

UoA 67: Overview Report

1. A total of 59 institutions returned 487.3 FTE category A/A* researchers (631 individuals) to the 2001 RAE under UoA 67, as against 57 institutions returning 422.4 category A researchers in 1996. In addition, 41 category C researchers were returned.
2. While some submissions focussed strongly on one particular area, the majority covered a wide range of musicological subdisciplines and/or practice-based research, reflecting the breadth of profile typical of academic departments in this field. The two most widely represented categories of output were composition and scholarly writing, for both of which there was at least one submission from the overwhelming majority of institutions. The third broad category of submission, performance, was represented more unevenly, with some institutions (mainly but not only the conservatories) making large numbers of performance submissions, while others made none.
3. Within these three broad categories, the following patterns were discernible.
 - Scholarly writing included submissions across a considerable diversity of approaches, including historical/cultural musicology, ethnomusicology, theory and analysis, psychology of music, music therapy, acoustics, and computer applications; historical/cultural musicology was the most widely represented, with a primary but by no means exclusive focus on music of the 'art' tradition. The other sub-categories were represented less consistently, with some institutions concentrating in fields (such as ethnomusicology or psychology of music) that were not found at all in the majority of submitting institutions.
 - Composition included both vocal/instrumental and electroacoustic submissions (with a predominance of the former); there was a small representation of work in popular idioms, film music, other forms of commercial music, and mixed media.
 - In performance the majority of submissions fell within the 'art' music tradition, with only a small number of submissions in jazz, popular, or traditional music. The primary focus of submissions was on solo performance, or on the contribution of an individual to an ensemble performance, with very few submissions from the conductors or directors of ensembles.
4. The panel consisted of eleven researchers selected, following consultation, for their expertise across a range of musical subdisciplines; four had served on the 1996 Panel. It was assisted in its work by specialist advice in the areas of music education (2 advisors), organology (2), electroacoustic music and technology (1), performance (1), commercial music (1), and music therapy (1). Individual submissions were cross-referred to the panels 29 (Electric and Electronic Engineering), 48 (European Studies), and 66 (Dance, Drama and Performing Arts). In line with practice across the 2001 RAE, advice was also solicited from a total of five non-UK based experts located in the US (3) and continental Europe (2); these individuals were again selected on the basis of disciplinary representation as well as individual eminence.
5. Evaluation of individual and departmental submissions proceeded in conformity with the panel's published criteria. The total number of departments assessed at an international (5/5*) level remained the same at 21 (which means that the proportion fell slightly, from 36.8% in 1996 to 35.6% in 2001), with the proportion of FTE researchers in these departments falling from 49.4% of the total in 1996 to 42.6% in 2001. Within this band, however, there was a significant increase in the proportion of departments rated at the highest international (5*) level, from 6 (10.5%) to 9 (15.3%); as a result, the number of research active staff now working in 5 and 5* departments is almost identical (in each case 21.3%). At the other end of the scale there was an general upward movement. 5 departments (8.5% of the total) were rated 1-2, as against 8 (14%) in 1996; their submissions did not always provide evidence of an adequate appreciation of the RAE definition of research.

6. Departments were rated at international level in three out of the four national regions, and individual work of international quality was noted in all of them. Work was assessed at international level in all principal areas of the discipline, encompassing composition of all types (including commercial), performance, historical and critical musicology, ethnomusicology, theory and analysis, popular music studies, organology, and music psychology.
7. In a significant number of institutions the panel identified work which was of a much higher standard than indicated by the overall rating awarded to the department. Virtually all such instances reflected the work of single individuals, who were eligible for flagging only when they were not part of a lower-rated research group in their institution. Given that the practice of flagging would therefore be inconsistent, the panel chose not to engage in it, but instead identified all eligible cases (possible only in departments rated at 4 or below) in the institutional feedback.
8. Practice-based research contributed fully to the ratings achieved by those departments which submitted it, with the proportion of researchers assessed at the highest level of international distinction being comparable to those in other areas of activity. There was a significant increase in the number of practice-based researchers returned as against 1996 (the conservatory sector, the research activity of which is predominantly practice-based, returned 180 researchers as against 108 in 1996, including 34 returned by one institution entering the RAE for the first time). While the principles governing the assessment of performance remained substantially the same as in 1996, they were spelt out in considerably more detail in the 2001 Criteria, which benefitted from the input of panellists with specific expertise in this area; in line with other panels assessing practice-based research, a distinction was drawn between professional practice *per se* and practice as research. A significant proportion of submitted outputs were considered to fall primarily or wholly within the former category and assessed accordingly.
9. Among those institutions which responded to the invitation to supply further details of the research embodied in practice-based outputs, the most helpful statements tended to be those which specified aims and objectives, research methods, and significance. Not all institutions responded to this invitation, however, and a substantial proportion of the details that were supplied did not address the issues specified in the Criteria (paragraph 3.58.8). The panel viewed the statements as no more than aids to assessment and thus attempted to make a fair assessment of submitted work regardless of the presence or absence of statements. This position is rather different from that of other UoAs in which documentation of the research process is seen as an integral element of practice-based research, and the panel considers that it will be helpful for all concerned if there is further debate on the nature and assessment of practice-based research in advance of any future RAE.
10. The panel was most impressed by textual commentaries that linked inputs to outputs, and placed both within a coherent strategic context. Information on research funding provided in RA4, for example, became much more meaningful when specifically linked to the outputs that had resulted (or were expected to result); in the same way, information regarding postgraduate student performance and funding provided in RA3 became more meaningful when linked to discussion in RA5 of the role played by postgraduate studies within the overall departmental research strategy. In general, as suggested by paragraph 3.58.19 of the Criteria, textual commentaries which provided well-defined objectives and plans were considered more impressive than those which provided vague statements of intent, or which described institutional structures and strategies without clearly linking them to specific departmental achievements.
11. There was wide variation of practice in the submission of category C researchers, the quality of whose outputs was often assessed as lower than that of the department with which they were associated. Rarely was sufficient information provided on the contribution of such researchers to the departmental research culture to enable the panel to view their inclusion as a positive feature.