

Annex A

Consultation questions and response form

1. Responses to the consultation should be made by completing the form below, and returning it by e-mail by **midday on Wednesday 16 December 2009**.
2. All responses should be e-mailed to ref@hefce.ac.uk. **In addition:**
 - a. Responses from institutions in Scotland should be **copied to** Pauline Jones, Scottish Funding Council, e-mail pjones@sfc.ac.uk.
 - b. Responses from institutions in Wales should be **copied to** Linda Tiller, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, e-mail linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk.
 - c. Responses from institutions in Northern Ireland should be **copied to** the Department for Employment and Learning, e-mail research.branch@delni.gov.uk.
3. We will publish an analysis of responses to the consultation. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case HEFCE. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. Further information about the Act is available at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk. Equivalent legislation exists in Scotland.

Respondent's details

Are you responding: (Delete one)	On behalf of an organisation
Name of responding organisation/individual	Royal Musical Association (RMA)
Type of organisation (Delete those that are not applicable)	Academic association or learned society
Contact name	Dr Björn Heile
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Consultation questions

(Boxes for responses can be expanded to the desired length.)

Consultation question 1: Do you agree with the proposed key features of the REF? If not, explain why.

The RMA welcomes the following aspects of the proposals:

- the commitment to research quality as the defining basis of funding
- the commitment to peer review as the primary method of assessing research quality
- the evaluation of research environment as a means to support a sustainable research infrastructure
- the descriptors of research quality
- the abandonment (or near-abandonment) of bibliometrics as an assessment tool

On the other hand, the RMA is critical of the following aspects:

- the methods, criteria and indicators proposed for the assessment of impact
- the weighting proposed for impact, given that a) the methods, criteria and indicators are untested and currently experimental at best, b) there is limited time for institutions to adequately respond to guidelines which are not expected to be in place before mid-2010, and c) the high weighting undermines the primacy of research quality. For these reasons, the RMA proposes a weighting of 75% research quality, 15% impact, 10% environment.
- the proposed sub-panel structure which envisages fusing Music with Drama, Dance and Performing Arts

Consultation question 2: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing outputs? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following proposals:

- that institutions should select research staff and outputs to be assessed
- for the categories of staff eligible for selection, and how they are defined
- for encouraging institutions to submit – and for assessing – all types of high-quality research outputs including applied and translational research
- for the use of citation information to inform the review of outputs in appropriate UOAs (including the range of appropriate UOAs, the type of citation information that should be provided to panels as outlined in Annex C, and the flexibility panels should have in using the information)

and on the following options:

- whether there should be a maximum of three or four outputs submitted per researcher
- whether certain types of output should be ‘double weighted’ and if so, how these could be defined.

We agree that there are no workable alternatives to allowing institutions to select eligible staff. We feel, however, that more consideration should be given to the contributions made by staff on fractional and fixed-term contracts. Such researchers contribute vitally to the overall research effort and their career prospects should not be jeopardised further but, on the contrary, strengthened. This means giving institutions clear incentives to include researchers in such circumstances, which, in turn, would involve keeping the inclusion threshold for fractional contracts as low as possible.

We explicitly welcome the encouragement given to 'all types of high-quality research outputs including applied and translational research'. Music is a field with a particularly diverse range of high-quality outputs, from publications (in all manner of formats), through to performances, recordings, compositions, installations, mixed-media applications, software etc., and we believe that this diverse range is an indicator of the vitality of research in Music and that it should be further encouraged.

We strongly advise that citation information has little or nothing to contribute to assessing research quality in Music. There seems to be agreement that Music will not fall into any of the 'appropriate UOAs' in which this data will be employed, but we would welcome further assurances.

We welcome the reduction of the number of research outputs to three on account of the reduced burden on sub-panel members as well as the shortened assessment period in comparison to RAE2001 and RAE2008.

We are also open to and welcome the principle of 'double-weighting' since this encourages researchers to concentrate on large, long-term projects. There is a particular difficulty in Music, however, in reliably and rigorously defining 'large projects' across the fields of composition, performance and musicology, while at the same time ensuring comparability across these fields as well as communicating the criteria employed effectively and in good time so researchers can have certainty about the status of their intended outputs.

In order to achieve this, we recommend that the sub-panel members develop clear criteria for double-weighting in consultation with the research community and that they communicate these criteria to the community. The RMA is more than happy to support this process. As a fail-safe mechanism, it should be considered to allow researchers to propose that certain items be double-weighted, but at the same time submit alternative items, should such double-weighting not be confirmed by the sub-panel (ideally, though, such uncertainty should not be allowed to arise in the first place).

We furthermore note that the proposed introduction of larger sub-panels may make the definition of double-weighted items much more complicated (if this is difficult across the different sub-fields within Music, how can comparability be achieved across such divergent fields?). In this way, the reduction of the number of sub-panels may effectively lead to a greater number of submitted items (since double-weighting may not be practicable) and, thus, unintentionally *increase* rather than reduce the burden on sub-panel members.

Consultation question 3: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing impact? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following:

- how we propose to address the key challenges of time lags and attribution
- the type of evidence to be submitted, in the form of case studies and an impact statement supported by indicators (including comments on the initial template for case studies and menu of indicators at Annex D)
- the criteria for assessing impact and the definition of levels for the impact sub-profile
- the role of research users in assessing impact.

The RMA believes that research in Music provides substantial public benefits in a great variety of ways and that the discipline would benefit from a fair and balanced recognition of the contribution it makes to the public good. Most researchers in Music actively seek to communicate with wide

audiences and to contribute to the economic, social and cultural well-being of society; indeed, many welcome the fact that these endeavours will receive more formal recognition than they have done in the past.

Unfortunately, however, we are not convinced that the proposals in their current form are practical and fit for purpose. In fact, we fear that they could damage the discipline and its international reputation. Many of our concerns have been articulated with admirable clarity by the British Academy in their response, and we wish to explicitly voice our support for their contribution to the proposals. We also believe that the notion of 'public benefit' introduced by the Academy is more suited than the concept of 'impact'. In particular, we wish to raise the following points (some of which have been raised by the British Academy; others are more discipline-specific):

- The proposals seem to be based on a model most suited to STEM subjects and seem ill-suited to 'cultural impact' which is likely to be the most relevant category for most research in Music.
- The methods, criteria, categories and indicators proposed appear vague and ad hoc and do not seem to apply to research in Music in any straightforward and rational fashion. Our wide-ranging consultation revealed that not a single respondent felt confident that their research would qualify as providing significant impact under the current criteria, although many undoubtedly produce high-quality research with substantial public benefits. In general, it is difficult to even abstractly conceive of research in Music whose 'impact' is recognised by the criteria as they currently stand. The uncertainties and anxieties this creates are regrettable and wholly avoidable.
- In particular, the rules and criteria for corroboration have to be concretised in discipline-specific ways. The current proposals seem to be weighted heavily towards economic and social benefits (in that order), with almost no thought given to cultural benefits. The mention of surveys is particularly confusing in this context. Not only are surveys rather crude and unreliable at the best of times, but they are also impractical and intrusive as well as resource-intensive. Yet the real problem is that they cannot be applied retrospectively to research that has been carried out 10-15 years previously, which is the timescale that the proposals envisage. Final guidelines and instructions are not expected before mid-2010, and the submission dateline is currently set for December 2012. How can surveys be conducted in such a short period and how can such a practice not disadvantage research that was carried out before the current plans even appeared on the horizon? This matter deserves much more thought than it evidently has been given so far.
- There is no evidence for any correlation between research quality and impact. The procedures must not lead to low-quality but politically, economically or socially expedient research being rewarded.
- In their present form, the proposals risk disadvantaging research that is critical of government, existing institutions and/or the status quo, thereby undermining academic freedom. By its nature, 'critical' research is less directly 'useful' in terms of public policy or short-term economic gain, but its real importance for the wider public benefit may be all the greater. The emphasis placed on government, public bodies and business in the definition of research users in the proposals does not inspire confidence, given that these groups have a track record of judging research on the basis of its compatibility with their own agendas rather than its inherent quality. Any rewarding of research on the basis of its political or economic expediency can do lasting damage to the reputation of UK research; Music is no exception to this rule.

- For similar reasons, we are sceptical about the employment of ‘research users’ for the assessment of impact. In addition, such a practice would effectively undermine the principle of peer review. More specifically, we are astonished at the idea that research users can also assess outputs ‘if they wish’ (para. 71): this demonstrates a rather cavalier approach to the principle of peer review and generally lax guidance for panels and sub-panels.
- In their present form, the proposals do not recognise international impact to the same extent as national impact. There has to be parity between local, regional, national and international impact, depending on the nature of the research. Obviously, the geographical and cultural focus of the research in question needs to be reflected in the employment of any research users as assessors.
- In their present form, the proposals do not sufficiently recognise the importance of impact on teaching or put too stringent obstacles in the way of such impact to be fully recognised.
- While we welcome the pilot studies which have been commissioned, we note that their results are unlikely to be directly applicable to Music and, further, that the results will be reported at a fairly late stage in the cycle which will make it hard for institutions to respond in a considered and rational fashion.
- The attribution of impact to institutions rather than individuals is highly problematic in a field dominated by individual researchers rather than coherent research teams.
- The number of case studies needs to more adequately reflect the great disparity in size between different institutions. Many music departments consist only of around five staff FTE, so their impact rating would theoretically rely on just one case study which clearly does not provide a reliable picture of the work undertaken and the impact achieved.
- Overall, we believe that the weighting proposed for impact is excessive and disproportionate, a) because the methods, criteria, categories and indicators are untested and experimental at best, b) because such a high weighting undermines the primacy of research quality, c) because the timescale is too short for institutions to prepare adequately to quite radically new approaches and procedures, and d) because a heavy weighting for a measure that is not recognised internationally could damage the international reputation of UK research.

The RMA makes the following proposals to improve the assessment of impact:

- The weighting of impact should be reduced to 15% to minimise any potential adverse effects or unintentional perverse incentives as well as to reconfirm the primacy of research quality and safeguard the international reputation of UK research; as noted above, we suggest that the overall profile should be 75% research quality, 15% impact, 10% environment
- The methods, criteria, categories and indicators used have to be genuinely discipline-specific, particularly as regards corroboration of impact
- To this end, we suggest that HEFCE liaise with the sector as represented, for instance, by the British Academy, the AHRC as well as learned societies and subject associations such as NAMHE, SMA and RMA.
- Furthermore, we propose that the sub-panel, in consultation with the community as represented by the bodies mentioned above among others, develops its own discipline-specific methods, criteria, categories and indicators for the assessment of impact – provided that these can be communicated to institutions in good time to enable them to prepare adequately. Both the proposed larger sub-panel and the tight timetable seem to be real obstacles to this approach. However, HEFCE needs to consider where its priorities lie: if impact is to be introduced, this has to be well prepared and subject-specific guidelines need

to be developed well in advance of the deadline. As mentioned above, a politically motivated, hastily introduced change to the system could do lasting damage.

Consultation question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to assessing research environment?

To the extent that the proposals are based on the procedures for RAE2008 they are proven and generally sound. The RMA is, however, a little puzzled by the reintroduction of 'esteem' under environment. We are not convinced that the procedures employed for assessing esteem under RAE2008 have been robust and transparent, and the abolition of esteem as an independent criterion seemed to suggest that HEFCE shared those concerns. We therefore believe that the guidelines need to be tightened as to how esteem can be measured and that indicators should be restricted to activities that serve the research infrastructure, such as editorships and board memberships on learned societies and subject associations.

Furthermore, we notice that the criterion of 'engaging with the public' seems to overlap with the criteria for impact, raising the possibility of double-counting. It may well be that the idea here is that the research infrastructure should enable impact just as it provides the potential for high-quality research, but, at the very least, the guidelines need to be clarified so that such uncertainties cannot arise.

We are also concerned about the notion of 'critical mass': the sub-panel report for RAE2008 has not found any correlations between the size of research groupings and quality, which clearly demonstrates that the notion of 'critical mass' has no validity in the field. While the notion may be more relevant in other fields such as the sciences, we believe that mention of it in future publications should be accompanied with such qualifications as 'in relevant UOAs'. Reassurances on this matter would be welcome.

Consultation question 5: Do you agree with our proposals for combining and weighting the output, impact and environment sub-profiles? If not please propose an alternative and explain why this is preferable.

No. As pointed out before, we believe that the weighting proposed for impact is excessive and disproportionate, because a) the method, criteria, categories and indicators proposed are untested and experimental at best, b) it undermines the primacy of research quality, c) the timetable is too tight to iron out difficulties and give institutions enough time to prepare adequately and d) a high weighting for a criterion that is not internationally recognised jeopardises the international reputation of UK research.

For all these reasons, we propose a weighting of 75% research quality, 15% impact and 10% research environment.

Furthermore, we believe that the sub-scores for quality, impact and environment should be published separately to maximise transparency, in particular with regard to the assessment of impact.

Consultation question 6: What comments do you have on the panel configuration proposed at Annex E? Where suggesting alternative options for specific UOAs, please provide the reasons for this.

The RMA appreciates the need to contain the administrative burden of the REF. Likewise, we have no reservations against the reduction of main panels. We are not convinced, however, that the number of sub-panels is crucial for reducing the administrative burden: surely, the number of submissions and the number of panel members needed to assess them are far more important

factors. Furthermore, the planned introduction of research users is certainly not going to reduce the overall burden: there clearly is a question of priorities here.

Many of our members have expressed concern over the new combined sub-panel for Music, Drama, Dance, and Performing Arts. Similar concerns have been raised by the British Academy (albeit regarding different sub-panels) and NAMHE (National Association of Music in Higher Education), among others.

While we appreciate that the new sub-panel would still be one of the smaller groupings, we fear that the unique diversity of research in Music has not been fully taken into account.

Research in Music falls into the main areas of Musicology, Performance and Composition, with some additional practice-based work in such fields as Music Pedagogy and Music Therapy. In addition, research in all these areas covers a considerable range of diverse approaches; for instance, musicological research ranges from traditional Music History which is predominantly based on approaches from the humanities; through Music Analysis which is often based on models from Mathematics and/or the Cognitive Sciences; Ethnomusicology and Sociology of Music which tend to apply theories from the Social Sciences; to Psychology of Music or Music Informatics which are more akin to Science and Technology.

The implicit rationale underlying the particular combination of disciplines seems to be the importance of practice-based research in the particular subjects. While this is undeniable, the understandings of practice-based research, research as practice and practice-led research are different across these disciplines and quite divergent approaches and traditions have emerged. Moreover, there is little similarity or interaction between the approaches taken in the scholarly branches of these disciplines. If there is any clear pattern at all, musicologists tend to respond more commonly to work in History, Art History, Literature and Philosophy than to corresponding approaches in Drama, Dance and Performing Arts.

While the suggested informal sub-groupings will probably prevent any undesirable effect on the actual assessment of outputs, environments and impact, there are obvious problems with comparisons undertaken by the sub-panel and the rankings established on the basis of their final report. Does it really make sense to say that the research undertaken by the Department of Drama at the University of X is superior to that of the Department of Music in the University of Y, while that is in turn stronger than that of the Department of Dance at the University of Z, and what is the basis of the comparison here? Such comparisons and rankings will lack credibility among the academic community.

Furthermore, as we have pointed out above, we believe that a satisfactory, discipline-specific solution to the problems of double-weighting of large outputs and the assessment of impact can only be found with the active involvement of the sub-panel, in consultation with their respective academic communities. We cannot see how this can be managed with such a diverse sub-panel, representing quite distinct fields. In this context, we specifically refer to the importance given to *discipline-specific* approaches in the assessment of impact: how can this be realised if sub-panels do not represent disciplines or even cognate disciplines in an unproblematic way?

Similarly, if, as is predictable, the larger sub-panel cannot satisfactorily solve the problems of double-weighting of large outputs and disciplines-specific measures for the assessment of impact, the overall burden of the exercise is actually likely to increase. Smaller, discipline-based sub-panels would almost certainly find it easier to arrive at pragmatic, yet robust, solutions.

We therefore urge HEFCE to reconsider its position on sub-panels. At the very least, however, we insist that different units within the same institution should be given the right to make separate submissions to the same sub-panels. In many institutions, Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts are completely separate and do not share research environments or strategy.

Consultation question 7: Do you agree with the proposed approach to ensuring consistency between panels?

Yes.

Consultation question 8: Do you have any suggested additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies? (If suggesting additional bodies, please provide their names and addresses and indicate how they are qualified to make nominations.)

As NAMHE in its response has pointed out, the user groups listed are currently insufficient for Music and we support the inclusion of the institutions mentioned in the NAMHE response. In addition, the absence of the International Musicological Society and the International Society for Contemporary Music are glaring.

Consultation question 9: Do you agree that our proposed approach will ensure that interdisciplinary research is assessed on an equal footing with other types of research? Are there further measures we should consider to ensure that this is the case and that our approach is well understood?

The whole premise of the REF seems to be that, under normal circumstances, research is disciplinary in nature. This is of course debatable and there are indications that the earlier RAE exercises have benefited research with a clear disciplinary base more than genuinely interdisciplinary, trans-disciplinary or non-disciplinary work, and the REF is unlikely to be an exception. Within the given framework, however, the measures proposed seem fine.

Consultation question 10: Do you agree that our proposals for encouraging and supporting researcher mobility will have a positive effect; and are there other measures that should be taken within the REF to this end?

The RMA is not convinced that researcher mobility is a desirable end in itself or that it is the REF's task to support it. On the contrary, the 'transfer market' for high-achieving academics shortly before the census date is clearly damaging to the academy and to long-term investment in a sustainable research environment. It is high time that HEFCE accepts responsibility for this problem. Furthermore, an emphasis on mobility benefits certain groups of academics – male, unattached and without young children or other dependents – more than others – e.g. mothers, people with disabilities and people with caring responsibilities – and thus jeopardises equality and diversity.

It is not easy to see how these undesirable effects can be countered without creating other unintentional consequences, but HEFCE may want to consider such measures as 'half-weighting' of outputs by academics who have joined their particular institution less than two years before the census date (if they aren't early-career researchers).

Consultation question 11: Are there any further ways in which we could improve the measures to promote equalities and diversity?

This may be more a question of not introducing certain policies rather than introducing others. For instance, both impact and esteem measures seem to disproportionately favour 'late-career researchers' mostly at professorial level. Once again, then, ensuring absolute primacy for research quality seems not only the most rigorous but also the fairest way of assessing research. We would also reiterate our observations about staff on fractional or fixed-term contracts and on mobility.

Like the British Academy, we urge HEFCE to undertake or commission research on how their proposals could affect different groups within academia.

Consultation question 12: Do you have any comments about the proposed timetable?

As pointed out above, the timetable is extremely tight, in particular as regards the introduction of impact as a quite dramatically new approach. The guidelines in this area are still far too vague for institutions to start planning in a systematic and rational manner. The results of the pilot projects and the attendant clarification of guidelines are not expected before mid-2010, just about one-and-a-half years before the closing date. This does not give institutions enough time to prepare adequately. While we appreciate that the proposals are designed to measure and reward existing practices rather than to change behaviour through incentivisation, there is a distinct danger of 'moving the goal posts' in the middle of the game.

Consultation question 13: Are there any further areas in which we could reduce burden, without compromising the robustness of the process?

As we have suggested before, the employment of research users as sub-panel members and some of the methods proposed for corroborating impact appear particularly resource-intensive and should be reconsidered.

Consultation question 14: Do you have any other comments on the proposals?

The RMA greatly welcomes the openness and transparency of the consultation process so far and congratulates HEFCE on the willingness to listen to the academic community that they have demonstrated in earlier phases of the exercise. We hope that this part of the consultation will be conducted in a similarly collegial spirit.