

# Detailed Strategy for Building Research Capacity at Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) (V3.2)

## 1. Research Clusters

Adam will be available for SCA on a floating basis to advise and assist in publishing outcomes from the research clusters.

Research clusters at the Sydney College of the Arts (SCA) offer a transformative approach to fostering collaborative, innovative, and impactful research. These clusters serve as dynamic hubs of creativity and scholarship, bringing together diverse expertise to address complex artistic and societal challenges. Research clusters at SCA have the potential to generate a diverse range of impactful outputs, from curated exhibitions and collaborative publications to interdisciplinary projects and international partnerships, all of which contribute to SCA's research profile and align with broader institutional goals.

Beyond these tangible outputs, research clusters create a supportive ecosystem for researchers at all career stages. They provide mentorship opportunities, skill-sharing platforms, and collaborative grant writing initiatives. This environment is particularly valuable for early career researchers and those re-engaging with research, offering a low-pressure space to develop projects and build track records. By fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation, research clusters not only enhance the quality and quantity of research outputs but also create a vibrant, supportive, and forward-thinking research culture that benefits all members of the SCA community. This structure encourages incremental research engagement, allowing members to contribute in various capacities and gradually increase their research activity.

The interdisciplinary nature of these clusters, with the potential to involve colleagues from other disciplines, fosters skill development and broadens academic perspectives. This aligns with the university's strategic goals and increases the visibility and impact of our collective research efforts.

These research clusters not only boost our research output but also create a more cohesive, supportive, and dynamic academic community at SCA. They offer pathways for career progression, facilitate knowledge sharing, and ultimately contribute to the school's research excellence and cultural impact.

### 1.1 Structure and Management of Clusters

- Implement self-selecting research clusters with appointed Chairs
- Schedule monthly meetings for each cluster to discuss project and funding opportunities
- Set an annual research output expectation for each cluster
- Clusters will be required to put basic content in a drop box for Christian Haag to upload to a dedicated SCA research website showcasing projects, publications, and achievements

- Ensure clusters align with FASS research priorities and themes

### What are the FASS research priorities and themes?

- FASS Strategic Plan 2024 - 2025: <https://unisyd.sharepoint.com/sites/fasshome-strategy>

- FASS research strategies and future plans include the following:

- 1.1a The current **FASS Strategic Plan** states that FASS will "establish priority themes that strengthen our research collaborations within the faculty, across the University and beyond" in 2024-25.
- 1.1b FASS will expand the scope of existing "flagship, theme-aligned centres" as a key contributor to the University's broader aspirations (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/arts/our-research/centres-institutes-and-groups.html>)
- 1.1c The FASS plan notes that these priority themes are not fixed, and will continue to evolve over time – just as the challenges facing society will change.
- 1.1d While specific themes are not listed in the FASS document, the plan emphasises the primary importance of multidisciplinary approaches to global issues and addressing "critical societal and community challenges."
- 1.1e It mentions aligning FASS priority themes with the University's broader research ecosystem. Research Priorities in the **University's Strategic Plan** are to address "society's great challenges" and specifically lists a few examples: (<https://www.sydney.edu.au/about-us/2032-strategy.html>)
  - 1.1f1 Living sustainably in a rapidly growing world threatened by climate change
  - 1.1f2 Harnessing the power of artificial intelligence for good
  - 1.1f3 Preparing leaders to unite, rather than divide, society
  - 1.1f4 Tackling inequality in all its forms

*Overall, throughout the University's strategic plan there's a focus on multidisciplinary problem-solving, leveraging the university's comprehensiveness and partnerships.*

### 1.2 Potential Research Outputs

- Curated exhibitions in the SCA gallery based on cluster research
- Co-authored/ Collaborative book submissions and publications (for example, an annual presentation at AAANZ)
- Organising visiting guest-artist/ artist in residence programs and events (when international art-peers travel to Sydney we can 'host them at the SCA)
- Development of symposia and conferences associated with your research cluster
- Research Assistant (RA) positions for each cluster (see potential funding sources below)
- Clusters will can form the basis for interdisciplinary projects with other faculties or institutions (very desirable for FASS Strategic plan)
- Clusters can strive to create outputs that demonstrate impact on national and international communities
- Development of external websites and online platforms for research dissemination

<https://newmaterialismincontemporaryart.wordpress.com/about/>

### 1.3 Non-Research Benefits of forming Research Clusters:

- Clusters could facilitate Week 7 events on a rotational basis
- Research Clusters can form their own Grant Writing Support sessions (for grants proposals and research statements etc)
- Clusters could organise screenings or other events involving HDR students where possible/ appropriate
- Clusters would have a cross section of ECR and MCR's to encourage collaborative projects with established researchers
- Where relevant clusters could invite colleague from other disciplines to join (TAPS, the Con, Film Studies)
- Clusters would support early career researchers in developing pilot projects and track records

- *Leadership Opportunities for Less Active Researchers*

Individuals have the chance to lead a cluster without the pressure of individual research output

They have the opportunity to contribute through coordination and facilitation skills

They would receive recognition for academic leadership, which can compensate for fewer publications

This would all be reflected in one's AP&D

- *Collaborative Publication Opportunities*

- Co-authorship on papers, reducing individual writing and creative-production workload
- Opportunity to contribute specific expertise to larger projects
- Increased publication count through multiple collaborative efforts
- *Shared Grant Writing*
  - Collaborate on grant applications, distributing the workload
  - Access to colleagues' grant writing expertise and successful templates
  - Increased chances of success with interdisciplinary proposals
- *Mentorship and Reverse Mentorship*
  - Senior researchers can fulfill mentorship roles without extensive individual research
  - Early career researchers can offer fresh perspectives and digital skills
  - Mutual learning environment that values diverse contributions
- *Flexibility in Contribution*
  - Ability to contribute in various ways (e.g., conceptual development, methodology, networking)
  - Opportunity to stay involved in research while managing other responsibilities
- *Career Progression Pathways*
  - Alternative route for promotion, emphasising research leadership and collaboration
  - Development of transferable skills valuable for academic administration roles
  - Building a research network that can lead to future opportunities
- *Incremental Research Engagement*
  - Low-pressure environment to re-engage with research for those who have been inactive
  - An opportunity to contribute to smaller parts of larger projects
  - Gradual increase in research activity at a manageable pace
- *Interdisciplinary Skill Development*
  - Exposure to methodologies and perspectives from other disciplines
  - Opportunity to apply artistic skills to diverse research contexts
  - Development of a broader academic skill set

#### **1.4 Funding Sources**

- Internal funding from SACE and FASS
- Industry collaborations, sponsorships and partnerships
- HERDC/RBG (research block) funding (in consultation with Alan)
- Actively pursue diverse funding sources as per FASS strategy

#### **1.5 Establishment Process**

- Conduct the SCA Research morning on October 28th
- Use the Survey Monkey questionnaire to gauge interest and potential cluster themes:  
[https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/Preview/?sm=R\\_2FvBfUiBSJNoEBmfEdac0zO9x4jHtAmHn49k\\_2BYeehgvplOYme7z3fuKiqkvRueei](https://uk.surveymonkey.com/r/Preview/?sm=R_2FvBfUiBSJNoEBmfEdac0zO9x4jHtAmHn49k_2BYeehgvplOYme7z3fuKiqkvRueei)
- Develop clear guidelines for cluster formation and management (see Guidelines for Research Cluster Formation, below)
- Ensure alignment with FASS research priorities and themes (as listed 1.1 above)

#### **Guidelines for Research Cluster Formation**

Set a trial period for the chosen model with a planned review and adjustment phase. Staff could stay in clusters for a pre-determined period of time: ie 12months or 3 years.

Clusters could be formed using any of the following 5 approaches: Thematic approach, Methodological approach, Challenge-based approach, Career-stage approach, Flexible-magic-hat approach.

We've come up with the following 'Approaches' to establishing the research clusters. These are designed to align with the FASS and University Research priorities.

*Personally, as contemporary artists, I believe that EACH of the following Cluster approaches could be used with equal efficacy, as they each have their merit. For discussion, rather than choosing what you believe to be the “best” approach, could you please consider ways in which your practice could be applied to EACH approach.*

### **1.5a Thematic Approach**

- Staff cohort identify 5 key themes in contemporary art research and practice engaged with by SCA colleagues
- SCA members propose and vote on these themes
- Clusters form around the most popular or strategic themes
- For example....
  - Digital Materiality in Contemporary Art
  - Eco-Art and Environmental Sustainability
  - Decolonising Art Practices
  - Interdisciplinary Collaborations (Art + Industry)
  - Urban Art and Public Spaces
  - Art and Mental Health
  - Performative and Participatory Art
  - Archival Practices in Contemporary Art

### **1.5b Methodological Approach**

- Identify distinct research methodologies used in art practice and research
- SCA members align themselves with primary methodologies
- Clusters form around shared methodological approaches

Some possible examples:

- **Practice-led Research** Focus on research where artistic practice/ process of creation is the primary method of inquiry
- **Archival and Historical Research** Utilising historical documents, artifacts, and archives to inform contemporary art practices or lead to curated exhibitions
- **Ethnographic and Participatory Methods** Involving immersive fieldwork and participant observation and collaboration, ie socially engaged practice.
- **Digital and Computational Methods** Utilising digital tools and technologies in art creation and analysis (AI, algorithmic art, digital sound art, digital preservation techniques etc)
- **Material-based Experimentation** Focusing on exploring the properties and potentials of various materials
- **Phenomenological Approaches** Emphasising lived experience and subjective perception, could use performance as a mode of inquiry and knowledge production, captured in documentation and reflexive analysis
- **Critical Theory and Discourse Analysis** Applies theoretical frameworks to analyse art and its contexts (ie self-referential practices), potentially resulting in critical writing or curatorial projects
- **Interdisciplinary Collaborative Methods** Combining methodologies from art with those from other disciplines (e.g., sciences, social sciences), could involve a team-based research with experts from multiple fields outside of SCA

### **1.5c Challenge-Based Approach**

- Identify key societal or artistic challenges
- SCA members propose how their research addresses these challenges
- Clusters form around shared challenge focus.
- For example, some thoughts:

1. **Climate Crisis and Environmental Sustainability** How can art engage with climate change? What sustainable materials and practices can be developed for art-making?
2. **Social Justice and Equity** How can art address and challenge systemic inequalities? What role can public art play in promoting social cohesion? How can art amplify marginalised voices and experiences?
3. **Mental Health and Well-being** What role can participatory art play in community mental health?
4. **Digital Transformation and AI in Art** How is AI changing the landscape of art creation and curation? What ethical considerations arise from the use of AI in art? How can traditional art forms adapt to and utilise digital technologies?

5. **Cultural Heritage Preservation in the Digital Age** How can digital technologies aid in preserving and restoring art and cultural artifacts? What strategies can be developed for archiving digital and ephemeral art? How can Indigenous knowledge systems be respectfully integrated into digital preservation efforts?
6. **Urban Development and Public Spaces** How can art contribute to creating more livable and sustainable cities? What role can temporary and permanent public art play in urban renewal? How can art address issues of gentrification and community displacement?
7. **Cross-cultural Communication and Global Understanding** How can art bridge cultural divides and promote intercultural dialogue? What role can art play in addressing global migration and refugee issues? How can digital platforms be used to create global art communities?

### 1.5d Career Stage Approach

- Form clusters based on career stages (e.g., ECR, Mid-career, Senior)
- Each cluster includes mentors from more advanced career stages
- Focus on career development and stage-specific research challenges

### 1.5e Flexible Magic-Hat Approach

- Allow SCA members to draw names from a hat!

The benefits of this approach include:

- **Promoting Interdisciplinarity** Randomly grouped researchers from different specialties are forced to find common ground, Encourages exploration of unexpected intersections between diverse art practices, Can lead to truly innovative and unique research directions
- **Breaks Down Silos** Prevents the formation of predictable groups based on existing relationships or disciplines, Encourages interaction with colleagues who might not typically collaborate
- **Stimulates Creativity** The challenge of finding connections with randomly assigned colleagues can spark creative thinking, Encourages researchers to view their work from new perspectives, Can lead to the discovery of novel research questions or methodologies
- **Encourages Adaptability** Researchers must be flexible and open-minded to work with their assigned group, Develops skills in finding common ground and adapting research interests
- **Reduces Bias in Group Formation** Eliminates potential biases that might occur in self-selected or theme-based groups, Challenges preconceptions about who can contribute to specific research areas
- **Facilitates New Relationships**
- **Encourages Risk-Taking** Pushes researchers out of their comfort zones, Fosters a culture of experimentation and innovation
- **Flexible Evolution** Allows clusters to adapt and change over time based on discovered synergies, can lead to the emergence of new, unexpected research strengths within SCA

## 2. SCA Research Coordinator / Facilitator

The 'Research Facilitator' at Sydney College of the Arts plays a pivotal role in nurturing a vibrant and productive research ecosystem. This position serves as a key in our strategy to building research capacity, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment for all researchers. The role of the "Research Facilitator" is supportive and enabling in nature, rather than a top-down approach.

The Research Facilitator's value lies in their ability to ignite research potential across the SCA. They provide crucial support to early career researchers, facilitate cross-disciplinary collaborations, and help established researchers explore new avenues. By organising research days, coordinating with SACE and FASS, and liaising with external partners, they identify opportunities for knowledge exchange and potential partnership development.

This role is instrumental in improving the visibility of SCA research, developing strategies to showcase our achievements and impact. The Research Facilitator also plays a key part in enhancing our research infrastructure, from improving reporting systems to guiding grant applications.

Perhaps most importantly, the Research Facilitator offers personalised support through annual consultations, helping each academic chart their unique research trajectory. This individualised approach, combined with broader strategic initiatives, ensures that SCA's research community thrives at both individual and collective levels.

In essence, the Research Facilitator is a nurturing force, empowering our academics to reach their full research potential and elevating SCA's research profile in the process.

## **2.1 Role and Responsibilities**

### **2.1a Chair the 'Building Research Capacity' working group to draft and develop the SCA Research Strategy**

Present the SCA Research Strategy at the SCA Staff Forum 23<sup>rd</sup> September

Work with the SCA community to synthesise outcomes into actionable strategy points

### **2.1b Guide and support the execution of SCA Research Strategy**

Organise and facilitate the research day (Oct 28<sup>th</sup> 2024) as the launch pad for research clusters.

Provide ongoing support and guidance for strategy implementation

### **2.1c Foster alignment of SCA research activities with FASS goals and priorities**

Attend FASS and SACE research meetings and share insights with SCA colleagues

Advocate for SCA research interests at the faculty level

Encourage and support collaborations between SCA, SACE and FASS

### **2.1d Coordinate biannual SCA Research Days**

SCA Research Days will typically involve invited guest presentations and showcase research cluster achievements

Collaborate with clusters to develop engaging programs showcasing achievements

Facilitate invitations to external speakers and industry partners

Create networking and collaboration opportunities

### **2.1e Support the annual SACE Research Day**

(to date I have been the instigator and facilitator of the SACE Research Pecha kutchka days)

Collaborate with SACE colleagues to develop cross-disciplinary themes

Encourage SCA participation alongside other SACE disciplines

Help identify potential collaboration opportunities across SACE

### **2.1f Support research clusters and their outputs**

Regular monthly check-ins with cluster chairs to discuss progress and offer support

Provide constructive feedback on cluster annual reports

Help identify and facilitate cross-cluster collaboration opportunities

### **2.1g Compile reports on research activities and outcomes for School, Faculty, and University leadership**

Collaborate with clusters to develop comprehensive annual research report for SCA

Present SCA research achievements at faculty and university forums

Advocate for SCA research needs at all levels of university governance, where appropriate

### **2.1h Encourage cross-disciplinary collaborations across SCA, SACE, FASS, and beyond**

Help identify potential collaboration opportunities through networking and research mapping  
Support the organisation of cross-disciplinary workshops and seminars  
Assist in the development of interdisciplinary grant applications and projects

**2.1i Facilitate regular review and updates to the research strategy**

Conduct annual collaborative SWOT analysis of SCA research landscape with the SCA 'Building Research Capacity' working group (currently Mestrom (Chair), Kelly, Sully, Geczy)  
Gather feedback from SCA staff on strategy effectiveness at annual SCA Strategy Planning Day  
Work with the SCA community to refine the strategy based on emerging opportunities and challenges

**2.2 Research Trajectory Support**

**2.2a Offer annual one-on-one consultations with each academic (20min each)**

Develop a supportive consultation template to ensure consistency  
Collaboratively review previous year's achievements and set goals for the coming year  
Identify specific support needs and resources required  
Provide written summary and action points as a supportive follow-up

**2.3 Enhancing Research Visibility**

**2.3a Digital Presence**

Support the development of a dedicated SCA research website showcasing projects, publications, and achievements  
Collaborate with Christian Haag to design and implement the website  
Encourage regular updates with fresh content from clusters

**2.3b Showcase SCA's unique contribution to SACE and FASS's research ecosystem**

Support creation of visual representations of SCA's role within SACE and FASS  
Help develop narratives around SCA's distinctive research approaches  
Highlight interdisciplinary collaborations involving SCA researchers

**2.3b Support implementation of regular research newsletter**

*Should this be internal or external?? (I could facilitate regular contributions to the SACE newsletter??)*  
Collaborate on determining frequency and format  
Encourage contributions highlighting recent outputs, upcoming opportunities, and researcher profiles

**2.3c Encourage use of social media platforms to share research updates and engage wider community**

Support development of social media strategy in consultation with Emma (?)

**2.4 Improving NTRO Reporting**

**2.4a Reporting Infrastructure (in collaboration with Joseph Toltz)**

Support implementation of user-friendly research management system  
Assist in evaluating systems appropriate for SCA needs  
Facilitate training for all staff on system use  
Ensure system integrates with university-wide research management tools

**2.4b Help develop clear guidelines for staff on reporting research activities**

Collaborate with Joseph Toltz on comprehensive guide covering all types of research outputs  
Support regular workshops on effective research reporting (*Research reporting could be workshopped within Clusters?*)

Offer one-on-one support for staff who need additional assistance with reporting



**2.4c Support regular research output audits**

Help implement quarterly audit process (*facilitated by Joseph Toltz, and translated back to staff by me*)  
Collaborate on developing checklist to ensure comprehensive capturing of all research activities  
Use audit results to identify areas for additional support in reporting practices

**2.4d Assist in aligning reporting with FASS impact measurement strategies**

Liaise with FASS research office (Joseph Toltz et. al.) to understand faculty-wide impact metrics  
Support development of SCA-specific impact indicators that align with FASS strategies  
Help ensure all SCA researchers understand how their work contributes to impact measurements (ie working towards projects that have a focus on multidisciplinary problem-solving, leveraging the university's comprehensiveness and partnerships (See 1.1, above)

**2.5 Learning from Other Institutions: Collaborative Benchmarking**

**2.5a Support analysis of research strategies and reporting infrastructures**

Focus on Monash, RMIT, UNSW, and selected international institutions  
Collaborate on developing comprehensive benchmarking framework  
Help identify key areas of comparison (e.g., research output, funding success, impact measures)

**2.5b Facilitate identification of best practices that can be adapted for SCA's context**

Support creation of report summarizing findings and recommendations  
Present findings to SCA staff for discussion and feedback  
Collaborate on implementation plan for adopted best practices

**2.5c Where appropriate, support arrangements for meetings or workshops with research leaders from other institutions**

Help identify key contacts at each institution  
Collaborate on agenda for knowledge-sharing sessions  
Explore possibilities for ongoing relationships or research exchanges

**2.5d Assist in benchmarking against FASS research priorities and themes**

Ensure SCA's benchmarking aligns with broader faculty goals  
Help identify areas where SCA can take a leadership role within FASS  
Use benchmarking results to inform SCA's strategic positioning within FASS

**2.6 Collaborative Grant Writing Support**

**2.6a Facilitate access to grant writing workshops and mentoring programs**

Support development of in-house grant writing workshop series (these can be developed in Clusters)  
Identify and promote external grant writing resources  
Help establish peer mentoring program pairing experienced and new grant writers

**2.6b Support development of database of successful grant applications as reference materials**

Assist in collecting exemplar applications from SCA and broader university  
Help organise database by funding body and grant type  
Ensure accessibility while maintaining confidentiality  
*(I'm already doing this with Steph in the SACE research office)*



- 2.6c **Collaborate with SACE to access broader support and resources**  
Participate in regular meetings with SACE Research committee and research support team  
Advocate for SCA-specific support where needed  
Help facilitate SCA researcher access to faculty-wide grant support services

## 2.7 Support Structure (to support the Research Facilitator role)

- 2.7a **Collaborate on appropriate workload allocation**  
Work with SCA leadership to ensure adequate time for research facilitation activities  
Advocate for recognition of the role's importance in workload models  
Initially, this could be work loaded/ acknowledged in the Governance pillar, while we work out how many hours are actually involved.
- 2.7b **Chair the 'Building Research Capacity' working group/ committee**  
Support quarterly meetings to gather input and feedback  
Encourage diverse representation from across SCA  
Use committee as a sounding board for research initiatives and improvements

# 3. Strategy Implementation Timeline

## 3.1 Short-term (0-2 months)

- Establish research clusters and appoint chairs
- Develop and launch the SCA research website
- Conduct initial benchmarking analysis of Monash and RMIT
- Begin alignment process with FASS research priorities and themes

## 3.2 Medium-term (2 - 6 months)

- Implement new research reporting infrastructure
- Launch mentoring program for early career researchers
- Organize first series of public engagement events
- Develop strategies for attracting diverse funding sources

## 3.3 Long-term (6 - 12 months)

- Review and refine research cluster performance
- Assess impact of new strategies on research outputs and grant success
- Develop long-term partnerships with key industry and community stakeholders
- Fully integrate SCA research strategy with FASS research ecosystem

Extra things to add to Research Strategy: define guidelines for assessing quality of NTRO's (see

<https://unisyd.sharepoint.com/sites/fasshome>

[research/ResearchResources/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Ffasshome%2Dresearch%2FRResearchResources%2Ffass%2Dminimum%2Dlevels%2Dresearch%2Dperformance%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Ffasshome%2Dresearch%2FRResearchResource](https://unisyd.sharepoint.com/sites/fasshome/research/ResearchResources/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2Ffasshome%2Dresearch%2FRResearchResources%2Ffass%2Dminimum%2Dlevels%2Dresearch%2Dperformance%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2Ffasshome%2Dresearch%2FRResearchResource)

**FASS Minimum levels of research performance**

**Aspirational Research Performance Standards**

<https://intranet.sydney.edu.au/careers-training/performance-planning-development/academic-staff/aspirational-research-performance-standards.html>