

## School of Film, Music and Performing Arts

### Undergraduate

- BATHP Theatre & Performance (LBP)(UG)
- PERFA Performing Arts(UG)

Please indicate, below, whether you agree with the statements about the threshold standards of Leeds Beckett University's awards, student achievement and the conduct of the University's assessment processes, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements. Please also list any shortcomings and areas for commendation. You should expand on any issues you mention here in the main report. If any boxes are ticked "No" the Dean of School or nominee will be alerted and will oversee the response from the Course Director.

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#### Standards Set

	Yes	No
"In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards meet with the requirements of the relevant National Qualifications Statement's."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

#### Student achievement

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, students' who have been awarded qualifications have had the opportunity to achieve standards beyond the threshold level that are reasonably comparable with those achieved in course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar." *Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this statement, please note here:	X		

Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short:

#### Conduct of process

# External Examiner's report summary

	Yes	No
"In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are reliable, rigorous and fairly conducted."	X	

If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.

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## Actions from last year's report

(This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time)

Yes
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## Areas of good practice/commendation

Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment:

There is ample evidence of good practice in teaching delivery and the rich and detailed feedback demonstrates a real investment by academic staff in the learning and development of the students they teach. Module documentation is thorough, and the students are clearly being supported very well through the opportunities for formative feedback and guided support from the lecturers across all modules.

Students are introduced to appropriate theorists, critical frameworks, artists and theatre makers - as well as to relevant creative industry platforms/festivals (such as GIFT and Fierce). The influence of this can be seen in the diverse, creative outputs the students are creating in assessment work and the professional approach that many are adopting in the presentation of their work.

I'd also like to comment on the provision of recorded assessments and vivas by the academic team. Great care is taken in ensuring all practical assessments are recorded well and, in particular, it is noteworthy that the academic team also provide recordings of work-in-progress 'showings', in which lecturers' feedback is also captured and evidences the support and expert advice that students receive to help further their burgeoning practice.

This year, I have also taken on External Examining in the second semester for the BAPER programme and it is satisfying to see the same academic standards and levels of student support evidenced on this programme. Many modules are shared across the BATHP and BAPER Programmes and aside from one module (see below) the levels of student attainment are comparable.

I would like to highly commend the academic teams for their robust and innovative response to the challenges posed by the Coronavirus Crisis. The pressure on staff has been (and continues to be) considerable and the response to this has been excellent, not only in relation to delivery and assessment modification, but also the wealth and diversity of learning resources provided to students in moving to an online, remote learning environment - in particular examples of online performance work existing or recently developed by artists working in the creative industry.

## Main report

In this section you are asked to describe more fully how the University has or has not maintained threshold academic standards and the quality of the student experience in relation to the course(s) for which you are

# External Examiner's report summary

the external examiner, using as a reference the framework for higher education qualifications and applicable Subject Benchmark Statements / Qualification Characteristic Statements.

**Please complete all sections of the form fully and where not applicable please state N/A. Where applicable please also complete the sections for any collaborative provision sampled.**

If you are an external examiner for any of the University's Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes (HND/HNC level) provision, please also complete the section on page 9 sections l, m and n entitled "for External Examiners Associated with Pearson Licensed Centre Programmes."

## Professional Body Requirements

	Yes	No	N/A*
"In my view, the professional body requirements for this course have been met. *Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.			
If your answer is 'no', please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.			

(a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended).

I did not attend a module and progression board as the University chose to employ an alternative 4-stage process in response to the Pandemic. However I was fully informed about this process and the requirements of my role in this. I was also sent all appropriate information and documentation in a timely manner at appropriate stages of the process.

(b) The action, if any was required, taken in response to your report of last year. (This will not be relevant if you are examining for the first time.)

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.

As in previous years, the overall standard of the student's work is comparable with levels of work across the sector at other institutions, of which I am familiar. The standard of work students have demonstrated overall on practical modules is stronger than I expected, given the challenges they have faced in moving learning and assessment online on programmes that, by nature, are ordinarily defined by liveness and co-presence with audiences.

Although there is strong evidence of good practice in teaching delivery for the Semester 1 Performance Project collaboration module (BATHP), there was quite weak overall achievement on the viva component (4 out of 10 submitting students achieved in the 30s or 40s, and 2 did not complete the assessment – although, overall, only 2 achieved a third for their final grade). The strong evidence of good practice on this module (see section h) indicates that this is not an issue of academic support or shortcomings in

module design. The Module Leader comments in the report that "To enable the students to engage more critically in terms of engagement with the works of others (including artists and scholars), time for teaching towards the viva might be more generously apportioned". This is an issue that should be addressed in the apportioning of teaching workload to ensure that students have sufficient learning contact time to enable them to develop the critical skills that many students taking performing arts degrees find more challenging than the practical work.

(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the students in general with respect to knowledge, conceptual grasp or application of skills.

Even during the current crisis, students are showing risk taking and experimentation in their practical performance work, as well as strong conceptual grasp of material and confidence in performing.

As at my own institution, there is higher level of mitigation on the modules that require more academic engagement/written submission – e.g. Critical Contexts and Placement modules, and a relatively high number of students who have not achieved first time pass for these modules (some fails but largely through non submission). The Module Leader Report for Critical Contexts states that student engagement was sporadic following the move to online delivery. Although this is entirely understandable under the circumstances, the move to blended delivery will inevitably involve the students engaging in more forms of synchronous online and asynchronous learning, so the Programme teams are advised to discuss and consider ways to encourage more consistent engagement, and to share good practice across different modules.

(e) The standards of the structure, organisation, design and marking of all examination papers and/or other forms of assessment.

As commented in previous reports for BATHP, The Programme uses a range of assessment methods, from continuous assessment, practical performances, written essays, critical reflections, vivas, online blogs and presentations. This diversity accommodates a plurality of learning styles and enables a range of practical, academic and transferable skills to be assessed. Sharing many modules, BAPER employs a similar range of assessment methods with differentiation in respect of forms of assessment outcome applicable to

Detailed and guided information is given in module Handbooks and formative learning is built into all modules to support the student's progress and achievement in summative assessment. I have commented previously on the substantial use of continuous assessment across the programme. There is variety in terms of the transparency of the weight that some individual elements of the coursework bear on the final grade such that it is not always clear why some students have achieved higher than others (for example, see comments on Critical Contexts 4 in section h).

Grade banding descriptors were developed this year, which is a positive development. However, whilst the personal attention given to individual students' achievements and areas requiring development is to be commended, banding descriptors are not always being consistently applied in feedback in terms of the language used. For example, I suggest that "Poor" is not an appropriate term to describe a work that passes, even at 40%. Likewise, a work that achieves a 2:1 grade should not be described as 'Outstanding'. The Programme teams are advised to consider the adjectives used for describing assessment achievement and agree a consistent approach across all modules that is in line with the language used in the the grade banding descriptors.

(f) The curriculum, teaching or resourcing of the programme of study as indicated by the performance of the students in the assessment

Modifications to teaching and assessment here are similar to changes made at my own institution, and others that I'm aware of. These include, for lecture/seminar based modules, a mixture of asynchronous lecture material, with embedded seminar tasks, and synchronous tutorials via Zoom; for practical modules, students have been supported with online tutorials and assessments have moved from the physically live to the screen.

I have had the opportunity to examine rich range of outputs evident in the project-based modules. The range includes an audio piece; a dystopian, claustrophobic story, incorporating Siri as voice; a split screen 2 person performance on Zoom and an autobiographical story-telling piece exploring social and cultural experiences of 2 generations of a British Asian family, using the Turban as both a central piece of 'costume' and a symbolic device that marks both ethnic identity and difference.

On the Semester 2, level 5 Placement modules, The BATHP cohort in particular have a low first time pass rather here, with only 5 students out of 13 passing the module. Whilst the PERFA cohort have stronger first time pass rates (11 out of 15), this is clearly a module on which many students have struggled in the move to remote delivery. This might require some investigation by the relevant academics to identify any specific issues that might inform delivery next year, should the module need to be delivered through an online or blended approach.

(g) Comments on the use of My Beckett (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

Although there is some differentiation in quantity and diversity of learning resources provided across modules, My Beckett is populated well with all required module documentation and appropriate learning resources.

(h) Module content, consistency of modules and module assessment across the course and the achievement of learning outcomes. (You may be asked by your School to provide detailed comments on the modules that you examine.)

Modules across the programme curricula are linked to provide a coherent journey and scaffolded learning for students. There is also integration of both criticality and practice/presentation in all modules. There is much to commend in relation to good practice as well as some minor areas that would benefit from enhancement. I offer some comments on specific modules in relation to both good practice and recommendations for consideration by the programme teams:

## Semester 1

### BATHP Critical Context 3: Reading Performance (L5)

The Feedback on this module is very rich and detailed and recommends many resources/reading materials to students to develop their learning. However I find it overly critical on several feedback forms where students have achieved in the first or upper second class band, which can be disheartening for the student and seem out of balance with the grade achieved. Also, some of the essays in the lower bands are extensively annotated and, whilst this shows how hard the tutors are working on providing quality feedback for students and putting a lot of time into this, this level of annotation for students who are

obviously struggling can be overwhelming and may deflate their confidence further. I'd recommend fewer annotations per paragraph focusing on the key problem areas.

## BATHP Performance Project Ensemble (L5)

The use of a one to one tutorial mid-way through the project period is good practice in terms of student support, as is the Q&A at the end of the performance to facilitate critical analysis and reflection by the students.

## BATHP Performance Project collaboration L5)

In addition to the comments made in Section c, i'd like to highlight some excellent practice on this module. The approach of having two different artists with different disciplinary specialisms working with the students encourages interdisciplinary and accommodates diversity of interests in the cohort, and this is reflected in variety of approaches in performance outcomes. Additionally, the 'some areas to consider and Reflect on' section in the brief for the Viva, summarises some of the key questions that came up from students in their working journals. Linking the final assessment to the issues/questions that have come up during the process, and asking students to reflect on these, is an excellent, joined-up approach to module delivery.

## BATHP Publishing Project 1: Conference (L6)

A strong set of marks, across the range, with one student scoring in the 80s. There is also ample good practice evident in formative/developmental learning – such as the students attendance at a relevant symposium, writing a research plan for an already published article.

## BATHP Professional Practice 2: Portfolio (L6)

Good practice includes the inclusion of guest speakers on different aspects of portfolio careers to help develop employability and graduate outcomes. The approach used here – choosing guest speakers in a way that is responsive to students in their own feedback on the programme, should be particularly highlighted. This demonstrates clearly to students that their feedback and needs are being directly addressed in module design and delivery.

Other good practice that should be highlighted is the production of a guide to the assessment, undertaken as a collaborative task with students. This appeared to have worked successfully with students in giving them more sense of ownership with their assessment work, clarifying criteria and breaking down the assessment task for/with them.

The Module Report comments on lack of BAME representation in the guest speaker 'pool' and that this may have had an impact on student attendance. This is clearly something that should be addressed next year in the scheduling of guest speakers to enable greater diversity and inclusivity.

As well as some other recommendations for enhancing this module this module, the Module Leader also suggests a halfway marking point (a 30% weighted presented on a researched arts organisation) rather than a 100% portfolio. The point is made that the students are used to heavily weighted continuous assessment in other modules (which I have commented on in previous reports) and that it is a quite a jump to a 100% summative end point written assessment. I think these suggestions are sensible, and I commend the ML's efforts to respond to student feedback in thinking through the future development of the module.

## BATHP Pilot Project (L6)

Very high quality, detailed feedback which offers lots of useful suggestions for students who may want to develop their projects further. Just one niggle here is that the feedback on the sheet that's titled 'Second Marking Pilot' prefaces many of the positive comments with "I enjoyed..." and I think this can potentially

make the comments appear as subjective value judgements, which can enforce the view of some that students that the quality of their performance work is sometimes judged on how much the marking tutor likes it.

## Semester 2

### BATHP and BAPER Critical Contexts 4: Bodies in Performance (L5)

Although, as noted in General Comments, there was sporadic engagement with the move to online learning, and a relatively high number of mitigations for this module, it is clear that the students have been well supported and those students that have engaged well have not been disadvantaged through the need to modify delivery and assessment.

I Support the Module Leader's suggestion (in their report) to remove the continuous assessment elements in response to the need to employ a blended delivery model next year. I have commented in previous reports that in my opinion the Continuous assessment was too heavily weighted at 70%. The change to essay, alongside the Statement in Action, will required students to demonstrate their development of criticality and academic skills through both written and performative methods, whilst also enabling the team to clearly indicate to students how the different elements of assessment are weighed. The Module team might also consider retaining this method of assessment once retuning to full face to face teaching.

### Professional Practice1: Placement (BATHP) and Placement (BAPER) L5

There is ample evidence of good practice. In particular the collaboration with the Careers team is a very positive development, that will help students to strengthen employment prospects and prepare them for the professional world.

### BATHP Performance Project 3: Self (L5)

A comment in the second marking document comments in relation to academic expectations for the writing component. Although it was noted that the brief does allow for a more 'artist's commentary' approach, this is not evident in the criteria as it currently stands, so some revising of criteria would be appropriate here.

### BAPER Cultural Perspectives (L5)

Again, feedback is very detailed and supportive. However, it is not explicit in the handbook how process and performance are weighted in grading the work and this raises questions around parity of marking across individual students. For example, one student is graded at 40 and another at 61 when both receive similar comments on engagement/attendance in relation to process. It is clear from viewing the videos that the higher graded student is somewhat stronger in the practical outcome, but the feedback commentary is weighted more to the process, as is the criteria (3 out of 4). Perhaps a specific assessment weighting in regard to process and final performance/practical would make this more explicit for the students, and for markers, to ensure there is parity across the student cohort in the value given to process and performance.

### BATHP and BAPER Lift Off 1 (L6)

The module team are to be commended on the extensive written guidance provided for all aspects of the continuous assess (blog journal, pitch, written statement) as well as formative feedback/forward notes. This is excellent practice that should be shared with the wider programme teams.

### BATHP and BAPER Lift Off 2 (festival) L6)

Excellent and innovative response to moving what is a live performed festival to online projects. The Module Leader provides a lot of excellent resources to help the students in this move (which for many involved a change of project idea from Lift Off 1 to 2), as well as suggesting many different forms the project may take.



This is reflected in the strong set of marks achieved and the innovative range of creative outputs from the students, including performances for camera/live via Facebook, interactive pieces with limited audiences via Zoom or via text/phone, a durational online project using existing social media platforms and an audio piece.

(i) Areas of student/staff engagement in teaching and learning, scholarship, research or professional practice.

The Lift Off festival provides an opportunity for final year students to showcase their work in a forum that mirrors professional industry platforms and reflects the latest developments and trends in the professional arts and industry.

Several of the teaching team are also engaged in professional performance practice. This work supports and helps facilitate student learning and is integrated within module content and delivery where appropriate.

(j) The University welcomes external examiners' comments on its academic regulatory framework. Such comments may not have a direct bearing on standards set and achieved or the conduct of processes and so it may not be appropriate to include them elsewhere in this report or its summary. Please record any concerns or comments you may have here.

NA

(k) Collaborative Provision: please include here any comments you wish to make on elements of collaborative provision for which you have responsibility (in addition to those you may have indicated previously in this report).

NA