

## **Creative Research and Workload Allocations**

An ongoing and active research profile now contributes directly to our workload. This agenda item is concerned particularly with creative i.e. non traditional forms of research. I am conscious that some of the issues raised in section 2 are complex.

There are three areas of concern:

1. How we map timelines for creative research projects in comparison with more normative approaches such as social science models of research,
2. How assessment criteria and assessment practices function in relation to translating creative research projects into workload “allocations”,
3. How the criterion “calibrated for quality” (see Workload Policy 2009, p 3 *passim*) is determined in the matrix of DEST, ERA and other factors.

### **1. Mapping of Creative Research Projects**

In the current round of data collection, there was no obvious set of guidelines made available which might have indicated how to describe past, present and ongoing research projects. The determination of allocations seems to be based on a proven record of achievements e.g. actual publications, broadcasts, exhibitions, film festival showings etc. As it was explained to me, the overall assessment “is a matter of judgement”. Traditional research activities, however, do not require the same level of flexible judgement as to their status and their assessment does not place such an exclusive stress on outcome. Rather, their assessment allows into consideration elements to do with evolving process, research activity, ongoing limited objectives and outcomes, assemblage of data, accompanying activities such as colloquia, conference visits, networking, planning etc. These are measured over a period of several months to much longer periods such as five years (or more.)

A concern is that Creative Practices academics are being asked to accept an allocation in relation to singular objects (a book, a performance, a broadcast etc) in relation to a single year. The production of that singular object may well have taken between several months and five years to produce (or more). Its research process and graduated goal achievement process may have been the equivalent of a senior ARC fellowship over several years.

The risk is not just that we are asked to trade significant long-arrived at achievement for a single allocation. This is an important matter certainly. The more difficult risk is to do with how to map evolving and future projects - which may well substantially contribute to future projects in future years and, therefore, to future allocations.

No traditional researcher (e.g. a researcher or research team engaged in wide scale, long term clinical research which leads to a single paper in *The Lancet*) would accept a valuation of his/her research as a single DEST paper accomplished in a few weeks. We are being asked to accept the equivalent, or worse. For example, a page long poem published in the *London Review of Books* (equivalent to *The Lancet*) is deemed to be only accountable in DEST terms (which are minimal) and

then has to be re-estimated on that basis in terms of a judgement in relation to one year's allocations.

## **2. Assessment Criteria and Assessment Practices**

The good will and the exploratory confusion in terms of the evaluation of creative work in the merged Faculty is appreciated.

A set of questions, however, remains for colleagues in Creative Practices to consider:

1. Within the current Workloads Document, how are DEST-worthy items evaluated in relation to the overall weighing of multiple factors in the context of the policy of 4+1 allocations?

### *Example*

To take an example: the current document requires from a Lecturer C a minimum of 6 DEST points over three years. (Each appointment grade has an appropriately graded quantity.)

In this context, a record of refereed journal publications adding up to 6 DEST points presents no problems in terms of making the assessment.

But if, for example, over the three years you have achieved 4 DEST points (traditional research, refereed or credibly published over three years) how is the remaining balance quantified? In terms of the balance (2 DEST points) are single works counted as single points? Is a general judgement applied without specifying this or that item individually?

Let us assume that this is the case and an overall "good will" generalised estimation is applied. If so, what happens when we come to apply this practice to another appointment level? Take the case of the level D professor? Is a Level D professor (who, for example, has generated less than the minimum requirements of required 8 DEST points and less than \$20,000 research income) expected to have produced *more* non-DEST works than a Senior Lecturer? and how is this measured? and in relation to what non-traditional research activities?

Among all these questions, there is also the danger (once again) that a single significant achievement (a film which took several years to develop) will be counted as a single counter-balance to the required matching DEST points. And that it will be counted in a single year as a single value. This is in distinction to the medical researcher who produces a single 2000 words paper and whose research is counted as ongoing and major over several years.

2. How do creative practitioners propose projects into the future, and do so in ways which define ongoing potential achievements?

### *Example*

- A traditional research project will map a series of research activities, minor goals and major goals, and a documentation process. Probably shared among several participants who have differing levels of engagement, this project will be predicted into the future (1 or 2 or 3+ years etc). There will be an expectation that most but not all the research activities (experiments) are conducted and that significant findings result. Significant findings may also include inconclusive results. Results are

published and responded to and the project is evaluated. The funding for the whole project (NB funding directly applicable to DEST and workload criteria) is offered at the start of the project. By Australia Council standards this funding is colossal i.e. easily more than the Professor's required \$20,000.

- In comparison: a novelist plans her next work. She is planning it as she is in fact finishing her current book. Through the first year she drafts and rejects several sketches which take months to write. In year 2 she applies for an individual project grant from the Australia Council (\$15,000). She continues to write the draft. In year 3 the grant comes through and she can complete a significant portion of the forthcoming book. In year 3 a publisher agrees to publish it but not until sometime in year 5. In year 4 she completes the draft and composes a magnificent book.

It is easy to see how the traditional project which is funded at its inception fits into the planning process of DEST points and allocations. It is less clear that ERA benefits the novelist other than "after the event" e.g. on publication. But this difference in how the traditional researcher and the creative researcher can engage in time line planning impacts directly on workload allocations. The traditional researcher can claim the research activity on an ongoing basis, even with inconclusive results. How does the novelist do the same?

### **3. Calibration for Quality**

The intention of the phrase "calibrated for quality" is well taken. The assumption that there is a difference between journey work and calibre is arguably incontestable. But as soon as we think about the contexts in which Creative Practices academics actually work, discrepancies will start to occur. To take a single example: How is a good edited book calibrated against a good individually authored work? (The first is commissioned, already commercialised, likely to succeed, sells, then dies within a few months, the second is not commissioned, gains publication, is open to the vagaries of review, and in fact is a real contribution which evolves in critical debate over a decade.) The flexibility of the comparative issue is all too obvious. What happens when we extend the question of calibre across very different sorts of activity e.g. external engagement activities in comparison with the writing and shooting of a movie? Clearly the questions are complex and not for an agenda item. Unfortunately, however, this question of calibration will work out as a real impact on real outcomes in Creative Practices colleagues' working lives at UTS.

Lastly, in this matter of calibration, who is to make the call? There may be a general climate of good will, but in real terms it requires specialist knowledge and expertise to assess the status of creative research contributions. To be excited by and respectful towards the work of one's colleagues is a good thing. But the capacity to position such work in its field, and to have enough reading and research across an unfamiliar field of activity in order to be able to do so, cannot be taken for granted.

Items for discussion:

. How do we map our evolving projects into the future in a manner consistent within the allocations system?

. How do we calibrate the non-traditional elements of our work in relation to a) the traditional assessments and b) the overall judgement negotiated within Faculty processes? MH