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2013

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Berry, P. (2013). *Measurement and ranking of performing arts – British strategies*. [Publisher information missing].

Total number of authors:

1

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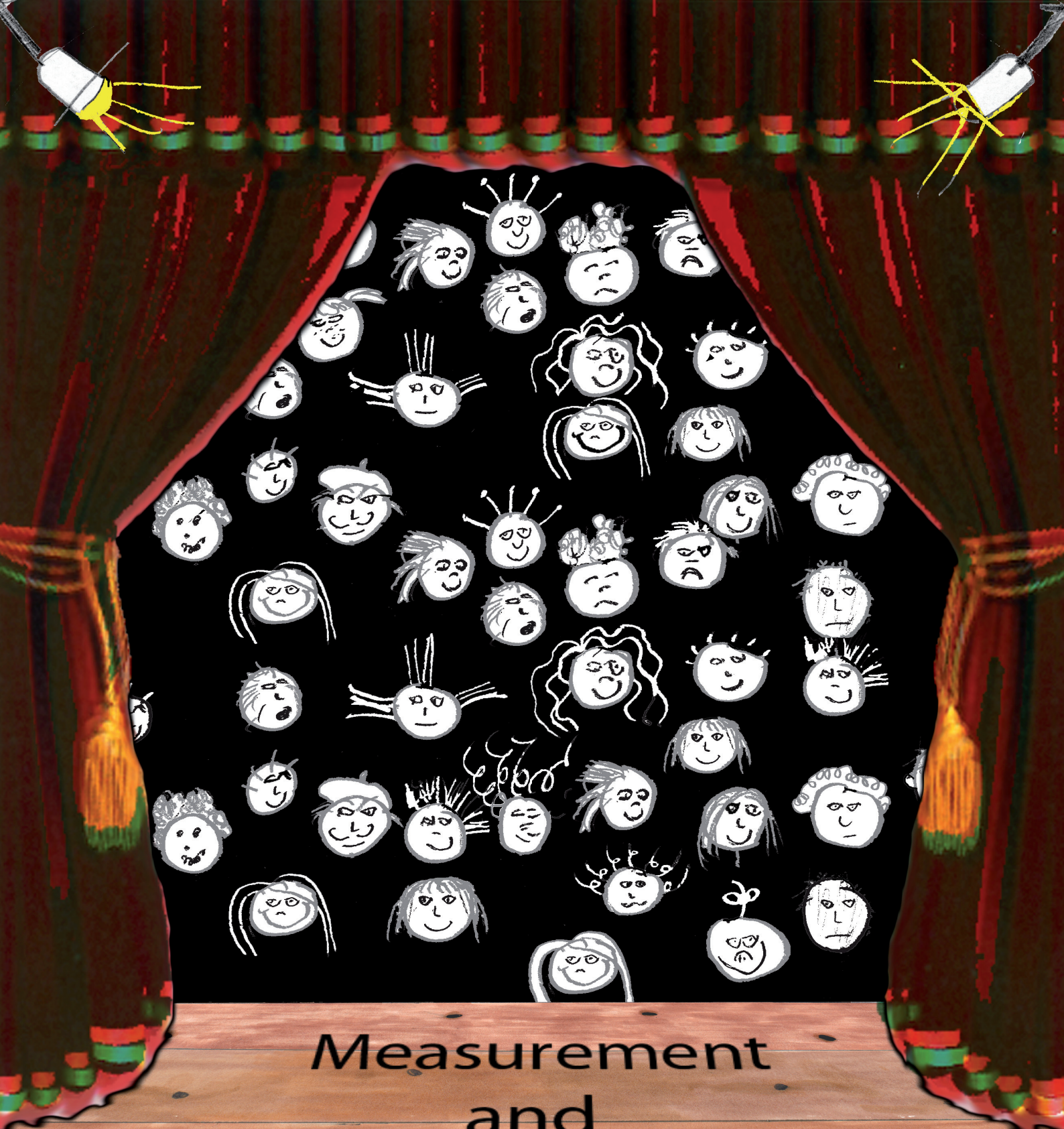
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Measurement
and
Ranking
of
Performing Arts

Lund University
Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts

Measurement and ranking of performing arts – British strategies

Peter Berry



LUND UNIVERSITY

Lund University/Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts

Cover design: Rut Lindgren, Per Åke Qvick, Dorian Zapfe

Malmö 2013

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Measurement and ranking of performing arts – British strategies

I. BEFORE I START

The practical purpose of this paper – to boost our strategies

The purpose of writing this essay on the measurement and ranking of the performing arts has been practical from the outset. It is aimed at sharpening the tools needed by our research department to meet the demands of authorities. Indeed, it is to show that we do reasonable things at reasonable cost and that we merit a reasonable remuneration for our efforts. This is not a scholarly paper. It is aimed at action.

I think that those who are in the process of formulating a rhetoric to shape and defend the future of their departments will find the following arguments interesting. Some of the arguments will no doubt be familiar.

Before each subsection of this paper I present questions addressing what I find to be central arguments. These simple aids serve as a summary of each section and provide a relief for one's own thoughts about measurement and ranking.

Background – why we chose to go to the UK

I will now proceed to present the background of this paper, in what environment the questions appeared, why I was commissioned to work on this and how it came about that we turned to our colleagues in the United Kingdom to find the inspiration to move forward. Then, I will get into the meat of the matter by giving you suggestions, based on answers from British colleagues, as to how to position yourself when addressing issues of government ranking and measurement of the performing arts in the university/conservatory sector. I will end with a section where I use a more intuitive approach. We belong, after all, to the artistic sector of society.

Our Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts

I belong to the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts in Malmö, Sweden. We are a fairly recently established faculty consisting of units representing theatre, music and fine arts. We belong to Lund University but are located in the city of Malmö, some twenty kilometres from the main campus. We

are one of a comparatively small number of academic art institutions in Sweden. At this point we are all being subjected to harsher economic times. As a result, we are seeking ways to make more efficient use of the funds distributed to us by government bodies such as research councils and the ministry of higher education. We are not accustomed to this new measuring and ranking and we need help to position ourselves. This is particularly difficult in the field of performing arts where standard measuring techniques seem difficult to apply. I will limit myself here to research, particularly practice-based research.

Our project

We are working on these issues as part of a project sponsored by Lund University in cooperation with Gothenburg University. We received a small grant and decided to use some of that to send me to the UK to pick the brains of our British colleagues. The choice of the UK was obvious, because of its considerable experience of measurement in higher education. A regulated system of measurement of research was introduced there as far back as the 1980s.

My background

I am a librarian and as such I have been involved in developing our digital research archives. We have tried to shape these archives so that they will comply with our particular demands in the arts sector, such as multimediality and different definitions of artists' roles to fit into registration systems. My expedition to the UK concerned attitudes and arguments, not primarily technology or the particulars of measuring systems, which are described at length on the Internet anyway. Measurement technologies seem often to be at the core of discussions at home (Arvidsson & Söld, 2012).

What government does in Sweden

There is a timely explanation behind our effort to get involved in these issues. Quite recently our government introduced measuring of undergraduate education (Högskoleverket, 2012). Still, there is no regulated system of evaluating research. What has been introduced is a series of self evaluations of research. Is it wrong to expect a more regulated system of interrogation by government institutions concerning research in the future? I think not.

What government does in the UK – a brief introduction to the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The British experience of ranking and measurement in higher education consists primarily of the REF (earlier Research Assessment Exercise, RAE). I will not provide a detailed description of this system. I suggest you turn to the official pages on the Internet concerning the performing arts, *Main Panel D Criteria*, which is a subset of *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01.2012). You may also want to look at *Units of assessment and recruitment of expert panels* (REF 01.2010).

The RAE/REF system depends on peer-review. It is the nerve of the whole system. The work by different academic institutions is evaluated by peers on a set of subject-oriented panels and sub-panels. There are special sub-panels for art and design (UOA 34) and music, drama, dance and performing arts (UOA 35), communication, cultural and media studies (UOA 35). I will focus on the first two sub-panels. The peer review system relies on a careful selection of panel members.

Interestingly enough, the preamble to panel criteria in the performing arts draws attention to that a wide area of submissions is considered.

In a number of cases, the fields of work may be interdisciplinary, and thus have no firm or rigidly definable boundaries. For this reason the sub-panel expects to assess submissions that do not necessarily map onto institutional structures.

Interdisciplinarity is clearly a concern, and it is a point that I will return to. Note also the wide definition of media: "The sub-panel will consider outputs, in whatever genre or medium, that meet the definition of research."

Assessment criteria are sorted into three groups: output, impact and environment. It was decided in advance that they were of different relevancy. Output is by far the most important, followed by impact and environment. Each of these groups is valued according to a grade system consisting of starred levels from 1 to 4 where 3 and 4 are defined as high quality. These criteria and level definitions are explained in the document *Assessment criteria and level definitions* (REF 2014, Assessment criteria...).

"Output" concerns the core of research, i.e. the actual research presented in whatever form it may appear. In the area of performing arts it may be research papers as well as performances and "other

types of live presentation". They need to be made available to the public in some way, published or documented. This is also belaboured in *Guidance to submissions*, which is available at the internet REF site (REF 2014, Assessment framework...). Each star level is identified in terms of "originality", "significance" and "rigour". Note that it is stressed that in the performing arts the relevant sub-panel "will neither receive nor make use of any citation or bibliometric data to inform their judgements".

"Impact" deals with the impression that research has left on society, concerning the performing arts for instance in terms of cultural life, economic prosperity, education and public services. Here departments are supposed to present written "case studies" with "examples of evidence of impact", for instance quantitative measures ("publication and sales figures"), critiques or citations (citations in reviews, prizes, inclusion in teaching materials etc.) or policy engagements ("evidence of influence on a debate in public policy"). Each star level is defined according to "reach" and "significance".

"Environment", the last of the three categories of criteria, concerns the institution itself, its research strategy, people, income, infrastructure and facilities. This data is mainly quantitative and follows a form supplied by the REF authorities. The sub-panels will evaluate this data in terms of "vitality" and "sustainability" and translate it to the star levels.

These measurements are summarized in "overall quality profiles". The information is made public on departmental level and may then be used to construe league tables and rankings. Many seem to think that it has been a powerful ingredient in the dispersing of money and fame.

Selecting interviewees

In my search for responses to the REF measurement and ranking system, I needed a group of experienced high level university people who were involved with the measuring system and were interested in sharing their views with me. Professor Sarat Maharaj of the Malmö Academy of Fine Arts provided me with invaluable help identifying these individuals. I am much obliged to him. He made it possible for me to navigate in a strange and unfamiliar territory. Without his kind and considerate support I would not have persisted. I am grateful to all colleagues who supplied me with valuable information, particularly to my friend Jayapalan Reddy, who made this text readable and who suggested a place to stay that left quaint memories.

The selection of interviewees was geared towards the specific needs of my institution. It was to consist of representatives of all areas we are involved in: music, fine arts and theatre. Practical circumstances limited my expedition to a restricted geographical area and constraints of time. The decision to choose the London area seemed obvious considering the concentration of world renowned arts institutions there. My decision to choose Glasgow as my second point of interviewing might seem more enigmatic. I knew Glasgow as a centre of the arts. I had heard of the "Glasgow miracle". What I did not know was the particular situation of Scottish research in relation to REF and other measurement systems, which makes the Scottish experience different from other UK institutions. Going to Glasgow turned out to be a wise decision. I got to know more about the key concept of "regeneration", connecting the arts and society, and the particular political cultural agenda of the Scottish government.

Finally, I had a list of eleven people who I was going to meet during the following weeks. They are associated with the following universities and conservatories: Goldsmiths university of London, University of Sussex, University of Cambridge, Queen Mary university of London, University of the Arts (London), Glasgow School of Arts, Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and Royal College of Music. I have decided not to mention the names of my interviewees to avoid the risk of compromising their work.

Thanks

I was very pleasantly received by all the people I interviewed. It was a great experience for me to listen to learned, experienced and committed colleagues.

Outline of my report

The first part of my paper deals with the REF and general questions about attitudes to measurement and ranking. The second part offers possible strategies. In the last section of my paper I present less formal interpretations of what we do when we are in the business of ranking and measuring.

What others have written

Much has been written about the REF: what constitutes practice-based research in the arts or attempts at devising better systems of measurement and ranking (van Vught, 2012). There is comparatively little on the subject of attitudes and arguments. Perhaps one of my contacts offered

an explanation by saying, "it is simply too boring – nobody wants to talk about this".

The REF has been discussed in the Times Higher Education (RAE 2008: The results) and in the Higher Education Quarterly (Johnston, 2008). Much of this debate was inspired by the 2008 RAE. Common themes were, for instance, critique of the subjectivity of the peer review process, difficulties in interpreting the definitions used in measuring and the cost of the process. I will return to these concerns shortly, since they are also at the core of the comments I received from my interviewees.

II. THE INVESTIGATION

The interviews

The interviews were conducted by me and lasted generally an hour. I recorded them and made transcripts. Subsequently, I tried to organize these statements into groups of arguments. I decided early on not to publish the actual interviews, but to concentrate on the arguments and what appeared as shared views.

The interviews were purposely informal to permit the most urgent concerns of the interviewees to surface. This made the analysis of the material more difficult, but it had the advantage of showing how arguments interrelate and overlap.

All interviews were informative and helpful. Some interviews concerned my project more obviously than others, but then I became aware of aspects that would otherwise have escaped my attention. I managed to connect with a representative group considering my goal to address different aspects of performing arts. There was a notable interest in the questions I asked and I received comments that reflected a high degree of commitment.

Circumstantial factors – the whereabouts

What does your physical environment tell you about your attitude to measurement and ranking?

An agenda of mine was to try and break through the surface of standard arguments. By way of informality and letting the interviewees guide the conversations. I attempted to reach attitudes that

were beneath the surface of what was polite and official. This was why I paid particular attention to such circumstantial factors, as the whereabouts of our meetings, which reflect personal preferences and professional roles. I experienced transient milieus, offices that seemed to be practical temporary solutions. In contrast to these rooms there was the old art school environment, with squeaking floors, a slight smell of turpentine and dark wooden panels. There was also the high tech, high security office landscape, with the impression of a fortress. This in turn constituted a great contrast to the café or the plaza, the sense of a stage, where some interviews were conducted, accompanied by background noise. And then there were offices, just like the ones I am familiar with at my own institution, practical with desks and book shelves. Finally there were rooms that reminded me of artists' no nonsense working studios.

Backgrounds of interviewees

What is your background as head of management and research?

Just as the settings provide a mixture of different locales of communication, the backgrounds of the interviewees reflect a palette of different professional experiences: the administrator, the teacher, the artist, the researcher. Mostly all these experiences are mixed in the same person. Is the variety of settings and experiences the essence of a creative arts environment?

General attitudes to the REF

What is your general feeling about measurement and ranking projects that have been introduced in your work as of late? What pluses and minuses appear spontaneously in your mind?

Looking at attitudes to REF it is possible to discern general attitudes and a set of specific issues. Basically there is sense of being for the REF, against, resigned, or, less frequently, indifferent. There are few who are downright positive to the REF. He might be a person who has seen the benefits of the REF in his career, how it has opened up possibilities for recruitment into the academic world, or how it stimulates his own work, as witnessed in a statement such as: "It is a good way for me to push myself. It is a kind of motivator." The next level of acceptance would be: "We have confidence in the REF since most of the wrinkles have been ironed out".

By far, most statements indicate the REF as something that one has to accept because it is there and that it is necessary to buy into it to receive benefits. Responses would vary from being insistently pro active to a bordering of acceptance and resignation. A pro active statement might be:

"Engagement in the process is absolutely vital; putting your head inside or being a refusenik does not get you anywhere." A somewhat more resigned statement would be "we make money by this" or "I understand the economic issues. It would be unrealistic to pretend that they are not there." A very resigned statement might be: "we have lived with it – you get to a point where it is a fact of life – as least bad as possible." Then, there are mildly critical and highly critical opinions as in the following examples: "What we lose is time, energy and morale – it is demoralizing in a lot of ways, for people feeling that they are constantly assessed." The sense that there is a price to pay is present in statements like:

The people who are actually at odds with the REF, who feel that it is so instrumental, detrimental to quality thinking that actually changes your practice and forces you to act in certain ways and to re-equilibrate according to performance agendas find themselves in tremendous conflict. And they either address it or some people decide it is not for them.

Also: "If you take the polarized position and say that this has nothing to do with the arts – you are ultimately at the mercy of the private sector."

None of the interviewees claimed that they totally rejected the REF or actively worked against it. The position of not caring very much either way, of distancing oneself to the whole REF process, was unusual. It is safe to say that the statements often included attitudes of many shades, but that they seemed to cluster around acceptance, albeit more resigned than gung ho.

The pragmatic attitude

Would "pragmatic" be an adequate description of your attitude to current measurement and ranking projects? Why?

I asked the interviewees to select a name for their general attitude to the REF. The most frequent suggestion was "pragmatic". Pragmatic seems to include first of all an acceptance of the existing system: "I think I can see the reason why we have to have some kind of measurement ... we have to find a way of accommodating to this." Often an allegiance to the pragmatic opinion was followed by a declaration of a commitment to help researchers to navigate the REF. Emphasizing that pragmatics was a matter of making the lives of researchers easier seemed to be an important point.

Complicity

If you define yourself as a pragmatist, do you feel unease being part of a project that you

are not completely satisfied with? Is “complicity” a word you would use in this context?

When you present your case, do you think of it as “playing a game”?

A certain amount of acceptance and involvement in a system that many interviewees treated with reserve was sometimes expressed as "complicity". Most of those who mentioned unease with the system made statements that described the process as "playing a serious game ... we have some very difficult decisions to make about how we play this." Using the game metaphor, one had practical circumstances in mind such as positioning yourself within the REF to promote teaching ability, research quality or general reputation. One interviewee stated that "very strict guidelines" limited complicity.

Involvement in the REF process – different roles

What is your role within the administration of measurement and ranking? Are you aware of conflicting roles?

There is a range of different kinds of involvement in the REF. You might work on several aspects of REF-work but probably not at the same time.

A prominent role among those I interviewed was that of research director. This is the category I looked for first of all when I selected subjects for my interviews. The involvement of research directors connected with the REF consists of collecting material that is to be submitted to REF panels. One important aspect is to select the theses and scholarly articles that are to represent the respective departments. This is often done by submitting these items to internal scrutiny within the department and then external experts, before deciding on which to select. Another aspect of the work is to make the submitted materials presentable, and to meet the expectations of the panels. This might include writing the requested case studies or helping to supply submissions with accompanying texts, which is of particular importance for practice-based research. The role as a selector and promoter is naturally a sensitive one. It is "painful but important". It may not involve assessment as much as "setting up an evaluative process".

The researcher himself also takes an active part in the REF. Four research papers are supposed to be submitted for the period that is under evaluation, which is approximately six years. Although this is an exercise that the researcher might find quite stressful, it is of central importance to his standing at the university. The effort of putting oneself forward and making one's work visible might imply a conflict with other values:

It is very much self promotion. It is a very distasteful and unsatisfying process. Do we learn anything other than the business of positioning yourself? And learning to self-promote is something we do not do easily.

Another role in the REF process is to be consulted as an expert on one of the REF panels or indeed become an actual member of a panel. There seemed to be the possibility of a conflict of interests here, but it was not viewed as such by those consulted. One does not evaluate the work of one's own department in this capacity. Working on a panel as a member is done full time without ties to ordinary work for a decided period of time. It is like working "on an oil rig". Working as a panel member might be appreciated by your university. There might be a feeling that it is good to have somebody whom you know, and whose values you may share, representing your institution. It is seen as a personal honour for the person who is asked by panel authorities to become a member.

There other examples of shared roles. Being both a researcher and a research administrator is common. Those two roles might imply different, conflicting perspectives of REF-related activities. One interviewee described this as being "both game keeper and poacher".

Scale of the REF – the workload

What is your opinion of the amount of work involved in the maintenance of measurement and ranking projects?

Moving from general attitudes to the REF and the framework of one's role in the department concerning research, we now get into some particular issues that are frequently brought up. Arguments all seem to point in the same direction when interviewees comment on the work load attached to the REF: "It takes an inordinate amount of time – it is like a military expedition".

[The research council] requires material only every 4th year but my institution requires it every year. I submit 4 research papers to the REF. As a department we also submit a narrative about our research environment, data about our post graduate community, data about our research income, the impact of our research and the four impact case studies. A lot of material has to be prepared.

Working on the REF requirements might entail bringing in people especially to administer the process of creating the submissions and preparing the accompanying documentation. For the RAE 2008 a special national warehouse had to be set up to receive this documentation, often quite bulky

objects.

The peer-review system

How do you perceive the advantages and disadvantages of peer-review?

The REF in the performing arts is based on peer-review. While metrics were looked upon as incompatible with performing arts, there seemed to be little worry about the idea of peer reviewing. Somebody explained that this was a consequence of the fact that reviewing is ordinary and accepted in the field of performing arts. The essence of peer reviewing is to involve the universities in the distribution of government funds: "Government needs ranking to make painful choices – they want us to tell them how to decide." This challenge seemed to be accepted. Many commented on the importance of universities investing in high quality representation on the panels. Panels were mostly regarded as representing the cause of the universities, rather than the governing authorities: "The fact is that the REF panels are us ... they are not faceless bureaucrats." Panellists "bring their subject expertise to interpreting the criteria" and "create an equality across the subject areas ... the same standards should be used in all subjects" "If the government developed the standards it would be more frightening."

The general opinion among those interviewed seemed to support the beneficial nature of the panel-university connexion. One might have expected more of a concern about how the "smallishness" of the performing arts world might create problems of bias, but it seemed to be generally viewed as unproblematic that people on the panels might be, or most likely were, acquainted with one and familiar with one's work.

The language of the REF

Do you use official language consciously in order to influence measurement and ranking decisions?

In order to make an impression on the panels one needs to adapt to the language of the REF. There was a general awareness of this. What struck me when I first became acquainted with the vocabulary of the REF was that it had the the sense of a different kind of language that university people, particularly university people in the arts, might be able to relate to without a certain unease, as it reminded me of business language. I was interested to find out if my impression was shared.

There seemed to be a consensus that the REF language indeed was of a particular nature and that

you have to accept that. Typical statements would be: "I know what's going to tick the boxes"; "I know what they are expecting"; "I can speak their language". The nature of the language was described as "implementary" and "hugely instrumental". The interviewees seemed to distance themselves from this language. It "looks scientific" or it "looks rigorous", but is it really? This does not mean that interviewees preferred to abstain from using it. The pragmatic attitude seemed to dominate:

How shall we make our subjective judgements look a bit more scientific? A hunch: we could start by identifying common factors describing those so our scientific colleagues would understand. You have to offer something that they are familiar with – “we can't do it your way but there is a way we can do it”.

Most interviewees claimed that they were able to manage the REF language, because of their long experience of such systems. They were able to mitigate the effects of REF by setting up university internal processes of translation and interpretation of REF language, and procedures of coaching researchers. A conscious use of the language of the REF to promote one's own research, the fate of one's research department or the fate of research in the arts in general, seemed permissible. Some stressed the importance of arriving at a common understanding of the REF language within the community of performing arts. Defining research would be such an issue of common concern.

Defining research in the REF

Are you struggling to define practice based research within a measurement and ranking project? Are you confident that it is understood and evaluated properly?

Views seemed to be unusually unequivocal when interviewees described how performing arts research fitted within the framework of the REF. There were those who focussed on the REF as system very alien to performing arts research. Somebody stated that:

You are looking at a very different kind of epistemology, where knowledge is coming from a very different understanding and set of values.

On the other hand there were those who did not find the REF a particularly impressive hurdle. It might rather prompt an extra effort to make space for performing arts research in the REF.

One concern in defining practice-based research for the REF was to relate to the boundaries between practice and research. Besides the ordinary demands that the department would make in

terms of having a work qualify as research, such as contextualization or contribution to knowledge, the REF has a set of particular requirements, such as an accompanying text, consisting of approximately 300 words, which describes the research process and why research is important to the production of a particular piece of practice. Formulating this text might be something that is alien to those conducting practice-based research:

In music we can learn from the drama department ...:In music we have tended to let the music or the performance stand alone, and assert some research significance for it, with some supplementary text. But in drama they have been much more used to very thorough critical and theoretical contextualisation. The way is to go down that road, to make sure that you do not move or play a note till it is completely well contextualized within its critical framework - I am not so keen on that. I think we need to get better at explaining the research intent of performances. We are not very good at it in music sometimes. We need to learn from drama's experience in their use of critical frameworks, but not necessarily feel the need to take on all that baggage.

REF – impact on performing arts research

Do you believe that current measurement and ranking projects influence the way research is done in your institution? How?

There was a shared awareness that the REF sets out to influence the way research is done, not just measuring and informing. Thus academies need to use the system to their advantage as much as they can. There were two problems mentioned here. One was that academies adapt to the measuring systems to such an extent that research becomes defined by how it is measured: "the tail is wagging the dog". On the other hand academies might get so skilled at using the measuring systems to their advantage that the engineering effects of the system are neutralized. Both these concerns were present in the interviews.

The easiest way to list comments on the impact of the REF on performing arts research is to group these comments into those consisting of emphases on positive effects, and those on the negative effects. In reality the interviews presented a mixed picture, where both negative and positive reviews might be mentioned by the same person, although it was clear that some leaned more to one or the other position.

On the positive side, the REF was thought of as stimulating collaboration within the institution:

People start to value what they are doing. That is one of the benefits of REF. The REF forces you to create a coherent story of what your institution as a culture, as a community, is doing. What are we doing? Why? Who is doing what? How does the jigsaw puzzle fit? I think that makes people talk and communicate and interact and to see, to put the jigsaw puzzle together to see what is the picture, what we are actually selling here, or promoting to the public who are funding what we do. We cannot just be islands to ourselves. We need to connect and interact. And I think that is one of the pluses.

One interviewee commented that the REF does not assess research but the research process. Many though seem to think that assessment goes beyond process.

The big minus is the sort of instrumentality, the language, the narrowness in which the things are construed. Government did not want to really see... it is not in the interest of political correctness to be hearing the multiple voices.

One concern was that the REF did not promote good research in the field of practice based research, where often either practice or research might be excellent. There was a risk that the system demanding high scores for both would lead to a preference for work that was acceptable because it had both these elements, but as a whole was a "duff piece of research". You got neither good research nor good practice, just an acceptable mixture.

There was a concern that the REF discriminated against certain kinds of research.

I think there should be categories [in the REF] which enable the more innovative.... We do not know how to judge them. Things that do not have a box.

The amount of labour required to submit work might be regarded as insurmountable, even though there were support systems within the university.

There is some wonderful research that just does not get on the table – lots of things are lost. Lots of researchers write books, give performances, write poetry, do amazing pedagogical work ... and do not fit.

To do research that fits the boxes you might as a researcher, choose smaller projects and perhaps be wary of how critical you are, particularly if you are not senior faculty. One interviewee stated that if your research did not fit you might be urged to stop being a researcher and become a teacher or an administrator instead.

Interdisciplinarity within the REF was often, though not always, considered problematic. It was looked upon as an argument appreciated by authorities, in spite of the fact that it presented difficulties for the REF panel structure, which is subject based.

Everybody talks about interdisciplinarity but in reality the systems are very geared to tenure track specialization. The REF is a good example, where: which unit of assessment do you go into? If your specialisation consists of an ability to move across several units, then that is a problem for the assessors. They do not know how to deal with it.

General attitudes to measurement and ranking

Do you have a general opinion about the role of measurement and ranking in society today? How does it impact your attitude to working on current measurement and ranking projects?

You have to make a judgement. You get into a plane, you have trusted in the judgement that that pilot has his qualifications so that he has made it up to a certain standard and will cope in case of an emergency.

At this point I would like to turn to the wider issue of general attitudes to measurement and ranking and how these processes relate to society and government.

I have not kept the concepts of measurement and ranking separate although, as one of the interviewees pointed out, they represent different things. According to her, measurement would be more acceptable to academics than ranking, because the latter would force certain well established institutions to re-evaluate their position, once they are compared to less established institutions.

A general point that was brought up by one of the interviewees is the difference between the concept of measuring and "evaluation", which is much less a matter of mathematics than a moral and philosophical issue.

Evaluation is a more reflective, value-oriented action basically positive, whereas management and research are sort of rank and file, boxes, a typology.

"Surveillance culture"

How to respond to the concept "surveillance culture"?

Are measurement and ranking considered typical of the society and the time that we exist in now?

All agreed that measurement and ranking were not only prevalent in academia. Within education they are very frequent, too frequent according to many. There are several instances of evaluation besides the REF. It is indeed part of the routine of the academician; his preparing proposals for further research, asking for funds, being reviewed when published.

The views on measurement and ranking varied a lot between those who saw this as a mere fact of life and those with a grimmer outlook. A generally held belief seemed to be that universities should allow themselves to be evaluated in some way since they are publicly funded. There was a strong consensus on the subject of accountability. Among those who were more accepting, there was often an element of viewing it as a "necessity". Without government induced ranking and measurement, academics simply would not get the means they needed in an orderly and fair manner. Resources would be indiscriminately steered towards larger universities and traditional "scientific" research. The remainder might be seen only as teaching facilities.

There were many critical statements that concern different aspects of the culture within which academics live. It was here that the notion of a "surveillance culture" appeared, a notion not subscribed to by all. A milder form of criticism concerned excessive emphasis on achievements, the existence of a "performativity culture".

So the climate is such that government would not be interested in publicly funded higher education institutions that could not give something back demonstratively.

One interviewee described this culture as "worse than Kafka's Schloss...a process of obfuscation, distraction...".

I feel we are disciplined as academicians. There is a sort of punishment. People think of us as ivory tower, elitist. Government is going to make us accountable in the way businesses are.

To what extent is this a national agenda? Comparisons were sometimes made with other countries. The UK was seen as having a leading role in terms of extensive measurement and ranking. When I mentioned to one of the interviewees that Sweden was embarking on the same route, her comment

was:

I would be very worried. I would be working very hard so that I could keep some control. Because governments do not listen.

The nature of government's measuring, government's goals

Why does government want to measure and rank research? Is there a business agenda?

There was a strong conviction among the interviewees that the government thought in economic terms, analysing the work of universities as businesses and measuring outcomes as products. The very idea of measuring was seen by one interviewee as business management, putting everything into measurable units, "like in a factory". Many interviewees considered the impact on industry and national growth as one of government's ultimate concerns. There was sometimes the sense that values within academia were at odds with government visions:

I believe that our activities as educators and academics are to support a level of cultural development that might not be linked to economic value. You cannot be totally determined by industries... There is considerable pressure requiring us to do only those subjects that lead directly to some kind of economic impact, but, on the other hand, we put a lot of pressure on the other panel members to talk about cultural impact and quality of life impact. There are issues within our subjects areas that have much more to do with quality of life than other subjects.

There was a feeling that universities promoting sciences, particularly those with a definite research-oriented profile, were privileged in the measurement systems. The government agenda consisted of supporting universities, primarily within technology, maybe preferring privately managed alternatives. Those institutions that did not comply might "be forced to merge or be wiped out".

Government's attitudes to the arts

What is government's attitude to the arts? What does it want to achieve by measuring and ranking in the field of performing arts? Are there alternatives to government's current goals?

Criticism seemed to be less harsh concerning the perceived intentions of government's attitude to the arts.

Most interviewees seemed to agree that government was treating the arts with respect, allowing

academic institutions to make important decisions within their own fields. There was an awareness that research in the performing arts might be regarded as inferior to the sciences; indeed, to everything that could be seen as making a more substantial contribution to the national economy. Such a "product" that might emanate from the performing arts world and benefit the national economy was "regeneration", vitalizing run-down neighbourhoods, indeed whole cities, as in the example of the city of Glasgow.

It is time to turn to the Scottish experience.

In Scotland government funding of research is connected to Scotland's establishing itself as its own nation. There are specific national Scottish goals regarding measuring and ranking. There is also a difference as to how funding is organized. Scottish institutions take part in the REF, but funds are distributed by Scotland's own funding agency, the Scottish Funding Council. When the results of the REF are published in 2014, there will also be a national referendum in the same year to decide the future of Scotland as its own nation. The fact that both will happen at the same time is likely, it was claimed, to add a specific national aspect to the workings of the REF in the Scottish context.

The goals of Scottish government in some ways do not appear distinctly different from those of other parts of the UK. There is reportedly a strong sense of utilitarianism – resources that in some ways influence positive change are prioritised, particularly in set-back communities, as in the Highlands and the islands. This is referred to as "regeneration".

Nationalism in the Scottish sense was described as "nationalism without the taint of racism". This kind of nationalism was claimed to be particularly beneficial to the performing arts. Among aspects of Scottish culture such as literature, entrepreneurship and philosophy, the performing arts were described as holding a role as "a showcase of Scottish culture" incorporating the "legacy of Gaelic song and dance".

III. STRATEGIES

Strategies

Is strategic thinking in terms of influencing decisions within the performing arts a frequent and comfortable consideration on your part? What does “strategic” mean to you? What do you think about implementing an aesthetic, a bureaucratic and a political strategy in your environment?

The need to transform attitudes into action, and to cooperate in achieving common plans, seem to be strongly felt in the performing arts: "We do a lot of politicking, a lot of advocacy". Performing arts do not conform to government criteria of excellence, since they are often intangible, they come and go and do not always represent themselves as objects.

Strategies, in terms of addressing different relevant groups of recipients, might be expressed in the following way:

We have been developing a policy here at the university where we clearly differentiate between the strategy for the production of work for government assessment, and the strategy for developing a vibrant culture within our own institution. They might not be the same thing. We must realize that we might have people that are extremely important in terms of life and the community of our educational institution, and the outer world that is connected to it. They might not be the same people.

Although many seem to be in favour of thinking strategically as a way of addressing different audiences, there was also a concern about "the core message", which is the same for all audiences: "The one thing for me is how one upholds the integrity of one's message".

Summing up the arguments proffered in the interviews, I suggested three kinds of strategies addressing different audiences: an aesthetic strategy concerning the general aim of the subject of performing arts, its future and role in society; a bureaucratic strategy defending the institutional program against university and funding bureaucracy; and a political strategy addressing politicians, showing them the success of staff and students, finding a way to make definitions and values within the field known to government and turned into political action. This way of reasoning seemed to be supported by most of the interviewees.

Some mentioned the aesthetic strategy as being the most important one. Others emphasized that

questions concerning the definition of research should be at the core of the matter. One of the interviewees made the point that this strategy should imply an open environment, allowing space for a multitude of orientations.

Bureaucratic strategy was problematic. The interviewees identified different groups of bureaucrats or management, within the institution or outside, and some indicated that there was indeed a "moat" between them. Interviewees from institutions that did not belong to a larger academic unit were happy about not having to deal with a second layer of bureaucracy. Others, who probably considered themselves as belonging to this second layer, reasonably enough did not criticise the layer of bureaucracy they represented and instead emphasized the negotiating, facilitating and navigational aspects of their work.

The political strategy was sometimes seen as a way of weighing the perceived need to emphasize the relationship between art having a value in itself and the impact on economic issues, influencing industry, the economic well being of society. A sense of distance and frustration in developing political strategies was sometimes strongly worded.

Selling points

What are your own selling points?

My final question concerns what "products" might be easy to get recognition for, i.e. aspects that one may want to stress when addressing different audiences in order to receive a satisfying response. The following suggestions are listed in no specific order and are not answers to a specific question to the interviewees.

1. Interdisciplinarity (performing arts creativity connecting to other disciplines).
2. The role of brand names (names of famous institutions) particularly in relation to the national economy.
3. Creative cities make business sense. The issue of regeneration. It is no coincidence that there is a strong clustering of vigorous activities in the creative industries, where there is also a strong presence of higher education institutions concentrating on these disciplines.
4. Growing research capacity (performing arts academies becoming more research intensive, more similar to established research universities).
5. Makes a happy and contented society. Marks of a civilized society.

6. Arguments on how to develop products with an impact on the outside world. Here we have an increasingly real concern about whether publicly funded research is accessible to the public.
7. Service design. Design of certain technologies, telematics, communication interfaces that might facilitate for instance the medical end of life sciences.
8. Contribution to the national sense of cultural identity. People might get excited and realize that universities are not stuffy, closed systems.
9. Collaboration and working within the sector.
10. Taking on a role of leadership in your subject area.
11. That fashion houses do not exist without experimental activity. We have to stand up for a certain type of pure experimentation, and also point out to our funders in government that the “blue-sky” area of activity is important even if does not have an instrumental connection to the economy.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have dissected the anatomy of arguing and thinking to see its contents. In this process – the connexions, of which there ARE many, are lost. In fact all the arguments seem extremely interrelated and it is difficult to tell them apart.

Having dissected the structures, I now aim to reassemble them to summarize my investigation. I will do that with a very light touch, since total reconstruction will fail, and is of no value even if it succeeds.

This paper offers a structure, a way of analysing attitudes to measurement and ranking. It starts with a look at the room, the spatial connotations of your role, continues with your environment and your function within this environment. It then moves from the specific to the general, from a look at the measuring and ranking projects at hand, to general views on this phenomenon. I try to point out what appears crucial concerning the REF: pragmatism and complicity, the process of peer review and the use of official measurement language. The final arguments concern thinking in terms of positioning, relating to different recipients, and using strategies.

The interest and the general liveliness of the discourse surrounding measurement and ranking in the performing arts show that it is important not only to pay attention to the mechanics of measurement and ranking, but also to study attitudes and arguments and the use of strategies.

In conclusion I would like to mention that this was my first longer visit to London and the UK. It brings to mind the following quote:

London - to a slave - was a sufficiently interesting place. It was merely a great big village; and mainly mud and thatch. The streets were muddy, crooked, unpaved. The populace was an ever flocking and drifting swarm of rags, and splendors, of nodding plumes and shining armor. (Mark Twain, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court)

ATTACHMENTS

A performance of performances - Interpreting ranking and measurement within the performing arts as a piece of artistic work

I asked all the interviewees to represent the idea of my project – measuring and ranking within the performing arts – as an artistic work. I present these suggestions without comments. I leave the interpretation to the reader. I have chosen to think of them as a chain of performances within one main performance, a performance in several acts, if you will. The order is of no consequence.

Act I

The audience sits around a stage. In the centre some actors are producing a play. It is a play of a situation. Let us invent a scenario: a scene, an artist, a government minister and an educationalist having an argument about a young person who wants to get into a program. The decision made is either that the application to get into the university is rejected, or that government tells the university to change its decision. What happens in forum theatre is that the play is performed once. It is a short play, like a “Lehrstück”. Then, at the end of it there is a kind of a master of ceremonies who says to the audience: “OK, you have seen the play; we are now going to perform the play again. This time, if there is a moment when you think a wrong decision is being made or something

else may be done in order to change the outcome of the play – you must shout "stop!" and come onstage to replace that character and play the change. And you do it and you do it and you do it – at the end of it hopefully some decisions will have been exposed and changed and, more importantly, the complexity of the decision-making situation will have been made obvious. Thus, you may have come up with some interesting solutions to some of your questions.

Act II

A stage with dancers spiralling and turning. There is a sense of simplicity of movement.

Act III

A big room. Actors dressed like scientists in white coats. They carry large bags of rice. They measure and pour out amounts of rice proportionate to certain statistical information, demographic information about people in the whole world. They make piles of the rice to indicate, for instance, how many people in Britain attended an artistic event last year. The audience ask questions. There is also a computer. This performance deals visibly with measures, comparisons, and also the arbitrariness of the exercise, the kind of silliness.

Act IV

The ensemble of possibilities. An authentic well composed piece of music. There is tension, a sense of moving forwards. It is multidimensional. Several instruments are used. Flexibility and improvisation.

Act V

A sausage factory. It makes no difference whether you invest in a teaching factory or a sausage factory. The end result is not to teach or make sausages. It is to make profit.

Act VI

A play or a symphonic piece in various parts. You have an overture that might describe the nature of the work, and then go into different movements, each of which describes different expressive potentials: engagement, empathy, industriousness.

ACT VII

Circus. A visual spectacle.

ACT VIII

A very big canvas

ACT IX

A mashup. It is a work that is created from the internet – all kinds of input from different websites. It is a digital artefact that consists of borrowing, like sampling in music.

Add your own performance

Designing the cover of my paper

I also asked the interviewees to design a cover for my report.

An audience drawn by a kid [same as the cover of this report]

[Nothing] "Is it important?"

A moving line

Balloons capturing the air

Kaleidoscope

[Sign on a free way] "Wrong way!"

A trapeze

A rainbow

A ruler that can be bent - a "Moebius ruler"

A tube map: You can miss some stops that are not important; people can read it in different ways; you can get off, or get on, choose your path.

A recording device

Add your own cover design

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