

The Vice-Chancellor,
University of Cambridge,
The Old Schools,
Cambridge CB2 1TN

September 28th 2017

**Music Tripos Part 1A
External Examiner's Report**

Dear Vice-Chancellor

Belatedly - for which my apologies - I'm happy to be providing you with my report on this year's examination process for the Music Tripos 1A. This is my third, and hence final year in this role.

I will be brief, since there are very few substantive issues. As usual, I was sent materials (exam papers and rubrics) early on and was able to scrutinise these at leisure. I attended the University for three days (June 14th-16th) in order to sample scripts from all papers, to arbitrate referrals and to attend the two examination board meetings.

As in previous years, I was impressed with the standard both of the work of the students and with the diligence and efficiency of the faculty and staff involved - particularly Dr Causton as board chair. I felt I was able to form a satisfactory overview of the process and the marking and these were undertaken with care and fairness. I was pleased to note that the concerns I had raised over the last two years (over due diligence in ensuring disagreements over marks were rationalised before referral, and over appropriate level descriptors) had been addressed satisfactorily.

My two general concerns this year are as follows:

Far more so than in the previous two years, there was a tendency to avoid outstanding marks (80+) for obviously outstanding work. For the vast majority of papers, there were no marks at all within the 80+ range. I am aware that this is a familiar and ubiquitous danger and I flag it up here merely as a warning: in my experience this kind of tendency is of the 'creeping' variety and I'd recommend that faculty are encouraged to be aware it and to reward the best work appropriately.

There was also an issue about the use of scaling (in the Tonal Skills papers) as a 'corrective' to perceived deficiencies in students' pre-university training in these disciplines in recent years. Those deficiencies (not the fault of the students themselves, of course) are undoubtedly there; but the problem is the University's and the issue should be addressed through adaptation or modification of the curriculum rather than the type of 'air-brushing' that scaling can often represent. So I would encourage faculty to think carefully about the efficacy of setting these papers at the standard currently in place, and maybe to consider whether in the current educational climate they should be assessed in the way they are, at the level (year 1) that they are, and perhaps whether they should be assessed at all - by which I mean that such skills can be provided in an extra-curricular context perfectly effectively (they are in many other universities).

Finally, my thanks go to all members of the Music faculty and staff who have made my three years of service so enjoyable, interesting and stress-free. It is obvious that Cambridge produces some of the very best undergraduate work in Music anywhere, and examining work of this quality is naturally a joy rather than a chore.

My very best wishes

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External Examiner