

RECOGNITION OF ARTISTIC RESEARCH IN FLANDERS

Report: Dr Prof. Mario Nell

Thinkers' Programme of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (KVAB): collaboration between the Young Academy's Working Group Artistic Research and Class of the Arts, 2026

1. Introduction: Background, Scope and Method

1.1 Background to the Thinkers' Programme

The Thinkers' Programme is an initiative of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (KVAB), intended to strengthen high-level societal debate in Flanders through multidisciplinary and future-oriented engagement with an international expert or international panel of experts. The KVAB framework describes a Thinkers' Cycle within the programme as a process in which Academy members, partners, and stakeholders work around a contemporary problem to identify bottlenecks, explore solutions, and formulate recommendations. The programme provides for a scientific coordinator, an organisation or steering structure, expert and stakeholder involvement, a range of activities, and a final report. This general framework is important because it establishes that the present report belongs to a programme designed not simply to document a discussion, but to create a structured process of reflection with potential policy relevance.

In accordance with the Thinkers' Programme model, the cycle also appointed an international expert as its central thinker. The central thinker contributes an external and comparative perspective to the programme, working alongside the steering and expert groups and reflecting critically on the issues emerging from the discussions. In the present cycle, this role was undertaken by Prof. Mario Nell, whose experience in the recognition and evaluation of artistic research in South Africa provided an international point of comparison for the Flemish discussion.

The present cycle has a more specific institutional genealogy. It is the first KVAB Thinkers' Cycle to emerge from the Young Academy of Flanders in collaboration with the Class of the Arts, both of which are part of under KVAB. It grew out of the Young Academy's Artistic Research working group and reflects a longer development of artistic research within Flemish higher arts education (Schools of Arts), including the growth of artistic doctorates, peer-reviewed dissemination, and research funding opportunities. This cycle identifies the recognition of research-based artistic output as a pressing point of interaction between artistic and more traditional academic research cultures. In this context, recognition is understood broadly: not simply as an evaluative judgement of quality or significance, but as the capacity to identify an output as research-related, make its research context intelligible, and ensure that it can be documented, accessed, and made visible within the wider research landscape. The question of recognition therefore precedes the more specific question of how such outputs might be formally recorded or valorized. The cycle therefore brought together the broader societal and interdisciplinary mandate of the KVAB Thinkers' Programme with the Young Academy's specific concern for (non-standardised) research output in the broad sense.

A significant premise of the programme is that research output is changing. Conventional scholarly publications remain important, but they no longer exhaust the ways in which research is communicated and documented. Artistic research provides a particularly visible example because its outputs can take the form of artistic artifacts, including performances, exhibitions, recordings, audiovisual works, catalogues, podcasts, and other forms or ways of knowledge production. In practice-based research, for example, knowledge may be embodied in prototypes, interventions, design processes, or demonstrators; in architecture and design, research may be communicated through models, drawings, digital environments, or built projects; in science communication, through exhibitions, public demonstrations, digital media, or interactive resources; and in applied or community-based research, through workshops, toolkits, guidelines, or other forms of knowledge exchange. These diverse forms of output raise related questions about how research can be identified, documented, preserved, accessed, and recognised when it does not conform to the conventional scholarly publication. Within the present programme, these questions ultimately lead to the more specific issue of artistic research recognition: what information is needed to identify and document research-related artistic output, and how might

such registration support recognition without turning documentation into a measure of artistic or research value?

1.2 From the initial expert meeting to the four-session framework

The programme design was preceded by an initial meeting at the KVAB with a broader group of experts from artistic research institutions in Flanders, as well as from the Centre for Research and Development Monitoring (ECOOM). This meeting was important not because it was intended to settle the issue, but because it allowed the organisers to identify the principal fault lines in the debate before determining the detailed structure of the Thinkers' Programme. The discussion confirmed that the question was considerably broader than the technical design of a database for research-based artistic output. It concerned the status of artistic research within the research system, the relation between artistic practice and research documentation, the appropriate forms of recognition, the role of peer judgement, and the possible consequences of introducing a shared registration or validation framework. The initial exchange therefore functioned as a form of diagnostic mapping: it helped reveal which questions were already institutionally mature, which remained contested, and which could only be answered after the underlying purposes had been clarified.

Several recurring tensions emerging from this preliminary stage directly informed the later architecture of the programme:

- (1) One was the distinction between documenting an output and evaluating its quality.
- (2) Another concerned the relationship between institutional registration and broader questions of recognition or funding.
- (3) A third involved the tension between a shared framework and the diversity of artistic disciplines and institutional practices.
- (4) A fourth concerned the status of the artistic artefact itself: whether it should be treated simply as evidence accompanying a research project, or whether it can constitute a substantive site of knowledge production. Finally, the organisers recognised that any central system could have effects beyond its stated purpose. A mechanism introduced for visibility or documentation could later become a mechanism for evaluation, ranking, or resource allocation.

These tensions made it necessary to structure the subsequent programme so that the purpose of a system was considered before its technical design, and so that assessment was treated as a distinct question rather than as an automatic consequence of registration.

1.3 The Development and Structure of the Four Sessions

The four sessions were consequently designed as a sequence of questions rather than merely a sequence of administrative topics. The underlying logic can be summarised as follows:

The four sessions were structured as follows:

Session	Central question	Main issues
1. Intra-institutional state of affairs	What currently exists?	Output forms, assessment practices, registration systems, institutional differences, previous collaboration
2. Scope of application	Why would a shared system be useful?	Purpose, stakeholders, policy relevance, limitations, applicability beyond artistic research, opportunities and risks
3. Assessment	How can relevance and quality be assessed?	Peer review, assessment levels, research character, impact, disciplinary diversity, categories
4. Central documentation platform	How might alignment or a shared infrastructure work?	Metadata, repositories, interoperability, definitions, acceptance criteria, governance, sustainability

The choice of the four themes reflected four distinct but interconnected dimensions of the problem. The first session, *Intra-institutional State of Affairs*, established the empirical starting point. Before proposing a common system, it was necessary to understand how institutions currently valorise, document and communicate practice-related research output, where practices

already converge, and where they differ. The session therefore focused on existing systems and experiences rather than on an ideal future model.

The second session, *Scope of Application*, moved from description to purpose. A shared system can only be designed responsibly once its intended function is clear. The central questions were therefore: What problem would greater coordination solve? What should a shared framework include or exclude? Should it primarily serve visibility, documentation, preservation, knowledge transfer, validation, assessment, or some combination of these? And what should it explicitly not be used for? The distinction between valorisation and funding was particularly important here, because the programme was framed as an exploratory exercise in recognition, documentation and knowledge exchange rather than as a mechanism for performance-based resource allocation.

The third session, *Assessment, Quality, Relevance and Impact*, addressed one of the most conceptually difficult dimensions of the discussion. Once outputs become visible and documented, questions may arise about their research character, relevance, quality and significance. The session therefore considered how such questions might be approached across diverse artistic disciplines, what constitutes appropriate evidence of research, who possesses the expertise to judge it, and how qualitative assessment might be made credible without reducing artistic research to bibliometric or numerical indicators. The choice of assessment as a separate session was deliberate: it allowed the participants to examine evaluation as a distinct question rather than allowing assumptions about assessment to become embedded automatically in the discussion of valorisation or documentation.

The fourth session, *Central Documentation Platform*, addressed infrastructure only after the preceding conceptual and institutional questions had been considered. The focus was therefore not simply on whether to build a database, but on what kind of shared overview or data infrastructure might be justified, whether existing systems could be connected, what minimum common metadata might be needed, and how governance could prevent a documentation infrastructure from acquiring functions for which it had not been designed. Placing infrastructure at the end of the sequence was significant: it treated technical arrangements as a possible consequence of an agreed purpose rather than as the starting point of the exercise.

The four sessions therefore formed a progression from the existing reality, to purpose, to judgement, and finally to infrastructure. This sequence also provided a methodological safeguard: at each stage, participants could ask whether the next question followed logically from what had already been established. The approach helped keep the programme exploratory and prevented it from becoming a technical exercise before there was sufficient clarity about the underlying problem and the purposes a shared framework might serve.

1.4 The Flemish institutional context

Any discussion of artistic research recognition in Flanders needs to take account of the institutional relationship between the Schools of Arts and the universities. Rather than being fully integrated into the university system, the Schools of Arts occupy a distinctive position within university associations, with different organisational arrangements across the various associations. They constitute the primary institutional setting for formal artistic research, while universities retain responsibility for the awarding of doctoral degrees. In doctoral research, artistic and academic supervision are therefore structurally connected, although the precise organisational arrangements differ between associations. Dedicated structures have been established in some associations to support artistic research and doctoral trajectories, while others rely more directly on interaction between Schools of Arts and university faculties. Artistic research also takes place beyond doctoral trajectories and outside the Schools of Arts, but doctoral research remains a particularly prominent and institutionally developed form of formal artistic research in Flanders. This institutional diversity is important for the present discussion because a system for registering artistic research output would operate across organisations that do not share identical governance structures, research infrastructures, supervisory arrangements, or funding mechanisms. The question is therefore not simply how to create a common register, but how to create greater visibility and interoperability without erasing legitimate institutional differences.

1.5 Purpose of this report

This report has four purposes. First, it documents the main themes and institutional experiences shared during meetings, sessions, and discussions with various stakeholders. Second, it analyses the conceptual tensions underlying the discussions. Third, it identifies areas where a degree of alignment appears possible without eliminating institutional autonomy. Fourth, it develops preliminary recommendations for further work within Flanders.

The report should not be read as a verbatim transcript, nor should every observation be interpreted as a formally adopted position of the participating institutions. The session discussions capture contributions, questions, examples and emerging points of agreement. Some statements were exploratory, some were explicitly critical, and several issues remained unresolved. The report therefore distinguishes, as far as possible, between reported practice, analytical interpretation and recommendations.

1.6 Who was brought into the process, and why?

The participant architecture was deliberately broader than a single disciplinary expert group. The composition of the participant group was deliberately broader than a single disciplinary or institutional perspective. The programme sought to bring together the perspectives of research coordinators from Schools of Arts, artistic researchers, a specialist in research and development (R&D) monitoring, and university professors involved in the supervision of artistic research. This breadth followed directly from the nature of the problem: no single group controls all stages of the trajectory from artistic research practice to institutional registration, assessment, visibility, and possible policy recognition.

A selection of experts whose experience could illuminate different parts of the problem was identified. The selection included:

Mario Nell (central thinker: Stellenbosch University, South Africa)

Kurt Bertels (Royal Conservatoire of Brussels/VUB)

Els De Bruyn (Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp/AP School of Arts)

Dieter De Vlieghere (LUCA School of Arts/KU Leuven)

Bruno Forment (Orpheus Institute, Ghent)

Ellen Gillard (RITCS/VUB)

Pieter Schuermans (LUCA School of Arts/KU Leuven)

Maarten Stragier (Royal Conservatoire of Brussels/VUB)

Christel Stalpaerts (Ghent University)

Annelies Van Assche (Ghent University & Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, AP School of Arts)

Kristin Van den Buys (Royal Conservatoire of Brussels/VUB)

Jan Van Landeghem (KVAB Arts Class)

Florian Vanlee (ECOOM-VUB & Ghent University)

Kevin Voets (Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp, AP School of Arts)

Katrien Vuylsteke Vanfleteren (KASK Conservatoire, HOGENT School of Arts)

Bert Willems (PXL/Hasselt University)

Institutional representatives were equally important. Schools of Arts and universities are the places where artistic research is undertaken and evaluated, but their information systems, governance structures, and research cultures are not identical. Bringing these perspectives together made it possible to distinguish between problems that are genuinely systemic and problems that arise from local institutional arrangements. The participation of people with experience in research information systems, administration, and policy was also important because the proposed questions have technical and governance implications that cannot be resolved by artistic or academic judgement alone.

The central thinker occupied a deliberately different position from the other participants. As an international expert, the central thinker was not primarily included to represent a particular institution or stakeholder group, but to contribute comparative distance and an independent analytical perspective to the programme. The KVAB's general framework describes the 'Thinker' as an international expert who works with the steering and expert groups, participates in the major meetings and activities, contributes to the intellectual development of the programme, and ultimately prepares a report with recommendations. In this cycle, Prof. Mario Nell was invited in that capacity because of his extensive involvement in South African policy discussions concerning the recognition and evaluation of artistic research, as well as his broader

experience as an artist-researcher and academic. His role was therefore not to represent a particular Flemish institution, nor to import a South African model, but to provide comparative distance and to act as a critical mirror through which assumptions in the Flemish debate could be tested.

The value of the international perspective lies precisely in its capacity to make the familiar unfamiliar. A system that appears self-evident within one institutional environment may look contingent from another. International comparison can reveal alternative ways of defining output, different relationships between artistic practice and academic documentation, and possible unintended consequences of apparently neutral categories.

2. Conceptual Context: What Is at Stake in Artistic Research?

2.1 Artistic research as a challenge to established knowledge regimes

The discussions repeatedly returned to a fundamental tension between the forms of knowledge traditionally privileged within universities and the forms of knowledge generated through artistic practice. Conventional academic systems have historically been particularly well equipped to register discursive, textual, and cognitive outputs. Artistic research, by contrast, may produce knowledge through doing, making, performing, composing, staging, designing, experimenting, embodying, and situated interaction with materials, spaces, objects, and audiences.

This does not mean that artistic research is inherently non-discursive or anti-academic. On the contrary, the institutional examples discussed during the sessions demonstrate that artistic doctoral research must include research questions, methodologies, engagement with existing knowledge, documentation, reflection, public dissemination, and defense. The issue is rather that these elements may be distributed differently across the research trajectory. The artwork or performance can carry knowledge that cannot be fully restated in the accompanying discourse, while the discourse can situate the artistic work without functioning as a conventional explanatory substitute for it.

This distinction is particularly important for performance-based research. Knowledge may reside in the performer's embodied choices, timing, interaction with materials, spatial awareness, sound, movement, tacit technical decisions, or relation to an audience. Some of this knowledge can be discussed and documented, but it cannot necessarily be transferred into a purely textual representation without loss. The challenge for research systems is therefore not simply to find a new label for an old category, but to recognise that different media can participate differently in knowledge production.

2.2 The artwork is not necessarily the research output in isolation

A recurring insight from the sessions was that an artistic artefact should not automatically be equated with artistic research output. The discussions repeatedly distinguish between artistic

activity in general and artistic work that forms part of a research trajectory. A professional musician may perform dozens of concerts, but not every concert is necessarily research output. Conversely, a particular performance may constitute a significant research outcome when it is demonstrably connected to a research question, methodology, and process.

This distinction also invites a useful comparison with conventional academic research. A scholarly output is not necessarily self-evidently identifiable as research simply because an object has been produced; rather, its status as research depends on the relationship between the resulting output, the underlying research process, and the way in which that research is communicated and made accessible to others. An academic article, for example, communicates not only its findings but also sufficient argumentation, contextualization, and methodological grounding for its contribution to knowledge to be recognised and evaluated. A similar principle can be applied to artistic research. An artistic work may constitute a research output when it is presented, exhibited, performed, screened, or otherwise disseminated in a context that makes its relationship to a research process and its contribution to knowledge identifiable. In some cases, the context in which an artistic work is presented also involves a process of professional or peer gatekeeping: a performance may be selected for a concert series or festival, a work may be accepted for an exhibition, or a publication may undergo editorial or peer review. Such processes can provide an additional form of validation that the work has been judged suitable for presentation or publication. They should not, however, be treated as equivalent to research assessment, since the criteria, expertise and purposes of such selection processes may differ. The relevant distinction is therefore not simply between private and publicly shared artistic work, but between an artistic artefact and an artistic research output whose research dimension is sufficiently contextualised and communicated, and, where relevant, subjected to appropriate forms of professional or peer judgement. This does not imply a rigid set of requirements for every artistic discipline or output; rather, it provides a conceptual basis for distinguishing between artistic practice in general and artistic work that is presented as, and can be recognised as, research.

The distinction also protects against a potential strategic problem. If every artistic activity of an affiliated individual were automatically treated as institutional research output, the boundary between research and professional practice would disappear. The session discussions specifically raised the possibility that institutions could otherwise recruit a highly successful

artist for a limited appointment and then attribute a large existing artistic CV to the institution. The research connection therefore matters not only conceptually but also for the integrity of registration.

2.3 Research process, research output and research context

Another important distinction concerns three related but different objects: the research process, the research output, and the context in which the output is interpreted. Existing institutional systems often register the output more readily than the process. Yet the sessions showed that the process is crucial to understanding artistic research. Progress reports, supervisory feedback, doctoral advisory committees, and project documentation can make the development of questions and methods visible even when the final artistic artefact is difficult to interpret without contextual information.

The emerging model can therefore be represented as a relationship rather than a hierarchy:

Element / Function	Role within the research relationship	Typical evidence or forms
Research project/trajectory	Defines the research question, rationale, aims and methodological frame	Project description, proposal, research plan, research assignment
Research process	Shows how knowledge is developed, tested and negotiated through the course of the project	Progress reports, reflections, supervision, process documentation
Artistic research output	Materialises, performs or otherwise communicates an outcome of the research	Performance, composition, visual artwork, installation, film, design, recording, etc.
Contextualisation	Explains how the artistic research output relates to the research project/trajectory and process, making its research dimension intelligible	Research statement, methodological note, exegesis, catalogue text, programme note, interview, discussion
Dissemination	Makes the artistic research output publicly accessible and enables its circulation, reception and wider engagement	Exhibition, concert, screening, publication, album, recording, online release, public presentation etc.

The key implication is that a registration system should not force these elements into a single field. It should instead allow them to be related. This is particularly relevant for a future central system: the research project can function as the organising unit, while multiple outputs and forms of documentation can be linked to it.

2.4 Artistic and discursive components as an integrated whole

The institutional examples discussed suggest that a false opposition between ‘artistic’ and ‘academic’ components is increasingly unhelpful. Some institutions require a written component, while others allow for a broader range of discursive forms, including essayistic, dialogical, creative, spoken, or other non-textual modes of communication. In such cases, websites and other digital platforms may serve as media through which these forms of communication are presented and shared. Yet the underlying principle appears remarkably consistent: the researcher must be able to communicate and situate the research, engage with relevant knowledge, and demonstrate an adequate understanding of research practice.

Several participants argued that the artistic and potential discursive components should form a unity. This is more than a procedural observation. If the artistic work and the written component are treated as unrelated deliverables, the system risks reproducing the very dualism that artistic research has challenged. The research question, methodology, artistic practice, reflection, and dissemination should instead be understood as interconnected parts of a trajectory.

At the same time, the discussion revealed legitimate differences of emphasis. Some participants defended a relatively strong academic writing requirement because writing provides a powerful means of knowledge transfer and dialogue with peers. Others emphasised that artists should be allowed to communicate research in forms appropriate to their practice and that not all knowledge generated through artistic practice can be verbalised. The report does not resolve this tension. Rather, it identifies it as a productive area in which the criterion should be communicability and research accountability rather than adherence to one prescribed literary form.

3. International State of the Art: How Other Systems Recognise Artistic and Practice-Based Research

The Flemish discussion becomes considerably clearer when placed against the longer international development of artistic and practice-based research. The central problem is not uniquely Flemish. Across Europe, and in countries like Australia and South Africa, among others, higher education institutions have had to respond to a transformation in the meaning of research output: knowledge is increasingly produced and communicated through forms that do not fit comfortably within the conventional article, monograph, or conference paper. Artistic research is one particularly visible expression of this wider transformation.

International comparison is useful, however, only if it avoids the temptation to search for a ready-made model that can simply be imported. The systems discussed below developed under different histories of higher education, funding regimes, relationships between universities and Schools of Arts, and understandings of artistic research. Their value for Flanders therefore lies primarily in comparison: they make different choices visible concerning what counts as an output, how outputs are documented, who validates them, how institutional affiliation is established, whether outputs are registered or assessed, and how information systems relate to funding or accountability.

The selection presented here is necessarily limited. It focuses on examples that are particularly relevant to the questions addressed by the Thinkers Programme and for which sufficiently detailed documentation was available. The United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Norway, Austria, and the international Research Catalogue represent different approaches to the recognition, documentation, assessment, and dissemination of artistic and practice-based research. The selection should therefore not be understood as an exhaustive survey of international practice, nor as an attempt to represent all European approaches. Rather, these cases provide a set of comparative reference points against which the Flemish situation can be considered.

My own international perspective is shaped most directly by the South African experience, where I have been extensively involved in policy discussions surrounding the recognition and evaluation of creative research outputs under the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). This experience provides a particularly relevant comparative case because South Africa has attempted to establish a national framework in which creative research outputs are formally recognised within a research-support and subsidy environment. It is therefore an instructive example not because it should be copied, but because it makes visible both the possibilities and the risks of formal recognition.

The purpose of this international overview is not to propose a new general model for research output. Such an undertaking would be far beyond the scope of a single Thinkers Programme cycle. Rather, artistic research provides a focused case through which broader questions about the recognition, documentation, assessment, and dissemination of non-conventional research outputs can be examined. The international examples are therefore used to illuminate choices and consequences that may be relevant to the Flemish context, rather than to suggest that the wider research-output regime should be redesigned as a whole.

3.1 The United Kingdom: practice research within a mature research-assessment framework

The United Kingdom provides one of the most developed examples of the incorporation of practice-based and creative research into a national research assessment framework. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) has progressively expanded the range of outputs that can be submitted for assessment. The current REF 2029 framework explicitly recognises diverse forms of output, including non-textual, creative, performance, and practice-led outputs, while retaining the principle that research should constitute a process of investigation leading to new insights that are effectively shared (REF, 2026).

The significance of the UK model lies in the fact that it does not simply create a special category called 'artistic research' and leave it outside the mainstream research system. Instead, the framework attempts to establish a general definition of research broad enough to include different modes of knowledge production. The current guidance states that diverse outputs can include artefacts, audio, visual and multimodal outputs, creative and performance outputs,

software, datasets, policy outputs and other forms. It also states that no particular form of output should be regarded as inherently superior or inferior simply because of its format (REF, 2026).

This is relevant to Flanders because it suggests that the recognition of artistic research does not necessarily require a completely separate research regime for the arts. Rather, it raises the broader question of whether research systems themselves can accommodate sufficiently plural conceptions of research output. Artistic research becomes a demanding test of whether such systems can apply the principle of methodological and communicative diversity consistently.

The UK model nevertheless demonstrates the complexity that follows from formal assessment. Outputs do not simply become visible; they enter an evaluative system connected to institutional performance and public research funding. The current REF framework has introduced a ‘substantive link’ requirement between an institution and submitted research, reflecting concerns about the relationship between outputs and the institution that enabled the research (REF, 2026). This is strikingly relevant to the Flemish discussions about institutional affiliation and the danger of importing an artist’s pre-existing professional output into an institutional research record.

The UK experience therefore illustrates both the possibilities and complexities of formal recognition. A national assessment system can accommodate a remarkably broad range of outputs if the definition of research is sufficiently open and if disciplinary panels possess appropriate expertise. At the same time, once recognition becomes part of a high-stakes assessment environment, questions of eligibility, attribution, selection, and institutional ownership become more consequential. For the Flemish discussion, the important distinction is recognising diverse forms of research output and deciding whether, and for what purposes, those outputs should subsequently enter a formal assessment system.

3.2 Australia: non-traditional research outputs and the importance of portfolios

Australia offers another important case. In the former Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) system, non-traditional research outputs (NTROs) were formally incorporated into national research assessment. The 2018 framework included original creative works, live

performances, recorded or rendered works, curated or exhibited events, research reports, and portfolios (Australian Research Council, 2019).

The Australian case is particularly instructive because it demonstrates the scale at which non-traditional outputs can be integrated into a national data environment. The framework explicitly recognised portfolios, which could bring together related works where the research significance could not reasonably be understood by examining one isolated artefact.

This point deserves emphasis. The portfolio is a conceptual alternative to the idea that every research output must be reduced to one discrete object. In artistic research, a research trajectory may consist of experiments, performances, iterations, compositions, exhibitions, prototypes, failures, documentation, and reflections. The final work may be only one part of the knowledge-producing process. A portfolio allows the relationship among these components to become visible.

For Flanders, this suggests that the unit of registration should not necessarily be the individual artwork. A central system could record an output as one element of a research trajectory and permit a portfolio or project-level relationship where appropriate. This would be particularly valuable in fields such as performance, design, theatre, and interdisciplinary practice, where research is often cumulative and processual.

Australia also offers a caution about the relationship between national data and assessment. ERA was discontinued in 2023, and the Australian Research Council is developing a proposed replacement framework (Australian Research Council, 2026). The lesson is not that national assessment is inherently unsuccessful. Rather, it demonstrates that large-scale research evaluation frameworks are policy instruments that evolve and may be redesigned. A Flemish system should therefore be technically and conceptually adaptable rather than built around assumptions that may become obsolete.

3.3 South Africa: national recognition of creative research outputs

South Africa is especially relevant to this report because it represents the comparative policy environment in which I have personally been involved. The DHET manages policies concerning both research outputs and creative outputs, and public higher education institutions submit

annual claims relating to these outputs (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2026). The policy framework for the evaluation of creative research outputs was established as a formal mechanism for recognising creative outputs as research within the national higher-education system.

The South African model is important because it confronts the central Flemish question directly: how can creative work become recognisable as research within a national research-support environment? The answer has involved formal policy definitions, categories of creative output, documentation requirements, and expert evaluation. DHET has also established advisory and sub-field structures for evaluating submitted creative outputs (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2020).

The model demonstrates the value of expert panels. Artistic quality and research significance cannot be reduced to citation counts, and the South African approach recognises the need for disciplinary experts to assess creative outputs. This is closely aligned with one of the strongest conclusions emerging from the Flemish discussion: where substantive assessment is required, expertise must be appropriate to the practice being assessed.

At the same time, South Africa provides a powerful warning about the consequences of linking recognition to subsidy. Once the recognition of creative outputs becomes part of a funding mechanism, the categories acquire strategic significance. Researchers and institutions have an incentive to understand what is recognised, how it is documented, and what counts as a successful submission. This can produce positive institutional investment in artistic research, but it can also create administrative behaviour, strategic categorisation, and pressure to produce outputs that fit the recognised framework.

My own experience of these policy discussions has therefore reinforced a distinction that I regard as essential for Flanders: recognition and evaluation can be connected, but they should not be conceptually conflated. A system can learn from the South African experience precisely by asking which elements support recognition and which become problematic when attached directly to financial consequences. The Flemish proposal to keep the current exercise separate from funding creates an opportunity to establish a healthier first layer of infrastructure before any financial application is contemplated.

From the perspective of my own involvement in South African policy development, this distinction is not merely conceptual, because once a system for recognising creative research outputs becomes connected to institutional funding, the categories used for registration acquire consequences beyond description. They can influence institutional priorities, researchers' understanding of what constitutes a recognisable output, and the administrative practices developed around submission and verification. This experience reinforces my view that the Flemish discussion is at an advantageous point: it can first establish what information is genuinely useful for recognition, documentation, and knowledge transfer before allowing financial or performance considerations to determine the architecture of the system.

3.4 Norway: registration, archiving and the distinction between documentation and assessment

Norway offers a different model, and one that is particularly relevant to the Flemish discussion because it demonstrates the value of separating registration and documentation from high-stakes evaluation. Artistic research is registered through national research information infrastructure, and institutions such as the Norwegian Academy of Music provide dedicated mechanisms for registering artistic research alongside conventional research outputs (Norwegian Academy of Music, 2026).

At the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, artistic research results are documented, archived, and registered, with institutional and national research information infrastructure playing complementary roles (Oslo National Academy of the Arts, 2026). The institution explicitly requires documentation that enables colleagues to follow the working method and the insight generated through artistic research.

This is close to the architecture I believe is most promising for Flanders. Registration does not need to mean that a central authority has judged an artistic work to be excellent. A record can instead make research visible, searchable, citable, and preservable. Assessment can take place where it is actually needed: doctoral examination, research funding, appointment and promotion, project review, or institutional quality assurance.

The Norwegian approach also illustrates the importance of documentation as an epistemic practice. Documentation is not merely administrative evidence that an event occurred. It can make visible the research process, methodological choices and insights generated. This is especially important for artistic research because much of the knowledge involved may be embodied, tacit, performative, or materially situated. The challenge is to document enough to enable understanding without forcing the practice into a discursive format that misrepresents it.

3.5 Research Catalogue and multimodal exposition

Alongside national and institutional approaches, the international Research Catalogue provides a complementary infrastructure model. Used institutionally by organisations such as Aalto University, it is designed specifically for artistic research and allows researchers to document, publish, share, and develop research through combinations of text, images, video, sound, and other media (Aalto University, 2026).

The significance of this model is conceptual as much as technical. It does not treat documentation as a secondary report attached to an artwork. Instead, the exposition itself can become a research communication form. Artistic research can therefore be presented through a constellation of media in which written text, image, sound, video, and artefact interact.

This is particularly useful in addressing a persistent problem in discussions of artistic research: the false choice between ‘the artwork alone’ and ‘a large written explanation’. A third possibility is research communication through a multimodal exposition in which the artistic work, documentation, contextual text, and references are arranged so that the research can be understood without reducing it to conventional academic prose.

For a Flemish infrastructure, this suggests that a central metadata system should not attempt to reproduce the entire research exposition. Instead, it could link to institutional or specialist platforms where richer multimodal documentation can reside. A central record can provide discovery and stable identification; a specialist exposition platform can provide depth.

3.6 International publishing and peer-review infrastructures

International artistic-research publishing further complicates the conventional distinction between artwork and publication. The Journal for Artistic Research (JAR), together with the Research Catalogue infrastructure, has developed an international environment in which artistic research can be communicated through multimodal expositions and subjected to peer review. Such infrastructures demonstrate that peer review does not necessarily require the conventional journal article.

This is significant for Flanders because the question ‘How do we assess an artistic output?’ should be followed by a second question: ‘What kind of communication makes assessment possible?’ If a reviewer is expected to judge research contribution, methodological rigour and significance, the reviewer needs sufficient context. That context can be textual, visual, sonic, performative, or multimodal.

The 2026 framework proposed by Glisovic and Batty is particularly relevant. Their work identifies contextual information, intention, process, form and content, insights and knowledge gained, relevance, dissemination context, and supporting documentation as potentially relevant dimensions of evaluation. They also distinguish between academic peers who may assess research dimensions and industry or professional peers who may provide evidence of esteem, quality or engagement without those forms of evidence necessarily being equivalent to research quality (Glisovic and Batty, 2026).

This distinction is useful for the Flemish debate. A prestigious venue, curator, festival, commissioning body, or professional collaborator may be evidence of recognition or reach. It should not automatically become a proxy for research quality. Conversely, a work may make a substantial research contribution without having been presented at a prestigious international venue.

3.7 Comparative synthesis

The international examples reveal several recurring patterns that are relevant to the Flemish discussion. Taken together, they demonstrate a broad shift away from treating the conventional journal article as the sole or primary model of research output. Major research systems increasingly accommodate diverse forms of non-textual, practice-based, and multimodal research.

At the same time, the recognition of such diverse outputs creates a corresponding need for appropriate documentation and contextualisation. The more heterogeneous the output, the more important it becomes to provide sufficient information for others to understand its research context, process, and contribution. The form and extent of such documentation vary considerably, however, and no single international model establishes a universally applicable standard.

The international cases also demonstrate that the relationship between artistic artefacts and discursive research communication need not be reduced to a simple choice between the two. Portfolios, multimodal expositions, contextual documentation, and other forms of research communication provide ways of bringing artistic practice and research reflection into relation without requiring every project to conform to the model of a conventional scholarly publication.

At the level of evaluation, the comparative evidence points to the continuing importance of expert judgement when research quality, significance, or contribution must be assessed. The limitations of bibliometric indicators do not eliminate the need for evaluation; rather, they highlight the importance of appropriate expertise, contextualisation, and assessment criteria that are sensitive to the nature of different forms of research.

The international examples further demonstrate the importance of keeping registration, assessment, and funding conceptually distinct, even where they may interact in practice. South Africa illustrates both the possibilities and risks of a national mechanism linked to research funding; the United Kingdom demonstrates how diverse outputs can be incorporated into a high-stakes assessment framework; and Norway illustrates the value of registration and archiving as functions that need not themselves be reduced to funding or performance measurement.

Several systems draw attention to the relationship between research output and the institutional context in which research is undertaken. The United Kingdom's current concept of a 'substantive link' provides one example of how systems can distinguish between professional activity and research undertaken within an institution. This is particularly relevant to the Flemish discussion, where questions arise about how artistic research that develops before, outside, or across institutional affiliations might be documented and recognised.

The significance of these comparisons therefore lies not in identifying a model for transplantation, but in making consequences and design choices visible. They show, for example, what can happen when recognition becomes assessment, when registration becomes connected to funding infrastructure, when categories require strategic significance, or when documentation is designed primarily around the requirements of conventional publication rather than the nature of the research itself. These comparative observations provide a basis for returning later to the Flemish discussions and asking which principles appear appropriate in the local institutional context.

3.8 The Flemish context

The international examples become most useful when considered against the existing Flemish landscape. Flanders does not approach the question of artistic research output from a blank slate. Artistic research has become institutionalised within the Schools of Arts, artistic doctorates are established, and research funding and support structures have developed around these activities. The present Thinkers' Programme therefore entered an already developing landscape in which questions concerning the recognition, registration and evaluation of artistic research had previously been considered.

An important part of this history is the work undertaken through the Centre for Research and Development Monitoring (ECOOM)¹. Over an extended period, approximately 2009–2022, an ECOOM trajectory brought together Schools of Arts and other stakeholders to investigate the

¹ The ECOOM trajectory addressed the monitoring and representation of research and development, including questions concerning non-written research outputs in the arts and design. Its work considered how such outputs could be represented within research information systems and how indicators might be developed without simply reproducing conventional publication-based metrics.

registration, representation, and harmonisation of non-written research output, including output from the arts and design. The work examined how research outputs that do not conform to conventional publication formats could be represented within research information systems and considered the development of indicators appropriate to such forms of research.

This earlier trajectory forms an important part of the institutional history of artistic research in Flanders. It demonstrates that the technical and conceptual questions surrounding the representation of non-written research output had already been explored within the Flemish research environment. Subsequent work on the representation and evaluation of non-written research outputs similarly addressed the challenges involved in making artistic research visible within systems developed primarily around conventional scholarly publications.²

The Flemish landscape also includes broader research-information infrastructure. The Flemish Research Information Space (FRIS) provides a regional research-information environment within which research outputs, researchers and research activities can be documented and made discoverable.³ Questions concerning the registration and representation of artistic and other non-written research outputs therefore form part of a wider research-information context that extends beyond individual institutions.

These developments demonstrate that the present Thinkers' Programme forms part of an existing history of institutionalisation, experimentation, and infrastructure development relating to artistic research in Flanders. The following four Sessions build on this context and examine the current state of affairs, the possible scope and purpose of a shared approach, questions of assessment, and the potential role of a central documentation platform.

² See, in particular, Vanlee and Ysebaert (2019) on the disclosure and evaluation of artistic research and the representation of non-written research outputs. The ECOOM-related work also explored the relationship between artistic/design research outputs and systems of research registration and evaluation.

³ The Flemish Research Information Space (FRIS) provides the broader regional research-information context within which questions of research output, discoverability, and institutional research information are situated.

4. Session One – Intra-Institutional State of Affairs

The first session established a clear starting point: Flanders does not currently have a harmonised system for registering or evaluating artistic research output. Institutions have developed different arrangements in response to their own histories, partnerships, disciplines, and organisational structures. This diversity is not necessarily a weakness, as it reflects the autonomy of the Schools of Arts and the heterogeneous nature of artistic research itself. The challenge arises when institutional diversity results in fragmentation to such an extent that artistic research outputs become difficult to locate, describe, preserve, or make visible beyond their immediate institutional contexts.

The discussion therefore pointed not simply to the absence of a common registration system, but to a broader issue of visibility, interoperability, and recognition across the Flemish artistic research landscape. Several related observations emerged:

- **There is currently no common Flemish framework for registering artistic output.** Institutions have developed their own approaches to recording and documenting such outputs, resulting in considerable variation in terminology, categories, metadata, procedures, repository practices, and approaches to contextualisation. This makes it difficult to obtain a coherent overview of artistic research activity across institutions and limits the discoverability of outputs beyond their original institutional settings.
- **The visibility of artistic research remains limited at both institutional and sector level.** The absence of a shared framework makes it difficult to establish even a basic descriptive overview of what kinds of artistic research are being undertaken, where it is taking place, and in what forms its outputs are produced and disseminated. This challenge is compounded by the fact that existing research information systems were largely designed around conventional academic outputs, meaning that artistic outputs and the different ways in which artistic research is documented and contextualised do not always fit easily within existing structures.

- **The diversity of artistic research also creates challenges for assessment and classification.** Assessment is predominantly qualitative and often process-oriented, reflecting the situated and discipline-specific nature of artistic research. Consequently, the development of shared categories and descriptors is more complex than in systems based primarily on standardised publication types or quantitative indicators. The question is therefore not simply how to create common categories, but how to develop descriptors that can accommodate disciplinary and institutional diversity without reducing artistic research to conventional academic output types.
- **Long-term preservation and accessibility remain uneven across institutions and types of artistic output.** This is particularly relevant where artistic research is embodied in performances, exhibitions, installations, audiovisual works, or other outputs for which conventional repository models may be insufficient. Registration is therefore closely connected to questions of preservation, discoverability, and continued access over time.
- **The relationship between registration, assessment, and funding was identified as an important contextual consideration.** The absence of a performance-based funding mechanism for artistic research output in the Schools of Arts currently distinguishes the Flemish situation from systems in which research-output registration is directly linked to institutional funding. This separation is significant for the design of any future registration system. Participants also expressed concern that greater visibility and comparability should not automatically introduce bibliometric or performance-oriented logic into artistic research, particularly through quantitative indicators or evaluation models developed for conventional academic publishing.

4.1 The forms of knowledge at stake

One of the strongest observations concerned the tendency of university systems to privilege cognitive and textual forms of knowledge. The discussion of performance studies provided a particularly useful example. A performer may produce knowledge through embodied action, through the way an object is handled, through interaction with a site, through spatial relations, materials, movement, or oral practice. Such knowledge is not necessarily reducible to a written proposition.

This is not an argument against documentation, but in fact creates a stronger argument for documentation. If artistic knowledge is embodied or ephemeral, a system must find ways of preserving evidence and context without pretending that the representation is identical to the original work. Participants explicitly noted that any recording is always a representation rather than the work itself. This insight should become a guiding principle for future repository design.

4.2 Assessment of doctoral artistic research

The PhD emerged repeatedly as the most developed existing framework for thinking about artistic research assessment. This is understandable: doctoral regulations require a formal trajectory, supervisory structures, and a final evaluation. The examples shared during the symposium indicate that a doctoral assessment may involve artistic specialists, academic readers, doctoral advisory committees, research boards, public presentation, and defense.

One recurring model consists of at least two forms of expertise: artistic expertise and theoretical or academic expertise. Importantly, participants noted that artistic assessors do not necessarily need to hold a PhD in order to judge artistic quality. In some assessment models, academic expertise may be directed particularly towards the research question, methodological approach, research process, and written or discursive component, rather than requiring the academic assessor to make an independent judgement of the artistic quality of the work itself. Other institutions attempt to move beyond the distinction by appointing assessors who are able to engage meaningfully with both the artistic and academic dimensions of the research.

The discussion of doctoral writing was similarly diverse. There was no general agreement that artistic doctoral research must have a prescribed page length or word count, nor, in some

institutional models, a requirement for a particular form of communication at all. Where the research can be communicated through the artistic work itself, an artefact such as a documentary, installation, performance, or other artistic form may constitute the primary vehicle through which the research is communicated. Other projects may combine the artistic output with essays, dialogues, creative writing, spoken forms, or other discursive components. The key issue is therefore not the imposition of a particular communicative format, but whether the chosen form or combination of forms enables the research to be communicated, contextualised, and evaluated. What appears more stable is the expectation that the research should be substantial, coherent, and appropriately situated in relation to relevant sources, knowledge, and research practice.

4.3 Institutional examples of research communication

Several institutional approaches illustrate the diversity of current practice. In Ghent, researchers are asked from an early stage to consider how their research findings will be communicated. The emphasis is not necessarily on explaining what the artwork ‘means’, but on providing sufficient context to understand the research process. Progress reports can create space for supervisors to articulate aspects of research that are invisible to quantitative systems.

In Antwerp, the process of research is similarly important. Students prepare progress documentation and supervisors respond to it. Artistic outputs are then registered in a school repository, with public dissemination functioning as an important criterion. Other institutions combine artistic portfolios with written or discursive components. In Brussels, examples were given of doctoral artistic outputs embedded in the programming of cultural institutions, thereby placing the artistic work within a professional artistic field rather than evaluating it solely inside the university.

These examples suggest that institutional validation frequently depends on a combination of academic and artistic perspectives. Importantly, this does not necessarily mean that academic supervision and artistic supervision are located in separate institutional or professional contexts. In some institutions, artistic supervision by practitioners or specialists in the relevant field forms an integral part of the institutional supervisory structure, alongside academic supervision. A research project may therefore be situated within an academic research framework while also

receiving discipline-specific artistic guidance and evaluation. The hybrid nature of artistic research thus appears not as an exception but as a structural characteristic, reflected not only in the outputs produced but also in the ways in which research is supervised, contextualised, and validated.

4.4 Beyond the PhD

While the PhD currently provides the most explicit and developed institutional framework for artistic research, institutions have also developed frameworks for research at Master's level, although these are often less standardised and less fully articulated. Participants nevertheless raised the need to consider how artistic research is undertaken and recognised across different levels and scales of practices. At Master's level, approaches differ: some institutions require a thesis or other discursive component connected to the artistic work, while others allow more open formats or place greater emphasis on the artistic work itself. Yet recurring learning outcomes include the ability to formulate a research question, position the work in relation to existing sources and research practices, and communicate the research to peers or other appropriate audiences.

The discussion also raises the question of artistic research beyond the doctoral level, particularly in relation to postdoctoral research. Compared with doctoral research, postdoctoral opportunities for artistic researchers appear to be considerably less developed and less consistently structured. The relative scarcity of dedicated postdoctoral positions, projects, and institutional pathways raises broader questions about how artistic research can be supported as an ongoing research trajectory rather than being concentrated primarily at doctoral level. This is particularly relevant if artistic research is understood not simply as a qualification-oriented activity, but as a continuing form of research practice within higher education and the professional artistic field.

These observations suggest that an eventual framework should not be designed exclusively around doctoral research. The PhD can provide an important reference point because its research processes, supervisory structures, and assessment mechanisms are relatively well established, but a broader framework should be capable of accommodating research trajectories of different

scales, durations, purposes, and career stages, from Master's-level projects through doctoral research and into postdoctoral and other independent forms of artistic research.

4.5 Why documentation matters

Participants identified several reasons for improved documentation. First is the evidential function of documentation: it provides a record that an event, performance, exhibition, or other artistic research output took place and establishes what was produced. Second is public accessibility: documentation makes such outputs discoverable and accessible beyond the immediate context in which they were created or presented. Third is preservation: documentation can help safeguard ephemeral artistic outputs that might otherwise disappear or become inaccessible over time. Fourth is research continuity: once outputs have been documented and preserved, future researchers can discover, reference, and build on previous work. Fifth is career sustainability: researchers need to be able to demonstrate the work they have undertaken in future applications, evaluations, and professional contexts.

In the case of PhD's, the asymmetry between the written thesis and the artistic output is particularly striking. A doctoral dissertation can normally be found in a university library and may remain accessible for decades. The performance, exhibition, recording, or installation that constituted an important part of the research may be far more challenging to locate. This creates a distorted historical record of artistic research. Improving documentation is therefore not merely an administrative exercise; it is also a question of research heritage.

4.6 Institutional diversity, autonomy and financial structures

As outlined in the introduction, the Flemish landscape of artistic research is characterised by a distinctive relationship between Schools of Arts, university associations, and universities. The Schools of Arts constitute the primary institutional setting for formal artistic research, but they are organised in different ways within the various associations. Some arrangements involve relatively close integration between the School of Arts and the university, as is the case with the LUCA School of Arts in Leuven. But other than LUCA, Schools of Arts maintain a clearer organisational distinction from their associated universities. The Antwerp Research Institute for

the Arts (ARIA),⁴ and the Brussels Arts Platform⁵ provide examples of dedicated structures that coordinate artistic research across institutional boundaries. Ghent, by contrast, has relied more directly on interaction between artistic supervisors and their academic counterparts rather than on a separate dedicated research structure.

This institutional and financial diversity is directly relevant to the question of registration. A common system for documenting artistic research cannot simply assume that all Schools of Arts operate with the same governance structures, research infrastructures, supervisory arrangements, or financial resources. The institutional location of research, the responsibilities of Schools of Arts and universities, and the mechanisms through which research is supported all shape how research outputs are produced, recorded, assessed, and made visible.

The financial dimension is particularly important. The funding of artistic research in Flanders has historically differed from the funding of doctoral research in many conventional academic disciplines. According to the Flemish Indicator Book⁶, artistic doctoral research has been less likely to receive support through some of the major general academic research-funding schemes and has consequently relied substantially on resources allocated to the Schools of Arts. These so-called ‘academisation resources’ form an important part of the financial basis for artistic research and are distributed according to institutional parameters, including factors such as student numbers and awarded degrees. Schools of Arts then exercise considerable discretion in deploying these resources, including through calls for doctoral research.

This creates an important distinction between registering research output and allocating research funding. Participants were conscious of the possibility that improved documentation and visibility could acquire financial consequences if registration were subsequently used as an input into institutional performance measurement or funding allocation. The concern raised in the

⁴ The Antwerp Research Institute for the Arts (ARIA) is a collaborative platform connecting the University of Antwerp with the School of Arts of the Antwerp University Association to shape and advance artistic research.

⁵ Brussels Arts Platform (*Kunstenplatform Brussel*) is a collaborative partnership that guides and supports artistic research and doctoral programs in the arts across the Erasmushogeschool Brussel (EhB) and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

⁶ The Flemish Indicator Book contains policy indicators that chart the development of the Flemish potential in science, technology and innovation: <https://www.vlaamsindicatorenboek.be/8.1/artistic-research-and-the-phd-in-the-arts>

discussions was therefore not simply about the administrative burden of registration, but about the potential transformation of a descriptive infrastructure into an evaluative or financial instrument.

This issue should be distinguished from the present registration exercise. The purpose of establishing a clearer overview of artistic research output need not be to create a new funding formula, nor should registration automatically imply a judgement about institutional performance. Indeed, linking registration too directly to funding could create incentives for institutions to adapt their research practices to the requirements of the system rather than designing the system around the actual diversity of artistic research practices.

The implication for any future Flemish framework is therefore significant: registration, assessment, and funding should be treated as related but distinct functions. A registration system should first make artistic research more visible, discoverable, and documentable. Decisions about assessment or funding may draw on such information where appropriate, but should not be built into the registration system by default. Maintaining this distinction would allow a common infrastructure to improve sector-wide visibility while preserving institutional autonomy and the diversity of artistic research practices.

5. Session Two – Scope of Application

The second session sharpened the discussion by asking what a central registration system would accomplish. This was an important methodological move because, rather than assuming that a central database is inherently desirable, participants considered the added value, stakeholders, limitations, and risks. A recurrent question was whether the proposal should be a central metadata platform, a central archive, a researcher database, a research repository, or some combination of these.

The discussion suggested that the strongest justification is circulation, and that it should never be control: a system is valuable if it helps research become findable, understandable, accessible, citable, and reusable. If it merely reproduces existing administrative reporting, its added value is limited. If it becomes an instrument for counting productivity, it risks damaging the very forms of research it seeks to recognise.

5.1 Documentation, visibility and preservation

The most consistently supported functions were documentation, visibility, and preservation. Participants described a situation in which artistic research has increased considerably but remains difficult to see as a coherent field. A central overview could make the extent and diversity of this activity visible without assigning numerical value to each output.

The KASK example of extending existing library infrastructure to accommodate podcasts, websites, vlogs, and other potentially disappearing research materials was particularly instructive. It demonstrates that practical responses to the documentation and preservation of non-traditional research outputs are already being developed within institutions, often through creative use and adaptation of existing resources. Such initiatives should therefore be regarded as an important starting point for future development rather than as isolated experiments to be replaced by a new centralised solution.

A complementary example is the platform developed at the University of Antwerp, originally known as Brocade and now operating under the name WANDER. Its applications support the management of library and heritage collections, institutional repositories, and research information. The experience of institutions such as the Royal Museum of Fine Arts Antwerp

also illustrates a continuing challenge: research activity may be documented within an institutional repository, while exhibitions, restorations, and other non-written outputs are not necessarily represented in wider research-information environments such as the Flemish Research Information Space (FRIS). This distinction highlights the difference between having a system in which outputs can be registered and ensuring that those outputs are discoverable across institutional and regional infrastructures.

This also points to the importance of avoiding unnecessary duplication. A future Flemish framework should begin by identifying, connecting, and learning from the documentation practices, repositories, infrastructures, and research initiatives that already exist within the Schools of Arts and their partner institutions. The objective should not be to start again from the beginning, but to build upon existing expertise and infrastructure where these already address parts of the problem. At the same time, this example illustrates that such local solutions may depend on considerable institutional creativity and the mobilisation of existing resources. A central framework should therefore seek not simply to reproduce these solutions elsewhere, but to recognise the work and resources required to sustain them and to consider how existing initiatives could be supported and connected more systematically.

5.2 Citation, knowledge continuity and discoverability

One of the most compelling arguments for improved registration was the possibility of making artistic research more visible, discoverable, citable, and available for subsequent use. At present, researchers may be able to cite the written thesis while the artistic work itself remains difficult to locate or reference. This creates an imbalance in which artistic research becomes part of scholarly conversations mainly through its textual representation. A more systematic approach to documentation could help address this problem by making the artistic output itself identifiable and accessible alongside the research context in which it was produced.

A well-designed record could provide stable identifiers and links to an artistic research output, together with sufficient contextual information to establish what the work was, when and where it occurred, who contributed, and how it related to the research project. Such information would allow subsequent researchers to locate, cite, discuss, and build upon artistic research itself rather than relying primarily on secondary descriptions or written representations. In the longer term,

this could contribute to the emergence of identifiable research traditions and lineages within the arts and support greater continuity between successive generations of researchers.

The benefits of improved discoverability would extend beyond citation. A searchable repository or discovery platform could become an important learning and research resource. Lecturers could direct students to previous projects; students could examine different research methodologies and approaches; researchers could identify precedents; and supervisors could demonstrate how artistic research has been conducted in related areas. Participants identified students and early-career researchers as particularly important beneficiaries because access to previous artistic research is an important part of developing research questions, methodologies, and a broader understanding of the field.

Students often struggle to locate previous artistic research when constructing a state of the art or developing a research methodology. Much knowledge currently circulates through personal networks: a supervisor may know a researcher, remember a project, or recommend an example from memory. This can be inefficient and may create unequal access to knowledge, particularly for students who do not already have access to well-established academic and artistic networks. Improved discoverability could therefore contribute to a more systematic and equitable research environment in which examples of artistic research are accessible beyond individual supervisory and professional networks.

The significance of such a platform would consequently extend beyond simply making outputs easier to find. Its value would lie partly in transforming a fragmented body of artistic research into a resource that can be encountered, studied, referenced, and built upon by subsequent generations of researchers and practitioners. In this sense, documentation and discoverability could contribute to a shared research culture and perform an important knowledge-transfer function. The infrastructure would not simply record that research had taken place; it would help make the research part of an accessible and cumulative body of knowledge.

5.3 Career sustainability and research visibility

A visible body of documented research could also support the sustainable career development of artistic researchers. This is particularly relevant for researchers who seek to continue their

careers partly within academia through postdoctoral positions, multi-year projects, or other externally funded research trajectories.

The discussion pointed to a particular challenge in this regard: the expertise to recognise and assess artistic research is often concentrated within the Schools of Arts, while external research-funding structures may have less specialised expertise in evaluating artistic outputs and their research significance. A well-designed platform or database could therefore contribute to making the nature, scope, and continuity of artistic research careers more visible beyond the immediate institutional environment in which the research was undertaken. It could provide accessible evidence of research trajectories that might otherwise be difficult for external assessors or selection committees to identify and contextualise.

This would give documentation a significance beyond simple record-keeping. For artistic researchers seeking to establish a sustainable research career after the PhD, systematic documentation could provide an important evidential basis for demonstrating the continuity, diversity, and development of their research practice. A central discovery platform could make relevant outputs more readily identifiable while also providing contextual information that helps external audiences understand their research character and significance.

At the same time, participants distinguished between a research repository and a personal CV. A repository should not determine which achievements are ‘best’ for a particular application. That selection is context-dependent and should remain an act of scholarly or professional judgement. The repository can provide the evidence; the researcher, together with the relevant evaluator or selection committee, can provide the valuation and selection. Maintaining this distinction is important because it allows a shared infrastructure to improve visibility and recognition without itself becoming a hidden ranking or evaluation system.

5.4 The problem of prestige indicators

During the discussions, reference was made to an approach known to some participants in which the significance of an artistic output is partly associated with the prestige of the venue in which it is presented. The examples were discussed as a contested approach and was invoked precisely because it illustrates the difficulty of translating artistic recognition into a standardised metric.

While the profile or reputation of a venue may provide useful contextual information for an evaluator, it cannot automatically function as an equivalent to citation-based measures in scholarly publishing.

The underlying issue is broader than the particular examples discussed during the sessions. It concerns the tendency to assign value to research outputs according to the perceived prestige of the platform, venue, or publication through which they are disseminated. A parallel can be drawn with academic publishing, where the perceived prestige of journals has historically been reinforced through mechanisms such as indexing, citation measures, impact factors, and other bibliometric indicators. Yet the relevance of such measures varies considerably between disciplines, and particularly in the humanities their usefulness as proxies for the quality or significance of individual research contributions is increasingly questioned. In some fields, researchers may deliberately prioritise publications that are more accessible, open access, or more appropriate to a particular research community, even when these outlets carry less conventional prestige.

This parallel is particularly relevant to artistic research. A major international presentation or exhibition may provide evidence of recognition and reach, but its significance as research cannot be determined by the reputation of the venue alone. Conversely, an artist-researcher may choose a less prestigious or less internationally prominent platform because it is more appropriate to the research question, the intended audience, the artistic context, or the communities with whom the research is undertaken. The relevant question should therefore not simply be where an output was presented, but why that context was appropriate and what the output contributes as research.

This distinction between contextual evidence and numerical or hierarchical value should be preserved. Venue profile can be recorded as contextual metadata, but it should not automatically be converted into a score or ranking. More broadly, a future registration system should resist reproducing prestige hierarchies that may obscure the diversity of contexts in which meaningful artistic research takes place. The purpose of documentation should be to make research visible and intelligible, rather than to establish a hierarchy of venues through which the value of research is indirectly determined.

5.5 Policy relevance

A central overview could also benefit policymakers by making artistic research more visible. The current lack of comprehensive data makes it difficult to communicate the scale and diversity of the field. However, visibility and measurement should not be treated as synonyms. Government may reasonably require evidence that publicly supported research exists and that research resources are used for research. That does not logically require a ranking of artistic outputs or a productivity index.

The session discussions reveal a legitimate tension here. Some participants saw value in being prepared if governments eventually demand more systematic reporting. Others feared that the creation of a system might itself invite future performance-based evaluation. This is a governance issue and should be addressed explicitly rather than left to assumption.

5.6 Applicability beyond artistic research

The second session broadened the scope considerably. Architecture and design, practice-based research, exhibitions, workshops, toolkits, podcasts, science communication, and other societal-impact activities were identified as examples of output that may not fit comfortably within traditional publication categories.

This suggests that artistic research can be a leading case for a broader transformation in the understanding of research output. The question is not whether every podcast or workshop is research. Rather, the question is whether a research information architecture can accommodate outputs that contribute to knowledge without forcing them into categories designed for journal articles and books.

The potential alliance with the humanities and social sciences is particularly important. Participants observed that similar debates are already taking place around catalogues, interviews, podcasts, and other forms of scholarly communication. Artistic research should therefore not isolate itself by demanding an entirely separate system if broader reform of research-output recognition is possible.

5.7 Opportunities, risks and the central principle emerging from Session Two

A shared system for artistic research could provide several benefits, but the discussion also highlighted the possibility that the same infrastructure could be used in ways that were not originally intended. The opportunities and risks can be summarised as follows:

Potential opportunity	Potential risk
Greater visibility	Visibility becomes productivity measurement
Preservation of ephemeral work	Technical infrastructure becomes costly and rigid
Citation and knowledge continuity	Citation counts become performance indicators
Improved discoverability, accessibility and contextualisation	A repository becomes another administrative burden
Intra, inter-, and transdisciplinary discovery	Rigid categories limit the discoverability of hybrid work
Shared terminology and interoperability	Standardisation undermines institutional autonomy
Evidence of research activity	Evidence becomes a proxy for funding allocation
Stronger public communication	Public visibility is equated with artistic quality

The central concern is therefore not whether a shared system would generate useful information, but how that information would subsequently be used. Information collected for purposes of documentation, discovery or knowledge transfer could potentially be repurposed for comparison, performance measurement or funding allocation. Similarly, categories introduced to improve search and retrieval could acquire unintended evaluative meanings. The distinction between descriptive infrastructure and evaluative infrastructure is therefore important: a system may provide information that enables human judgement without itself becoming a mechanism for ranking or measuring artistic research.

The relevant questions are therefore practical and qualitative: Can students and researchers find relevant previous work? Can artistic outputs be appropriately referenced and contextualised? Can the public access information about research and its outcomes? Can institutions document their research activity? Can the history of artistic research be preserved for future researchers? These purposes do not require the system itself to determine the value or quality of the research.

The distinction reinforces a broader principle of the report: governance and purpose are as important as technical design. A shared infrastructure should therefore be designed around clearly defined purposes and safeguards against its subsequent use as an unintended proxy for productivity, quality or funding performance.

6. Session Three – Assessment, Quality, Relevance and Impact

The third session produced one of the strongest conceptual distinctions of the entire symposium: assessment and measurement should not be used interchangeably. Measurement seeks to translate an object or activity into a numerical value while assessment can involve judgement, interpretation, contextualization, and expert reasoning. Artistic research may rather require the latter even when the former is technically possible.

Participants were particularly critical of attempts to import bibliometric systems into artistic research. The concern was not simply that the metrics are imperfect, but the deeper problem is that the categories and assumptions underlying bibliometrics were developed for particular forms of scholarly communication and do not map neatly onto artistic research. A system that rewards only what can be easily counted may create incentives for researchers to adapt their research practices and outputs to the requirements of the measurement system, rather than choosing the forms of research, documentation, and dissemination that are most appropriate to their particular research questions and contexts. In this sense, the problem is not merely whether a particular metric is accurate, but whether the use of metrics begins to shape the research itself.

6.1 Who should assess artistic research?

There was broad support for peer assessment involving both artistic and academic expertise. Existing doctoral models provide useful evidence: artistic specialists can assess the quality and significance of the practice alongside academic or theoretical specialists who can assess research framing, methodology, and discursive components, and hybrid experts can sometimes bridge both domains.

The discussion also exposed a weakness in some external evaluation environments as panels responsible for research funding may not consistently contain specialists with first-hand experience in artistic research. In other words, these panels may not consistently contain disciplinary peers. Participants regarded this as a significant issue. They went even further and advocated that one universal commission cannot assess every artistic field. A single panel cannot reasonably possess deep expertise in music, theatre, dance, visual arts, design,

architecture, film, and other practices. If artistic research is to be assessed fairly, the composition of the assessment panel must reflect the object being assessed.

In my view, the implication is not that every discipline requires an entirely separate assessment system. Rather, a common framework should establish the principles of assessment while allowing the expertise applied within that framework to remain sufficiently specific to the research being assessed. This distinction between common principles and differentiated expertise may offer a more workable alternative to both a single universal panel and completely fragmented disciplinary systems.

6.2 What exactly is being assessed?

Before creating criteria, the purpose of assessment must be specified. Participants asked whether the object is the artistic work, the research character, the researcher's skills, the contribution to knowledge, the impact of a project, or institutional productivity. These are distinct but potentially interconnected objects: an artistic work may constitute part of a broader research trajectory, while the significance of that work within an artistic field may form an important component of the assessment of the research project as a whole. Similarly, aspects of the research trajectory may be inseparable from the artistic work through which the research is encountered. The challenge is therefore not necessarily to assess these dimensions separately, but to establish how they relate to one another and which dimensions are relevant to the particular purpose and level of assessment.

Assessment object	Possible purpose	Most appropriate basis
Artistic work	Artistic quality / significance	Artistic peer judgement
Research trajectory	Rigour, coherence, methodological development	Supervision, documentation, peer review
Research project	Achievement of aims and contribution	Project review / expert panel
Individual researcher	Career progression / profile	Holistic expert judgement
Research group	Collective contribution	Peer review and contextual evidence
Institution	Research environment / policy / capacity	Institutional review and external peers
Output record	Verification and discoverability	Metadata validation, not quality ranking

This overview suggests that assessment should be purpose-specific without necessarily fragmenting the research process into separate, unrelated components. Different forms of evidence may be required for different purposes, but they can be considered in relation to one another where appropriate. The distinction between assessment objects is therefore primarily analytical: it helps clarify what is being considered and why, rather than prescribing that each dimension must be evaluated independently. The practical implication is that a shared information system should not be expected to serve every assessment purpose through the same database fields or evaluation instrument.

6.3 Existing assessment practices: the doctoral trajectory as a model

The doctoral trajectory offers a useful example of how different dimensions of artistic research can be considered holistically. In several institutions, the artistic output is evaluated alongside the discursive component; supervisors and doctoral advisory committees monitor the development of the research; and external artistic specialists contribute to the final judgement. Public presentation or defence can further strengthen the process by making the work and its research rationale available for scrutiny, supporting academic and artistic accountability, and providing an opportunity for questions and critical exchange.

As discussed in Session 1, the development of artistic research may also require documentation of its process and progression, since the final output alone does not necessarily make the research trajectory or its contribution fully visible. The doctoral example illustrates how evidence concerning the work, its development and its research rationale can be brought together within a holistic assessment, while remaining attentive to the particular purpose and context of the judgement.

6.4 Contextualisation rather than explanation

A recurring principle was that artistic work should be contextualised but not necessarily ‘explained’ in the sense of translating it into another medium. This distinction is subtle but important. If an artwork is reduced to a written explanation, the system implicitly assumes that

the real knowledge exists in the text and the artwork merely illustrates it. In artistic research, the relationship may be different: the artwork can be a site of inquiry and knowledge production in its own right.

Contextualisation can instead answer questions such as: What research question motivated the work? What methodology informed the process? What materials or practices were explored? How does the work relate to previous research? What decisions were made? What was learned? How and where was the work disseminated? Such information makes the research legible without claiming to exhaust the artistic experience.

6.5 Qualitative assessment has costs and risks

The preference for qualitative assessment does not mean that it is uncomplicated. Participants explicitly acknowledged that qualitative systems require more time, expertise and administrative labour. They may also create their own forms of gatekeeping. If a small group of recognised experts repeatedly decides what counts as significant, networks can become concentrated and the Matthew effect can be reinforced.

A future system must therefore resist the false choice between ‘metrics are bad’ and ‘peer review is perfect’ as neither is sufficient. The appropriate goal is an assessment process that is transparent and context-sensitive, and whose level and form of scrutiny are appropriate to the purpose and nature of the research. Such assessment should be supported by good documentation and broad access to relevant expertise.

6.6 Impact and relevance

Participants were cautious about the language of impact. Impact is increasingly important in research policy, but its meaning varies greatly. In artistic research, impact may be artistic, cultural, pedagogical, social, technological, professional, community-based, or methodological. It may unfold over many years and may not be visible at the moment of dissemination.

The discussion therefore favoured description and expert judgement over numerical impact indicators. This is not to deny that impact matters, but to insist that impact should be interpreted

rather than simply counted. A performance that becomes influential years later, a methodology adopted by other artists, or a new pedagogical approach may have considerable impact without producing an immediate numerical trace.

6.7 Disciplinary diversity

Artistic research includes more solitary and more collaborative practices, performance and object-based work, time-based and place-based practices, disciplinary, and transdisciplinary projects. The economic and professional ecology of a sculpture, a concert, a theatre production, or a design intervention can be radically different. These differences affect what constitutes dissemination, recognition, and possible impact.

The participants were therefore wary of excessive categorisation. At the same time, they recognised that some categorisation is unavoidable for search and retrieval. The distinction to preserve is between categories used for *description* and categories used for *valuation*. It may be entirely useful to label an output as a performance, exhibition, podcast, film, or installation, because such categories help users identify and retrieve different types of research output. However, the category itself says little about the quality, significance, originality, or research contribution of the particular output. A performance should not, for example, be considered more or less valuable simply because it is a performance, or because its ephemeral nature makes it less readily preserved than a material artefact; its significance needs to be assessed in relation to the research question, context, process, and contribution of the specific project. Descriptive categories should therefore help users understand and navigate the diversity of artistic research without becoming proxies for judgements about its value.

The distinction is therefore between categories that describe existing research and categories that begin to prescribe how research should be conducted. The former can support discoverability; the latter can constrain innovation.

Although disciplinary practices differ, participants suggested that some research characteristics are sufficiently general to provide a common foundation. These include the presence of a research question or problem, relevance to a field, a recognisable research process or methodology, engagement with existing knowledge or practice, and some form of knowledge

production or contribution. These should not be interpreted as a rigid checklist. Their purpose is to establish a minimum research logic while allowing the form of that logic to vary.

This may be the most promising basis for Flemish alignment: common principles at the level of research character, combined with flexibility in artistic form and disciplinary implementation.

6.8 Categories of output

The discussion of categories revealed that many forms are technically easy to describe but difficult to value. Interviews, podcasts, catalogue texts, workshops, performances, exhibitions, websites, and multimedia productions can all be registered. The more fundamental question, however, is whether these categories should remain purely descriptive or whether they should also incorporate qualifiers that imply relative weight, value, relevance, or impact. A category such as “performance” or “exhibition” can identify the form of an output without making any claim about its quality or research significance. By contrast, adding evaluative qualifiers to such categories could effectively create a hierarchy between different types of artistic research output. Participants therefore generally resisted the idea of introducing categorical or ranking systems that would assign predetermined levels of value or significance to particular forms of artistic research, such as an A1-style hierarchy. The distinction is important: the concern is not that artistic research outputs should never be evaluated, but that the descriptive category used to identify an output should not itself predetermine its evaluative status.

The report recommends that categories first be treated as descriptive types rather than hierarchical levels. If later assessment requires qualitative distinctions, these should be made by expert judgement in context rather than by an automatic hierarchy embedded in the database.

6.9 Conclusion: Knowledge transfer as a primary rationale

The discussion ultimately returned to knowledge transfer. Research is intended not merely to be completed but to become available for further inquiry. If artistic research is invisible or inaccessible, subsequent researchers may have to begin again. Better documentation can create a cumulative research culture in which artistic researchers can cite and build on the work of others.

This is particularly important for a field whose institutional history is comparatively young. A robust record of artistic research could help future generations see how questions, methods, and artistic practices have developed. The value of such a system is therefore partly historical, since it contributes to the formation of a collective memory of the field.

7. Session Four – Towards a Central Documentation Platform

The fourth session began with the possibility of a central database but ended with a more nuanced proposition: the strongest practical option may be alignment around common structures and standards rather than the creation of a single central repository that replaces institutional systems.

Participants recognised the advantages of a shared overview but also questioned the added value of building a new system when institutions already have repositories and information platforms. The strongest argument for interoperability is therefore not that existing systems are inadequate, but that they currently operate largely as separate environments. In practical terms, interoperability would mean that relevant information could be described using compatible metadata and data structures, allowing outputs recorded in different institutional systems to be discovered, searched, and, where appropriate, linked through a common interface or central point of access. An institution would not necessarily have to transfer its records to a central repository; rather, its existing information could become more readily discoverable beyond its own system. The aim would therefore be to connect existing infrastructures rather than duplicate them.

7.1 Building on what already exists

Several systems are already relevant to this landscape. At the Flemish level, FRIS (Flanders Research Information Space) occupies a different position again. FRIS is a government-level metadatabase and public research-information portal that aggregates information about researchers, organisations, projects, and research results from participating institutions. Crucially, FRIS does not replace the institutional systems in which research information is created and maintained. Rather, institutional systems supply information to FRIS, using agreed data structures and exchange mechanisms; FRIS then makes this information searchable at Flemish level. The FRIS architecture explicitly allows data to be supplied from existing

institutional systems and exchanged through standardised formats, while also making the aggregated metadata available through open services and APIs.

DOSP (Digital Open Science Platform) is a research-information management platform developed for the Flemish Universities of Applied Sciences and Arts. It supports the administration of research projects across their lifecycle, from project application through to the dissemination of results, and can exchange research information with FRIS. At HOGENT, for example, DOSP is used as a central environment for research administration, with project information being transferred to both the institutional research portal and FRIS.

Brocade/WANDER represents a different part of the infrastructure. Brocade originated as a library information-management system and has developed into the broader WANDER environment, which supports cataloguing, collection management, research information, repositories, and the discovery of research outputs. WANDER specifically supports the registration of researchers, research groups, projects, research outputs, and associated metadata, and can exchange information with FRIS using the relevant Flemish research-information structures. It can therefore function not simply as a repository, but as an environment in which research information and metadata are managed and made searchable.

LIRIAS (Leuven Institutional Repository and Information Archiving System) is the institutional repository and research-information environment used within the KU Leuven context. Importantly for the present discussion, LIRIAS already accommodates categories for *Creations in the Arts and Design*, meaning that artistic outputs can be registered alongside more conventional forms of research output. The recent ADRO initiative provides an instructive example: artistic research outputs are registered in LIRIAS, where peer-reviewed works can receive an associated quality label, and relevant information can subsequently be made available through FRIS.

PURE represents yet another type of infrastructure. It is a research information management system (CRIS/RIMS) used by universities and research organisations to manage information about researchers, projects, outputs, and related research activities. In such environments, the emphasis is primarily on the structured management and reporting of research information rather than on creating a single public repository for the underlying research objects themselves.

These examples demonstrate why the question should not be framed simply as “Which system should become the central database?” The existing landscape already operates through different layers: some systems support research administration and project management; some provide institutional repositories and discovery functions; some manage research-output metadata; and FRIS aggregates information across institutions at Flemish level. The more useful question is therefore how these different layers can be connected and, where necessary, extended so that artistic research is adequately represented throughout the information chain.

The challenge may not be the absence of a place in which information can technically be stored, but rather the absence of sufficiently consistent categories, metadata, links, and workflows through which artistic research can move from institutional registration to repository or discovery infrastructure, to Flemish-level visibility. A future framework could therefore focus on identifying the gaps in the existing chain: which types of artistic output are currently difficult to register; which metadata are missing; which systems cannot currently exchange the relevant information; where links between research projects and outputs are lost; and where documentation or full research objects need to remain locally hosted rather than being duplicated centrally.

The strategic conclusion is consequently more specific than simply stating that “interoperability is preferable to duplication”. The aim should be to strengthen the existing infrastructure by improving the representation of artistic research within it, establishing compatible metadata and exchange mechanisms where necessary, and ensuring that information can move between systems without requiring researchers or institutions to register the same output repeatedly. A future Flemish platform could then function primarily as a point of discovery and aggregation rather than as a new repository that duplicates the storage and management functions already performed by existing institutional systems.

7.2 Metadata versus primary archival infrastructure

The distinction between metadata and primary archival infrastructure follows directly from the preceding discussion of interoperability. If the objective is to connect existing institutional systems rather than replace them, there is no need for a new central repository that stores every artistic research object. What is needed is a way of ensuring that relevant information held in

different institutional systems can be described in sufficiently compatible ways and brought together for discovery.

In this context, a central metadata layer would not constitute a separate archive in which all artistic research outputs are deposited. Rather, it would provide a shared set of descriptive fields, identifiers, and data structures that allow information from different institutional systems to be aggregated and searched through a common discovery interface. An output could therefore remain registered and stored within the appropriate institutional or specialist infrastructure, while selected metadata about that output - such as its title, creator, institution, type of output, research project, date, discipline, keywords, links, and relevant contextual information - could be made available through a central Flemish-level system. Where appropriate, the central record could link directly to the institutional repository or other location where the primary material is held.

This approach would also avoid the unnecessary duplication of large or technically complex research objects. Artistic research can generate high-resolution images, large audiovisual files, interactive works, websites, installations, and other data-intensive or technologically dependent materials. A central repository that attempted to store all such primary materials would create substantial technical, financial, rights-management, and long-term preservation obligations. It could also duplicate archival functions that institutions or specialist repositories are already equipped to perform.

A more sustainable architecture would therefore separate storage from discovery. Primary materials could remain within appropriate institutional or specialist repositories, where responsibility for preservation, access, rights, and technical maintenance can be managed according to the nature of the material. A shared metadata layer would then connect these distributed resources and make them discoverable through a common Flemish-level interface. The central system would not need to hold the artistic work itself; its function would be to make the existence, nature, context, and location of that work visible.

This model also clarifies the relationship between the concepts discussed in the preceding sections. Interoperability provides how information can move between existing systems; harmonised metadata provides a common structure through which that information can be described; and a central discovery layer provides a point at which users can search across the

distributed landscape. These are therefore complementary functions rather than competing alternatives.

Such an architecture would support the principle that storage can remain decentralised while discovery becomes more centralised. It would also reduce the administrative burden on researchers by avoiding the need to upload the same primary material or enter substantially the same information into multiple systems. The central Flemish infrastructure would function primarily as an aggregation and discovery mechanism, while responsibility for the underlying research objects could remain with the institutions and repositories best equipped to preserve and provide access to them.

7.3 What should a record contain?

The discussions suggest that a useful record should go beyond a title and medium. At minimum, it should be capable of expressing the relationship between an output and a research project or trajectory. Possible metadata fields include:

- Title of the artistic research output
- Researcher(s) and collaborators
- Roles of contributors (for example author, performer, curator, director, designer, collaborator)
- Associated research project or trajectory
- Research question or concise research context
- Research field / discipline, without implying a hierarchy
- Output type (performance, exhibition, composition, film, installation, design, etc.)
- Date and place of public dissemination
- Type of dissemination or venue
- Links to primary material where available
- Links to associated discursive or contextual material
- Persistent identifier or stable reference
- Access and copyright conditions
- Optional description of relevance, contribution or impact

- Institutional affiliation and research group where appropriate

These fields should be tested with real projects before being fixed. The principle should be minimum necessary metadata: enough to make the research intelligible and discoverable, but not so much that registration becomes an excessive administrative burden.

7.4 Acceptance criteria: research-related output

One of the most difficult questions was what should be accepted into a research repository. The session discussions converge around a core principle: the output must have a demonstrable relationship to research. The consensus was that it should be linked to a research project, research assignment, or research trajectory, which creates a boundary between artistic research output and general professional artistic activity, and that the public nature of the output is important, in parallel with scholarly publication. Registration should focus on outputs that have been publicly disseminated or otherwise meet an agreed criterion of research disclosure. This would also help keep the repository manageable.

However, a formal project number or administrative research code should not become the sole condition for registration. Artistic research does not always develop within a clearly defined project structure. For example, an artist-researcher may develop a series of performances, an exhibition, a documentary, or an experimental artistic process over an extended period, with the research dimension emerging gradually rather than being established through a formally registered project from the outset. In such cases, the output could still be considered for registration if the researcher can provide sufficient contextual information to demonstrate its relationship to a research question, investigation, or sustained research process.

A future system could therefore require a small amount of contextual information alongside the output itself - for example, a description of the research purpose, the research question or area of investigation, the relationship to a broader research trajectory where applicable, and information about where and how the work was disseminated. The purpose would not be to require every artistic output to be accompanied by a full research report, but to provide enough information for another person to understand why the output is being presented as research-related.

This would establish a practical distinction between professional artistic activity and artistic activity undertaken as research without requiring every research output to fit the same administrative model. A concert, exhibition, film, installation, or performance would not qualify simply because it was produced by an artist-researcher; there should be some evidence of its connection to a research process. At the same time, the absence of a formal project code should not automatically exclude an output where that connection can be demonstrated through appropriate contextual information.

7.5 Inter-institutional collaboration, shared responsibilities and international interoperability

Artistic research is frequently collaborative. A performance may involve performers, composers, directors, curators, designers, dramaturges, technicians, and researchers, whose contributions may differ in nature and extent. A repository that records only one ‘author’ risks misrepresenting the collaborative character of the research and obscuring the contributions of other participants. The session discussions therefore highlighted the need to document different roles, including authorship and collaboration, in ways that reflect the complexity of artistic practice. A future data model should treat contribution as multidimensional, allowing different forms of participation to be represented without necessarily imposing a single model of authorship. This would support fairer recognition of collaborative research and make the relationship between artistic practice and individual research contributions more transparent.

Developing such an approach requires inter-institutional collaboration, since technical architecture cannot be separated from governance, particularly where shared infrastructure depends on trust between institutions. Participants expressed concern that a system established primarily to improve visibility could later be used for performance assessment or other purposes not originally intended. Once data have been collected, institutions and governments may identify additional uses for them. Clear agreement on the purpose, permitted uses, and governance of shared research information should therefore be established as a precondition for collaboration. Such an agreement would clarify what information is collected, why it is collected, who may access it, and for which purposes it may be used. If the primary purpose is documentation and discovery, this should be made explicit. Any subsequent use for a different

purpose should require a separate policy decision rather than being silently inferred from the existence of the data.

Within this context, VLHORA could provide an appropriate forum for inter-institutional dialogue and coordination. It could facilitate the exchange of existing practices and support the development of shared principles for artistic research and research-information management. Its role would need to respect the institutional autonomy of individual university colleges. The aim would not be to impose uniform institutional policies or technical solutions, but to establish sufficient common ground to enable institutions to collaborate with confidence.

A sustained inter-institutional structure, such as a specialised subgroup or working group focusing on research in the arts, could provide a practical mechanism for this coordination. Such a structure would be most valuable if it included people who experience research-information challenges in practice, including artistic researchers, research managers, librarians, IT specialists, and relevant policy stakeholders. It could support the development of shared terminology and metadata principles, facilitate dialogue between research-information specialists and technical teams, and formulate recommendations for the registration and visibility of artistic research. Establishing these common principles before implementing shared infrastructure would help ensure that technical interoperability is accompanied by institutional trust. The purpose would not be to create another layer of administration, but to provide a sustained forum in which existing institutional expertise could be brought together and practical responses to shared problems developed.

The international dimension should also inform this collaborative approach. Participants observed that the registration of non-traditional artistic and design outputs remains fragmented internationally, although examples exist in countries where arts research has been integrated into university evaluation frameworks. A coherent Flemish approach could therefore have significance beyond the region if it supported interoperability and established a sufficiently robust descriptive standard. The objective should not be to create a uniquely Flemish, closed system, but to develop an approach that can connect with wider developments in artistic research while remaining sensitive to Flanders' own institutional structures and practices. Shared terminology, flexible metadata, and appropriate representation of collaborative contributions could help make artistic research more discoverable across institutional and national boundaries.

In this way, inter-institutional coordination within Flanders could provide a foundation for wider international compatibility without requiring institutions to abandon their existing systems or relinquish their autonomy.

7.6 The final movement of the discussion

By the end of the fourth session, the conversation had moved away from the idea of a centralised database as an end in itself. The more mature proposition was to seek alignment in definitions, metadata, and documentation while preserving existing institutional systems and autonomy. This is arguably a more achievable and less risky objective.

In practical terms, interoperability would mean that different institutional systems could exchange a defined set of research information using compatible metadata and data structures, without requiring institutions to replace their existing systems or repeatedly enter the same information. An artistic research output registered within an institutional system could, for example, have its key metadata - such as title, researcher, institution, output type, research project, date, keywords, and a persistent link - made available to a shared Flemish discovery platform. The primary output could remain within the institutional or specialist repository responsible for storing and preserving it, while the central platform would make the output discoverable and provide a link back to the original source.

The central ambition can therefore be reformulated not as a single repository that owns or stores all artistic materials, but as a shared Flemish framework for discovering, documenting, and connecting artistic research output, supported by compatible institutional systems and shared metadata standards. Such a framework would allow institutions to retain responsibility for their own infrastructures while making the broader landscape of artistic research substantially more visible and accessible.

8. Cross-Cutting Themes and Analytical Findings

The four sessions revealed several interconnected tensions concerning the documentation, recognition, evaluation, and governance of artistic research. Rather than representing separate problems, these tensions point to a common question: how can artistic research become more visible and discoverable without reproducing the measurement, standardisation, and performance logic of conventional research systems? The principal findings can be summarised as follows:

Theme / tension	Potential gain	Potential risk
Recognition versus measurement	Greater visibility and discoverability of artistic research	Recognition may become quantification or performance measurement
Documentation versus evaluation	A shared evidential basis for subsequent assessment	Registration may become a de facto quality-control mechanism
Standardisation versus diversity	Common metadata support discovery and interoperability	Excessive standardisation may flatten disciplinary and contextual differences
Institutional autonomy versus interoperability	Institutions can retain their own systems while enabling cross-institutional discovery	Common requirements may constrain institutional autonomy
Process versus product	Research trajectories and experimentation can be made more visible	Excessive documentation may create administrative burdens or surveillance
Public visibility versus researcher evaluation	Research can become more accessible without ranking researchers	Visibility may become linked to performance or impact measures
Recognition and performativity	Recognition can strengthen the visibility and consolidation of the field	Researchers may adapt their practices to what the system recognises or rewards
Knowledge transfer and cumulative research	Researchers can find, engage with, cite, and build on previous work	Easily documented forms of knowledge may become privileged
Artistic research as a wider test case	Artistic research can contribute to broader debates about plural forms of knowledge production	Treating artistic research as an exceptional category may reinforce its marginal position

A particularly important finding concerns the distinction between documentation and evaluation. A repository can document an output, establish its research context, and make it discoverable without necessarily judging its artistic or research quality. Where validation is required—for example, in doctoral examination, funding, promotion, or project review—assessment can take place for that specific purpose. Registration can therefore provide the evidence and context for evaluation without itself becoming a numerical or ranking mechanism. This distinction also reduces the risk that a discovery infrastructure will gradually become a performance-management system.

This leaves one question deliberately unresolved: how far can a system recognise an output as research-related without also undertaking substantive validation of its research character? The discussions did not fully settle this relationship, and I regard that uncertainty as a useful finding rather than a weakness. Any future framework will need to decide explicitly where structured documentation ends and substantive validation begins, and whether that boundary should vary according to purpose.

The same principle applies to standardisation and interoperability. Some common metadata and identifiers are necessary for cross-institutional discovery, but these should constitute a minimum shared layer rather than a uniform model of artistic research. Institutions can retain their own repositories, workflows, and assessment practices while enabling outputs to be discovered across institutional boundaries. Similarly, documentation should make research processes sufficiently visible to provide context without requiring the complete research trajectory to be centrally archived.

The discussions also highlighted the importance of governance. What a system recognises may eventually influence what researchers produce. Categories initially introduced for documentation can acquire unintended evaluative consequences if they become linked to institutional rewards or performance expectations. The design of the infrastructure should therefore be considered alongside its longer-term effects on research behaviour.

8.1 Broader relevance

The value of improved documentation therefore extends beyond administrative recognition. A more discoverable research environment can strengthen knowledge transfer and enable researchers to find, engage with, and build on previous work. Artistic research can consequently serve as a useful test case for a broader shift towards more plural forms of research output - provided that documentation, recognition, and evaluation remain related but distinct functions.

9. The International Thinker's Reflection: What I Take from the Flemish Process

The purpose of this section is not to repeat the findings of the four sessions, but to interpret them from the comparative position of the international expert. The preceding chapters have established what was discussed, what institutional practices currently exist, and what international experience can contribute to the debate. What follows is my analytical reading of what these discussions imply for the future development of artistic research infrastructure in Flanders.

An international perspective is valuable here not simply because it adds examples from other countries, but because a different institutional history can make assumptions visible that may otherwise remain implicit. My principal conclusion is that Flanders is confronting a problem that is simultaneously administrative, epistemological, and infrastructural: how outputs should be recorded; what counts as knowledge and how artistic practice contributes to it; and how records can be made persistent, discoverable, and interoperable.

These questions should not be answered in the wrong order. If the administrative problem is addressed first, there is a risk that available database fields will silently define what counts as research. If the epistemological problem is discussed only abstractly, the result may be intellectually compelling but institutionally unusable. If infrastructure is built before its purposes are clarified, technical convenience may become policy by default.

My reading of the Flemish process is therefore that the most important outcome is not a proposed database but it is a clearer hierarchy of questions. The first question should be: what kind of recognition does the research community actually need? The second: what information is necessary for that recognition? The third: which functions should remain local and which genuinely benefit from central coordination? Only after those questions have been settled should technical architecture be designed.

9.1 Visibility is not valuation

The strongest insight I take from the discussions is the importance of separating visibility from valuation. A research output can be made visible without being assigned a score. It can be described without being ranked. It can be preserved without being declared excellent. It can be cited without generating a funding point.

This distinction may appear obvious, but institutional systems often allow these functions to converge. A database begins as a descriptive tool; because it contains structured information, it becomes useful to management; because management uses it, the data begin to inform performance discussions; because performance discussions influence resources, the categories acquire strategic value. What began as metadata gradually becomes an incentive system.

This is where the Matthew Effect becomes relevant. Once a system repeatedly attaches visibility and recognition to already visible institutions, venues, researchers, or forms of output, existing differences can be reinforced. The problem is not that established excellence should be hidden. The problem is that visibility should not become a self-reinforcing proxy for quality.

My recommendation is therefore to design the first generation of Flemish infrastructure explicitly around discoverability rather than valuation. The system should help a researcher find an unfamiliar project from another institution, help a student discover how a performance or exhibition was researched, help a librarian preserve a record, and help a policymaker understand the diversity of output. None of these purposes requires a score.

9.2 Registration, validation, and assessment

My international experience leads me to be cautious about the movement from registration to assessment. A registration system answers a relatively straightforward question: what research-related output exists, who was involved, when and where did it occur, what research trajectory does it belong to, and where can further information be found? Assessment addresses a different set of questions: how significant, rigorous, original, relevant, or impactful is the research? Although these functions may inform one another, they should not automatically be treated as equivalent.

An important distinction emerging from the discussions in Session 3 was that it may be possible to establish whether an artistic output is the result of an original artistic research process without making more complex judgements about its quality, significance, or impact. A preliminary process could, for example, consider whether the output is connected to an identifiable research question or trajectory, whether the research process and its aims are sufficiently documented, and whether there is a credible relationship between the artistic work and the claimed research contribution. Such a process would help distinguish artistic research outputs from artistic activities that do not explicitly form part of a research process. It would not, however, determine the artistic quality of the work or establish the significance of its contribution to knowledge.

Whether this preliminary process should be understood as validation or as a basic form of assessment depends on how the terms are defined. In the terminology used in this report, *validation* can refer to confirming that a record or claim meets specified requirements, whereas *assessment* involves a more substantive judgement against defined criteria. Establishing whether an output can reasonably be identified as the result of artistic research lies near the boundary between these functions. The distinction is nevertheless useful: confirming the research character of an output need not require a comprehensive evaluation of its quality or impact. Any such process would still require transparent criteria and appropriate expertise, but it could be more proportionate than a system in which every registered output must undergo extensive peer review before becoming visible.

A further question concerns the relationship between artistic quality and research quality. These dimensions may overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Artistic quality may concern the work's aesthetic, interpretative, technical, or other discipline-specific qualities, while research quality concerns the originality and rigour of the inquiry, the development of knowledge or understanding, and the relationship between the artistic work, the research process, and the questions being pursued. In some cases, the artistic work itself may embody or communicate the research contribution in ways that cannot readily be separated from its artistic form. In others, the research contribution may be more fully understood through the relationship between the work, its process, and its contextualisation. Assessment should therefore avoid assuming either that artistic excellence automatically demonstrates research quality or that the research contribution can be judged independently of the artistic work.

The assessment of significance and impact introduces further complexities. The contribution of artistic research may be conceptual, methodological, aesthetic, pedagogical, cultural, or social, and its effects may emerge over different timescales. Some contributions may be recognised within a specialist artistic or research community, while others may influence practice or understanding in ways that are difficult to capture through conventional indicators. Requiring every output to demonstrate measurable impact would risk privileging contributions that are more readily documented or quantified. It could also encourage researchers to frame their work in terms of outcomes that are legible to an evaluation system rather than those that are most meaningful within their particular research context.

These distinctions have implications for any future Flemish framework. There is no reason why a shared information system could not support different levels or forms of validation and assessment. A relatively accessible registration threshold could make outputs discoverable, while additional information could be attached where a specific purpose requires further scrutiny. A doctoral examination might provide one form of expert judgement; a grant panel, institutional research review, or national assessment exercise might provide others. The record could refer to these judgements without implying that any one of them offers a universal measure of the work's value.

The central recommendation is therefore to distinguish registration, validation, and assessment both conceptually and in practice. Registration should establish a reliable record and support discovery. Validation, where required, should confirm specified claims or requirements, including the research character of an output where appropriate. More extensive assessment should be undertaken only when there is a clearly defined purpose, with criteria and forms of expertise suited to that purpose. This would allow Flanders to recognise artistic research outputs and make them visible without requiring every output to undergo the same evaluative process or treating the measurement of impact as a necessary condition of recognition.

9.3 Artistic quality is not identical to research quality

If artistic research outputs are to undergo assessment, it is essential that evaluators distinguish between artistic quality and research quality. The two may overlap, but they are not identical, and the relationship between them may differ according to the nature and purpose of the work being assessed.

An extraordinary concert may be artistically excellent without constituting a research output. A modest performance may form part of an important research trajectory. A technically innovative design may be aesthetically unconvincing but methodologically significant. A highly prestigious exhibition may communicate research without necessarily demonstrating a particular research contribution. Conversely, an obscure experimental presentation may generate substantial new knowledge within a specialised community. These examples illustrate why neither artistic achievement nor the visibility of a work can, on its own, establish the nature or quality of its research contribution.

This distinction also affects how evidence of significance and impact should be interpreted. Venue prestige, professional recognition, audience numbers, and media coverage may provide relevant contextual evidence, but they should not serve as automatic proxies for research quality. Depending on the purpose of the assessment, such evidence may help establish the reach, reception, or influence of a work. It cannot, however, substitute for an examination of the research itself, including the questions pursued, the processes through which the work developed, and the contribution it makes to knowledge or understanding.

The distinction has implications for the composition of assessment panels as well. A panel of distinguished artists may be well equipped to judge artistic quality but may not necessarily have the expertise to evaluate the research contribution of a project. Conversely, a panel of academic researchers may understand research methodology but lack the practical expertise needed to assess an artistic process. The appropriate composition of a panel should therefore reflect the purpose of the assessment and the nature of the work under consideration. Where artistic and research qualities are both relevant, a combination of artistic and research expertise is likely to provide the strongest basis for a balanced judgement.

9.4 Documentation should be proportional to the knowledge claim

A recurring challenge in artistic research is the demand for explanation. Researchers are sometimes asked to provide increasingly elaborate textual accounts because institutions are more comfortable with words than with performances, images, sound or material artefacts.

I do not believe the answer is to reject contextualisation. Without context, many artistic research outputs become difficult to interpret, cite, or assess. But documentation should be proportional to the knowledge claim and the purpose for which it is required.

A concise contextual statement may be sufficient for registration. A richer exposition may be required for publication. A full research narrative may be necessary for doctoral examination. A grant application may require a different account again. The mistake is to design one universal documentation burden and apply it to every context.

This principle is especially important if Flanders wishes to avoid repeating earlier resistance to central registration. The problem may not have been documentation itself, but the assumption that all artistic research must be translated into a single textual format before it can be recognised. International multimodal models demonstrate that this assumption is unnecessary.

9.5 Centralisation should occur where it creates genuine value

I am not convinced that Flanders needs a single central repository containing every artistic research artefact. Such an ambition would immediately raise difficult questions about storage, copyright, access, preservation, audiovisual quality, file formats, institutional ownership, and long-term maintenance.

I am much more persuaded by a central discovery layer. In such a system, institutions retain responsibility for their primary repositories and richer documentation, while a common Flemish service harvests or receives a limited set of metadata. The central layer makes outputs discoverable across institutional boundaries and provides stable identifiers and links.

This architecture has another advantage: it is politically more modest. It does not require institutions to surrender control of their research infrastructures. It asks them to agree only on the minimum information necessary for interoperability.

The principle should therefore be: decentralise storage, coordinate metadata, centralise discovery. Where an institution already has a good repository, the new system should make that repository more visible rather than duplicate it.

9.6 Comparative reflection and proposed direction

The international comparison should not be read as a one-way lesson in which Flanders is merely catching up. The Flemish context has several features that can contribute to the international discussion, while international experience also highlights risks that should be considered when developing a shared approach. The comparative reflection therefore points towards a staged rather than comprehensive solution, in which the immediate objective is to improve recognition, discoverability and knowledge transfer while keeping more consequential policy choices open.

The main comparative implications can be summarised as follows:

Comparative observation	Potential contribution from the Flemish context	Caution from international experience	Implication for Flanders
Recognition and funding	The current separation between documentation/visibility and direct funding consequences provides an opportunity to develop a low-stakes infrastructure focused initially on recognition and knowledge transfer.	Systems can become distorted when registration, assessment and funding are closely coupled. Information collected for documentation may subsequently be repurposed as a performance measure.	Establish the purposes and permitted uses of the system explicitly at the outset. Any later connection to funding should require a separate policy decision.

Inter-institutional collaboration	The Flemish emphasis on dialogue is valuable because artistic research extends across universities, Schools of Arts, conservatoires, research centres and cultural organisations. No single institution possesses the whole field.	Excessive centralisation can undermine institutional autonomy, while complete decentralisation can limit interoperability and discovery.	Develop common principles and interoperability while allowing institutions to retain responsibility for their own repositories, systems and practices.
Existing technical and institutional knowledge	Earlier ECOOM work and current institutional practices constitute accumulated knowledge rather than failed attempts that should simply be replaced.	Repeatedly developing new systems without building on existing infrastructure can increase administrative and technical burdens.	Treat existing platforms, expertise and previous research-information work as assets and identify which elements can be connected or extended.
Categories and metadata	Shared descriptive terminology could make diverse artistic research outputs more discoverable and interpretable.	Categories can become rigid once embedded in software, while descriptive categories may acquire unintended evaluative meanings.	Use categories primarily for description, search and retrieval, avoiding predetermined assumptions about quality, value or significance.
Metrics and proxies	A shared infrastructure could provide reliable information about artistic research without requiring it to become a measurement system.	Where conventional metrics are unavailable, systems may substitute proxies such as venue prestige, awards, audience size, citations or institutional reputation. These may provide contextual evidence but should not substitute for expert judgement.	Maintain a clear distinction between information that supports evaluation and indicators that claim to measure research quality or performance.

Administrative burden	Inter-institutional coordination could reduce duplication by aligning existing practices and developing shared minimum standards.	Documentation systems tend to accumulate fields and reporting requirements, creating researcher fatigue and reducing data quality.	Begin with a limited set of meaningful metadata and expand only where there is a demonstrated need.
Professional recognition and research evaluation	Professional contexts can provide useful evidence concerning the reception and significance of artistic work.	Professional prestige should not automatically be translated into research value; venue, award or institutional reputation is not equivalent to research contribution.	Treat professional recognition as contextual evidence within assessment rather than as an automatic measure of research quality.
Visibility and institutional inequality	A shared discovery infrastructure could make research across institutions and disciplines more visible and support knowledge continuity.	The Matthew Effect may cause systems intended to increase visibility to amplify the visibility of already established researchers and well-resourced institutions.	Design discovery and interface structures to support visibility across institutions, disciplines and career stages rather than merely reproducing existing reputational hierarchies.
Documentation and exposition	Flanders can build on existing institutional practices while allowing richer forms of documentation where appropriate.	A single documentation model may privilege conventional written forms and fail to represent multimodal or practice-based research adequately.	Allow optional richer documentation and multimodal exposition where these are appropriate to the research and its communication.

These observations suggest that Flanders should not attempt to design a single comprehensive system that simultaneously solves recognition, documentation, assessment, funding and policy reporting. A more sustainable approach would be to develop the infrastructure progressively, allowing experience to accumulate before more consequential uses are considered.

A possible staged trajectory would therefore comprise five phases:

Stage one: shared conceptual vocabulary and minimum metadata.

The immediate objective should be to establish a common vocabulary and a limited set of minimum metadata fields that make existing artistic research outputs discoverable and interpretable. This stage should not attempt to resolve questions of assessment or research quality.

Stage two: distributed discovery infrastructure.

The next step could establish a discovery layer that connects institutional repositories and research-information systems. Existing platforms should be treated as assets rather than competitors. The principle would be to coordinate discovery without requiring centralised storage.

Stage three: richer documentation and exposition.

Once basic discoverability has been established, institutions and researchers could be given the option of providing richer contextual documentation or multimodal exposition where this contributes meaningfully to the understanding of the research. Such documentation should remain proportionate to the nature of the research.

Stage four: purpose-specific validation and assessment.

A framework for validation and assessment could then be developed for situations in which evaluation is required, such as doctoral examination, research funding, appointment or promotion. Such a framework should recognise disciplinary expertise and allow different forms of evidence rather than relying on a single hierarchy of output types or metrics.

Stage five: separate consideration of aggregated policy uses.

Only after sufficient experience has accumulated should consideration be given to whether aggregated information has a legitimate role in national policy or funding. Any such development should constitute a separate policy decision, subject to explicit consultation and governance, rather than being an automatic consequence of having established a research-information infrastructure.

This staged approach creates value early while keeping the most consequential policy choices open. It also allows the system to develop in response to actual use and demonstrated needs rather than attempting to design a definitive framework in advance.

The comparative reflection can ultimately be reduced to one principle: the infrastructure should serve the research, not the research serves the infrastructure. This principle has far-reaching consequences. Categories should remain subordinate to practices; metadata should remain subordinate to meaning; assessment criteria should remain subordinate to the purpose of assessment; and administrative convenience should remain subordinate to research integrity.

This principle also requires accepting that a good system will contain a degree of uncertainty. Not every artistic practice will fit perfectly into a predefined category. Not every research contribution can be reduced to a single sentence. Not every form of impact can be counted. Not every research process produces a stable or readily preservable object.

A mature infrastructure does not eliminate these complexities. It makes them manageable without pretending that they do not exist. The objective should therefore not be to create a system in which all artistic research becomes uniform, easily measurable or administratively predictable, but one in which diverse forms of research can remain visible, intelligible and discoverable while retaining the contextual and disciplinary complexity on which their significance depends.

9.7 Personal recommendation regarding the role of the international expert

The experience of this Thinkers Programme has also clarified, for me, the particular value of the international expert within an exploratory policy process. The contribution is not primarily the delivery of foreign examples, but the comparative testing of assumptions that may otherwise remain invisible within a single institutional environment.

My role has therefore been most useful when South African experience has functioned as a critical mirror rather than a template. The South African system demonstrates what becomes possible when artistic research is formally recognised at national level, but it also demonstrates why the relationship between recognition, evaluation, and funding requires careful design.

European systems provide other lessons about portfolios, repositories, multimodal exposition, peer review, and national assessment.

The added value lies in bringing these cases into conversation with the specific institutional culture of Flanders. The international expert can ask questions that are difficult to formulate from inside a system: Why is this field necessary? What problem does it actually solve? What behaviour will it produce? What happens if the data are later used for another purpose? Which existing structures already perform this function? Which categories are genuinely necessary? Which are inherited simply because other research fields use them?

The international role is therefore not to decide for Flanders but to enlarge the range of possible decisions.

9.8 Analytical synthesis: the real object of reform is the research ecosystem

The discussions can ultimately be understood as a debate about an ecosystem rather than a database. A database is visible and concrete, which makes it tempting to treat it as the object of reform. But the database is only the surface layer of a larger system consisting of researchers, institutions, research offices, libraries, repositories, cultural organisations, assessment panels, funders, students, and publics. If the underlying relationships remain unclear, better software will not solve the problem.

The reform opportunity is therefore broader. Flanders can use this moment to establish a more coherent ecology in which artistic research is documented, communicated, preserved, and assessed in ways appropriate to its modes of knowledge production. Such an ecology would not require every institution to use the same repository or internal procedures. It would require enough shared language and interoperability to make the field legible across institutional boundaries.

The most important design principle is consequently not centralisation but coordination. Coordination preserves diversity while reducing unnecessary fragmentation. This is, in my view, the strongest strategic direction to emerge from the process.

The analytical reflections above lead into the formal recommendations that follow. The distinction is intentional: Section 9 sets out the interpretive position developed through the

Thinkers Programme, while Section 10 translates that position into principles and recommendations for further consideration.

10. Preliminary Principles and Recommendations

The following recommendations are deliberately presented as a framework for discussion. They should be tested against additional institutional information before being treated as final recommendations.

1. **Keep registration structurally separate from funding.** The purpose of improved registration should be documentation, visibility, preservation, accessibility, and knowledge transfer. Registration should not automatically generate a financial value or performance score. Any future proposal to use the data for funding should require a separate policy discussion.
2. **Establish a clear distinction between artistic activity and research output, while documenting research context.** A central research-oriented record should document artistic outputs that are demonstrably related to research. The relationship may be expressed through a research project, trajectory, assignment, or concise contextual statement identifying the research question, methodological context, or contribution. Not every professional artistic activity should automatically become a research output, and the contextual information should not require the artwork to be translated into a purely textual explanation.
3. **Distinguish metadata, repository, and assessment functions.** A shared metadata layer can provide discovery and contextual information, while primary materials can remain in institutional or specialist repositories. Substantive quality assessment should normally take place in the relevant research, doctoral, Master's, grant, or career context.
4. **Build interoperability rather than replace existing systems.** Before creating new infrastructure, conduct a technical and functional mapping of DOSP, WANDER/BROCADE, PURE, LIRIAS, FRIS, and other relevant systems. Identify common fields and interoperability gaps. The principle should be to build on what already exists wherever possible.
5. **Use common descriptive categories without creating automatic hierarchies.** Terms such as performance, exhibition, composition, installation, film, podcast, workshop, or

design can improve discoverability. They should not automatically imply levels of quality or value.

6. **Preserve disciplinary and institutional autonomy while avoiding prescriptive approaches to impact.** A common Flemish framework should establish minimum shared principles rather than prescribe identical research practices. Institutions should retain the ability to define and develop research in ways appropriate to their disciplines and traditions. Impact and relevance may be documented as qualitative and contextual dimensions, but should not automatically be reduced to numerical indicators. Where assessment is required, informed expert judgement should interpret the evidence.
7. **Ensure appropriate peer expertise in substantive assessment.** Where artistic research is evaluated, panels should contain relevant artistic expertise alongside academic or theoretical expertise as required by the purpose of the assessment. A single generic panel is unlikely to possess sufficient expertise across all artistic domains.
8. **Make artistic research outputs discoverable and citable.** Stable identifiers, persistent links, and adequate metadata should make it possible for researchers and students to discover and cite artistic research outputs directly, rather than only their written supplements. The system should function as a research and learning resource through which users can identify previous projects, methods, artistic approaches, and outputs.
9. **Make governance explicit from the beginning.** The purposes for which data may and may not be used should be stated clearly. Any expansion into performance evaluation or funding should require explicit policy consideration rather than becoming an unintended secondary use.
10. **Keep the administrative burden proportionate.** Qualitative systems can become cumbersome. Registration fields should therefore be limited to information that serves a clear purpose, and duplication across institutional systems should be minimised.
11. **Establish a continuing inter-institutional forum and keep the framework under review.** A permanent or recurring expert group could bring together artistic researchers, academic researchers, research managers, librarians, IT/data specialists, and relevant policy stakeholders to monitor developments, refine definitions, coordinate technical work, and review the framework periodically. Since artistic research and its associated practices

evolve, categories and metadata should remain revisable rather than becoming a fixed taxonomy. Periodic review, in consultation with the field, would allow the framework to respond to emerging forms of practice, changing research needs, and developments in the wider research-information environment.

11. Implications for Stakeholders

The proposed approach has different implications for the stakeholders involved in artistic research. The principal benefits and considerations can be summarised as follows:

Stakeholder	Potential benefits	Key considerations
Researchers and artistic practitioners	Greater visibility, discoverability, and the possibility of building a cumulative record of practice-based research	Registration should provide clear benefits to researchers and avoid unnecessary administrative burden
Students	Access to previous projects, methods, artistic approaches, and research precedents; a resource for state-of-the-art exploration	Information should be accessible, searchable, and sufficiently contextualised to support learning
Schools of Arts	A clearer overview of institutional research activity and a stronger basis for demonstrating its diversity and value	Participation should not become an additional reporting requirement without clear added value
Universities	An opportunity to broaden institutional understandings of research output and knowledge production	Artistic research should be accommodated without being forced into conventional publication models
Research funders	Better visibility of the field and access to relevant research and expert communities	Appropriate artistic expertise is essential where artistic research is formally assessed; documentation cannot replace expert judgement
Government and policymakers	Greater transparency concerning publicly supported research and the diversity of research outputs	Accountability should not automatically translate into simplistic performance metrics

Libraries and research infrastructures	A central role in preservation, metadata, persistent identification, and long-term accessibility	Copyright, preservation, identifiers, and access conditions should be considered from the outset
Cultural organisations and the artistic field	Greater visibility of connections between higher-education research and professional artistic practice	Public presentation may demonstrate dissemination and field engagement but should not automatically constitute research validation
The public	Improved access to publicly supported artistic research and more accessible information about its relevance and context	Public communication should provide meaningful context rather than reduce research to administrative statistics

The implications extend beyond the immediate question of documenting artistic research. The discussion suggests a broader transition from a predominantly publication-centred research culture towards a more plural understanding of knowledge production. Artistic research makes this particularly visible because artistic practice may itself constitute a mode of inquiry. Similar challenges increasingly arise in relation to design, architecture, software, public engagement, datasets, exhibitions, and other practice-based forms of research.

The international examples considered in this report demonstrate that different systems have responded to these challenges in different ways. The United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, Norway, and various European initiatives have developed different approaches to the recognition, documentation, and evaluation of non-traditional research outputs. Their value for Flanders lies primarily in comparison: they demonstrate the consequences of different choices rather than providing models that can simply be imported.

The findings of the Thinkers' Programme therefore suggest a staged approach. The immediate priority should be to make research-related artistic outputs visible, intelligible, discoverable, citable, and preservable. Questions of validation and assessment can subsequently be addressed based on experience with the infrastructure rather than being built into it from the outset.

This approach also offers a way of avoiding a recurring institutional problem: recognising artistic research only when it has been translated into the categories of conventional research. The objective should instead be to recognise research as research while allowing the forms through which it is conducted, documented, and communicated to remain diverse.

The success of such an infrastructure should consequently not initially be measured by the number of records it contains or the quantity of statistics it can generate. Its value should be evident in whether researchers can discover and build upon previous work, students can learn from earlier artistic research, institutions can preserve their research heritage, and policymakers can gain a clearer understanding of the breadth of contemporary knowledge production.

The distinction established throughout this report is therefore fundamental: an infrastructure of recognition need not become an infrastructure of measurement. For Flanders, this provides a basis for developing a system that increases the visibility and cumulative value of artistic research while preserving its diversity and exploratory character.

12. Conclusion: Towards a More Plural Understanding of Research Output

The four-day symposium did not produce a final technical specification for a Flemish central database, nor should that have been its immediate purpose. Its greater value lies in clarifying the conditions under which improved recognition and documentation of artistic research could be pursued without undermining the qualities that make artistic research valuable.

The first condition is conceptual clarity: artistic research output is not synonymous with all artistic activity. Research output should be connected to a research trajectory, question, process, or knowledge-producing intention. At the same time, the output may take forms that cannot be adequately represented by conventional publication categories.

Next, the second condition is functional separation: registration, documentation, validation, assessment, and funding are different activities. A central information system can support the first three without becoming a performance-measurement mechanism. This separation is essential if the system is to remain trusted by the field.

Furthermore, the third condition is expert judgement. Where quality or significance needs to be assessed, informed peers, both artistic and academic where appropriate, are more suitable than bibliometric indicators. This does not mean that peer review is flawless. It means that the object being judged requires contextual expertise.

Then, the fourth condition is infrastructural pragmatism. Flanders already possesses multiple systems. The most realistic route is likely to be interoperability, shared metadata and a common discovery layer rather than a new monolithic repository. Primary artistic materials can remain in appropriate institutional or specialist environments.

The fifth condition is respect for diversity. Artistic research encompasses radically different practices, economic models, temporalities, and disciplinary traditions. A framework must therefore define common principles without closing down the space in which new forms of research can emerge.

Finally, the symposium suggests that the most compelling reason to improve the registration of artistic research is not to make artists easier to count. It is to make their research easier to find, understand, cite, preserve, and build upon. The objective is cumulative knowledge rather than cumulative statistics.

The central proposition emerging from this first report can therefore be formulated as follows:

The primary value of a shared Flemish framework should be access, recognition, and knowledge transfer.

This principle does not imply that artistic research should remain outside systems of accountability. On the contrary, better documentation can strengthen accountability by making research visible and traceable. But accountability should be proportionate to purpose, and the means of demonstrating research should not be allowed to determine the nature of the research itself.

The next phase should therefore focus on testing these principles against additional institutional evidence, clarifying the technical landscape, examining existing Flemish and international models, and determining which elements genuinely require common agreement. The aim should be a framework that is robust enough to create visibility and continuity, yet open enough to accommodate the future forms of artistic research that cannot yet be fully anticipated.

12.1 A proposed implementation roadmap

The next phase should move from conceptual discussion to controlled experimentation. I recommend a staged roadmap with explicit review points rather than a single large technical procurement or policy exercise.

Phase 1 – Conceptual consolidation

Agree on a small set of shared definitions: research-related artistic output, research trajectory, contextualisation, registration, documentation, validation, and assessment. Explicitly state which functions the proposed infrastructure will not perform.

Phase 2 – Institutional mapping

Map current systems and practices across universities, Schools of Arts, and relevant research centres. Identify what is already registered, where it is stored, which identifiers are used, and which fields can already be exchanged.

Phase 3 – Metadata prototype

Develop a minimum metadata profile and test it against a diverse sample: a concert or performance, composition, exhibition, installation, design project, film/video work, collaborative project, and multimodal research exposition.

Phase 4 – Discovery pilot

Create a small cross-institutional discovery layer using existing records. Do not initially create a new repository. Evaluate searchability, linking, persistent identification, and researcher usability.

Phase 5 – Documentation and exposition

Test richer links to institutional repositories and multimodal research expositions. Establish guidance for proportionate contextualisation rather than a single mandatory textual format.

Phase 6 – Validation framework

Only after the discovery layer has been tested, develop optional validation pathways for specific purposes such as doctoral research, grants, or institutional review. Keep validation purpose specific.

Phase 7 – Governance and review

Establish a representative governance structure and conduct an independent review of the pilot. Examine administrative burden, data quality, disciplinary inclusivity, discoverability, and unintended incentives.

13. Proposed Next Steps for Further Development and Implementation

1. Collect and integrate the available recordings, transcripts, presentations, and institutional documentation.
2. Obtain current documentation from participating institutions concerning their registration, repository, and assessment practices.
3. Map the functional relationships among DOSP, WANDER/BROCADE, PURE, LIRIAS and FRIS, distinguishing project registration, metadata, repository, and reporting functions.
4. Clarify the current institutional and legal position of artistic research within the Flemish higher-education landscape.
5. Document the history and outcomes of the ECOOM initiatives from 2009–2022, including the lessons learned from the earlier harmonisation exercise.
6. Develop a comparative matrix of institutional practices, especially criteria for recognising research output, forms of contextualization, and assessment arrangements.
7. Identify potential models for peer assessment, including discipline-specific panels and mixed artistic-academic expertise.
8. Develop a draft common metadata schema and test it against a diverse sample of artistic research projects.
9. Examine copyright, authorship, data ownership, access, preservation, and persistent-identification requirements for artistic research materials.
10. Consult broader research communities in the humanities, social sciences, architecture, design, and practice-based research to test whether the proposed framework could support a wider ecosystem of non-traditional research output.
11. Develop governance principles that explicitly prevent unintended conversion of documentation data into automatic funding or performance metrics.
12. Use the resulting evidence to refine the recommendations and maintain and periodically update the present report, with appendices containing institutional comparisons, proposed metadata fields, and selected case examples.

Appendix A. Preliminary Thematic Matrix

Theme	What appears broadly agreed	What remains open
Purpose	Documentation, visibility, preservation and knowledge transfer are valuable	Exact scope and institutional ownership
Funding	Registration should not automatically determine funding	Long-term policy safeguards
Output	Research-related artistic output should be distinguishable from general artistic activity	Exact definition and project-link requirement
Assessment	Peer expertise is essential; artistic and academic expertise may both be required	Level, frequency and governance of assessment
Metrics	Bibliometric equivalence is inappropriate	Whether any limited descriptive indicators could be useful
Categories	Descriptive categories improve discoverability	How far categorisation should extend
Infrastructure	Build on existing systems and improve interoperability	Which system should provide the shared discovery layer
Primary materials	Preservation matters	Where heavy audiovisual/material data should reside
Process	Context is important for understanding outputs	How much process documentation should be required
Disciplinary diversity	Flexibility is essential	Which common criteria can travel across disciplines
Governance	Purpose and permitted uses should be explicit	Who should govern the shared framework

Appendix B. Preliminary Glossary

Term	Working meaning
Artistic research	Research in which artistic practice forms an integral part of the inquiry and/or knowledge production.
Artistic research output	An artistic or related output that is demonstrably connected to a research trajectory and is sufficiently disseminated or documented to function as a research outcome.
Metadata	Structured information describing an output, such as title, creator, date, type, context and links.
Repository	An infrastructure capable of preserving and/or providing access to research materials themselves, rather than only describing them.
Registration	The act of recording the existence and relevant information of an output.
Validation	Verification that a record meets agreed formal or documentary requirements.
Assessment	A qualitative or expert judgement made for a defined purpose.
Measurement	The assignment of numerical values or indicators to an object, activity or performance.
Research context	Information that explains the relationship between an output and its research question, methodology, trajectory or contribution.
Knowledge transfer	The circulation of research knowledge so that others can access, understand, cite, learn from and build upon it.

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