



Royal Conservatoire
of Scotland

**School of Music
Assessment Handbook**

BMus

MMus/MA

AdvPGDip

ArtDip

2021-22

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Introduction

Assessment is an important part of every student's degree studies at the Conservatoire. Assessment enables the Conservatoire to measure student progress and understanding but it also facilitates learning itself. Feedback is a vital part of this learning process.

Assessment at the Conservatoire reflects the institution's learning and teaching ethos, which is to nurture creativity through a focus on every student as an individual. Every assessment is designed to enable students to develop creatively as musicians, and every piece of feedback a student receives at the Conservatoire is tailored specifically to them and their work.

The School of Music utilises many types of assessment and feedback. This Handbook is designed to introduce students and staff to the different types ('modes') of assessment and the marking processes at the Conservatoire.

The majority of this Handbook focusses on 'summative' assessments, i.e. formal assessment of work with a grade that contributes to the final degree result. However, it is important to remember that assessment can also be informal and ungraded ('formative'). An example of formative feedback is the oral feedback delivered in principal study lessons.

The processes of assessment of and for learning must be fair, appropriate, consistent and transparent. This Handbook outlines the policies and procedures that the Conservatoire adopts to ensure this.

Information about Assessment

The School of Music undertakes to provide clear and accurate information about assessment, which is available to all staff, students and examiners. The main sources of information are programme and departmental handbooks and further information can be found on the Conservatoire's Moodle site for each module.

Examiners

The School of Music deploys four types of examiner: RCS staff members act as Internal Examiners and Internal Moderators; and professional practitioners and colleagues in other Conservatoires and Music departments act as Special External Assessors; and External examiners. The different roles and responsibilities of these are detailed in Appendix 1.

Submitting Assessments

Submission Deadlines

Submission deadlines are, as appropriate, published in student handbooks, posted on Programme noticeboards and in Moodle, and logged in students' Asimut calendars. The submission deadline is always 2pm on the advertised day unless otherwise stated.

Meeting the assessment requirements

Students should follow read the assessment brief (instructions) carefully and make sure that their work meets the assessment criteria. This information will usually be published on Moodle. Students should consult their module tutor or the module coordinator if they have questions concerning the assessment requirements.

Students are not permitted to submit the same work twice for examination. This applies to all forms of submission, including performed repertoire. E.g. a complete sonata may not be performed in a BMus 3 examination if one movement was performed in an examination in a previous year.

Flexibility is allowed in the case of Postgraduate students, however, where the same repertoire may on occasion be presented in different contexts: for example, an aria that is both performed in an opera and presented in an audition assessment, or a work that is both recorded and performed.

An essay or presentation already submitted for a previous assessment may not be submitted again in a different module, nor should the content of a presentation be submitted in another module as an essay or vice versa. Students should also take care not to copy sections of work from their previous submissions, as this may result in disciplinary action due to self-plagiarism.

Assessment Scope and Penalties

Assessment Scope

All submissions define the scope of the assessment in terms of a **word count** (for written work) or a **duration** (for presentations and lecture recitals). The scope of the assessment should be clearly stated in the module and assessment information although at postgraduate level these are often more flexibly defined.

Written work

For written work, the word count should be stated clearly on the submission at the end of document. The word count given should not include the title of the essay, the bibliography/ reference list, footnotes, captions on examples. It must, however, include any quotations (whether indented or not) and Harvard citations provided in the main body of the text.

Presentations and lecture-recitals

For presentations and lecture-recitals, the examiners will time the submission for live presentations, and normally take the indicated duration of a recording as the length of the submission except where there is obvious “dead air” on the recording, with no audio/ visual content – such ‘blank’ recording will be discounted in the overall duration of the submission.

You may also be given guidance about the proportion or length of played or recorded examples used in a presentation or lecture-recital. Not adhering to the guidance will normally have an impact on your mark in relation to the assessment criteria – for example, if you use too many examples in relation to

the guidance then you may be penalised for not having left yourself enough time in the assessment to explore issues in sufficient depth; if you use too few, you may not be able to demonstrate adequately the application of your research and understanding to your practice.

Penalties in relation to coursework and presentations

In Recitals, where it is essential that examinations keep to a specific schedule, penalties are applied in cases where the recital is shorter or longer than a 'plus or minus 10%' tolerance.

In written coursework submissions, presentations and lecture-recitals, it is likely that failing to meet the requirements of the scope of the submission will impact on the assessment grade in relation to the assessment criteria as defined in the assessment criteria and/ or rubric. Where this is the case, there is likely to be no further penalty, as it would be unfair to penalise the student twice in relation to the same issue.

However, in circumstances where work is significantly over- or underlength and this is not accounted for in the assessment rubric, the following penalties may apply:

- Submissions that are over or under the required length by 10-19% may be penalised by one grade point to a minimum of D3.
- Written submissions that are under the required length by 20% or more may be capped at D3.

Where a submission exceeds the required length by more than 20% the examiner may not read any work beyond the +10% tolerance.

Extensions

In exceptional circumstances, where a student knows in advance that they will be unable to meet the submission deadline through good cause, they may apply for an extension to the deadline, using an Extension Request Form. Extensions should normally be requested a minimum of 48 hours in advance of the deadline. Work submitted late where an extension has been granted will not be subject to penalty.

Extension requests may only be granted by the Heads and Associate Heads of the student's programme. To apply for an extension students should complete the extension request form and submit it to the relevant Programme Support Administrator. Extension requests received less than 48 hours before the deadline may be rejected unless there is good reason for the lateness of the request.

Extensions are usually only granted for 1 or 2 working days. They may exceptionally for longer periods, in particular where a student has a Learning Agreement. The longest period of an extension is normally 7 days (or 5 working days).

Extensions will not be granted for data loss or personal computer malfunctions. Students have a responsibility to retain back-ups of their coursework at all times.

Late Submission and Non-Submission

Late work will not be accepted and will result in the work being classed as a non-submission. Non-submissions of coursework or non-appearances at in-person examinations without medical certification or other third-party evidence will be recorded as fails by the Progress Committee or Board of Examiners, and the Overall Module Grade will also be recorded as zero. Students with zero grades must complete the outstanding assessment(s) before the Resit Board of Examiners; each outstanding assessment will incur a resit fee (up to a designated maximum). The results of all resit assessments are capped at a bare pass (D3). Where an individual resit grade contributes towards an Overall Module Grade, the final grade awarded will have the suffix ®.

Students with zero grades or fail results at the Resit Board of Examiners will be the subject of special attention at that Board and their progress will be determined according to the Conservatoire's *Regulations Governing the Award of Degrees, Diplomas and Certificates* and the degree programme's progress regulations, mindful of the student's overall profile.

PMCs (Personal Mitigating Circumstances)

Due to unforeseen and unavoidable circumstances students may be unable to complete an assignment to the best of their ability, on time, or at all. In such cases students should use a Personal Mitigating Circumstances form to inform the Conservatoire of serious factors that may impact on their studies. Examples where a PMC form should be submitted may include:

- Sudden illness
- A family bereavement
- Changes in personal circumstances

Students should include medical evidence (or equivalent) to support the PMC form.

PMC applications are recorded by AAS and are considered by the next scheduled Pre-Board of Examiners (Special Circumstances) or Board of Examiners. Students should liaise with the module coordinator to arrange a suitable new deadline or examination date. The deadline should only be set once the student is fit and able to complete the assessment.

Where personal mitigating circumstances have been accepted by the Pre-Board of Examiners (Special Circumstances) the grading of the relevant assessment/s will be unaffected.

The Assessment Process

Moderation and Panel Assessment

In the following, *assessment* describes the processes of assessing work while *submission* describes the work completed and submitted by the student. Grades and pass/ fail decisions for all summative assessment should be reached either through marking by a panel (normally two or three assessors) or confirmed through a process of moderation. Which of these two process is used will depend on the nature of the submission, the module and the number of students and assessors. However, in no circumstances should it be possible for a student to fail an assessment without it being possible for the submission to be scrutinized by a third party in order to confirm the fail.

Moderation

The purpose of moderation is to ensure that marking criteria are being applied consistently and fairly both by individual assessors in their own marking, and across marking by multiple assessors on the same submission.

Internal Moderators have responsibility for ensuring comparability of assessment standards and processes across a given module, particularly in modules where several Internal Examiners may be involved in the assessment process. Internal Moderators scrutinize the assessments in a particular module, or a sample of the assessments, depending on student numbers and the module level. Where Internal Moderators believe that an Internal Examiner's grade should be changed or that her/his comments require modification, they have the authority to discuss this issue directly with the Internal Examiner concerned. In any cases of disagreement, the relevant Head of Programme will act as arbiter, and final recourse may be made to the relevant External Examiner.

After marking, the both the module coordinator (or moderator, where this is not the coordinator) and the Programme Support Administrator should be informed, Where the Module Co-ordinator has undertaken all the marking, another member of the module team or department will be designated Internal Moderator.

Assessment is moderated when all of the following apply:

- There are more than 10 students on a module
- All students are responding to the same assessment task and are being assessed using the same criteria (i.e. the task, the mode of assessment and the criteria has not been negotiated with student)
- The submissions are being assessed by only one or a relatively small number of assessors.
- The submissions exists in a form that can be reviewed by a moderator at a later date (e.g. audio-visual recording, written work)

- The submissions are not being marked by a panel

Moderation process

Where there are more than two assessors marking a submission, the moderator may be one of the assessors.

The moderator should select a sample of at least 10 submissions or 10% of submissions, whichever is the greater, including work from all grade bands, all work graded at A1 and A2, and all failed work. It may be necessary to have more than 10 submissions/ 10% of submissions in the sample to fulfil these requirements. Where there are multiple assessors, there should be at least 5 submissions from each assessor within the sample, including all fails and A1/A2s.

The moderator should look at the following to see if there are obvious anomalies

- The average grade being awarded by a marker and the average grade for the assessment as a whole (where there is more than assessor)
- The number of fails
- The balance of marks across each grade band
- The feedback that has been written

Anomalies that may indicate a need for intervention are:

- An unusually high or low average mark
- A high number of fails
- A bunching of marks in a very small range of the grade bands
- A misalignment of feedback and grade
- Feedback too brief to give a clear indication of what the grade should be

The moderator should not adjust the marks only of the students in the sample: on the basis of the sample, adjustments should be applied to all students assessed by a particular marker or all students on the module, as appropriate. The moderator may adjust marks prior to them being returned to students in the following circumstances:

- Where there is a perceived misalignment of grades across the cohort in relation to one or more specific marking criterion (i.e. marking is generally too harsh or too generous)
- Where marking by one assessor appears to be misaligned to that of other assessors, resulting in marks that are consistently slightly higher or slightly lower than those awarded by other

The moderator should always discuss adjustments with the assessor, and the proposed actions and new grade (where relevant) should be agreed between moderator and assessor, (normally up or down by up to two increments, e.g. from C3 to C1).

If no consistent pattern is evident in the perceived misalignment of grades, but the relevant Head of Programme agrees that the grades need adjustment, all affected scripts will be re-marked by the Internal Moderator or other designated member of staff.

Feedback should also be considered as part of the moderation process, and this is an area that the moderator may ask the assessor to re-address where there are apparent contradictions between comments or grades; where comments are too brief to be of use to either the moderator or, more importantly, the student; or when comments appear to be inappropriate (for example, the comments indicate that areas of the submissions that are not part of either the assessment criteria or learning outcomes have been considered in arriving at the grade; or the style/ tone is likely to cause distress).

Additionally, the Moderator may ask an assessor to readdress the submissions where feedback forms and rubrics have not been properly completed.

Once all adjustments have been agreed and applied to the feedback forms, the moderator should add a comment to the feedback form of each submission in the sample to confirm that the work was part of the sample, and that the mark has been agreed. They may add specific comments on the work if they wish, but this should add to the assessor's feedback and should avoid contradicting points made by the assessor.

The Internal Moderator will upload completed marks, forms and rubrics to Moodle and confirm final marks to the Programme Support Administrator. The grades are forwarded to Student Records; feedback and provisional results released to students in Moodle by the Programme Support Administrator.

A sample of work on Moodle will be inspected by the External Examiner at the end of the academic session.

Panel assessments

Panel assessment (double and triple marking) describes the process where two or three assessors individually and collectively assess a submission. Assessments should be assessed by a panel when any one of the following applies:

- There are fewer than 10 students on a module
- Assessment tasks are negotiated with the student and make take one of a number of different forms (live performance, composition, recording, written work, audio-visual work etc.) and are assessed using different marking criteria
- The submission represents a substantial number of credits in the student's diet of study
- The submissions are being assessed by a large number of tutors (e.g. an assessor who may only assess one student on the module)
- The work does not exist in a form that can be reviewed by a moderator at a later date (e.g. live performance) and so cannot be moderated.

Panel assessment is most often found in project-based/ student defined work, in live performance and other creative work (e.g. composition portfolios, film submissions), especially where the work is ephemeral; or represents more than 10 credits in the student's diet of study. It is also found on modules with small numbers of students, where number means that all students would need to be in

a moderation sample: in such cases, double marking is the net result and this is therefore the process that should be followed.

Where a submission is assessed by a panel of two, either both assessors will be internal staff members, or one may be an external assessor. Where there are three panel members, one should be always an external assessor.

Some submissions will stipulate that the student's tutor for the module should not be a member of the panel, such as in Principal Study assessments. In other modules, especially in specialist areas of research and practice, it may be appropriate for the student's tutor/supervisor to be one of the markers.

Where possible the same panel should be formed in a way that allows for consistency and promotes the transparency and fairness of the process.

- On a module with a small number of students, where all students have the same assessment task, the same panel should mark all submissions.
- On a module where several students are undertaking negotiated work on a similar topic, either the same panel should assess them all, or a small number of assessors should be drawn on to form all the panels for those assessments.

Panel assessment process

Each assessor should individually consider the submission (whether live performance or coursework) and write their own initial notes, consult the relevant rubric and/ or assessment criteria, and decide on an initial mark. For some assessments, there will be an independent marking sheet or other format in which the individual initial marks should be recorded. The initial mark should be regarded as starting point for discussion, and individual examiners may revise their thoughts about the final mark on the basis of comments from other examiners.

The panel members should then discuss the submission – either in person, or via email exchange –and agree a final mark. This should not be a simple averaging of the initial marks, but an agreed mark based on the discussion. It may be the same as, different, higher or lower than any of the initial marks.

The feedback to the student should go on a single feedback form with the appropriate, completed rubric. In some assessments (e.g. Principal Study) it is normal for one panel member (e.g. the Specialist External Assessor, where there is one) to write the feedback. In many assessments, the feedback will be a joint statement that combines the feedback of all the assessors into a single statement to the student on the strengths of their work and areas for development. In others, there may be individual comments from the assessors. In both cases, the final grade will have been agreed by the panel.

The assessors should return the final completed marks and forms to the Programme Support Administrator. The grades are forwarded to Student Records; the feedback form is either uploaded to the Student Contract, or uploaded to Moodle. In some modules, assessors will upload feedback to

Moodle themselves but this is released by the Programme Support Administrator once the grade has been registered by Student Records.

A sample of work on Moodle will be inspected by the External Examiner at the end of the academic session.

Marks and Feedback

Return of Grades and Feedback to Students

The School aims to return grades and feedback to students **within five-six working weeks of the submission date**. Students will be notified by email when their grades and feedback are available on Moodle or their Student Contract.

Grades and feedback for performance examinations are usually released within two weeks. Students should be aware that they will not receive feedback immediately; feedback for performance exams is generally released in batches once a complete instrumental or vocal area has been examined.

Students should be aware that hard copy submissions and exam scripts may be retained for inspection by External Examiners and returned to students after inspection.

All grades are provisional until they have been confirmed by the relevant Board of Examiners.

Publication of Results

All assessment results are provisional until ratified by the relevant Board of Examiners. Boards of Examiners reserve the right to moderate results and to correct erroneous results. Assessment results are released to students in different ways, depending on the assessment, as follows:

Essays, written submissions, exam papers, folios, assessed exercises

- feedback is returned online: either via Moodle or scanned and uploaded onto Student Contracts

Oral exams

- feedback is returned online: either via Moodle or scanned and uploaded onto Student Contracts

Performance exams

- feedback forms are scanned and uploaded onto Student Contracts or may sometimes be handed to the student by the Head of Department in a private meeting before being uploaded to their Student Contract

All Overall Module Grades are notified to students by transcript following the relevant Board of Examiners.

Students seeking clarification of an assessment result should go to:

- the Head of Department (for performance exams or Traditional Music)
- the Head/Associate Head of BMus (for BMus programme assessments)
- the Head of MMus/MA for Practice Research assessments
- the Academic Registrar

Feedback on your work

There are two main functions to feedback – the first is to allow you to understand your attainment level in a particular piece of work; and the second is to suggest ways forward for improvement. The Conservatoire is strongly committed to the principle of feedback as an essential component in your educational and professional development, and we employ a range of methods to ensure it is as effective as possible. Feedback is given for both in formal, summative assessments and through supporting formative assessments.

Feedback is given orally and in writing. In almost all instances, written feedback is word-processed; the exception to this is in some performance assessments where feedback is written in limited time in a performance venue and the presence of computers would be both inappropriate and often impractical.

Oral feedback is usually formative – this is a normal type of feedback for work in progress, in one-to-one lesson, a class setting or in a tutorial.

Written feedback may be formative (on work in progress or formative work) or summative (on assessed work). Where written feedback is given on summative assessments, it will normally be accompanied by a copy of the marking rubric and/or assessment criteria for that particular submission. Where there is a rubric, sections of text will be highlighted or underlined to indicate where your work falls in relation to grades. The final grade is holistic but it should be clear from the combination of feedback and rubric (when used) how the assessor has arrived at the grade.

Feedback on Drafts

In some modules, the formative work involves submitting some work in draft for feedback. In others, there is no specific formative submission of this kind, and the formative work is focused on other areas, such as developing particular academic research skills. In particular, in very large modules (such as IMS1 and IMS2) it is not usual practice to read a student's draft essay as this would potentially give that student an unfair advantage, given that tutors do not have the capacity in their schedules to read drafts of all students' essays. However, students are still welcome to contact the Effective Learning Service (els@rcs.ac.uk) for general advice on their work.

Further information on expectations of feedback can be found in Appendix 2 of the document.

The Conservatoire's Assessment Scale

The Conservatoire's Common Assessment Scale employs the letters A-F with numerical subdivisions:

Grade	Descriptor	Honours Degree Classification	Masters Degree outcome	Background Scale	
A	Excellent	First Class	Pass	17	
				16	
				15	
				14	
				13	
B	Very Good	Second Class, upper division (2i)		12	
				11	
				10	
C	Good	Second Class, lower division (2ii)		9	
				8	
				7	
D	1 Satisfactory	Third Class		6	
	2			5	
	3 Adequate			4	
E	Inadequate/Fail	Not Honourworthy		Fail	3
					2
F	Serious Fail				1
NS	Non-submission / Non-appearance		0		

Grading

- any assessment which shows that a student has achieved the learning outcomes of the module (or element of the module) should pass with at

least a D3 (in the event that a late penalty is applied to a 'pass' submission, the work cannot be graded lower than D3).

- examiners should ensure that the grade awarded corresponds with your comments, and vice versa (i.e. that a preponderance of 'very good' comments is matched by a grade B1, B2 or B3).
- where an assessment rubric is in use, examiners should ensure that the grade and comments reflect the descriptors highlighted within the rubric
- grades are important, but the feedback comments are more useful to students
- examiners should consider justifying the numerical part of the grade (e.g. C1); what could the student do to improve this to a B3 or B2 next time?
- all grades are provisional until confirmed by the relevant Board of Examiners.

Grading Resit Assessments

All resit assessments are capped at D3. However, in all cases of resit work examiners must award the grade which the work/performance (etc.) deserves: resit capping is applied by Student Records at the final stage of processing.

The Assessment Matrix

The Undergraduate Assessment Matrix in the RCS Undergraduate Handbook (see the [Key Documents](#) in the portal) provides a general description of achievement at each level, and is used as a calibration in formulating the specific rubrics for assessments in a module. The learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and assessment rubrics are set out in the relevant Programme Handbook, module documents and module "Essential Information" guides.

The MMus, MA, AdvPGDip and ArtDip all use the same Grading Matrix to calibrate what is meant at postgraduate by excellent, good, very good and so on. Taken together with the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria, the Grading Matrix fulfils a similar function to the rubrics that inform assessment in the undergraduate programmes.

Assessment Types and Processes

Coursework submissions

Including essays, critical commentaries and other written documents, mid-session folios and score-based submissions [not Principal Study]

In these types of submissions all students will normally respond to the same assessment brief. This type of assessment is normally marked using the moderation process

Presentations

Including live presentations, video presentations and lecture-recitals

In these types of submission, all students will normally respond to the same assessment brief. If all students submit recordings then this may be assessed using the moderation process. However, where the assessment takes place live and in-person, it is more usually marked by a panel of two..

Negotiated Projects

In the case of projects where assessment is negotiated, content and assessment of the project will be clearly articulated in each student's completed proposal/ learning contract for their project. These negotiated project proposals are held by the module co-ordinator and recorded on the Student Contract.

All Negotiated Projects should be assessed by two internal examiners, following the "Panel Assessment" process.

Practical tests

For exams with specific unseen tests (e.g. Keyboard Skills, Advanced Aural skills)

If the assessment produces a written paper, then this work can be moderated, depending on the number of students on the module. Live tests should be marked by a panel of two.

Performance/Practical Exams

The constitution of Principal Study Performance Exam Panels is given in the table on the below; none of the examiners can be the student's tutor in the module/Principal Study being assessed unless otherwise noted.

Programme/Year	Exam	Exam Panel Constitution
Principal Study Exams		
BMus (all years)	Mid-Session (Performance B)	2 Internal Examiners, normally the Head of Department (Convener) plus one other specialist examiner
BMus (Traditional Music) I-IV	Performance Auditions (formative)	2 Internal Examiners, one of whom is the student's tutor
BMus I & II	End-of-Session (Performance A)	2 Internal Examiners, normally the Head of Department (Convener) plus one other specialist examiner

BMus III & IV	End-of-Session (Performance A)	1 Specialist External Assessor 1 Internal Examiner, normally the Head of Department 1 Internal Examiner (a 'generalist' from another department, who acts as the Exam Convener)
Postgraduate programmes (except Opera)	A assessments	1 Specialist External Assessor 1 Internal Examiner, normally the Head of Department 1 Internal Examiner (a 'generalist' from another department, who acts as the Exam Convener)
Postgraduate programmes (except Opera)	B assessments	2 Internal Examiners, normally the Head of Department (Convener) plus one other specialist examiner
MMus/MA Opera: special arrangements apply, see Handbook.		
Other performance and practical examinations		
BMus programmes, years I and II	Additional Performance, Performance Folios	Where assessment is by recording: One internal examiner. Video sampling for review by the EE. Moderation of fails. Where assessment is live: Two internal examiners
BMus programmes, years III and IV	Ensemble Musician, Additional Performance, Performance Folios	Where assessment is by recording: One internal examiner, normally a discipline specialist. Moderation of a random sample of 10% or 10 examinations, whichever is greater. Where assessment is live: Two internal examiners.

Specific assessment arrangements

Traditional Music Principal Study Performance Auditions

- the student and the tutor are joined by an additional full-time or pro-rata member of departmental staff at a lesson by prior arrangement
- the student performs a range of music representative of the past ten weeks' Principal Study
- the tutor and additional staff member together assess the student's performance, progress and application in relation to their syllabus requirements in discussion with the student
- Feedback Form jointly completed and returned to AAS Office
- Feedback Form scanned and uploaded to Student Contract; originals placed in student files

Principal Study performance exams

- For students in Years III, IV, MMus/MA and AdvPGDip: Exam Programme Form submitted to departmental administrator for approval by relevant Head of Department by the advertised deadline.
- schedule of exam times (with preparation room) should be published at least three weeks in advance of the exam
- special arrangements should be made for candidates with Learning Agreements, where necessary
- Exam Folder (for examiners' use) whether online or in hardcopy should contain:
 - the Exam Schedule (with a note of particular special needs in the case of candidates with Learning Agreements)
 - BMus assessment rubric or MMus-MA Assessment Summary
 - blank Feedback Forms
 - Independent Grading Grid
 - Assessment Handbook
- After the exam: where in hardcopy, the Exam Folder with completed Feedback Forms should be returned to the AAS Office. Electronic documents will normally be used entirely within OneDrive and will need no separate upload/ return process.
- None of the Examiners present can be/have been the student's tutor in the Principal Study/module being assessed in the current academic session.
- Examiners should employ the system of independent grading (see "Panel Assessment" above), where each Examiner arrives at their own grade before discussion
- Where Specialist External Assessors (SEAs) are involved, the panel convener or HoD should brief SEAs before the exam panel begins.
- Normally, the Specialist External Assessor (where present) will write the report during the performance; the other examiners are encouraged to add a short summary statement at the end of the report, after discussion
- where the exam consists of the performance of separate pieces/tests, Examiners must not award grades for the individual items, but rather a single holistic grade reflecting the level of achievement across the exam

- comments must be written and grades awarded with reference to the published assessment criteria and assessment rubric
- the form must be signed by all Examiners
- External Examiners (EEs) may sample a selection of exams. When present, the EE observes the exam process, but is not involved in the assessment of the candidate.
- copies of all feedback forms will be distributed to students after the exam via their student contract; copies are retained for inspection by the EE at the end of the academic session

Penalties for over- and under-running recitals

Recital lengths are specified as an exact number of minutes: this is the length of the complete recital, including, where appropriate, spoken introductions, resetting of the stage etc. The actual start and end times of recitals must be noted clearly on the report form.

- Recitals that under- or over-run by 10% or more will be penalized as follows:
 - Recitals that over-run by 10% will lose 1 mark and be stopped in order to try and keep to the published schedule.
 - Recitals that under-run by 10-19% will lose 1 mark to a minimum of D3.
 - Recitals that under-run by 20% or more will fail with a grade of 0
- Examiners will first grade the recital as normal, and then apply the penalty to the agreed mark.
- The penalty should be clearly noted on the report form (reason for penalty and marks deducted).

Penalties for non-memorisation

Where there is a requirement to memorise a programme, or part of a programme, and the candidate fails to perform from memory, the Exam Panel will deduct 1 full grade band, to a minimum of D3 (i.e. a B1 performance becomes a C1).

The penalty should be clearly noted on the report form (reason for penalty and marks deducted).

Where a student has a Learning Agreement, a reasonable adjustment may have been made that waives a memorisation requirement. HoDs should be aware of which students in their department this applies to and ensure that the panel is informed.

Principal Study Composition Folios

Principal Study Composition Folios are assessed in a manner equivalent to that for Principal Study performance assessments. None of the Examiners can be/have been the student's Composition tutor in the current academic session.

Principal Study BMus Years I and II

- An electronic copy of the portfolio should be submitted to the relevant OneDrive assessment folder
- All submissions are expected to be submitted electronically (e.g. there is **no** requirement to produce a physical score).
- the Internal Examiners should independently prepare draft notes on the quality of the submission and come to an independent grade
- after independent grading, the two examiners must meet to compile a joint final report, and an agreed final grade
- comments must be written and grades awarded with reference to the published assessment criteria and assessment rubric
- do not award grades for individual pieces of work within a folio (folios receive a single holistic grade)
- the final report should be written on the appropriate feedback form which must be signed by both Examiners
- originals of all end-of-session submissions should be retained for inspection by the Specialist External Assessor for Composition at the end of the academic session.

Principal Study BMus Years III and IV, MMus/MA, and AdvPGDip

- An electronic copy of the portfolio should be submitted to the relevant OneDrive assessment folder
- All submissions are expected to be submitted electronically (e.g. there is **no** requirement to produce a physical score).
- the submission will be assessed by three examiners: 2 Internal Examiners (one of whom is normally the Head of Composition) and the Specialist External Assessor for Composition.
- the three examiners should independently prepare draft notes on the quality of the submission and come to an independent grade
- after independent grading, the examiners must meet to compile a joint final report, and an agreed final grade.
- Comments should be written and grades awarded with reference to the published assessment criteria and assessment rubric

- the final report should be written on the appropriate feedback form which must be signed by all examiners
- originals of all submissions will be retained for possible inspection by the EE at the end of the academic session.

Assessing Dissertations

Dissertations and other extended prose submissions generally feature as a mode of assessment in Year IV and the one-year MA programme. Dissertations etc. are assessed by means of the written submission itself, with accompanying audio/video materials where appropriate, and may involve an oral exam.

- Students are required to submit an electronic copy of the submission on Moodle, which will be assessed anonymously and independently by one of two examiners
- for dissertations, one of the Examiners will normally be the dissertation supervisor, acting as second marker. The first marker should have some expertise in the topic but should have had no supervisory contact with the student on the project.
- the Internal Examiners should follow the “Panel assessment” process described above. Where there is an oral exam (viva), the examiners should share their initial comments and grades with each other beforehand, and agree the questions to be asked.
- examiners should pay due attention to standards of presentation and, (for dissertations) referencing and bibliography
- the final report should be written on the appropriate form, along with the final agreed grade, and the form must be signed by both Examiners
- all Year IV submissions must be retained for inspection by the EE at the end of the academic session

Mid-session Dissertation Submissions

- Dissertation modules normally require students to submit a proposal and/ or work in draft earlier in the year (see relevant Module Descriptors for details). This work is reviewed by the supervisor and the student will receive feedback but will only receive a grade in cases where the proposal is designated as summative rather than formative.
- the supervisor will provide a written report on the proposal and/ or draft work, with appropriate ‘feedforward’ guidance

Observation of Working Practice (OWP)

Observation of Working Practice (previously known as continuous assessment) features in the assessment of:

- Performance/Composition Studies
- Tutor Reports (for Principal Study and other modules)
- Practical Musicianship 1 and 2
- Selected School of Music electives
- MMus/MA Supporting Studies
- AdvPGDip Advanced Supporting Studies

Observation of working practice results in Tutor Reports and 'Process Grades', i.e. grades awarded by the tutor(s) delivering the lessons/module on the basis of continuous observation and assessment of the student's working process throughout the course of the lessons/module, measured against the learning outcomes for the module.

Observation of Working Practice is the principal mode of assessment within Performance/Composition Studies on the BMus programme and Supporting Studies on the MMus/MA/AdvPGDip programmes, and also features within some other BMus modules. Principal Study Tutor Reports contribute towards the assessment of BMus Performance/Composition Studies and MMus/MA/AdvPGDip Supporting Studies

BMus Performance/Composition Studies

Process Grades contributing towards Performance/Composition Studies are awarded by single examiners/tutors working independently, with reference to the appropriate assessment criteria and assessment rubric.

A Portfolio of Reports for each component of Performance/Composition Studies is collated by the Head of Department, providing supporting evidence and additional information on students' achievement in each component.

Grades for each component of Performance/Composition Studies are noted on a grid on the student's Student Contract, monitored and collated throughout the year by the relevant Head of Department.

The Head of Department awards an overall Pass or Fail for Performance/Composition Studies, based on the grades listed on the Performance/Composition studies profile hosted within the Student Contract. The Pass/Fail result is confirmed by the Head of BMus after scrutinizing the Student Contract and the substance of the reports in the accompanying Portfolio of Reports.

Student Profile Charts and Portfolio of Reports are scrutinized by an Internal Examination Panel. This Panel consists of all Heads of Department in the School of Music, convened by the Head of BMus with the Registrar in attendance. Students' Performance/Composition Studies component grades and Overall Module Grades will be considered in the context of the student cohort and departments. The Panel will confirm the Overall Module Grade, and will give particular thought before making a final decision in cases of overall

failure, or where one or more of the Performance/Composition Studies components has been failed. Results, once confirmed by the Panel, are submitted to the Board of Examiners.

In the event of a perceived misalignment of grades (a pattern emerging of consistent under- or over-marking in the case of one particular tutor, or for one particular Performance/Composition Studies component), the Head of BMus will refer affected cases for consideration by the Internal Examination Panel. The Internal Examination Panel (for all years), with the advice of the relevant External Examiner, may apply a general moderation of grades for all students affected.

MMus/MA/AdvPGDip Supporting Studies

Indicative grades contributing towards Supporting Studies are awarded periodically by single examiners/tutors working independently in different contexts across the academic year. A portfolio of reports for each component of Supporting Studies is collated by the Head of Department, providing supporting evidence and additional information on working practices in each component.

Indicative grades for each element of Supporting Studies are recorded as 'non-credit bearing marks' on the Student Contract, monitored and collated throughout the year by the relevant Head of Department. The Student Contract and associated reports are scrutinized by an internal examination board chaired by the Director of Music, leading to an overall module result of Pass or Fail.

Presentation, Referencing and Bibliography

Some modules contain specific Learning Outcomes in relation to academic practice and therefore require students to meet specific standards of presentation, referencing and bibliography. Submissions which fail to meet these standards or which show lapses in these areas, should be assessed with reference to the assessment criteria for the submission, and examiners must make specific mention of those areas where students need to make improvements in the quality of their work.

Module coordinators should ensure that students are aware of the resources in Moodle and via the Library to help them with issues of researching, writing and referencing. Where written work displays issues with English language, students should be referred to the Effective Learning Service for specialist advice and support: els@rcs.ac.uk

Some modules require written work but their learning objectives and marking criteria make no reference to standards of written presentation. Whilst plagiarism and collusion are not acceptable in any circumstances (see below) modules where writing standards are not an element of the module's learning outcomes should not penalise students in relation to lapses of grammar and proofreading. If the writing is so poor that the work cannot be understood, this will affect the mark in relation to content (in that the content has not been

communicated) but where the writing is poor but the meaning is clear, the work should not be penalised specifically for the standard of written presentation.

Plagiarism and Collusion

All work submitted for assessment must be the student's own. If the submission includes material borrowed from others then the source of this information must be properly acknowledged through appropriate referencing.

Plagiarism is passing off someone else's work, whether intentionally or unintentionally, as your own for your own benefit.

This applies equally to the work of other students as to published sources. In short, copying and pasting information from the Internet or any other source and failing to acknowledge the source is a form of plagiarism and constitutes a breach of the RCS Rules and Regulations. Likewise, submitting work on which one has been previously assessed is considered to be "self-plagiarism" (see p.7)

Collusion occurs when one student passes off another student's work as their own, with their knowledge. Collusion often means that two students are expected to hand in two pieces of work that they have each worked on independently, but instead hand in what is effectively one piece of work that they have both contributed to. Even if one student has done much more work than the other, both students have colluded. Students should always check the assessment brief or consult the module coordinator if they are unclear about permitted group activities.

In the School of Music all written work submitted on Moodle is screened by Turnitin, a text-matching software package that is used to assess the originality of submitted coursework. Turnitin performs a text matching search against all available sources, which extends to the Internet, published materials, and previous student submissions at the Conservatoire and other institutions worldwide.

Section 11 of the Conservatoire's *Regulations Governing the Award of Degrees* sets out the procedure for dealing with cases of suspected plagiarism and cheating.

If an Internal Examiner or Internal Moderator suspects a student has cheated or plagiarised, **they must report this to the Module Co-ordinator and relevant Head of Programme immediately using the appropriate form.** Examiners will be asked to compile a short report which identifies the nature of the cheating/plagiarism (including the sources used, where these can be determined).

The relevant Head of Programme will report cases of plagiarism or cheating to the Convener of the Quality and Standards Committee. If they determine there is a case to answer, the student will be asked to attend a formal interview with the Academic Registrar. If the interview concludes that there has been a deliberate attempt to deceive, the student will be asked to acknowledge, in writing, the presence of plagiarism or cheating in her/his work. If the

acknowledgement is not forthcoming, a formal investigation may be launched. The relevant External Examiner will be asked to comment on all cases of suspected plagiarism and cheating.

This process is fair to the student, but it is time consuming. Nevertheless, it is very important that the process be completed **before** the relevant Board of Examiners, since it is for the Board to decide on any sanction which might be imposed. Plagiarized work and submissions involving cheating will normally be recorded as fails (0) by the Progress Committee or Board of Examiners, and the Overall Module Grade will also be recorded as zero. Sanctions may range from resit or retake to expulsion.

Monitoring Assessment

Various bodies have differing levels of responsibility for the monitoring of assessment practices, procedures and results within the Conservatoire, namely:

- Academic Board
- Boards of Examiners
- Quality and Standards Committee
- School of Music Management Team
- BMus Programme Committee
- BMus Traditional Music Programme Committee
- Postgraduate Music Programme Committee
- Learning & Teaching Forum
- Heads/Associate Heads of Programmes
- Heads/Associate Heads of Departments

To continue to improve the effectiveness of the Conservatoire learning experience, BMus programme staff will additionally take further steps to monitor the effectiveness of assessment processes.

The BMus and Postgraduate Music Programme Board will monitor module and module component pass/fail rates: modules and module components with a pass rate of less than 55% at the June Board of Examiners (or 90% at the August Board) will be the subject of review, and External Examiners will be invited to make specific comment on these modules/components. Any modifications arising out of their comments should be implemented in the following academic session, wherever possible.

The next Programme Meeting after the June Board of Examiners will consider:

- module and module component pass/fail rates and progress statistics with comparisons on previous years
- an analysis of any moderation which has taken place, and comments from Internal Moderators
- External Examiners' Reports, if available, and their specific comments on any modules or module components with pass rates lower than 55%

- the results of Student Questionnaires, if available, to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of assessment practices

and will review:

- the amount, type and timing of assessment, to ensure fitness for purpose
- the balance between formative and summative assessment
- assessment criteria and assessment matrixes

The first Programme Meeting of each academic session will consider:

- External Examiners' Reports
- the results of Student Questionnaires, to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of assessment

The conclusions of these meetings will inform changes to modules and handbooks, for subsequent approval by the School of Music Committee and Quality and Standards Committee.

Staff Development

Recognising the important role staff play in assessment processes, the School of Music embeds staff development opportunities as a means of further enhancing the quality of the student experience, particularly with regard to assessment.

Since staff from partner institutions (the National Piping Centre, and Scottish Ballet) also participate in assessment processes, they are also invited to attend relevant staff development sessions.

Ongoing themes for staff development in assessment practices include:

- assessing and moderating written work (with exemplars from the previous academic session)
- assessing performance
- assessment design: matching assessment tasks to learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment matrixes
- plagiarism and cheating
- assessment opportunities afforded by new technologies (Moodle etc.)
- the possibilities afforded by different assessment tasks, e.g. presentations, self- and peer-assessment
- the convening of performance exam panels
- best practice in other institutions.

Appendix 1: Examiners

The School of Music deploys four types of examiner:

Internal Examiners are members of staff, including Heads of Departments and staff at partner institutions. They are responsible for assessing students against the relevant published learning outcomes, assessment criteria and assessment matrix. Some performance exam panels are convened by Internal Examiners from another department (i.e. 'generalist' Internal Examiners). Specifically, the duties of Internal Examiners are:

- to assess the work of students impartially, in accordance with the assessment regulations for the programme, and, through discussion with Internal Moderators, to agree assessment outcomes;
- give detailed, specialist (or generalist) feedback to students;
- to employ the process of independent grading (in particular assessment processes) and arrive at an agreed grade with other examiners.

Internal Moderators are, normally, the Module Co-ordinators of the relevant modules. They are responsible for ensuring parity of assessment standards within a module. If the Module Co-ordinator is Internal Examiner ('1st marker') for any submissions/scripts within that module, then another member of staff will be appointed Internal Moderator for the module in question. Specifically, the duties of Internal Moderators are:

- to review student submissions impartially, in accordance with the assessment regulations for the programme;
- to confirm the grades awarded and, in consultation with Internal Examiners, to moderate grades, where necessary.

Specialist External Assessors (SEAs) must not be otherwise employed by the Conservatoire. They are appointed to assess students in Performance disciplines as well as in other specialist disciplines such as Composition and Conducting. The main duties of Specialist External Assessors are:

- to assess the work of students impartially, in accordance with the assessment regulations for the programme and, through discussion with Internal Examiners, to agree assessment outcomes, giving detailed, specialist written feedback to students;
- to employ independent grading and arrive at an agreed grade in consultation with Internal Examiners;
- to conduct an oral examination of any candidate, if required;
- to compare standards applied with those of comparable programmes, particularly those in other conservatoires;

- to report annually to the School of Music Management Team on the effectiveness of the assessments, and to make recommendations arising from them.

Academic Board appoints eight **External Examiners** (EEs) for the School of Music, as follows:

- BMus (Composition and Joint Principal Study) all years
- BMus (Jazz)
- BMus (Performance) all years
- BMus (Traditional Music) all years
- BEd Music Studies (all years)
- BEd Education Studies and School Experience (all years)
- MMus/MA, AdvPGDip and ArtDip (two examiners)

External Examiners are not directly involved in the assessment of candidates: they are responsible for monitoring quality and standards for the relevant years/programmes. The main duties of External Examiners are:

- to compare standards applied with those of comparable programmes, particularly those in other conservatoires;
- to judge the work of students impartially, in accordance with the assessment regulations for the programme and, through discussion with Internal Examiners, to moderate and agree assessment outcomes;
- to monitor progression within programmes;
- to approve the form, content and manner of delivery of the arrangements for assessment;
- to conduct an oral examination of any candidate, if required;
- to make recommendations to the relevant Board of Examiners to monitor the procedures by which the recommendations for awards are reached;
- to endorse, through signing the record of the Board of Examiners, the decisions of Boards of Examiners in respect of awards and student progress;
- to report annually to the Principal on the effectiveness of the assessments, and to make recommendations arising from them.

All aspects of the Programme are open to scrutiny by the External Examiners, including performance examinations. It is envisaged, and provided, that the External Examiners may decide, at their discretion and in line with common practice, to carry out their duties through sampling. In cases where it is agreed

that a sample of assessed work will be provided, the principles for such a selection will be confirmed with the External Examiners in advance. The selection will be made so as to ensure that the External Examiners have sufficient evidence to determine that internal grading, moderation and classification are of an appropriate standard and consistency. Normally, the selection will include the work of students across the ability range and all failed work. External Examiners will also be provided with the complete assessment data for all assessable components of relevant modules.

The External Examiners for the undergraduate programmes have oversight of both performance/composition and programme modules for the relevant programmes/years, thus enabling them to comment on overall standards.

Appointment of External Examiners

Academic Board appoints External Examiners in accordance with the process described for 'External Examiners' in the Quality Assurance Handbook (QAH6): the School of Music Management Team's nominations for the appointment of External Examiners are received by the Quality and Standards Committee for subsequent approval by Academic Board.

The School of Music Management Team, on the recommendation of the relevant Head of Department and in accordance with the criteria published in QAH6, appoints Specialist External Assessors (SEAs) in each discipline.

EEs are normally appointed for a four-year period. SEAs are normally appointed for three years.

Appendix 2: Formative and Summative Feedback

All written feedback, even for the final assessment of the academic session, is formative and, in some cases, summative. The purpose of feedback is twofold: to let students know how well they have done in relation to the criteria against which the submission/performance is assessed ('feedback'), and to advise them about how to improve their work in future ('feedforward'). Markers should bear in mind the notion of 'feedforward' even when they know the work being assessed is the final piece of work for the academic session; this is particularly important in cases of failure.

Written feedback

Examiners must be familiar with the guidelines contained in this Handbook, and the Learning Outcomes, Assessment Criteria and/ or Assessment Rubric for the relevant module and refer to them in feedback. Rubrics should be highlighted to indicate where the student's work sits in relation to the rubric's descriptors. Well-constructed feedback should help students understand the assessment criteria. Please bear in mind the following points:

- Feedback should be student-facing. Writing in second person (you, your) is recommended.
- feedback/feedforward should be constructive
- the amount of feedback will vary from student to student, but please provide enough for it to be useful
- give due credit for evidence of creative and critical thinking
- commend good work
- even an excellent piece of work requires feedback; please try to write more than simply 'Excellent'
- comments should align with the published assessment criteria
- where a marking rubric is in use for an assessment, this should form part of the feedback form returned to the student, with relevant sections highlight to show how the student's work aligns with the assessment criteria and to clarify how the grade has been decided
- the language of the feedback narrative should align with the awarded grade, i.e. 'excellent', 'very good', 'good' etc.
- it is good practice to identify areas for improvement i.e. 'next steps' and feedforward, even for work of a very high standard, or work in the final year of study.
- do not write cryptic comments, or strings of punctuation marks (e.g. '???'); ensure that your comments could be understood by a third party, e.g. another examiner/moderator
- avoid writing comments which reveal any level of exasperation on your part

- Take care when writing negative comments: critical feedback should be reasoned and measured; harsh comments are unacceptable
- if an assessment (e.g. a folio) fails to meet the syllabus requirements, explain this simply and clearly, and award an appropriate fail grade
- where you feel a student would benefit from specific help with written English, essay structure, sequencing, standards or presentation, or any other area not related to content, please write a comment which refers the student to 'make an appointment with the Effective Learning Service (els@rcs.ac.uk) to discuss...'
- if you believe that it would be helpful for the student to discuss the submission in person then do recommend that the student arranges a tutorial with you or another member of staff.
- When writing feedback reports by hand (especially for performance assessments), ensure that the handwriting is legible.

Oral Feedback

Oral feedback is the most common type of formative feedback in the conservatoire environment. Tutors make instant responses to their students' work and suggest ways of improving what they have heard or seen. Good practice in one-to-one or small-group tuition includes:

- offering advice and criticism which is always constructive
- offering advice and criticism which is clearly expressed, so that the student understands what preparation is required for the next lesson
- reflection after each lesson so that long-term strategies can be formed to facilitate students' development
- keeping a written record of each lesson to facilitate consistency of feedback, a sense of continuity and a record of the lessons given.

Feedback on Drafts

In each module all students are given the same opportunities for informal feedback on work-in-progress, and the arrangements for this should be clearly stated in the Module's "Essential Information" guide. It should be noted that in very large modules there may be a 'no draft review' policy. However, students are still welcome to contact the Effective Learning Service (els@rcs.ac.uk) for general advice on their work.

Where feedback is provided, it will generally be on essay plans or verbal precis of proposed work. Please note that staff will not 'pre-mark' assessments; with the exception of dissertations modules, staff will not provide feedback on full draft versions of work.