FINAL REPORT FROM THE AEC WORKING GROUP FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF FIELD-BASED INDICATORS FOR MUSIC IN U-MULTIRANK

October 15, 2016

Background: What is U-Multirank and is this system relevant to Higher Music Education institutions?

The AEC closely follows developments taking place across European and international education institutions and tries, where appropriate, to participate in and influence them. These developments include sensitive topics such as ranking, which, so far, has focused on universities' research activities and reputation, and therefore has been of limited interest to Higher Music Education (HME).

Ranking is, however, an established feature of the international higher education scene and one that the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture has embraced as part of its strategy for the modernization of higher education. The establishment of the U-Multirank system, funded by the European Commission, represents a new approach to ranking because of its 'multi-dimensional' character.

U-Multirank (UMR) considers five dimensions: teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation, and regional engagement. It combines institutional ranking (comparing whole institutions) and field-based ranking (comparing separate disciplines). Unlike other rankings, UMR is user-driven; it allows users to decide the relevance of individual indicators and refrains from calculating a composite overall score.

After some years of developmental work, the first UMR survey was published in 2014. It now includes data from over 1300 universities in more than 90 countries, with the contribution of 105 000 students. As units within major universities, an increasing number of AEC institutions have already been confronted with UMR.

With this in mind, the AEC has responded to an invitation from the UMR developers to explore whether it might be practicable and in the interests of the HME sector to develop a set of field-based indicators for music. The objective is to ensure relevance, reliability and validity of dimensions and indicators, which, in a transparent way, may contribute to the visibility of AEC institutions and further enhance the quality of the HME sector.

It is important to clarify and emphasize that:
1. **The AEC is NOT developing its own ranking system; rather, it is attempting to make an existing system (which was developed for higher education generally) relevant for AEC member institutions that may be subject to UMR in the future.**
2. **The AEC will NOT require or even encourage AEC member institutions to adopt this system.**

AEC's efforts to explore this issue over the past years

2009-2011   The AEC participated in the stakeholder consultation phase of UMR. The initial conclusion was that the existing UMR indicators under consideration were not suitable for higher music education

2012-2013   The AEC conducted a small project (PRIMO) designed to further explore the possibility of identifying suitable indicators for the inclusion of music in UMR. This resulted in an increased awareness of the difficulties with finding relevant indicators for music, but also led to the acknowledgement by the

UMR team of the AEC's authority to have ownership of the decision on whether there should be (field-based) indicators for music.

Following the breakout session on the UMR system at the AEC Congress in 2013, the AEC Council was mandated to begin cautious discussions with the UMR Team and further explore the possibility of constructing suitable indicators.

2014   Exploratory meetings were held at the AEC Office in April and October 2014. A consensus emerged: with a flexible approach from the side of UMR and sufficient time for careful consideration, it might be possible to develop a set of indicators appropriate to the needs of HME institutions.

Given this result, the AEC faced a strategic choice: to engage further with UMR and potentially be the first arts-based discipline to develop field-based indicators or to turn away from engagement and risk that UMR will become reality for AEC institutions without containing relevant indicators for music.

During the General Assembly at the Annual Congress 2014, AEC members voted to proceed with a project proposed by the Council and agreed to the establishment of a new AEC working group to develop and test indicators suitable for music.

2015   Based on the proposal from the Working Group, the AEC Council presented a set of indicators, and corresponding institutional and student questionnaires, to the General Assembly at its Annual Congress in 2015. The General Assembly voted to proceed with a pilot project to test the validity and relevance of the proposed indicators and the questionnaires.

2016   During 2016, 17 institutions, in cooperation with the Working Group and the U-Multirank team, participated in the pilot project. The pilot concluded in June 2016 with a seminar which was attended by participating institutions to discuss results and share experiences. Based on the experiences from the pilot project, the Working Group revised the indicators and the institutional questionnaire.

The AEC U-Multirank Working Group

As previously mentioned, the AEC Council established an AEC UMR Working Group to further explore and develop relevant indicators for HME sector. This work began in early 2015.

The working group comprised the following representatives:

> ➢ Eirik Birkeland, Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo (Chair)
> ➢ Hubert Eiholzer, Conservatorio della Svizzera italiana, Lugano
> ➢ Martin Prchal, Royal Conservatoire, The Hague
> ➢ Georg Schulz, University of Music and Performing, Arts Graz
> ➢ André Stärk, Hochschule für Musik Detmold
> ➢ Kjetil Solvik, Norwegian Academy of Music, Oslo (Secretary)
> ➢ Ángela Dominguez, AEC (Secretary)

The Working Group has collaborated with two members of the U-Multirank team: Gero Federkeil and Solveig Gleser. Ruth Fraser from the AEC Student Working Group has participated in some of the meetings of the Working Group.

The working groups' discussions and considerations

Following the discussions at the Budapest congress in 2014, the Working Group examined existing ranking systems in higher education. The exercise suggested that it is not possible to reflect the quality of an institution based solely on quantitative indicators. Moreover, the concept of excellence, so important for HME, is even harder to define and capture in terms of quantitative indicators. It was clear to the Working Group that a ranking system with a league table which claims to be able to show that conservatoire X is, for example, 17th and conservatoire Y is 18th, would not be acceptable, as it cannot respect institutional diversity in terms of aims, goals, context and cultural background. UMR, as a multidimensional system, however, can address this diversity by taking into account scores for a variety of indicators. As UMR allows users themselves to decide the relevance of indicators and refrains from calculating an overall score, UMR may also be seen as a benchmarking tool, rather than a ranking system. After careful consideration, the Working Group decided to develop a set of field-based indicators for music as part of the UMR system.

As mentioned above, UMR arranges its indicators in five dimensions: *teaching and learning, research, knowledge transfer, international orientation*, and *regional engagement*. While *teaching & learning* and *international orientation* can easily be used for HME, *research* had to be extended to *artistic output and research*. The Working Group's scrutiny of the indicators for *knowledge transfer* and *regional engagement* showed that in music these dimensions overlap and/or conflict with each other in many ways. In addition, only a few indicators from both dimensions were found to be relevant. Thus, the Working Group decided to suggest a merged dimension entitled *knowledge transfer*, which would include the original indicators for *regional engagemen*t.

To work solely with existing UMR indicators was considered too limited an approach. The Working Group started with an extensive collection of possible indicators and studied each of these carefully by asking the following questions:

- Will institutions have the data or at least not find it too difficult to collect them?
- Will data be comparable with other institutions/countries/cultures?

After extensive discussions, the Working Group developed a significantly reduced set of indicators. The dimension that has been most challenging in terms of finding suitable indicators, is the *artistic output and research* dimension. The main reason for this is that so far no well-established international systems have been developed for the recognition of artistic output and artistic research in academia, similarly to traditional research. The Working Group recognizes that further work is necessary to develop suitable indicators in this area, but still believes that the proposal is as relevant as possible in the present situation.

Many ranking systems work with publicly available data, such as citation indices or financial data. In most countries these sources will create challenges for collecting data on HME institutions. Therefore, data provided by the institutions (through the institutional questionnaire) and by the students (through the student questionnaire) will be the main sources.

In the interests of comparability, the Working Group decided to focus on data limited to performance-based study programmes in music (including conducting and composition) across all genres (e.g. classical, jazz, pop, world music). However, for some indicators it is necessary to collect data covering the entire music education activity at the institution, as it will be difficult (and sometimes impossible) for the institution to provide data covering the performance based activity alone.

The Working Group decided to put an important emphasis in its work on the student questionnaire, as student opinion can provide important feedback on various issues. Student questionnaires from the institutions of Working Group members were analysed and compared to the UMR questionnaire to address the distinctive topics of

conservatoires. The AEC student Working Group provided feedback on the proposed indicators and the student questionnaire and on the relevance of UMR for music students.

The pilot project

Seventeen institutions participated in the pilot project to test and validate the proposed indicators. The institutions represented a diverse range of European HME institutions in terms of size, organizational structure, genres, levels of study programmes and geographical location. They were located in the following countries: Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.
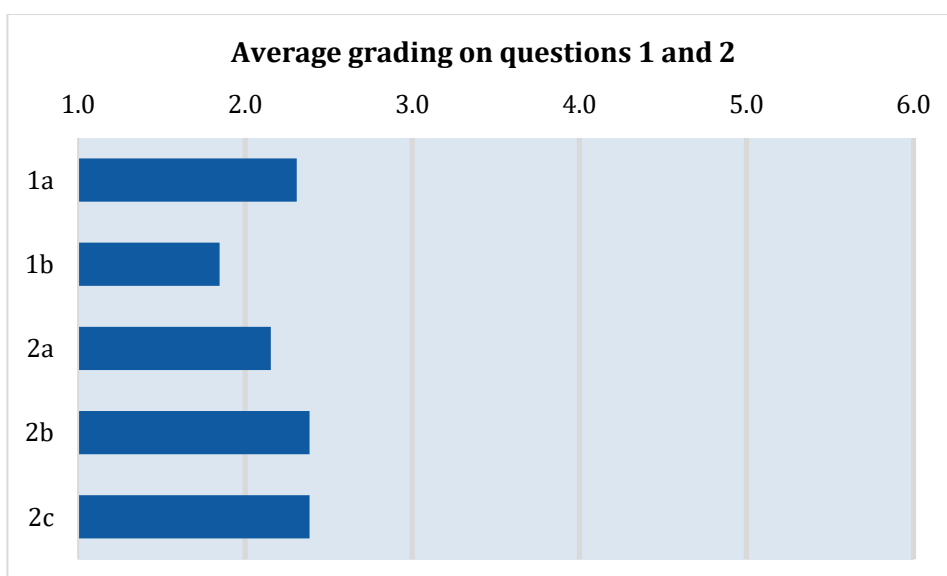
The data was collected by the UMR team according to normal UMR procedures. The results were analysed and compiled by the UMR team and presented to the institutions at the seminar in June 2016. The results of the pilot will not be published, as the main purpose of data collection in this project was to test the quality, reliability and precision of indicators and questionnaires.

After the seminar held for institutions participating in the pilot, the representatives from the pilot institutions were invited to give feedback on the project and on the process. A total of 13 of the 17 participating institutions responded to the questionnaire, which consisted of questions on both the UMR and the pilot project. The following questions posed in the questionnaire related to the pilot project:

1. How satisfied are you with the relevance of the U-Multirank exercise?
  a) Relevance of the questions in the institutional questionnaire
  b) Relevance of the questions in the student survey

2. What is your opinion on the relevance and value of U-Multirank for higher music education institutions?
  a) Did the data collection process for filling in the institutional questionnaire contribute to provide useful information about your own institution?
  b) Do you think that U-Multirank for higher music education has the potential to be of value for quality enhancement in higher music education in general?
  c) Do you think that U-Multirank for higher music education has the potential to be of value for quality enhancement in your own institution?

On a scale from 1 (very good / very much) to 6 (very bad / not at all), the average grading was between 1,8 and 2,4, as shown below.

Based on the experiences from the pilot and the feedback from the institutions, the Working Group made several changes to both the indicators and the institutional questionnaire. The student questionnaire worked well, and no changes were made after the pilot project.

The proposal from the Working Group

The Working Group is now ready to present to the AEC members the following three documents, which, taken together constitute the Group's suggested revisions:

- A book of dimensions & indicators
- An institutional questionnaire
- A student questionnaire

The Working Group has had an open and constructive dialogue with the UMR-team based on the UMR´s principles of being user-driven and transparent in its work. The Working Group´s objective has been to develop the best possible tool to support institutions that will be confronted with the UMR through the participation in the UMR by their mother institutions, institutions that want to participate in UMR of their own choice, and institutions that in the future may be required to participate by their national authorities. As mentioned above, the Working Group would like to underline that from the perspective of the AEC, all institutions must be able to choose whether or not to participate in UMR according to their individual preferences.

During the dialogue with the UMR team, the Working Group established the following understanding with UMR:

- No institution will be included in the field-based ranking for HME without the institution's explicit consent
- It is possible for an institution to withdraw from participation after each year of operation
- If a field-based ranking for HME institutions is established, UMR is ready to form a joint committee with the AEC to monitor the evaluation process
- AEC and UMR will jointly perform a comprehensive review after four years

Based on the results and experiences from the pilot project and the positive feedback from the participating institutions, the Working Group is ready to recommend that the AEC support the introduction of a field-based ranking system for HME institutions within UMR. Despite the difficulties articulated above relating to the measurement of quality in the HME sector, the Working Group considers that the proposed indicators are relevant and may provide valuable information for institutions, students and prospective applicants alike. In particular, the Working Group would like to emphasize that the results of the student survey were very interesting and gave the participating institutions useful feedback. For the European HME sector, such a student survey has the potential to be a very valuable tool for quality enhancement and to be useful for the identification of critical issues within the sector.

The AEC Council's recommendation

This proposal was presented and discussed at the AEC Council meeting in September 2016. The AEC Council considers that the Working Group's proposal is strong and relevant, and therefore supports the establishment of a field-based ranking system in music within UMR. The primary reasons for this include:

- a field-based UMR for the HME sector can provide valuable information for both the participating institutions and the entire music education sector, and has the potential to provide a significant contribution to quality enhancement.

- it is important to be proactive and take control of the development of relevant indicators for the music education sector rather than to wait and let others define the development in this area.
- it is important that the HME sector be present and visible in the European Higher Education Area

If supported by AEC's General Assembly, the establishment of a field-based ranking system in music within UMR, does not mean that the AEC will require or even encourage AEC member institutions to adopt the system. It will be up to the individual institution to decide whether the institution will participate or not.