

### **The School of Music. Statement by the Vice-Chancellor**

The proposal that UEA cease admitting new students for degrees in music has caused a public cry of pain. This seems to me entirely appropriate. What the School of Music (MUS) provides is a public good and its withdrawal a tangible loss.

UEA is among Britain's foremost universities for the Humanities, as evidenced by our prominence on the national and international stage in Literature, World Art Studies, History, American Studies, Film Studies and Translation Studies as well as our strengths in Politics, Philosophy, Drama and Language and Communication Studies (LCS). This prowess has just been underscored by the announcement of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for our work in Creative Writing. It is because it is in the interests of our work in the Humanities, and of the University as a whole, that I have recommended withdrawal from degree provision in music.

#### **2011 Review**

Since the School was formally reviewed in 2002, I have been aware that specialists in the field have judged it to be 'at the absolute margin of viability.' Following the 2002 Review, the University has made investment in the School, but that has necessarily been contingent on each stage of investment bringing the right results in admissions and research; slow progress here meant that even during the less challenging times of the last decade, the case for further investment at the expense of other areas has been difficult to make. Prompted by the HE environment becoming dramatically more challenging in terms of both research and student funding, I established a Review Panel to examine the School's prospects in the post-2012 regime.

To maximise the chances of an impartial assessment of those prospects, rather than special pleading either way, I asked senior colleagues outside the Faculty to serve on the Review while ensuring the Panel consulted senior colleagues in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities (HUM). I also asked the Head of MUS to sit on the Panel to ensure the Panel was fully briefed on the strenuous efforts, made over many years and most vigorously under his leadership, to find ways forward. The timing of the report was affected by my wish that the bleak internal assessment of the School's prospects in the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) be cross-checked by MUS's much delayed mock-REF external assessment.

#### **Research Excellence Framework**

The Panel's conclusions are compelling and, that view having been reinforced by consultation with Senate, I recommend their implementation. Despite the research strategy put in place by the Head of School (which has provided study leave for half the School in the last two years), the efforts of colleagues and the work of promising early career colleagues, the research assessment and income prospects look too poor for a University committed to research-led teaching. The prospect is that, at best, the School will fare no better in REF 2014 than it did in RAE 2008. Its RAE rating was the second lowest in the Faculty, and with research metrics now far more challenging, a continuation of that position would still further reduce the already inadequate research income.

Unfortunately, the School's research trajectory is at odds with the mission of a University whose research influence is currently ranked in the top twelve in the UK. Only a considerable investment in new staff could do anything to change this situation, but that would be at the direct expense of other Schools unless MUS secured a large increase in student numbers; in the present climate in higher education, that is not possible.

### **Student Numbers**

Key to the challenge facing the School has long been the need to increase its student numbers and thus fund a staff complement at a healthy remove from 'the absolute margin of viability.'<sup>1</sup> In the last two years, under the leadership of the current Head, some progress has been made but the new government policy on Home/EU undergraduate places makes further progress exceedingly unlikely. Universities of UEA's quality, which have of necessity resolved to charge more than £7,500, have had their guaranteed numbers cut from September 2012. All places filled in September 2010 by students reaching AAB at A level (or equivalent) are being removed, and a percentage of the remainder are being creamed off for auction to providers charging less than £7,500. This cut is likely to be repeated annually for the next few years. The numbers can be recouped, but only by competing successfully in a new open market for students with AAB or better.

In four of the last five years, MUS's recruitment of students reaching AAB has been the lowest in the Faculty, a very long way below the Faculty average. The modest increase even in 2011, when applications ballooned across the sector, makes it plain that in the new regime MUS would face a year-on-year cut in student numbers and associated income. It is possible that some time after 2012, the open market will be extended to ABB. But here too MUS's admissions picture is far out of line with the rest of the Faculty and the implications clear. It is this intractable market position that moves the issue beyond the scope of the generous offer from the Royal Music Association and the National Association for Music in Higher Education to provide counsel from music specialists.

With its student base and teaching income set to shrink, MUS's admission profile is at odds with the University's aspirations and direction of travel.

### **Faculty of Arts and Humanities (HUM)**

Had the Faculty advanced the case that the School of Music is integral to the academic agenda, research, teaching or league table position of the Faculty and its other Schools, it would have been necessary to weigh that against the grim outlook for MUS. HUM has made no such case. Despite the Faculty having, rightly, steered to give MUS a staff:student ratio as good or better than any other in HUM, the School has usually been below and sometimes far below the Faculty's demanding average on key performance indicators.

In this situation, to divert further resource in order to prop up MUS does not look responsible. To go further, to fund the additional staff places judged necessary to move it above the margin of viability,

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<sup>1</sup> Given limited recruitment of postgraduate and international students, the key issue has been Home/EU undergraduate numbers. The Faculty, despite being constrained by tight limits on its overall numbers, gave MUS scope, increasing its permitted in 2009 and 2010. On both occasions it fell well short, and in 2011 the target was reined back. In that exceptional year, when national applications leapt, and UEA's far above the average, its numbers rose sharply, overshooting its target. Unfortunately, that was an aberration precluded by the new rules on student numbers introduced for the 2012 intake.

looks perverse. The effect of doing so in the absence of a miraculous upsurge in AAB students choosing MUS would be greatly to increase the burden placed on other Humanities Schools. Their AAB targets would become all the more stretching to compensate for MUS's dearth. Resource needed to fulfil our plans to enrich their academic offering, increase their academic numbers and reinforce their appeal to students and top-quality staff would have been siphoned away.

### **University Strategy**

Such an approach, weakening instead of strengthening our position in fields in which UEA can do supremely well, would fly in the face of the Corporate Plan now taking shape. Extended to other areas, it would reverse UEA's progress and obstruct our expansion into new academic areas. In the UK's fiercely competitive HE environment, it would imperil the University's position with negative repercussions for the Norwich Research Park, the city and the region.

### **Completing cohorts, musical activity and outreach**

It is vital that we safeguard the education of the School's final student cohorts and support their career plans. The prospects are good. We will seek to ensure that the amount of academic time per student devoted to the cohorts graduating in 2013 and 2014, the academic support and attention they receive, is even greater than for earlier cohorts. The Head of School (who has agreed to serve throughout the period) and his staff are fiercely committed to this mission, and plans are in place to underpin provision should colleagues leave. We will seek to avoid redundancies and consult fully with trade union colleagues throughout the process.

It is also essential that we reinforce and if possible expand the musical activity and opportunities available on campus for students of all disciplines. Here, too, the prospects are promising and offers of expert help most encouraging. The plans being developed will draw both on the experience and resources of the School and on best practice elsewhere. Those plans also encompass ambitious ideas for developing the University's musical outreach programme.

### **Communication**

We must communicate our plans in both areas effectively - to students, concerned parents and mentors, and the School of Music's many supporters. We must communicate our pride in the School's achievements and our regret that UEA's response to the fiercely competitive new HE environment dictates that the School cease to admit new students. We must underline the University's determination to expand its provision in the Humanities, nurturing as they do so much of what is most beautiful and profound, funny and interesting in life. We must make clear UEA's commitment to excel in all that we do.

Edward Acton

28 November 2011