

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2018-19

QAT Received 29/10/2019

Part A: General Information

Subject area and awards being examined

Title and Name of Examiner:	Dr Dominic McHugh
Faculty / School of:	Music
Subject(s):	<i>Music</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Electronic and Computer Music, MA Applied and Critical Musicology, MA Performance, MA Critical and Experimental Composition
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.

- Assessment practices are careful and rigorous, so staff and students can rely on the marks being accurate and thoughtful.
- Feedback in the Contexts module on the MA in Electronic and Computer Music is particularly focused, clear and concise, though feedback for all modules on all programmes makes it clear why the marks have been awarded.
- The Aesthetic Theory module is producing work of exceptional sophistication.
- The Composition programme continues to produce outstanding work at the top of the range.
- The Performance programme is facilitating superb work – sometimes of conservatoire standard – across a range of modules (e.g. Concerto and Applied Performance Studies).

Enhancements made from the previous year

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

I had not previously raised any grave issues so there has been nothing major to respond to. Nevertheless, staff clearly continue to reflect on the provision and assessment of modules, with plans to overhaul Professional Studies going forward.

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

- Along with colleagues examining the Management and Psychology programmes, I would urge the School of Music to consider consolidating where work is stored and how work is assessed. There is a clear opportunity to use Blackboard/Minerva/Turnitin to the full, bringing together submissions, feedback and marks within the same system, and this has not yet been exploited across the board.
- I have previously recommended that the School consider the quantity of feedback being delivered in many modules. Lengthy prose responses do not always bring about the best student satisfaction; nor is it necessarily the clearest way to convey feedback. Staff wellbeing and workload should also be considered.

Therefore, the School should streamline feedback across all programmes and modules to ensure clarity of information while also containing the amount of work required from staff.

For Examiners in the first year of appointment only

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 only

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

It has been a hugely fulfilling, enjoyable experience. I've really learnt a lot from reading student submissions and have admired the quality of the best of the work across all three years. The Composition programme has stood out for me as having facilitated at least one outstanding student every year, but all four programmes have consistently supported excellent students who have produced excellent work – and the value added by the School is notable. I feel valued and respected by staff and have been impressed by the leadership of the Head of School, who has an obvious ability for bringing colleagues together into a shared vision.

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 School has an advanced understanding of how to pitch MA-level programmes into a market that will serve some of the best MA students in the country. Modules are well designed to allow progression; for example, several modules have a smaller assignment that tests core skills that can then be more widely developed into a larger main assignment. Each programme has well-tailored modules that work well for the students taking the programme but students also benefit from being able to take options from other programmes.

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)

Quite simply, the fact that each programme is producing student work that could or does lead to PhD-level study is a clear sign that staff have the expertise to supervise work of such quality. Dissertation or project work is especially impressive, where staff have been able to push students further as a result of their own expertise.

14.	Does the programme form part of an Integrated PhD?	N
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<i>Please comment on the appropriateness of the programme as training for a PhD:</i>		
In all four programmes, students are pushed to produce advanced work that combines all the relevant reading with the opportunity for independent research. This gives students a clear pathway into a PhD.		
15.	Does the programme include clinical practice components?	N
<i>Please comment on the learning and assessment of practice components of the curriculum here:</i>		
16.	Is the programme accredited by a Professional or Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB)?	N
<i>Please comment on the value of, and the programme's ability to meet, PSRB requirements here:</i>		

Assessment and Feedback

17.	Does the programme design clearly align intended learning outcomes with assessment?	Y
<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>		
Each programme offers its own assessment methods, tailored to the appropriate discipline. In the two composition programmes, students can undertake a series of independent projects alongside prescribed themes and set readings. In Performance, students have the chance to do a big recital but can also play a concerto/song cycle and undertake a research project such as performing a role in a music theatre piece. These examples show how the design of the programmes allow the students to satisfy the ILOs at programme level.		
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
<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>		
In all four programmes, the best of the students is equal to the best standards nationally. It's also true that all four programmes have one or two weaker students but the staff do an impressive job of pulling them through and making sure they can obtain value from them.		
<i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make in relation to assessment and feedback:</i>		
I'm always impressed by the hard work of all staff in producing challenging assessments and giving excellent, thoughtful feedback.		

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?	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?	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 / N
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
<p><i>Please use this box to provide any additional comments you would like to make on the questions above:</i></p> <p>It was rather difficult this year to access work for most modules, due to the complicated nature of storing it. From an external examiner's point of view it would be much easier to have all the work, marks and feedback in one place.</p>		

Other comments

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

I wanted to share once again my appreciation of the friendly professionalism of the school and my admiration for these excellent programmes. The School operates incredibly well and the quality of the work has always been outstanding.

Name of School and Head of School (or nominee)

Title and Name of Examiner:	Dr Dominic McHugh
Subject(s):	<i>Music</i>
Programme(s) / Module(s):	MA Electronic and Computer Music, MA Applied and Critical Musicology, MA Performance, MA Critical and Experimental Composition
Awards (e.g. BA/BSc/MSc etc):	MA
Title and Name of Responder:	Dr Oliver Thurley
Position*:	School Assessment Lead
Faculty / School of:	<i>Music</i>
Address for communication:	School of Music, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT
Email:	o.thurley@leeds.ac.uk
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. 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

We are pleased with Dr McHugh's praises of both our teaching and the high standard of our student's work.

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:

Dr McHugh raises some vital issues for us to consider. Moving forwards:

- The school will be moving towards a complete online marking and feedback system, providing a more coherent framework for staff and students alike.
- The depth of feedback continues to be an issue. We hope that clearer central guidance will provide a more realistic framework, and that student expectations can be shifted in line with this.

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:

We are delighted that Dr McHugh has found this to be such a fulfilling experience. We recognise that some of the feedback systems have been convoluted and thank Dr McHugh for his patience with this.

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:

Our programme and module staff work hard to provide a clear sense of progression through our student's period of study, and we are pleased that Dr McHugh notes that often the undergraduate frameworks so positively influence the standard of our postgraduate programmes.

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:

Dr McHugh raises an important point about the difficulty of managing work in a convoluted, distributed manner. Moving forward, we will unify student work and feedback to a central point in order to provide external examiners a clearer overview.

Other comments

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

The programme team has enjoyed working with Dr McHugh again this year and are grateful for his encouraging comments and patience with some of the logistical challenges we have faced this year.