

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT
ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016 – 2017

Name and home Institution / affiliation of Examiner

Title and Name of Examiner:

Institution:

Address for communication:

Email:

Telephone:

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 Progression and Awards Board, to gat@leeds.ac.uk. **All reports should be submitted in Word format to allow the responses to be appended.**

Alternatively you can post your report to: **Head of Quality Assurance**
Room 12:81, EC Stoner Building
The University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT

Guidance to the External Examiner:

This standard report form is in several parts.

Part A summarises information about the programmes being examined. **Where individual modules are listed it is important to link these with a specific programme and award.**

Part B asks some specific questions and provides space for more detailed comments from Examiners. This External Examiner's Report is designed to ensure the University is in line with sector standards; however it is also used to support further enhancement of student education across the institution. It is therefore essential that where External Examiners have presented oral or written reports to the Assessment Board salient details are reiterated within this annual report.

Examiners may, if they wish, structure their report(s) in a different way; however, please address the matters identified in the prompts.

Examiners in the final year of their appointment are asked to give an overview of their opinion on the programme over their full period of acting as external examiner in the box provided, commenting in particular on aspects of development and enhancement.

The report will be considered by the School and the relevant Faculty Taught Student Education Board. It will also be made available to students, with appropriate redactions applied.

Part C provides a formal response to the External Examiner's Report.

Data Protection Act 1998

Comments in any part of the form relating to a named or identifiable student will become available to that student should (s)he submit a data subject access request under the Data Protection Act 1998. External Examiners are accordingly asked not to identify individual students in their reports. Examiners are also advised not to identify individual members of staff by name.

If, in addition to this report, you wish to send a confidential note to the Vice-Chancellor on any matter, please feel free to do so.

April 2017

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2016-17

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Faculty / School of:	Music
Subject(s):	<i>Music</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Critical and Applied Musicology MA Electronic and Computer Music MA Critical and Experimental Composition MMus Performance
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA

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

Points of innovation and/or good practice

Please highlight areas of innovation or good practice within the programmes or processes you have been involved with in this box.

It was an enormous pleasure to be invited to act as external for these programmes and modules. The quality of the programme, including the range of options, the range of topics, the rigour of the delivery and the quality of the feedback, is exceptionally good, and the School is to be congratulated on such strong provision. Module information is clear and thorough: coming in to the programmes for the first time, it was easy to understand how most of it worked. Students are doing a lot of work and a lot of it is extremely good. I was particularly impressed by the best of the composition work, where the School seems to have had a couple of really excellent students and an exceptional one, who produced work of publishable quality. This is a tribute to the input of staff as well as to the quality of the students that the School is attracting. Across all the disciplines, it's noticeable that even where the students aren't of an exceptional standard, the level of ambition and the level at which the work is pitched is appropriate. For instance, the works chosen for the concerto and song cycle module were genuinely challenging and the students had a valid attempt at playing them. Overall, the flexibility of the modules, the appropriate challenges posed by the larger projects for each programme and the strength of the interdisciplinary environment clearly inspires a high level of intellectual curiosity in the best students while supporting the needs of those of lower ability.

Enhancements made from the previous year

Please highlight any enhancements made to the programme(s) or processes over the past year in this box.

Since this is my first year as external, I'm not aware of any changes. However, I understand that some amendment has been made to some of the feedback forms related to performance.

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

There are no areas for urgent attention. The programmes and their delivery are exceptional.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

1.	Were you provided with an External Examiner Handbook?	Y
2.	Were you provided with copies of previous External Examiners' reports and the School's responses to these?	Y
3.	Were you provided with a External Examiner Mentor?	Y

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
5.	Has the school responded to comments and recommendations you have made?	Y / N
6.	Where recommendations have not been implemented, did the school provide clear reasons for this?	Y / N
7.	Have you acted as an External Examiner Mentor?	Y /N

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

Standards

8.	Is the overall programme structure coherent and appropriate for the level of study?	Y
9.	Does the programme structure allow the programme aims and intended learning outcomes to be met?	Y
10.	Are the programme aims and intended learning outcomes commensurate with the level of award?	Y
11.	Did the Aims and ILOs meet the expectations of the national subject benchmark (where relevant)?	Y
12.	Is the programme(s) comparable with similar programmes at other institutions?	Y

Please use this box to explain your overall impression of the programme structure, design, aims and intended learning outcomes.

The programme structure allows flexibility for the students so that they can pursue larger independent projects alongside smaller, more structured modules. It is obvious from the large percentage of students doing very well that the design of the suite of programmes is highly effective. One student did extremely well in one dissertation and received a low mark for a shorter dissertation, which was surprising, but otherwise there was no sign that the programmes were anything other than successful.

13.	Is the influence of research on the curriculum and learning and teaching clear?	Y
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Please explain how this is/could be achieved (examples might include: curriculum design informed by current research in the subject; practice informed by research; students undertaking research)

It's clear that the enormous expertise of staff is reflected in the curriculum: students are encouraged to think about cutting-edge ideas that obviously come from the research activities of staff. The high quality of the solo projects (e.g. recitals, dissertations, composition portfolios etc) is also evidently a reflection of the rich research environment in which the students are working. Students are encouraged to be ambitious and imaginative: in one case, a student conducted an opera performance, which was an extraordinary feat for a 30-credit module.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:

The balance of taught modules and independent research provides a strong framework for doctoral preparation. In musicology, for example, students have the opportunity to engage with sophisticated readings in aesthetic theory in a focused module, which is essential for becoming a PhD student, and at the same time their main dissertation allows them to pursue issues and repertoire of their own choice.

15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
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Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:

NA

16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
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Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
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Please comment on the assessment methods and the appropriateness of these to the ILOs, in particular: 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.

Assessment methods generally tend towards written essays, but there's an impressive range of other types of assignment, ranging from creative portfolios to concerto performances. In the more creative programmes, there is an appropriate balance of practice-based and theoretical work. Occasionally there is some variety in the length of feedback being given by different colleagues, but it is always thoughtful and useful.

18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
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19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
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Please comment on 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:

In the composition modules, it's noticeable that the written/reflective component is consistently a problem for the students, understandably, but I wonder if there's a way to support that even further in the delivery of the module: the feedback is all really clear about why it's a problem in each case, so obviously staff are on top of the problem in that sense.

Students taking the Electronic Music programme were notably weaker than those on other programmes at Leeds; the Performance students were also relatively unspectacular. However, the numbers of students were small in this cohort so this does not seem to be a problematic trend.

In general, the students are comparable to those at other top-class institutions.

Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:

- The areas for improvement list is really useful and effective in directing students to the headlines – it's such a good idea. However, in a few cases, comments such as "continue to work at this level" had been put, and that's not really an area for improvement. I think students want to know where to direct energy *differently*. My overwhelming reaction to looking at the feedback is that all staff are exceptionally committed and sincere in the provision of it. Clearly, their level of engagement with the work is detailed and they are all spending a lot of time, effort and concentration in writing it. My only query is whether at times it's almost a little too long, which is an observation rather than a criticism. I'm sure the students appreciate their engagement and advice, and I also recognise that this is M-level work, and thereby worthy of a serious response. But some of the feedback is extremely lengthy e.g. more than 1,000 words, in some cases almost 2,000 words – and there are some examples where the feedback for 30 credit modules is as long as that for 60 credit modules. That's often in addition to comments directly on the work in Turnitin. In short, there are instances where some staff are going far beyond the line of duty. I'm not suggesting they should engage with

the work any less rigorously, but I think it would be reasonable to streamline things a little, maybe by reaching a consensus about roughly how much feedback should be given to different categories of work. The disparity is particularly noticeable in the Dissertation feedback, where some staff have written one page of prose, some two pages, and some just bullet points.

- In Issues in Critical Musicology, it was noticeable that more than half the students did better in the essay mark than in the abstract assignment. From the outside, it seems a little odd that they did worse in something small and technical than in the more substantial piece of work. There's the opposite trend in Aesthetic Theory where all but one students getting a grade band lower in the essay than in the book review, but I think that's probably more logical. There may be nothing in that but's obviously it's a shame when a good piece of work is let down by a weaker one.
- Almost all of the time, the marks are fair or even on the critical end of fair, but just occasionally I noticed places where the feedback identified a major weakness but the student still received quite a high mark, e.g. a student whose dissertation conclusion was only about half a page long but the mark was 79. It's not a major problem but just a reminder always to align marks and feedback.
- On that topic, staff seem occasionally to disagree about whether certain grade bands are good or bad; for instance, sometimes marks in the high 50s are given to work described as "good" and sometimes "disappointing"; I found a 64 that was begrudgingly described as "reasonably good" while a 68 was called "often excellent". Again, it's just about alignment: I didn't disagree with any of the marks, just with the use of language in the context of student experience.
- The feedback sheets for Recital and Performance don't have a box for presentation (which seems particularly important in performance) or an Areas for Improvement section; it might be worth revisiting those to ensure consistent experience for students (bearing in mind the sharing of modules across programmes).
- There were two or three modules where the marks seemed to gravitate towards specific areas, e.g. in Short Dissertation the top three results were within three marks of each other (68-70-71) and the bottom four were within a couple of marks of each other (52-53-54-53). There was nothing above 71 and only one between 56 and 68. There are multiple examiners for the module so this is possibly a coincidence. Similarly, in Applied Performance Studies the marks gravitate towards certain areas: 51; 60-62-63; 67-68; 74-74-75. In all likelihood there is nothing to worry about here, but I think as a general note it's always worth looking over a module's marks overall when everything has been marked and checking that everything is satisfactory.

The Progression and Awards Process

20.	Were you provided with guidance relating to the External Examiner's role, powers and responsibilities in the examination process?	Y
21.	Was the progression and award guidance provided sufficient for you to act effectively as an External Examiner?	Y
22.	Did you receive appropriate programme documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
23.	Did you receive appropriate module documentation for your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
24.	Did you receive full details of marking criteria applicable to your area(s) of responsibility?	Y
25.	Were you provided with all draft examination papers/assessments? NO – but there were no written exams.	N
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	Y
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	Y
28.	Was sufficient assessed work made available to enable you to have confidence in your evaluation of the standard of student work?	Y

29.	Were the examination scripts clearly marked/annotated?	Y
30.	Was the choice of subjects for final year projects and/or dissertations appropriate?	Y
31.	Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate for the final year projects and/or dissertations?	Y
32.	Were the administrative arrangements satisfactory for the whole process, including the operation of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
33.	Were you able to attend the Progression and Awards Board meeting?	Y
34.	Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
35.	Were you satisfied with the way decisions from the School Special Circumstances meeting were communicated to the Progression and Awards Board?	Y
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i>		

Other comments

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

The School was enormously welcoming and friendly. Particular thanks to _____ for providing such clear information from an administrative point of view and for arranging my visit smoothly.

Overall, I really appreciated the seriousness with which the process was conducted and I was impressed by the high quality and large quantity of feedback. Processes are rigorous and student work is consistently interesting.

I very much enjoyed reading both the work and the feedback and I congratulate the School on having such a clear vision for an ambitious group of programmes.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)*Title and Name of Responder:**Position*:**Faculty / School of:**Address for communication:**Email:**Telephone:***If the individual responding to the report is not the Head of School please state their position within the School.***Completing the School response**

The completed School response (including the full original report) should be attached to an e-mail and sent to the Pro-Dean for Student Education in the relevant Faculty. Following approval by the Pro-Dean for Student Education, the School must send the response (including the full original report) directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at gat@leeds.ac.uk. External Examiners should receive a formal response no later than six weeks after receipt of the original report.

Response to Points of innovation and/or good practice

It is particularly pleasing to read the examiner's comments that highlight not only the quality of student work in the composition modules, where some particularly outstanding work has been produced this year, but also the comments that draw attention to the level of ambition that is evident in work produced across the School of Music's MA programmes. The suite of modules that comprise these programmes, and the programmes themselves, are designed to promote flexibility for students to explore and develop in a breadth of areas that they are interested in and passionate about, as the examiner identifies, and it is gratifying to see the impact of this aspect of the programme design being reflected in the breadth and quality of work that students are producing.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

N/A

Response to Matters for Urgent Attention

If any areas have been identified for urgent attention before the programme is offered again please provide a specific response to them here:

N/A

Response to questions 1-7 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Standards**Response to questions 8 to 16 (and related comments)**

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

In line with core principles of the Leeds Curriculum, the notion of research-based learning is pivotal to the reviewed programmes, not least in the larger independent project modules to which the examiner refers. The examiner's comments about student achievement in such modules and their relation to both the expertise of individual staff members and the general research-oriented environment in the School are particularly encouraging to read, as are the points about the programmes serving as effective preparation for doctoral study. The situation in which a high-achieving student received a strong mark for one dissertation but a much lower mark for their shorter dissertation does indeed appear to be atypical, and likely related to subject-specific challenges associated with the shorter piece of work. However, this particular case serves as a timely reminder to the programme team of the potential pitfalls that go hand-in-hand with the opportunities that the breadth of choice on the programme can allow, and the need to continue to try to minimise the impact of any such potential pitfalls insofar as is possible. One such response that the School has taken, whilst not likely to have been an influential factor in this particular case, is to change the deadline of the Short dissertation module as part of our on-going process of monitoring assessment load and seeking to most effectively support students' skill development.

Assessment and Feedback

Response to questions 17 to 19 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

The constructive and detailed comments from the examiner are immensely helpful for the School as we continue to monitor our assessment and feedback provision. Since the examiner's visit, where several of these observations were also shared verbally, the School has re-circulated a guide which outlines good practice for written feedback and addresses some of the points the examiner has raised surrounding: the transparency with which language used in feedback aligns with numerical marks; good practice in writing the three points for improvement; and consistency in the length of feedback provided, particularly in relation to the amount of module credits an assignment is worth. Equally, following the examiner's visit, the performance team have made amendments to the recital feedback sheets in line with his comments about adding a presentation section to these documents. Internal examiners responsible for the listed modules have been alerted to the examiner's observations in order that they can be vigilant in monitoring the trends surrounding specific assessment components that have been identified in this report, and in order that they can more proactively support students in preparing for the specific assignments that have been identified.

The Progression and Awards Process

Response to questions 20-35 (and related comments)

Schools may provide a general response; however, where Examiners raise specific points these must be addressed individually:

N/A

Other comments

Response to items included in the 'Other Comments' section of the report

The School of Music is glad that the process (particularly regarding the logistical arrangements surrounding the examiner's visit) was so clear and positive, not least given that this was the examiner's first year in post. We very much look forward to working with the examiner again across the remainder of his tenure.