

NAMHE Conference Report: May 2010

The 2010 Conference was generously and efficiently hosted by Cardiff University on 4 May 2010 and was well attended. The Conference devoted itself to the theme of impact. Proceedings began with a presentation from Simon McVeigh on the current status of the REF. McVeigh noted that he was not present as a representative of HEFCE, but had served on the 2008 RAE panel, the initial REF consultancy and the AHRC KT panel. He suggested that HEFCE should be seen as a friend of the HE community, attentive to that community's concerns and representative of them. He pointed out that the pressure to demonstrate 'impact' came from government, and in particular from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills. McVeigh pointed out that institutions would be required to demonstrate their track record and that rewards would be dependant upon this. The aim is to encourage movement between HE and business. He noted that the Labour Party manifesto explicitly connected STEM subjects with innovation and that future research funds were likely to be ring-fenced and committed to technology with focussed investment through innovation centres. On the other hand, the Conservative Party recognised HE's links to the economy and the importance of fundamental research. He stressed that HE would be required to demonstrate its importance as QR counts for 85% of research funding.

McVeigh subsequently turned to the REF. He noted that there were many ways in which a positive result might be achieved. The prospect of citations had now been seen off, and the proportion of 'quality, environment and impact' had now been finessed. He pointed out that little new information had emerged in the outcomes from the consultation process as further changes would be dependant on the pilot study. However, HEFCE would require assistance in developing the impact criteria. McVeigh referred to the report 'Capturing Research Impacts' (December 2009) which drew on models from abroad, especially the proposed Australian framework (which was not enacted). He noted that ERIC (Evaluating Research in Context) employed self-evaluation and indicators, assessing reach and significance in the impact statement.

He noted that of the pilots, the closest to Music was English Language and Literature, though he acknowledged that comparison might be problematic. He pointed out that there was a strong tradition of external engagement in Music, and suggested that we should celebrate this. According to McVeigh, much remained hidden in RAE 2008, especially the external validation of work. He noted that practice-based research would not be downgraded but might in fact be upgraded in REF with opportunities to develop it further. He stressed that the onus was on us as the subject community to demonstrate our use of public funding and to establish that we are best placed to carry out this work.

McVeigh referred to examples of research areas such as technology and performance practice, and stressed the need for us to question whether such work would flourish without the efforts of the HE Music community.

He urged the community to consider how the broader infrastructure might be underpinned, and referred to the international dimension of some researchers in music, citing examples of researchers working on the music of Afghanistan and Vietnam. McVeigh noted that Music might be submitted collectively with Drama and Dance. He concluded by noting how REF might affect the behaviour of the academic community and questioned whether there might be an incentive for some institutions to concentrate on impact research whilst others would focus on 'blue-skies' work. Questions were put to Professor McVeigh on practice-based research and on the balance of future funding.

This presentation was followed by a panel discussion facilitated by Peter Manning. The panellists were Susanna Eastburn (Director of Music Strategy for Arts Council England), Shearer West (Director of Research for the AHRC) and Andrew Kurowski (BBC Radio 3). Kurowski called for clarity of language, and spoke of the potential for knowledge transfer, cultural enrichment and creative partnerships with the HE Music community. As an editor for BBC Radio 3, he considered himself responsible for the use of public money, and asked how the relationship between the BBC and the HE music community could be made more beneficial. He pointed to the BBC's interest in developing student composers and performers, and noted that of the 30 or more works commissioned by Radio 3 each year, some 30% of these composers work in HE. Kurowski noted that impact may be quantifiable through audience statistics, but suggested that there were other ways of evaluating cultural enrichment.

Susanna Eastburn noted the connections between HE Music community and the music industry, as manifested in music publishing (where many composers are also active as academics) and in music promotion (where she cited the example of the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival). She stressed that the music industry needed HE and that the converse was also true. She suggested that there needed to be a sense of shared purpose which could inform future investment of public money. She pointed to the development of young people, widening participation and sustainable growth as being concerns that were shared between the HE community and the music industry.

Shearer West questioned the use of the word 'impact', and suggested possible alternatives such as value and benefit. She rejected the theory that impact could be predicted and asked how impact might be achieved. Professor West stressed that the survival of the HE research community depended upon our embracing the impact agenda, and pointed out that

we need to justify our entire portfolio of research, whilst accepting that impact also occurs through teaching. West pointed to the Treasury definition of impact, which focused on benefits to business, improvement to public services, contribution to public policy and to the quality of life in the UK. She stressed the significance of knowledge exchange and public engagement.

The panel's presentations provoked a number of questions from the floor. Steve Halfyard asked how we might deal with the large volume of literature produced by academics in music. West replied that methodologies required further attention and suggested that although these were based upon quantitative indicators, nevertheless the emphasis went beyond the quantitative. She noted that the DCMS was collaborating with the AHRC on developing such methodologies. Peter Johnson questioned whether practice-based research benefited from adequate AHRC support, but Professor West disagreed, stating that practice-based research is valued and well supported by the organisation.

Following an impressively good lunch, the afternoon panel focused on HE Music and the Creative Industries. Christine Hamilton (Director, Institute for the Creative industries, Coventry University) addressed two themes stemming from the lessons learnt over the last twenty years of her career, "never forget your audience" and "be careful what you wish for". We cannot escape for accountability on how public money is spent in supporting our research, particularly in the current economic position, which can encourage a utilitarian approach (that art should provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people). However, this can go too far. She gave the example of scheme she devised for allocating grants: Simon Frith pointed out that whilst it would ensure that no mediocre work would be funded, it would also exclude what he described as the two most important works of the 20th century, Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* and the Sex Pistols' first album. Hamilton also outlined a series of policy documents and reports which assessed the economic impact of Glasgow's City of Culture year in 1990. These economy-focused analyses were ultimately too limited to capture the essence of creative enterprise. The definitions and terms of reference for measurement make the creative industries very difficult to analyse. They are responsible for some £65 billion per year in the nation's economy (circa 7% of GDP); and they clearly have a role in leading us out of recession. However, there is still a definition issue in the term "creative industry". It is the role of public policy in culture to create a space in which creativity can occur; and subsuming it into a primarily economic environment locates it somewhere that does not truly suit it. In particular, she was uncomfortable with the idea of positioning artists as drivers of the economy. Finally, she addressed some of the dangers in how we present our impact: we need to be careful about the claims we make for what we do. The important question to ask ourselves is how does our work serve society and how do

we measure the cultural (rather than purely economic) value of our work. In discussion following her presentation, she again reiterated that economic arguments and measurements are limiting, because our value is more than economic: while we cannot ignore the government's metrics, we can make the case for looking at other things, questioning and demonstrating how impact is measured.

Sally Groves, director of the Contemporary Music Department, was the sole representative of the commercial sector and acknowledged that she offered a fairly narrow perspective, given that contemporary music is a small subset of the music industry. She observed that significant impact emerges from partnerships and creative collaborations, many funded by the BBC and Arts Council, and we should forget these organizations at our peril. She outlined several areas in which she feels there are important questions to be asked about impact in terms of how we relate to, promote, engage with and foster contemporary writing, in particular issues of copyright and the professional development of our students. There was considerable discussion of the copyright issues following Sally Groves' presentation, both from the point of view of the industry protecting its interests (it can cost around £6000 to produce the score and parts for a new work) and the impact copyright can have on academic projects (e.g. cost of licenses for academic publications); and the rights issues for both composers and the original performers in relation to recordings in BBC archives which are not licensed for any form of broadcast and publication.

Andrew Pinnock (Southampton University) could not be present but sent a paper which Prof Schmidt-Beste read. Pinnock is a former researcher in impact assessment; but is now delivering projects rather than assessing their grant-worthiness. He is currently involved in the "Reinventing Venus" project and was also part of the *Fairy Queen* project last year. He identified several issues arising from these projects in relation to impact:

1. The nature of impact is driven and defined by the funding bodies. Children and young people are an important target group for the Arts Council, and so "Reinventing Venus" involves them partly for that reason. Their interest in new methods of research dissemination encouraged the Purcell Society to reinvent itself in terms of public engagement.
2. Projects need the right people with the right contacts, leading to new types of academics, practitioners who bridge the gap between the universities and the music industry.
3. Impact involves reciprocal exchange: we should be thinking of swaps, not sales. The working relationship with Glyndebourne on *The Fairy Queen* involved licensing the new edition on "bargain basement" terms; but the collaborative relationship resulted in better research outcomes.

4. Research quality and research impact are semi-independent: we should not mistake one for the other. Not all high-impact work is going to have the highest research quality.
5. The nature of impact delivery is unavoidably collaborative: impact is a social phenomenon, not an individual activity. A consequence of this is that non-research staff (e.g. concert managers) can be essential to impact environments, not just the research "stars".

Pinnock's paper concluded by asking whether NAMHE could devise a good practice statement on impact with input from the major funding bodies that emphasised the collaborative nature of impact. Celia Duffy, who chaired the afternoon session, thanked the participants and Thomas Schmidt-Beste brought the discussion to a close, thanking our hosts and wishing us well with our travels as we negotiated volcanic ash and broken railway tracks on our journeys home.