



ROYAL MUSICAL ASSOCIATION

To: Vice-chancellor, University of East Anglia, Professor Edward Acton

Cc:

Chair of Council, UEA, Richard Jewson

Head of School of Music, UEA, Professor John Charmley

Dr Jonathan Impett (Music)

Ref.: Proposed Closure of School of Music

01 November 2011

Dear Professor Acton,

We note the proposal to close the School of Music at the University of East Anglia with great concern. It is not for us to comment on the merits of the case, other than to emphasise that the staff, alumni and current students of the School are held in great esteem within HE Music and beyond and that the School performs an important function not only for music research and education but for musical culture more generally within the region. We are however very troubled by the procedure which resulted in the proposal being adopted. As you may be aware, the *Report of the Music Review Panel*, dated 26 October 2011, is in the public domain (and it is not marked confidential). This document shows that there was no member with subject expertise on the panel. Not only is there no evidence of meaningful consultation with the staff and students concerned, there is also no record of external subject expertise having been sought. Both of these are normal procedure in such cases and can legitimately be expected before decisions of such magnitude are taken.

This lack of subject expertise is readily apparent in the document. We note for instance that under 5.5, the outgoing Associate Dean Teaching is quoted as stating that ‘teaching in MUS was based less around an organised curriculum, [sic] than on a selection of modules reflecting staff’s personal interest, past and present.’ (p. 8) It is unclear to us how such a confident assertion can be made by anyone without relevant subject expertise and why what is described as a ‘view’ of one individual is apparently taken on trust by the panel.

Likewise, we are disturbed to read under 6.6 that ‘the Panel considered web pages showing facilities at other Music departments nationally and the impression gained was one of the UEA MUS School being rather limited’ (p. 10). Who undertook this kind of comparison and what is it actually based on? We are frankly amazed that such a comparison can be undertaken on the basis of institutions’ web presentations (which, needless to say, don’t always provide exactly accurate representations of what is really available to students) by people who have no demonstrable expertise in such a complex field as music technology.

Over and above the question of subject expertise, there are grounds to query the uses to which some of the figures in the document are put. For instance, the document quotes a figure of £150k as an annual subvention to MUS. This figure is described under 3.6 (p. 4) as funding “‘engagement” activities i.e. Choir, Orchestra, performances and concerts for the wider

community'. Under 7.2 it is claimed that this funding stream 'had been used in significant part as core subsidy for some time.' (p. 11) Nowhere in the document is there an actual figure for the deficit of the unit itself, or which part of the subvention is used as a subsidy for the School's primary functions.

Finally, we take issue with the way different options for redistributing the current student numbers are debated under 7.6 (p. 12). We fear that such an approach risks prejudicing the outcome of any review and creating demands from other parts of the University for the closure of the School of Music that are based on reasons other than those of financial or academic viability. This is particularly problematic since some panel members' own units are listed among the potential recipients of student numbers currently associated with Music, which could result in questions about those panel members' motivations and possible conflicts of interest.

For all these reasons, we are frankly astonished how a decision of such far-reaching consequences for both staff and students as the closure of a School can be undertaken on the basis of a document such as this, the credibility, impartiality and rigour of which all can be called into question. We therefore urge you to reconsider your decision and conduct a proper, rigorous review, with meaningful contributions both from within Music and an external subject specialist. Furthermore, such a panel should have more options at its disposal rather than the simple alternative of closing the School or continuing it in its present form. On the basis of the report, we can have little confidence that all possible alternatives have been considered. What is at stake is not only the future of staff and students within Music but the otherwise distinguished reputation of the University as a whole.

Yours sincerely,

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