

Obviously it is not only music which comes under these constraints. All disciplines are affected. But one type of project suffers disproportionately: the analysis of a substantial body of previously unpublished work which first has to be edited from primary sources - and this is much commoner in music than in literary disciplines, where far less editorial work remains to be done. In such hybrid projects, even the supervisor can't necessarily predict whether time-consuming difficulties are likely to arise in editing, which for a PhD will by definition be using previously unexplored sources, and if such problems do strike, the student can't at that point squeeze the project into a rigid time-frame by arbitrarily trimming it. (Just imagine: 'Contrapuntal technique in *a few of the keyboard fantasias of Bugsworthy!*') In any case, though, the 'editorial' project is only an extreme example of form being defined by content - or being distorted by enforced changes to it; analogous problems afflict other areas of study too.

There's a lot of fatalism and resignation among the profession about this cramping of the PhD (as about much else in academic life these days): mention of it is often met with a sigh and the observation that "they" won't listen to us if we complain. But they certainly won't if we say nothing. So, would colleagues like NAMHE to express concern to the AHRB? If you would - or for that matter if you are strongly against the idea - please contact Dr Bruce Wood, School of Music, University of Wales, Bangor, Gwynedd LL57 2DG (e-mail: b.wood@bangor.ac.uk). Individual evidence either way is welcome: it will be treated in strict confidence.

**Bruce Wood**

## Election of Committee members 2002

Three members of the current NAMHE Committee complete their term of office at the end of 2001. They are:

**Professor Graham Barber** (University of Leeds)  
**Mrs Hilary Bracefield** (University of Ulster)  
**Professor David Kimbell** (University of Edinburgh)

There is a further vacancy to be filled, due to the resignation due to relocation of:

**Dr Charles Bodman Rae** (Royal Northern College of Music)

Nominations are now invited to fill these vacancies and nomination papers have been sent to your NAMHE representative. The deadline for nominations is Friday 26 October.

The continuing Committee members are:

**Professor Stephen Banfield** (University of Birmingham)  
**Dr Amanda Glauert** (Royal Academy of Music)  
**Dr John Irving** (University of Bristol)  
**Dr John Rink** (Royal Holloway, University of London)  
**Dr Bruce Wood** (University of Wales, Bangor)

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2001

NAMHE held its annual conference this year in the Victoria Rooms, Department of Music, University of Bristol, on Tuesday 8 May. After a brief Business Meeting, Mr Wyndham Thomas, Head of the Bristol Department of Music, welcomed delegates to the University.

The NAMHE Chair, Professor Graham Barber, then introduced the conference proper, which had as its theme this year, **Challenge, Threat, Opportunity: the Outlook for Music in Higher Education.**

### 'Cross Road Blues'

**Professor Nigel Osborne (University of Edinburgh)** was the keynote speaker at the opening plenary session. He suggested that Higher Education in Music was at a significant crossroads, as important as the immediate post-war period, if not as momentous as the developments of the late nineteenth century. His own view, based on a wide experience of Higher Education institutions both in Britain and Europe, was an optimistic one, albeit optimistic with an important cautionary proviso. His optimism was due to the fact that it was fast becoming clear that music was a meeting point for a great deal of pathbreaking educational work, creative, practical and cultural; scientific, medical and sociological. The answer to questions such as how to reconcile social inclusion on the one hand with, say, the teaching of sixteenth-century counterpoint on the other, lay in encouraging and supporting the wide variety of courses now available at degree level in Higher Education. It was desirable to have different emphases in different institutions and to encourage collaboration on this basis.

He saw the main stumbling block to this development in the current bureaucratisation of education, where processes such as "Quality Assurance" and the Research Assessment Exercise stand in the way of risk-taking, variety, long-term thinking and collaboration.

**Dr Robert Saxton (University of Oxford)** agreed with Nigel Osborne in general; the 'nanny state' and over-regulation is leading to compartmentalisation and loss of focus; and the target that matters is becoming obscured. We must judiciously combine 'traditional' musical training (which is a good deal more exciting than vague concepts such as 'innovation' would have us believe) with adventurous ideas. The educational side of this responsibility is in trouble, because of false values in the wider professional sphere. Concerts are too often rehearsals for CDs and the same repertoire rotates from city to city, as orchestras struggle to survive as businesses.

But what are they surviving for? Few of the administrators seem to take part in serious cultural debates about the future of the symphony orchestra (socially/culturally/aesthetically) or, indeed, to know anything about Adorno or his critics (to give one example). Too often the whole area of education, where such debate should take place at the highest intellectual level, is by-passed by those running the institutions (including opera houses), which demand and use vast amounts of funding which ought to be used for higher education and a reshaped and renewed professional musical world working together. There must be no high-jacking by education pressure groups, nor by those feathering their own nests in 'commercial' music matters. 'World Music' may be a good idea syllabus-wise, but what does it entail? Being an expert on everything prior to knowing anything seems 'daft and untenable'. To quote Edward McKeon of Oxford Contemporary Music, it is time for the whole music arena to grow up.

**Dr Dai Griffiths (Oxford Brookes University)** took bearings from two great twentieth-century theorists of the left: Althusser's idea of being 'hailed' by a prevailing ideology, and Gramsci's phrase, 'optimism of the will, pessimism of the intellect'. Music faced a variety of schisms arising as much as anything, he thought, from a division of ministerial responsibility where education was grouped together with employment while 'culture' lay elsewhere - a split which our discipline surely could not in truth maintain. On the

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side of optimism, he was able to give an account of how his institution had collaborated with its regional arts board and city council to develop projects in the local community. Space, and the negotiation of different kinds of space in the city and beyond - especially for creative work - was a theme of this collaboration. It was risky for music departments to cast themselves as always expensive and always requiring special treatment, and it might be time for departments to 'think laterally', towards links with the community or business.

One of his chief concerns was that, if small staff teams needed to attend to issues around social exclusion on the one hand (addressing the local community) and the research agenda on the other (addressing an international community), a vacuum might develop in the middle - ironically enough the space of the department itself. He also raised the issue of whether Music Departments were demanding a degree of subject-specific prior learning which might be seen as 'insanely high' in most other university subjects: it might be time to reconsider the range of 'literacies' required for different strands of the subject.

After lunch the members divided themselves into three groups for the Parallel Sessions

## Parallel Sessions (1)

**'Entry and exit standards'  
(in the Chair: Dr Hilary Bracefield, University of Ulster)**

### 1. ENTRY CHANGES

The discussion centred round the rather unknown quantity of the new AS and A level examinations. Music Departments need to be aware of:-

- The new tariff system and the uncertainty of how it is to be applied; the variety of acceptable qualifications eligible for points.
- The reduced content of the new AS and A level Music examinations, especially the loss in most cases of traditional harmony papers.
- How far ABRSM and their practical examinations are included in the tariff system, at what grades, and how they are verified.
- How much knowledge of twentieth-century music is included in students' experience (still often confined to the *Rite of Spring!*).
- How far AS level Music might by itself be used as an entry qualification to a Music degree.

- How far Grade VIII Theory might be used as an entry qualification.
- The rather high aspirations of traditional Music degrees, which may be losing students to Music Technology or Popular Music courses
- How far performance is important for degree-level study, and to what extent it is paid for by the institution (note that school pupils' perception of an institution is often based around whether it offers first and even second study performance).
- The possibility of using or providing Access courses.
- Whether each department's current interview system needs re-examining.
- How Year 1 might be readjusted to allow different access, including, possibly, *ab initio* access (note the Scottish system, which requires no knowledge of harmony in schools [though the option is available], and the four-year honours degree, one year of which *may* be used for foundation teaching).
- Students being our 'customers', do they they want what we offer? Is university just a continuation of school? Are students aware of the differences?

### 2. EXIT STANDARDS AND SKILLS

Some points to consider: we should:-

- Note the insistence on key skills at AS and A levels.
- Understand and apply the new subject benchmarking standards now available.
- Realise that, because of its wide-ranging nature, Music teaches a huge number of 'key', 'transferable' or 'generic' skills. How far do we recognise these, advertise them and ensure students and employers understand their presence in our degrees?
- Be responsive to the marketplace.
- Make it clear to employers that while Music teaches certain core skills to a certain standard, there is much variety in the way each degree fosters them.
- Examine how far we prepare students for the profession, other employment, and lifelong learning.

**Christopher Wilson (University of Reading); Hilary Bracefield**

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## Progress on the Music Subject Benchmark Statement

The draft Music Subject Benchmark Statement, which forms part of the second phase of the Subject Benchmarking Project under the auspices of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), is now available for consultation. Benchmark statements represent general expectations about standards for the award of honours degrees in the subject concerned. As such, they provide points of reference that may be used by institutions in demonstrating the standards of their academic provision, and by the QAA in conducting reviews.

The consultation document and the associated 26 benchmark statements were published on the QAA website on 16 July 2001. The address is:

[www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/phase2consult.htm](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/phase2consult.htm)

Printed copies are available on request from - Rachel Curtin: email: [r.curtin@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:r.curtin@qaa.ac.uk) or tel 01452 557042. Responses can be made electronically via the above email address or in writing, using the format of the response form that appears on the website. The consultation period ends on Friday 16th November 2001.

In preparing the draft statement, the music subject benchmark group conducted informal consultations with the subject community. An analysis of the responses to the present formal consultation will also be considered by the group, which will then finalise, in January 2002, the benchmark statement in the light of the responses. The QAA will publish the final statement by March 2002. The members of the group are:

**Professor Graham Barber** (Chair) (University of Leeds)  
**Dr Eric Cross** (University of Newcastle)  
**Ms Louise Gibbs** (Royal College of Music)  
**Dr Amanda Glauert** (Royal Academy of Music)  
**Professor Trevor Herbert** (Open University)  
**Dr Rita McAllister** (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama)  
**Dr Richard McGregor** (University College St.Martin's, Lancaster)  
**Professor Anthony Pople** (University of Nottingham)  
**Professor Derek Scott** (University of Salford)  
**Professor Jan Smaczny** (Queen's, Belfast)  
**Professor Adrian Thomas** (University of Wales, Cardiff)  
**Dr Richard Widdess** (School of Oriental and African Studies)

**Graham Barber**

## Improper pressure on PhD students?; some reflections

Over the last few years, PhD students have come under more and more institutional pressure to complete their dissertations quickly. Time limits have come down from six years (longer in certain universities) to five or even four - causing some students intolerable stress. As for extensions, the grounds on which these are granted are getting steadily narrower, with some universities refusing to accept, for instance, that after three years of full-time research, the demands of a full-time job may very reasonably slow down the finishing of a thesis. (This can be a major problem: academe still supposedly allows newly-appointed staff a modicum of time for research, but obviously not every research student moves into an academic post).

Pressure to complete no doubt concentrates the minds of some who without it might be dilatory. But it just as surely causes others to abandon work that could have been successful. There is no system in place to monitor whether the supposed gains are outweighed by losses - nor to keep a watchful eye on whether the scope of individual PhD projects, and the depth of research they involve, is insidiously shrinking because of such pressure, as many of us suspect.

Insistence on tighter PhD time-scales stems, as we all know, from the funding bodies. They monitor completion rates and bring sanctions to bear on institutions that fail to "deliver". This is perfectly proper, some will argue: the research boards are, after all, spending public money, so they have a right to demand accountability. But that is a simplistic argument, open to four objections. First, completion (and hence the funders' assessment of delivery) rests solely on the date of *submission*; the boards do not monitor actual *outcomes*, which may be put in jeopardy by over-hasty submission. Second, the research boards' view is, implicitly, that three years of funded full-time research followed by, say, three years of writing and polishing carried out entirely at individual expense, somehow gives less value for public money than a project completed quickly: in fact, the reverse may be true. Third, the boards insist on scrutinising the completion rates not only of the students whom they fund, but of *all* research students, even self-funded ones - information to which their entitlement is debatable. Finally, and perhaps most worrying of all, only a modest proportion of PhD students (around one third of them across all subjects, and fewer than that in music, which gets only about 20 studentships per annum) is funded by the research boards - who are therefore calling the tune without paying most of the pipers.

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pleased that not all universities have a modular system. Most of his students, he said, wouldn't have known at the beginning of their degree what their eventual choice of options would be; most discover the scope of the subject only as they work through the degree programme.

The third part of the discussion concerned how to deal with the changes, however they are perceived, and how to bridge the gap between what we think the students need and what they feel they want. Richard McGregor urged a reversal, asking that we 'focus' the curriculum again, while reminding us of the things we cannot do for the students: 'read, perform, and listen'. Stephen Banfield volunteered the information that his department (Birmingham) has agreed that every course will in future include an element of technical work because of student slippage in this area. Dai Griffiths (Oxford-Brookes) took the historical view: he surmised that what we teach is culturally determined. The 90s, he suggested, were good for certain areas, like film music, pop music and interdisciplinary issues; music analysis 'had had a good 80s'. This sparked a lively discussion of issues related specifically to some of these subjects. Stephen Banfield claimed that it was difficult to aspire to accepted standards in the teaching of pop music, as there were none; Mark Pulman (Barnsley) warned of the dangers of enforcing a 'doctrinal framework' onto such teaching, touching on the continuing 'musical v. social analysis' debate in this area; Alan Moore (Surrey) asserted that the process was often more self-revelatory than the product. Touching again on the issue of student taste, he claimed that students of this subject were more clearly accepting that they would sometimes have to study music they dislike. He also claimed that there was a difference between teaching pop music to 'only pop music students' and to students studying other music too.

Then, back to Dai Griffiths' historical perspective: 'What is the first decade of the 2000s going to be good for?' He wanted the issues cleared up: 'What's the core going to be, and what are the options?' Carolyn Rae reminded us that we were teaching people who will be teaching, and Paul Archbold (Durham), that education was about 'ways of thinking'. A definitive answer was put off until another day.

**Rhian Samuel (City)**

## Exeter Music Closure Averted

One unwelcome additional item on the Bristol agenda was a hastily convened special meeting to receive an update on the news of a threat to the Department of Music at Exeter University. After hearing from Peter Allsop what the current position was, it was agreed that the NAMHE Chair, Graham Barber, would write to the Vice-Chancellor of Exeter, Sir Geoffrey Holland, expressing the Association's concern at the proposal to close the Department. Graham Barber now reports as follows:

*I can report that I received a reply from Sir Geoffrey on 14th May setting out the arguments that had been put forward to support the Academic Planning Committee's recommendation. I wrote again on 20th June in response to those arguments and further amplifying the case for the continuance of Music.*

*As a result of pressure from many sources including NAMHE, the recommendation to close the Music Department was thrown out by 27 votes to 16 (with 5 abstentions) at the Senate vote on 2nd July. Music staff and students mobilised considerable support: for example, the students gathered 4000 signatures in just a week; there was a campaign in the press and lobbying of local and regional interests. The victory was all the more remarkable in that Music was not directly represented at the Senate meeting, a request for a representative of the Music Department to attend having been flatly refused. I understand that the reversal took the meeting completely by surprise, and that the subsequent resolve was to refer the matter back to the APC with a general instruction to draw up a plan of support for music at Exeter and to make it work. However, when I made contact on 11th July nobody in the Music Department had been apprised of the exact wording of the recommendation.*

*This is an example, mercifully rarely called upon, of NAMHE's ability to support one of its member departments when under threat, and accords with NAMHE's constitutional obligation to 'identify, articulate and promote the interests and needs of Music in Higher Education and of those engaged in it.' Exeter departmental staff have asked me to pass on to NAMHE members their sincere thanks for the association's support.*

**Graham Barber**

## Parallel Sessions (2)

**'Widening Access'**  
(in the Chair: Dr John Irving, University of Bristol)

A small but select group met to discuss this second key theme. As a starting-point we took the 'Mission Statement' of the Department for Media, Culture and Sport (which had been circulated to all conference participants in advance). While this provided initial food for thought, it was soon apparent to us that it was couched in such anodyne terms as to be uninspiring and practically useless. We decided instead to focus on practicalities.

John Irving discussed in detail Bristol University Music Department's long-standing tradition of delivering courses to the 'public' through the Department of Continuing Education (formerly Extra Mural Studies). This has consisted, until very recently, of a part-time 'Certificate' course, taught two evenings a week by Music Department staff and others and typically attracting about 10 mature - sometimes very mature - students coming from a variety of musical and career backgrounds (sometimes retired) and bringing a wealth of varied life-experiences to their studies. Clearly, important issues regarding the monitoring of appropriate teaching levels, assessment procedures and timetabling have had to be resolved over the years, and he explained some of the ways in which this had been achieved. The course had developed during the last decade or so in such a way that it was now possible for some students to enter the Music Department part-time, leading eventually to a BA qualification (about a dozen students have so far proceeded to graduation, and the trend continues).

The Music Department's experience of nurturing this project through to maturity (including the integration of these mature students into the undergraduate life of the department) is now being drawn upon by other departments in the Arts Faculty in Bristol. Other colleagues present at the NAMHE session shared their own (quite similar) experiences of delivering such courses (at Birmingham, Glasgow and Edinburgh), and also of setting up and developing public access courses (in music technology, for instance, at the University of Hertfordshire). What emerged from the discussion was the depth of commitment to widening participation strategies; it was refreshing to discover that this commitment typically reflects enthusiasm from within departments themselves, rather than a grudging response to pressures imposed institutionally. One day, the DMCS 'Mission Statement' may catch-up with what some of us in Music have been doing successfully for years!

**John Irving**

## Parallel Sessions (3)

**'Aspirations and Dumbing Down'**  
(in the Chair: Professor Stephen Banfield, University of Birmingham)

This session, attended by some 20 members, was lively and sometimes controversial. Stephen Banfield began by summing up the changes in university teaching culture: the syllabus has broadened; school music has diversified; research productivity has increased; student numbers have doubled; library facilities have stayed the same; students are paying for their education; as university teachers as a group are getting older, the gaps between them and school-leaving undergraduates are getting bigger. 'Given these changes', he asked, 'has there really been a drop in standards, or are we now simply assessing different things, judging strengths, not weaknesses?' Bruce Wood (Bangor) believed there had been a drop, referring to what is perceived as the 'shame of the 2.ii' (it used to be 'the shame of the 3rd'); but Amanda Glauert (RAM) pointed out that, in Performance, standards are not lower; students still 'have to deliver'. Stephen Banfield, answering his own question, claimed that higher levels were often attained, and offered as an example his students writing critically on *Carmen*: 'They are producing better work than their equivalents 20 years ago'.

A second question was, 'Is the culture of aspiration by precept still appropriate?' Some felt that specific aspects of the old curriculum (at A-level as well as university) had needed improvement: Philip Grange (Manchester) complained that the learning of a string of extracts at A-level often meant that context was ignored. However the loss of subjects which demand skills and self-discipline was much lamented by the assembled group. Richard McGregor (St Martin's) asserted that the curriculum had 'lost the balance'-a lot had gone into composition, but a broad general knowledge of the subject had disappeared, as well as skills like notation. Bruce Wood agreed: we should urge students to 'Eat your greens!' because subjects like Harmony and Counterpoint 'are good for you'. Others claimed that areas of the curriculum had improved: Amanda Glauert talked of new attempts to 'historicise tradition' at conservatoires, 'making people take responsibility' for the study they undertake. Darla Crispin (GSMD) agreed, though 'performance students often have to be persuaded about the worth of musicology'. For some, modularisation is an improvement, too: Caroline Rae (Cardiff) claimed that while it means greater pressure, it's also very fair, and 'students don't have so much opportunity to make mistakes'. David Kimbell (Edinburgh), however, was

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