AUTHOR(S): MARCELLA, R., MACDONALD, S. and BAXTER, G.

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Measure for Measure: the Economic and Social Value of Creative and Performing Arts Research in the UK

Rita Marcella, Stuart MacDonald and Graeme Baxter
The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen

There are many ways in which one might seek to measure the value to the UK of arts and humanities research and yet in certain respects that value is immeasurable. In this essay the twin aspects of value to the economy and contribution to quality of life are examined side by side in an attempt to assess the significance for society of encouraging and supporting research into the arts and humanities, and in particular the creative and performing arts. As the authors work in quite diverse academic disciplines, the essay is an unusual fusion of both business school and art school perspectives.

Economic value

It is a salutary reminder of the frailty of human effort to begin an attempt to evaluate the contribution to the economy of creative and performing arts research at the precise moment in time when the seven Research Councils in the UK have just 'conceded that it is not possible to accurately quantify the value to the economy of a diverse range of research projects' (Corbyn, 2008). Well if the combined intellectual might of Research Councils UK (RCUK) could not do it, why should the present authors feel ready to offer an opinion? Perhaps because the RCUK objective initially had been to develop a formula or algorithm to calculate research project impact. Many arts researchers will be filled with misgiving at the confidence placed in formulae and algorithms which lure with the promise of a precise, objective, verifiable number or grade which can equate with something as amorphous, subtle, variable, perceived and individual as 'value'. Equally, value is here being used to denote a qualitative assessment, and even when 'value' is used in a strictly numeric and calculable way, we all understand that the value of, say, a pound sterling or a gold ingot can vary at the whim of all kinds of factors, political, social, cultural and economic. However attractive such neat formulae resulting in a single figure might be, these are dark arts and require unquestioning belief in the calculations, often invisibly performed, which have produced the number.

As with all good academics, one must proceed from definitions and so let us begin by seeking to define 'value' in terms of the economy. As Martin Taylor of the Royal Society said, 'the algorithm-based approach was in danger of oversimplifying the relationship between knowledge creation and economic impact' (quoted in Corbyn, 2008). For this is ultimately what we must evaluate, the extent to which research activity and the creation of new knowledge and understanding may, often through complex interactions, ultimately generate new economic activity and boost the capacity of UK industry to compete globally.

While it behoves any public body, including Research Councils, 'to provide compelling evidence that their investments lead to impacts that are both real and substantial' (RCUK, 2008), the ways in which such evidence might be assembled are potentially more variable, from the design of overall strategy on research funding, through engagement with economic actors, to the creation, selection and dissemination of research findings which impact on the economy or the productivity of industry. The research community is unfortunately often fearful of a shift towards applied, or useful research, at the expense of basic or blue sky research – but then change always results in uncertainty and fear. Equally, it's unsurprising that users are 'ambivalent' about the success of the Research Councils (Baty, 2007), for how are they to judge success? There is clearly a case for greater integration and communication with industry. One suggestion has been that greater use be made of industry practitioners in peer review of proposals, however such reviewers are often far less critical than their academic colleagues. Their input might be rendered far more valuable if industry reviewers were given a separate and distinct set of questions to answer, in terms of the value and utility of potential research findings. Otherwise, in the true spirit of research, why don't we ask the practitioner and industry community what kinds of research they would find useful? The creative industries are all about innovation and dynamic change is de rigueur: value might be added by an annual review of the industry sectors, its successes, failures, challenges and need for new understandings. The creative industries are collectively a valued group with little common voice or consensus, where the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) might play a valuable role in providing underpinning research and a set of shared understandings.

Critically, the AHRC might unravel for us how art, culture and the economy are indivisible, whilst offering the evidence needed to influence policy. The real crux of the matter is that the creative industries do need the intervention of policy. A consensus is emerging that the challenge for policy makers is to reflect the highly distributed, self-organising, post-industrial ecology of the creative industries themselves. The creative industries represent a new way of living and working; they constitute a 'Creative Class'. It is not sufficient for support or research and development to be 'delivered' via an old industrial model. Creative practitioners, it would seem, agree with this scenario and the need for the creative and performing arts research agenda to be broad enough to embrace the impact of arts activity and the need for an evidence base to influence policy. To Pat Kane, author of *The Play Ethic*, and one half of pop duo Hue And Cry, this means:

> *'Research in the creative and performing arts is essential because an 'artistic/creative career' is becoming a viable option for many in the developed world. The need to explore, analyze and document the social, economic, cultural, technological and psychological conditions that support (or don't support) a 'creative' life is - to this artist at least - a pretty imperative research task. We need solid, quantitative and qualitative social-scientific accounts of creative lives and communities, which can help both policy-makers and*

> *practitioners discern how a creative society - let alone a 'Creative Scotland' - can be sustained and developed.'*

Kane's perspective is from the music industry, but is shared by prominent design commentator and director of design agency Graven Images, Janice Kirkpatrick, who believes that:

> *'Research in the creative and performing arts is much needed because, other than limited economic data and anecdotal evidence, there is little factual evidence with which to understand, support and exploit Scotland's strong creative industries sector.'*

The focus of both these creative industries practitioners is real and expedient - the altering career patterns of creative people, set against the emergence of a new national arts agency in Scotland, coupled with a need for a better evidence base to inform policy and nurture growth. The issues centre upon the scene in Scotland but they are of UK-wide, if not international, importance. As the Prime Minister highlighted in his foreword to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's recently unveiled action plan for the creative industries, *Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Economy* (DCMS, 2008), 'our capacity to break new ground will be crucial to our future prosperity'. Crucially, these are the areas in which creative and performing arts research can play a major role by impacting upon not just the academic world, but also the wider society.

Social Value

And what of the social value of creative and performing arts research? In recent years, a succession of UK Government Ministers and other policy makers have argued that the creative and performing arts more broadly have a significant societal impact, while acknowledging that little attention has been paid to developing robust mechanisms by which this impact can be measured: '*I know that Arts and Culture make a contribution to health, to education, to crime reduction, to strong communities, to the economy and to the nation's well-being, but I don't always know how to evaluate it or describe it. We have to find a language and a way of describing its worth'.* (Morris, 2003).

The question, therefore, is not whether the creative and performing arts have a social impact, because it is clearly evident that their influence on individuals and groups is wide-ranging and complex. The important thing in terms of research is how and why the impacts occur, and the connection between different approaches and different outcomes. Central to our understanding of the arts is how people use them and how they are valued as public goods, as a source of pleasure, wellbeing and the replenishment of our collectively created culture. This is particularly true given the extensive remit of creative and performing arts research and the wide terrain of creative endeavour that it encompasses, ranging from support for the work of individual artists to the development of major public exhibitions and commissions.

The performing arts are of vital significance to the general public and the wider community. They offer them a feel-good factor and positive escape from the realities of the day to day grind, whether it is through a professional pantomime for the family at Christmas, a visit to a West End show, or watching The X Factor on TV. As a performer one must realise our main objective is to entertain the public. Any study into the significance of the performing arts is essential to gauge the impact it has on the general public. **Colin McCredie, Actor (DC Stuart Fraser in *Taggart*)**

The AHRC's own studies have served to demonstrate the diverse impacts that arts research has instigated. These studies have shown, for example, how an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum – *At Home in Renaissance Italy* – as well as revealing the role of the Renaissance interior in the flourishing of Italian art and culture, had an influence upon the stimulation of creativity, life-long learning, social identity and cohesion, as well as having collateral economic benefits (AHRC, 2008). At another level, two exhibitions by artists showed how arts funding had both brought added value by emphasising the research element and by heightening visitor awareness of the issues raised by each exhibition. Not least, the two artists involved also felt that being involved in the case studies was invaluable in gaining wider perspectives on their work (AHRC 2007).

Although they represent different ends of the research funding spectrum, these exhibitions and their case studies underline the singular contribution that creative and performing arts research makes to our contemporary society, culture and economy. It is unique because on the one hand it transects the production, transmission and reception of the arts and can answer crucial questions to do with engagement, and therefore on the other can extrapolate values for the consideration of funders, sponsors or policy makers. And, as the impact studies commissioned by AHRC have demonstrated, the benefits from the point of view of visitor, curator and artist, can be variously identified.

How important are the creative industries to the UK economy?

In *The Warhol Economy: How Fashion, Art and Music Drive New York City* (2007), author Elizabeth Currid asks which is more important, the gleaming corporate office or the grungy rock club that launches the best new bands? Currid argues that creative industries like fashion, art and music drive the economy of New York as much as finance and law. She describes how these industries are fuelled by the social life that whirls around the clubs, galleries and venues where creative people meet. She is referring to New York, but equally she could be discussing London, Glasgow, Manchester and the creative buzz that is palpable in cities throughout the UK. The creative industries are a key component of our culture and an ineluctable part of our national identity. It is now

impossible to think of a contemporary Britain without Jonathan Ive's iPod, the music of the Arctic Monkeys, Tracey Emin's Tent, Rockstar North's Grand Theft Auto, a Christopher Kane collection, crowd-pulling exhibitions at the Tate Modern, or prize-winning performances by the National Theatre of Scotland. The connective tissue, the golden thread that links these apparently disparate things together is talent and creativity. Our present-day culture and economy demand a never-ending stream of ideas and imagination from artists and performers.

We are now living in an age of mass creativity and innovation. More and more people are taking part in creative projects; consumers are becoming producers. This is especially true amongst young people who understand culture as something they remix and remake through and with technology to create their own meanings and identities. The production and co-production of meaning is now the primary industry in post-industrial economies.

Indeed, in 2007, a report by the Work Foundation noted that 'the UK has the largest creative sector in the EU, and relative to GDP probably the largest in the world. It is a national asset in multiple ways'. At the time, the creative industries accounted for 7.3% of the UK economy and employed one million people, with an associated 800,000 in creative occupations. The Work Foundation also noted, however, that uncovering the exact extent of the contribution of the sector to the wider economy, in for example tourism or the impact of creativity in other sectors, such as visual branding across industries, 'is made very difficult because of a paucity of evidence and data' (p.16). The creative sector has bucked the trend in industry performance, with deficits growing across UK industry as a whole but diminishing for the creative industries.

Equally importantly, the creative industries sector is growing. According to the *Creative Britain* report (DCMS, 2008), they are growing at twice the rate of the economy as a whole, with continuing strong growth for creative content in the English Language. But we must recognise as a country the essential core of the industry, which is built upon creative and talented people, well supported in driving forward the industry as a whole through sound commercialisation and entrepreneurship. Equally, the creative industries depend for their future survival on young people committed to creativity, well schooled in terms of skills and techniques and who are encouraged to see the creative industry sector as one where there are mature career and business opportunities, rather than being disregarded by parents and careers advisers as less serious than the traditional and safe occupations of, say, medicine, the law or engineering.

The DCMS tell us that: 'We will conduct research to ensure that academia is equipping students with the skills they need to make the most effective contribution they can to the creative economy'. Clearly, academic institutions are playing their part already in generating an environment in which creative and talented individuals can and do flourish; arguably it is in supporting those students into employment, industry and entrepreneurship that we might do rather more. Many will start up their own businesses and need to be prepared for the challenges that brings;

others will go into employment in industry and must be prepared for the realities and imperatives of that industry. In order to ensure that this process of increased interaction between industry and academia continues, a number of funding measures are being introduced.

For example, the Technology Strategy Board has announced the investment of £10 million to 'inspire new collaborative research and development ideas for the creative industries', for projects involving small creative businesses and the research community; the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) is launching a £3 million Creative Innovators Growth Programme, which will provide business support in the commercialisation of new technology with applications for the arts; while the Department for Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS) intends to provide more detailed and analytical measurement of the benefits of the creative industries to the economy, and will review in particular the whole area of intellectual property and copyright in protection of the creation of original content and the ways in which these protections are challenged by new dissemination media. If intellectual property protection can no longer be guaranteed, then how can industry sectors such as newspaper publishing and music best respond? What shifts in business models are needed in order for an enterprise to remain commercially viable?

Meanwhile, the AHRC and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) are currently operating a joint initiative entitled *Designing for the 21st Century*. It has a budget of £6.5 million and will run from 2005 to 2009. By working together, the AHRC and the ESPRC hope to encourage applicants from across the remits of both funding bodies to work collaboratively and foster understanding of the different perspectives of design research. The initiative itself aims to support leading-edge design research which will explore new modes of design thinking suitable for the challenges of the 21st Century society. Whilst the initiative can claim success in stimulating new research clusters and collaborative modes of research, the extent of its engagement with industry has been limited.

The AHRC, however, has also introduced very recently a new stream of research funding with the prime aim of increasing interaction between the universities and business. These take three forms: knowledge transfer awards to support projects which are executed by a research team composed of academics and practitioners, where typically team members spend time working in the partner environment; collaborative doctoral awards, where the PhD student works on a project of relevance to an industry partner, and where the supervisory team consists of a mix of academics and practitioners; and awards for students engaged on professional Masters courses where the course studied specifically focuses on the vocational environment in which the graduate will be employed, and where the dissertation is focussed primarily on applied research in a particular working environment or for an industrial partner.

This shift in focus is particularly welcome in seeking to ensure that arts and humanities research covers the full spectrum of research activity,

from the pure, basic, blue sky research expanding our thinking, through to the very focussed and useful research which has a real value now for business. However to neglect either end of the spectrum would be short-sighted and it is important that in introducing new streams of activity we do not simply seek to stretch the wire ever tighter.

The commercialisation of innovation and acts of creativity is not limited to this sector but is certainly dominated by it, and yet there is less evidence of government and industry investment in research in the arts than in any other disciplinary area, despite the fact that they are commercially thriving, albeit ironically amongst a community that is frequently not commercially driven. This relationship is fascinating in itself and worthy of further research.

However, on a more cautionary note, strong economic performance in the creative industries would appear to be closely related to the affluence of societies as a whole and, in the present climate of credit crunch and increasingly less disposable income in the average British and American pocket, creative industries' growth may be adversely affected. The last few months have signally failed to deliver 'the march of growing wealth' (The Work Foundation, 2007, p.188) which a dynamic creative economy would appear to require. Equally though, in a period of doubt as to the security and suitability of conventional investment in banks or shares, the work of art as an investment is again coming into its own with prices soaring in the UK's auction houses. It is likely, therefore, that the arts and antiques industry will continue to demonstrate growth. Generally, however, leisure and luxury sectors are likely to suffer.

Music as an industry had already seen a decline by 2004, arguably as a result of the growing evidence of online piracy and with new models of doing business evolving. Again, this illustrates the need for the industry to forge ahead in looking at new ways of commercialising artistic content. British Music Rights (BMR), in partnership with the University of Hertfordshire, has recently completed research into the music consumption habits of 16-24 year olds in the UK. The research has found that home copying of music by 95% of young people is a greater threat to the music industry's profits than internet file sharing, against which the industry had previously marshalled its strength (Allen, 2008). In a communication with the present authors, Feargal Sharkey, former frontman of the Undertones and now Chief Executive of BMR, stressed the extent to which the music industry had previously *'failed to incorporate research-based analysis into our wider communications... without the necessary facts and figures you're essentially left with a position based on morality'*. This is an excellent example of research embedded in an industry perspective, and challenging *'generalisations about the MySpace generation'*, although as Sharkey reminds us *'the impact of research is always difficult to quantify, unless it leads to action'*. The project's findings will help to shape business models that fit consumer behaviours, through for example advertising-funded downloads.

Publishing is an industry which might be characterised by constant change, yet it is one which has seen improved economic performance year

on year generally in the 21st Century, particularly in the publishing of journals and books. In terms of newspapers, the picture has been very different, however, with most newspapers seeing a decline in sales as fewer people purchase a paper. Free newspapers have, of course, taken off as a phenomenon. The path to digital revolution has obviously had an impact here, but journals publishers have utilised this shift to grow profits, while other sub-sectors have apparently failed to find ways of doing so. Do such ways exist? These are significant questions for us to ask now.

It is very difficult to assess performing arts separately from the music and film industries as no discrete classification or recording of data takes place. New collaborative models may need to evolve for all performing arts in understanding better the opportunities for commercialisation that can actually work. Equally, interaction across industry sectors in the creative industries is common and frequently characterises particularly successful commercial ventures. If one considers, for example, the Harry Potter phenomenon, there is scarcely a creative industry that has not been affected.

The TV and radio sector has shown steady growth over the period 1997 to 2004, but again this has been mirrored by a move to digital from conventional broadcast and a growth in alternative means of access which could potentially undermine the sector as a whole. It is vital, therefore, that innovation and blue sky thinking be encouraged in this sector too.

What Kind of Research Contributes to Industry Performance?

In its recent study of the economic impact of the UK Research Councils, PA Consulting (2007) suggested four areas of research impact on the economy: business and commercial; development of human capital; government policy; and commercial impacts. However, in terms of creative and performing arts research, it is not sufficient to consider solely the commercial adoption of research and the exploitation of intellectual property, as indicated in that report, for this is an impact much more applicable in the science, engineering and technology disciplines, evidenced by the fact that only two AHRC examples are cited by the report's authors.

According to PA Consulting, the beneficiaries of research include: the award holder; third-party product developers; policy developers; the wider academic community; amateurs; the general public; professional critics; publishers; the media; and booksellers. While industry sectors impacted upon include: museums and galleries; tourism; other artists and commercial designers; collaborative partners; film and theatre; exhibition and conference organisers; publishers and booksellers; PR and marketing companies; merchandisers; city centre traders; and transport and infrastructural support. These might easily be expanded to specific industries such as the textile industry and music production.

The relationship between research funding and the creation of new artistic outputs has not yet been measured. How might this be evaluated? The

majority of funded research takes place in academic institutions, and their partner organisations, most notably museums, galleries, libraries, the academic analogues and, to a lesser extent, commercial partners. It is the last group that should in particular be encouraged to become active partners and collaborators.

'Only a small proportion of UK arts and humanities research is funded by the AHRC (around 16%)' (PA Consulting, 2007, Part II, p.24). Much of the rest is funded either from government research funds distributed to universities, or through other agencies and individuals funding their own research. For example, it is likely that the AHRC funds no more than 10% of all arts and humanities PhD students in the UK. Some others are funded by university bursaries, while large numbers are self-funded overseas students. However, were it not for the stability of the AHRC numbers underpinning the work of academic departments, far fewer overseas students might be attracted to the UK to study.

In moving away from a numeric valuation of arts and humanities funding, though, we must bear in mind Philip Esler's cautionary words about the AHRC's 'obligation to fund research to improve lives in terms of health, educational, social and cultural benefits' (Esler, 2008). The AHRC, along with the other Research Councils, enables through the provision of funding, distinct types of new knowledge creation to take place:

1) doctoral study by the brightest and most creative graduates who have identified a new research topic or research questions that have yet to be answered;
2) exploration of research areas by mature researchers building on existing work and stretching the boundaries of knowledge;
3) opportunities for busy academics to take time out via a sabbatical to disseminate research findings or develop a new line of research through to a full funding proposal; and
4) collaboration between academics and practitioners to test blue sky thinking in practice and enable the application of new knowledge in ways that embed value.

Each of these basic types of research arguably adds value in different ways, from building capacity to undertake research through to its application in practice, where its impact is most likely to be demonstrable and measurable.

In the process of peer review and evaluation of the quality of research proposal, it is imperative that questions are asked about its potential impact. At present, peer reviewers and panellists may do this but they do so in an inconsistent manner. It would be helpful in reaching funding decisions if greater clarity was given to this aspect of review. There are fairly obvious questions which might be asked both of the applicant and the reviewer.

- Who benefits from the proposed research?
- Does it demonstrate impact on organisations and business?
- Will it lead to more extensive use of cultural resources?

- Will new cultural artefacts be produced?

According to the research metrics of the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (formerly the Department of Trade of Industry), the UK is spending far too little on research, with figures showing that we are 18th of 21 competitor countries in terms of research, and seventh of the G8 nations (DTI, 2007). Yet our research performance is excellent, in terms of the numbers of PhDs completed and academic papers published, and in the level of citations of UK researchers' work by the wider, global, academic community. A serious concern is that business is spending less on research than in many competitor countries, and this is particularly an issue for the creative industries where there is less of a history of research being funded by commerce than in, say, pharmaceutical or computing research. This is an area where efforts should be made by government and the AHRC to convince business and industry of the business benefits of funding blue sky research.

> *Research which broadens and deepens our understanding of the arts and their function in distilling human experience plays an important part in developing national and international culture, but even more vital is research which takes the form of experimental practice – exploring and expanding the boundaries of what art can do and say and testing new approaches to its manifestation. The UK currently leads the world in the training of actors, dancers, musicians and visual artists – and the HEI's at the forefront of this field can, through research (broadly and imaginatively defined), have a pivotal and lasting impact on the country's economic and cultural future*. **Jeremy Newton, Managing Director, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art**.

What Kinds of Projects are Supported by the AHRC?

Between 2005 and 2007 more than 500 creative and performing arts projects were funded by the AHRC, ranging from very large scale projects of over £500,000, such as a study of audience participation in the dance experience, to those of a very much smaller ambit, such as an investigation of the analysis of musical structure by computer which received just over £25,000.

The 185 projects in the music and performing arts domains cover a wide range of subject matter and can be subdivided into those which provide support to a museum, such as the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, and those funding a project to extend our knowledge of a more specific topic. It is impossible to give a full flavour of the range and variety of these, but a few examples might serve to illustrate their diversity. In terms of the theatre, for example, there are studies of various national theatres, of costume, of the adaptation process, of 20th century censorship, of multi-cultural playmaking and of individual theatre companies, such as Joan Littlewood's. There are studies of subgenres, such as pantomime, dance and opera. Music projects range from those

involving current technological advances to historical studies of, for example, restoration and fiddle music. A relatively small but growing number of projects consider the challenges associated with delivery of performance, such as an investigation of methods of promoting live music in the UK.

Of the 323 visual arts and media projects funded, 48 have a clear and specific focus on industry or practice in the 21st century, while, of course, many more may have applications that are less evident on a superficial examination. Again, the spread is wide with some focussing specifically on the interaction between art and business and the remuneration of social engagement, and on the extent to which the creative industries have taken advantage of government knowledge transfer research funding, a type of funding which is designed to encourage innovation through universities and industry working together. Other projects support new technological developments transforming textile production, photography, sculpture and art, or investigate the particular demands of working in the creative sector in, for example, contemporary urban planning or the use of digital tools in the management of participative design. There are also studies of certain sectors of the industry, such as the evolution of transnational television in Europe and the impact of music policy, production and identity in the digital world. There is even, on a modest scale, some contribution to artistic innovation in order to test what is persuasively titled the 'Sci-fi hot tub' and the evaluation of performative art in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

This is indeed a rich variety and one that demonstrates a pleasing unpredictability, an inevitable result of the process of open competition, rather than the setting of a research agenda driven, usually, by a committee of expertise demonstrating, as committees often do, little more than a collective view of idiosyncratic tastes.

Conclusion

> *Arts and Humanities are central to the development of the human race, they encompass our finest aspirations. Research that explores the expanding boundaries of Arts and Humanities, drawing parallels from different disciplines, can enrich us not only individually but for the common good.* **Ashley Page, Artistic Director, Scottish Ballet**.

In seeking to address the value of creative and performing arts research, we should be mindful of the challenge of seeking to impose measurement on complex relationships, for as Matarasso (2007) cautions: 'the academic and research sector needs to focus less on a short-term, outcome-driven public policy agenda and interest itself more in understanding the processes by which exposure to the arts influences people'. The creative industries in the UK are a phenomenon which merit further exploration

both in terms of what catalyses success and of the value that we attach to that success however it is measured.

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Note: Unless indicated otherwise, all quotations included in this essay have been obtained by the authors via direct communication with the individuals concerned

Contact details

Professor Rita Marcella, Dean of the Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen, AB10 7QE.
Tel: 01224 263904
Email: r.c.marcella@rgu.ac.uk

Professor Stuart MacDonald, Head of Gray's School of Art, The Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen, AB10 7QD.
Tel: 01224 263601
Email: s.w.macdonald@rgu.ac.uk

Graeme Baxter, Researcher, Aberdeen Business School, The Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road, Aberdeen, AB10 7QE.
Tel: 01224 263889
Email: g.baxter@rgu.ac.uk