

**MA Popular Music and Culture 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	
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.			
* 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.

Learning materials are conveniently summarised and the format of student evaluation statistics and comments are convenient and easy to use.

The provision of a module leader's report is a useful opportunity for external examiners to see the module leader's perspective on the course. Written feedback is of a high standard.

Written feedback is consistently of a high standard and provides insight and rigour.

## 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.	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A *</b>
<i>*Not applicable if the course is not a professional body course please indicate here.</i>			<b>x</b>
<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).
I have not been able to attend an exam board since my last report.

(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 overall performance of students is in keeping with what I would expect at this level of study and includes some very strong work.

(d) The strengths and weaknesses of the students in general with respect to knowledge, conceptual grasp or application of skills.
The general standard of work I have seen is high and the submission materials demonstrate a rigorous approach to ensuring that students have an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding of the skills needed in these areas of study. Of particular commendation is the level of technical scrutiny demonstrated by students undertaking technical analysis on a given theme. The work with the highest marks awarded was an excellent example of this and the

student's overall mark of 79% is well earned. In terms of application of skills though, I do find it surprising that modules such as Advanced Audio Engineering have entirely written submission outputs and I wonder whether practical components could be integrated here. It is good to see the rigour that evolves from the pattern of written proposals, followed by reports and presentations but overall, practice is arguably less well represented than in some comparable courses and the best work I have seen is in written reports.

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

I am not looking at examination papers in this review. With regard to other forms of assessment though, I have been consistently impressed by the approach taken by the course team towards presenting me with relevant module information. Module handbooks, moderation packs, student feedback, marks summaries and module leader reports etc., are generally very clear and informative, allowing me to get a good sense the assessment process. Feedback is quite diverse however, and I would encourage the course team to share examples of best practice with one another with a view to aligning both the focus and quantity of the feedback that you give. This could really help with the expectation management of students.

Note that Orchestration, Arrangement and Programming was the only module leader's report to give a full breakdown of marks in the commentary section. As an EE, this was very useful and gave a much clearer insight into these statistics than the marks spreadsheets themselves and provided a clearer narrative than the prose approach taken by other MLs.

Also, see item G below.

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

*The following response has been pasted from a previous report.* I have now gleaned a good understanding of the curriculum through a combination of accessing the VLE, talking with staff, talking with students, reading through handbooks and looking at student work and feedback. I toured the buildings in which teaching and practical work takes place in late 2016 and I was impressed by both the curriculum, the quality and engagement of the staff and the resources.

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

When I began as EE in 15/16, there were issues with accessing the VLE. Since then, all materials have been provided for me via GoogleDrive, and this has worked very well. However, in light of GDPR, many insitutions are now moving towards only hosting personal information on cloud storage that resides within the firewall of the institution (e.g Sharepoint), and I would encourage the team to check whether current system is in line with best practice in this regard.

(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.)

Although this report focuses mainly on the Winter enrolments, it was useful to be provided with examples of work from the following modules:

Creative Sound Design; Electroacoustic Music; Advanced Audio Engineering; Advanced Software Engineering; Final Project; Music Industries in Practice; Negotiated Skills

Development; Orchestration, Arrangement and Programming; Popular Music Analysis; Popular Music as Leisure and Culture; Research Practice; Sound and Music for Interactivity; Sound, Music and Image, and Music Industries Practice.

I have already made reference to the highest marks awarded in this module in section (d) above. I looked at all of the work within this module and I was pleased to see a range of research topics clearly focused on student's personal development and applied learning. At the lower end of the marks range I noted that the lowest marks were awarded to work that demonstrated a noticeably poor level of written English and the disparity between this student's verbal and written modes of presentation. While staff feedback is thorough and insightful and points to areas other than writing that are in need of improvement, I would encourage the course team to continue to explore a variety of mechanisms for submission to ensure that students have every opportunity to excel. As remarked in previous reports, I commend the inclusion of an alternative presentation of research in this regard – this is a great idea.

Across all modules available to me, it would good to see a wide range of projects, a consistency of high-quality feedback and a good spread of appropriately awarded marks.

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

I was intrigued to read about the Skype interviews set up with industry professionals for the Music Industries in Practice module. This appears to be a very economical and personalised way of students interfacing with industry. As the module leader comments however, it will be interesting to see whether this can be scaled to larger cohorts.

(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.

In my interim report, I suggested that to encourage the use of the full range of marks, descriptors be produced for each grading category. I saw a number of feedback sheets where lower marks are bracketed as '0-39' and higher marks as '70+' and I suggest that there should be quality descriptors for every 10% bracket. I'm pleased to see that a wider range of marks seems now to be being used but this makes a more detailed descriptor sheet all the more important.

(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**

<b>Course Materials</b>				
Did you receive?		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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		

<b>Draft examination papers</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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

<b>Draft coursework</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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?			X
c.	Were suitable arrangements made to consider your comments?			x

<b>Marking Examination Scripts</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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
<b>Recommended sample sizes at Leeds Beckett University are as follows:</b>				
<p>a) <b>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.</b></p> <p>b) <b>Samples to include all classification categories, and it is helpful to concentrate around the boundaries to include some fails.</b></p> <p>c) <b>Samples to consist of internally moderated work, clearly evidencing the moderation process.</b></p>				
b.	Was the general standard and consistency of marking appropriate?			X
c.	Were the scripts marked in such a way to enable you to see the reasons for the award of given marks?			x

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

<b>Coursework/continuously assessed work</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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		

<b>Orals/performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
a.	Were suitable arrangements made for you to conduct orals and/or moderate performances/recitals/appropriate professional placements?			x

<b>Examination Committee/Board of Examiners</b>				
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>N/A</b>
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		