

Re. External Examiner's Report 2011/2012, on the Academy of Popular Music performance assessments.

This is my first report as External Examiner for the Academy of Popular Music. The report relates to my observation of recitals held on 19th & 20th June 2012.

1. The operation and conduct of the Board of Examiners (and any Mitigation Panel or Examination Committee meeting you may also have attended).

The board of examiners was very efficiently conducted. Despite the board examining and processing the marks for a large number of students, all the information required was extremely clearly presented, both at board and to me as external examiner on both days, with summaries of all moderation undertaken, student profiles up to date and the mitigating circumstances that had been granted explained

2. Whether the academic standards set for its awards, or part thereof, are appropriate

In my view, the academic standards set for the awards listed above are indeed appropriate. In coming to this judgement, I sampled all forms of task (sight-reading, aural training, recitals) used to assess what was a large student cohort. The tasks are extremely well suited to their purpose.

3. The extent to which its assessment processes are rigorous, ensure equity of treatment for students and have been fairly conducted within institutional regulations and guidance

I am confident that the assessment processes are rigorous and fair, and that these processes conform to the institutional regulations and guidelines.

4. The standards of student performance in the programmes or parts of programmes which they have been appointed to examine

Across the various performances for which I was appointed, there was some work of an exceptionally high standard and very little work of poor quality. The prepared pieces were generally undertaken to a very high standard. The widest span of marks pertained to the identification of scales and arpeggio elements for which some students had clearly prepared much better than others.

5. The overall performance of the students, in relation to that of comparable levels of work in other institutions

In general, the standards and student achievements compare very favourably with those at other higher education institutions with which I am familiar. The best student achievements were truly impressive. I agreed with the marking of all work that I sampled.

6. Issues which should be brought to the attention of supervising committees in the faculty/department, division or wider University

I offer two suggestions for Faculty consideration:

(a) Due to the sheer number of performances to examine there was not always time to have a sufficiently long viva voce. There were many instances where students played their piece of choice in its entirety at the expense of a rushed viva. In an effort to make the viva more inclusive the examiners should not be afraid to interrupt some of the performances if they feel enough has been played to merit a mark. This would free up some time for a viva. The viva is a valuable part of the assessment as it can provide further insights into each students development. It also gives the examiners a chance to make immediate recommendations to the students, in terms of further listening etc.

(b) The faculty should consider the provision, if not already done so, of written reports for the performances to be made available, in due course, to the students for their pedagogical benefit.

8. 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 Academy of Popular Music 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 Academy 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.

I trust that this information is sufficient, but please get in touch if there are any outstanding queries

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