



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Point Blank Ltd, May 2019

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 commendable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision since the [June 2018 monitoring visit](#).

Changes since the last QAA monitoring visit

2 The School delivers undergraduate programmes validated by Middlesex University. There are 402 full-time students including 67 on its distance learning programmes. There was a 30 per cent increase in recruitment from 57 to 74 students on the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering accelerated two-year programme. Recruitment on the three-year equivalent course had increased by 160 per cent to 86 students. Across the whole provision there has been an increase of 402 students from 273 students at the last monitoring visit equating to a 47 per cent increase. This significant increase triggered an extended monitoring visit.

3 The School's annual data return indicates 12 full-time managerial and support staff, 30 sessional academic staff, one full-time and nine part-time permanent staff.

4 Changes to the School since the last monitoring visit include the extension of space at the School's Penn Street site, which is the start of an extensive refurbishment beginning at the start of 2020. The School is also developing a foundation year (Level 3) to align with a widening and participation vision and will be delivering new courses in Music Industry Management from September 2019.

Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The School has made commendable progress with the ongoing monitoring, review and enhancement of its higher education provision and fully implemented fully all the recommendations from the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) (HER (AP)) carried out in June 2017. The School has embedded further actions which contribute to ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities. The School further developed the HER (AP) action plan into a Quality Enhancement Plan, monitored by the Quality and Standards Committee.

6 The module and programme leaders' roles have become embedded (paragraph 10) and the Academic Staff Development and Improvement Plan ensures a more systematic approach to qualification and sustainable development of academic staff (paragraph 10). The School is implementing the Quality Enhancement Plan, which is regularly monitored by the Academic Board. There is clear commitment to a comprehensive and inclusive review of the governance arrangements (paragraph 11). The School has taken deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities by the implementation of extensive student support for wellbeing and music industry engagement activities (paragraph 8 and 9).

7 The School has robust admissions procedures, monitored by the Admissions Committee (paragraphs 12). Assessment is carried out with rigour and integrity as evidenced by external examiner reports and student feedback (paragraph 13). The School monitors and reflects on retention and pass rates for all its cohorts (paragraph 15) and it continues to work with national frameworks and the base line regulatory requirements.as appropriate external reference points (paragraph 16). There is evidence of further good practice which is freely disseminated through formal and informal processes. Moreover, the example of good practice noted in the HER (AP) 2017 Report has been further developed and embedded (see paragraphs 8 and 9).

8 The School has made significant efforts to enhance student support and engagement activities. Comprehensive arrangements are developing for the effective representation of the collective student voice at all organisational levels. A Student Engagement Executive has been appointed to liaise with and support student activities. The Student Consultation Panel contributed to the development of a Foundation degree. Student Voice Leaders (including students studying at a distance) play a pivotal role in student engagement and regularly meet together formally. The School has taken successful innovative steps to overcome the challenges of engaging distance learning students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience with the wide use of interactive technology, social media and social networking. Students recognise these improvements with high scores in the School's internal surveys and the National Student Surveys.

9 The School has substantially expanded its structure of academic and pastoral student support. Students are comprehensively supported by a student services section which includes a student counsellor and active well-being provision including out of hours support. The Academic Board monitors student support and well-being There are opportunities for weekly one-to-one academic tutorials. The School continues its commitment to small group learning in addition to the extensive use and development of current music and educational technology. It is worthy of note that the students studying in the distance learning mode have the same access to technological resources and academic support as the students attending in London. Students report they value the extensive and individual support available. The School continues to enhance student opportunities for engagement with industry specialists to support their learning and preparation for future careers. Students greatly appreciate these opportunities to develop their music industry links.

10 The module and programme leaders thoroughly engage with the new roles, which now have clear job descriptions identifying responsibilities and functions and extensive structured training. The teaching staff contribute to regular development sessions including external contributions from Advance HE. All staff have these training opportunities and the senior managers and external examiners have noted the positive impact on the provision.

11 The OfS requires the School's governance arrangements to be reviewed as part of the registration process. This is being undertaken by external consultants, the School's External Advisory Committee and an internal working party. Subsequently, the governance will be reviewed annually and furthermore the External Advisory Committee is developing a Code of Governance. There is evidence to demonstrate that the revised committee structure is providing effective oversight of the School's quality assurance processes.

12 The School has fully embedded its robust admissions procedures which provide an effective basis for assessing an applicant's prior qualifications, their ability to study and their motivation for learning. The School admissions web pages give clear and detailed advice on admissions requirements, the admissions policy including appeals procedure and terms and conditions. The trained Admissions and Recruitment Team, led by Head of Registry,

manage student recruitment. This process is reviewed annually by the Admissions Committee, reporting to the Academic Board. During 2018 the School conducted an audit and review of the recruitment process creating a comprehensive flow chart and further training for staff. An applicant's proficiency in English language is assessed through internationally recognised language proficiency test scores. Any non-traditional applicants are assessed by an interview, written and practical exercises and portfolio of work. Students confirm that the admissions process is transparent, supportive and provides equality of opportunity.

13 The School assesses students' work with rigour and integrity. The external examiners confirm that internal and external verification processes ensure that student work is genuine, achieves the learning outcomes required and is marked fairly and securely. There is a broad range of assessments with an emphasis on practical tasks consequently, the opportunity for plagiarism is limited. The external examiners are particularly complimentary about their access to the School's VLE where they can view all assessment briefs and examinations in advance. Assessment practices offer the student sufficient opportunity to demonstrate achievement of module learning outcomes. There are specific grading criteria and marking rubrics for all modules which link feedback directly to learning outcomes and grading criteria.

14 There has been significant increase of student numbers reported by the School since the last monitoring visit in 2018. Specifically, recruitment onto the BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering two year accelerated course has increased from 57 to 74 students in 2017-18. Student recruitment has also increased from 33 to 86 students for the three-year BA (Hons) Music Production and Sound Engineering in 2017-18. There has also been a slight increase in 2018-19 recruitment for the distance-learning courses. The School confirmed that they have recruited additional staff to support the increases in numbers, but the capacity of students has not significantly increased as most of the students who have enrolled onto the higher education courses were existing students on the School's practical courses. The School is limited to student numbers within the maximum space of 16 per studio, but there are plans to expand and upgrade the Penn Street site with additional studios and facilities. Students confirmed that they have noticed an increase of students, but classes are still a manageable size and the School has increased the number of one-to-ones students have with tutors to ensure sufficient time and support is available.

15 The Quality and Standards Committee gives detailed consideration to student outcomes data, the analysis of student feedback, and progression data by module. Pass rates for the programmes due to have been completed by students in the 2016-17 cohorts range from 96 per cent to 100 per cent. Retention rates for the 2017-18 cohorts range from 80 per cent to 100 per cent for the BA programmes, 75 per cent to 100 per cent for two Certificate HE programmes and the Distance Learning Diploma in Music Production and Business. A number of programmes have small student cohorts and this can impact on the overall percentages. Students on many of the other programmes are not yet due to complete.

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

16 The School demonstrates highly effective engagement with relevant external reference points and has developed further its scrutiny and review of procedures to ensure alignment with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) (2013-18 and 2018) and the baseline regulatory requirements. This is demonstrated by the Quality Enhancement Plan's objectives directly relating to QC expectation the development of the School Strategic Plan the student engagement initiatives and the review of admissions. The School ensures its programmes draw effectively on Subject Benchmark Statements with a detailed emphasis

on learning outcomes in the programme specifications. The external examiners confirm that academic standards set for the award are appropriate for the qualifications.

17 As well as guidance from the University the School has also consulted a wide variety of sources such as the Office for Students, the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Advance Higher Education, UK NARIC, and has applied for a TEF 2019 award.

Background to the monitoring visit

18 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.

19 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mrs Catherine Fairhurst, Reviewer, and Miss Siobhain O'Mahony, QAA Officer, on 30-31 May 2019.

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