

BA (Hons) Performance 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."	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' achievement is comparable with similar course(s) or subjects in other UK institutions with which I am familiar."	x		
Please provide any further comment on the comparability of collaborative provision.	NA		
* 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."	x	
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.

- A unique programme with opportunities for students to engage with the professional community. This is fostered both by the input academics within the programme team, who are also practitioners and through specific modules – such as Professional Placement and the input of invited artists on Project modules.
- A strong focus on developmental learning and entrepreneurial skills within the Programme – which supports professional development of students through and beyond the programme of study.
- The team should be commended on the emphasis on continual assessment/course work, which provides a scaffolding model of learning and formative learning opportunities on the programme at all levels.
- Students are presenting a diverse range of work on current topics and using current and innovative forms and approaches. This indicates a healthy diversity of approaches and topics covered within module content.
- L6 Modules Lift off 1 & 2 uses approach of professional mentoring and consultation rather than prescriptive 'how to', mirroring practice within the profession. It also uses a critical peer review process built into the module that enables students to learn by doing and observing and engage in critical dialogue with tutors and other students. The input of a professional photographer to assist the students in producing their brochure image also helps them to produce high quality work and model professional practice in the marketing and management of the festival project.
- Feedback overall is detailed and shows a real interest by the tutors in the students work and development as artists. It is clear that the staff are highly invested in the students as individual theatre and performance artists and in providing a holistic and well-rounded learning experience.
- Peer feedback is clearly a strong element of this programme, and is evidenced in formative assessment methods in several modules. This is good practice that enhances the student's development of criticality by having them feed back on each other's presentations and/or performance work in class.

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 *
	NA		
<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).
<p>I attended the Exam Boards in March and June.</p> <p>The academic and administration team provided documentation and sample material in good time and communicated effectively at all points of the process. The Programme Administrator also arranged parking space, provided directions and answered any other queries promptly and helpfully.</p> <p>The conduct at the Boards was extremely professional and collegiate and all procedures and regulations were adhered to appropriately.</p>

(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.)
<p>I am a new External Examiner</p>

(c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions.
<p>In my view 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. Most students have achieved or are achieving in the 2:1 band, with a significant percentage also in the 2:2 band. A lesser percentage have/are achieving in the third band or First class. On the latter most students who achieve a First are marked at or near the 70s border (more rarely in the upper part of the 70s band). The team might reflect on their use of the available band</p>

range at the upper end and whether it might be appropriate in some cases (and without wishing to promote grade inflation) to mark higher for those students who show a more marked achievement from their peers who are achieving in the high 2:1 band.

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

Students are showing risk taking and experimentation in their practical performance work, as well as strong conceptual grasp of material and confidence in performing. This was evidenced in the range of contemporary forms and approaches used in the project modules – from durational and installation work to devised theatre pieces and intermedial performance.

Students are given the opportunity to engage in collaborative as well as solo work and. Whilst the former provides an invaluable training ground in team-working and problem solving when working within ensembles, the latter allows students to follow personal interests and supports them in taking more individual responsibility in the development of their practice.

On academic modules students are engaging with academic conventions (such as referencing systems and Bibliography,) even, to some extent, when achieving grades in the lower bands.

Again on Publishing 2 (level 6) a range of topics were chosen by students (such as the performance of Britishness and National Identity; gender and cinema; Applied Theatre in prisons), which demonstrates a healthy diversity in module content and the extent to which students are enabled to pursue individual interests, particularly at level 6.

There is not always a strong level of elaboration and analysis of critical material and students generally achieve stronger marks on their practical performance work, but this is in-line with the sector generally. This kind of programme - with its emphasis on practice and the student's development as creative artists – typically attracts students with stronger performance/creative ability.

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

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.

Highly detailed and guided information is given in module Handbooks on assessment tasks and the criteria of assessment.

Formative learning is built into all modules to support the student's progress and achievement in summative assessment. This is a commendable approach, which uses assessment *for* learning (and not just *of* learning) to a high degree.

There is, uniquely, a 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. This is an area that I will give more concentrated attention to next year, now that I have

familiarized myself with the programme structure and the student journey through it.

Whilst feedback is detailed and often constructive, showing a genuine investment by staff in the students' progress, feedforward is not offered in all cases. This was particularly noticeable for students achieving in the low first band, where adjectives like 'excellent' were used but no indication was given to indicate what the student might do to progress to a higher first or in the 80s. Similarly some feedback around the low 40s, whilst pointing constructively to areas for improvement and development, did not always indicate the elements that earned the student a pass. There could, therefore, be greater consistency in balancing the 'positives' and 'negatives' in feedback as appropriate to the class band achieved.

Grades from both first and second markers, and final grades, are evidenced effectively on proformas. These forms also helpfully summarise discussions and the rationale for the final grade.

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

The curriculum offers a broad reach of study across the field of contemporary performance, as evidenced by the range of works presented by students at the Life Off festival in May, which I attended. The students demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding and confidence in performance. In addition the 'vibe' of the festival was enthusiastic and energetic and the interaction between staff and students showed a mutual respect and a sense of a strong community feel.

The studio space is small and basic, although adequate for the performance I attended there. The Dance studio in the centre of Leeds was a more impressive space, which provided a more professional environment and greater audience capacity for the students to present their work.

In relation to academic study, students are introduced to a range of appropriate theories, practitioners and approaches to theatre and performance. The development of critical and analytical skills is well supported through the formative teaching, learning and assessment methods employed and the inclusion of in-class contributions in some assessment criteria.

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

Blackboard is well populated with course documentation and learning materials. There is also very clear and detailed guidance given on learning and assessment in module handbooks and assessment briefs.

I was provided with all relevant documentation and sample materials, including documentation of live work and web links to online material. These were provided through module boxes on Google' Docs. In some cases samples of feedback were provided, in others I accessed feedback from Blackboard. Whilst this was relatively easy to navigate it would be more time-efficient and consistent if all modules boxes included feedback. Nevertheless, on the whole the provision and support in the navigation of materials was very efficient and helpful.

(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.)

There is considered linking of modules across the programme within and across levels to provide a coherent journey and scaffolded learning for students. For example, Critical Contexts 3 & 4, develops the students critical skills and theoretical knowledge from level 4 modules, taking this a stage further in CC 4, which takes a Practice as Research focus that builds on CC 3 and effectively prepares students for the level 6 Publishing 1&2 modules. Again at Level 6 the two publishing modules are developmentally linked.....

Similarly, the Project modules also focus in delivery and assessment on the student's learning journey shifting emphasis as appropriate from process to outcome. For example the 'Level 6 Lift off' modules move from 100% continuous assessment in 1 to a 70% practical and 30% viva in Lift Off 2 – which also facilitates the students' presentation of their final work on the degree in the form of a performance festival, which represents a springboard into the professional world of contemporary performance.

The programme curriculum has also been designed in such a way that the more explicitly academic and more explicitly practical modules at all levels 'speak' to each other as there is integration of both criticality and practice/presentation in all modules.

Below are comments on some specific modules that are not referred to in other sections of this report:

L5 Performance Project 1 – Ensemble

This module is evidencing effective integration of critical and contextual material with performance practice. Students are making reference to critical reading material and methodological approaches when reflecting on their performance process, even in the lower bands.

However I wonder if there might be a tendency here to be a little over enthusiastic in feedback at the higher end of the grading – or a reluctance to use the 80s band. For example one student is awarded 70 for essay, which is described with adjectives such as “great” and “excellent” and no feedforward is provided. Similarly one student's achievement for the Continuous assessment component” is described as “excellent” for a grade of 68.

The teaching team might also consider connecting feedback more directly to assessment criteria (which is done in some other modules) to enable the students to more clearly contextualise their grade in relation to ILOs.

More broadly the programme team are encouraged to discuss what adjectives such as “excellent’ mean in relation to specific grade bandings – and, perhaps, to agree a shared language that can be adopted across module feedback, in line with grade descriptors, so achieve a greater parity in this regard.

L5 Critical Contexts 3

The quality of learning support and feedback is excellent. However, in the handbook, the module appears to use the same criteria for the 2 separate components – one of which is continuous assessment and the other an essay. Also the criteria on assignment brief and module handbook don't fully match up. Finally there doesn't appear to be any criterion for academic standards (i.e. referencing, bibliography), as would be expected for an academic writing assessment.

I would suggest a general review and tidying up of the handbook for this module. **Check handbook**

L5 Project 3

The module box included samples of detailed guidance for independent study hours to help students manage their workload and structure their learning hours outside of the classroom. This is excellent practice and might be adopted in other modules.

L6 Publishing 2

This module effectively provides solid grounding for students who may wish to pursue postgraduate study, commensurate with current professional research practice, by enabling students to present their final outcome in either the form of a 6,000 essay or Practice as Research Project.

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

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 – for instance in ‘Lift Off 1’, where the tutors present their own professional practice and introductory practical workshops to the students as a way of introducing themselves in their role as ‘professional mentors’.

I am not aware of any specific student engagement in professional practice but clearly the team are making the most of opportunities that may arise to engage students in professional practice or research. For instance, this year, level 5 students on ‘Performance Project: self’ were given the opportunity to publically perform their summative assessed performance at the International Women’s Day event as part of the University’s Gender Research Conference. This presented valuable ‘real world’ experience as the students were able to receive feedback from audience and organisers, which will contribute to their professional and personal development.

The L5 module ‘Professional Practice 2: Placement’ should also be highlighted here for embedding employability skills and knowledge within the curriculum. As well as introducing students to employment opportunities in the Creative Industries by facilitating and supporting a 2-week professional placement, Supported by formal scheduled teaching, the module brings in invited professional speakers to deliver session on a range of relevant areas (such as fundraising and marketing).

The Lift Off festival also 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.

(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

External Examiners' Report Checklist

Please comment for all boxes

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

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

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

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?	NA		
	(ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory?			
<p>Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows:</p> <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?	NA		
c.	Were the scripts marked in such a way to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?	NA		

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

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?	x		
b.	Was the method and general standard of marking and consistency satisfactory?	x		

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?	x		

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