

***SUPERVISION:***  
**INNOVATIONS IN DOCTORAL SUPERVISORY PRACTICE**  
**IN ART AND DESIGN**

**Carole Gray and Julian Malins**

Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland UK

[c.gray@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:c.gray@rgu.ac.uk)

[j.malins@rgu.ac.uk](mailto:j.malins@rgu.ac.uk)

in collaboration with

**Beryl Graham**

School of Arts, Design, Media and Culture, Sunderland University, UK

[beryl.graham@sunderland.ac.uk](mailto:beryl.graham@sunderland.ac.uk)

and

**Caroline Davey**

The Adelphi Research Institute for Creative Arts and Science, University of Salford, UK

[C.Davey@salford.ac.uk](mailto:C.Davey@salford.ac.uk)

***Abstract***

*This paper describes and evaluates recent and ongoing attempts to develop innovative responses to the growing need for high quality research student training and supervisory practices. Their importance has been acknowledged by a new scheme of funding from the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council – Collaborative Doctoral Research Training. Through the development of new networks the scheme aims to not only encourage the sharing of existing good practice but also to inspire imaginative new approaches to student learning and supervision.*

*Nine new networks in have been funded in Visual Arts and Media including one – SuperVision - co-ordinated by the authors. One of our tasks is to identify examples of good and/or innovative practice in doctoral supervision and student training. Starting close to home we have initially mapped our network's experimental schemes and ideas in development. For example: research student Exposition; Summer School for research students and supervisors; web based research training; research students working within major projects; new research resources e.g. Visualizing Research book and web site; and the mysterious and wonderfully titled Supervisor in a Box!*

*A wider search also provides evidence of other suitably imaginative mechanisms, processes and resources, as our sector characteristically flexes its creativity in responding to quality standard requirements and anticipating and speculating on future needs.*

## Introduction

‘The history of my supervision is so scary and abusive that I am sometimes at a loss for words trying to tell it to people.’  
Doctoral student, *Hard Lessons*, Guardian Education (9/9/2003)

Thankfully this quote is not from a student in the art and design sector and in comparison to doctoral research in more established academic sectors the instances of publicised problems appear to be few and far between. Professor John Wakeford has done more than most in raising the debate on the quality of doctoral supervision in the UK and collates a series of sorry tales, the worst leading to litigation.<sup>1</sup> However, as the number of research students in art and design expands, the demand for expert high quality supervision also increases. As Wakeford demonstrates, the costs of poor supervision, research training and an impoverished student experience can be very high, not only to the institution but also to the student and supervisors concerned.

The introduction of the UK Quality Assurance Agency’s *Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Programmes* in 2004 requires that each new postgraduate research student receives a ‘binding’ contract to provide the following: a team of trained supervisors for each student with defined workloads and responsibilities, an adequate research environment, a full induction, comprehensive skills training, monitoring and review procedures, progress reports, feedback mechanisms, assessment criteria and complaints and appeals procedures. In short a comprehensive infrastructure that encourages good practice and clarifies expectations within the student/supervisor relationship. The UK’s research councils have also published a research student ‘Skills Statement’<sup>2</sup> that provides ‘clear and consistent’ recommendations for research training across all disciplines.

Whilst such initiatives are welcomed they are nonetheless generic. In 2005 the Arts and Humanities Research Council’s (AHRC) working group on the *UK Doctorate in the Arts and Humanities*<sup>3</sup> will publish a study on how the demands and nature of the UK doctorate are changing, and a set of recommendations for how AHRC should respond to the findings with respect to future funding. The implications for future research training and supervisory practices in art and design will be important.

The challenge involves a delicate balance; on the one hand, an adherence to generic doctoral standards and criteria whilst on the other, attending to the specific needs of art and design research, especially that involving practice. The relative inexperience of the sector in providing robust yet subject specific research training e.g. the role of visual

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<sup>1</sup> Documented on [www.missendencecentre.co.uk/johnw.htm](http://www.missendencecentre.co.uk/johnw.htm) (accessed 28/4/05)

<sup>2</sup> [www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home\\_page/Universities/Policy/Joint\\_statement\\_of\\_skills\\_training\\_requirements/plegiklFf](http://www.grad.ac.uk/cms/ShowPage/Home_page/Universities/Policy/Joint_statement_of_skills_training_requirements/plegiklFf) (accessed 28/4/05)

<sup>3</sup> [www.ahrb.ac.uk/ahrb/website/university\\_staff/postgrad/working\\_group\\_on\\_the\\_uk\\_doctorate\\_in\\_the\\_arts\\_humanities.asp](http://www.ahrb.ac.uk/ahrb/website/university_staff/postgrad/working_group_on_the_uk_doctorate_in_the_arts_humanities.asp) (accessed 28/4/05)

evidence, and strategies for supervisory practice prompts us to consider fruitful collaborations.

## The Development of Collaborative Doctoral Research Training

To stimulate responses to this need a new scheme of funding from the UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council – *Collaborative Doctoral Research Training* (CDRT) was launched in 2004. Through the development of new networks the scheme aims to not only encourage the sharing of existing good practice but also to inspire imaginative new approaches to student learning and supervision. For these are two sides of the same coin; in all the examples described in the paper, both research training and supervisory practices are enmeshed in the shared effort of understanding and shaping the research process and the learning within it.

Nine new networks have been funded in Visual Arts and Media (2004-2006) including one – *SuperVision* - co-ordinated by Gray’s School of Art, working with The Adelphi Research Institute for Creative Arts and Science, University of Salford, and the School of Arts, Design, Media and Culture, Sunderland University<sup>4</sup>. Our network will also involve other experienced supervisors, and co-ordinators and members of the other CDRT’s are invited to our key events. This helps to extend and evaluate developments across a UK wide ‘super network’.



Figure 1 AHRC funded networks in Visual Arts and Media (2004-2006) – diagram in progress

<sup>4</sup> The collaboration involves experienced supervisors from: University of Sunderland – Brian Thompson, Beryl Graham and colleagues; University of Salford – Caroline Davey, Rachel Cooper (Director of the Adelphi Research Institute) and colleagues; Gray’s School of Art - Carole Gray, Julian Malins and colleagues.

## ***SuperVision Network - Visualizing Research programme***

The *Visualizing Research* collaborative research training programme aims to extend our various institutions' existing provision of practice-led research training for doctoral students in art and design by bringing together specific and significant research expertise and supervisory experience. By sharing best practice in doctoral training and supervision we will be able to provide a unique and focussed programme for practice-led research students. This programme is characterised by experiential and constructive learning and imaginative and creative engagement with the research process. A series of events are in progress: supervisors' workshops, research student Expositions and Summer Schools (see next section for details).

The programme is specifically designed for doctoral students in the collaborating institutions whose research involves practice, or aspects of it, as a key methodological component. In total, student numbers for the programme are in excess of 50 students, covering research topics in design, visual arts, new media, applied arts, as well as music and performing arts. A key outcome of the programme will be a series of new research materials that contribute towards core content for a new book and that extend an existing web site<sup>5</sup>.

### ***SuperVision Network – developments in progress***

One of our tasks is to identify examples of good and/or innovative practice in doctoral supervision. Starting close to home we have initially mapped our network's experimental schemes and ideas in development. For example:

#### **• *Research Student Exposition***

The *exposition* provides an opportunity for students to visualise and make explicit their research questions, context, methods and emerging outcomes using a variety of display methods (Gray and Malins, 2004). When research involves practice it is likely that some new work (art work, design, performance, etc) has been developed to explore the research questions. These may be resolved pieces embodying some of the research concepts or they may be experimental 'sketches' or prototypes revealing methodology. The higher degree research framework requires that the work be considered in quite a different way than one would usually view art/design works within an *exhibition* - a concept that carries with it much baggage! Historically, this model has involved the artist/designer (usually an artist, as single author) displaying a body of work for public appreciation and consumption (by an audience and market), and for professional evaluation (by critics). Although the work may be obviously thematic and have accompanying catalogues with critical writings, usually we are not fully aware of the artist/designer's intentions for the work, and we are not obliged to evaluate it against their specific criteria. We will make of

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<sup>5</sup> The working title of the book is *SuperVision: insights into supervising research degrees in art and design*, to be published by Ashgate in 2007. This complements an existing book by Gray and Malins - *Visualizing Research: a guide to the research process in art and design* (2004, Ashgate). This book also has a web site [www.visualizingresearch.info](http://www.visualizingresearch.info).

the work whatever we like and apply, usually in a very unconscious way, our own implicit criteria for judging the quality of what we see.

The word 'exposition' seems much more appropriate for research purposes, as its suggestion of exposure and explication matches very well the key characteristics of good research - accessibility, transparency, transferability. Douglas (in Swift, 1997: 20-25) suggests that an exposition should reveal 'stages of research thinking, diagrammatic mapping of the evolving research process and its evidence 'in product', evidence of failure and changes of direction.' Explicitness about criteria for evaluating research findings - especially art/design work produced as part of a research argument - is an essential feature.

For any research involving practice it is essential that the role of the art/design work in the argument and the criteria for its assessment be made clear. In a research exposition one would expect to see articulated:

- the research questions which were posed
- project objectives
- the methodology including the role of practice and
- some positioning of the project in relation to other key research in the field (research context)

One would expect to know precisely:

- what the criteria were (derived from project objectives) for evaluating the artefacts in relation to the research evidence they demonstrate, and
- what were the 'failures' and well as the successes, the experiments as well as the resolved pieces.

One might also expect to discuss with the practitioner-researcher some of the issues raised by the research. In this sense the research exposition is didactic/heuristic in that it encourages interaction, critical exchange, understanding and learning for all concerned.

During the Exposition there are opportunities for presentations, feedback sessions<sup>6</sup> and built-in evaluation procedures. The student learning from this particular experience can also be discussed in regular supervisions.

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<sup>6</sup> Gray's piloted this kind of event in the School in March 2004 involving 13 Research Students.



Figure 2 – *Research Student Exposition - Reflexions, University of Salford, April 20-22, 2005*

Two such events have been held so far to test how far the ideal (described previously) matches with reality (Gray's, 2004 and Salford, 2005). Feedback from participating students<sup>7</sup> demonstrates the social and academic value of this kind of event in helping to 'get to know other students and their views' and 'an opportunity to understand other PhD research'. For all it was a challenge in conciseness, and despite this clearly providing a memorable learning experience, there is considerable room for improving the expo model. Three things have emerged from student feedback:

- more explicit instructions about expo requirements
- specific visual skills training (we made the assumption that all students already have these skills)
- a two-stage event structure:
  1. a formal, structured 'promenade' around the displays with participants and supervisors, giving each student an opportunity to highlight issues for discussion and receive feedback from peers
  2. an opening, exposing the research to invited guests, taking on a more convivial nature.

The expo model will continue to be developed and refined.

• **Summer School for research students and supervisors**

The Gray's Summer School addresses specific training needs identified by students and their supervisors<sup>8</sup>. There is a programme guide including a detailed curriculum with learning outcomes, assessment criteria and self-evaluation proformas to assist students in reflecting on their learning. This annual residential event takes place in mid August for one week. The typical programme (see Table 1) includes:

- social sessions e.g. *Ice Breaker* session – 'who am I?' (based on the speed dating model!), Summer School Dinner
- subject-specific research training e.g. *Approaches to the Contextual Review*, group workshop on *Mapping Methodologies* through visualization, recently completed PhD student experiences, Summer School *Exposition*

<sup>7</sup> Source: student focus group, part of *SuperVision* Network research programme, April 21 2005

<sup>8</sup> Gray's have successfully operated an annual Research Student Summer School since 2000.

- transferable skills training e.g. creative thinking group exercises, using information technology, *Communicating your Research: Publication and Presentation Techniques*, student presentations, career development including Personal Development Profiling<sup>9</sup>
- supervisions for distance learning students
- contributions by guest researchers e.g. *Visualizing Argument*, lecture by Prof Ray McAleese, August 2003

Feedback from participating students<sup>10</sup> revealed the value of sharing research experiences, discussing progress and problems, and gaining critical feedback:

‘I really enjoyed the Summer School and found it very helpful to hear about what other people were doing and to identify new strategies and approaches. Also it was good for me to have the opportunity to present my own research to others who have not seen it before.’

PhD Student, Art and Design Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University.

Again the value of personal interaction is highlighted, with a certain ‘bonding’ and development of community evident, as well as the importance of a forum for exchange of skills and ideas: ‘The social interaction is a wonderful de-stressor and a great cross fertilizer of ideas.’ PhD student, Gray’s.

Whilst mainly focused on the student experience, participating supervisors also see it as an opportunity to meet and exchange experiences. For students working at a distance the Summer School is considered ‘a lifeline’. Of course a week is never long enough!



Figure 3 - *Research Student presentations, Summer School, Gray’s School of Art, August 2004*

<sup>9</sup> For details see Malins, J. and McKillop, C. (2005) Evaluating GraysNet: an on-line PDP tool for use in an art and design context, *Journal of Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education*, vol. 4.1

<sup>10</sup> Source: Summer School Evaluation Questionnaires, August 2004

- **web based research training**

One of the first attempts<sup>11</sup> at providing structured web-based research training was pioneered at Gray's with the initiation of the *Research Masters in Art and Design* degree (1998 – 2000)<sup>12</sup>. This was a unique and experimental on-line course aiming to embed research strategies and methods within professional practices through a work-based project. Six modules visualised research as a 'journey of exploration', each module containing:

- learning materials - typically 5/6 topics - essays on key themes with visual materials, suggestions for reflection and action, and resources e.g. bibliographic and glossary databases, key references.
- an assignment with (usually) four tasks, the final one always a structured debate task - an interactive method; self-evaluation proformas for each task was a way of developing reflective and critical skills and collating a 'personal development profile'
- explicit assessment criteria against which written assessment feedback and advice was provided from supervisors on each students' assignment.

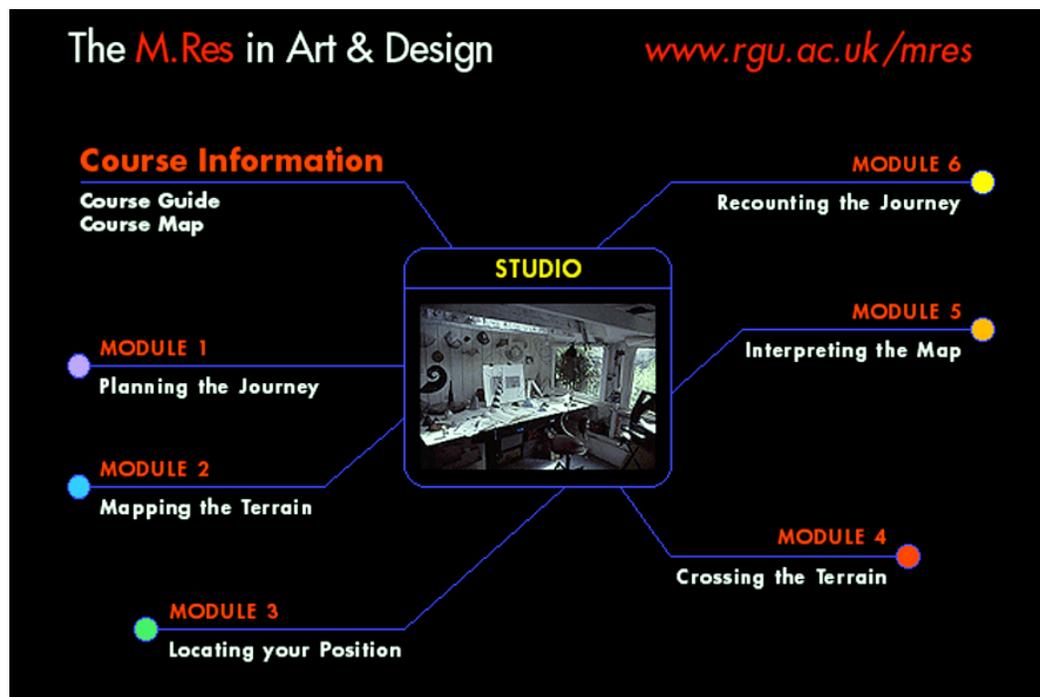


Figure 4 – MRes Studio web interface

<sup>11</sup> The publications from the Research Training Initiative were the UK's first resource. These materials were available on-line in 1998 and have since developed into an impressive and valuable resource encouraging debate about research skills, methods and approaches; supporting researchers, research students and research supervisors through the publication of PhD case studies, methodological papers and reviews. [www.biad.uce.ac.uk/research/rti/index.html](http://www.biad.uce.ac.uk/research/rti/index.html) (accessed 7/4/05)

The MRes was innovative – as far as we know it was the first of its kind. Based on a constructivist learning model the course engaged students' own personal knowledge and experience as practitioners, involved them in active experimentation through structured tasks, and attempted to provide a social learning environment. In developing the course as a distance learning one, tacit knowledge about the research process and concepts had to be made explicit, by both the supervisor and the student, especially in relation to assessment criteria and evidencing learning. Specific tools for reflection and analysis were developed and methods for collaborative working were tested e.g. peer reviewing of research proposals. However, the limitations of technology at that time made collaboration a major challenge and we never achieved any true interactivity. The assessment procedures were over burdensome and this still remains a challenge within the qualitative managed learning environment (Malins and Gray, 2000).

• **research student thematic seminar programmes**

The University of Salford has developed a seminar programme specifically for members of the Adelphi Research Institute for Creative Arts & Sciences (ARICAS), bringing together students from art and design and music, media and performance, as well as built and human environment. The seminar programme covers key aspects of the doctoral process, including the PhD interim assessment and viva. It also addresses different approaches, such as practice-based research, and aspects of the research process, such as conducting a literature review, accessing electronic data sources and using particular methodologies. In addition, the seminars support PhD students' career development by providing help with writing and publishing journal articles and understanding Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Established by the director of the Institute (Rachel Cooper) in 2002/3 whilst supervising five or six PhD students, Cooper noted that she often gave the same advice to her students, suspecting that other supervisors might also be having similar discussions with their students. The director had also started to formalise her supervision activities, with the first Monday of the month being dedicated to PhD supervision. This helped the students, particularly those studying part-time, to plan their activities. It was therefore a natural step to establish a seminar programme for her students, which was then made available to other PhD students.

While the seminar programme is currently open to all the PhD students from the Adelphi Research Institute - approximately 45 students - the numbers actually attending each session can be fairly small e.g. four or five people. This is because students only attend sessions that meet their needs, and their needs change throughout the PhD process. Whilst supervisors and directors may be concerned about the low attendance rate, the student focus group (run as part of our *SuperVision* network programme) revealed that students actually see the low numbers as a positive factor. The small group size means that they can ask questions and gain specific advice about issues of concern to them. The focus group also confirmed the value of the seminar programme to PhD students.

This initiative is academically sound and pragmatically valuable encouraging students to explore different perspectives anchored by a central theme or common concern, bringing

about group interaction with focused engagement, and extending supervisors' input through group work and peer learning.

• **art and design theses in digital formats**

Some valuable attempts have been made at developing alternative PhD submissions whose format is responsive to the research topic and thus counters the usual problem of text-based submissions - 'language doing the work of eyes' (Tyler, 1986:137). Several examples have been developed at Sunderland and Gray's. An early attempt at the inclusion of new media as part of a doctoral submission was Douglas's PhD in 1992<sup>13</sup>. The use of laser disc technology was an attempt to reveal and animate the making and research process. The laser disc was presented in addition to a full written thesis, but the use of such display technology with a short life span illustrated the risks of using non-standard formats. Bunnell's thesis<sup>14</sup> was structured as a series of linked databases that enabled direct access to dynamic data and a visualisation of the research methodology, while Hogarth's thesis<sup>15</sup> included a CD-ROM presenting case studies of her environmental projects. The topic of Burt's research<sup>16</sup> was an investigation of multimedia in art and design practices leading to a thesis in that medium, the format responding directly to the argument.



Figure 5 - Interface from Hogarth's thesis

<sup>13</sup> Douglas, A. (1992) *Structure and Improvisation: The Making Aspect of Sculpture*. PhD thesis, Sunderland University

<sup>14</sup> Bunnell, K. (1998) *The Integration of New Technology into Designer-maker Practice*. PhD thesis, The Robert Gordon University

<sup>15</sup> Hogarth, J. (1999) *'Dislocated landscapes': A sculptor's response to contemporary issues within the British landscape*. PhD thesis, University of Sunderland

<sup>16</sup> Burt, I. (2000) *The Use of Multimedia for Practitioners in Art & Design*. PhD thesis, The Robert Gordon University

All these examples are prototypes – pioneering attempts to reveal methodologies and visualise research. Whilst the use of digital media enables the argument to be evidenced through hyperlinks to research data, ironically the rapid advances in technologies affects the accessibility of the submission. The challenge is to implement adequate archiving protocols to ensure a continuing level of access.<sup>17</sup> All prototypes are limited and flawed in some way yet are acknowledged as an essential part of research. Such ‘failures’ as Feyerabend says, are ‘preconditions of progress’ (1988:164) giving us understandings just as valuable as seemingly successful outcomes.

- **research students working within major projects**

A recent development in our sector has been the emergence of large-scale collaborative research projects e.g. Research Grant schemes of AHRC, EPSRC (Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council). Considered the standard model in science and technology, and in some areas of design, this kind of research is relatively new for some arts and humanities areas, especially the visual arts, where individual research has been the norm. The research project model affords the opportunity for PhD projects to be framed and carried out in relation to the main project, and ideally a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship develops.

One such project based at Sunderland is CRUMB, a major research project on curating new media art, running since 1999, funded by AHRB, and involving co-operation with BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Newcastle ([www.crumbweb.org](http://www.crumbweb.org)). As part of this project, curators Sarah Cook completed her PhD in 2004, and Ele Carpenter is one year in. Involvement with professional art fields and practice most certainly helps to make research outputs relevant and useful, but also places great strains on the student, as they try to resolve the needs of research with the famously intense time demands of arts organising, and the unpredictability of the practice of curating. The time for ‘quiet reflection’ needs to be strongly defended. Project co-ordinator Beryl Graham comments ‘As a supervisor, I’m uncomfortable that both my own and Cook’s PhDs took 4 years instead of 3, and I worry sometimes that the demands are too much, but I’m also proud of the professional usefulness of the research, and the fact that we get asked to do consultancies.’

In major research projects the challenge initially is to maintain a distinct space within which the student’s research can evolve, yet allow for an exchange of expertise and experience between the research project and the doctoral study. The distinct advantages are that the student is working as part of a research team, and that supervision is carried out from an expert and involved position within the research team.

- **new research resources**

The book - *Visualizing Research: a guide to the research process in art and design*<sup>18</sup> – uses the metaphor of a ‘journey of exploration’ to explain the stages of the research

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<sup>17</sup> For further discussion and advice on theses in digital formats see Graham, B. (1999) Using new formats for PhDs and Research Degrees. Section 3.5 in: *Using Digital Resources in Teaching, Learning and Research in the Visual Arts*. Visual Arts Data Service (VADS) [http://vads.ahds.ac.uk/guides/using\\_guide/sect35.html](http://vads.ahds.ac.uk/guides/using_guide/sect35.html)

<sup>18</sup> Gray, C. and Malins, J. (2004) *Visualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design*. Aldershot: Ashgate. Related web site and online database - [www.visualizingresearch.info](http://www.visualizingresearch.info)

process and creative engagement with it. The chapters are: *Planning the Journey, Mapping the Terrain, Locating Your Position, Crossing the Terrain, Interpreting the Map, Recounting the Journey*. Within each there are suggestions for ‘reflection and action’ prompt further exploration of the issues.

This book has a web site – [www.visualizingresearch.info](http://www.visualizingresearch.info) - including:

- extended visual materials in colour and animation
- example tasks and tools related to the book’s ‘reflection and action’ suggestions
- a database of doctoral projects in progress - a unique feature that attempts to collate current research to assist with contextualisation and networking
- links to other research resources
- related papers by the authors and colleagues (PDF’s to download).

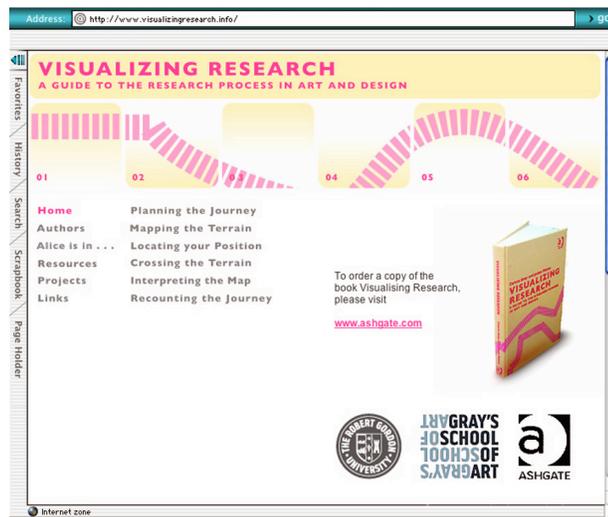


Figure 6 – Page from web site

Attempting to engage students in creative, imaginative strategies for research *Visualizing Research* distils ten years of experience and expertise, drawing on real project examples. It is currently being reviewed but feedback so far has been encouraging.

A key vehicle for the dissemination of our network programme is a book of new research materials - working title *SuperVision: insights into supervising research degrees in art and design* (to be published by Ashgate in 2007). The *Visualizing Research* web site will be used to include new resources e.g. expansion of current database of doctoral projects in progress, discussion forum on practice-led research issues, downloadable utilities such as a project planner, reference and glossary databases.

• **progress proforma**

Deceptively simple but one day may save your academic career! This one page proforma developed by Cooper at ARICAS encourages supervisors to keep formal records of progress for PhD students. The proforma documents: progress to date, targets for next stage of work; records decisions and agreements, personal development needs, date and time of the next meeting. It was introduced to make communication between student and

supervisor clear and help both keep track of progress. Cooper felt that this was good practice and has encouraged other members of staff to adopt the system:

‘I felt that progress reports were good practice and supported our quality assurance systems. They also encourage openness and transparency. These progress reports simply mirror good practice in relation to undergraduates.’

In increasing litigious times keeping a concise record of student/supervisor discussion/agreements can be crucial evidence in an appeal situation.

### • *Supervisor in a Box*

With a distinct flavour of ‘genie in a lamp’ Salford’s *Supervisor in a Box* conjures up instant solutions to supervisor challenges! In fact it is a simple card index system that can sit on the supervisor’s desk and contains summary information about ‘what to do now’ and ‘what to do next’.

Changes in QAA regulations and pressure from funding bodies prompted the setting up of a working group to review University procedures. Several members of the group took forward the idea of developing a system for informing research supervisors of the new regulations. It was specified that the new system should be in a very accessible form, as the then Director of Postgraduate Studies explains: ‘We wanted to launch the new regulations in a way that would get attention. We wanted something physical that would sit on the desk.’ The index box was chosen because it was relatively easy and cheap to purchase, and index cards could easily be updated and replaced. The cards were designed in-house to minimize costs.



Figure 7 – *Supervisor in a Box*

The feedback about *Supervisor in a Box* has been mainly positive, both from within the University and externally. There is a web version called, oddly enough, *Supervisor out of a Box!* However, nobody has said that they like this version, and most supervisors rely on the index cards. Although the idea is again simple it is powerful, especially in relation to QAA requirements and issues surrounding ‘duty of care’ in supervision.

### **The other CDRT networks – developments in progress**

Fortunately our particular network’s activities are informed and positioned by the work of eight other networks (see Figure 1), which between us extend greatly the capacity for mutual learning and real innovation. Acknowledging the obvious advantages of ‘economies of scale’ adding value to existing provision by extending and integrating subject knowledge and supervisory experience beyond the provision of any one institution, in this next section we highlight the distinct and specific developments of three networks.

#### **• ADIT - Art + Design Index to Theses**

Co-ordinated by Tom Fisher (Sheffield Hallam University) this project is developing a searchable on-line index of completed research degrees in the art and design sector. Since the last update of the Allison Research Index of Art and Design (ARIAD) in 1996 we have had to rely on the British Library’s Index to Theses as a key source of information on completed higher degrees. Valuable though this is, even using complex and focused search strategies it is difficult to identify specific art and design material. As ‘son of ARIAD’ ADIT collates information from existing key sources into a pilot database to be tested and evaluated at a student conference in 2005. Fisher highlights the difficulty of ‘identifying the field, indeed if there is such a thing!’ and in developing criteria for selection of projects. Currently the prototype contains basic textual information, but it is easy to imagine the inclusion of various other media that would make this resource an essential part of identifying and contextualizing a new PhD project.



Figure 8 – Tom Fisher demonstrating the prototype of ADIT, Salford April 22, 2005

• ***Regional Provision of Research Training in Art and Design in the North West***

In April 2005 Manchester Metropolitan University hosted a one-week residential event bringing together research students from seven regional partner institutions. According to John Hewitt, the network's co-ordinator, the aim was to complement existing provision by the partners through an event where students could share experiences, network, and concentrate on specific needs, for example, the role of visual evidence in doctoral research. A particularly valuable session involved representatives from the local cultural industries in discussing alternative research careers. Feedback from students confirmed the social and academic value of this residential programme.

• ***Perspectives on Practice-based Research***

By means of a series of discussion workshops this network, involving six institutions, seeks to develop a set of position statements on practice-based research. Co-ordinated by Stuart Evans (University of the Arts, London) each event focuses on a particular theme e.g. institutionalisation of knowledge, the artefact in research. A key feature of the work draws on the experiences of completed PhD students revealing a range of approaches to practice-based research. With sustainability in mind the network aims eventually to give ownership of this initiative to their students. The outcomes of the work will be made available on-line.

## **Conclusions**

The *SuperVision* network is making a contribution to our understanding of the research student experience in the following ways:

- as a forum for exchange of best practice in research supervision drawing on some of the most extensive experience in the sector
- providing critical analysis of completed examples of practice-led PhDs identifying best practice
- exploring potential 'benchmarking' for practice-led PhD programmes – clear criteria and quality standards
- sharing actual existing training resources – compiling 'the best of' what we have now
- piloting and evaluating new materials with an extensive doctoral cohort
- developing a new book on supervision for our sector
- extending an existing on-line resource (the book's web site) that is open access, thus expanding training provision beyond those involved in the programme.

The possibility of joining together with other AHRC funded networks to form a 'super network' is under discussion so that we share the thinking on particular initiatives, help to sustain developments, and do not reinvent the wheel!

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Table 1 Typical Research Student *Summer School* programme

Day	am: session 1	am: session 2	pm: session 3	pm: session 4	evening
Day 1	arrive	arrive, lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome and overview of programme</li> <li>• <i>Ice Breaker</i> session – ‘who am I?’ (‘speed dating’ model)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative thinking exercises</li> <li>• ‘Show and Tell’ poster session as part of <i>Exposition</i></li> </ul>	social
Day 2	<i>Approaches to the Contextual Review</i> – presentation and discussion	<i>Mapping Methodologies</i> – group workshop using visualization	<i>Mapping Methodologies</i> – group workshop using visualization	<i>Funding Research</i> – presentation and discussion	social
Day 3	<i>Guest Researcher</i> – keynote lecture and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>IT skills</i> – Workshop or library visit / use of other research resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisions (for distance students)</li> <li>• Recently completed students – telling the PhD story</li> <li>• Free time – library, other facilities; seeing Aberdeen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervisions (for distance students)</li> <li>• Recently completed students – telling the PhD story</li> <li>• Free time etc.</li> </ul>	Summer School Dinner
Day 4	<i>Communicating your Research: Publication and Presentation Techniques</i> – presentation and discussion	Preparation for Student Research Presentations	Student Research Presentations: discussion and feedback	Student Research Presentations: discussion and feedback	social
Day 5	Student Research Presentations: discussion and feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open Forum</li> <li>• Plenary and close of Summer School</li> </ul>	Evaluation of Summer School – completing proformas  depart	depart	