Point Blank Music School (UKPRN: 10019178) - TEF submission 2019

Mission, Vision and Values

Founded in London by CEO Rob Cowan in 1994 as a commercial recording studio, the concurrent revolution in DIY recording software soon altered the path of Point Blank. Clients booking the studio began to ask how the equipment worked and Rob wrote a weekend crash course in music production as a response. Following carefully planned and controlled development over the succeeding years, courses were added organically in response to a) those looking to learn and further their skills; b) positive student feedback; and c) knowledge exchange with industry partners. Excellent teaching and facilities alongside real-world experience rooted in the industry enabled Point Blank to evolve first into an FE College and then the global HE School we see today. Point Blank Music School is now a specialist leader in its subject area with this core ethos, teaching music production, sound engineering, DJ skills, music business, singing and radio broadcasting.

Our commitment to providing highly engaging, employability-focused courses, informed through our close links with national and international leaders in the creative industries, has been proven to be effective. Our students have historically achieved high success rates of progression into highly skilled employment or further study. This trend has been borne out by our core metrics report where we scored 100% in highly skilled employment as opposed to regular employment. The actions detailed in our response to criteria SO1-SO3 evidence our commitment to continuing this trajectory in line with our growth. We have long-established partnerships with industry manufacturers including Pioneer DJ, Ableton and Native Instruments, as well as schools worldwide, including China where our partners are leading internet giant NetEase. This enables us to provide exclusive artistic associations and collaborative opportunities for students in a wide variety of settings, as well as facilities unmatched by other institutions. Working closely with our students and those at the forefront of the sector empowers our graduates to lead positive change and find success in a highly competitive industry. This is the heart of our mission.

In keeping with this mission, our class sizes are limited to 16, encouraging open-minded innovation and fostering creativity with personalised constructive critique. Students from diverse backgrounds are prepared for a successful career in the music industry, utilising Point Blank's extensive network of music industry contacts and partners. Furthermore, as a global institution with an international reputation, almost 40% of our students are from overseas. This enables us to facilitate a truly cross-cultural, cross-disciplinary student experience, enriching our learning environment with opportunities to learn from other cultures, genres and perspectives. These elements influence our students' own work and creativity in turn.

As a Collegiate Partner of Middlesex University, we are aligned with the strategic objectives in their Strategic Plan, "Transforming Potential Into Success" (2017). In harmony with Middlesex University, Point Blank is committed to providing students with transformational journeys and empowering them with the tools, attributes and opportunities to turn potential into success.

Our students have benefited from over £3m+ investment since 2015 in the latest state-of-the-art equipment and recording facilities in our new central London premises at 26 Orsman Rd. Guest speaker events and masterclasses feature high profile figures from the industry and include Pete Tong MBE, Goldie MBE, Annie Mac and Zane Lowe. This enables our students, at appropriate levels of their course, to learn from pioneers in their field, discovering their potential with professional standard equipment and facilities before entering the industry. This is in line with our ethos to integrate current industry practice and insight into our curriculum.

Summary of metrics, student and sector recognition

Known for our specialist, employability-focused education, our success has been acknowledged in both the Higher Education sector and the music industry. The School won six consecutive 'Best Music Production & DJ School' awards annually from industry publication DJ Mag as well as the Independent HE Annual Award for Exporting Education in 2018.

Point Blank has received a high level of student recognition through a) scores of 100% (2017) and 91% (2018) for 'Overall Student Satisfaction' in our first two years taking part in the NSS and b) winning the 2018 WhatUni Student Choice Award for 'Best Independent HE' institution.

Whilst the metrics have been suppressed to an extent, it is nevertheless significant that:

- 100% of students in 2017 agreed that the teaching quality of the course was strong (NSS Q1-4, 2017). This is 15.7% above the sector benchmark for the year.
- 82.5% of students agreed that assessment and feedback was clear, timely and fair (NSS Q8-11, 2017). This is 2.7% above the sector benchmark for the year.
- 100% of students agreed that academic support was strong and helpful (NSS Q12-14). This is 17% above the sector benchmark for the year.
- Our 100% graduate outcomes score in highly skilled employment or further study is 23.9% above the sector average.

Against a larger graduating cohort in our second year of participation (year 3), our ratings remained particularly high for both teaching quality (88%, NSS Q1-4, 2018) and academic support (85%, NSS Q12-14, 2018). It is arguable that whilst suppressed for year 3, the high student satisfaction ratings maintained against a larger sample size evidences our ability to scale up and maintain our excellent teaching and learning experience.

Regarding the continuation metric, analysis has shown that this data is incorrect. Three of the six students who did not continue from 2015/16 should have been reported as part of the data set for 2016/17, and two of those students temporarily interrupted their studies in 2016/17. Context on the continuation metric also reveals that of the three remaining students in the 2015-16 dataset, one withdrew due to finding employment early (positive outcome) and another transferred. Considered in this context with three students discontinuing, the continuation metric should be 83% for 2015/16, which would be 1.8% above a sector benchmark of 81.2%. We have been in communication with OfS since our registration with the OfS on 23/10/18 and HESA following this, in order to investigate and rectify this error. The data stated here is in line with our return to HESA in 2015/16 and we are assured that it should be reflected as such.

These results prove we are on the right path. Our students have recognised the extensive work to create an excellent teaching and learning experience for them, responding positively via awards and surveys. We advocate that this recognition and a) lack of negative flags, b) context of our positive metrics and c) error in the continuation metric, suggest that Point Blank is in a strong position for a TEF Award commensurate with our exceptional teaching provision.

Our commitment to providing an excellent student experience and employing outstanding staff who prioritise the needs of our students has fostered the open-minded, dynamic and pioneering academic community we are all proud to be part of. Our current cohort shows no signs of altering the positive trajectory, as confirmed by our Student Voice Leaders' Group Statement:

"The teaching quality of the university is at a very high standard considering that all tutors come from a wide range of different music industry niches and successes respectively.

The lecturers always have their students' best interests in mind & students are encouraged to perform to their highest abilities and improve themselves. There is often a range of skill levels within classes, but lecturers make it personalised, engaging, interesting and challenging for all students. They are always making sure they are interacting very well with students by asking questions, putting us in groups for more engagement, setting practical tasks for outside of class and giving us enough time to conduct our own research.

Over the past year (since 2017), Point Blank Music School has made striding efforts to implement more student engagement activities such as consultations, listening sessions, student mixers & other activities. These improvements have been recognised by students. Students also have a chance to submit their mixes to various platforms such as Pioneer DJ Radio station, Point Blank Record Label and magazine partners or performance competitions, etc." ***- Student Voice Leaders (excerpt from Group Statement, Levels 4-6, Music Production and Sound Engineering / DJ Practice)***

Drawing from our strong progress to date, Point Blank's mission is to grow our diversity, and enable all students to develop a successful career in the music industry by providing access to:

- A global community and student experience unmatched in creativity and innovation
- The latest state-of-the-art equipment
- Teaching excellence via highly trained lecturers with a wealth of industry experience and Point Blank's network of contacts and partnerships

In order to achieve this, the School has committed to the following aims, drawn from our five year strategic plan: 'Point Blank: The Road Ahead 2018-2023':

- Develop engaging and innovative higher education and vocational creative arts programmes that enable students to contribute significantly to the creative industries
- Continually strive to enhance our student experience and support all our students to reach their full potential
- Create strategic partnerships with key creative industry representatives and maintain strong internal links through the recruitment and retention of talented staff with extensive industry and sector experience
- Support access and participation objectives and global creativity by welcoming a diverse range of students and strengthening our open-minded, dynamic and pioneering academic community
- Raise awareness and advance our mission and aims by engaging with the music industry, consultations and local and national policy decision-makers

Supporting statement by Lord Jon Mendelsohn, House of Lords: *"I have observed the growth of the School since circa 2006 and have been impressed at the high-quality student experience and satisfaction throughout this growth. It has been clear to me that maintaining student satisfaction and providing the best student experience possible is at the heart of the School's operations and decision-making processes. This is further evidenced by the various awards won by the institution and high satisfaction scores achieved in the NSS.*

The School is an outstanding example of how new institutions and Alternative Providers can bring modern subjects and innovation into HE and provide an excellent student experience.

Strategic direction of the School has taken a natural and sustainable transition from FE to HE. This has been a thoroughly considered decision and the Board of Directors are evidently passionate about this mission and enabling the next generations to succeed and innovate in the creative arts. The School's growth has been meticulously planned and executed. I look forward to watching Point Blank Music School's continued growth in these evolving times."

The School is aware that combined with the changing regulatory landscape and registration with the OfS, the journey into HE is just beginning. We are open-minded towards any adaptation that may be necessary as the sector evolves. We have been positively responsive towards student and staff feedback, consultations and evidence-based analysis via committees. This is demonstrated via our five year strategic plan in which the School is dedicated to key actions to improve the student experience. Moreover, many of these actions are already being carried out and the strategy is progressing well. Key examples are:

- Our governance review featuring the addition of an External Advisory Committee (EAC)
- The revision of all our committees' Terms of Reference
- A Staff Development and Investment Plan to retain and develop our talented staff
- Increased consultation and engagement of students to further integrate the student voice in our operations and decision-making processes, e.g. student consultation panel, details of which can be found in the following sections

We are fully prepared for our long-term commitment towards providing the best student experience possible and excellent teaching.

Student Engagement

In line with our commitment to teaching excellence and the student experience, the School has made great efforts to include students at the heart of as many decisions, investments and operations as possible. We are continually increasing the opportunities for further inclusion of students in our decision-making processes. Actions and progress are reviewed termly in line with effectiveness and student feedback, proven by the recent implementations detailed below.

Student views and representation have informed this TEF submission following consultation with our Student Voice Leaders (SVLs) and our students' involvement in the focus group in the preparation of the submission. SVLs were consulted both individually and as a group to provide written statements representative of the views of our student body against each TEF criteria.

Actions resulting from current student representation opportunities, such as those arising from our student-led Board of Study (our student-staff consultation committee) have not been one-off commitments. At the Committee, SVLs are free to collect and contribute views on any aspect of their student experience. SVLs are also encouraged to lead discussion and contribute to the enhancement of our curriculum at our Boards of Study. Additionally, a Student Consultation Panel has been set up for consultation for significant decisions affecting the student experience, increasing opportunities for student or alumni input on their learning experience and School investment. This allows SVLs and students who are unable to commit to becoming an SVL to take a direct, short term role on specific areas of their interest. We are currently consulting our student panel on the development of our Foundation Year and reviewing the first year student experience of our degrees. By collecting these experiences and feedback, we are developing a highly supportive Foundation Year and first year, to ease student journeys from FE to HE, throughout their studies with us and enable them to reach their full potential.

Teaching Quality

Student Engagement, TQ1

Extending our model of integrating personalised learning to encourage student engagement and effort, a system of one-to-one teacher to student tutorials (1-2-1s) was trialled in our online school in 2015 and introduced to the in-classroom provision in 2018. We have heavily embedded this into our curriculum as part of our teaching and learning strategy, alongside study blogs/Personal Development Planning that are highly encouraged. Students can book a 1-2-1 every week with a lecturer, for every module they are studying in a term. Sessions are entirely student-led and may cover any aspect of their studies, student experience or assessment. 1-2-1s are voluntary and though encouraged, they are not under any pressure to take advantage of this opportunity every week with respect to their individual needs.

As a result of our efforts to continuously improve teaching quality, student feedback via Module Evaluation Questionnaires has been overwhelmingly positive in response, reinforcing our high NSS scores. Students have reported supportive lecturers who express genuine interest in their progress, as well as inspiring and encouraging them to take creative risks and develop their skills to the best of their ability. In January 2018, the average module evaluation survey result for teaching quality was 92% (students responding "agree" or higher). Satisfaction increased to 97% in July 2018, evidencing that our improvements have been effective.

In the creative world, it can be a challenge to instil confidence in students regarding their own abilities. The opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with a variety of lecturers and receive personalised constructive critique away from the class on each module has proven particularly effective. The 1-2-1 system also integrates supervision for project-based modules as well as first year support and transition. Students can book 1-2-1s with not only their current module lecturer but across all modules allowing different critical perspectives and creative expertise on their work. We are also continuously working to improve the system using the Academic Staff Database *(see Valuing Teaching TQ2),* following recommendations by students that they would like more information on each lecturer when booking sessions.

As the sessions are student-led, many students have reported that tailored 1-2-1s have helped them engage and actively commit to their studies by receiving ongoing feedback. The system of facilitating weekly 1-2-1s for all modules enables a multiple-layered safety net for monitoring engagement and student progress when used in context of learner analytics such as attendance. Predictive grading, integrated with learner analytics, is also available on our student dashboard to increase study engagement. Furthermore, previously reported occasional difficulties with teaching differentiation in 2017 by academic staff have been largely resolved.

We are working to integrate the wide range of music-related disciplines taught at Point Blank to our advantage. To add stimulation, challenge and create further opportunities for students to apply what they have learnt, a new initiative in 2018 created an ecosystem of cross-disciplinary collaboration. This aims to increase student networking and build upon the existing real-world industry scenarios that we foster. Music Industry students are encouraged to help release music from Production students; Sound Design students work with Audio for Games students to provide effects and themes; Singing students pair with Production students, and more.

We are currently supporting our Radio Broadcasting students to organise a "Point Blank Live Lounge", which will bring together those taking the Singing, Advanced Recording & Mixing and Radio modules on a termly basis. Students on our Music Entrepreneur module have also put on events and gig nights which they have run at a profit for themselves. These are prime examples of how our ecosystem is working and supporting student-led initiatives.

We also arrange regular field trips to established recording and mastering studios. Students have opportunities to visit well-known premises, e.g. The Fish Factory and Assault & Battery Studios. Radio students benefit from visits to BBC Radio 1, Rinse FM and MiSoul Radio.

Strengthening our efforts this year around wellbeing and the promotion of this often-overlooked topic in the music industry, we launched our first "*Tips for Surviving in the Music Industry"* event. This featured a debate panel, including Artist Manager and Founder/MD of Unmanageable Artists Olga Heijns, as well as Aidan Culley of Help Musicians UK and Sam Jordan of the Musicians' Union. We are proud that the topics discussed took the subject of student wellbeing beyond the institution into wellbeing in everyday life, as well as the realities of the importance of mental health when working within the pressures of the music industry.

Excerpts from the Student Voice Leaders' Group Statement, Levels 4-6, Music Production and Sound Engineering / DJ Practice: *"Point Blank has created an enriching and nurturing environment for musicians to develop their craft and a great platform for young and emerging talent in the industry to blossom into becoming a great artists by providing the knowledge and tools to excel in their musical career. The 1-2-1 system is great and allows very helpful 1-2-1 meetings between the tutor and the student, the rest is up to the individual student depending how far they want to take it to! Students are encouraged by lecturers to expand their boundaries and develop critical thinking through various exercises in-class and through private study. Lecturers are able to make every lesson interesting for students of different skill levels, making sure everyone has something valuable to take away from these lessons. The efforts of Point Blank to organise activities outside of classes that continue to engage students are very good. They offer both social and academic activities like masterclasses and listening sessions. Access to Point Blank's roster of accomplished music professionals, who are well-versed in their respective areas and industry-standard equipment and facilities makes sure that students learn only from the best and are up to date with the latest music technology."*

Our classrooms have been designed to enable personalised learning and improve engagement. Each classroom is limited to 16 students which also allows close monitoring of learner progress and continuous provision of feedback from the lecturer. A workstation is provided for each participant for in-class exercises in between lecture topics. Additionally, lecturers have their own networked workstation and projector so they can invite students to broadcast the knowledge and techniques and actively participate with their peers. To engage students in the teaching process and encourage constructive creative critique, we designed the assignments of our 'Creative Production and Remix' module so that for the first component, students write briefs for each other. This was a unique way to add stimulation and variety to the challenge of this module.

Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

In 2018, we launched our Staff Development and Investment Plan, a core part of fulfilling Aim 3 of our 5 year strategic plan titled *'Point Blank: The Road Ahead 2018-23'*. In Aim 3, we have pledged to "maintain strong internal links through the recruitment and retention of talented staff with extensive industry and sector experience".

As in our introduction to Point Blank's mission, vision and values, we are proud that an overwhelming majority of our lecturers are actively continuing a rich and successful career in the music industry. We understand that they are in a strong position to transfer valuable skills and knowledge to our students and are willing to give us their time to do so.

Lecturers who have taught at Point Blank for three years or more and shown excellent examples of best practice in teaching, have historically been rewarded with the opportunity to progress to a Module Leader. This extends their responsibilities to include course development work, lecturer support and training, moderation and assessment calibration.

We recently extended the career progression pathway to include Programme Leader and Senior Lecturer positions. Following recruitment, new lecturers now follow a closely monitored induction and support programme over the first year of their career with us. This includes:

- Enhanced peer observation, internal observation and appraisals in the first two terms
- Training on delivery, VLE usage, lecture planning, resources and assignment marking
- Assignment calibration exercises
- Staff investment in at least 3-4 internal and external training sessions per year (including professional education staff attendance). These will cover a range of subjects and shared best practice, with training so far covering effective assessment and feedback, engaging students and supporting mental health and student wellbeing
- Support from their module leaders, meetings and open support when needed
- Assurance they can develop a career at Point Blank with a career in the music industry
- Funding for degrees and PG Cert in Higher Education when appropriate

We are members of AdvanceHE, who will continue to provide some of the external training sessions and workshops we schedule for our lecturers, in addition to in-house training. Lecturers are also encouraged and will be supported in their efforts to obtain Fellowship with AdvanceHE and a PG Cert in Higher Education.

The Staff Development and Investment Plan is being facilitated and supported by the development of a dedicated Academic Staff Database launching in 2019. This will hold records of experience, student feedback, training and development to help us support staff recognition. Lecturers who demonstrate examples of best practice and excellent student engagement are currently rewarded via recognition in our termly Best Practice Newsletter, events or career promotion. This has been well-received; as a result, we are building upon this with more communication and sharing of best practice at forums and events. Consistently excellent teaching is rewarded via promotion through our improved career pathway.

Training and support for lecturers is also reinforced by a dedicated area of teaching content on the VLE known as the 'Instructor Portal'. This is an 'Instructor Handbook', with additional assessment and feedback guidance, best practice in HE, teaching strategies, and more.

Following staff feedback, we recognise that social opportunities are difficult with the variety of sessions and timetable scheduling. We are now introducing and promoting more collaboration, social opportunities and events for academic staff including termly evening get togethers.

Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

We are fully committed to ensuring and maintaining the academic integrity of our courses. Lecturers and a dedicated course development team led by our Head of Curriculum work together to create and ensure our course content and classes are cutting edge and informed by

the latest research, technology and industry practice. Our staff work closely with our students via the Board of Study and Student Consultation Panel and feedback from lecturers is reported and discussed at our Programme Development Committee. The Academic Board has oversight of our academic rigour and stretch as well as all academic committees, reporting to our External Advisory Committee and Board of Directors. This includes termly and annual reviews of data including analysis of grade inflation, student progression and achievement. Furthermore, our HE programmes are validated and monitored by Middlesex University, providing an additional level of quality assurance of our programmes. The QAA noted at our last annual monitoring visit:

"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 […] Good progress in developing and implementing a more systematic approach to monitoring, measuring, and reporting enhancement. The School has also introduced a comprehensive data monitoring system which is considered and reviewed at the External Advisory Committee and the Board of Directors." - ***QAA, Educational Oversight: Report of the monitoring visit, June 2018***

Feedback on the academic rigour and teaching quality has been positive and in 2018, 83% of students agreed that their course provided opportunities to explore ideas of concepts in-depth (NSS Q5). 91% of our students additionally agreed in response to NSS Q7: *"My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt."*

Grade inflation is actively prevented via our moderation and external examination processes, which ensure that the distribution of marks is appropriate each term. A self-initiated review resulted in enhancements to our moderation system and assessment processes in 2018. These were positively received and recognised as good practice by Middlesex University and our subject specialist external examiners. Furthermore, annual monitoring reviews of our programmes are undertaken which cover course design, student engagement, academic standards and assessment to assure that the presentation and content is appropriately challenging, stimulating and fit for purpose. This review of the effectiveness is given further assurance via Middlesex University's oversight and quality assurance of our programmes.

Christian Jones, BA (Hons) Music Production & Sound Engineering graduate, Producer/DJ, released on multiple* record *labels, BBC Introducing Artist: *"I found not only did the creative and technical aspects of the course help tremendously, but also that the music industry and business side are so important. They teach you what's normal in the industry and what things to look out for which is vital. I think the point I'm trying to get at is that Point Blank teaches you how to think, instead of what to think very well – I think the fable "give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day, teach a man to fish and he'll eat for life" really applies."*

External Examiners have provided consistently positive reports. 2017/18 reports highlighted:

"Point Blank's (CertHE/DipHE/)BA (Hons) Music Production & Sound Engineering programmes are specialist courses with strong industry currency and credibility in the electronic dance music sector. I have examined evidence of moderation for each of the four examination boards I have attended and am satisfied that standards are being maintained in the assessment process.

[Many] Tasks are highly practical and require learners to create their own tracks, mixes, digital assets, etc. Consequently, the opportunity for plagiarism is limited. The assessment briefs in some modules are quite inventive and has resulted in some student work which has been a pleasure to examine." - ***External Examiner, 2017/18 EE Report, BA (Hons)/DipHE/CertHE Music Production & Sound Engineering***

Our 2017/18 reports also noted how the School has been quick to action quality enhancements during the year, inclusive of the review of our moderation system and assessment processes:

"It is with great pleasure that I really congratulate what the team at Point Blank have done in the last year to develop the online delivery of their higher education courses – it has been a huge leap forward.

All of my points raised have been implemented, I can't ask for more in a year of external examining." - ***External Examiner, 2017/18 EE Report, BA (Hons)/DipHE/CertHE Music Production & Sound Engineering Online***

Continuous monitoring of our programmes to ensure academic rigour and stretch includes students and staff via our termly Programme Development Committee, Board of Study and module surveys. This is further detailed in TQ4. We recognise that it is only by listening to our students and staff to gain perspective on their experience that we can ensure our student body is fully engaged and appropriately challenged. The insight gained so far into student independence and perspectives on how they apply what they have learnt has been invaluable.

Due to the focus on practical application of skills and learning in our curriculum, our assessment methods and opportunities for extra-curricular activity nurture a high level of independence, enabling all our students to reach their full potential. Examples of this include the opportunity for students to show off their DJ skills on our YouTube channel, in the form of bi-weekly 'Live at the Hub' afternoon DJ sets. This not only provides valuable online exposure (our channel has 337,000 subscribers), but also the practical experience of performance, engagement and live broadcast. Students also have regular opportunities to perform on Pioneer DJ Radio for exposure and experience. Radio Broadcasting students, who have classroom access to the industry standard Myriad radio playout system have initiated plans for the creation of a Point Blank radio station and podcast series. Furthermore, integrated into our course design is a dedicated VLE page on 'project work / private study' that sets out recommended independent study tasks, supporting the ongoing application of their knowledge.

Feedback, TQ4

Supporting statement from Keith Harris OBE, External Advisor on the External Advisory Committee at Point Blank, Manager of Stevie Wonder, Chairman of UK Music's Diversity Taskforce: *"Assessment and support systems for progression have significantly improved over 2017/18, evidencing Point Blank's commitment to constant advancement. These actions were implemented following student feedback and consultation and have been very effective, as reinforced by student feedback data and EE reports. This progress, alongside the use of External Advisors on strategic decisions and desire to excel in HE has shown that the School is totally dedicated to their mission."*

We previously observed in module evaluation surveys and the NSS that students required greater clarity on marking and how to receive feedback. Action was taken to address this at the start of 2018 and, as a result of our efforts, student feedback via Module Evaluation Questionnaires has shown an increase in student satisfaction.

- In 2018 we revised our assessment marking rubrics to provide greater clarity on requirements and student information regarding how marks and grades are finalised
- We introduced a system of 1-2-1s, which enables continuous and personalised feedback to be provided from the start of every module, through to assessment
- Training was provided for lecturers on assessment and feedback practices via one internal and one external (AdvanceHE) event. Training covered the revisions made to the rubrics, best practice in assessment and feedback, as well as the language used in feedback, amongst other topics

Following these changes, we noted students explicitly highlighting recognition of the range of feedback we provide following our explanation of resources in this area, as well as increased clarity in marking/assignment feedback. Significantly, student satisfaction also increased to 95% in July 2018 for assessment and feedback in comparison to 88% in January 2018.

Student Voice Leaders, module survey results and staff feedback have since reinforced our confidence that student satisfaction in assessment and feedback has substantially improved.

Student Voice Leaders are given termly opportunities at Boards of Study to lead discussion and provide feedback on the larger student experience, assessment and academic rigour of the programme. Combined with termly module evaluation questionnaires, this enables us to identify a wealth of enhancements to learning and teaching and improvements to academic rigour. As

we have four termly intakes and committee meetings per academic year, there is a quick turnaround to implement enhancements before the end of each term.

As our 1-2-1sessions are student-led, lecturers have reported that the tailored 1-2-1s introduced in 2018 have not only improved engagement with studies but are now a primary source of personalised feedback and assignment support, tailored to each module. This system of facilitating weekly 1-2-1s also enables a multiple-layered safety net for monitoring engagement and student progress when used in context of other learner analytics, such as attendance and VLE access.

A bespoke VLE has been developed to support campus and online delivery where students access a rich variety of course guidance and class notes, grades and feedback and book 1-2-1s. From here they can participate, receive peer feedback, organise and develop collaborations with each other on our online forums, and message lecturers. We have a predictive grading function for students as part of our feedback on progress, further integrating learner analytics with our dashboard to increase academic engagement.

Our distance learning (online) students also receive 1-2-1 feedback in the form of fortnightly Skype sessions which provide interactive feedback equivalent to that received by campus students. This is a student-led facility whereby they are expected to upload work to their lecturer ahead of the session to receive tailored feedback. Lecturers can share their screen, play audio and interact face to face via a webcam. The sessions are also recorded using Call Recorder software and uploaded back to the student afterwards for future reference. Distance learning support is also reinforced via our online forums and the facility to ask questions at any time outside of 1-2-1s and classes, in keeping with the flexibility of online course design.

Module Leaders communicate the voice of our lecturers termly via reports or attendance at our Programme Development Committee. We recognise that it is only by acknowledging the challenges and ideas presented by students and lecturers that the course design, including assessment and feedback, can improve and evolve to effectively stimulate and challenge students. Our methods have proved to be highly efficient, with a significant number of resulting actions being completed each term.

Point Blank Music School's Exceptional Learning Environment

Resources, LE1

Effective, state-of-the-art learning resources are integral to Point Blank's teaching and learning strategy, ethos and student experience. Students benefit from an incredibly wide range of course resources, in the form of equipment/ facilities, highly personalised support via academic staff and digitally via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

As stated at the outset of this submission, our students have benefited from significant reinvestment (£3m+) by the School in the facilities to improve the student experience. The learning environment is distinctive to Point Blank and alternative from that found in conventional music schools. Focus is placed on employability, challenging students to be independent, with access to studios and equipment to encourage creative liberty.

As a result of our efforts to continuously improve the learning environment, student feedback via Module Evaluation Questionnaires has shown an increase in student satisfaction with facilities, learning resources and the personalised learning environment. In January 2018, the average module evaluation survey result for resources and facilities was 81% (responding "agree" or higher), with student satisfaction increasing to 88% in July 2018.

"The learning environment is both professional and highly challenging for students. It's clear that a lot of investment has been put into facilitating an excellent student experience. Learning resources are matched to those used in the industry and are introduced to students at an early stage on their learning journey. This gives them a truly immersive experience before graduation and allows them to creatively experiment within the school in order to be ready to enter a very

competitive industry." - ***Keith Harris OBE, External Advisory Committee Member at Point Blank, Manager of Stevie Wonder, Chairman of UK Music's Diversity Taskforce***

As mentioned previously, a bespoke Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) supports campus and online delivery. Students take their courses from the VLE, a system Point Blank has developed in-house over a period of 10+ years. Peer feedback, collaboration and communications with lecturers and each other via online forums and other systems all improve the student experience. Predictive grading, integrated with learner analytics, is also available on our student dashboard to increase study engagement.

All students are given initial VLE training at the start of their course. All lecturers receive VLE training as part of their induction and students can approach either lecturers or Student Services for help in this area if necessary. Currently, our VLE provides:

- Course notes and diagrams, written by our course developers and lecturers
- Over 2000 tutorial videos and guest masterclasses developed by Point Blank. These are used for distance learning and assisting blended learning for campus students
- Embedded Spotify playlists tailored to course content created in-house
- A growing collection of multitrack song projects created at Point Blank
- Downloadable audio samples and synth patches
- Examples of past assignment work (used with student consent)
- Study Essentials modules. These are supportive resources which also contain our Student Wellbeing module. Many students currently access supportive "Study essentials" modules, course guidance and handbooks per term

External Examiner, EE Report 2017-18, Music Production & Sound Engineering Online:

"I reflect the same comment as last year: the content of the qualification is highly detailed and of an excellent academic quality.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) delivery has vastly improved again and it must be praised. Students are able to see their predicted marks throughout their modules and time at Point Blank. I consider this to be a very engaging process for the students and they get a better estimate of how their marks translate to a classification.

On the whole the VLE is better laid out, more intuitive to use, and again I cannot comment any more favourably about this aspect, it is the best example of online delivery I have seen in HE."

The layout at our main campus Orsman Road has been designed to include a Hub area serving as a natural social area and performance space, surrounded by classrooms. This promotes collaboration, performance (including our broadcasts "Live at the Hub" on Youtube and regular shows on Pioneer DJ Radio), Point Blank's creative "ecosystem" and academic cohesion.

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice, LE2

The resources detailed in the previous section facilitate our focus on practical application of skills and learning in our curriculum. Our assessment methods and opportunities for extra-curricular activity nurture a high level of independence, enabling students to reach their full potential. Examples of students achieving tangible success are given exposure on our blog "Point Blank Plus" to inspire others to follow suit. As an example:

"I won the Anthony Touma remix competition, which was on the Point Blank Opportunities page. The label team loved the remix and wanted to release it. A massive thank you to Alex Phountzi, my lecturer for the Creative Production & Remixing module, for helping me hone my remixing skills and shed light on new & innovative production techniques.

Since then, I have been asked to do a second remix for a Universal artist. The label also asked me to send them some of my 'Radio Style/Top 40' songs, which was a fantastic opportunity for

which I am very grateful!" - ***John Kerfoot, accelerated BA (Hons) Music Production & Sound Engineering. Signed to Universal shortly after graduating.***

By forming close links with high-profile manufacturers such as Native Instruments, Solid State Logic, Ableton, Pioneer, Adams, Myriad, AVID and Izotope, we are often informed of the latest products by working with the manufacturers before products are officially released. We conduct knowledge exchange via working with our industry partners to support the development of their products. This also enables us to stay cutting edge and prepare course content or update our course design to integrate new products in time for the release.

Point Blank's latest successful annual monitoring visit found that our students valued the strong experience and knowledge of our lecturers, particularly highlighting: *"The students whom the team met spoke enthusiastically about the good quality of teaching they receive. … Students greatly appreciate the professional experience of their instructors, which helps them improve both academically and creatively."*

We have committed to recruiting world and industry-renowned staff with ongoing experience in their respective specialisms, supporting them via personalised HE training and funding for qualifications such as degrees and PG Cert in Higher Education where appropriate. All staff members are respected and encouraged with support and time to continue their creative interests and pursuits alongside their teaching responsibilities. This enables our students to learn from current industry practice and benefit from the insight, employability advice and connections continuously embedded throughout their studies by all staff members. They additionally benefit from a dedicated Careers and Alumni Service, facilitating our 100% graduate outcomes score in highly skilled employment or further study.

Examples of lecturers at the forefront of our provision and working in the industry:

- **Kevin Kerrigan** – Music Composition module leader, Kevin has composed for top 10 hit music and for movies/TV for Paramount, BBC, Warner Bros, Sony & Universal
- **Tony Briscoe** – Composer/Producer of top 10 hit music (e.g. Craig David and Beverley Knight). Composer on the BBC Wildlife Series presented by David Attenborough
- **Linton Bennett** – Composer/Producer of top 10 hit music who has been active in the music industry for 3 decades. Signed to Motown in the US
- **Jen Anderson** – Music Industry Module Leader, Jen ran the music festival T in the Park for 5 years, A&R at Fiction Records, set up King Tut Recordings and Euphonios and worked with the BBC. A board member of industry organisations AIM & SMIA
- **Anna Lakatos** – Musician, audio engineer and music producer. Avid Certified for Pro Tools, official Ableton Certified Trainer and Product Specialist for Native Instruments.
- **Simon Bird (Shadowchild)** – Logic lecturer; highly successful and innovative artist
- **Ellie Lawson** – British singer-songwriter and vocalist signed to Atlantic Records, also has her own record label called 'Create Your Own Reality'
- **Max Heyes** – Sound Engineering lecturer; worked on four albums nominated for the Mercury Music Prize, including Doves, Paul Weller and Asian Dub Foundation
- **Joseph Keevil (Saytek)** – Ableton & Electronic Music Performance lecturer; highly successful and well-respected live artist
- **Michael Bailey** – Resident DJ for Goldie's Metalheadz record label, Presenter at 1Xtra, Radio 1 & Ministry of Sound

We regularly invite other experienced industry professionals to give masterclasses, either to students studying relevant modules, or to a wider group of students in our communal 'Hub' area. Where possible, our guest masterclasses and events are filmed and shared with future students via our Virtual Learning Environment in an area known as "PB Talks".

Recent masterclass examples for our radio students have included:

- Tim Mansel – A freelance radio documentary and package maker who has completed projects for the BBC, ABC (Canada and Australia) and NPR

- Ben Burrell - A radio presenter with over ten years of experience. Currently a presenter on Absolute Radio since 2016

Recent masterclass examples for our Music Entrepreneur students have included:

- Laura Young - Co-Director of music publishing company S2k Music Limited
- Elise Cobain - Digital Music Content Manager at Amazon and Specialist DJ on Amazing Radio. Previously Global Playlist Programming and Curation Manager at Sony Music and Vevo and Creative Producer at BBC

Every student has day and night access to the studios with industry standard equipment, including SSL Duality Delta, Audient, TLA Audio and Oram mixing desks. We also provide fully equipped workstations for all students in class with high-end music production hardware such as Push, Maschine, Komplete Kontrol, the latest Pioneer DJ and Roland equipment. All students can access relevant software and study Logic, Ableton, Native Instruments and Pro Tools. On completion of our degree, students will have experienced using industry standard mixing consoles under the guidance of our lecturers with professional industry experience, preparing them for work in the world's top recording studios. Lecturers also have their own in-class workstation, at which they can invite students to demonstrate the knowledge and techniques they have learnt, and actively participate with the class.

Personalised Learning, LE3

As detailed in earlier sections, the School has integrated many methods to tailor academic experiences to the individual, such as:

- 1-2-1s which act as a personal tutoring system tailored to each module. The opportunity to develop a positive working relationship with a variety of lecturers and receive personalised constructive critique away from the class has proven very effective.
    - Notably, this is a student-led facility, and students can upload/bring work to their lecturer ahead of the session to receive tailored feedback.
- Enhanced support systems, such as Academic Skills Workshops, Music Theory Essentials workshops (launching in 2019) and Student Services available day/evening
- Student Consultation Panels for decisions affecting the student experience
- Small class sizes (max. 16 individuals)
- "Meet the CEO": direct email communication with the CEO/Founder of Point Blank Music School, open to all students throughout their studies
- A feedback box for paper-based, personal or anonymous ideas and feedback any time
- Career consultations for final year students
- A dedicated Student Wellbeing Counsellor for private consultation
- Listening sessions, for personalised feedback on their music
- Studio Assistants available day and night for help and guidance with learning resources

Staff members across Point Blank Music School also have a strong reputation of being approachable and available to all, in line with our friendly and supportive culture. Our Academic Support has consistently been rated highly by students in response to NSS Q18 "I have been able to contact staff when I needed to". 100% of students agreed or strongly agreed in 2017, with 96% also agreeing in 2018 against a larger sample.

Pass rates reported for completing students also show a very positive trend in response to our changes and enhancements (as noted by the QAA, report of the annual monitoring visit, June 2018): **88.2 per cent (2014-15), 94.4 per cent (2015-16) and 96.7 per cent (2016-17).**

Examples of recent enhancements we have implemented in response to student feedback to maintain our reputation of excellent individual support:

- We noted some students reported a need for further support in music theory and essential academic skills support (e.g. academic writing, project management).
    - In 2019 we are launching Academic Skills Workshops and Music Theory Essentials Workshops for students to attend at all levels as additional support.
    - We consulted our Student Consultation Panel on the development of our Foundation Year and first year student experience. By collecting experiences and feedback from students and alumni, this will help us to launch a highly supportive Foundation Year and first year which will help ease student journeys.
- Student Community – Student feedback raised that they wanted more socials/student networking opportunities/events to increase the student community.
- We recruited a dedicated Student Engagement Executive in 2018 to personally liaise with students and support the arrangement of social events among other duties.
- In 2018, we found in student surveys and via Student Voice Leaders that they enjoyed our guest speaker events and would like to see more of this.
    - As a result, we more than doubled events in 2018 vs 2017, inclusive of larger, themed days such as: *PB x International Women's Day,* and *Tips for Surviving in the Music Industry* events. We record many events and host them on our VLE as *PB Talks*, **subtitling as many as possible**, inclusively enabling students unable to attend and our distance learning students to also benefit from the experiences. These actions have been very well received and we will add further value in 2019.
- We established a Student Consultation Panel for all significant student experience decisions. Students can take direct, short term roles affecting specific areas of interest.

These efforts have been positively recognised by students:

"The student mixers are great and plenty of opportunities have been created centred around music each week to meet and collaborate. They offer both social but also academic activities like masterclasses and listening sessions." ***- Student Voice Leaders (excerpts from Group Statement, Levels 4-6, Music Production & Sound Engineering / DJ Practice)***

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO1 and SO2)

Due to the industry focus of the School, our students benefit from regular guidance in the application of their skills in scenarios equivalent to those in employment. They also gain employability and transferable skills as embedded in course design, and guidance from lecturers still in the industry. This is additional to the introduction of our dedicated Careers and Alumni Services, facilitating our 100% graduate outcomes score in highly skilled employment or further study. We are very proud that historically many of our graduates have entered highly skilled employment and been established as high profile musicians, producers, engineers and more in their own right. Significantly, as the School has grown, many graduates have continued to find high profile success, profiled under 'Student Success' on our blog, Point Blank Plus.

The QAA team found at our 2018 annual visit that students recognised our efforts to ensure complete support for all: *"Students the team met reported that with more students present, they had not experienced any reduction to access to staff or specialist facilities."*

Enabling our students to progress into further study or highly skilled employment is in line with our ethos and Aim 2 of our strategic plan 2018-23: *"Continually strive to enhance our student experience and support all students to reach their full potential".* To achieve this, we integrate current industry practice and insight throughout their student experience and curriculum via:

- Lecturers still active in the industry and career consultations for final year students
- High staff:student ratio; classes limited at 16; additional weekly 1-2-1s for each module
- Forming close links with high-profile manufacturers and employers in the creative industries. This keeps our courses cutting edge with knowledge exchange and offers a wide range of opportunities for employment, high profile exposure or technology insight

- Regular guest speakers including Pete Tong MBE, Goldie MBE and Annie Mac
- Opportunities to practice on industry standard resources and visit high-profile premises

Insights from staff active in the industry and guest speakers at appropriate levels of their course enable students to learn from pioneers in their field, train, and discover their potential with our professional standard facilities before entering the industry. Our established relationships and reputable academic rigour have led to regular opportunities for students to visit industry premises and graduates obtaining jobs there as a result, e.g. Gemma Cairney (BBC Radio 1).

Throughout their course, students are also provided with private listening sessions and workshops for guidance on their music in addition to their module 1-2-1s. Our careers service also includes consultancy/careers advice sessions with an active and influential figure in the music industry as part of their final year. In the final year, consultancy/careers advice sessions are provided for students who gain career insights and guidance on their music:

"I provide personalised guidance for final year Point Blank students on their music and career guidance. I can offer students work opportunities and insight into the industry through my music industry network built up over 30 years in the business which has seen me achieve chart success as an artist, producer and manager. I've found Point Blank students to be highly motivated and to have a genuine passion for success in the music industry. Their skills have been well developed over the course of their programme and each student's creativity and individuality is nurtured, enabling them to reach their full potential.

Point Blank has a reputation for having genuine roots in the music industry and has used this insider knowledge to define and shape their programmes in a fast-moving sector. I have been running music seminars with Andrea Euell and Nicola Charles for 20 years and we have witnessed a shift in educating the next generation of music business entrepreneurs. Point Blank's tendency to move towards what the sector needs has formed the basis of the high student/graduate success ratings of the School. The programmes are innovative in both delivery and content and manage to harness the unique individuality and industry experience of each lecturer. - ***Kwame Kwaten, External Student Consultant. Artist Manager with ATC Management, CEO of Ferocious Talent and Record Producer***

Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

Point Blank is dedicated to equality, diversity and enabling positive outcomes for all our students. This is reflected in Aim 4 of our Strategic Plan 2018-23, which states: "Support Access and Participation objectives and global creativity by welcoming a diverse range of students and strengthening our open minded, dynamic and pioneering academic community". In line with this, we currently provide:

- A dedicated Student Wellbeing Counsellor for private consultation
- Dedicated Student Services and Programme Administration Teams available for student support or assessment, (e.g. alternative arrangements or extenuating circumstances)
- Outreach programme and scholarships, bursaries and a hardship fund available for talented students who may otherwise be unable to study with us without supportive funding, or who may find themselves in financially difficult situations during their studies
- Studio Assistants available day and night for student support, guidance on learning resources and to help arrange accommodations for ease of access regarding health conditions or any impairments
- Building and room access for students with health conditions or any impairments
- Listening sessions, for personalised feedback on their music

Due to the intimate scale of the School, we can make many special arrangements for students to personalise their learning experience or help them reach their potential. Staff go out of their way daily to accommodate student circumstance and facilitate significant learning gain for all.

Crucially, our commitment starts prior to admission with outreach and social mobility programmes to inspire under-represented or underprivileged groups in HE and the music industry. In relation to this, we provide scholarships, bursaries and a hardship fund. Particularly, we are proud to recruit students and staff without discrimination and our extensive efforts to accommodate mental health conditions or any impairments. We have undiscriminating entry requirements, which are open to experience and portfolios but higher than similar providers to match the strong academic rigour, demands and quality of our programmes. However, to increase access and participation for those unable to study with us due to this, we are launching a Foundation Year in 2019. This will support and prepare entrants who did not meet standard entry requirements to still reach their full potential on our courses.

Notably, our lecturers are also excellent role models for our students, with some, e.g. Joseph Keevil (Saytek), being open about their personal struggles or health conditions within the high pressures of the music industry, in their classes, at themed talks or events. We are proud that student success stories have resulted from these combined efforts. Examples include:

- Our Student Services and Education Team provided exceptional help to a student struggling with mental health issues, who initially did not have the confidence to embark on an HE course following being sectioned. We held a place until they were confident enough to start and provided student counselling, guidance and academic support. After successfully completing their CertHE, they continued their studies with us, stating: *"I really appreciate the immense support from PB. I became a promoted student success story at Point Blank and a couple of tracks from my EP were picked up by BBC Introducing South. I found PB very supportive, thorough and highly enjoyable and would love nothing more than to continue where I left off. I feel totally prepared to do what I wanted to do whilst also becoming more aware of the other options available to me."*
- A student suffered an accident resulting in a brain injury after starting a course with us. We provided counselling sessions, assurance of student support and extensive discussion of their resulting learning difficulties, and they found the confidence to continue their studies with us and pursue their ambition to produce music. They are now successfully progressing with their studies following accommodation to enable ease of access to course resources, academic support, counselling sessions with our dedicated counsellor and access to their own support team via our VLE.

Kwame Kwaten, External Student Consultant. Artist Manager with ATC Management, CEO of Ferocious Talent and Record Producer: *"I have seen students from diverse and undiscriminating backgrounds having many opportunities to collaborate, experiment and discover new interests together. In addition to musical opportunities like performing at events and carrying out remix and production projects for artists, students can create and lead events and debate issues at International Women's Day and mental health themed days. These are effective ways for students to start leading change and implement their skills. Combined with the small class sizes and personalised support via a variety of 1-2-1 sessions on every module, each student's creativity and individuality is nurtured, enabling them to reach their full potential."*

Conclusion

We intend to embrace the spirit of change in the higher education sector as we enter the next phase of our evolution. Over the next five years we will enhance our course provision; recruit more talented members of staff; train and develop our workforce appropriately; ingrain the quality cycle into everything we do; deliver quality to our students and ensure they receive the best possible experience we can deliver. In doing so, Point Blank will remain a specialist HE provider, offering a bespoke, high-quality, student-centred experience.

Our students have recognised the substantial work which has already taken place to create an excellent teaching and learning experience for them, alongside our excellent graduate success rate in entering highly skilled employment or further study. This recognition and the context of the evidence presented in this submission, suggests that Point Blank is in a strong position for a TEF Award commensurate with our exceptional teaching provision.