

**The University of Leeds**  
**EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QA Team received 15/07/2019

**Part A: General Information**

**Subject area and awards being examined**

*Title and Name of Examiner:*

*Faculty / School of:*

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures / School of Music

*Subject(s):*

*Music*

*Programme(s) / Module(s):*

BA Music, BMus Music, BA Music with Enterprise

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

BA, BMus

**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. The level of detail in the feedback reports (typically 300–400 words and sometimes significantly more), coupled to the consistent identification of three key areas for improvement per assessment, represents good practice. Feedback therefore rightly serves the dual function of explaining the mark, and offering advice for the student to take forward in future assessments. The reports were often also helpfully subdivided into categories such as use of evidence/use of sources, structure and planning, content and ideas, and presentation (following the assessment criteria), and any late penalties were clearly stated.*

**Enhancements made from the previous year**

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

**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*

**For Examiners in the first year of appointment only**

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 only**

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 is well structured with a diverse range of options available to the students and a clear sense in which the programme is distinctive, not least in its research-led offering. I am aware that the School of Music aspires to provide for the students a unique experience, an aspiration that in my opinion is being met.

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)*

There is a strong sense in which the curriculum is led by the specific research of individual academics, most notably in terms of the topics of some of the modules (e.g. Special Study in Musicology, Music in Context). Students are also encouraged to undertake original research themselves, not least in the dissertation module and, indeed, in many of the other modules in upper years of the programme.

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:*

There is no PSRB appropriate to the accreditation of these programmes.

## 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.*

A variety of appropriate assessment methods are used, with significant use being made of oral presentations and literature reviews in addition to, or as an alternative to, the standard written essay—which is particularly valuable as arts students might well excel more in oral presentation than written formats. Formative assessments rightly gave students the opportunity to improve (and sometimes, to shape the student's choice as to which assessment method was best for them).

The arrangements for the marking of modules and the classification of awards seems fair, and organisation and implementation of the totality of the assessment process is commendable. It should be noted that in addition to reviewing students' written work and marking at the end of the academic year, I have also been given the opportunity to review and approve examination papers throughout the year, and to review the recital performances and oral presentations via live stream and video recordings.

Student performance indicates a high quality of teaching, learning, and assessment methods, leading to an enviable level of student attainment, for instance, in the dissertation.

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

*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:*

The academic standards demonstrated by the students were generally high, and compare favourably to students on comparable courses at other UK HEIs. I was impressed by much of the work I reviewed, but equally I note that examiners were unafraid to award low, even failing, marks if a student had struggled to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

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

My only concern with the commendable level of detail of the feedback reports is one of sustainability. The quality and quantity of feedback provided by every examiner without exception must be quite time intensive to produce, and I would want to be sure that the students were engaging with the feedback to an extent that would warrant such meticulous treatment.

Occasionally I felt that in the literature reviews, students might have needed more support in narrowing down their enquiries to manageable proportions. It isn't really possible to deal with (to cite just two examples) the whole of the history of music on film, or how sound recording technology has changed music, in just 1,000 words.

### 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?	Y
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**

Following the Progression and Awards Board, I was left with the sense that the academic staff had, in some cases, been required to work under significant time pressure in order to turn around the marking in time. If this is indeed the case then it may be prudent for the University to review the timeframes and make adjustments accordingly.

**Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)**

Title and Name of Examiner:

Subject(s):

*Music*

Programme(s) / Module(s):

BA Music, BMus Music, BA Music with Enterprise

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

BA, BMus

Title and Name of Responder:

Position\*:

School Assessment Lead

Faculty / School of:

*Music*

Address for communication:

School of Music, University of 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) must be sent directly to the External Examiner. A copy must also be emailed to the Quality Assurance Team at [gat@leeds.ac.uk](mailto: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**

comments about the detail and rigour of assessment routinely provided by the School echo those made by predecessor and external examiners for our taught postgraduate programmes in previous years. Addressing broader concerns (which are also echoed in response to Q19), the School is currently looking into options for reducing the volume of feedback and the significant demands that this places on staff, whilst retaining the elements of good pedagogic practice and clarity identified in this report.

**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:

The optionality in the School's provision is a particularly distinctive feature of our offer and a quality that students often say played a key role in attracting them to Leeds. The School is currently considering programme developments that: retain this breadth of choice; potentially provide greater opportunity for new and revised modules that more consistently explicitly relate content to individual staff's primary research interests; and that

provide further opportunities to ground students in a range of relevant skills to equip them for a variety of formats of extended research projects in their final year of study.

## 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:*

It is especially pleasing to see recognition of the work produced in the Dissertation module where a number of students produced particularly exceptional final pieces of research this year. The literature reviews mentioned in response to Q19 were recently designed into level 2 modules precisely as a formative mechanism for supporting students in preparation for their Dissertations, and the programme team suspect that these may in part have contributed to the strong Dissertation results this year. Typically students receive plenary (rather than individual) guidance in selecting the topics for these assignments and the programme team will consider the development of additional resources to help students in selecting appropriately focused titles for the scope of these assignments. In other modules that utilise the literature review format (e.g. Music in Practice) students are encouraged to confirm their chosen topics with the module leader and their failure to do so may result in the occasional unwieldy topic choice.

As part of the programme revisions noted above, the School will also be looking at the feasibility of implementing more widely the assessment model that commends above, which was adopted this year in Special Studies in Musicology (where students could select whether their large project is presented in written or oral form).

## 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 timeframe for competing the assessment of work submitted in May was indeed shorter than usual given the late Easter and a number of other logistical reasons (in some cases resulting in final exams taking place less than 15 working days before the Assessment Board, and thus requiring staff to mark the final scripts in less time than the stipulated University guidelines). Similarly, unexpected factors such as staff illness across the year resulted in additional adjustments needing to be made to our marking allocations across the year. There is much to reflect on to try and prevent or limit the impact of similar challenges in future years, several of which (such as the bunching of assessment deadlines) will be considered in relation to our programme revisions and as a result of the assessment mapping exercise currently being undertaken by the School.