

The University of Leeds
EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2017-18

QAT Received 01/11/2018

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:

Faculty / School of:

Music

Subject(s):

Music

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MMus Performance; MA Electronic and Computer Music; MA Critical and Applied Musicology; MMus Critical and Experimental Composition; Dissertation module for all programmes.

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

MMus/MA (see above)

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 act as external for all four programmes, which are consistently excellent. Examples of innovation and good practice include:

MMus Critical and Experimental Composition: This is clearly an exceptional programme because the entire cohort produced work of the highest standard. The structure of the programme allows sufficient flexibility for students to design their work to suit their independent research interests yet provides enough structure to control the process. The written commentaries by the top two students were exemplary and helped to formulate the compositions as research. The top submissions were of doctoral standard or potential.

MMus Electronic and Computer Music: The three main modules for this programme provide students with a framework to develop their skills as composers and scholars. The Contexts module is especially rewarding, helping students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the issues surrounding their creative work, and all students attained a Merit on this module this year.

MMus Critical and Applied Musicology: There was a significant amount of excellent work here; one of the students achieved a Distinction in all modules. An example of outstanding innovation is the Editing and Archival Studies module for which one student used the University's special collections to produce a critical edition of scenes from an opera. Dissertation work allows students to pursue a range of interests across genres and using a range of methodologies. The Aesthetic Theory module is extraordinarily rigorous and stimulating and the best piece of work here was impressively sophisticated.

MMus Performance: The Performance programme offers an unusually stimulating and interesting range of modules that provides both flexibility and support. The Concerto/Extended Work module has produced some excellent work this year, with the top two submissions coming from completely different genres: this shows that the module is working well for different kinds of musicians. Feedback focuses on expression and interpretation, not just technique, which seems to help students to enhance their work. The Applied Performance Studies is remarkably ambitious too, with students conducting or performing large roles in operas alongside reflective work.

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

- The Composition programme has produced stronger written work this year, showing that all students have a clear understanding of why the commentaries are important for the execution of the compositions.
- Feedback for the Performance programme has become even clearer, focusing more on what students need to focus on to improve their general performance quality.
- On the Musicology programme, the Aesthetic Theory module has produced work of a higher standard this year, which is unquestionably the result of robust staff input in a challenging module.
- The ECM programme has continued to develop the importance and quality of the contextual work, and even where students are not always pursuing this in the creative modules, the feedback is consistently lucid in explaining why it matters.

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

- On the Musicology programme, staff could consider awarding slightly higher marks at the upper end of the range. Marks rarely stray above the low 70s, even when it is comparable to work in the other programmes that is achieving higher marks. The current (large) gap between the highest marks awarded to dissertations written by students on (e.g.) the Music Psychology programme and those on the Musicology programme is not entirely reflective of the relative merits of the work.
- On the Performance programme, it would be beneficial to weaker students on the Extended Work module if a repertoire approval process could be put in place – or made stronger, if it already exists – to ensure that students do not attempt to take on concerto work that is impossibly taxing for their technical facility. (Clearly students have a responsibility for this too, of course!)
- Across the board, the School could usefully discuss the relative importance of writing in the assessment process. Modules are often inconsistent in bringing marks down for weaker prose, or the balance between content and expression is inconsistent across modules and programmes.
- Staff in the School are still producing a strikingly large quantity of feedback for student work. The feedback is exceptionally insightful, detailed and thoughtful, but the School should consider whether staff time/energy could be conserved by using a more concise or structured system. On most feedback forms, the bulleted list of “areas of improvement” at the bottom is the most useful and communicative part of the feedback. Staff could not possibly be working harder to provide feedback and the consistent level of commitment from all colleagues in assessing work rigorously is almost humbling. I am also aware that NSS creates a daunting pressure on staff to “improve” feedback. However, a number of feedback forms contain typographical or even grammatical errors, no doubt because of the attempt to provide as much detail as possible under time constraints, and this clearly creates a problem when berating students for not proofreading their work. Perhaps one problem is that at times, the level of detail in the feedback explains to students how they could have made their (e.g.) essays of professional quality, rather than merely improving them to M-level standard. Pedagogical research has shown that more feedback does not necessarily make for “better” feedback; nor (crucially) does it necessarily improve student satisfaction. This is entirely a matter for the School to discuss and resolve and not for an external examiner to dictate, but I am struck by the staff’s stunning dedication to all aspects of learning and teaching and naturally sympathetic about the impact on staff wellbeing of writing enormous amounts of feedback.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment

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

For Examiners completing their term of appointment

4.	Have you observed improvements in the programme(s) over the period of your appointment?	Y / N
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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.

All four programmes are well designed and the range of modules on offer is exceptional. Occasionally, there is a problem (i.e. the marks are lower) when students from one programme take on a module designed for another, and staff could consider whether additional support might be needed. Documentation makes the structure, design and ILOs clear and the programmes are all working extremely well, as I have noted above.

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)

All four programmes are good at facilitating opportunities for students to use their creativity to achieve intellectual independence. For example, students on the Musicology programme use interviews and special collections to do original research; the ECM and Composition programmes allow students freedom in conceiving their creative projects; on the Performance programme, students can use the Applied Performance Studies to pursue external opportunities such as performing a gig or conducting an opera. The ECM, Performance and Composition programmes are also excellent at embedding creative practice into an intellectual context.

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:

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:

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
<p><i>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.</i></p> <p>All modules provide clear documentation online to demonstrate the design of the learning activities and ILOs. Assessment is mostly by coursework or performance, and most assessments are so rich and diverse that it is clear what students have to do to achieve the ILOs.</p>		
18.	Is the design and structure of the assessment methods appropriate to the level of award?	Y
19.	Were students given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the programme aims and intended learning outcomes?	Y
<p><i>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:</i></p> <p>It is clear across all programmes that the School expects a high standard, comparable with other Russell Group institutions. One or two weak students on the ECM and Performance programmes have been appropriately assessed as performing below the rest of the cohort.</p>		
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i></p>		

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?	N/A
26.	Was the nature and level of the assessment questions appropriate?	N/A
27.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments on assessment questions?	N/A
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?	N/A
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

It has again been a great pleasure to work with the School. Staff are exceptionally professional and welcoming and the seriousness and energy with which they approach their work is commendable.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

Music

Programme(s) / Module(s):

MMus Performance; MA Electronic and Computer Music; MA Critical and Applied Musicology; MMus Critical and Experimental Composition; Dissertation module for all programmes.

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

MMus / MA

Title and Name of Responder:

Position*:

Assessment Lead

Faculty / School of:

Music

Address for communication:

School of Music
University of Leeds
LEEDS
LS2 9JT

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

The examiner's report identifies the breadth of provision offered in each programme and it is pleasing, with the examiner, to reflect on particular student success and ambition across all four programmes this year. As the examiner notes, the composition cohort has been particularly strong, with two of the students referenced here going on to doctoral research or considering doctoral study at a later research.

Response to Enhancements made from the previous year

Colleagues in the School of Music have taken time to consider and respond to the points raised in the examiner's report from last year. It is pleasing to see these efforts being borne out in practice and enhancing our provision for students in terms of module delivery and feedback on assessment.

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:

- Staff on the Musicology team intend to revisit the assessment criteria to reflect on how they award marks for work in the higher grade bands.
- Repertoire chosen by students on the extended work modules in the Performance programmes are made primarily via consultation with the students' instrumental tutors. In the 2018-19 session, students are being encouraged to bring their repertoire choices to module tutors from Week 5 in the first Semester in order to enable the efficacy of these repertoire choices to also be gauged by the module tutors.
- The School will continue to engage with the issues surrounding marking of content and quality of expression in the context of considering how to ensure compliance with the University's recent inclusivity baseline standards and as part of on-going discussions surrounding this issue via forums such as STSEC.
- The examiner's comments about the quality and quantity of feedback provided by the School resonate with the comments of external examiners on other programmes, and the School is considering the volume of feedback that it provides as a matter of urgency. Teaching Enhancement Strand activity and discussions at

STSEC are specifically being targeted at considering how to reduce and standardise the amount of feedback provided, whilst not compromising on the quality and pedagogic value of formative feedback. Strategies for supporting students to better engage with feedback will also be discussed via these forums.

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:

The opportunity to take optional modules beyond their immediate area of specialism is an option that is appealing to many of our students. Modules such as the Individual Project module (in which students audit undergraduate modules in such areas and use these as a basis for designing independent research projects if it is felt that they might find equivalent M-level modules too challenging in terms of the required pre-requisite knowledge or experience for study at TPG level) have been put in place to try and mitigate for the challenges that the examiner notes in relation to these students. However, in addition to this initial triage mechanism, we will advise staff to remain attentive towards the progress of students from other programmes who may be undertaking their modules, in order that they might continue to highlight to these students the various support mechanisms available such as staff drop-in hours and the opportunity to ask questions via e-mail.

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:

N/A

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 thankful to _____ for the supportive, detailed and pertinent comments in _____ report, which echo areas that we are currently prioritising in trying to develop our provision and processes. _____ observations will be very helpful in informing our discussions going forward.