Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre

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The challenges of supervision of a doctorate in practice-based research in music: perceptions of students and supervisors

Abstract:

This paper interrogates the process of supervising a practice-based doctoral program in music. To date, there have been no studies documenting this process in music. As the first study of this type, the nature of supervision in relation to practice-based research in music is investigated through the eyes of students and supervisors. The paper highlights the significant challenges of supervising the practice-based degree but also reveals many positive outcomes for both students and supervisors working in this field.

Issues discussed include the encouragement of innovative research methods and forms of presentation along with the challenges of supervising cross-disciplinary work. Drawing on data from students at the site, the relationship between coursework, artistic practice and more 'traditional' modes of supervision is examined. Students also reflect on supervisors' involvement in defining the scope of the study, maintaining work-life balance and managing this type of study from a distance. Other themes emerging from the students include shaping the end-product of practice-based research and supervisor advice concerning the examination process. Similarly, academics' perspectives of the supervisory process are presented. These include balancing the needs of students who have considerable practical experience in their field with the necessary understanding of institutional imperatives. Locating suitable exemplars, supervisor wellbeing and the supervision of colleagues are also discussed.

Biographical note:

Scott Harrison lectures in music and music education at Griffith University. He is a graduate of Queensland Conservatorium and Queensland University. After more than twenty years teaching singing and music in schools, he now co-ordinates research higher degrees within Queensland Conservatorium and convenes the Master of Music program. He leads the Music Education and Training strand of Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre. Scott has recently published in the fields of masculinities and music and teacher identity. An accomplished singer, Scott has sung roles with major Australian companies and conducted choral and music theatre

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Stephen Emmerson studied music at Queensland University where he graduated in 1980 with first class honours and a University medal. In 1981 he took up a Commonwealth Scholarship to study at New College, Oxford and graduated with a M.Phil in Music in 1983 and a D.Phil from Oxford University in 1989. He has been on the staff of the Queensland Conservatorium since 1987 where he teaches a range of subjects. He has performed nationally and internationally both as soloist and with a variety of chamber ensembles. His recordings in collaboration with a variety of performers have been released by ABC Classics, Move Records, The Anthology of Australian Music on Disc, CPO and Contact. He convenes the Doctor of Musical Arts at Queensland Conservatorium and leads the Artistic Practice as Research strand of Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre.

Introduction and context

This paper interrogates the process of supervising a practice-based doctoral program in music. Through the eyes of students and supervisors, the nature of supervision in relation to practice-based research in music is investigated. The paper highlights the significant challenges of supervising the practice-based degree but also reveals the positive outcomes for both students and supervisors working in this field. The research was conducted at Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU), a major tertiary provider of higher education in the creative and performing arts in Australia. The tertiary population of nearly 700 includes domestic and international students. The number of those engaged in postgraduate research has increased substantially over recent years with over 50 research higher degree (RHD) students enrolled in 2008. This growth was stimulated by the establishment of the Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre in 2003 and, a short time later, the launch of the Doctor of Musical Arts (DMA) program where music professionals (with at least five years experience in the field) were able to gain a doctoral degree based on research into their professional practice. Four specialisations are offered within this program: performance, technology, composition, and teaching and learning. In addition, students enrolled in traditional RHDs (Master of Music, Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy) also have the opportunity to engage with some forms of practice-based research.

The basis for the study reported here has its foundation in the relatively recent phenomenon of practice-based research within the tertiary music school. As Schippers notes:

> a conservatoire is one of the greatest resources for research in music. Musicians in the process of learning, teaching, performing and creating music provide a unique opportunity to study the essence of the art. That which flashes before our ears in performance as the end-result of complex physiological, technical, conceptual, aesthetic and social processes is laid out in all of its component parts in the learning process at a conservatoire, as *musical practice in slow-motion*. That is a promising basis for renewed dialogues on widening perceptions and formats of academic rigour and artistic practice. (2007: 34)

Gabrielsonn also encourages the interrogation of musical practice, classifying four potential modes of inquiry:

> Music performance should be studied as much as possible: (a) in musically relevant contexts to ensure ecological validity; (b) in relation to performers' intentions, and listeners' experiences and reactions; (c) both as process and product; and (d) considering that performances are (should be) aesthetic objects. (2003: 258)

This recent literature points to the need for institutions to provide programs through which these modes of enquiry can be pursued.

DMA candidates at the QCGU have the opportunity to interrogate their own practice as performers, teachers, composers or within the field of music technology. (In reality, in most cases their professional practice cuts across more than one of these boundaries.) Each student is appointed two supervisors, usually from within the full-

time or fractional staff at the conservatorium. They are encouraged to present findings in non-traditional formats such as a websites or via other digital media where written text can be integrated with audio and video recording. Research submissions may be in the form of a portfolio where, in addition to the written component, combinations of performances or recordings and other forms of creative work can be included. The balance of separate components is not stipulated and the written exegesis does not necessarily form the majority of the submission. Students propose the components and their relative weighting for approval at their confirmation (usually after one year of full-time study).

The flexibility of this situation presents substantial risks for both student and supervisors in these uncharted waters: the degree of flexibility has been perceived by some as more a challenge to negotiate than an opportunity for new ground to be explored. The shortage of available models or templates in presenting doctoral work in this field causes further insecurity, though Emmerson's *Around a rondo* (2007) provides a model for documenting on DVD and DVDRom the process of interpretation behind a performance. Often the most useful models come from fields outside music, such as nursing or design (Marshall & Newton 2000). Nursing, for example, has come from a tradition of practice-based training, with a relatively short history in the academy. Models from this discipline are therefore readily adaptable for other practice-based areas of endeavour. As Hockey and Allen-Collinson suggest:

> in an area where research is traditional it's easy to say 'look here's a good model. How can I adapt that for myself?'. With our area, those models are not really around at the moment, so I'm busy nicking proposals from people in other areas, and then trying to use my imagination, and saying to the student 'look you can adapt this'. (2002: 348)

Students engaging in the research culture at QCGU come from diverse backgrounds. While some have followed a traditional academic path to a research higher degree, a large number of candidates in the DMA program are admitted on the basis of substantial professional experience, as leading practitioners in their field but often with little recent academic experience. To cater for this cohort, the DMA has a number of coursework units that supplement their more traditional style of supervision. These courses develop skills and awareness in research methods and design, digital technologies, as well as the aural and written presentation of their research. Delivery of the courses is typically over one weekend each semester in 'intensive mode', as the professional practice of many candidates does not permit attendance at regular weekly classes. Moreover, of the eighteen DMA students in 2008, a number are completing the program from a distance: three from interstate and one from Singapore.

Phelps et al (2005) claim that, as the sector has traditionally valued professional experience over academic qualification, the demand for such programs has therefore been growing at a surprising rate in both Australia and Europe. Moreover, there has been pressure from within many institutions for their staff to upgrade their qualifications. This has resulted in a situation where supervisors and students are also colleagues within the academic or professional music-making settings. A significant number of those doing practice-based doctorates are currently employed as staff at the

conservatorium, that is, four DMA candidates and one PhD student who is undertaking primarily practice-based research.

Challenges and issues

The nature of such a practice-based research program presents significant and specific challenges for both students and supervisors. Many of these will be common in other discipline and institutional contexts. Hockey and Allen-Collinson found several generic problems associated with doctoral supervision, including 'balancing pastoral and intellectual support; co-ordinating supervisory teams; and the selection and formulation of overall supervisory strategies' (2002: 345). Furthermore, at QCGU as elsewhere, staffing levels have not matched the growth of research culture and existing supervisory strengths are tested by the nature of the cohort and the range of projects being undertaken. Leder comments on the pressures on human resources and the practice of 'inexperienced personnel being drafted prematurely' (1995: 7). This is not a new problem, and partially a symptom of the combining of universities and stand-alone creative arts institutions in the early 1990s. As Shannon notes:

> safety nets, of varying strength, are needed particularly in newer universities and emerging fields of study where the pool of experienced supervisors is limited and changing supervisor in midstream may not be feasible. Without guidelines and a framework for operation, however, candidates can be at the whim of academic idiosyncrasies. (1995: 13)

The QCGU practice of assigning two supervisors, which at times may be supplemented by an external third supervisor, does go some way to alleviate such concerns.

The nature of the student cohort within practice-based research programs presents significant and specific supervisory challenges. As many students are working professionals, often with little recent experience of academic life, supervisors are required to assist them in negotiating the academic terrain as they (the students) maintain a demanding professional career and hopefully a satisfactory, if not always healthy, work-life-study balance. Managing appropriate student contact time with supervisors is a related issue. Supervisors at QCGU are allocated time in their workload for supervision at the rate of 45 minutes per week of semester as principal supervisor for doctoral research and 30 minutes for an associate supervisor. In reality, contact with research students cannot be so neatly prescribed, and supervision does not only occur during teaching terms. Certainly there are weeks when less time is required, although there are also periods where the time required to read work and give detailed feedback greatly exceeds the amounts allocated. Most supervisors willingly accept this to be the case. However, particularly with students who are unaccustomed to an academic environment, there seems at times an expectation from some students that they can have unlimited access to their supervisor's time and attention. Despite all students being informed clearly of what contact time can be expected, anecdotal evidence suggests that negotiating such boundaries with some students has been an issue for several supervisors at QCGU. Beyond face-to-face

contact, this situation is exacerbated by the ease with which supervisors may be overloaded with email correspondence from students. Email is obviously a valuable way of communicating, especially for those students taking the program from a distance or even local candidates who may rarely be on campus (Dutton, Dutton & Perry 2001). The extent to which supervision should rely on email as the primary means of supervision was a matter that this study endeavours to explore.

Practice-based research, like many other forms of qualitative research, is frequently cross-disciplinary (Parncutt & McPherson 2002) and a significant number of research projects at QCGU cross into areas beyond music. Examples of subject areas within these projects include music and physiotherapy, music and linguistics, music and psychology, music and digital arts, music and criminology, and music and sociology. Many of the research topics cross between sub-disciplines within music such as performance and improvisation and composition, or performance and teaching, performance and musicology or performance and music technology. While awareness of concepts, methods and literature from other disciplines and sub-disciplines can add valuable dimensions to the research project, it is often not realistic for either supervisors or students to attain a high level of expertise in more than one of these. As such, the inherent dangers and insecurities of cross-disciplinary work could lead to stress for both supervisors and students: this project seeks to interrogate the nature of this stress.

Beyond such pressures, there are other factors that bear specifically on the supervision of practice-based research. As Candlin notes, the innovative programs and paradigms associated with practice-based research can lead to significant levels of stress and anxiety for those involved:

> Anxiety is endemic to doctoral study; abnormally balanced or overly arrogant candidates aside, virtually everyone suffers from it … Like any other PhD, practice-based PhDs are also the focus of much anxiety but, significantly, those anxieties reach beyond personal doubt and are often shared by supervisors, examiners and senior academic management. Here, I argue that the anxiety concerning practice-based PhDs should not be lightly dismissed because it is a product of the institutional relations practice-based doctorates put into place. At least in the short-term anxiety is structured into the qualification. (2000: 1)

This project seeks to unpack some of the concerns raised in the literature from student and supervisor perspectives.

The study

These, and related, issues were explored through the collection and analysis of data from students and supervisors in QCGU's RHD programs. Beyond generic supervision concerns, the project aimed to interrogate specifically those related to the nature of practice-based research in music in this context. The data comprised quantitative and qualitative elements using both questionnaire and focus group as the data collection methods. The questionnaires sought to tease out the perceived issues and challenges involved in supervision within a practice-based doctoral research

program, and provided both quantitative and qualitative material. These challenges were then extended and unpacked further in a focus group of supervisors, supplying further qualitative data.

A questionnaire was distributed to doctoral students whose projects incorporated a practice-based component. To maintain anonymity for students, the survey was distributed through an independent party, in this case the research assistant who manages QCGU's research centre. The questionnaire was also stripped of identifiers prior to forwarding to the research team for analysis. A similar questionnaire was administered to supervisors of practice-based RHDs, with similar lines of questioning employed to facilitate the comparison of data. Differences were that students were asked how much of their programs were practice-based and whether they were internal or distance students. Supervisors were asked how many students they supervised. Other demographic data was not collected, as this was not considered relevant given the size of the cohort. The responses to the questionnaires can be seen in Tables 1 and 2 below.

The supervisors also participated in a focus group immediately after responding to the questionnaire, in order to provide an opportunity to explore the issues raised by their answers to the questionnaire. While questionnaire respondents remained anonymous, the focus group was scheduled as part of the regular meetings of RHD supervisors and formed a component of the university's ongoing program of professional development and evaluation. Although there was an opportunity for supervisors to excuse themselves from the focus group if they felt uncomfortable with the research process, none took this option. The focus group was recorded on video and later transcribed. After transcription, the video was erased. There was no overlap between the student and supervisor cohorts. In other words, no supervisors were also students.

The project was designed to enable the attitudes and perceptions of students and supervisors to be compared. It elicited some general attitudes regarding being involved with such a program, and towards innovative research approaches, as well as comments relating to specific issues regarding supervision from distance, supervision using email, and the supervision of colleagues. Supervisor confidence and perceived stresses involved were also interrogated, as well as questions of work-life balance. Eighteen questions were devised to address these matters. In addition, participants were provided with an opportunity to raise other concerns and to also prioritise those of most interest to them. Participants were asked, for example, for open-ended comments about any aspect of the supervisory process and to rank the three most important issues for them as students or supervisors.

Students' responses

The questionnaire was sent by email to twenty-two doctoral students, which included eighteen DMA students and four PhD students whose research was significantly practice-based. Ten of these, including one PhD student, participated in the study and their responses are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses from students

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am pleased to be studying in an academic environment that is exploring the potential of practice-based research in music.	1			3	6
Undertaking practice-based music research presents more challenges than a traditional PhD in music.			5	3	2
I welcome the challenges of engaging in practice-based music research.	1			3	6
My supervisor encourages me to embrace new innovative research approaches and forms of submission.	1	1		8	
I think that new innovative research methods/approaches involve a considerable risk for students and that more traditional research paradigms are safer.		3	5	2	
I believe that the research higher degree offerings at QCGU have the flexibility to cater for a range of innovative projects.				9	1
I am satisfied with the level of supervision I receive in the practice-based aspects of my research.		2	2	5	1
My supervisor is able to advise me in relation to work-life balance.		4	3	2	1
I feel confident my supervision arrangement caters for cross-disciplinary work.		2	2	6	
I feel my supervision is adequate in research areas that are outside my areas of expertise.			6	3	1
I appreciate the possibility of supervisory support from areas outside of music.		2	3	4	1
I find it a major challenge balancing my practical experience with the necessary understanding of the institutional imperatives inherent in the academic environment.	1	2	3	3	1
Managing the appropriate contact time with my supervisor has been an issue.	2	3	2	2	1
Much of the supervision of practice-based RHD research students can be done via email.	1	3	2	2	2
Supervision from a distance significantly raises the challenges involved.		1		2	2
I feel comfortable and confident being supervised by my professional colleagues in practice-based research.			5	4	1
I find undertaking a practice-based research higher degree stressful.	1	2	4	3	
I feel confident my supervisor/s have the necessary training to guide me through my degree.			2	5	3

It is clear that most students welcomed the opportunity to engage in practice-based research and to embrace innovative approaches, and felt encouraged in this by their supervisors. The challenges of practice-based research were, however, perceived to be more significant than traditional research paradigms. On the whole, most were satisfied with the level of supervision of their practice-based research as well as any cross-disciplinary elements, although fewer were satisfied with the guidance on work-life balance. Responses to the question of balancing practical experience with the imperatives of an academic environment were divided almost equally between positive and negative. For obvious reasons, not all responded to the question regarding supervision from distance with four of the five agreeing – two of them strongly – that this raised the level of challenge significantly. On the other hand, that one of the five felt it did not do so is, in itself, worthy of note. Again, opinion was divided on the question of whether a significant percentage of the supervision could be carried out via email. Clearly, the issue of managing the appropriate contact time with the supervisor was significant for many, with half of the sample answering that this was the case. Students largely perceived that the supervisors were trained sufficiently to undertake their role and supervision by professional colleagues was not perceived as an issue. It was interesting to note that only three of the ten students claimed to find the process of undertaking the program stressful.

In addition to the questionnaire, students were also asked to consider the three most significant challenges in undertaking a practice-based research higher degree. They were informed that these could include issues raised in the questionnaire or other matters of concern. Themes were derived from these responses and divided into four categories: project scope and nature; time management and work-life balance; balancing the formal academic and practice-based elements of the degree; and issues around the project's end product.

Seven students commented on the difficulties of defining the scope of a practice-based research project. Typical comments in this category included:

> Setting reasonable, appropriate boundaries on research [topics] is difficult. Being so open-ended, this needs to be constantly considered and reassessed.

Another related this specifically to music:

> Defining how the research contributes to new knowledge is tricky in practice-based music research, as reception of music is difficult to quantify.

A major concern for students related to the timing of different stages of the research, and the support available from the supervisor/s to assist in the management of these stages. Nine students referred to either time management in their interaction with their supervisor/s or other aspects of their (working) professional lives, or maintaining a balance with life, family and recreation as a major concern. Indicative comments included the response that 'Practice-based research demands more time than other approaches'. Six students commented, moreover, that maintaining a sense of equilibrium between the practice-based components and traditional academic expectations was a significant issue. Student responses indicated an understanding that institutional requirements are favoured over practice-based elements, and that

supervisors need to take more responsibility in championing the value of practice-based work. For instance:

> I think practice-based research has a closer connection to our everyday lives and therefore can often answer that question better than studies where it is not incorporated. The supervisor becomes crucial in keeping the student to workable boundaries and adapting the ideas to meet academic criteria.

Another example stated that:

> There seems to have been a lot of assumed knowledge – such as university protocol, etc – that is not necessarily known by those outside the faculty. Perhaps supervisors could help in this area.

A practical suggestion regarding implementing this process came from a student who advised blending practical and academic requirements:

> Practice-based research should be 'research based on the practice', and not 'practice based on the research'. I think it is being taken a bit for granted that the student has an abundant interest in the topic proposed, enough to survive the demands of academic rigor … What a supervisor should then do, ideally, is to help the student adapt the reflections and findings of his/her practice to an academic framework, not try to adapt the actual practice so it fits a given academic model.

For other students, the problem went somewhat deeper. The question of practice-based 'thinking' as opposed to academic processes was clear in a remark that noted the difficulty of 'trying to adapt practice-based thinking into previously existing, formal academic moulds. I don't think there is 100% compatibility there yet'. The balance of traditional academic protocols and practice-based paradigms was also raised in relation to the thesis. Five students expressed concerns about supervisors' advice on the format of the final product, especially when supervisors trained in more traditional formats were advising students on aspects of the composition of the final practice-based submission. Comments reflecting this included those that expressed anxieties regarding 'Understanding the diversity allowed for the "final product"', and locating 'Agreement on formats and most propitious ways of achieving best practice/methodologies early in the degree, including support for performances and technology'. As the degree is still in its infancy (the first student only graduating in 2009), the issue of the nature of final products remains contentious. It will only be as supervisors gain more experience and the resulting work from their supervision is assessed by the broader academic community that the diversity of the final product will be tested and honed.

Two further themes were identified in a small number of responses: the process of undertaking the degree from a distance, and assessment. Two students commented on the effect that distance education had on the supervisory relationship and their own inclusion in the research community: 'As a distance student, getting within the radar of the supervisor consistently so that responses are timely and, by being timely, still relevant', and '[preparing the final product] is very difficult to manage from a distance and can be very isolating, especially as the submission date looms'. Three respondents discussed the examination of the project, with one student concerned

regarding a potential mismatch between supervisor and examiner, asking, 'What if your examiner thinks in an entirely different way from what you and your supervisor have worked through?' Interestingly, two remaining comments about assessment provided some possible solutions to this potential dilemma. Both related to a corporate understanding of assessment criteria and the nature of practice-based research. The first felt that:

> [The supervisor needs to be responsible for] clearly communicated and specific examination criteria as well as ensuring the assessors are both knowledgeable of, and sympathetic to, the research style and content.

The second felt that:

> One of the most significant challenges in the end is trusting that [the supervisor will recommend] external assessors who will also understand what 'Practice Based Research' is. It could have disastrous consequences for a candidate if an external assessor is only accustomed to reviewing traditional PhD theses and fails to recognise that a practitioner's thesis must also have industry relevance and therefore may not appear in the same form as a traditional PhD.

In summary, students noted that the supervisory role should embrace aspects of advice on overall scope of the project, particularly in relation to the manageability of the practical and academic components within the timeframe. Practice-based research requires supervisors with extensive skills in both academic and practical domains and some knowledge of acceptable alternative formats for the final presentation of the project.

Supervisors' responses

The questionnaire was provided (in person) to participating supervisors. The focus group involved the same group and attempted to build on their responses to the questionnaire. The responses are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Responses from supervisors

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I am pleased to be working in an academic environment that is exploring the potential of practice-based research in music.				2	9
Supervising practice-based music research presents more challenges than a traditional PhD in music.			4	4	3
I welcome the challenges of supervising practice-based music research.			1	6	4
I encourage the students I supervise to embrace new innovative research approaches and forms of submission.			3	4	4
I think that new innovative research methods/approaches involve a considerable risk for students and that more traditional research paradigms are safer.		1	1	4	5
I believe that the research higher degree offerings at QCGU have the flexibility to cater for a range of innovative projects.		1	1	4	5
I am less comfortable supervising a practice-based research than a traditional PhD.		2	5	4	
I am comfortable advising students in relation to work-life balance.		3	3	5	
I feel confident to supervise cross-disciplinary work.		3	2	3	3
I feel obliged to supervise in research areas that are outside my areas of expertise. *			1	6	2
I appreciate the possibility of supervisory support from areas outside of music.			1	8	2
A major challenge is balancing the student's practical experience with the necessary understanding of the institutional imperatives inherent in the academic environment.		1	2	6	2
Managing the appropriate contact time with practice-based RHD students has been an issue with one or more of the students I supervise.		3	3	3	2
Much of the supervision of practice-based RHD students can be done via email.	2	7	2		
Supervision from a distance of off-campus students significantly raises the challenges involved. *				6	3
I feel comfortable and confident supervising my professional colleagues in practice-based research.		3	3	3	2
I find the responsibility of supervising practice-based research higher degree students stressful.	1	3	4	3	
I feel I have had sufficient training for my role as a research higher degree supervisor.	1	1	3	4	2

* Supervisors did not necessarily answer all questions.

Conclusions from the quantitative data

The data shows that all supervisors welcomed the opportunity to engage in the supervision of practice-based work, even though most found such work more challenging than the supervision of traditional research and felt less comfortable in the role. Most claimed to embrace this challenge and to encourage their students to adopt innovative approaches, although all but one felt that undertaking this type of work involved a considerable risk for students. Responses were divided in relation to providing guidance on work-life balance, as on their confidence levels in supervising cross-disciplinary work. Almost all acknowledged the obligation supervisors felt to supervise research topics outside their areas of expertise, as well as how much the opportunity for support from outside the field of music was appreciated. With only one exception, the challenge of balancing the student's practical/professional experience with the imperatives inherent in the academic environment was recognised as a significant issue. Managing the appropriate contact time with students was an issue for some, and there was significant agreement that the supervision of practice-based candidates could not be undertaken mostly via email. All agreed, furthermore, that supervision from a distance was an issue of concern overall. There was a spread of responses in relation to the supervision of colleagues, with half the respondents expressing some concern over this situation. Despite the challenges identified, however, only two respondents agreed that they found the supervision of practice-based research projects and candidates a stressful experience. While a full range of responses was tendered in relation to training, this was weighted towards an agreement that training was sufficient.

The supervisors' questionnaire also asked staff to consider their perception of the three most significant challenges in the supervision of practice-based RHD students. There was a range of recurring themes derived from these responses. These included: the lack of established research methodologies and innovative models for submission; the balance of academic and professional life; development of initial topics into full-blown proposals; and the availability of assessors and supervisor experience. The focus group provided an opportunity for supervisors to elaborate on their written responses to this question. Four clear themes emerged from the focus group: formats and exemplars; supervisor expertise; the supervision of colleagues; and supervisor wellbeing.

Specific issues of practice-based research were addressed by ten of the eleven supervisors in the focus group. The lack of exemplars in the practice-based arena was viewed as a major challenge, with 'no trodden path for methodology and format' and 'many ways you can go about a research project and supervising students'. Eight supervisors commented at length on the nature of supervision where the research area did not align with their field of expertise. For some, this was problematic, while for others it was considered not only part of the job, but also an opportunity to learn:

> I don't have a problem supervising things outside my expertise because I expect to be informed, and it's a learning curve for me … So I guess that's an expectation I have as the supervisor.

Another noted that:

> Many students are outside our field of expertise. When you get into this level of research, especially practice-based (which I take to mean there's some sort of applied musical output or input from the students) it really requires quite a sympathetic ear and understanding of nuance…. when you get towards submission and it's more the performing of a project, I find it really different, the steering as a supervisor in an area I'm less familiar with.

Yet another noted that:

> In your major area … you go in and know how to communicate, how to interact, how to reinforce, how to probe, how to question in a dialogue with the student. But in a research situation that's outside my field, it's like you constantly have to switch on your brain, you've got to wait to find out if you've achieved your purpose.

Several participants referred to the complex nature of dealing with a student with experience in the profession and providing advice regarding balancing academic and practical work:

> When you have a student coming in with often extensive experience in the profession but without academic stuff, the obligation to show them the academic path is much stronger. We've got the course work which can contribute to that but that can't always provide what is needed.

Some supervisors noted an element of risk in the supervisory process, both from the perspective of student and supervisor:

> a lot of projects, I find, are really risky to actually back a student and to go 'let's try and do that, let's see if it's going to work' … it's exciting to be on that road but it's not safe at all, I find.

Others focused on the challenges:

> We negotiate our project together and that's what I find the most challenging part. It's actually standing up as a supervisor and being accountable for that innovation with the student … That's what I feel personally is the largest challenge, is taking that risk with the student as a supervisor, it's a huge step.

Supervisors had mixed experiences of working in a supervisory relationship with a colleague. Two supervisors were positive about the experience:

> so far no problems ... I think it's related to the workplace relationship as opposed to the supervisory relationship and I don't actually have huge issues with it.

Another added:

> I'm supervising colleagues who are technically senior to me but in general it's not a problem for me because I'm so accustomed to critiquing colleagues' work because I do a lot of co-writing and co-research with others. You have to be confident and give that critique. That comes from having worked with colleagues in other capacities and being used to that whole process of critiquing.

Two others were more cautious in their assessment of the experience:

> Sometimes there are colleagues who aren't even in the institution who you know may have performed there or you collaborated with in some way and you have to be extra cautious about the critique or the suggestion. With other students who aren't colleagues, you say, 'go away and do that'. The other side of the coin is that you actually do get to know one's colleagues and get a sense of what is important to them and share that with them and have time with them.

And:

> Particularly in practice-based work, so much of their identity is tied up with their particular creative work and their particular project and, you know, to be critical of that is extremely difficult. A further complication arises when you are faced with a defensive response.

For two supervisors, the stress of supervising colleagues was quite problematic, with comments such as: 'It wakes me up at four in the morning' and 'I find the negotiating and that much more stressful than I do for other aspects of my teaching'. In one case there was both anxiety and exhilaration in the experience, describing it as: 'very tiring and extremely exciting too to supervise … because you come across problems that I have never thought of in my life'.

The final significant theme to emerge from the supervisor discussion related to the individual supervisor's feelings of academic isolation. In this, supervisors welcomed the opportunity to discuss both the positive and the challenging aspects of supervision. Many noted that this project was the first opportunity they had been afforded to engage in reflection and co-operative problem-solving of supervision-related concerns. The project has provided the impetus for more regular meetings of supervisors in both formal and informal contexts. The formal meetings now take place on a monthly basis in term time, with focus areas for each meeting determined by group. A research higher degree convenor has also been appointed within the faculty with a view to maintaining coherence between supervisors' views of particular projects.

In summary, supervisors found the lack of established formats problematic when providing advice to students but welcomed the opportunity to work in the practice-based domain. Supervisors acknowledged a number of issues related to supervising students whose projects did not match their own skill set. Some found this challenging while others embraced this as an opportunity to further their own knowledge base. Supervising colleagues, while not problematic for many supervisors in this study, did present significant challenges for a number of participants in the focus group and was one of the major contributors to supervisor stress.

Comparison and conclusions

On most matters, students and supervisors in our study of supervision in practice-based research higher degrees in music were largely in agreement, although some differences may be noted. It was clear from responses to the questionnaires that both

students and supervisors welcomed the opportunity to be involved in exploring the potential of practice-based research. Similarly, both were undecided in relation to the proposition that practice-based music research presents more challenges than a traditional PhD in music. The challenges involved were welcomed by a large majority of respondents. However, although most supervisors believed they encouraged their students to embrace innovative research approaches and forms of submission, not all the students felt that this was the case. Supervisors acknowledged that new innovative research methods involved a considerably higher risk for students than traditional paradigms, though the students were more divided on this issue.

While supervisors and students alike acknowledged an issue around maintaining work-life balance, supervisors appreciated the possibility of supervisory support from outside music more strongly than did students. Surprisingly, the data suggests that supervisors were more concerned than students in the balancing of practical experience with academic imperatives: anecdotal evidence from students would suggest that they frequently have difficulty in this domain but the data from this investigation does not support this contention. Managing the appropriate contact time with the supervisors was an issue for both cohorts; however, supervisors felt more strongly than students that email was not an appropriate vehicle for effective supervision. The main comments on this issue related to the capacity of the student to engage in the research culture of the institution and the opportunity for misinterpreting email feedback. There was no significant concern regarding supervision between professional colleagues from either students or supervisors, nor was the training of supervisors perceived as a major issue. Both supervisors and students were divided in whether they perceived their involvement in such research projects to be stressful. The qualitative data, similarly, did not reveal major differences between the issues of concern for supervisors and students.

This is clearly a preliminary study with too small a sample to warrant further statistical analysis. While the results suggest that most of the issues raised are of real concern, within this cohort of students and supervisors, the levels of concern are not acute for the most part. Although the results did not reveal much that was unexpected by the researchers, it confirmed the significant challenges involved in this kind of research supervision. A student participant cast the journey in a positive light: 'practice-based research is the most fantastic, revelatory experience, and this student considers it an absolutely life-long pursuit', while a supervisor similarly noted that:

> supervising practice-led research is one of the most rewarding and exciting parts of my job. It forces us to rethink existing research paradigms and explore (even explicate) how musical practice contributes to the stock of human knowledge.

It is hoped that further research in this area will lead to a deeper understanding of how these issues have an impact on the supervision of practice-based research at doctoral level.

Endnotes

[1]   Examples of cross-disciplinary practice-based research projects at QCGU:
Music in advertising: corporate demands and the artistic process
Korean music education and Japanese colonial rule
Injury prevention and management for flautists
An interdisciplinary approach to defining the Beach Boys sound
How visual, auditory and kinaesthetic sense apply to the principles of beginner string teaching, and how this affects the learning styles of students
Building a digital library of French horn repertoire
Perceptions of playing-elated discomfort/pain among string students
The creative process and the impact of autistic spectrum disorder traits
The role of analogy and metaphor in the teaching of music to students from non-English speaking backgrounds

[2]   Examples of research topics of practice-based doctorates currently being undertaken at QCGU:
The extended flautist: techniques, technologies and performer perceptions in music for flute and electronics
Performance and electro-acoustic DSP techniques with pipe organ
Spatialisation in electro-acoustic music composition
Creating music and creating knowledge: new approaches to music, technology and research
The intersection of composition and improvisation in the development of music practice
Composition: an autobiographical research paradigm
Jazz composition and arranging: an investigation into the creative process
Stylistic synthesis in composition and improvisation for the classical guitar
The effectiveness and application of the accent breathing method and modern brass pedagogy
Education in contemporary voice: the development of multi-faceted media in the delivery of contemporary voice instruction
The pedagogue as continuous learner
Distinguishing the learning needs of the improvising jazz vocalist from the instrumental counterpart
Handel's tenors and his writing for the tenor voice

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