

MA 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 leader.

| Standards set | | |
|---|-----|----|
| | Yes | No |
| “In my view, the threshold academic standards set for the modules/awards are appropriate.” | X | |
| <i>If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.</i> | | |
| | | |

| 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. | | | |
| <i>* Not applicable – if you are a practitioner and are not in a position to assess this please indicate here.</i> | | | |
| <i>If your answer is ‘no’, please provide a brief statement (bullet points) of the respect(s) in which they fall short.</i> | | | |
| | | | |

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

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

This is my first full year working as an External Examiner on this MA Performance course. I have been struck by its bridging between pedagogy and practice. There is a clear trajectory available to students through the modular structure of the MA towards a sense of their own professional practice and it is interesting to read that many of the current cohort are emerging artists already.

I find that the module materials and feedback given by the teaching team is highly attuned to the language, specific vocabulary of process and measurable outcomes of the professional industry. Questions like 'how did it hang together?' or 'how rich was the work?' are pertinent to practice etc.

On specific modules e.g. Artist Mentor, students are given the opportunity to work closely with visiting artists, which connects their practice to the industry. In others, e.g. Artist Major, they were invited to work with a professional photographer to create publicity images for their performances.

Much of the modules feature assessed presentations and also a strong sense of optionality in terms of the way in which students can choose to be assessed and by which weighting. This seems to gear their learning towards their strengths and allows them to attain productive learning. Relationship to theory is strong and students exhibit growing criticality and self-reflexive skills.

The use of a 'festival' context to showcase their final work e.g. Landing Party also works well as an innovation and creates both a celebration of their work and a full stop in their learning journey. However, feedback at this stage is mindful of the fact that they may develop this work further. Other modules e.g. Festival and Embodied Knowledges, also replicate a professional opportunity.

Innovations include the embracing of alternative modes of performance for assessment e.g. zine, audio tour, one-to-one performance, immersive performance, durational performance, installation. There is also an element of innovation in the different blogs and 'outputs' the students create to document their practice. Also, using Facebook as a means to communicate across the cohort.

It was pleasing to see students engage in 'live briefs' to create a site-specific performance at the gallery in Leeds and also have opportunities for pedagogical placements that impact on the BA. Staff are actively engaged in professional practice and added to this is the fact that there are multiple opportunities to intersect with the industry at different stages of the creative process.

This is a professional and public-facing course that offers a bespoke learning journey. It is an exemplary MA and I applaud the course director and teaching team on its design and delivery. It has been a pleasure to work with them as an External Examiner and I look forward to its future.

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. | Yes | No | N/A * |
| <i>*Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.</i> | | | X |
| <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 Board of Examiners (and or Examination Committee meeting you may also have attended). |
|--|
| All very well organised and have received access to material in good time in advance |

| (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 – However, I have offered verbal feedback at each of the three boards I have attended and found that the course director and teaching team have responded to this. Most of my feedback has been about the documentation of live work and how best to record performance. It has been decided that perhaps this could be considered as part of the assessment process by the student. |

| (c) The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions. |
|--|
| To the best of my knowledge levels of attainment are comparable to other institutions. It is certainly comparable to MA Theatre at University of Lincoln and other Masters programmes I have encountered at Manchester Met University, De Montfort University & University of Chester. |

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

There are some weaknesses in written work which is comparable to other institutions, also for professional practitioners who maybe visual learners or makers the written form may not be preferable as a means to articulate their ideas. However, some academic skills could be developed in terms of essay writing and stronger, more robust critical writing about their practice. At the same time, some of their presentation skills were sometimes slightly weaker than the material they were presenting – something I fed back to the Course Director after one board. We discussed whether students are assessed on actual presentation style as well as the content. This said I have found that the performance skills of most students to be confident and assured.

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

Assessments are well structured and strike a fine balance between practical and theoretical learning. This is particularly the case on modules like AP Major when students can design their own assessment pathways and weightings e.g. viva, blog, presentation etc. Other modules employ subject specific modes of assessment such as presentations, blogs and/or essays. The structure and organisation of performance work is carefully considered and gives students a professional context for their assessments.

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

Generally, performance levels have seemed high across all modes of assessment, with the caveat that some written work is affected by the issues I raise above. The lowest marks were attained in modules such as Festival which was offered across two institutions and involved an experience attending an international festival which, though beneficial, will be revisited next year as it was felt by the Course Director that it takes students out of their comfort zone academically.

(g) Comments on the use of X-stream (Virtual Learning Environment) within the course (if applicable).

N/A

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

Embodied Knowledges

This is a 'short, fat module' that takes place over a short time period to replicate an artist residency. From the information I could access via the Facebook group it is apparent that the residency brings them together in an intensive way to explore through practice. The final culmination of the module is a series of presentations exploring a theme of their choosing, though some documentation of these was difficult to access. That said, its impact was tangible in Artist Project Major and the clear cohesion of the cohort.

Performance Matters

Particularly impressed by innovations in module where one-day tasks give students sense of creative process. Some questions about how best to access documentation of performance, for example, one student's documentation seemed to be a train ticket. This to be considered by the student as part of the live brief. Also, ongoing discussion about how to assess practice as

research and for future iterations the course director has suggested 100% PaR project. Other iterations of this module – Performance Matters 2 – offers the opportunity to create a conference and present a paper which is excellent experience for anyone pursuing further study post-MA.

Artist Mentor Project

Great input from a range of professional practitioners including members of the teaching team. Clear that students get a rich and inspiring experience from this kind of professional mentoring. I would like to see the results of these live pieces given similar mini-festival platform as APM.

Artist Project Major

I was able to attend Landing Party in 2017/2018 and impressed by the range of work, in terms of style, scope and site etc. It is clear that students are encouraged to test the boundaries of the artform e.g. conference, audio tour, one-to-one performance etc. and also challenge their own theatre-making defaults. Space for critical reflection is afforded in the flexibility around assessment pathways and professionalisation of their practice considered through the platforming of the work in a mini-festival and related publicity. Feedback is sensitive and robust.

The Festival Project

This module presents students with an exciting opportunity to attend a festival in Romania and critically respond to performances they see there with daily 'crits'. They then bring this real-world experience back into dialogue with a UK festival for a written component at the end. Some students seemed to struggle with this longer piece of critical writing and in future iterations the assessment will be adapted and the festival partner may be national rather than international. That said, this module speaks to the international and professional aims of contemporary theatre-making and, post-Brexit, it is important to explore these contexts on this kind of MA.

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

My summaries of the individual units, as detailed in section (h), refer to these areas.

(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.

N/A

(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)? | 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/marketing criteria? | X | | |

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

| Draft coursework | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | Yes | No | N/A |
| a. | (i) Did you receive all the draft coursework? | | X | |
| | (ii) If not, was this at your request? | X | | |
| 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? | | | X |
| | (ii) If you did not receive all the scripts, was the method of selection satisfactory? | | | X |
| 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? | 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 |

| Examination Committee/Board of Examiners | | | | |
|---|--|------------|-----------|------------|
| | | 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 Examination Committee/Board of Examiners? | X | | |