



Association Européenne des  
Conservatoires, Académies de  
Musique et Musikhochschulen

# Key Concepts for AEC Members

## Artistic Research

### An AEC Council 'White Paper', 2015

#### 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 form of research that possesses a solid basis embedded in artistic practice and which creates new knowledge and/or insight and perspectives within the arts, contributing both to artistry and to innovation.*

Artistic Research commonly displays all, or most, of the following features:

- It is usually conducted by the artist-researcher or through the collaboration of artists within a research team
- It promotes critical dialogue within the artistic field, with other relevant fields of knowledge and between the scholarly and professional domains
- It is supported by critical reflection on the content and/or context of the research topic
- It articulates and reflects on methods and work processes
- It shares relevant professional knowledge with the wider artistic community and disseminates it in the public sphere to the enrichment of cultural understanding

## PART TWO: Developing the Concept

The place of Artistic Research in the wider research context

Research is *a rigorous and formalised seeking after knowledge and understanding*; Artistic Research needs to fit inside this general frame whilst, at the same time, asserting its specific and distinctive character. In order to locate the preceding definition of Artistic Research within the wider picture of research types and traditions, a number of elaborations and qualifications 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 incompatible with *more traditional forms of research*. Artistic Research should aspire to the same procedural standards that apply across the whole research spectrum - replicability (especially of procedures), verifiability, justification of claims by reference to evidence, etc. - even though, especially in areas such as replicability, it must be allowed the freedom to achieve these standards in ways particular to its own nature, and to the individual and subjective nature of artistic practice
- 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. Artistic practice is the source from which it draws its questions and also the target towards which it addresses its answers.

### 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*.

The growing importance of *technology* should be seen as a field of opportunity for developing artistic and research practice in conjunction with one another

- 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.

- Artistic Research as a Collaborative Process

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 possesses 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 often be done by teams in which the competences and expertise required are differently distributed amongst team 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 2<sup>nd</sup>- and, especially, ***3<sup>rd</sup>-Cycle studies***, but they will also benefit from being introduced to research principles and the 'research attitude' as part of their 1<sup>st</sup>-Cycle study.

Research in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cycle may primarily be of benefit to the growth of the individual student; research in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle and beyond should be capable of having an impact on ***the wider community***.

- 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 confirm it as a fully-established discipline**

AEC supports the growing number of its member institutions who have embraced the concept of Artistic Research. It welcomes the progress being made towards the eventual achievement of the full range of 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 training and Post-Doctoral development
- Research funding programmes specific to it
- Funding for graduate students

## **PART THREE: 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" and the handbook on research in 2<sup>nd</sup>-Cycle programmes)
- 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 the development of web-based resources relating to research (the 'Polifonia' database of student research projects and supervisors; a 'living' online bibliography; perhaps an online journal/published proceedings of 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.*