

## **GETTING INTO STEP WITH THE RQF: RQF Measures of Quality and Impact For Screen Works**

The purpose of this paper is to make an attempt at devising agreed criteria for the screenbased academics on quality and impact. The idea is to reach broad agreement on these criteria (after discussion at ASPERA) and then to forward them to Panel 13 of DEST. It is also hoped that this can be written in a sufficiently generic way that with differing examples for quality and impact, these criteria might fit or at least relate to, other creative areas such as dance, performance, radio, sound, music etc.

In the end it will be the RQF Reference Committee and the Panel 13 Assessment Panel who will determine the criteria to be used. But it is important we have strong input. It is also important that we agree on these assessment criteria for use on our own ASPERA National Peer Review Committee if that is the approach we take.

My research for this paper is based on the work of Josko Petkovic and others who have developed the ASPRI Peer Review Index (Marvell in IMedia), Jay Peters (2005), the various CHASS discussions, RQF: The Preferred Model and conversations with Ross Gibson and Theo Van Leeuwen at UTS.

One of the things we grade the MA Work on at UTS is innovation and another is evidence of professional expertise.

### **Definitions of Research**

I am adopting the definition of research adopted by the RQF “Research and experimental development comprises creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge”. We have had previous discussions where it has been pointed out that essentially we are in many ways similar to the science model for research. It’s also true that what we do is often art. Without spending much more time on this I wanted to quote D Throsby.

But what of artistic creation itself? To consider whether it can be seen as research, think of that part of the definition of scientific enquiry that refers to the formulation, expression and testing of ideas about the world. Isn’t that

what artists do? Behind every work of art is a hypothesis about the reality perceived by the artist. It may be descriptive, it may be analytical, and we as observers can accept or reject it as we wish. But the making of an artistic statement, however insignificant, is an exploration of an idea, and furthermore each statement, however insignificant, is some sort of contribution to the objective body of knowledge which is called art.<sup>1</sup>

## Update

Where are we now? We have or can set up an ASPERA National Screen Based Works Peer Review Committee (I'm not so sure about the weight of, or need for state based ones but that can be discussed). We've essentially agreed with ACUADS and others about the need, and indeed advantage, of a contextual statement to accompany work submitted to Panel 13. Some of us have managed I imagine to be formed into Research Strengths within our universities which will bid for RQF funds based on our outputs of the last 6 years. Judging from what I read and see we have finally had acceptance of screen based creative works into the current national regime for funding of research.

So what I am wondering here is what criteria would we develop for screen based works, what would get a 5, a 4 and so on here. Note that unlike the ASPRI model we have developed I am not making assumptions as to length of the work, or the role in the work the person is claiming. So if the Editor or Designer is claiming the work (or their part of the work) their claims to quality would be in the field of Editing or Design for the work. I also think its quite possible that a short work may make a higher quality contribution than a long one so I have not done any ranking based on length.

Note that the copy in italics below is from "The RQF: The Preferred Model" and so that is not copy we can alter. This is their table. I am trying to make a version of it that looks like how we would rank creative work in our field. So I want feedback on the plain type. And also feedback on indicators for work that might fit in each level, like those from Josko's earlier paper and our ASPRI Model, that would indicate to Panel 13 what was a high status prize or festival and what not.

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<sup>1</sup> Throsby, D article in Art Monthly Australia 64 (1993) p.35

Table 1: THE RATING SCALE FOR RESEARCH QUALITY

Rating	Descriptor
5	<p><i>Research that is world leading in its field or makes an equally exceptional contribution in an area of particular significance to Australia.</i></p> <p>Screenworks that make exceptional contributions or innovations in one or more of :- form, content or style and which extend the state of the art.</p>
4	<p><i>Research that meets world standards of excellence in its field or makes an equally excellent contribution in an area of particular significance to Australia.</i></p> <p>Screenworks that make excellent contributions or innovations in one or more of :- form, content or style and which extend the state of the art.</p>
3	<p><i>Research that is recognised as excellent in terms of its originality, significance of rigour but which nonetheless falls short of the highest standards of excellence.</i></p> <p>Excellently executed screenworks that make strong original contributions or innovations in one or more of :- form, content or style and which extend the state of the art.</p>
2	<p><i>Research that is recognised as methodologically sound in its field and of high originality, significance and rigour</i></p> <p>Screenworks that make useful original contributions in one or more of :- form, content or style and which extend the state of the art.</p>
1	<p><i>Research that is deemed to fall below the standard of recognised quality work</i></p>

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Screenworks that while executed with a high degree of competence, fail to make any new contribution in either form, content or style or to extend the state of the art.

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## Indicators for Quality

Below is NOT a ranking of indicators but some suggestions for indicators that might come into play in different rankings for quality.

1. The degree to which the researcher can make a case that their work is an investigation of a certain theory or set of ideas and/or practices could be an indicator.
2. Level 5 quality would be indicated by an International film festival invitation, international film conference, or invitation for the work to be in a major international exhibition. Lesser festivals and conferences might indicate quality at lower rankings
3. An international prize or award for the work would be an indication of Level 5 quality. Lesser prizes and awards would be indicators at lower rankings
4. Critical journal articles and reviews about the screenwork might play a part in determining the quality.
5. The receipt of competitive funding for the screenwork work from state, national or international film or art funding bodies or their equivalent would be an indication. This would be especially the case with programs like the National Interest Program of Film Australia, or with the Strand O documentaries funded by the AFC and possibly the “accord” docos funded by the ABC, SBSTV and the FFC. “Accord” docos and “National Interest Program Films” have already been judged by peers and experts as of “significance to Australia”.
6. Screening on national or overseas TV, cable television or TV online sites would be an indicator of quality as would theatrical exhibition.
7. What others can we think of ?

Another way to put this is to say that indicators for level 5 quality would be highly selective competitive screening and/or prizes or awards. Indicators for level 4 would be inclusion in a selective competitive screening. Level 3 would be indicated by invitation to a festival or conference. Level 2 would be an open public domain screening.

To further expand this section and make it more useful for Panel 13 ASPERA can deliver a list of local, national and international festivals and awards competitions (such as the AFI and the Oscars, ATOM etc) and rate them 1 – 5 in terms of their status. For example for festivals Telluride, Montreal, Berlin, Venice, Cannes and Edinburgh would be level 5 indicators and the Dubbo film festival may be level 1 or 2.

We could also list television programs and rate them 1 – 5 in a general sort of way where for example *Mother and Son* would be a 5 but *The Amazing Race* or *The Footy Show* might be a 1.<sup>2</sup>

But I think a really good thing we could do for our members is have a yearly ASPERA Awards judging where we give awards for the best quality works, as ATOM – a similar peak body to us, does. Screen producers able to claim an ASPERA award would have an immediate boost to their claim for quality since we are experts in the field.

## Impact

One of the concerns raised here in the latest Brisbane CHASS<sup>3</sup> discussion was how one could include the idea of “intensity” of impact. Ross Gibson related a good story here. Apparently some time late in the 60s or early 70s Paul Schraeder and Martin Scorsese were at a screening of Bresson’s film, *Diary of a Country Priest*. Gradually everybody else left except them. This is where they met and the film so influenced them that they developed a whole new way of making films and worked together on many significant projects. So while there were only two “bums on seats” at the

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to suggest that there could not be a 5 rated game or panel show. In fact one might argue that *The Chasers War on Everything* has level 5 quality. One might also argue that the original *Big Brother* was a 5 level quality show in terms of introducing a new form.

<sup>3</sup> Griffith University, Brisbane, and month, 2007

end of that screening of the film, Bresson's work was hugely impactful because of who his film influenced.

We could also talk here of Errol Morris's film *The Thin Blue Line*. This documentary influenced the courts such that the man convicted of murder was re-tried and acquitted. So here we could talk of the film's impact. Of course in the case of this film we could also argue for its quality because it introduced and made popular a form of highly artistic re-enactment that also had the effect of making "obvious" truths seem doubtful. It ushered in a whole new period and new aesthetics for documentary that is a testament to its innovation and extension of the field today.

### The Criteria for Impact

The Criteria for impact can be thought of in three ways.

1. Absolute quantity of viewers, also known as "bums on seats", "hits" on the internet and sales figures for DVDs and the like.
2. Indirect impact. Here we are talking about evidence that the work influenced policy, brought about cultural shifts or had influence on other practitioners in that field or other fields.<sup>4</sup>
3. Direct impact. Where a screenwork changes policy or makes a difference to the way things are done either in the screenwork making field or in the wider general community.

For example here I have argued that my film *Our Park* has had indirect impact because it is screened to park staff at Leichhardt Council as part of their training. Of course in order to prove that, I would need a letter from a council staffer to say that indeed they did screen it to new staff.

Not all screenworks might qualify for impact in all the three ways above, but all could try to evidence claims for impact in those areas.

Impact should be evidenced using the three criteria above and then arguing for how major or minor the impact is. More major impact would

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<sup>4</sup> Note that his last influence is also rather like the quality measures, but this shows how both impact and quality can cross over. Something of quality often has impact on its field of production.

be at an International or national level, and more minor impact would be at a local or minor level. However even work that is very local might be able to argue intensity of impact. Note that DEST wants the top two levels to include the idea of international standing of some sort.

Evidencing impact will be time-consuming but not impossible.

Below is the Rating Scale for impact from “The RQF: The Recommended Model”. I have not amended it. The amendment I would suggest for our case is merely replacing “Adoption of the research” with “The Screenwork” or “The Exhibition of the Screenwork”. Again italics indicate that these are DEST words, not mine.

Table 2: THE RATING SCALE FOR RESEARCH IMPACT

Rating	Descriptor
1	<i>Adoption of the research has produced an outstanding social, economic, environmental and/or cultural benefit for the wider community, regionally within Australia, nationally or internationally</i>
2	<i>Adoption of the research has produced a significant social, economic, environmental and/or cultural benefit for the wider community, regionally within Australia, nationally or internationally</i>
3	<i>Research has been adopted to produce new policies, products, attitudes, behaviours and/or outlooks in the end user community</i>
4	<i>Research has engaged the end user community to address a social, economic, environmental and/or cultural issue regionally within Australia, nationally or internationally</i>
5	<i>Research has limited or no identifiable social, economic, environmental and/or cultural outcome, regionally within Australia, nationally or internationally</i>

Again it would be possible for us to provide Panel 13 with a list of most impactful to least impactful screening, television and internet outlets, but I'm not sure if there is any point in this since individual researchers will have to do that anyway when they submit portfolios to Panel 13. But I think there would be some point in providing Panel 13 with a list of the significance of the various audiences for the work. Where a U TUBE video may get a lot of hits it may not be as significant in terms of impact as work screened in a museum, gallery or film festival or a curated internet site. This is another case of where quality and impact cross over.

### What should ASPERA do?

I suggest the following:-

1. Amend this paper and circulate to the other tertiary creative areas for input – and then Gill to rewrite as a paper for the all the creative areas (If possible) – then submit to DEST
2. Set up an annual ASPERA awards open to Screen Production lecturers and Research Degree students.
3. Invite tertiary staff and research students to submit works for awards and or peer review by ASPERA. We should do this soon.
4. Provide a list to Panel 13 of festivals and awards and conferences and rank them in terms of quality – 1 – 5
5. Help the formation of research strengths for screenwork makers in universities and assist each other in presenting portfolios to Panel 13.
6. Lobby DEST to include AFC, FFC the Australia Council and State film Bodies funding as competitive sources of funding. From my reading it seems that the only sort they consider is DEST funding or international peer reviewed funding.

DRAFT 2.1 25/6/07

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