

NAMHE Annual Conference, MMU Crewe, 8 May 2012

"REF"

Summaries of sessions

I. Morning session (plenary) [CW]

The morning session was an overview of the REF, chaired by Thomas Schmidt-Beste. The speakers were as follows:

- Simon McVeigh (Goldsmiths; Deputy Chair of REF Sub-Panel 35)
- Stella Hall (Director of Preston Guild Festival; member of REF Sub-Panel 35)
- Andy Lavender (Head of the School of Arts, Surrey University)
- Robin Nelson (Central School of Speech and Drama; member of REF Sub-Panel 35)

The panellists explained that the experiences of RAE 2008 and its aftermath had led the sector to resume a process of expert peer review. The intention behind the REF was to get the best of the sector and to enrich thinking about the process. It was pointed out that 'Esteem' has disappeared as a category but that genuine symbols of engagement with research infrastructure can find a place in the assessment (most probably as part of the 'Environment' category).

The question of the several disciplines included within Sub-Panel 35 was addressed, drawing attention to the fact that separate submissions by a single institution to the same sub-panel (for example, for Music and Dance) would be viewed as multiple submissions. He pointed out that panel members are working to establish common aims and points of discussion between disciplines. Sub-panel guidelines make it clear that some universities will wish to make separate submissions for different disciplines, and if this is the strongest way to present the research cultures of an institution, then this should be done. The institution needs to make a case for the best way of presenting their research. For good cases for such multiple submissions, the audience was referred back to the guidelines. It was also asked whether separate 'Environment' submissions could be made even if there were a single submission from an institution. This might be possible, but a case would need to be made by the institution. Although the overall requirement from HEFCE was to bring panels together, the sub-panels recognised distinctions in output.

On an operational level, it was pointed out that additional assessors would be appointed after institutions had declared their submission intentions in late 2012. Creative practice in particular was highlighted as a likely area in which the panel might require assistance from such additional assessors. Delegates were reassured that in contrast to the last RAE, such appointment would be made in good time.

On the question of interdisciplinary research, colleagues were urged to have confidence in the sub-panel members and their recognition of such work. Music education research might be cross-referred or dealt with by Panel 35, depending on its nature; it was recommended that colleagues self-define music research (as opposed to education research), which should be seen to emerge from a music environment and interact with the experience of music. It was confirmed that HEFCE are keen to see fewer cross-referrals, but the panel still has the discretion to cross-refer work should this be deemed necessary.

HEFCE's definition of research was discussed next, addressing questions of interdisciplinary research and practice as research. The criteria for assessment – originality, significance and rigour – were the same for all research, and colleagues were reminded that evidence would be

needed to allow the panel to make evaluations of practice-based research. The work itself might not be sufficient evidence on its own. It was suggested that the 'statement' component of the submission is key to orientating the panel as to the nature of the research. The portfolio is in effect a gathering of evidence and a sharing of the evidence.

The subject of 'Practice as Research' was then expanded on. It was made clear that practice-based outcomes were welcome and treated the same as any other form of research, but that the challenge for the practitioner involves 'articulating and evidencing the research enquiry'. High grades had been awarded in RAE 2008 where the research inquiry was demonstrable. Colleagues were reminded that a portfolio – above and beyond the 300-word commentary – could be included, but were encouraged to do so only where the research process and 'information about the research process and/or content' did not provide material sufficient to assess the output. Colleagues were strongly encouraged to annotate or mark up the evidence presented; the panel wants to be guided through the research submitted, not presented with an unorganised mass of ancillary evidence.

Regarding the discursive component in the statement, it was pointed out that the practice itself constituted a body of evidence, but that the underlying research enquiries in a complex artwork could be manifold so the statement should be indicative and suggestive of the aims pursued. NAMHE was encouraged to contact HEFCE with the request more guidance be given to the community on supporting evidence. However, it was made clear that if a researcher were confident that a score would be sufficient to assess the output, then a portfolio might not be required.

Colleagues were reminded that substantial pieces could be entered as a double-weighted outcome and that a group of short pieces could be submitted as a single output.

The phrase 'effectively shared' as applied to research was discussed. It was pointed out that this was not necessarily synonymous with wide public dissemination; the minimum requirement was that the research was 'in the public domain'. It was stressed that the panel would not privilege venues in terms of a hierarchy of prestige or value. Colleagues were referred to the UoA65 overview report in RAE 2008 about certain research which was judged problematic because it failed to articulate research inquiry and finally called for a 'reflexive and dialectical critique'.

Regarding submission of staff, it was deemed likely that the future non-funding of 2* research might mean that some universities would enter fewer staff in the REF. However, the panellists referred to the Code of Practice and assured colleagues that the sub-panel wished to be fair to the research community. Regarding part-time staff, colleagues were reminded that (according to Part 3, Paragraph 78 of the guidance document) staff was only eligible if their contractual status was defined as research or 'teaching and research'. There was some uncertainty over whether the 0.2 FTE minimum referred to the census date or to the whole period – this was not clear for hourly paid staff with a notional FTE contract. It was suggested to refer this question directly to HEFCE.

Some worry was expressed over the (or non-submission) submission of early career researchers who may thus be disadvantaged, causing issues of diversity and equality. The Codes of Practice and Diversity and Equality statements of the individual HEIs would deal with this, but ultimately, universities would have discretion to decide which staff to submit.

The panel discussed co-authorship and the importance of clarification. It was recommended that colleagues 'talk the panel through their statements' in this and other regards. The panel also discussed double-weighting and were asked about how exceptional this would be: it was reported that different panels would treat this differently. It was understood, for example, that the History panel would treat substantial monographs as double-weighted as a matter of

course. Panel 35 was open to double-weighting as well, with a reserve item to mitigate the risk for submitting staff.

On the subject of the 'Environment' template, colleagues were encouraged to produce lively and engaging narratives about what makes their environment special and distinctive but asked to make sure that the information is stated clearly and organized under the appropriate headings. The panel would look for an indication not only of vibrancy but also for a sense of where research had been, where it is now and where it intends to go in the future, as well as at the infrastructure.

On the question whether lists or narratives were preferred in the 'Environment' statement, it was stated that there was no right-or-wrong answer to that. Most institutions ended up with a mixture of both in RAE 2008 and colleagues should use whichever presented them in the best light.

On the subject of Impact, a summary of the aims and procedures was given, with referral to case studies in other disciplines. Colleagues were reminded that case studies should exemplify the best work, not a breadth of everything a UoA did. It was stressed again that 'impactable' research had to have taken place in the submitting institution. Both quantitative and qualitative indicators of impact were needed, but in order to identify these, independent sources of corroboration were needed. On the issue of availability of commercially sensitive information (and the potential unwillingness of institutions and companies to provide it), it was decided that NAMHE and the panel would jointly query this with HEFCE. Colleagues were encouraged to demonstrate the diversity of people experiencing the research and to consider such factors as demographics.

II. Afternoon sessions (breakout)

A. Impact (with Stella Hall, Simon McVeigh)

1. The distinction between qualitative and anecdotal evidence for Impact.

This distinction is drawn in Research Excellence Framework impact pilot exercise: Findings of the expert panels are found in Re01_10.pdf paragraph 45.

Some don'ts: Reliance on indicators that lack context or meaning – for example, numbers of hits on a website, without benchmarks or further contextual explanation; relying on anecdotal evidence such as personal correspondence or quotes from individual members if used in isolation (but could offer a useful illustration of impact on individuals when used alongside other evidence).

Independent testimony is acceptable in particular circumstances. See Panel criteria and working methods01_12.pdf paragraph 78c, 82c, 85, 85. However, submitting units should ensure that, so far as possible, any evidence cited is independently verifiable. Where testimony is cited, it should be made clear whether the source is a participant in the process of impact delivery (and the degree to which this is the case), or is a reporter on the process. While it is recognised that the evidence for many significant and far-reaching forms of impact may be hard to define, greater weight may be placed on evidence of fact over evidence of opinion in determining the significance and reach associated with a claimed impact.

Table D2: Independent testimony: Acknowledgements in annual reports or other publications of NGOs, charities and other civil society organisations. Testimony of experts or users who can attest to the reach and/or significance of impact. Third-party evidence of changed policies, practices, processes, strategies.

2. Distinction between public engagement and impact: Evidence of dissemination alone is not sufficient to demonstrate impact

3. The nature of Impact:

- Both planned and serendipitous impact can be included.
- Need to state the research questions asked, and what has changed.
- 'Positive' and 'negative' impacts can be accepted.

4. Movement of staff between institutions

- The impact is credited to the institution where the research took place.
- It is anticipated that impact will take some time to mature.

5. Impact Case Studies – size of group: Should impact be related to a single source, or to one person who has created many impacts, or to a group of individuals working on related projects that lead to several impacts? All these cases could be acceptable.

6. The assessment of impact is flexible at the moment: it is the sum of the Case Studies which will establish the precedent. This is a challenge and an opportunity for the community.

7. The passage from research to impact may not be linear, and there may be gaps in the narrative. It is expected that links may be direct and causal, or nonlinear.

8. The panel recognised that impacts could be local or global, yet both types could be of great significance.

9. Impact in education: General dissemination of the research within HE would be excluded. However, impact outside HE, and impact within HE where the research can be demonstrated to have changed behaviour can be included, for example: e.g. research-informed textbooks that change behaviour; research that changes professional standards and behaviour

10. Partnerships with arts funders: Arts Council applications give a list of required information that can be useful: e.g. intended audiences, actual audiences, box office numbers, demographic information etc. For Arts Council England Audience development and marketing see: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/doc/audience_development.doc

Not all collaborators are willing to give detailed audience information (they may regard this as commercially sensitive). Panel 35 will pursue this issue with venues, promoters, BBC etc.

11. Website information:

- Some webhosts provide limited user statistics (e.g. Apple iTunesU)
- Some give opportunities for user feedback (e.g. YouTube)
- Statistics may include page hits, user demographics, number of previews, number of downloads, dwell time etc. NB choose type of information carefully to support impact case

12. Impact criteria: Panel 35 had lobbied very hard to include impact criteria that were relevant to the cultural sector. The community is urged to make use of the range of criteria available. See: Ref01_12.pdf Table D1 p89-90

B. Creative Practice as Research (with Robin Nelson, Andy Lavender) [CD]

1. Portfolios: there are no firm guidelines about content. It is up to the submitter, but it will help the panel if you highlight anything that elucidates research content. Help the panel! So if you point to a website, make sure you point out the relevant sections; if you include a 6000

word article about a composition, highlight (literally) the sections that deal with the research content of the output.

2. No ranking: the panel has explicitly moved away from ranking venues, journals - their perceived standing will not be assessed. Is that rather too idealistic? How can the panel really avoid being influenced by e.g. high profile venues or commissions?
3. Worth checking the overview report from both music and drama/dance panels for RAE 2008: one report suggested that submissions overdid data and documentation over research explanation.
4. What's the difference between artistic quality and research quality? Recognition that sometimes a very fuzzy boundary, but the guidelines are clear: REF is interested in research quality.
5. New-ness in artistic outputs is easier to 'sell' as research, but still that case needs to be made (this was an important message regarding composition and performance-based outputs)
6. In composition, the research element isn't only evident at the level of style and musical technique. There are many ways in which a composition may display research content and compositions in different styles may have different kinds of research enquiries - e.g. relationship with an audience.
7. It's important to draw the panel's attention to where the research is in an output. An output doesn't necessarily have to be of top artistic quality (although this was questioned - is artistic mediocrity rewarded?): a student production may evidence a research imperative, as long as it's in the public domain. But questions about the refereed/peer reviewed element in a public venue from a commission - self- publication or student performances are missing that.
8. It's very rare that a practice-based output will be able to articulate its own research content and stand alone without an accompanying text clarifying its research content. Such an output would be 'paradigm shifting' and would be rare.
9. Will practice-based outputs be judged differently on the new panel now that drama and dance are joined with music? Perhaps complementary writing has a longer history in drama and dance, but there are signs that this is changing in music (in which historically practice as research was not always explicitly articulated in text). Perhaps the demands and experience of writing AHRC applications has made a difference.
10. 'Effectively shared' as the addendum to the definition of research: one effective way of sharing is if the work has been reviewed or critiqued by someone else.
11. Although not official, and there has been no steer to panels on this, some say that HEFCE may be expecting fewer 4 stars to be awarded to outputs.
12. Co-authored outputs from researchers at different universities: the work as a whole will be judged according to its merits and both researchers awarded the same score.

III. Closing Plenary Session – Summaries and Q&A[HG, MM]

A. Creative practice

1. Portfolio: what can go in it. There are no firm guidelines, but the purpose of the portfolio is clearly to help guide the panel about the research enquiry and provide clear signposts in relation to the output. For composers an article on that composition could be included as long as it provided clear signposts in relation to the output. Web links could also be provided. The purpose is to help the panel unpack the research journey and/or understand the specific research issues.

2. There is an explicitly move in the sub-panel away from hierarchies (i.e. value perceived by the prominence of specific venues or journals). That approach was perceived to be somewhat idealistic. Can these kinds of value judgements really be avoided?
3. It is worth reconsidering the Music report from RAE 2008, where it was suggested that there was too much documentation and not enough explanation of actual research enquiry.
4. The relationship between research and artistic quality. The guidelines are clear, the emphasis on research quality.
5. It was suggested that 'newness' is easier to argue for in research terms than professional quality. The way in which 'newness' contributes to developing and redefining the discipline may be a fruitful line in defining research enquiry.
6. Composition: where does the research content lie. It could exist, for example, in the composition's relationship with its audience. But in any case it would need to be explained.
7. An output could be, for example, a student production, as long as the output is in the public domain. But what about the peer review element?
8. It was considered very unlikely that a paradigm-shifting piece could be submitted without also needing a commentary.
9. With the joint panel what will change? There is a rumour that HEFCE has given a steer that fewer four star ratings are requested, but this is not HEFCE's formal position.
10. The need for complementary writing traditionally is less featured in music than drama, dance and the performing arts. But this is changing particularly with the requirement for writing in AHRC applications. There is perhaps a greater tradition of including portfolios with drama, dance and performing arts than with music. This is also evident in Practice-as-Research PhDs. How will this be embraced by the REF panel?
11. Co-authored outputs are accepted, even where authors come from different institutions The work as whole will be graded.
12. Different compositions in different styles, could result in very different research enquiries.

Impact

1. The evidence for impact. The difference between qualitative and anecdotal evidence. Commentaries and independent testimony is acceptable (e.g. user groups, focus groups or an audience).
2. Public engagement and impact. Evidence of dissemination alone is not sufficient. It must link back to the research enquiry. How are the research questions answered?
3. Intended impact or serendipitous impact. How might this be articulated?
4. Where does impact belong when people move institution- the place where the original research was done is crucial according to REF guidelines. Impact does not move institution if the person moves.
5. There is a long lead time on impact. How are universities strategically planning for the future?
6. Should impact come from a single person/output or should it come from a team? Any of these will be acceptable and is to be decided by the unit submitting.
7. Aspects of linearity. The impact story may not always be continuous and this should be articulated in the commentary. If there are gaps, these will be understood by the panel.

Q&A

1. Beyond the REF2014. Will there be another one? Do we know what will happen post REF 2014? It was suggested that we should assume that there will and it is likely that weighting for Impact will rise. It was re-iterated that HEFCE has never indicated that they want fewer 4* announcements. Panellists have been given clear instructions about only assessing the quality of the work. 2* was the previous floor for funding. Now it is a 3* floor. Does this change the ceiling?

2. It was noted how hard panel 65 had worked to develop Impact criteria that included aspects relevant to the creative arts. This will allow music institutions to create Impact narratives that are a true reflection of themselves and the subject.

IV. Issues to raise with the subpanel and HEFCE (with additional input from Simon McVeigh, post-conference)

1. Staff eligibility criteria - how is a 0.2 minimum submission measured? Is it simply 'in post on the census date' or by means of some kind of average over a longer period? It was remarked that aggregates of 0.2's might affect Impact Case Study numbers. In other words, there may be a dichotomy between 0.2 on the census date, and the justification in terms of working months that needs to be made somewhere for why such a person might have reduced outputs?

2. Impact information - colleagues appeared to find difficulty in extracting necessary impact information from some bodies (BBC, particularly) without recourse to FOI applications. Might costs involved in acquiring information be prohibitive or might they have a negative influence on selecting and constructing Impact Case Studies?

3. 300 word statements. How widely might these be used? Though the panellists indicated broad usage, colleagues felt clarification from HEFCE might be useful on matters such as edited collections. A secondary issue was raised: since the 300-words will eventually be published on the website, is it possible to have these deemed commercially confidential in rare cases?

4. (this point came up outside the formal meetings for the second time) What happens in the case of death in post prior to 31 Oct 2013? There is apparently at least one instance of a substantial body of work which an institution supported and would have submitted. As the rules stand, the work cannot be submitted because the person will not be in post on the census date. But the work has been undertaken within the REF time-frame and is apparently of significance to the research culture concerned.

5. Colleagues are uncertain about the status of the portfolio, and about its relationship with the 300 words. The guidelines under 71c are clear enough about the intentions of the portfolio ('assisting panel member to access fully the research dimensions of the work') and about what might go in, but would it be helpful if some fuller explanation of what is expected and how it is to be used could be provided? HEFCE may not want to put anything into the public domain that is open to new lines of interpretation from those already stated, but this is an issue of general concern, and the sub-panels will certainly want submissions to use the portfolio wisely.

6. A very pertinent general issue: Is the likelihood that institutions may tend not to put in work below 3-star intrinsically discouraging the inclusion of ECRs? No doubt HEFCE is highly aware of this issue, and they could argue that it is not their decision whether 2-star work is funded or not: but it is a concern from the sector, nevertheless.