



2017 DEFSA NATIONAL CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

Three major developments have been occurring in the Fashion Education and Training landscape at Tertiary Institutions (and we speak here of primarily, of state institutions; but private universities are part of that landscape, also).

1. Pressure is being brought to bear on academic staff to publish research and enhance academic qualifications;
2. Many of the Fine Arts related disciplines are turning to Practice-Led Research (and related approaches) as a critically situated methodology for the enhancement of their qualifications and burgeoning publication record; in this way keeping a foot squarely in creative and design practice. Some design-related disciplines have moved in this direction, but the Fashion arena has tended to move towards Consumer Sciences type research and related methodologies for Masters and Doctoral work and for publication;
3. The government and DoE have released, some time ago, the final draft for comment of a white paper that acknowledges the recognition of artistic/creative (and design) outputs as “equivalent” to research outputs (as defined).

From these two developments, two major matters have to be considered:

1. If the Recognition of creative outputs is to take place in the Fashion departments, then the peer reviewing, report writing, assessment and adjudication will need to be done by members of other Fashion departments. How?
2. We suspect that there is limited clarity on:
 - a. what a Masters in Fashion looks like
 - b. how to use Practice-Led research as a methodology (or auto-ethnography)
 - c. what should be assessed
 - d. what extent professional practice is to be present in the “research practice”.

We cannot trace any doctorates in Fashion that have gone in this direction in South Africa, and yet it appears to us that it is critical to have shared vision on these matters and practices. After all, we are the ones that will be approached to supervise or promote, and we are the ones that need to assess. We need to stress that this is not about designing a new set of degrees but about working within accepted structures.

Given this, DEFSA have set up a one day round table workshop at the 2017 National Conference that will lead to shared/communal guidelines on these two issues.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE

Morning Session:

Roundtable on Masters and Doctorates using professional practice and Practice-led research, in Fashion.

Points for discussion:

1. The nature and scope of the practice
2. The interaction between professional competence and research competence in the practice (Should one call it a “research exhibition” rather than an “exhibition”, in fine arts parlance, for example?)
3. The difference (if any) between problem-solving and research problem-solving
4. The necessity or otherwise to integrate the practice into the research
5. The desired complexity (and format) in the written component
6. The relationship between credits/notional hours and the research/practice split
7. How all of this might differ between Masters and Doctoral expectations
8. etc.

Afternoon session:

The scope, assessment criteria and practice, and supporting documentation, of work submitted for review as creative outputs equivalent to research outputs.

The driving motivation for this session is that, whereas some universities already do acknowledge and process creative outputs as equivalent to research outputs, others do not, but in all cases it was an internal arrangement and internally funded. With the government white paper in its final stages, it seems right to be proactive in setting up expectations and strategies for Fashion scholars. Whereas the white paper provides fair guidelines, the guidelines do rely extensively on integrity and the ability of a discipline to set its own benchmarks that are commensurate to expectations of levels of complexity, contribution and the like.

It is our feeling, therefore, that the Fashion sector should have systems in place, should the white paper be activated, and, even if it were not, many universities acknowledge the contributions of artefacts and therefore our guidelines could be used, there, too.

Fundamentally, this session is geared towards sharing experiences and building a common frame for the compilation of an “acceptable” submission from Fashion for peer review, and the peer-review process (and reporting), within the guidelines of the white paper. Again, colleagues in the Fashion departments will be doing the submitting and the assessing and so it seems proper that they should come to a decision on what the procedure and criteria should look like.