



Queensland **Ballet**

Evaluation of Queensland Ballet's Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program for Dance Teachers

Developed by
Sandra Gattenhof

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Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements from QUT

Sandra Gattenhof would like to thank the Queensland Ballet Teaching Artists who delivered the Petit Pointers program, as well as Queensland Ballet staff and dance teachers in Longreach, Rockhampton and surrounding communities for assistance in the development and delivery of this research.

QUT acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands where QUT now stands, and pays respect to their Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledges the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to play within the QUT community.

Acknowledgements from Queensland Ballet

Queensland Ballet would like to thank the support of the John Villier's Trust for enabling this pilot project.

Queensland Ballet acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and perform. Long before we performed on this land, it played host to the dance expression of our First Peoples. We pay our respects to their Elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledge the valuable contribution they have made and continue to make to the cultural landscape of this country.

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About QB Petit Pointers

Since 2015, Queensland Ballet has been running early childhood classes at its home in West End. Beginning as an extension to the community dance class schedule, Queensland Ballet's decision to serve this segment of the population was in response to strategic priorities centred around enriching all lives, regardless of age, background, socio-economic status or geographic location.

Originally developed by Education Teaching Artist Sally Ringland, and titled Twinkle Toes, the early classes were structured as a beginner level introduction to ballet for young children, where the development of the foundational skills of ballet would be approached through the lens of creative movement, with imagination, creativity and musicality as the key drivers.

In 2017, Queensland Ballet invited Queensland University of Technology Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof to review the Teaching Artist component of the course, leading to recommendations that would generally bring the course into alignment with current research around early years arts education, Queensland and national curriculum priorities, and more broadly the benefits of experiential arts offerings for children. This enhanced the content, structure and delivery of the program, while consolidating the evolution of the first course into three streams under the new banner of Tiny Dancers.

Throughout the period from 2015 to 2017, Queensland Ballet actively pursued the delivery of these courses in a range of settings, including parklands, shopping centre activation zones, regional town halls, private dance studios and kindergarten settings. Made possible through a partnership with the Queensland Department of Education's Premier's Reading Challenge (PRC), this year (2019) will be the fifth year that Queensland Ballet has delivered creative movement workshops as part of the annual PRC. Throughout the programs, each of the lessons within the course structure has been reviewed and rewritten by subsequent Teaching Artists in consultation with early years educators.

In 2018, Queensland Ballet delivered Kindy Moves, enabled by Arts Queensland's Artist in Residence funding. This 10-week ballet course for kindergarten children was the first extended implementation of the revised program. Kindy Moves occurred in partnership with Lady Gowrie Caboolture East Community Kindergarten, and was supported by an evidence-based framework, again developed by Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof. Proving successful with educators and students alike, it was found that the students could competently explore lived themes while navigating key learning areas relating to literacy, numeracy, physical development and creativity. The kindergarten teachers' approach to include a movement program based in ballet was enhanced, as were the pedagogical skills of Queensland Ballet's Teaching Artist team.

In 2018, Queensland Ballet rebranded the umbrella name for all courses to QB Petit Pointers. This name references foundational skills pertinent to ballet, echoing the French language used in ballet classes all around the world. As the state ballet company now prioritises 'creating magic and enriching lives' (*Strategic Plan 2019–2021*), the course brings educators and students one step closer to Queensland Ballet, with relevant and authentic experiences that inspire and motivate engagement in the arts. By focusing on what the company does best — ballet — and by integrating foundational ballet skills into all QB Petit Pointers classes, the delivery team has always ensured the high-quality, high-performance paradigm of the art form at the elite level is threaded through all community engagement offerings. For this program, this has meant a strong alignment with the national Early Years Learning Framework, contemporary research and an evidence-based approach to continuous improvement.



Research Framework

Queensland Ballet commissioned Queensland University of Technology, Creative Industries Faculty, under the leadership of Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof, to undertake an evaluation of the first delivery of the dance teacher training program. The delivery of the training program was supported by funds from the John Villers Trust, enabling the Queensland Ballet Teaching Artists and staff to travel to regional Queensland. The aims of the training program are to¹:

1. provide comprehensive training in an early years arts-based learning program which is evidenced by research to foster creativity and improve wellbeing across the community
2. benefit regional arts workers by building their capacity, raising the profile of businesses and individual practices through tailored professional development, cooperative professional networks and connection with the state ballet company, and facilitating enhanced program offerings
3. contribute to the regional dance ecology by developing strong connections with dance studio owners/teachers
4. enhance regional activities by enabling a program of meaningful, creative, play-based learning and engagement with young children and their families.

There are two naming conventions used in this report. QB Petit Pointers refers to the syllabus for early years learners developed by Queensland Ballet. Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program refers to the professional development program for dance teachers also developed by Queensland Ballet.

This research reports on the outcomes of the inaugural Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program only. It does not report on the outcomes of the delivery of Petit Pointers for children and parents/carers, or the structure of the QB Petit Pointers syllabus. Detailed information about Petit Pointers can be accessed on the Queensland Ballet website: <https://www.queenslandballet.com.au>.

¹ The aims of the QB Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program have been drawn from a Queensland Ballet application to the John Villers Trust. This application is an internal document to Queensland Ballet and is not publicly accessible.

Data Management

To maintain the confidentiality of the research participants (in accordance with research ethics), names have been replaced with title (Teaching Artist, Queensland Ballet staff member or training participant) and a numeral. To maintain consistency, all data has been de-identified.

The research has ethical approval from the QUT Research Ethics Unit:

Ethics category: Human — Negligible–Low Risk

UHREC reference number: 1800001171

Dates of approval: 14/12/2018 to 14/12/2020

Project title: Evaluation of Queensland Ballet's Petit Pointers Program

Data for this report has been drawn from the following six key sources:

1. observation of the two Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program delivered by Queensland Ballet Teaching Artists in Longreach and Rockhampton
2. interviews with the two Teaching Artists responsible for delivery of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program
3. interview with acting Head of Community Engagement at Queensland Ballet
4. survey of Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program participants undertaken three months after the delivery of the program (May 2019)
5. participant evaluation of training program immediately after delivery
6. unsolicited feedback from Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program participants.





Limitations of the Data

The findings from this research must be read as indicative rather than encompassing or definitive in relation to the outcomes for the training participants (n=18) and Teaching Artists (n=2).

This is due to the small data sample and the brevity of the initial delivery of the professional development program and the research timeframe. No pre-testing of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program participants was undertaken; therefore this is not a comparative study. To capture the long-term impact of the training model and the evidence of outcomes over time, the data sample would need to be larger and be longitudinal in nature

Program commendations

- The program allows the reach of the state ballet company to be broadened beyond Brisbane and large regional centres, not just in terms of touring artistic product, but as the leading training centre for ballet in early years learning contexts.
- The teaching partnership between the Teaching Artists was dynamic, cohesive and robust. The skills sets of both Teaching Artists were complementary, marrying professional dance experience, longevity of experience in teaching-related Queensland Ballet programs and considerable primary teaching experience in Queensland schools.
- The program works well with two Teaching Artists delivering the content. The delivery is intensive, and having two Teaching Artists allows for complementary skills sets to be engaged, reduces fatigue and supports modelling, as one Teaching Artist is able to participate and model responses while the other takes a leadership role in the delivery of the activities.
- Modelling and active participation are highlights of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program.
- Attention to behaviour management strategies was appreciated by participants.
- Embedding a demonstration class engaging early childhood learners and their parents/carers was an ideal way of demonstrating the efficacy of what participants had been learning in the program.

Program recommendations

- More deliberate planning for a reflective phase both during and after delivery of the program is essential to developing a learning community within Queensland Ballet, and supports the professional development of Queensland Ballet's Teaching Artists.
- The role of teaching assistant should be given more attention in the training program. This type of important work — scanning the room for those who need additional support, assisting parents/carers with child inclusion, welcoming siblings sitting at the side — helps to develop the safe dance learning environment, and cannot be underestimated. Advice about the role of the teaching assistant could be added to the QB Petit Pointers website as support material.
- Increased attention is required to support an inclusive education model to ensure that the program is suitable for all young children. The addition of information related to inclusive education should be added to the program. Stronger links could also be made to Queensland Ballet's partnership with AllPlay Dance, Deakin University Child Study Centre. This may include direct links to the All Play website and accompanying resources. Additionally, it is important to consider that inclusive education is not limited to children with disabilities, but that inclusive education principles also encompass cultural and linguistic diversity.
- Sustainability of the delivery model needs consideration. A strategy is needed to mitigate loss of knowledge if either of the current Teaching Artists are unable to deliver the program in further rollouts. Additionally, training expertise needs to be developed within Queensland Ballet's Teaching Artists in the field of adult learning known as andragogy. Adult learning principles are significantly different to those employed currently by Queensland Ballet's Teaching Artists, who are predominantly working in the field of pedagogy, that is, working with children and young people in learning contexts.
- Consideration should be given to ongoing engagement with participants of the training program through additional face-to-face professional development or the use of digital learning and communication platforms.





About the participants

There were 18 program participants across the two centres (Longreach n=7; Rockhampton n=11). All participants were female, comprising owners/teachers of dance schools and teaching assistants in dance schools.

The participants came from Longreach, Biloela, Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Emerald, Moura and Gladstone. Data show that 80 per cent of attendees were first time participants in a Queensland Ballet training program. All participants had attended a Queensland Ballet performance in either Brisbane or a Queensland regional centre such as Cairns, Rockhampton, Mackay, Gladstone or Longreach. Of the 18 participants, 11 responded to the survey. It should be noted that four attendees were under the age of 18 and therefore did not participate in the research.



Efficacy of the programs

The inaugural delivery of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program took place in early 2019 across the Queensland regional centres of Longreach (19 and 20 January 2019) and Rockhampton (2 and 3 February 2019).

The two-day program delivery was similar in both centres. In both deliveries, there was an emphasis on equity of access rather than elitism. Queensland Ballet staff believe that the company has 'a commitment to access and equality for all past, existing and future dance audiences and participants across Queensland' (Queensland Ballet staff member 1, 2019). Attention to the way that QB Petit Pointers is anchored in creativity and play-based learning was also of paramount importance. One Teaching Artist supported this position by saying, 'Queensland Ballet aims to provide regional communities access to high-quality teaching artists and teaching resources' (Teaching Artist 1, 2019).

The QB Petit Pointers program provides clear guidance for dance teachers to implement early years activities in their program offerings. The various elements of the course highlight, and assist teachers to understand, the specificities of teaching in an early childhood context. These elements include:

- the use of props to encourage sensory learning and enhance creativity, as well as the use of imagery in exercises
- three levels of activity, ensuring that each age group is catered for depending on their developmental stage
- the inclusion of 'teachable moments' focusing on the learning outcome or desired intent of the exercise, which enables the teacher to understand each exercise and how it relates to the learning of the child
- the inclusion of 'targeted multiple intelligences' (Gardner 1983), which highlights the different learners and how dance can cater for different learning types in early years settings.

Through participation in the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program, dance teachers can become a licensed provider. This enables 'regional students and teachers to have a special connection to their state ballet company, linking what we offer in Brisbane to other locations across the state' (Teaching Artist 1, 2019). Such an outcome for dance teachers supports the delivery of aim 2 of the program to 'benefit regional arts workers by building their capacity, raising the profile of businesses and individual practices through tailored professional development, cooperative professional networks and connection with the state ballet company, and facilitating enhanced program offerings'. The program allows 'local teachers to upskill [thereby] empowering local communities to be self-sufficient and confident in their expertise and knowledge' (Queensland Ballet staff member 1, 2019).

For early years teachers, 'it is rare to have a professional development and networking opportunity' (Teaching Artist 1, 2019). In the survey, all Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program participants believed that it is important for a state ballet company to engage with dance teachers and children living in regional Queensland. The participant survey showed that all participants have incorporated elements of the QB Petit Pointers syllabus into their local programs, and responses indicated that the inclusion is well received. One comment from the participant survey shows the efficacy of the program: 'I have a Petit Pointers class every week in which I am working my way through the 2- to 3-year-old program. The kids are loving the program and are progressing well' (QB Petit Pointers participant survey, 2019). A highlight of the training program is the demonstration workshop with child participants accompanied by their parent/carer. The workshop allows dance teachers to either actively participate or observe, and is followed by a group debrief on outcomes of this lesson, challenges that arose and techniques to overcome these. Queensland Ballet staff member 1 (2019) noted that 'This element is highly valuable as it empowers dance teachers to think about how they would implement classes in their local context using an "adapt or adopt" method for their students.' Teaching Artist 2 (2019) commented that 'the QB Petit Pointers program offers teachers more than just a ballet syllabus. It layers educational outcomes underneath the traditional ballet class lesson plans'.

One of the two Teaching Artists stated that QB Petit Pointers 'enables [the company] to promote and provide a lifelong engagement and love of ballet in our regional audiences' (Teaching Artist 1, 2019). Unsolicited responses from training program participants demonstrated the local impact of implementing the syllabus. This evidence supports program aims 1, 2 and 4.

Response 1

The Petit Pointers program is working really well for our 16 little dancers here on Saturday morning, with them reminding me every week of the Welcome song and Good-bye song and singing them loudly and proudly each time. They are enjoying the adventures that ballet is taking them on each week.

Response 2

I have been running the classes since the training and have found that they have been very beneficial to include in my Tiny Tot program ... Parents are very positive and praising the content. [One child] has a great problem with listening and following instructions. [The parents] were amazed at how engaged she was for the majority of the lesson, in particular when being asked to return to sit on her coloured spot and stopping when being asked to stop using her 'noisy' eggs that I purchased to assist with rhythm. Thank you to the Queensland Ballet and all who were involved in the creation of the Petit Pointers syllabus for a wonderful program. I am sure word of mouth will be my biggest form of advertisement as both parents cannot speak highly enough of it.

Teaching Artist 2 (2019) said that 'the sharing of the QB Petit Pointers syllabus in regional Queensland strengthens links between the company and the regional communities. This program invites a very new audience/community of people to access Queensland Ballet in a friendly and inclusive manner'.



Role of a learning community

Built into the delivery model were reflective phases to support best practice development for the Teaching Artists. Prior to the first delivery in Longreach, the Petit Pointers Teaching Artists delivered a test workshop for Queensland Ballet staff and EdSquad Teaching Artists, as well as invited dance teachers.

This workshop helped the Petit Pointers Teaching Artists to shape the delivery of the workshops in regional Queensland by experimenting with the language and tone of delivery within a supportive environment. The test workshop was an important foundation step, as it was the first time the two Petit Pointers Teaching Artists had worked simultaneously on the delivery phase. Taking this approach from the outset established a learning community between the Teaching Artists, Queensland Ballet staff and the researcher. The development of a learning community to support impactful change occurs when all participants are positioned as co-investigators, using what Schon (1983) refers to as 'reflection in action', where key stakeholders in the project can be responsive and adaptive to changing environments and project dynamics.

The learning community approach was actualised during the delivery of the workshops and between the Longreach and Rockhampton deliveries. Debriefs with the team, including the researcher who observed the deliveries, as well as written feedback about areas of improvement such as participant

engagement, co-artistry and effective delivery modes for adult learners, allowed the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program to be immediately responsive to necessary changes. One example of the learning community in action resulted from the first program delivery in Longreach. Part of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program is a built-in demonstration lesson with early years learners so that the dance teachers can see how the program works in real time. After the demonstration lesson, the workshop participants were invited to engage in a reflective discussion. The researcher observed that the discussion needed to be more participant-centred rather than the Teaching Artist delivering advice via monologues. This observation was conveyed in written feedback to the Teaching Artists and Queensland Ballet staff, and invited reflection by participants to demonstrate how they may be able to share their significant knowledge about how the program applies in their specific context. In short, less 'teacher talk' and more 'learner/participant talk'. In response, prior to the same activity being delivered in Rockhampton, the Teaching Artists provided the participants with three questions to think about as they either participated or observed the child workshop. The questions provided a strong framework for reflection and discussion post the delivery of the child workshop, and the discussion was led by participants to a greater degree. This session not only became a site of workshop reflections, but also a session about problem-solving issues that participants encountered in their own teaching.

The example above demonstrates how the Teaching Artists used feedback to reconfigure the program delivery to better suit the needs of the participants. In adopting a learning community approach to the reflective phase of delivery, the training program becomes responsive and agile.

Impact Narratives

Views from training program participants

At the point of survey, 100 per cent of participants reported that they had implemented some elements of the QB Petit Pointers syllabus, with 90 per cent of respondents indicating that, within three months of participating in the training program, implementation had already occurred within their dance schools. The majority of responses indicated that the program was well structured in its delivery and allowed participants to understand early childhood approaches to teaching dance. All survey respondents reported that the written materials provided were useful and will assist them to deliver the program in their local context, and that the Queensland Ballet Teaching Artists delivering the training program were of a high calibre.

The survey asked participants if Queensland Ballet should provide ongoing support for dance teachers after engaging in the Petit Pointers program. In response to this question, 90 per cent of participants reported that additional support following the training program should be considered. Participants indicated that they would find an annual refresher course to maintain the currency of their skills and knowledge, and the creation of a network 'to exchange ideas and share any adaptations made to the work to cater for different situations' (QB Petit Pointers participant survey, 2019) useful. Noting the obstacles to engagement (geographic distance and travel costs) for some participants in travelling to either Brisbane, Longreach or Rockhampton, participants suggested that the engagement of digital platforms for refresher training could be considered as way to address the need for ongoing support and training. As a corollary, one participant reported using digital technology to overcome the tyranny of distance to deliver QB Petit Pointers to students not in Longreach. The participant commented, 'I have included QB Petit Pointers classes in my weekly timetable at the dance school, and we are now offering it as part of our weekly Zoom lessons in Blackall, where we have seven participants. I have also been contacted by other small towns in the central west region who are wanting to participate in weekly QB Petit Pointers Zoom classes, such as Barcaldine and Winton' (QB Petit Pointers participant survey, 2019). Such an innovation supports the view of Teaching Artist 2 (2019), who stated, 'access to these programs opens up a world beyond regional children's hometowns, which could potentially be thousands of kilometres from a major city'. This innovation shows the adaptability of the syllabus and the teaching methodology.

One of the four stated aims of the training program is to 'contribute to the regional dance ecology by developing strong connections with dance studio owners/teachers'. Survey respondents were asked if, as a result of attending Petit Pointers, they formed any new relationships with dance teachers that they continued to foster and believed will lead to long-term collaborations. The data show that, while the majority of respondents (45%) were already familiar with each other, as a result of engaging in the training program, new relationships and activities were created. Comments such as 'I was already close friends with a few of the teachers there, but also met another teacher who is about an hour away from our studio. We have opened up our workshops to each other's students' and '[names of dance teachers] are now connections I have made and we are now working together with students attending classes with each other' (QB Petit Pointers participant survey, 2019) show that reciprocity between dance teachers has been established through the program. Queensland Ballet staff member 1 (2019) noted that the practical nature of the engagement 'provides a platform for regional teachers to network and share challenges/ideas/solutions with each other'. Overall, participation in the training program cemented 'stronger relationships with the other teachers' (ibid).

While not part of the brief of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program, survey responses included an indication of other needs of regionally based dance teachers. Suggestions included workshops specific to teaching ballet (e.g. an introduction to pointe) or a focus on building strength and career development sessions for students interested in a professional ballet career.



Impact Narratives

Views from Teaching Artists

Both Teaching Artists believe that it is important for a state ballet company to engage with children living in regional Queensland. The state ballet company has a remit to equally value both regional and metropolitan communities, and provide the same opportunities to engage with dance to support the entire Queensland dance ecology. Teaching Artist 2 (2019) noted that ‘engaging with children in regional Queensland helps to eliminate the elitist tag, and Queensland Ballet becomes a mainstay part of regional Queensland life’.

When asked how the Petit Pointers program assisted dance teachers to understand the specificities teaching in an early childhood context, Teaching Artist 2 described how the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program asks dance teachers to take a deeper approach to their teaching practice, and to consider what they are teaching and how they are achieving it. Teaching Artist 2 (2019) stated that ‘it asks them to question their current teaching practice and to implement the Petit Pointers educational outcomes underneath what they already know. This will encourage a greater depth of knowledge into the early years practice of teaching and learning ballet for this age group’. Teaching Artist 1 noted the way the inclusion of both ballet and education terminology establishes a link between early years dance and learning in kindergarten and then school preparation. ‘This is unique and puts dance teaching for early years learners and teachers into the context of the wider learning happening for young children’ (Teaching Artist 1, 2019).

Like participants, the Teaching Artists supported the need for training to be practical. As Teaching Artist 1 (2019) commented, ‘... only so much can be conveyed via text. The two-day practical course was crucial for teachers to learn and analyse some key techniques and strategies for teaching early years’. By sharing ‘key learning and “lived experiences” via highly skilled Queensland Ballet Teaching Artists with significant experience with early years learners, the dance teachers are empowered with the confidence and skills to deliver locally’ (Queensland Ballet staff member 1, 2019).

Both Teaching Artists noted that the delivery of the Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program offered them the opportunity to be situated within a learning framework. Both Teaching Artists were asked to ‘reflect on action’ (Schon 1983) to consider what new skills or understandings they gained from the program that they will carry forward into other projects.

Teaching Artist 1 (2019) stated:

This was my first experience of teaching teachers in a formal context. Working alongside such an experienced teacher in both schools and studios, and with an extensive professional dance career, was inspiring and insightful. Our mix of knowledge — mine being extensive knowledge of Queensland Ballet’s early years programs, teaching and designing courses, and [Teaching Artist name] years of experience teaching students was a good blend to deliver successful teacher training sessions. One of the most significant skills I gained over the project was working cohesively and co-teaching. I developed an understanding of the skill of working closely with a co-presenter, acknowledging the skills and expertise of the participants whilst finding your unique offering for the participants.

Similarly, Teaching Artist 2 spoke about the way in which the engagement allowed a repositioning of self as a professional, and confidence in the value of teaching using arts-based frameworks.

Teaching Artist 2 (2019) noted:

The role of Teaching Artist gave me a new lens through which to view myself as a teacher and facilitator. I was surprised at the volume of information I was able to share with the teachers using the perspectives of teacher, dance teacher and former dancer. It has been one of the most valuable learning and teaching experiences of my career as it is also taught me the value in sharing with other people — for my benefit as well as the benefit of others. It has also given me faith in the ‘what’ and ‘how’ I teach when I approach this early year cohort. Up until these workshops, I perhaps undervalued the quality of what and how I teach.

Similar to the embedded reflective activity described earlier in the report, the outcomes for personal learning described by the Teaching Artists above show the importance of a learning community within an organisation to support and develop staff capacities.



² Zoom is a video conferencing platform.

Conclusion

Queensland Ballet demonstrates a commitment to supporting the dance sector and recognises the need for regional engagement opportunities. The QB Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program provides dance teachers in regional centres with access to professional development. Queensland Ballet has ‘the resources and expertise to provide best practice models in teaching dance, and the early years education and teaching philosophy is unique, successful and engaging’ (Teaching Artist 1, 2019). The program is an important avenue to address the tyranny of distance within Queensland that may be a barrier for dance teachers, due to time and cost, to gain ongoing support for their profession. The program provides regionally based dance teachers with a sense of connection to their state ballet company, and the understanding that they are strongly valued members for the life of the company. It is important to make ballet accessible to all regardless of location, background or ability, and this is a part of Queensland Ballet’s vision and mission statement. Dance provides an alternative way for children to explore and understand the world, as well as to grasp basic learning concepts in literacy, numeracy, body awareness and social competencies. Professional development for dance teachers to understand the way in which engagement through embodied learning supports the holistic development of a child is vital. The QB Petit Pointers Teacher Training Program supports access to this knowledge, and allows Queensland Ballet to communicate care for the art form and for the people who share it.

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Author and Researcher Contact
Associate Professor Sandra Gattenhof
QUT Creative Industries Faculty
Musk Avenue
Kelvin Grove Qld 4059
Phone: +61 7 3138 3596
email: s.gattenhof@qut.edu.au



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