

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2015– 2016

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:

Music

Subject(s):

Programme(s) / Module(s):

Music, Music with Enterprise, Music and Music Psychology

Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):

BA, BMus, MArts

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Completed report

The completed report should be attached to an e-mail and sent as soon as possible, and no later than six weeks after the relevant meeting of the Board of Examiners, to exexadmin@leeds.ac.uk.

Alternatively you can post your report to:

Head of Quality Assurance
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Part B: Comments for the Institution on the Examination Process and Standards

Matters for Urgent Attention

If there are any areas which you think require urgent attention before the programme is offered again please note them in this box

n.a.

Only applicable in first year of appointment

Were you provided with copies of previous relevant External Examiners' reports and the response of the School to these?

n.a.

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

Please comment on your experience of the programme(s) over the period of your appointment, remarking in particular on changes from year to year and the progressive development and enhancement of the learning and teaching provision, on standards achieved, on marking and assessment and the procedures of the School

n.a.

Standards

1. Please indicate the extent to which the programme Aims and Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs) were commensurate with the level of the award

- *The appropriateness of the Intended Learning Outcomes for the programme(s)/modules and of the structure and content of the programme(s);*
- *The extent to which standards are appropriate for the award or award element under consideration.*

- The programmes' Aims and ILOs were appropriate. The structure and content of the programme allows for students to develop a wide range of academic and practical skills.
- The standards are appropriate for the award.

2. Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?

- *The comparability of the programme(s) with similar programme(s) at other institutions and against national benchmarks and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.*

The programme compares well with similar programmes at other institutions of which I have experience.

3. Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs

- *The design and structure of the assessment methods, and the arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards;*
- *The quality of teaching, learning and assessment methods that may be indicated by student performance.*

- The assessments are designed creatively – ranging from poster presentations to more conventional essay submissions. They are structured to enable students to progress throughout the programme. Modules where there are a number of pieces of coursework throughout the semester – for good pedagogical reasons - inevitably end up with some bunching in the middle in terms of the final marks; this is unavoidable, and not something about which to be concerned.
- The quality of teaching and assessment methods is high, as is reflected by student performance – particularly those students whose marks improve throughout their time at Leeds. Marking processes are monitored and documented closely.

4. Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the Aims and ILOs?

- *The academic standards demonstrated by the students and, where possible, their performance in relation to students on comparable courses;*
- *The strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort.*

As is the case elsewhere, there are increasing numbers of first-class degrees being awarded; generally these reflect the high quality of the students, but all universities, in my opinion, need to be careful about the potential for grade inflation. The majority of students gain 2:1 degrees; that there were 2:2s awarded (not always the case at other institutions these days) as well reflects the range of abilities of the student body and that assessment is being taken seriously and fairly.

I was pleased to see that the highest dissertation marks were comparable to those in performance and composition.

5. For Examiners responsible for programmes that include clinical practice components, please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum

n.a.

6. Please comment on the nature and effectiveness of enhancements to the programme(s) and modules since the previous year

It would be particularly helpful if you could also identify areas of good practice which are worthy of wider dissemination.

There have been some slight adjustments to some modules such as Music Analysis, which are still being embedded, but I think they will be successful amendments.

I had recommended last year that compositions receive performances, to enable students to hear each other's work, receive broader feedback, and to promote their achievements; I understand this is something that might be scheduled for the coming academic year.

7. Please comment on the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching

This may include examples of curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research.

The concentration of expertise in Music Psychology is an interesting development in the department and it is good to see that being reflected in the growing popularity of the Integrated Masters programme; student work produced in music psychology modules was of a very high standard.

8. Where the programme forms part of an Integrated PhD, please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD

Not applicable – but I was very interested to hear about the development of the Integrated Masters programme.

For Examiners involved in mentoring arrangements

9. If you have acted as a mentor to a new External Examiner or have received mentor support please comment here on the arrangements

n.a.

The Examination/Assessment Process

10. The University and its Schools provide guidance for External Examiners as to their roles, powers and responsibilities. Please indicate whether this material was sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner.

Whether External Examiners have sufficient access to the material needed to make the required judgements and whether they are encouraged to request additional information.

Yes.

11. Did you receive appropriate documentation relating to the programmes and/or parts of programmes for which you have responsibility, e.g. programme specifications or module handbooks, marking criteria?

The coherence of the policies and procedures relating to External Examiners and whether they match the explicit roles they are asked to perform.

Yes.

12. Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?

Yes.

13. Was sufficient assessed / examined work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work? Were the scripts clearly marked/annotated?

Yes, although it seems it is not possible to view annotations of student work via Blackboard, which it would have been interesting to see. I was grateful for access to performances of recitals and compositions online, as I could not attend them in person this year, and for the opportunity to hear some of the compositions in the studio. I understand there are plans to ask for electronic submission of compositions in the future, which would also enable me to look at more work prior to visiting Leeds.

14. Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate?

Yes.

15. Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Board of Examiners? Were you able to attend the meeting? Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Board?

I was able to attend the Board of Examiners and was satisfied with the recommendations of the Board. I was very pleased with the administrative arrangements for the Board and would like to offer my thanks to the exam officers.

This year the classification of degrees was undertaken anonymously; something I suggested in my report last year. There seems to be a range of views on this process and it highlighted the importance of following procedures for the application of classification guidelines and mitigating circumstances recommendations.

The Board decided to clarify how decisions were made on borderline cases, in line with changes made to the Master's programme. This seemed long overdue.

16. Were appropriate procedures in place to give due consideration to mitigating circumstances and medical evidence?

All mitigating circumstances recommendations were considered carefully at the Exam Board. I would strongly recommend that the University reviews the way in which it handles mitigating circumstances when discussing award classifications and provides clearer guidelines on how to apply the Committee's recommendations on a case-by-case basis. This year there was a candidate who had been judged to have had severe mitigating circumstances in Years 2 and 3; nothing substantial had been taken into account until the classification of the degree was being considered at the Board. Apparently in this instance the University does not provide any guidance for the amount by which a candidate's overall classification may be determined by the Board; at other institutions the Mit Circs committee recommends that a change might be made by up to a certain percentage, which would make the whole process seem less arbitrary (though I think the result decided in this instance was fair).

Other comments

Please use this box if you wish to make any further comments not covered elsewhere on the form

School of Music

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music@leeds.ac.uk**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**11th July 2016

Dear

Many thanks for your report on the 2015-16 session of the undergraduate music programmes. We especially appreciate especially your comments on our marking and feedback, and the success of the new Integrated Masters programme. Please find below the School's response to issues raised in your report:

Regarding the question of grade inflation, this is certainly a sector-wide issue to be wary of. We are focussing much of our energy on assessment strategy at this time, and are confident that our processes and standards are appropriate to ensure parity from cohort to cohort.

This year — as per your suggestion — we have trialled anonymization in several of our exam boards. We found that anonymity in module marks meetings was problematic, whereas anonymising the classification board was quite successful. We will continue to review our policy in this area since it is a considerable cultural shift for the School.

In our Summer exam board we decided to update our rules for academic discretion for undergraduate programmes, to match those for taught postgraduate programmes. This change has now been applied in the COPA for the upcoming year.

The School follows University policy and guidelines in relation to mitigating circumstances practice, and we note your recommendations in this area. The University is currently undertaking work in relation to mitigating circumstances guidance. We have referred your comments to our colleagues who are developing this guidance so that they can be taken in to account.

Regarding the performance of student compositions, we agree that it is very important for composers to be able to work with performers, and we are continuing to explore financially viable solutions. There are some partial solutions already in place for next year: LUUMS (Leeds University Union Music Society) have this year set up a dedicated Composers Ensemble, which has seen significant interest and performed two concerts of student work; we are starting to get more performance students involved in demonstrating their instruments and helping composers. We will be dedicating more time next year to concerts of

electronic music, also as a way to give students more practical experience with running live electronic music concerts.

With best wishes,

Head of School

Examinations Officer

Director of Student Education