

Royal College of Art

Innovating the Future: Designing
Professional Doctorates that Power the
Industry Transformation



Royal College of Art
Postgraduate Art & Design

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According to the QAA, the main characteristics of professional and practice-based doctorates are as follows:

- Professional and practice-based doctorates usually contain taught elements with significant lecture and seminar content, but final award of the doctorate is based on a supervised research project, projects or portfolio.

Research projects in professional doctorates are normally located within the candidate's profession or practice. In practice-based or practitioner doctorates the candidate's output involves practice-related materials. For example, in the performing arts, the output involves a written component, which complements the practice-based element (this may be shorter than the traditional PhD thesis, and includes both reflection and context), and one or more other artefacts, such as a novel (for creative writing), a portfolio of work (for art and design), or one or more performance pieces (for theatre studies, dance or music).

The UK Council of Graduate Education report in 2011 indicated that *‘A significant difference between Professional Doctorates and Practice-led Doctorates in the Arts, Design and Architecture relates to the fact that these Practice-led Doctorates are classified as a constituent part of the PhD award, recognising the importance of the research element. Whereas the Professional Doctorates, including as they do substantial taught elements and a significant research project, are generally classified as an award whose name reflects the scope of the programme. The common feature can be seen to be that in both types of award, a primary element is the strong focus on and engagement with practice’* (62).

Professional Doctorate and Knowledge

'In the context of the Professional Doctorate, the knowledge at issue may well be of the 'applied' kind but it is still knowledge – open to expansion and change through processes of investigation, evaluation and so on. It is notable that where the kind of academic knowledge typically referred to in PhD regulations may be general; the kind within the context of a professional doctorate may be specific to a professional context, albeit with implications for broader understanding of the world. In both cases, we suggest that contributions can be made that can be deemed 'original'. (Green and Powell, 2005: 93)

- In the case of professional doctorates, successful completion of the degree normally leads to professional and/or organisational change that is often direct rather than achieved through the implementation of subsequent research findings.
- Professional doctorate will make a tangible impact through the direct contribution to industry, NGOs, government bodies, charity organisations.
- Stakeholder Consultation: Engaging industry leaders, employers, and practitioners

Why Industry Involvement Matters:

- Aligns with the college strategy
- Encourages real-world application of research.
- Creates opportunities for funding and sponsorships.
- Co-Creation in Action:
- Joint supervision models.
- Industry-driven research projects.
- Embedded placements and fellowships.

From the Industry- *We are looking for those candidates to lead organisational transformation from its current status'*

Key Features of RCA Professional Doctorate

Key Features of Professional Doctorates

- Industry-aligned, Co-creation with industry
- Emphasis on real-world challenges and direct application.
- Collaborative engagement with stakeholders.
- Research embedded in professional practice (Costley & Lester, 2012).

Overcoming Challenges in Implementation

- Funding Constraints (e.g., UKRI, Horizon Europe).
- Partnering with industry for sponsorships.
- Intellectual Property (IP) Concerns
- Clear agreements on IP ownership.
- Encouraging open innovation models.
- Balancing Academic Independence with Industry Priorities

'Being self-funded is less pressured for me as I own the IP for my project. I also feel I have the freedom to do my research without control from my employer'

Future Considerations & Sustainable Growth

Long-Term Partnerships: Moving beyond transactional relationships.

Global Perspectives: Expanding industry-academic collaboration internationally.

Conclusion & Call to Action

Professional doctorates must evolve with industry needs.

- Co-creation with industry is key.
- Addressing funding, IP, and governance is crucial for sustainability.
- Next Steps:
 - Strengthening university-industry partnerships.
 - Exploring funding opportunities.



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