

EXTERNAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Name of External Examiner REDACTED
Course/Field BMus (Hons)
Academic Year 2003-2004
Assessment Board Date MAB: 29 June 2004

B. REPORT ON ASSESSMENT, REGULATIONS AND PROCEDURES AND STANDARDS

Part One: Module Assessment Boards (MABs)

1. Were the forms of assessment appropriate as set, free of significant errors and clearly articulated? If not, in what way do you think they could be improved?

Yes.

2. Do the assessment methods for individual modules adequately test the stated learning outcomes of the modules?

Mostly.

a) In the performance modules, the assessment methods adequately test the stated learning outcomes at every level.

b) In the modules where aspects of music notation are being taught (composition, scoring, basic harmony etc) the assessment methods adequately test the stated learning outcomes at every level.

c) The dissertations, both double and single, adequately test the stated learning outcomes. In much other essay-based work, where the learning outcomes include aspects of critical thought, the assessment methods are sometimes too limited in terms of word count adequately to allow the student to construct sufficiently critical, reflective and well-researched work.

3. Did you receive, or see, an adequate sample and range of assessed work?

Yes.

Would you wish to change/extend the sample in future (please give details)?

No.

4. Do you consider that the internal assessment of student work was carried out as rigorously and fairly as possible (eg were processes of internal moderation used and documented where appropriate etc.)?

Yes. This year, the Music Business module had been moderated.

5. Was there sufficient information available to you on, or accompanying, student assessed work to explain why marks had been awarded?

Yes.

Where assessed work was returned to students, was the feedback to them clear, unambiguous and likely to lead to improvement in future assessed work?

The quality of the reports is almost without exception exemplary. The form of the reports allows tutors to comment on every important aspect of the work. Almost all tutors use the report to give feedback that is useful and constructive. These tutors clearly spend a great deal of time marking work thoughtfully and preparing careful and useful reports. These tutors also mark up the copy of the work with corrections and comments. In these cases, if the feedback does not lead to improvement, it is certainly not because of any shortcomings in the feedback. However, as in past years, the Music Business module does not reflect these comments. The reports did not clearly identify some aspects of the work which very obviously needed further thought. Basic errors in use of language went uncorrected.

6. Were you given adequate information about expected standards and related criteria relevant to the student work being assessed. If you would like to receive better information in future please give details.

All the information was adequate.

7. Please comment on the level of actual student achievement against the assessment standards set (e.g. in your view how does the performance of Kingston University students compare with that of students elsewhere?).

In some cases, the level of achievement is comparable with that of students elsewhere. Some very good dissertations showed the ability to formulate an argument or focus on an issue and illustrate with case studies, engage with up-to-date scholarly literature, and construct a decent and coherent essay. Some of the recitals indicated a very decent level of attainment, some excellent. However, there are too many students struggling to reach a basic level of literacy and musical fluency. Some of these students, producing not just barely acceptable but sometimes unacceptable work, are attaining passes at Honours level. Although it is important to reward work that has shown improvement, *and while a great deal of the work produced at Kingston does show significant improvement* ('added value' is often enormous), it is surely important not to over-reward this work and thereby devalue the Degree. This has particularly been the case of the current second- and first-year students whose attainment has too often been lower than I have seen in the past at Kingston. In turn, this must lead to questions about the standard of some students at recruitment. It is not possible for the tutors to work miracles, and if the music school continues (rightly) to recruit students who show promise but only a limited attainment at A level or equivalent, then it must recognize this pressing need for a foundation year for some students.

8. Were the assessment regulations and associated procedures applied consistently and fairly? Were issues of mitigation dealt with equitably? Were any cases of breaches of regulations by students dealt with openly and equitably?

Yes on all counts.

Part Two: Module Assessment Boards (MABs) and Programme Assessment Boards (PABs)

My answers apply to the MAB only.

9. Was the conduct of the assessment board(s) and any referral/resit boards satisfactory? If you were not satisfied please indicate any areas for improvement.

Yes.

10. Do the standards set (eg. pass/fail boundaries, classification boundaries, levels set for merits, distinctions etc.) compare with those elsewhere and with any national expectations (eg. subject benchmark standards, industrial, professional or statutory body requirements).

In the documentation of the programmes offered at Kingston, this appears to be so. However, some of the work actually set is at a lower level than one would expect and then overmarked.

Part Three: Programme Assessment Boards (PABS) (Note: please respond to these questions if you are associated with the work of a PAB as well as a MAB and not if you work only with a MAB).

I was not present at the PAB.

11. Were the assessment regulations clear and unambiguous in discriminating classifications and gradings and in determining the conditions for progression, reassessment etc.? If not, please indicate what improvements could be made.

12. Were the assessment regulations and associated procedures applied consistently and fairly? Were issues of compensation and mitigation dealt with equitably? Were any cases of breaches of regulations by students dealt with openly and equitably?

C. GENERAL FEEDBACK

My views on this have not essentially changed. Generally, the work that includes a significant amount of practice-based work was better than that exploring abstract ideas. However, too much of the work exploring abstract ideas was poor. Analytical work was on the whole adequate in cases where straightforward identification was required but often there was little attempt at interpretation or imagination. Many modules revealed shortcomings in the ability to read scores. Prose-based work often reveals poor understanding of the English language and a low ability to communicate ideas. There is little evidence of real engagement with scholarly writing and too much essay-type work is based on a small selection of ‘tertiary’ materials (*New Grove*, even *Grout*). See also comments under B 7.

I continue to find the following:

- a) work overmarked in a significant number of modules (and still in the Music Business module);**
- b) some of the tasks set below the standard one would expect in the later levels of a Music Degree;**
- c) too much work lacking critical focus.**

But finally, I also continue to find significant progress in the work of many students and for these students it is clear that the BMus Degree at Kingston is a valuable experience. I congratulate the team on their results with these students and wish them luck in improving other aspects of their standards.

D. PUBLIC INFORMATION SUMMARY

On balance, considering the answers you have given in Section B and what you have written in Section C, would you agree that in your view as an external examiner:

1. The standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at this level, in this subject;

YES

2. The standards of student performance are comparable with similar programmes or subjects in other UK institutions with which you are familiar;

NO

If your answer is NO please provide details in approximately 100 words in this space.

Kingston Music School recruits broadly and often gives students who have shown promise but not high attainment the opportunity to engage in Higher Education. In this regard it fulfills an important role in Higher Education, especially given the current emphasis on Widening Participation. However, since no provision has been made for a foundation year, which would prepare those struggling at the lower end for Degree-standard work, it is scarcely possible in only 3 years for such students to attain a true Degree standard. The Music School does, rightly, reward improvement with better marks, but in doing so, has too often over-rewarded by national standards.

3. The processes for assessment, examination and the determination of awards are sound and fairly conducted;

YES

4. Please use the space provided to comment on any particular strengths, distinctive or innovative features in relation to standards and assessment processes.

A notable strength of the Music School is its encouragement and tutoring of weaker students. Reports are extremely thorough, useful, and likely to lead to improvement. Many students, who perhaps have not previously had the necessary musical or educational opportunities to reach a high level, graduate having developed adequate music and critical skills and an ability to use language effectively. A student entering the Music School who was prepared to work hard and heed the advice given by tutors would, under its system, be given every opportunity to improve to a very acceptable standard.

E. REPORT ON PROCESS

The University would be most grateful for your help in monitoring various practical and procedural matters concerning your involvement in the assessment process. The following section is designed so that we will be able to react to your comments and improve our practices and procedures.

Note: some questions apply to particular stages of appointment; please feel free to answer ‘not applicable’.

		YES	NO	N/A
1	Was an adequate briefing about the University’s external examiner system provided by the relevant School? (<u>New externals only</u>)			x
2	Were you provided with adequate briefing materials for the programme you are examining? (<u>New externals only</u>)			x
3	Was all necessary information regarding any changes to the programme you are examining provided? (<u>Continuing externals</u>)	x		
4	If you were asked to comment on draft assessments, or decided to do so, was sufficient time allowed?			x
5	Was sufficient time available to scrutinise samples of work?	x		
6	Were arrangements for any viva-voce examinations satisfactory?			x
7	Was sufficient notice given of assessment board meetings?	x		
8	Were resit/referral boards formally and properly constituted?			x
9	Were decisions made by referral/resit boards fully reported to the main assessment board?			x
10	In modular schemes, was the relationship between ‘module’ and ‘programme’ level boards clear and unambiguous?	x		
11	Was sufficient feedback provided by the course team on responses to your last report? (<u>Continuing externals only</u>)	x		
12	Were reports of previous externals made available to you in order to provide continuity? (<u>New externals only</u>)			x

Signature*

Date*

F. ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

1. An electronic version of the report form can be accessed from the University's web site (www.kingston.ac.uk/externalexam). If you do not have access to email you can obtain a paper copy of the report form from the assessment board clerk.
2. We would be grateful if you could return your report as a Word file by e-mail. In completing the form it would be helpful if your comments could be italicised or in a different font to the questions. E-mail files should be sent to extexam@kingston.ac.uk
3. You will be given an expenses claim form, at an assessment board meeting. (If for any reason you are unable to attend, the secretary to the board will forward copies to you.)
4. The fee due to you will be paid in the next payroll run after the date of receipt of the form.
5. **Please note that the University, in any one-year, may request additional feedback on aspects of standards or procedures as an investigation or occasional audit. This request will be made at the appropriate assessment board meeting as a supplement to the form and you will be asked to add any comments into section C of the form.**
6. It would be helpful if you could notify the University of any of the following when you return the form: change of title, change of address, telephone numbers etc.
7. If you have any queries please contact:

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