

Institution: Royal Conservatoire of Scotland

Unit of Assessment: 35 Music, Dance, Drama and Performing Arts

a. Context

The Royal Conservatoire is not, and has never been, an ivory tower. The notion of impact, and the ethos of making a difference in the world, has been central to our approach since the earliest days of our set-up Research Development Grant application in 1999. In our statement of intent to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council (as it was) we proposed that:

Research in a Conservatoire context should embrace musical composition, dramatic writing, performance, artistically-oriented and practice-based research, creating in the conservatoire a laboratory for the performing arts where socially-relevant ideas are both generated and tested [...] It will lead to the general enhancement of the cultural environment, improve the overall quality of life and impact upon the nation's health and well-being. [From our RDG grant application of 1999]

That original vision has been realised. The great majority of our research is conducted in a context in which considerations of impact are intimately bound up with, and often inseparable from, the research process. Our researchers' commitment to artistic practice at the highest levels and their close relationships with the professions and their audiences ensures that they see effecting change as the principal goal of their research. This ethic was in evidence at the Royal Conservatoire even before the discourse around impact achieved its current significance, and the inclusion of impact as a discrete area for assessment within the REF is therefore an initiative that we warmly welcome.

The main groups upon which our research has impact are **audiences**, whether live or mediated; **creative artists and organisations outside the Conservatoire**; and **policymakers** in the arts and culture, education and other sectors.

Drawing on the phraseology of the Panel Criteria, the principal kinds of impact that our researchers seek, and their relation to the different kinds of research we pursue, may be summarized as follows:

- *Through original creative work sharing new insights*, to create, inspire and support new forms of artistic expression and to generate new ways of thinking that influence creative practice;
- *Through the study of the arts practices in context*, to preserve, conserve and present cultural heritage and, particularly in our work on Scottish Music, to share insights into minority cultures;
- *Through the active promotion of original creative work and performance*, to contribute to the economic vitality of the creative sectors and contribute to the development of new products and services;
- *Through applied research for policy makers*, to inform or influence policy and provide expert guidance on the arts and education to governments and NGOs.

Since the Royal Conservatoire makes a REF submission in only UoA 35, statements about the unit are, in effect, statements about the institution, and vice versa.

b. Approach to impact

We can point to a wide range of examples that illustrate our well-embedded and committed approach to making a difference in the world.

In the AP, the Royal Conservatoire has actively developed the **audiences** for its researchers' original creative output, both live and mediated. The Conservatoire employs a Head of Artistic Planning and a number of supporting staff specifically to manage live performances and to build relationships with audiences, both at the macro-level of ensuring effective promotion and at the personal level of relationships with individuals. These staff work across all public performance events, and will help individual researchers to ensure that research-oriented events (such as our annual Plug festival of new music) are as effective as possible in reaching wide audiences. Our approach here includes fostering good relationships with the press and media to ensure that we maximise the visibility of our performances. We also take other steps to increase the impact of performance work: specifically during the AP, the Conservatoire has also established a close relationship with Nimbus Records (Wyastone Estate Ltd.), which now releases CDs and downloads on the Royal Conservatoire label, to ensure that our recorded releases benefit from the increased reach that an international company like Nimbus can provide, and has established *Broadcast*, the Conservatoire's own

online channel for digital content. In addition, researchers also foster their own independent relationships with production companies, and the Conservatoire helps to develop those relationships by awarding small grants for the international release of research-led outputs.

The Conservatoire also provides space and resources for researchers to create and support new forms of expression that will have an impact on our audiences. De Simone's collaboration with Robert Walton and Eilidh McAskill on *Alma Mater* (see De Simone 1) is an example of a new form of expression supported in-kind by the Conservatoire.

We monitor our engagement with live audiences very carefully through our box office and PRS returns and in other ways that help us to identify the impact of our work. On the basis of PRS data, for example, we know that we are the second busiest venue in UK Higher Education and annually reach more individuals through live performance than any of the London conservatoires. Research-led performance is, however, only a subset of our total performance output and our box-office data allows us to assess attendances at relevant events such as Plug, PianoFest and StringFest (which incorporate research-led work) and other events, including public talks. We also monitor sales and downloads from our Nimbus relationship carefully to understand the impact of that stream of our work, and analyse views of our *Broadcast* media.

We know that our researchers have a considerable impact on audiences furth of the Conservatoire, but we need to develop ways to further quantify and understand this so that we can maximise the follow-through: such initiatives will form part of our future research strategy.

Relationships with **creative artists and organisations outside the Conservatoire** may be developed at the level of the individual, such as in the example of Fennessy's work with Ensemble Modern and his relationship with Universal Edition, or they may be actively managed by the Conservatoire, as in the case of our close relationships with the National Theatre of Scotland, BBC Scotland (memorandum of understanding (MoU) 2009), and the Globe Theatre (MoU 2008). Our Associate Contemporary Ensemble, Red Note, which has a key role in performing original work by Conservatoire musicians, provides an especially clear example of how the Conservatoire works strategically to ensure impact: it often includes Conservatoire staff as performers and uses Conservatoire venues and facilities to fulfil its creative projects. It is a mutually beneficial partnership: Red Note's relationship with the Conservatoire provides it with an important source of new work and our artist researchers benefit from Red Note's external leverage of reach and impact. Reflecting our desire to understand better the impact we have, our researchers are collaborating with colleagues from the University of Edinburgh to examine the value and impact of contemporary music (AHRC-funded as part of the Cultural Value programme). Our work in socially inclusive arts practices is a further example of strategically-directed work with organisations outside the Conservatoire.

Sometimes, in dealing with creative artists and organisations, the boundary between research collaborations and partnerships that maximise impact can become blurred. As Geoffrey Crossick noted in his lecture to the Royal Society of Art in Leeds (May 2006):

Rather than being formed and then transmitted to others, knowledge in the creative industries is constituted within the interaction itself and it is from that engagement that value itself is derived. One might say that knowledge here is, by its very nature, networked. It comes from the engagement of people with different skills, imaginations and often different goals.

An example of these blurred boundaries is MacDonald's work with Catriona MacKay. This may be viewed as a research collaboration (MacKay as an independent scholar) and (on account of her international performing profile) as a partnership that increases the impact of research conducted in the Conservatoire by MacDonald. The Conservatoire supports and nurtures these sorts of relationships by understanding and making space for the complex interactions that can constitute research, knowledge exchange and impact in the creative and performing arts.

The diffuse and non-linear nature of these interactions is the focus of a chapter by Broad and Duffy which explores the nature of research in the Conservatoire and its relationship with the wider world (Broad, S and Duffy, C, 'Practising Research, Playing with Knowledge', in ed. Dogantan Dack, *Music Practice As Research* (Ashgate, in press).)

Relationships with **policymakers** are managed systematically, with our longstanding association with Creative Scotland, for example, actively nurtured at the highest institutional level, so that researchers can provide insights and expertise whenever necessary. There is a specifically Scottish context that is significant to the reach and significance of the impact we have in this area: all arts, culture, education and criminal

justice policy is devolved, and we therefore seek and enjoy a close working relationship with the devolved Scottish Government and its associated NDPBs. Broad's secondment to Creative Scotland in 2012 is an example of how close such relationships can be; a further example is our development with the Scottish Funding Council of an innovative access pathway (*Transitions 20/40*) for students who come from neighbourhoods that have traditionally been excluded from Higher Education. We have ensured a strong research dimension to this latter project by funding a strategic PhD studentship to explore the impact of the programme and expect research insights from that work to feed further into wider policy.

Our support for two ESRC CASE studentships through the Institute for Capitalising on Creativity (of which we are a member) is a further example of how we strategically manage the impact we have on policymakers. One CASE studentship, sponsored by Creative Scotland, explores participatory dance in Glasgow (an area that reflects our commitment to the performing arts in Scotland, and resonates with our BA (Modern Ballet) and *Transitions 20/40*); the other explores theatre for babies, which has emerged as an important strand of innovative practice in Scottish theatre (see, for example, Drury 1).

We also take strategic steps to influence policymakers outwith Scotland. In the wider UK context, for example, our AHRC-funded collaboration with other UK conservatoires on the Musical Impact project (led by the Royal College of Music), seeks to understand better the health and wellbeing of professional musicians. The outputs of that research will include curricular materials for use in conservatoires, and packages of CPD for professional musicians; the Association of British Orchestras and the Musicians' Union are key partners, ensuring that the project will have considerable influence in shaping the working practices of orchestras and individual musicians. In the European context, we are active members of the European Association of Conservatoires (AEC) and the European League of Institutes of the Arts (ELIA) with, for example, Broad being a member of the AEC Polifonia working group on the second cycle, which seeks to reshape Masters provision in music across Europe.

Relationships with policymakers in the arts, education and other sectors are driven at the highest level in the Conservatoire, with the Principal and his office overseeing and reviewing such relationships continuously. This is a feature of our unique status in Scotland, but also reflects our desire to punch above our weight in the UK and internationally.

c. Strategy and plans

As noted above, we have always sought to maximise the effect of our research outside the academy. Our submission in RA5a to RAE2008 specifically foregrounded the impact of our research, and the feedback from the 2008 panel singled out our 'impact on the cultural life of Scotland'. Since then, our former National Centre for Research in the Performing Arts has evolved into *The Exchange* – a new branding that better reflects the way we prioritise interaction with the wider world. The notion of impact, therefore, has underpinned successive institutional research strategies without being separately articulated in a discrete strategy. Looking forward, our key strategic goals are to sustain the considerable reach and significance of our impact (bearing in mind external factors such as the 2014 referendum), and to ensure that we take steps to understand better the impact that our research has by gathering more detailed evidence that will allow us to analyse it more systematically. This will involve consideration of both our managed institutional partnerships and the impact of individual researchers' work outside the Conservatoire, and we anticipate that different approaches will need to be developed for these different contexts.

These goals are integral to our latest institutional research strategy, making more explicit a thread that has been woven through our work since the Strategic Research Development Grant of 1999.

d. Relationship to case studies

Our case studies exemplify two of the kinds of impact highlighted above. The first reflects the nature of our researchers' impact on creative artists and organisations outside the Conservatoire, while the second explores the impact of our research on the Scottish arts and education policy context. The former represents well the way individual researchers' work informs and interacts with cutting-edge practices in the creative industries, while the latter reflects our sense of responsibility to wider society.

While they cannot embrace all the kinds of impact we seek, the case studies are nonetheless indicative of our aspirations to conduct research that makes a difference in the world.