

BA (Hons) Music Production 2017/18

External Examiner’s report summary

Please indicate in the relevant boxes 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.

| Standards set | | |
|--|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
| “In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards are appropriate.” | √ | |
| 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’ achievement is comparable with similar course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar.” | √ | | |
| Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision. | | | |
| * Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this please indicate here. | | | |
| If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short. | | | |
| | | | |

| Conduct of processes | | |
|--|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
| “In my view, the processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are rigorous and fairly conducted.” | √ | |
| If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short. | | |
| | | |

| Areas of good practice |
|--|
| Any particular strengths or distinctive or innovative features in relation to learning, teaching and assessment. |

The course is industry aware, providing a range of specialist options at level 6 reflecting the diverse areas in which Music Production graduates may gain work. A number of practical assessments at levels 5 and 6 provide effective simulations of real world working experiences.

Staff demonstrate a high level of engagement and enthusiasm for students work and progression which is evident in the feedback and supportive comments made on assessed work and their awareness of individual student profiles.

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

| (a) The operation and conduct of the Progression and Award Board (and/or Module Board meeting you may also have attended). |
|---|
| The board of examiners meeting was well organised and rigorous with all student profiles given due consideration. It was pleasing to see this level of scrutiny and attention to detail, and the awareness of individual student cases demonstrated by academic staff was very encouraging to see. There were a high number of student profiles to view in this meeting, but it was effectively chaired and ran smoothly. |

| (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.) |
|--|
| N/A |

| (c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions. |
|---|
| The work produced on the BA Music Production programme is comparable to that of other institutions I am familiar with. The range of grades awarded was representative of the students' engagement with the assessments and the marking criteria were applied effectively. There were some particularly strong examples of work at level 5 in the Post Production module which were justifiably awarded outstanding grades. At level 6 there were examples of excellent practical work in a number of modules. In particular, a high proportion of students work in the Music Production Project module attained a high 2:1 or 1st. Grades here reflect the specialist and individual focus of this module and fairly represent the effort and high technical attainment demonstrated by students. |

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

Students on the programme generally exhibit very good technical production knowledge and apply skills effectively, although to make an observation, learners are in some respects a little less strong in modules which are more reliant on core musical skills (theory and harmony) than at some other institutions I am familiar with. This is most probably a consequence of the entry requirements and prior experience students bring to the programme of formal notation, harmony and arranging techniques. The curriculum is set up to develop these skills from level 4 onwards so this isn't a particular area of concern, but I would encourage staff feeding back on all practical assessments to comment on core musical and aesthetic aspects of the work as much as they do the technical aspects. This was evident in feedback on some modules but not all. Overall the conceptual grasp of approaches to and execution of music production by learners is good.

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

There are no exams on the modules I have examined. All other assessment processes are clearly outlined in the module handbooks which contain detailed assessment briefs and associated marking criteria. The way in which this information is presented to students is well organised and consistent across all modules which presents a uniform and coherent message. Appropriate standards are used in the assessment criteria and are comparable with other HEI's and align with FHEQ music subject benchmarks. The use of rubrics in assessment feedback is effective but doesn't appear to be universally adopted across all modules. I would encourage this system to be employed to support feedback across all modules to aid with clarity and understanding in relation to where grades have been awarded against learning outcomes.

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

The curriculum is well designed and allows a wide range of specialisms to be studied at level 6. These are representative of the wide range of disciplines music production graduates may gain work in within industry and provide a good degree of flexibility and experience for students. The course has a strong industry focus within the teaching and assessments. In particular, modules which simulate client focused working as part of the assessments, such as Field Recording and Mixing Practice, provide students with valuable simulations of real world experiences. The programme is well resourced allowing students to achieve well providing they engage fully with the curriculum. This was supported by the range of grades awarded. As a discipline which is heavily reliant on technology and with ever changing working practices, resources need to be made available to continually update provision as required.

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

The VLE is effectively used to host and disseminate module documents, learning and assessment materials. Where applicable student work is submitted to the VLE which streamlines the assessment process. For two modules this year the EE module boxes were collated for viewing from within the VLE.

These were easy to navigate and saved unnecessary copying and duplication of data by academic staff. I would encourage this system to be adopted across all modules for the collation of materials to be externally examined in the next academic year.

(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 on the programme cover a wide range of music production skills and disciplines and the content displays a good outward looking industry focus. It was clear to see how the aims and outcomes of the modules I viewed linked to the overall course learning outcomes.

The consistency of information and materials provided to students, and the design of module assessment briefs was consistent and appropriate across all modules viewed. Feedback on the whole was detailed and constructive, notwithstanding my comment in (e) above regarding the use of rubrics in assessing some modules.

There is a requirement for a sizeable piece of academic writing in the majority of modules I examined, and in some modules two pieces of written work (a research/ planning element and referenced evaluation.) Given the practical and vocational nature of the discipline I would suggest that module leaders consider making greater use of presentations as a way for students to evaluate their practical work. This is being used effectively in the level 5 Music Production Practice and Post Production modules, and where there is group practical work in a summative assessment can provide a clearer insight for the assessor into the effectiveness of individual students' contributions. There can also be benefits in terms of learners getting timely feedback and the workload of assessors in adopting this approach.

The 'levelness' of the learning outcomes on the Contemporary Arrangement Techniques module feels a little low for a level 6 module in comparison to others on the programme and at similar institutions. The work produced by students was generally appropriate, but I would advise re-wording the LO's to better reflect the critical nature and level of understanding required to effectively complete the assessments rather than simply '*demonstrate and understanding of...*' or '*develop the ability to...*' I am aware that module modifications like this can take time to approve but for parity between modules at level 6 this should be addressed.

The Songwriting and Production module requires learners to collaboratively generate a lot of ideas in observed workshop sessions during the initial phase of the module. The rationale for this is sound, however there appears to be little time for students to act on any peer or tutor formative feedback received, to reflect on it and refine their ideas. Consider looking at the teaching schedule of the module to enable learners to rewrite and refine ideas after initial feedback. From experience this approach can greatly improve the quality of product, foster deeper learning and build confidence more quickly.

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

From the content and design of modules it is evident that staff are practitioners and engage in research linked to their subject specialism. It is also clear from comments on assessed work and from meeting academic staff that they have a very positive interest in the students' continuing development and practical output. This level of staff engagement and the supportive nature of feedback evidently provides effective motivation to learners.

The programme has some established links to industry with some high profile visiting professionals delivering masterclasses. These kinds of links to the wider professional area of music production are

invaluable to a programme competing in an increasingly congested HE market and resources should be made available to staff to try to develop further links.

(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.

I have no concerns with the academic regulatory framework but do question the validity of student module evaluations and their value to module and programme leaders. The response rate for the modules examined and quality of feedback gathered is poor. It is apparent from discussions with team members that the feedback is sought at too early a point in the delivery of the modules to engage a meaningful representative of the cohort and obtain a valuable quantity of data. The lack of any option for students to write comments within the present evaluation system also provides no opportunity to gather any rich data upon which staff can act to address issues and improve the quality of provision. At present any comments which staff may gather from students are anecdotal and not formally recorded.

(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).

N/A

External Examiners' Report Checklist

Please comment for all boxes

| Course Materials | | | | |
|-------------------------|--|------------|-----------|------------|
| Did you receive? | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | Course Handbook(s)? | √ | | |
| b. | Academic Regulations including any Professional Statutory Body requirements where appropriate (these may be included the Course Handbook)? | √ | | |
| c. | Module specifications (these may be in the Course Handbook)? | √ | | |
| d. | Assessment briefs/marketing criteria? | √ | | |

| Draft examination papers | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | (i) Did you receive all the draft papers? | | | √ |
| | (ii) If not, was this at your request? | | | |
| b. | (i) Was the nature and level of the questions appropriate? | | | √ |
| | (ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | | | |
| c. | Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | | | √ |

| Draft coursework | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | (i) Did you receive all the draft coursework? | √ | | |
| | (ii) If not, was this at your request? | | | |
| b. | (i) Was the nature and level of the coursework appropriate? | √ | | |
| | (ii) If not, were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | | | |
| c. | Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments? | √ | | |

| Marking Examination Scripts | | | | |
|--|--|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | (i) Did you receive a sufficient number of scripts from both home and (if appropriate) collaborative partner students? | √ | | |
| | (ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory? | √ | | |
| Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows: | | | | |
| <p>a) Samples should be determined by a square root of cohort size, no smaller than 6, no larger than 15. However it should be borne in mind that not all work is assessed in a way that makes a square root sample possible and allowance should be made. For example in subjects such as the performing arts where there may be a requirement for an external to come and view a performance instead, or to visit the exhibition of art work.</p> <p>b) Samples to include all classification categories, and it is helpful to concentrate around the boundaries to include some fails.</p> <p>c) Samples to consist of internally moderated work, clearly evidencing the moderation process.</p> | | | | |
| b. | Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate? | √ | | |
| c. | Were the scripts marked in such a way to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks? | √ | | |

| Dissertations/project reports | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | Was the choice of subjects for dissertations appropriate? | √ | | |
| b. | Was the method and standard of assessment appropriate? | √ | | |

| Coursework/continuously assessed work | | | | |
|--|--|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | Was sufficient coursework made available to you for assessment from both home and (if appropriate) collaborative partner students? | √ | | |
| b. | Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory? | √ | | |

| Orals/performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements | | | | |
|--|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | Were suitable arrangements made for you to conduct orals and/or moderate performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements? | √ | | |

| Module Board/Progression and Award Boards | | | | |
|--|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | Were you able to attend the meetings? | √ | | |
| b. | Were the meetings conducted to your satisfaction? | √ | | |
| c. | Were you satisfied with the recommendations of the Module Board/Progression and Award Boards? | √ | | |