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<https://nitro.edu.au/articles/2019/10/4/creative-engagement-with-the-apr-intern-program-for-prac>

Creative engagement with the APR Internship program for practitioner-researchers

Sandra Gattenhof, Lee McGowan and Donna Hancox

To Higher Degree Research (HDR) students in most disciplines, a paid internship can be a helpful torch to the light their way to the end of the tunnel. The prospect is especially attractive where it fills the scholarship-free period between submission and receipt of examiner reports. For practitioner-researchers (here we mean those working in the traditional fields of creative practice, including writers, theatre-makers, dancers and visual artists), who are often operating as sole-traders working project to project within the creative industries – a field populated by small, often subsistence-based enterprises – the shine of the scheme's appeal is not quite as bright.

The Australian Postgraduate Research (APR) Intern or *APR.Intern* is a not-for-profit industry arm of the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute and was initially set up to connect industry and research with a view to create a catalyst for innovation and advancement in the STEM related sectors. These days, it seeks to cater to every discipline through the incentive scheme, which is aimed at encouraging PhD level collaboration between businesses and university research.

Where a prospective employer is willing to make as little as \$10 000 investment, the prospective employer has their funding matched by *APR.Intern*. The employer is able, with the university's help, to recruit a hand-picked, highly trained researcher, free of teaching and the millstone of their thesis (minus any changes), to work on a project of their own design.

In return for the initial investment (which can increase depending on duration), the student receives a \$3000 monthly stipend for between three and five months. A one-off \$5500 contribution goes to the academic supervisor (more often the HDR student's principal supervisor, but it could be another academic mentor to support the student) research funds and a one-off \$5500 administration and case-management fee is retained by *APR.Intern*. It's an overly complex system but it does enable the University to promote and assist HDR students gain an internship and improve their chances of post PhD employment.

The minimum package for the internship is valued at \$20000 and can be higher if it runs for more than three months. The prospective employer can double the value of their money. A drawback, and one that impacts directly on the creative industries sector, is that the employer must pay the whole sum up front. The scheme rebates the other half to the employer afterwards.

The initiative, which facilitates the incorporation of the internship into the candidature, is aimed at connecting HDR students with industry, particularly where engagement is seen as vital to improving a researcher's employability and

transferrable skill development. The scheme encourages students to gain immersive industry experience and work with clients, mentors and academics to produce an outcome determined by the employer.

To date, only one such internship has been undertaken in the Creative Industries Faculty where we work, at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). A visual art student successfully conducted archival research with a Brisbane-based arts SME. The Graduate Research Education and Development team (GRE+D) at QUT have pushed hard to connect our students with industry, but have found the terrain difficult to negotiate, particularly where the treatment of, and track record for, arts and humanities in Australian Research Council funding has been less than kind.

A number of reports (*The Heart of the Matter* 2013; *Humanities Graduates and the British Economy: The Hidden Impact* 2013; *Australia's Future Workforce?* 2015), argue that creativity and innovation will be key to 21st century economies, particularly in developing responses to multi-perspective problems. While STEM reigns supreme increasingly demand and realisation of the need for creativity and innovation has resulted in recognition that the creative and cultural industries have an essential role to play. Practitioner-researchers in the creative arts possess skills in what education and business commentators note the real skills needed are what is broadly called the four C's – creativity, communication, critical reflection and collaboration. Their knowledge of, and connections to, their industry are extensive, and their ability to contribute to such a scheme would ordinarily ensure success. But there are real barriers to the scheme's success.

(1) Funding in a sector that is already experiencing stress. Dollars are stretched. Governmental agendas have shifted focus away from the arts, leaving arts organisations to rely on unstable grant-funding to build their own capacity. They are rarely in a position to offer \$10,000 for a three-month HDR internship.

(2) Creative practice as research is not seen to have a foot-hold in industry. Is it possible arts organisations do not see the value and impact of academic research? We ask because the GRE+D team highlight a disconnect between the academy and industry in terms of research outcomes.

(3) Sessional teaching loads, particularly studio-based teaching that often requires intensive periods of engagement. Additionally other short-term industry or project-based work that arises with festivals and event programs. Both impact on the practitioner-researcher's ability to engage with internship opportunities.

(4) Often HDR students will look for an internship that aligns with possible employment in the tertiary sector (a common means of securing some form of regular income for a practitioner-researcher), or – as would be expected – work that is clearly aligned with their chosen discipline. The internship model is ... (make a point here?).

We are acutely aware that it is not all bad news for the students or the program when it comes to practitioner-researchers. There are opportunities here. For example, an advantage of the scheme for HDR students is that they can work in an allied field or build elasticity and transferability where they employ their creative practice research skills in an alternative field. Give a speculative example? Creative Industries HDR graduates have the much sought after skills of creative entrepreneurship, social intelligence, problem-solving and critical thinking, which are becoming increasingly essential for work in the 21st century (see Chartered Accountants *Future of Talent*, 2017). One avenue the QUT Creative industries Faculty is looking to explore is Artistic residencies, which could offer opportunities for corporate entities that operate outside of the creative industries. These entities, which often have extensive budgets, could embed a creative within their organisation to develop an innovative and imaginative solution to industry identified problems. Where creative arts SMEs may not be able to afford the funding on their own, a consortium model, which features research around a specific common concern, might benefit the partner organisations involved.

This is a new scheme, millions are being invested and students from a range of disciplines are able to take advantage, but it's really not designed to accommodate the arts. We're sure it's possible to carve out a pathway for a practitioner-researcher that would support an HDR student into employment. But unlike the STEM disciplines that seem to have a foothold in government policy and funding, the Creative Arts and Creative Industries will need to think about different models of internship engagement for our HDR students in an industry dominated by SMEs.

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