



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Point Blank Ltd, June 2018

1 Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Point Blank Ltd (the School) is making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision following the June 2017 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

2 Changes since the last QAA review visit

At the June 2017 Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) visit, 81 students were enrolled and subsequent to this another 31 students were registered, leading the School to report 112 students enrolled in 2016-17 comprising of the following; 22 students across the online Certificate of Higher Education (CHE) and Diploma of Higher Education (DHE) in Music Production and Business, 35 on the CHE Music Production and Sound Engineering, 50 on the three-year and two-year accelerated BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering and five on the CHE Radio Broadcasting. In Annex 2, section 1.1 of the annual return form the School reported that there are 273 students enrolled in 2017-18, which represents a significant increase in student numbers which triggered the extended monitoring visit undertaken by the team. There are 44 students on distance learning programmes, 30 on the CHE and DHE Music Production and Sound Engineering, and 199 on the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering three-year and the accelerated delivery two-year programmes (paragraphs 14 and 15).

2 The School has recently had two new awards progressed for validation by its awarding body, Middlesex University (the University), and are currently awaiting the signing of the final Memorandum of Collaboration, the awards are in BA (Hons) Music Industry Management and BA (Hons) Music Production and DJ Practice. The School has plans to launch the BA (Hons) Music Production and DJ Practice in 2018-19 as three-year and two-year accelerated programmes, and the BA (Hons) Music Industry Management in 2019-20 as a two-year accelerated programme.

3 The data return submitted by the School indicates seven full-time equivalent (FTE) management posts, five FTE administration, four FTE permanent and six FTE sessional instructors. There have been additional new appointments since the HER (AP), which include the appointment of a new Quality Assurance Manager, Data Manager, Student Services Officer, additional instructors, and the implementation of the Module Leader role. The School has appointed a Student Wellbeing Counsellor to commence July 2018 and is currently advertising for an Industry Liaison Executive to support student progression and extend current industry links and community engagement.

3 Findings from the monitoring visit

4 The School has made acceptable progress with its action plan from the 2017 HER (AP). The good practice relating to the recruitment and induction of instructors has been maintained (paragraph 6). The introduction of Module Leaders and associated development forums have widened the range of academic staff expertise and experience to strengthen

the School's approach to programme design and development (paragraph 7). The School has reviewed the processes and support available to academic staff to ensure they perform their role effectively (paragraph 8). The School's academic governance and committee structure, reporting lines and terms of reference have been reviewed to ensure effective and systematic oversight of annual monitoring (paragraph 9). The systematic approach to monitoring, measuring, and reporting enhancement has been progressed, this includes the School collecting and evaluating quantitative student data (paragraph 10).

5 The School continues to build on the good practice identified in the HER (AP) concerning the rigorous selection and induction of music industry professionals employed as sessional instructors. The Recruitment and Selection Policy has been reviewed and a range of tools developed to monitor the performance of new sessional instructors. Module Leaders also liaise closely with instructors to provide appropriate support. The School continues to actively seek sessional instructors with relevant and current professional industry experience, providing technical and creative support in well-resourced studio facilities on an individual basis where needed. The Study Essentials section on the bespoke virtual learning environment (VLE) has recently been updated with further modules and relevant guidance for academics and students (see also paragraph 13). Aspects of good practice identified by Module Leaders and during regular lesson observations are promoted through regular 'Instructor Best Practice' newsletters. The students whom the team met spoke enthusiastically about the good quality of teaching they receive.

6 The School has made good progress in widening the range of academic staff expertise and experience to strengthen the approach to programme design and development. Since the HER (AP), Module Leaders have been recruited and a clear role descriptor developed. Initial training has been provided, although further sessions are planned as the role develops. The School has identified appropriate academic training needs and enabled some Module Leaders to obtain teaching qualifications as a result. They have begun to produce reports for, and actively participate in, the Programme Development Committee (PDC) to suggest, discuss, and agree on improvements to the courses. Senior managers have already noted the positive impact on the provision that these steps have had, which has the potential to increase further as the new arrangements become more embedded.

7 Acceptable progress has been made in reviewing the School's strategy for learning and teaching to ensure a more systematic approach to the qualification and sustainable development of academic staff. The Learning and Teaching Strategy has been reviewed and approved by Academic Board. The Staff Recruitment and Selection Policy has also been updated, to ensure that both professional experience and academic qualifications are considered when recruiting new staff. In addition to providing academic training for some teaching staff through the Instructor Handbook and training videos on the VLE, the School has recently registered with Advance HE to improve teaching quality through training and academic advancement. Although there is no structured programme of staff academic development running at present, senior staff are currently preparing to implement this prior to the commencement of the next academic year. Students greatly appreciate the professional experience of their instructors, which helps them improve both academically and creatively.

8 The School has made acceptable progress in reviewing its academic governance and committee structure, reporting lines and terms of reference, to ensure effective and systematic oversight of annual monitoring. The academic governance structure has been revised to give Academic Board, as the overarching academic authority within the School, greater systematic oversight of standards and quality. Lines of reporting between committees and the timeliness of meetings are appropriate. The Quality Assurance Manual, which contains terms of reference and meeting schedules for all academic committees,

has been updated to reflect the revised structure and ensure that Academic Board takes responsibility for annual monitoring processes. The External Advisory Committee was formed to include two external advisers with extensive academic and industry experience to provide advice and validation for the School's Board of Directors. As the revised committee structure has only been operating since the start of the current calendar year, it has not yet had the opportunity to prove its ability to provide effective oversight of the annual monitoring process, although in the review team's view it has the potential to do so.

9 The School has made good progress in developing and implementing a more systematic approach to monitoring, measuring, and reporting enhancement. The School has introduced a comprehensive data monitoring system which is considered and reviewed at the External Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors. The Quality Cycle in the Quality Manual indicates reporting lines within the new Academic Governance structure. Module Leaders have presented reports to the PDC, including suggestions for improvement and enhancement of the provision as well as an analysis of feedback from teachers. The annual monitoring report (AMR) contains a detailed action plan, which has been combined with the action plan resulting from the HER (AP) to form a detailed Quality Enhancement Plan. The Quality Standing Committee (QSC) is responsible for ensuring implementation of this.

10 Admissions to the School are governed by a clear and detailed Admissions Policy, which is based on the University's, and is available from the School website. Staff involved in the admissions process receive appropriate training and written guidance and provide clear statistical analysis of admissions to senior managers. The website also contains guidance on admissions requirements, including the minimum IELTS achievement for those who have a first language other than English. There is support on the VLE for students requiring additional help with their English language writing, and the School has also arranged a discount with a local language school to provide extra support. All applicants are required to complete an application form, available from the website, which includes a personal statement of at least 500 words. Where further investigation is deemed necessary as to the applicant's suitability for the course, they are interviewed using standardised questions and submit a practical task with a written description, following which an admissions decision is made. There are clear procedures for students declaring special learning needs or disabilities to be provided with appropriate support. Applicants requesting admission credit for prior experience or learning must be approved by the University. The students whom the team met had all received clear responses to their initial enquiries and been provided with accurate information both prior to and following registration. Following enrolment, students receive an informative one-day induction which covers course requirements, health and safety, use of the VLE resources and other relevant information.

11 The School has produced a detailed AMR for the academic year 2016-17, which contains action plans for that and the previous year containing designated and timely actions agreed. Progress against actions is updated each October prior to submission of the report for the current year to the University. The School has received a satisfactory written response to this from the University Liaison Tutor. Due to the revised academic committee structure and recently-appointed senior staff, the process to produce the AMR for the current academic year will differ from previous years. A draft will be produced by the Quality Assurance Manager, informed by data from teaching staff via the PDC, student feedback via the Board of Studies, achievement and retention data and other relevant statistical information. It will then be developed by the QSC and passed to Academic Board for discussion and sign-off prior to submission to the University.

12 There is a system of student representation in operation covering all courses. Student representatives confirm that their role was clearly explained to them by staff following their appointment. They are effective in passing on student views through their

representation on the Board of Studies. There is currently no student representation on any other academic committees, although senior staff say that they are considering changing this. The School also obtains feedback from students through surveys at the end of each module and the Student Forum on the VLE and takes appropriate action in response. For example, the Study Essentials section of the VLE has recently undergone significant improvements to provide up-to-date guidance on the use of specialised software in response to student requests. Such changes are communicated to students through the regular 'You Spoke, We Listened' publication and the VLE. The School also engages students through the voluntary opportunities offered by its two record labels, regular radio input and industry networking opportunities. Student engagement is also fostered through the provision of high-end technology in the classrooms and studios, which are bookable outside class times. Students are enthusiastic about the level of support they receive from Instructors, as well as a series of masterclasses from guest speakers; and recently voted the School as 'The Best Independent Higher Education Institution' in the WhatUni Awards.

13 The significant increase in student numbers reported by the School has been specifically onto the three-year and two-year accelerated BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering programmes. The increase is from 50 students in 2017-18 as reported in the data return to 199 as reported in the provider annual return form. The School confirmed that the increase is due to a combination of factors including; new cohorts of students being recruited and progressing onto and within the three-year and two-year accelerated routes; students transferring to the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering from the CHE Music Production and Sound Engineering; and, recruitment to the online version of the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering. To support the increase in student numbers the School has increased the number of academic and support staff members to ensure the students receive a quality experience. The Orsman Road campus was opened in January 2015 with the expectation that the planned growth in both student numbers and courses would be accommodated for within these premises. In addition, the School has made significant investment in industry standard sound and recording equipment. Enhancements to the online resources and infrastructure have also been implemented. The students the team met reported that, with more students present, they had not experienced any reduction to access to staff or specialist facilities.

14 The School had identified that improvements to the monitoring and reporting of student recruitment numbers were needed, and appropriate actions have been taken to ensure compliance with formal reporting procedures. These include the establishment of central recording systems and regular reporting through the QSC and Admissions Committee onto the Academic Board and Board of Directors, and subsequently onto external agencies as required.

15 The data submitted by the School indicates an improved trend for retention rates over the previous three academic years of 61.7 per cent (2014-15), 78.3 per cent (2015-16) and 82.8 per cent (2016-17). Pass rates reported for completing students are 88.2 per cent (2014-15), 94.4 per cent (2015-16) and 96.7 per cent (2016-17).

4 Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

16 The School is continuing to map its policies to the Expectations and appropriate Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) effectively. Actions arising from this have been included in the Quality Enhancement Plan. This process is monitored by the QSC and Academic Board. The current Quality Assurance Manual has also been revised to meet the requirements of the Quality Code. In addition, the provision is subject to the validation and review processes of the University as the awarding body. Handbooks for the two recently-validated degree courses, which are scheduled to start

running over the next two academic years, have been aligned with relevant sections of the Quality Code. The School made use of its two external advisers, who sit on the External Advisory Committee, to provide relevant academic and industry perspectives when designing these programmes.

5 Background to the monitoring visit

17 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

18 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mr Mike Coulson, Reviewer, and Mr Robert Saynor, Coordinator, on the 5 and 6 June 2018.

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