



Key Concepts for AEC Members, No.1: Artistic Research

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Conservatoires,
Académies de Musique
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(AEC)

An AEC Council ‘Green Paper’, 2014

PART ONE: The Basic Concept

Rationale

AEC believes that **research has an important role to play in the life and work of conservatoires** as a means of promoting the understanding and development of the musical arts. At the same time, AEC recognises that **not every conservatoire will necessarily wish to participate in explicit research activities** and not all who do will wish to attach the title ‘artistic research’ to what they do. It also acknowledges that precise definitions are not only difficult to achieve but might prove limiting to the valid research ambitions of some member institutions.

In framing this concept document, **AEC specifically wishes to endorse the freedom of institutions** to decide for themselves what role, if any, research should play in their activities. Equally, though, AEC is acting at this point in recognition of the fact that **more and more of its member institutions are moving towards embracing research** in some shape or form as integral to their missions.

The AEC’s concept of Artistic Research begins from the belief that **it should be viewed inclusively** and not as tied to a particular orthodoxy. It is seen as a virtue that it should be multi-faceted and avail itself of any research discipline or method relevant to its purpose.

Definition

Keeping the above in mind, AEC proposes the following broad definition:

Artistic Research may be defined as a research discipline that serves the purpose of promoting the development of the arts, and which displays all, or most, of the following characteristics:

- It possesses a solid basis embedded in artistic practice – usually that of the artist-researcher or of individual artists within a research team
- It contributes new knowledge and/or creates new perspectives within the arts
- It is supported by critical reflection on content and/or context
- It articulates and reflects on methods and work processes
- It promotes critical dialogue within the profession, and with other relevant professions
- It shares relevant professional knowledge with the public sphere

The place of Artistic Research in the wider research context

In order to locate this basic concept within the wider picture of research types and traditions, there are a number of elaborations and qualifications that need to be applied to it:

- Although the definition offered of Artistic Research is intended to refer to research **typically conducted in the context of artistic production** (e.g. conservatoires), this does not imply that every type of research conducted in a conservatoire is necessarily Artistic Research; there are types of research that may be well suited to a conservatoire's resources and strategy but which do not have as their main purpose the promotion of the development of the musical arts (e.g. studies on the health benefits of music-making)
- Artistic Research, although strongly application-oriented, does not preclude **pure research**. In fact, in order to make progress, the field of Artistic Research is likely to support a wide range of component activities, some of which may count as pure research, others as applied, and still others as developmental or translational research
- Artistic Research should not be understood as something that is opposed to **scientific research**. Artistic Research should fulfil the procedural standards that apply across the whole spectrum of research disciplines – replicability, verifiability, justification of claims by reference to evidence, etc. – although it may achieve these standards in ways particular to its own nature
- Artistic Research shares with **other research focussing its study on the arts** the aim of promoting the understanding, and thereby the development, of artistic practice; however, it is distinctive in the emphasis it places upon the integral role of the artist in its research processes. In the words of one widely-shared formulation, it is 'research where the artist makes the difference'.

Characteristics of Artistic Research in the context of conservatoires

In a similar way, there are a number of further points that need to be made to explain more fully the characteristics that Artistic Research is likely to display in the conservatoire context:

- **The Centrality of Artistic Processes and Products**
Artistic processes and products – performances, compositions, etc. - are central to the working patterns of conservatoires. It therefore seems both logical and desirable that **they should be similarly central to any research activity** taking place in conservatoires, although how this centrality is reflected must remain something that **individual institutions decide for themselves**.
- **Artistic Processes or Products in Relation to Other Elements**
Although artistic processes or products are essential components of, and in, Artistic Research, there should be **flexibility about how and when they are applied**: at any or all stage(s) of the research process; and either on their own or in conjunction with other research elements.
- **Collaboration between Artists and Researchers**
It is possible that an Artistic Research project might be conducted by a single person who not only engages in the artistic processes under investigation but also possess the necessary research competences. However, given the multi-disciplinary nature of Artistic Research it is expected that **much research will be based on collaboration**. Very few single researchers will be expert in all the relevant areas. Consequently, Artistic Research will usually be done by teams of artists and researchers in which these roles are distributed amongst the different members.

- **Students and Teachers**
Research in conservatoires may cover both the work engaged in by **students** in their programmes of study and that of **teachers** as part of their on-going professional development. Students are likely to engage in, and with, research primarily in their 2nd- and, especially, 3rd-**Cycle studies**, but they will also benefit from being introduced to research principles as part of their 1st-Cycle study.
- **Communication of Research Results**
The outputs of Artistic Research come in a wide variety of forms and media. Any Artistic Researcher has an obligation to the research community to explain both the process and the outcome of his or her research in ways that conform to the normal standards of comprehensibility among peers that are found in more traditional research. However, he or she is free to explore **new ways, more closely embedded in the artistic component**, through which this elucidation may take place either partly or entirely, provided that the overriding obligation of clear communication and dissemination is always borne in mind.
- **Appropriate Dissemination of Research Results**
Research processes and outcomes should be documented and disseminated in an appropriate manner, so that they can be communicated to the research community, the artistic community and the wider public. Dissemination **need not be confined to the written word**, although other forms of communication will almost invariably be complemented by, and complementary to, some written element. It is not enough to perform a work and call this a ‘communication of research results’, but Artistic Research, as a discipline, should promote understanding and respect for the difference between simply *implementing* research results in artistic processes and products and seeking to *communicate them directly through* such processes and products.

Features of Artistic Research that will confirm it as a fully-established discipline

AEC supports the growing number of its member institutions who have embraced the concept of Artistic Research in their aspirations to move forward from this to the eventual achievement of the institutional conditions typical of any established research discipline, such as:

- Its own national and international associations
- Its own journals
- Its own distinctive discourses (not just one discourse)
- Its own acknowledged leading experts in the field
- Its own regular conferences
- Full-time faculty positions in conservatoires
- Relevant Doctoral and Post-Doctoral training programmes
- Research funding programmes specific to it
- Funding for graduate students

Summary of AEC’s overarching beliefs and policies on Artistic Research

AEC believes:

- that Artistic Research, as a means of promoting the understanding and development of the musical arts, has the potential to play an important role in the life and work of conservatoires
- that those of its member institutions who are, or who wish to be, engaged in Artistic Research should be encouraged in this, whilst respecting those who do not want to go down this route
- that where Artistic Research does take place in conservatoires, it is helpful if, wherever possible, it complements the artistic activity that is these institutions’ main focus. This implies seeking out

opportunities to explore research questions relating to the most-played repertoire, as well to little-known or newly-created musics

How AEC will support the development of Artistic Research

AEC intends to support its member institutions that engage in Artistic Research, or are considering doing so:

- by providing helpful indications of what it might entail (e.g. through publications such as the AEC Pocketbook “Researching Conservatoires”)
- by offering platforms for researchers to present their work and discuss it with their peers (e.g. European Platform for Artistic Research in Music EPARM)
- by continuously monitoring and supporting the growth of research and of a ‘research approach’ in conservatoires, not only in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral activity but also in the earlier cycles
- by encouraging institutions who are seeking to develop Doctoral programmes and engage in research activity to do so according to the following principles:
 - Careful and progressive development
 - Achievement of a critical mass of researchers and resources as a pre-requisite for launching a Doctoral programme
 - An outward-facing approach based on building networks and exchanges with other institutions pursuing similar research approaches
 - Support for students and staff needing to develop and maintain contacts with the wider research community in their specialist area
- by ensuring that the concept of Artistic Research be understood adequately and widely, and that Artistic Research should not be something introduced solely because of external pressures, such as the need to increase the number of staff with Doctoral qualifications working in conservatoires* or to score highly in evaluation processes or funding criteria

* *In this respect, AEC is ready to support member institutions being pressured by their national ministries against their own wishes to move to an all-Doctorate faculty. This support does not extend to direct interference in national policy, but includes the writing of formal letters to explain the wider European position.*

PART THREE: Literature (to be developed further)

1. AEC Guide to Third Cycle Studies in Higher Music Education (2007)
This handbook sets out the territory for 3rd-Cycle studies in conservatoires and presents a suggested framework of Learning Outcomes for such studies
2. AEC Pocketbook “Researching Conservatoires” (2010)
This contains descriptions of a wide range of research activity that various member institutions have found relevant for them. Individual members are encouraged to consider all of these, as well as any other approaches that they may find fruitful.
3. Henk Borgdorff. *The Conflict of the Faculties: Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia* (2012). Leiden University Press
This seeks to define in concrete terms the standards to which artistic research should conform.
4. SHARE Handbook for Artistic Research Education (2013) – downloadable from ELIA website
This considers the field of artistic research education from organisational, procedural and practical standpoints.