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6<sup>th</sup> November, 2011

Dear Professor Acton,

We are writing to you because our son is a first year student on UEA's Music with Technology course (W350). We appreciate that this is a busy week for you and that a reply to the issues we raise may have to wait until the end of the month. However, please can we ask you to read this letter in full before the Senate Meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> November.

To summarise the content, we express our concerns over the conduct of the review, and the relevance and lack of impartiality in sections of the Report of the Music Review Panel; we express concerns over the quality of the education our son might receive in UEA School of Music if its closure is confirmed; and we consider the implications of the disparity between the staffing and resourcing of the School of Music as represented in the official UEA documents and websites which informed our son's choice of university last year and the very different situation revealed in the Music Review Panel Report.

Our son has settled in well at UEA, is working industriously and enthusiastically and is more than satisfied with the teaching provided and the opportunities for performance and practice. Consequently, we were very disturbed to hear from him that there are plans, apparently well advanced, to close the Music School. This would clearly have a very serious impact on our son's education and future opportunities and possibly a substantial financial impact as we are funding his UEA course. We are writing to express our concerns and would appreciate a response. We were disappointed to hear the news from our son rather than directly from UEA.

These concerns have been increased by accessing a copy of the "Report of the Music Review Panel" on the Scribd website. We are aware that the Internet can be an unreliable source of information, so it is possible that this rather flimsy document is a very early draft or even entirely spurious. However, if it is the final report, we have some serious reservations about four of the sections which we feel we must raise. We should stress that these are less significant to us than our worries about the impact the report and possible closure will have on the quality of our son's education at UEA and we will raise those issues later.

### **Conduct of the Review**

Whilst acknowledging the range of documentation reviewed, the report seems to result from just three meetings of the Review Panel and interviews with only 5 UEA staff members. We were disturbed to note that no members of the Music School teaching staff were formally interviewed,

and that the Acting Head of School was also not formally interviewed and so presumably there is no formal record of his input. This is particularly surprising in view of his dual responsibilities.

### **Research**

Of the 16 pages of the document we have seen, 6 are introductory, summary or appendices. Some 30% of the remainder is dedicated to Research. As non academic parents, we feel that there is disproportionate emphasis on research. From the perspective of parents, students and, we suspect, the mass of the general public and media, the quality of education delivered should have been the starting point and main emphasis of the report. We have no wish to delve into the complexities of 4\*/3\* research projects but note that the RAE Sub Panel report conceded that the absence of a Professorial Chair was a significant factor in the School of Music's problems. More of concern to us as parents was that much of the remaining 7 paragraphs of this section seem to focus on the failure of the School of Music to engage with UEA's internal REF process. Whilst we can understand your frustration at this, we are very concerned that the consequences of an administrative failure seem to be given far too much weight in driving a decision which will impact very adversely on our son's education. We were surprised to find a similar issue re-emerging in para. 5.7 and have a clear sense that housekeeping issues, which should be addressed more properly by competent management, are being used to justify the closure of an entire department.

### **Education**

We had expected Section 5 to focus on the quality of the education delivered to the majority of UEA Music students, but feel again that too much emphasis is placed on less central issues and that, in the whole section, there seems to be a determination to emphasise negatives and to sideline and undermine positives. For example, when para. 5.4 acknowledges the improvement in the School of Music's ranking in the Good University Guide, the penultimate and final sentences immediately appear to attempt to detract from the achievement. Similarly, in the next paragraph, the panel's praise for the quality of the School of Music staff's delivery in the face of difficulties and resourcing issues is prefaced by a negative and subjective statement from one of the 5 interviewees – a statement not endorsed by the External Examiner's report. It was this apparent bias within the text that made us doubt the authenticity of the document when we initially found it. Certainly, we get no sense that the day to day learning experience of students has been given sufficient weight in the report. You will be aware of the Guardian League Table 2011 in which the UEA School of Music is ranked 12<sup>th</sup>, higher than 4 of the "close competitor institutions" listed in para. 4.2 of the report. Of particular interest to us is the high Student Satisfaction with Teaching score, also reflected in the Good University Guide. It is unfortunate that the Panel did not feel this was relevant to their report or decision.

### **Management and Resources**

This section of the report has caused us considerable concern for very different reasons. When our son selected UEA as his first choice, it was on the basis of two factors. Firstly, we attended an excellent open day at which large numbers of enthusiastic and approachable staff were present. Secondly, we consulted the official UEA website and the brochures provided by the University. Nowhere in that documentation was it made clear that there were "accumulating concerns about the relative lack of effective leadership" within the Music School – since 2006 - and that the Music

building “has been a cause of concern over a long period” and that it “cannot offer the facilities of its competitor institutions”. We were given no indication that computing facilities were “barely sufficient”, that “there are important learning opportunities (UEA) are unable to provide” and that “there is a conspicuous lack of appropriate large teaching and performance space” and insufficient practice facilities.

There is a significant mismatch between the promotional material that UEA management places in the public domain and the contents of this report which highlight a substantial list of resource shortfalls; shortfalls presented by the panel as being of long standing and beyond probable remedy – and of which senior management were well aware. We have just rechecked the UEA website. The disparities still exist, even after publication of the report. This is a matter that we may have to readdress should your eventual decision have any adverse educational or financial impact on our son.

We have little to say on the **Finance** and **Enterprise** sections, other than that the comment on the inability to sustain the current level of recruitment seems a little disingenuous: the release of this report at this moment in the academic year will obviously blight any chance of sustaining that level of recruitment for next year. This is, sadly, another of the factors that create an impression, to the outsider, that the report lacks rigour and, most disturbingly, impartiality.

We hope that this is not a fait accompli and that the two meetings in November will not merely endorse this flawed report. However, it is prudent for us to plan for the possibility that the School of Music will close after our son’s cohort complete their degrees and we gain little reassurance from the bland statement in paragraph 3 of the **Summary and Recommendations** which promises “every effort” and “best practice”. Parents will reasonably demand a credible, concrete plan to ensure our children genuinely can “complete their studies without detriment.”

“Without detriment” must mean that the University of East Anglia delivers a degree that exactly matches the quality and the scope of the degree offered in your official documentation, both paper and web based, in the last academic year; documentation that led us, in effect, to contract with UEA to receive that product.

This means that we must ask you, as Vice Chancellor, to offer clear and unambiguous guarantees on the following key issues:

- **In years 2 and 3, our son must be offered the full range of modules currently offered for W350.** Please can you confirm that this will be the case.
- The report suggests that the modules offered reflect the current staff’s interests and expertise. Please will you confirm that **the current level, quality and experience of staffing will be maintained to the end of our son’s degree** – that is, no reduction will be made in staff numbers, quality or experience until **the end** of academic year 2013/2014.
- Please can you confirm that this will be the case **regardless of any decline in student numbers**. These will inevitably drop by one third each year, but in addition, some parents may feel forced by the closure decision to remove their children to other institutions.
- We will be reassured by your confirmation that UEA will not take action to reduce staff numbers. However, please can you also confirm that, should any current staff members

leave voluntarily for other positions, **they will be immediately replaced by new staff of comparable experience and expertise.**

- Please can you also confirm that, **regardless of any decline in student numbers, the quality and volume of teaching, studio and rehearsal space and the technical infrastructure and support will not be in any way reduced.**

We believe that it is in the power of UEA senior management to guarantee all the above and parents of the 2011 cohort will be immensely relieved to see clear, written assurances. However, there is one further concern which we do not believe can be so easily addressed and we seek your comments on how UEA will approach this final issue.

When our son accepted his place at UEA, we had no doubts about the academic quality of the degree he would receive, or of the perceived value that potential employers and other educational institutions would attach to it. We now have serious concerns that, following a decision to close the department, the degree he eventually receives may have less value and currency in the market place. The negative and damning nature of the Music Review Panel's report - in which senior managers question the scope of the degree, the quality of research by the staff, the numbers of staff and, most worryingly, the adequacy and currency of facilities – can only make this perception worse. **We would like to know how UEA management intend to address this issue.** It seems to us that a good starting point would be a robust and very public endorsement of the quality of teaching and outcome currently being delivered by the School of Music.

Responses to our concerns above are essential. We would prefer to receive assurances and to feel that we can keep our son at UEA School of Music and receive the quality and status of degree that we were led to believe would be available. If this is not the case, and we feel obliged by the closure decision to move him – perhaps to start a new three year course elsewhere at the higher tuition fees – then we would need to consider very seriously what legal redress was available to us. Hopefully, this situation will not arise: our son is very happy with the education he is currently receiving and change now would be immensely disruptive and damaging. However, we cannot afford to take gambles with the level of financial investment we will be making. Your response to this letter will be a crucial factor in our eventual decision.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. To aid our forward planning, we would appreciate a response to our queries above by the end of November. Timescales are obviously very tight if we are to ensure our son receives the best possible education.

Yours sincerely,

Timothy Stewart and Jan Scally