

A thematic analysis of the usefulness of small grant funding for music research

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An overall reduction in small grant funding by public funded research councils is likely to have a significant impact on academic institutions and charitable organisations that also make funds available for research. This article explores researcher perceptions of the impact of small grants on the development of music research. Data was collected using: 1) On-line survey information; 2) Semi-structured telephone interviews; 3) Face-to-face case study interviews. Participants were 43 published researchers based in the United Kingdom. Eleven of these researchers took part in telephone interviews and three participated in case study interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted of the data from the telephone interviews which was enriched by questionnaire and case study findings. It was found that small grants facilitated skill development in the career stage between PhD and lectureship, enabled full-time staff to manage projects alongside their teaching commitments and helped maintain a research profile for university audit committees. The application process was considered to be labour intensive, but the relatively quick turn-around of a small grant allowed research outcomes to have a more immediate impact. The outcomes of small research projects were perceived to have the potential to reach a wide audience through journal publications. Some researchers felt that collaboration on larger funded projects could give more ‘fire power’ to a bid and add more structure to research, but concerns were expressed that large collaborative projects would limit innovation and reduce key areas that are open to funding.

Background

This article is based on a report sponsored by SEMPRES (Society for Education, Music and Psychology Research) in response to government policy to phase out small grant funding. Small research grants have traditionally been a useful source of funding for music researchers. However, public funded research councils such as the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) and ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) that were once a primary source of small grant funding, have now restructured their funding policies in line with new Government requirements. For example, in place of small grant funding, the AHRC now includes a special route for early career researchers in their large research grant scheme. Their website states that it aims to ensure the success rate for proposals in this route is slightly higher than proposals to the Research Grants standard route (AHRC, 2011). However, with a minimum award of £20,000, this scheme still excludes individual researchers with no institutional affiliation and who wish to explore their own ideas on a small scale project. The British Academy has re-implemented its small research grant funding and although it has raised the maximum limit of funding from £7,500 to £10,000 (over two years), it no longer offers conference support grants or travel grants unless connected to a

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funded research project. Given the many pressures on research QR (Quality Related) funding from the Government, there is little evidence that Universities will find it easy to offer comprehensive small grant schemes. The shift in central policy also implies that individuals in less well rated institutions (in terms of the outcomes of the previous Research Assessment Exercise [RAE] and the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework [REF]) may be discriminated against, since they will have proportionately less access to QR funding and so less chance of bidding successfully for any such funds which are allocated via institutions. The likely consequence could be a significant reduction in the number of small grant awards made across the system by universities, with increased pressure on charities to address the shortfall. This article explores the perceptions of music researchers of the usefulness of small grants. The main aims of the research were 1) to ascertain whether small grant funding significantly benefits research knowledge and personal career development within the music sector, 2) to consider how a reduction in small grant funding is likely to impact on the future of music research. For the purpose of this investigation, the definition of a small grant is an amount of up to £10,000. It is hoped that the findings will provide the sector with evidence in its wider policy debate on research funding.

Methods

A mixed methods approach was adopted whereby qualitative interview data was enriched by the findings of questionnaire data

The Participants

All the participants approached were published researchers based in the United Kingdom. Participants were found through personal contacts, searching academic journals, personal approach at a music psychology conference, and lists of previous small grant recipients. The participants represented a broad spectrum of research within the music sector. From the 43 returned questionnaires, 6 participants had professorial status, 29 were lecturer/researchers with institutional affiliation, 4 were post doctoral researchers, 1 was an independent scholar and 3 had PhD studentships. Areas of expertise fall into four categories: Music Education, Music Psychology, Ethnomusicology and Music and Health. Of the 11 interview participants, 1 was an independent scholar, 2 were heads of department, 7 had fulltime lectureships and 1 is a post doctoral researcher.

Data Collection

Data was collected in three phases 1) on-line survey, 2) semi-structured telephone interviews, 3) face-to-face case study interviews.

Procedure

Initially n=83 researchers were approached by email to ask if they would participate in the initial survey. Of these, 57 researchers agreed and were sent an information sheet and questionnaire. Subsequently, n=43 completed survey forms were returned, which represented a response rate of 50.6% of all researchers approached. The questionnaire was designed to take a minimum of time to complete and to provide a basis to explore in greater depth the perceived usefulness of small grant funding (Appendix 1). From the completed forms, n=29 researchers reported that they had been recipients of small grants. Data from these participants formed the basis of this investigation. Additional data were extracted from open comments made by the 14 non-grant recipients on the questionnaire sheet (see Appendix 2 for a summary of questionnaire responses).

Semi-structured telephone interviews

From the questionnaires 25 participants indicated that they would be prepared to take part in further telephone interviews. Participants were chosen who had received at least two small research grants. In total, interviews were conducted with 11 researchers. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared (Appendix 3) and adapted according to the circumstances of each participant. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes, was recorded using an mp3 voice recorder and transcribed verbatim by the first researcher.

Case studies

Following the analysis of the interview data, three participants were asked if they would participate in semi structured, face-to face interviews. These case studies were selected to illustrate three different examples of the usefulness of small grant funding as reflected by the data analysis. Case Study One was an example of a project which provided seed data for a major funding award. Case Study Two outlined the development of a project that stemmed from a travel grant but had not yet attracted further funding. Case Study Three demonstrated the creative use of a number of small grants to fund one major research project. These interviews were conducted in a place of the participant's choosing, recorded and transcribed by the researcher and a summary made of each project. Each participant was shown a copy of the summary in order to check for accuracy. Extracts from these case studies are used to enrich the analysis.

Analysis

Thematic Analysis was the chosen method of analysis because of its flexibility to incorporate the various strands of data in this investigation. Interview data formed the basis for an over-arching analysis, which was enriched using questionnaire data and case study examples. Data was coded according to the specific research questions asked in this investigation (see Braun and Clarke 2006). Three over-arching themes were identified and these were used to structure the reporting of the findings: 1) 'Researcher experiences of small grants' explores personal experiences of the small grant system and the contributions of small grants to career advancement. 2) 'The impact of small grants on knowledge acquisition and dissemination' considers the contribution of small grants to the overall development of a research culture in music. 3) 'The future' explores the potential consequences for music research if small grant funding is reduced.

Results

1) Researcher experiences of the small grant funding

Analysis showed that researchers found small grants useful in raising and maintaining a research profile for career progression but that the time involved in preparing a grant application could detract from the value of any award. Four themes are discussed in this section. 'Publish or perish' looks at the pressure experienced by researchers not only to publish but to attract funding into a department. Skill development shows how small grants enabled researchers to acquire skills and experience on small scale projects before embarking on larger scale work. Conference support considers the place of foreign conference attendance in a research career and in particular the difficulties faced by researchers who want to keep abreast of current developments for themselves and their institution but are prevented from doing so because of lack of funding. 'Time management' compares the usefulness of small grants against the time involved in preparing a funding application.

Publish or perish

From the initial survey, 65% of grant recipients considered small grants to be very useful for career progression. The remaining 35% were equally divided between feelings that they were moderately useful or not useful at all. The latter percentage consisted primarily of established researchers with fulltime contracts. Early career researchers perceived the most benefit from small grant awards in terms of raising and maintaining a research profile. 'Publish or perish' was a phrase used by several participants to denote the importance of research publications in an academic career. Small grants played a significant role in facilitating research publications which all interview participants felt contributed to their professional status:

The grants I've had have produced publications, which obviously feed into my standing in the field and ability to get jobs...it's difficult to prove this, but I'm sure they've been important in my own development and that of the music department.

Survey data showed that out of 29 grant awards, all but three projects culminated in publication. In some cases one small award could lead to as many as three publications. As seen in the above extract, these publications not only enhanced the status of the individual but also the status of their department. For early career researchers with no permanent institutional affiliation small grants were the only source of funding available to support a research career:

In my stage of career they are hugely more helpful than large grants 'cos someone in my position doesn't have the qualifications to go for large funding as I haven't got a permanent position.

All participants felt that small grants were most useful to researchers hoping to move from PhD to a fulltime position, not only in terms of publication output, but because successful funding applications provided evidence of what one individual called 'one of the secret dark arts of academia' - the ability to bring money into a department. The following extract is from a participant in a post-doctoral position which had been funded by a series of small grants:

It's not my role to bring money in and create projects, but I do it anyway. It's a small way of contributing to my department and perhaps adds to the feeling that I might be worth keeping around.

Another researcher, who was looking for fulltime employment, commented that although they had a good quantity of published work to their name much of that work had been completed without financial support which lessened their chance of success at interviews. As one participant pointed out

...the Government measures excellence by the number of publications and the amount of money you have in the bank.

This meant that fulltime lecturers also felt under pressure to bring money into a department. The need to satisfy university audit committees was cited as a strong motivator to apply for small grants. The largest percentage of participants were lecturers in higher education institutions where regular research output was an expected part of their employment contract. The amount of research time tacked on to a job description varied, but all participants admitted to using large amounts of unpaid time to produce research. At times this caused considerable stress, which is illustrated the by following comments from a non-grant recipient:

I hope your research findings will be able to help researchers do more work and actually get paid for it –many of us just use our ‘spare’ time to do it. A few years ago I wouldn’t have thought to mention this, but having seen lots of colleagues suffer stress and burnout, it seems important to say that we shouldn’t be doing it just because we believe in it; we should be getting paid for it.

The lecturer/researcher position was considered by all participants to be mutually beneficial for both teacher and student on the basis that research activity informed their own teaching and delivery of up-to-date knowledge to the student. Several grant recipients used the money to employ an assistant for research support which enabled research to be sustainable alongside fulltime employment. In addition, the assistant also gained valuable research experience.

Skill development

Small grants also enabled researchers to develop research support skills. Three interview participants commented on the way small grants had helped them acquire supervision and budgeting skills on a small scale project:

When you are starting out as a researcher you have to show that you can be trusted to handle money in the right way. No-one’s going to give you £100,000 right off. It gives researchers at the beginning of their careers the chance to show that they can identify research questions, organise their research, and deliver the goods with a small amount of money.

In some cases, small grants enabled the development of research skills in musicians with no research background. For example, music conservatoires are ‘relatively new to research’ and the musicians who work in these institutions are less likely to have research experience:

Lots of people here wouldn’t think of themselves as researchers and they wouldn’t have the training in research skills. Small grants have been really helpful in getting people off the ground on small scale projects.

This particular conservatoire had an internal funding system in place for new staff who were interested in research but the head of research was also aware of the need to enhance the research profile of the institution in order to gain credibility with external funding bodies.

Conference support

Foreign conference attendance was deemed an essential part of promoting academic status and disseminating research findings, but is an area that many grant funders have removed from their criteria unless part of a funded research project. Early career researchers commented on the networking opportunities provided by these conferences whereby one researcher was offered a temporary post at a foreign university. Fulltime lecturers who have no conference allowance included in their salary were presented with a dilemma if they wished to attend a major conference:

...colleagues are finding it harder to go overseas, either they don’t go or [they] pay for themselves, which seems silly ‘cos you are doing this as a job for your employer.

It appears that many researchers invest in considerable amounts of ‘unpaid’ hours to enhance their own professional standing as well as that of their institution. Small grants have been able to ease this pressure but not all participants found this sort of funding helpful owing to the amount of time required to submit an application.

Time management

The time involved in preparing a grant application was sometimes considered to be counterproductive to making the best use of research time. One lecturer/researcher who had no hours allocated specifically for research commented:

I haven't had enough success with grants to say it's enhanced my career. I need to spend more time applying for grants; that's always the outcome of my appraisal, but we know it's a time related thing.

This individual found it difficult to set aside research hours during term time, but also in the vacations when re-sits and recruitment required attention. They also pointed out that ten years ago they would have found the time to apply because there was a belief that funding was more readily available. With one exception, the participants unanimously agreed that the time involved in putting together an application was not commensurate with the amount of money applied for:

For a small proposal, the amount of time preparing the application is nearly the same as the amount of time you are buying. Our university wants to buy out at £500 a day so, for £10,000. That's twenty days work. If you put in three or four days into writing the proposal, that's a significant proportion of the time applied for.

One participant cited this as a reason to 'actively avoid applying for small grants' and three other participants commented on the negative experience in general of applying for small grants because of the low chance of success. Two participants felt that it would be helpful if more small grant givers advertised success rates on their websites in order to help in their choice of funding bodies.

The amount of information required on application forms was also criticised by participants. One researcher stated they only applied for 'easy' ones. They quoted the local funding council as being particularly good because 'it takes a fairly light touch and that's much appreciated by everyone'. The majority of participants would like to see the system streamlined so that the application process is proportionate to the amount of money applied for. The following extract was a comment from a participant who had, at one time, been on the review board for a major funding institution:

Make the effort in applying commensurate with the money you are getting. Strip down application processes where you don't have to write a lot because my experience of being at the other end, you only speed read it.

Calls for more uniformity across the varying grant providers were also suggested in terms of the language used and procedures, which could reduce the amount of time involved in preparing an application. However, the time involved in writing an application was also perceived to be beneficial to learning, not only with regard to writing a proposal but in preparing the background work for the project:

They're great practice for bidding for a larger grant. A lot of people when they first approach the application process think, that it's a lot of work just to employ an assistant or a piece of equipment, but you can look at it another way, the grant writing process is helping you do the background research so there is a positive side to it.

This extract suggests a more optimistic approach to grant applications but earlier comments suggest that there is still an overall low expectancy of success.

In summary, producing published research was perceived by all the participants to be an essential part of their work, regardless of funding or time allocation. Small grants enabled fulltime staff to manage projects alongside their teaching commitments and provided evidence for university audit committees regarding the research profile of the staff members involved. Small grants appear to be most useful to early career researchers who are not eligible for other sources of funding. For fulltime lecturers, perceptions of their usefulness may be influenced by the amount of time required to apply and the estimated chance of success.

2) The Impact of small grants on knowledge acquisition and dissemination

Small grants were seen to be very useful in developing small scale work, particularly projects that were time specific such as research into music festivals. The theme ‘Advancement of Knowledge’ shows how small granted projects can stimulate innovative research conducted in a natural environment, but do not necessarily provide seed data to further the work in a larger scale project. ‘Value for Money’ compares researcher perceptions of the economic value of small grants.

Advancement of knowledge

From the survey data, 86% of grant recipients stated that funding had been very useful to their research and moderately useful for the remaining 14%. One participant pointed out that because it is not always necessary to predict the outcome of a project on a small grant application, a certain amount of flexibility can be brought to the research process which encourages innovation:

My feeling is that no-one ever has the last word on anything, but one can make a number of small contributions which can make a big difference. Just because they are small doesn’t mean they are not important. Some of the most exciting stuff I’ve done is where I have to rethink the whole thing quite radically in the middle of doing research. That’s when I’ve made some really ground-breaking discoveries which other people have picked up on...

Furthermore, despite the lengthy application process, the short response time (in comparison to that of larger grants) was highly valued by the participants in order to make the most of a particular research opportunity. Small grants, in the form of travel awards, also gave authenticity to a project whereby research could be conducted in a natural environment rather than using technology or theoretical based approaches:

The grant enabled me to visit higher education institutions and do face-to-face interviews. It also enabled me to conduct group interviews with music students in the context of the rehearsals, observe what was happening and then conduct the interviews. That wouldn’t have happened without funding because of the costs involved and it led to much more in-depth, valuable data.

Similar reasons were given by ethnomusicologists who needed to research communities in their native environment. Because research ‘subjects’ were not comfortable using Skype, telephone or email and in some cases were not literate, funding enabled two researchers to travel to these areas and set their research within a cultural context. The researcher in Case Study One used a travel grant to fund a research trip to work with indigenous Australians. An application was made to fund further work but the proposed project was considered too expensive to fund in the country of origin. This researcher had no academic affiliation and was therefore unable to approach larger funding bodies. However, in the current study, there is little evidence to suggest that the findings of small granted projects were successful in providing seed data for major funding awards. Only one interview participant (Case Study

Two) had been able to use a small grant in this way. In this study, a spontaneous idea led to a small award from the British Academy which fostered four Masters students and a research assistant. Seed data was obtained for a Leverhulme Foundation award which is currently funding a major three-year collaborative project. The researcher felt that the collaboration involved in both projects played a significant role in obtaining funding because several funding bodies document industrial collaboration and knowledge exchange as part of their funding criteria. Three further participants applied for a large grant on the back of being awarded a small grant, but were unsuccessful. However, one participant gave an example of how one small grant led to a further small grant:

From my experience of applying for a bigger one from a smaller one - I've never got it. I applied internally for a small grant. From there I went to the British Academy for a collaborative project and got that. We did apply for a bigger grant but didn't get it, so a tiny internal grant led to a bigger small grant.

In a similar vein Case Study Three showed how one researcher combined a number of small grants to fund a major research project. This individual combined two British Academy grants, a sabbatical and a matching leave grant from AHRC in addition to personal resources to fund an eleven month trip to South America. To date this work has been presented in over twenty conference presentations and invited papers, including three keynote speeches, alongside three published articles (with more to come), and a book in progress.

Only two participants felt that small grants had not enhanced the quality of their research, both of these were knowledge exchange projects. The first was collaboration between a music conservatoire and a business institution; the second, a collaborative EU project. Negativity was expressed with regard to the inequality of research findings, whereby findings were more relevant to business than music, and also with regard to research tasks, where some institutions were not felt to have sufficiently up to date equipment to collaborate on an equal footing.

Value for Money

Despite the relatively small amounts awarded under a small grant scheme (the lowest amount declared in the survey questionnaire was £500) only six participants from the initial survey felt that the amount awarded was insufficient for the task. Interview participants showed a trend towards being conservative in the amount that they asked for in the belief that they were more likely to be successful if they did not ask for too much. The technique used by one participant was to work out a budget and then ask for £500 less. Interview participants were unanimous in feeling that small grants represented value for money for the grant funders. This is because all the researchers (and in some cases the research assistants) subsidised the grant with their own unpaid time in order to disseminate the work:

I guess I'm lucky in that all the assistants I've used with these grants in the past have kept in touch and kept working on the papers, because it's in their interests as well as mine to get the work out there.

One researcher subsidised small grants with personal financial resources because:

...the work I do is in a very poor country and we are not badly paid so I feel there is a bit of reciprocity going on there. I do notice I'm seriously out of pocket sometimes. Maybe it's wrong, but sometimes it's the only way to get things done.

This was an example of an extreme commitment shown by the researcher, not only to their work, but to their research participants. The survey findings showed that of the n=29 grant

recipients only n=4 stated that they would still have conducted their research if funding had been refused. Although small grants did not cover the full cost of a research project, they appeared to provide the motivation for researchers to use unpaid time, where necessary, to complete the project and disseminate the findings. But if no award was made, the research was less likely to take place.

Several participants compared the impact factor of large and small grants in relation to value for money and, with one exception, all felt that the ‘the difference in the amount of money is much greater than the difference in how it helps’:

...the outcomes arising from 100 small grants (eg of £1000 each) are cumulatively more beneficial to a larger number, and wider range, of those who would gain from the findings than just one large grant of £100,000.

This researcher felt that, although ten grants may not go into the same depth, they would reach a wider audience, and from those ten there may be other researchers who find something to replicate or develop as was the case in the following extract:

Something that cost less than £5,000 has, in a way, had nearly as much impact as if I’d got £50,000. So a small amount of money if it’s directed in the right way can be really helpful. It’s also useful for [university] to show that our research has some use outside academia.

This project produced one publication and several conference presentations but attracted a large amount of interest and the work is currently being replicated in Turkey. A further participant observed that:

If you look through academic journals, most of what is published are results from small funded projects’

As 90% of the grant awarded projects cited in the survey resulted in at least one publication it would seem that in terms of research output small granted projects make a large contribution to overall knowledge but participants still felt that their research was limited by the amount of funding received. The findings also suggest that research might be limited by the amount of personal time and finances an individual is prepared to invest.

In summary, the outcomes of small research projects were perceived to have the potential to reach a wider audience and, therefore, a greater chance of replication or development. The ‘usefulness’ of small grants was in part influenced by their perceived value for money and their flexibility. Some participants felt that large grant funded projects were rarely worth the extra money in terms of knowledge advancement. However, this may be related to the fact that very few of the interview participants have had direct experience of working on a large granted project. It is interesting that the two projects cited as not being useful were both collaborative projects, but the one project in this study to attract a large grant was collaborative. This apparent contradiction could be an area for further investigation in the light of researcher perceptions of the future of music research discussed in the following section.

3) The future

Interview participants were asked how they thought a reduction in small grant funding would shape the wider future of research and, more specifically, how they thought it would affect their own approach to research. Concerns were expressed for the future quality, creativity and

diversity of research but excitement was also expressed about potential collaborations. This section highlights three areas of concern for the participants : Creativity, Allocation of Funds, Collaborative Research

Individual concerns

Five researchers felt that creativity and innovation would be lost if individual researchers were not able to develop their own ideas:

I see a strangulation of funds for original ideas that individuals can run. The only jobs that will be available will be ones run by big research groups or well established professors so you don't get to play with your own ideas. I hope it doesn't stifle creativity in young researchers but I fear it might.

Researchers who worked in the field, particularly ethnomusicologists, felt that the quality of their work would suffer without small grant funding:

'I'll do fewer research trips, they'll be shorter and my work won't be as fluid and empirically solid as it would be otherwise. We can all come up with things if we have to but that's not what it's all about. My work is all about people. I think it will be impoverished. Small grant funding is so important for allowing people to do research on a human level.'

This is an important point because a large amount of research within the music sector is generally concerned with the impact of music on individual lives. Much individual nuance could be missed if smaller projects disappeared. There was also concern that the diversity of research which small grant funding is capable of supporting is likely to be lost in favour of more streamlined, but perhaps less innovative research.

Allocation of Funds

Small grants enabled a wide variety of research to be conducted which was highly valued by the participants of this study but they were sceptical with regard to the way future funding decisions could be made:

Research wouldn't be funded unless it was in a key area, so research in general would be more limiting, less innovative, as big funders fund what is already tried and tested.

Questions were asked about who decides what money goes to which areas and fears were expressed by four researchers that this could be based on national strategies:

Larger grants tend to be influenced by research priorities and strategic actions which may not be the case for smaller grants'

This is confirmed by a researcher who talked about a large grant that their institution had received for studying music and Alzheimer's disease purely, they felt, because the Government had put elderly well-being and Alzheimer's high on its political agenda. Conversely, a music education researcher was concerned about the status of music on the school curriculum and consequently their job:

I'm worried about research in my area. Firstly we don't even know the status of music as a curriculum subject in secondary schools so in the current round of government reviews they may decide music is optional and then any small funding that is available will vanish and that's allied to what I see is a general belt tightening across music education generally at the moment. If music is removed from curriculum then a proportion of my job will vanish and if research is stopped then the opportunity to explore how music affects young people's development and what goes on in schools will also vanish.

Another researcher pointed to a possible issue surrounding the introduction of higher tuition fees and increased demands on lecturer time which could also threaten research work:

With new tuition fees coming in we don't know the sort of pressure we will be under. Students are going to be very demanding, wanting more of our time. so that is going to affect research time even more. It could be that research teams are formed and people come out of teaching for say two years and then feed back into the system. That might separate the whole tradition of lecturing and researching.'

If more pressure is put on institutions to give value for money by investing in their teaching curriculum they too are less likely to be able to fill the gap left by government funding bodies. This participant felt that such an environment could threaten the whole lecturer/researcher tradition whereby lecturers could only conduct research whilst on sabbatical and on larger collaborative projects.

Collaborative Research

The solution to any change in small grant funding was seen by all participants to be collaboration on larger research projects. Although this was thought to be a positive move in terms of a more robust grant proposal, four participants felt that this could be restrictive because of the difficulties of working with partners in a different institution or department and the lack of individual freedom in a project. However, another researcher, who is currently looking to put together a collaborative bid within their department, felt it could be quite exciting. The concept of research centres was talked about frequently. One researcher felt this concept could have positive benefits for the research industry:

In the Netherlands there was a research centre and it was more like a company – different strands of research and people would work within those strands. It was much more predefined and not much room for isolated people doing their own thing. For the research students that was quite good and it helped obtaining funding, there was a much clearer infra-structure.

This participant was concerned about what they felt was a general lack of structure in research activities in comparison to lecturing. However, according to another researcher, a problem with large collaborative projects is that they can be designed to engage researchers rather than to look at the requirements of the project itself:

I see bigger collaborative projects which don't necessarily take you in very creative directions. The large project we have at the college was basically set up to see how they could get all these academics to work together and I found it deeply unsatisfactory' cos people weren't talking a common language.

To summarise, the participants were divided in their views on the effects that any reduction in small grant funding would have on the future of research. Some felt that it would limit innovation in favour of research that focussed on specific outcomes and could reduce key areas that are open to funding. Others were more positive and felt that it could add more structure to research and even benefit students and early career researchers.

Discussion

This article has examined the perceptions of music researchers of the small grant system and the future of music research. To address the first research question which was concerned with the usefulness of small grants for a research career and knowledge advancement, survey and interview data showed that the majority of researchers found small grants to be very useful at some time during their career. The flexibility and quick turn-around of small grants were particularly valued because research outcomes had a more immediate impact. Small grants were also considered to give value for money in a culture where researchers are under

pressure to publish. Although it is likely that these perceptions were influenced by the number of successful awards, interview participants were unanimous in acknowledging the help that small grants had given them at the start of their careers. While major funding bodies still claim to be supportive of early career scholars, one participant pointed out that they are:

... taking away post doctoral schemes and replacing them with things you can only apply for if you have an affiliation. They reduce the funding on post doctoral schemes to 60% and expect the institution to pay the deficit, many of whom don't have funds either.

As fulltime positions become more difficult to obtain, post doctoral work is an important source of freelance work for many researchers. It is likely that early career scholars will suffer the most from a reduction in small grant funding.

The second research question sought to evaluate researcher perceptions of the the future of music research in the light of funding changes. Although restructuring is most apparent in the larger public funding bodies such as AHRC and ESRC, only two participants said they had received money from these bodies. The most utilised source of funding was the British Academy, which had supported 11 of the 29recipients. As the British Academy has now reinstated its small grant funding, there may not be as much impact for the sector as initially thought. However, some higher education institutions who were previously able to fund small initiatives may feel pressured to direct more money into teaching rather than research in order to satisfy student expectations of raised tuition fees. If this is the case, then charitable organisations are indeed likely to feel more demand on limited funds.

An additional concern was a reduction in the overall scope of research funded topics and a fear that decisions could be made on funding according to strategic government policy. The following extract is taken from the most recent AHRC report:

Arts and humanities researchers play an important role in public policy. The AHRC facilitates those links through policy seminars, commissioned research projects and Public Policy Fellowships. There is, for example, a series of Fellowships and a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency project set up in collaboration with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). This will result in a new approach for measuring the value of culture. (The Impact of AHRC Research 2010/2011. p3)

Given the current high investment in sport by the DCMS, coupled with the concern that music might not even be officially on the school curriculum in the future, music is likely to receive only a very small slice of this multi-disciplinary pot of money. An additional problem for Music Psychology research is that it frequently falls in between disciplinary boundaries whereby it is too scientific for arts and humanities but not eligible for social sciences.

The AHRC also states that collaboration is a fundamental aspect of many areas of AHRC-funded research, and that almost 80% of active research projects on 31st March 2011 were for collaboration (AHRC 2011). The findings of the current report indicate that participants were divided on the merits of collaboration. Although there was some enthusiasm for the principal of collaborative work, based on improved infra-structure and a higher chance of funding success, researchers were also concerned that proposals might be put together that favoured researchers rather than research. As increasing numbers of music researchers turn to collaborative projects to further their career and research perhaps more attention should be paid to the nature and implications of the collaboration. One study (Goldfarb 2008) suggests that the career of an academic could become a function of the type of funding received rather than academic merit if researchers were constantly bound to their commercial funders. To

counteract this Chang et al. (2009) propose that universities need to develop as dual structural organisations that allow for the pursuit of research excellence and at the same time research commercialisation.

The dangers of a reliance on commercial funding may also have relevance to the forthcoming implementation of the REF. Although the real implications of this framework are yet to be clear, a publication from University College Union (2009) expresses concerns that the proposals will a) undermine support for basic research across all disciplines as well as disproportionately disadvantaging research in the arts and humanities b) lead to the further commercialisation, and therefore narrowing, of the research agenda. In addition the document also points out that historically it is often 'curiosity-driven' research that leads to major advances in the arts and sciences. A similar point was made by Wood (1990) where, in a study of Australian academics, she found that 'freedom of inquiry' was highly valued by all her participants. All these points are reflected in the findings of this study and highlight the importance of small grants in supporting a wide research agenda, motivating individual researchers to pursue 'curiosity-driven' work and contributing to a well-rounded culture of music research.

Conclusions and wider implications

Music research is a relatively young discipline. If music becomes less important in the school curriculum this is likely to affect future government decisions on funding, making the sector even more dependent on charitable organisations if it is to maintain a respected research culture. However, for small amounts of money the application process could be streamlined to be more cost effective and more user friendly for the applicant. Greater communication between grant providers could assist in this.

Charitable funding bodies should strive to keep the small grant system alive in order to stimulate the growth and maintain the quality of all areas of music research and in particular prioritise early career scholars who are likely to be most affected by the re-structuring. For example SEMPRES states that it is particularly keen to encourage the participation of those at the start of their research career and, since 2004, has introduced a range of financial awards that are intended to foster new research and assist the work of new researchers (SEMPRES, 2011). Relatively small amounts of money have been seen to motivate researchers to commence a project that they might not otherwise attempt. If some funding bodies were to create a scheme whereby smaller amounts of money could be offered to a larger number of applicants this could encourage more researchers to apply for funding and make research more sustainable.

The system of auditing higher education institutions where quality is measured by publications and funding awards means that there will always be a demand for small pots of money to help researchers produce the necessary publications. Any reduction in small grant awards is likely to put even greater pressure on researchers to meet publication targets. Furthermore, many small but significant contributions to the wider research culture may be lost.

This research is primarily concerned with the funding situation in the UK. However, taking into account the current global recession, it could be beneficial for future research to investigate international funding structures. Nevertheless, it is anticipated that international researchers will also find certain elements of these results useful to their own specific contexts

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Appendix 1: Survey questionnaire

1. Have you ever been, or are currently in receipt of a small research grant

(up to £10,000)? If NO, please go to Question 10

2. Approximately how many small (up to £10,000) research grants have you been awarded?

N.B Further questions refer to your most recent grant

3. Did the research lead to publications?

4. From which source did you receive funding?

5. Please state the amount of funding

6. In your opinion was this sufficient for the type and duration of the project?

7. Would you have undertaken the research without financial support?

8. How useful would you rate the grant in terms of its significance to the final research outcome?

Very- Moderately – Not useful

9. How useful did you find the grant in terms of personal career development?

Very – Moderately- Not useful

10. Have you ever applied for and been refused a small research grant?

11. If yes, did you still undertake the research but without financial support?

12. Would you be prepared to take part in a further telephone interview or in depth questionnaire on matters regarding grant funding?

13. Would you be prepared to participate in a face-to-face interview to discuss one of your funded research projects?

14. Please add any further comments you think are relevant

Appendix 2: Questionnaire response summary

Completed questionnaires	43
Small grant recipients	29
Never applied for small grant	8
Grant application refused	6
Specific research disciplines of participants	
Music psychology	16
Music education	17
Ethnomusicology	5
Music and health	4
For Grant Recipients: Number of grants received	
One	9
Two	7
Three or more	13
Main Sources of Funding	
British Academy	11
Internal Funding	5
Sempre	5
Local Council	3
AHRC	3
Palatine	2
Others	4

Impact on career Very Moderately Not useful	19 5 5
Impact on research outcomes Very Moderately	25 4
Did the research led to publications? Yes No	27 2
If the research did not receive funding would you have conducted it without? No Yes	25 4

Appendix 3: Interview schedule

1. What is your general experience of the small grant system?
2. Are there any ways you think the small grant programme could be improved?
3. What do you think are the limitations of small grants?
4. How do you think large grants compare to large grants in terms of the wider advancement of knowledge?
5. In what specific ways have small grants helped your own career?
6. Have any of your small granted projects led to larger funding awards – if so can you tell me something about it/them?
7. Have you ever received funding that you felt was not useful – if so can you tell me about it?
8. Given the proposed reduction in grant funding how do you see the future of research?
9. How do you think the cuts will affect your own work?