative arts.

Its aim was to ensure that data was available that could chart the progress for creative arts researchers and to provide a focal point that could develop, and advocate for, scholarship in practice-led artistic research disciplines. Progress on implementing these two recommendations has been similarly slow. In the former, the availability of longitudinal comparative data has been interrupted by the introduction of administrative changes. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR 2009) collects detailed data on staffing and students under the academic organisational unit for Creative Arts, but changes from the previous category of Visual/Performing Arts

**Table 2: Comparison of Academic Organisational Unit: Visual /Performing Arts and Creative Arts**

2000 Visual/Performing Arts Academic Organisational Unit (DETYA 2000)	2001 Creative Arts Academic Organisational Unit (DEST 2001)
0600 Visual/Performing Arts - General 0601 Art 0602 Graphic Arts/Fashion Design 0603 Craft, Ornaments 0604 Performing Arts 0605 Music 0699 Other Visual/Performing Arts	10.01 Performing Arts 10.03 Visual Arts and Crafts 10.05 Graphic and Design Studies 10.07 Communication and Media Studies 10.99 Other Creative Arts

has broadened the definition to include a number of discipline areas within traditional theoretical approaches to the arts (ARC 2010d) as Table 2 demonstrates.

Thus, the data published for practice-led creative arts researchers to 2000 cannot be compared accurately with those collected after 2001 and progress is difficult to evaluate. We still do not know, with any certainty, how many practicing artists engaged in research are employed within the university sector, the extent to which non-text outputs form part of their research activity or indeed, how many have eschewed their artistic practice over time to meet text based performance outputs and achieve career progression.

A national symposium of representatives from all creative arts disciplines, held in 1997 as part of the Strand Inquiry's consultation process, called for the establishment of 'a national body to represent the research and policy interests of the creative arts' (Strand 1998 p.xxii). Since then creative arts issues have benefited from the support of colleagues in the Academy of the Humanities and from the active and enthusiastic representations of the Council of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (CHASS) which encompasses creative arts within its more general disciplinary remit. However, the multi-disciplinary nature of this representation makes for a more 'non-science' advocacy than a specific creative arts focus. A specific entity to represent the concerns of the artistic academic disciplines has yet to be realised.

The establishment and recognition of a scholarly academy with equivalent standing and funding to the Academies of: Science; Social Sciences; Humanities; and Technological Sciences and Engineering, would provide a mechanism to acknowledge creative arts as legitimate research disciplines and provide a focus for the development of scholarly maturity within creative arts disciplines, a support which other disciplines have been afforded for many years. The lack of such a body is all the more concerning given the recognition of 'membership of a learned academy' as a research esteem factor within

ERA (ARC 2010b). Collaboration between all artist disciplinary peak bodies has been ongoing (ACUADS 2008-9) but informal response from the government to the suggestion of a learned academy specifically for artistic disciplines has proved 'luke-warm' (S. Baker, personal communication, February, 2009).

### Conclusion

The question of how the government and university sector is to recognise, reward and support artistic work on an intellectual and scholarly level is one that the sector needs to address urgently. Artistic work needs to be encouraged without compromising the essential development of artistic technique if Australian higher education is to avoid producing a nation of art critics and commentators rather than artists. Thirteen years ago, a government commissioned report provided a roadmap to equity for creative arts research, yet successive governments have chosen to disregard most of its recommendations. Creative arts researchers, and individual supportive employers, were left to devise and implement their own local strategies to secure a path to parity in research funding, promotion and other aspects of university life predicated upon research performance evaluation. We do not yet know whether these strategies will prove to be successful for artistic inquiry and practice in the long term, or whether excellence in creative arts research will become a euphemism for art criticism and commentary.

Over twenty years have passed since creative arts disciplines were invited to join the university culture and its evaluation processes. Perhaps it is time for government and the academy to put aside prejudices against research that is different from the prevailing norms, and accept, acknowledge and welcome creative arts research method and output as equal to others within the academic community. It is perhaps time to put in place a research funding and evaluation system

that moves beyond the pragmatic approach devised in the 1990s to give equitable access to funding and recognition, to one where creative arts research methods, outputs and values are seen as valid scholarly approaches in their own right. The creative arts should be recognised not because of their similarity or equivalence with the prevailing disciplinary powerbase, but for their contribution to the furtherance of knowledge in their own fields and their value to Australian society as a whole.

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