External Examiners' report template
(Subject Assessment Board)

Appendix 4b

Section C: To be completed by the External Examiner

Name	K Foreman
Programme	BA Honours/DipHE/CertHE Music Production and Sound Engineering delivered by Point Blank Music School
Modules moderated	**All**
Overseas campuses	Are these modules taught at an overseas campus? **No**
Collaborative Partners	Is this programme (or any modules) delivered at a collaborative partner? **Yes** If Yes, please specify the name of the partner institution: **Point Blank**
Date (s) of assessment Board (s)	I attended four (4) assessment boards on the following dates: **15/12/2017** **03/04/2018** **22.06.2018** **21.09.2018**

Please complete the following by ticking the appropriate box:

OVERALL STANDARDS	Yes	No
1. In your view, are the standards set for the award(s) appropriate for the qualification(s)?	☒	
2. In your view, are the standards of student performance equivalent to other UK institutions with which you are familiar?	☒	

If 'no' to either of the above questions please provide further information in the box below.

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To be completed by all external examiners	Yes	No
I confirm that the assessment process was conducted effectively:	☒	☐
• The School and Programme Team communicated effectively with me throughout the year	✓	
• I was sent all draft examination papers, (where appropriate), with assessment criteria for approval		
• I was given sufficient time to approve draft examination papers (where appropriate), with assessment criteria for approval	✓	
• I was given the opportunity to see samples of marked work (including written assignments and examination scripts) covering the full range of marks	✓	
• I saw evidence of internal moderation in the assessment process and confirm it was used effectively and consistently	✓	

If 'no' to any of the above questions please provide further information in the box below.

> I was not sent examination papers because I was able to view all assessment briefs and examinations in advance on the Point Blank VLE. I was also able to view all the new assessment criteria which was introduced in 2017-18.

To be completed by external examiners in their 2ⁿᵈ and subsequent years of appointment	Yes	No
Did you receive formal written feedback on your report for the previous academic year?	☒	☐
Were you satisfied with the response to the issues raised in your report for the previous academic year?	☒	☐

If 'no' to any of the above questions please provide further information in the box below.

Programme/Subject design, content and standards

Point Blank's *BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering* programme (with *Cert HE and Dip HE*) is a specialist course with strong industry currency and credibility in the electronic dance music sector. It has been designed to meet the needs of students aspiring to be music producers/engineers and seeking professional instruction on up-to-date, industry-standard production tools.

The bespoke Pont Blank VLE is an excellent platform for online teaching and learning with a very good student interface and high-quality resources. The VLE has improved significantly during 2017-18 in response to external examiner feedback.

The Programme Handbook is fit for purpose and meets key requirements in communication of information on standards and policies. Programme and module aims are clearly outlined and assessments are designed to test the learning outcomes. I have examined evidence of moderation for each of the four examination boards I have attended and am satisfied that standards are being maintained in the assessment process. The assessment decisions for the work I examined, and grades awarded at L4, L5 and L6 are broadly in line with other institutions in the sector.

Student performance

Student performance in 2017-18 is varied and this is reflected in the broad range of grades awarded. At the top of the scale, there are examples of very high-quality work; some at L6 comes close to professional standard. I reviewed work across all the grade bands and found it to be broadly comparable to standards on other HE programmes.
In 17-18, I again looked at failures. Most fails resulted from non-submission of coursework rather than being awarded a grade below 40. I understand efforts are being made to mitigate the fast turnaround of assessments on the accelerated degree format requiring hand-ins during week 9. At the September examination board, it was proposed that assessments be spaced out across the semester to reduce pressure in the final weeks. I would recommend this be done wherever possible. Where work is failed, I would recommend that marks of 39 be avoided where possible.

Assessments: structure, design and marking
There is a broad range of assessment activity on the programme with an emphasis on practical tasks, supported by a written coursework component to contextualise the task.
It would be good practice to change/rotate written assessment tasks, such as the essay brief in the Music Industry module, year-on-year to guard against potential plagiarism. However, most assessment tasks at Point Blank do not involve academic essays. Tasks are highly practical and require learners to create their own tracks, mixes, digital assets, etc. Consequently, the opportunity for plagiarism is limited. The assessment briefs in some modules are quite inventive and has resulted in some student work which has been a pleasure to examine. Overall, the assessment activities are well-planned and offer the student sufficient opportunity to demonstrate achievement of module learning outcomes.

Feedback/Marking
Feedback and marking in general has improved considerably during 2017-18. This is a result of specific grading criteria and marking rubrics being introduced for all modules. I am pleased to note this and commend the programme team for responding positively to my feedback. There is still some variation in the quality of feedback, as would be expected with a teaching faculty of freelance HPLs. However, marking consistency and overall quality has improved significantly. The staff training which was carried out in August 2018 has clearly had a positive impact. All markers are using the new rubrics which link feedback directly to learning outcomes and grading criteria. Feedback is detailed and addressed directly to the student, with many examples of good practice in terms of developmental comments to help the student perform better.

During 2017-18, I looked at the following modules while examining for the examination boards:

- ✓ PB411 Introduction to Production
- ✓ PB412 Sound Engineering
- ✓ PB413 Music Composition
- ✓ PB414 Sound Design
- ✓ PB415 Art of Mixing
- ✓ PB416 The Music Industry
- ✓ PB511 Composing for Film and TV
- ✓ PB512 Production Analysis
- ✓ PB513 Record Deals & Branding (see below)
- ✓ PB514 Creative Production & Remix
- ✓ PB515 Electronic Music Performance
- ✓ PB516 Mastering
- ✓ PB611 Advanced Composition
- ✓ PB614 Advanced Sound Design
- ✓ PB615 Audio for Games
- ✓ PB616 Production Portfolio

Assessment Boards

I attended four assessment boards at Point Blank:

- 15/12/2017
- 03/04/2018
- 22.06.2018
- 21.09.2018

The boards were well organised and conducted professionally. The boardroom was an appropriate environment and module results were projected onto a large screen which was useful to attendees.
The first two boards were chaired by Callum Dolan, Head of Education.
The boards in June and September were chaired by Angela Foo (Quality Assurance Manager) and serviced by Briony Black (Programme Coordinator).
Discussion at each of the boards has been constructive; my comments and feedback have been responded to and noted in the minutes.

Role of the External Examiner

It has been useful for me to come to Point Blank to attend the examination boards. It has enabled me to get to know the academic administration team and to inspect the teaching facilities in both buildings.

A key challenge for me in 2016-17 was the accessibility of information and materials on which I needed to make judgements as an external examiner. The Point Blank VLE is an excellent platform for online teaching and learning with a very good student interface and high-quality resources. However, it had not been configured for HE external examination and I lost time searching for key information. This year, I have been impressed with the response to EE's requests for added functionality. The development team at Point Blank have made significant efforts to help myself and the other EEs and Briony Black has swift to pass on my feedback.

Collaborative Programmes

I have not personally encountered any problems in the relationship between Middlesex University and Point Blank.

Recommendations or actions

During four assessment boards, I have highlighted several areas for development and there has been a positive response. The regularity of the boards (4 per year) has allowed this be an iterative process with progressive changes and improvements.

- Following EE feedback during 17-18, Point Blank have developed an algorithm which is embedded in the VLE and automatically calculates final grades. This went live for the examination board of 21st September 18 and marks a significant development. There was a minor teething problem with number/text correlation of award classifications, but this should be swiftly ironed out. I am looking forward to full deployment at the next examination board, with inclusion of the Middlesex 20-point framework.
- I and other EEs requested greater functionality and access key information. As a result, the VLE has improved in terms of navigation. An academic profile for each student has been implemented. Developments are ongoing for academic tear 18-19

Each of the four recommendations I made in my last report has been addressed.

1. *Grading criteria – my primary recommendation was that grading criteria be developed for assessments.*

   Point Blank have also now rolled-out structured feedback templates that link to published grading criteria across the programme. The rubric feedback boxes ensure that the instructors refer directly to LOs in their feedback to students. I checked each module for the September board and confirmed that all markers are now utilising the rubrics.
   Feedback in places just need a little more depth - also important to ensure that the feedback form includes a final summary paragraph that gives holistic feedback around what could be done better

2. *I recommended that some training be done to improve the correlation between feedback language and the grade awarded*

   The instructor staff training event took place on 22nd August 2018. It has improved feedback and grade correlation. I have located significantly fewer examples of poor feedback/grade correlation over the course of 2018. The

application of grading criteria and rubrics has brought greater accuracy to the assessment process.

3. *Calibration of grading across faculty. A strategy to improve standardisation of marking across the HPL team*

This has been implemented and resulted in greater consistency of grading across tutor teams. I can confirm that staff training and calibration efforts by module leaders has resulted in significantly fewer outliers during 2018. There was discussion at June board regarding Electronic Music Performance. A tutor over-rewarded coursework but this was resolved through the moderation process and the correct marks were agreed.

4. *Turnitin for originality checking – there is a need for originality checking for academic essays.*

Solid progress has been made here. Although essays are not submitted through Turnitin, tutors marking academic essays now have their own Turnitin log-in. This is a positive development and allows them to originality check work they suspect of plagiarism. I note that some tutors have made more use of this option than others. Some still refer to 'googling passages' but there is a move in the right direction. Ideally, I would like to see all written work submitted through turnitin. However, I recognise the challenges of integrating the software into the VLE. It may also not be cost effective for Point Blank as the programme assessment does not include many academic essays.

Good practice

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- Communication by the education team has again been very good in 17-18.

- Positive response to my feedback. The points I have raised have been swiftly responded to and solutions proposed.

I would like to thank Briony and the team for their cooperation and for swiftly initiating the necessary work in response to my comments.