Rationale for Faculty of Music Part II Assessment Plan

The Music Faculty assessment plans (emailed to students, Directors of Studies and others headed Music Tripos Assessment Arrangements 2020, Tuesday 31st March, 16:58 & 16.59) were the result of extensive discussions and consultations with students and the University Education Quality and Policy Office. This document outlines the main considerations which led to the Plan and hopes to address some of the concerns that have been raised.

Guiding Principles

Prior to formulating alternative plans for assessment, the Faculty of Music asked students to let us know about their wishes concerning examinations in the light of the covid-19 pandemic and about their circumstances, receiving a response rate of more than 50% across all three years. Responses indicated that most students were keen to proceed with assessment as opposed to DDH (Deemed Deserving of Honours). It also revealed considerable disparities in the domestic situations in which students now find themselves, in terms of technological resources (computers, quality of internet connection) access to musical instruments/workspace/literature, and issues relating to health/caring responsibilities.

The Faculty Assessment Group sought to balance mitigation of these factors with upholding the University’s principles of fairness and rigour, resulting in the framework for assessment announced to students on Tuesday.

Number of Papers

The Music Faculty’s initial desire to reduce the number of final-year papers required from six to four — as some other Faculties have done — was deemed unviable as all six of our Part II papers are options selected by students themselves. Faculties that were permitted to reduce the number of papers had compulsory papers as part of their Part II; a strategy of dropping one of these compulsory papers was thus available to them, ensuring parity between students. To compensate for not being able to reduce the number of required papers from six to four, the Faculty has instead reduced the number of answers required in written papers from three to two, extended the deadlines for coursework, and cancelled the requirement for composers to provide a recording of their music using live musicians.

Mitigating Circumstances

The Music Faculty also considered asking all Part II students for a Statement of Circumstances outlining how the Covid-19 crisis had affected them. However, this course of action was also deemed unviable as it would have circumvented the established procedure of post-examination applications to the Examination Access and Mitigation Committee (EAMC). It is therefore vital that students whose work is compromised by the current situation do make an application to the EAMC via their College Tutor at the appropriate time.

Practical Papers (Advanced Performance, Advanced Skills)

The Faculty’s consultations with students demonstrated the wish to retain performance options, even in cases where submission of videos was impossible. Since the practical elements at Part II can total up to one third of the final mark, the Faculty was keen to preserve a way for students to offer some of these skills as part of their final assessments; to have failed to do so would have been to disadvantage a very large proportion of the cohort. The present set of options, the result of extensive consultation and deliberation, was therefore designed to be flexible, and to encompass pathways for students unable to submit recordings. Whilst a single live performance is no longer an option, the Faculty hopes that the new papers allow for many other modes of performance, and of engagement with performance, to be explored. The available options are intended to provide students with the opportunity, should they so wish, to reflect many aspects of their performing careers in Cambridge as
a part of their final assessment. We recognise that the conditions we would wish for are unavailable, but we wish to avoid dispensing altogether with the performance-related elements which have, for many years, been a great strength in Cambridge and a central part of the Tripos.