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Conservatoire student and instrumental professor: the student perspective on a complex relationship

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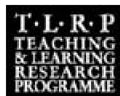
This article examines the special relationship between students and their instrumental teachers in UK conservatoires. Conservatoires in the UK provide a higher education for aspiring performers and composers and the students' choice of conservatoire will often be guided by their desire to study with a particular 'professor' who will teach them their major or 'principal study' instrument. Many such professors are visiting part-time staff whose teaching commitment represents only a small proportion of their wider professional lives. Here, the relationship between student and professor is revealed through the perceptions of piano students at a UK conservatoire and a picture emerges of partnerships which are remarkably productive, but vary widely in the degree and range of musical and personal support that students ideally hope to receive from them.

Introduction

A successful relationship between the young classical player and his or her instrumental professor is vital within the intense, demanding and rarefied environment of the conservatoire – an institution which seeks to provide specialist musical education and training for our next generation of performers and composers. A unique one-to-one relationship that evolves and develops over time (for many students over some years) and behind the closed doors of the teaching studio, it should ideally produce rounded musicians showing a high level of instrumental competence, a depth of musical understanding and a core of personal confidence that will allow them to express themselves with total commitment in any performing arena. With such high expectations placed on these tutorial relationships, it is surprising that relatively little research has been undertaken to explore this area in the UK, though Mills (2002) has investigated what conservatoire students see as successful instrumental teaching, and Kingsbury's (1988) study of a conservatoire in the USA has examined the student/teacher relationship and the effect of the environment on its students. Kingsbury remarks that 'Conservatory life is about talent . . . While everyone at the conservatory 'has' talent . . . nearly all students are very much concerned with how much talent they have, and sometimes with whether they 'really' have any talent at all'. This observation is highly relevant to UK conservatoires, where instrumental professors bear a great deal of responsibility for instilling the vital ingredient of self-belief in their students.

In the UK, instrumental lessons at conservatoire level are delivered by a mixture of salaried and hourly paid tutorial staff, often known as professors, with salaried employees required to undertake numerous other practical, administrative and research duties alongside their teaching commitments. However, the vast majority of instrumental lessons



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are delivered by part-time visiting staff who – like the salaried staff – are often successful performers but who teach for the minority of their working time. UK conservatoires typically pay such staff by the hour (Mills, 2004). Professors are employed to pass on their technical, musical and performing skills to undergraduate and postgraduate students and do so in highly contrasting and individual ways. Kingsbury (1988) stresses the wide variation in tutorial approach, adding that 'the formal teacher–student pairing must be considered as a fundamental element in the production of Western art music'.

This study was motivated by curiosity about what students feel makes a 'successful' tutorial relationship between student and professor. It sought to examine the following issues:

- What do conservatoire students themselves perceive to be the benefits and disadvantages of studying with part time, visiting instrumental staff?
- How do these students view their professors and how do they feel their instrumental education benefits from the wider professional activities of their professors?
- To what extent do students feel that other facets of their conservatoire curriculum and environment benefit their playing?
- Are any of the answers to the above questions influenced by factors such as gender, nationality and the educational background of conservatoire students?

Method

To seek answers to the questions identified above I interviewed 12 piano students from a UK conservatoire where I have been a visiting part-time tutor in the keyboard department for almost a decade. Whilst this research could clearly have focused on other instrumentalists, singers or composers, I wanted to focus my attention on the educational environment in which I actively participate. I also hoped that my familiarity with the issues involved would allow students to feel an understanding and empathy from their interviewer, whilst at the same time recognising that my position as a member of staff at the college might also have a bearing on the answers that students provided.

In addition, I was particularly interested in pianists because they are traditionally regarded as the most isolated of students at any conservatoire. They tend not to be involved in group activities such as orchestra, wind band and opera chorus and for some even participation in chamber music is a rare occurrence. Since pianists spend much of their day alone in the practice studio with their sole focus being their next lesson, I felt that the relationship with their professor might assume an even greater significance.

Students interviewed represented a cross-section of the college population – a mixture of male and female, undergraduate and postgraduate, UK and overseas – who were learning with different members of the visiting part-time tutorial staff (Table 1). Of a list of students suggested by the Head of Keyboard, I interviewed those who were happy to speak to me and who also had the permission of their professors to do so.

These students were interviewed during October and November 2004, with sessions lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Whilst notes were taken at the time, interviews were also tape recorded for future reference. The interviews were semi-structured, with five prompt questions leading students into discussion of the relevant areas as follows:

1. Tell me about your musical background and how this brought you to your present course of study.

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2. How do you see the role of your principal study professor at college?
3. In what ways do you feel that your professor's professional activities outside the college impact on your learning experience?
4. What factors do you feel are most influential in your musical development at college?
5. Is there anything else you feel is relevant/would like to discuss?

Further to the student interviews I also spoke to the vice-principal of the college, who was able to give the institution's perspective on the part-time visiting tutors currently employed there, along with some additional background information.

I embarked on the interview process with an open mind, unsure what student responses might reveal. However, when I examined the collected data, certain patterns and themes emerged. Drawn from a variety of backgrounds, these students had arrived at college with contrasting educational experiences and expectations and they expressed some interesting opinions on their instrumental training.

Results

What do students perceive to be the benefits and disadvantages of studying with visiting part-time instrumental staff?

It was at once evident that all students reported a high degree of satisfaction with their lessons, regarding professors as inspiring, motivating and a catalyst to learning. Asked to describe their professor's role, words such as 'mentor', 'guide' and 'consultant' were commonly used. Seven out of the 12 students said specifically that their professor's role was to 'teach them to teach themselves', to listen and guide and not to 'spoon feed'. Students

Table 1 *Student participants*

Student	Male/Female	Under/postgraduate – Year	UK/Overseas	Teacher
A	M	PG Yr 2	Overseas**	1
B	F	UG Yr 2	UK	1
C	M	UG Yr 4 (JC)*	UK	1
D	F	UG Yr 2 (JC)	UK	2
E	M	UG Yr 2	UK	2
F	F	PG Yr 1	Overseas	2
G	F	UG Yr 2	UK	3
H	F	UG Yr 3	UK	3
I	M	PG Yr 1	Overseas	4
J	F	UG Yr 4	UK	5
K	M	UG Yr 4	UK	6
L	M	PG Yr 1	UK	7

* JC, Joint University and Conservatoire Course.
** For the purposes of this research, the term Overseas refers to all students who are not UK students, including those from mainland Europe.

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who had studied at the institution for some years (in this case, 4th year undergraduates and postgraduates) all identified the need for the role of their professor to change gradually as they themselves developed. Student I, a postgraduate from overseas, was typical in speaking of the need for 'all round' guidance musically, technically and personally when an undergraduate, whilst in his current stage, as a postgraduate, his lessons had become a forum for 'diagnosing specific problems, discussing issues and sharing ideas'.

These remarks appear to show a remarkable degree of equality in the tutorial relationship. Given that students are studying with professors with established reputations as performers and pedagogues, one might expect them to express more sense of awe, and to feel their lessons to be sessions of instruction from the 'maestro', rather than enjoying such an apparently healthy two-way dialogue. Harald Jørgensen (2000: 68) states that 'historically, the predominant relationship between teacher and student in instrumental instruction has been described as a master-apprentice relationship, where the master usually is looked at as a role model and a source of identification for the student, and where the dominating mode of student learning is imitation'. Certainly my own experience of study at a conservatoire in the 1980s was more akin to this. I admired my professor tremendously and looked forward greatly to my lessons, but I regarded them as an opportunity to absorb as much information and advice as I could, rather than a chance to enter into dialogue and discussion. Perhaps the comments of current students reflect a change in the general educational ethos over the last 20 years or so, namely that students should learn to question and interact in lessons, whilst teachers should open doors and enable, rather than provide information to be absorbed wholesale and without question. No doubt there still exists considerable variation in the manner and delivery of conservatoire professors, with comments in the present paper reflecting only a very small number of student–professor relationships at this particular conservatoire.

Full-time members of staff who deliver instrumental lessons are, at least in theory, more visible and accessible than visiting part-time staff and by definition are potentially able to be more flexible in their approach to timetabling lessons, attending student performances and generally providing extra support in practical and emotional terms. Part-time staff in the keyboard department of this particular conservatoire teach as few as one, or as many as nine, students, so there is a wide variation in their time commitment to the college. Discussions with the vice-principal revealed that whilst certain part-time tutors live only a short distance from their teaching, others commute from further afield, including some from far-flung European cities. Part-time staff tend to be generous with their time, with some giving an exceptionally high level of unpaid input providing students with extra help and lessons.

Currently, the keyboard students questioned receive 28 individual lessons of 90 minutes' duration with their professor over each academic year – a figure that, whilst comparing favourably with other UK conservatoires, actually constitutes a relatively small amount of contact time over the calendar year. Students interviewed had differing experiences regarding the timetabling of their lessons, but those who tended to have them more irregularly spaced remarked on the difficulty of managing their time to make the most of their lessons, particularly as younger undergraduates. Having, for example, two lessons in 5 days and then no further lesson for 10 days or more required them to be particularly organised and focused in their practice and for some students this presented

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more difficulty than others. Pianist F, an overseas student, remembered that she had found the concept of her lessons daunting on arrival at the college. At the time she found it almost unbelievable that she would have only one lesson every week or 10 days, with no access to her tutor in-between times – clearly a contrast to her expectations. Looking back now, as a postgraduate, she believes more regular access to her tutor could have been helpful at an early stage, though she recognises that such contact would perhaps have provided short-term answers, rather than a long-term strategy for independent learning.

Interestingly, all three of the overseas students interviewed emphasised strongly the need for much more support when young undergraduates, identifying more access and contact with professors as desirable at that stage. In contrast, Student K, a 4th year undergraduate from the UK found his lessons at college 'a totally natural continuation of the way I was taught since I was six years old – a weekly lesson, with no other contact between visits'. The majority of students interviewed said that they received extra lessons when approaching important deadlines and many enjoyed the presence and support of their professors at examinations, assessments, concerts and so on. Whilst all grateful for their extra tuition, students had mixed responses to the attendance of tutors at their performances. Six of those questioned saw it as *imperative* to their instrumental education that their tutors saw them in a variety of performing situations, whilst the other six felt the tutor's attendance at such events was a mixed blessing, with their presence tending to exert a certain 'pressure' that was not always positive. The latter group of students felt they achieved a certain 'freedom' of expression when left to their own devices. It should be noted here that no professor is required to hear any of their students' assessments or performances and if they choose to attend (as indeed many do) they are not paid to do so. Student E, a 2nd year undergraduate, suggested that perhaps an ideal way forward was to video all performances, thus giving the student freedom of expression in performance, but allowing the professor the opportunity to hear and see the student's playing at their convenience, providing useful feedback to the student at a later date.

There were also widely differing attitudes to contact with professors outside lessons. Five students said that contacting teachers 'out of hours' was unacceptable, feeling that it represented an invasion of their privacy, with Student G stating that this scenario 'should not be the way the relationship works' and another unable to imagine any issue that could not wait to be discussed at the next lesson. Completely contrary to this were the other seven students who regarded telephoning, emailing or text messaging their teachers as entirely acceptable and often an important line of communication between lessons, when problems and queries arose. Pupils of the same tutors had differing attitudes on this issue, suggesting that the level and type of contact was dictated by the student and not the professor.

Overwhelmingly, and regardless of their level of informal contact with professors between visits, students felt positive about their teachers' physical and emotional distance from the college. All felt their professors arrived for their teaching visits refreshed and energised by their other professional activities, were able to be completely focused on their teaching and brought a breath of fresh air to the institution. Students perceived them as operating 'outside the political system', having 'no agenda' and all found it difficult to imagine their professors as full-time teachers at the college, suspecting (fairly or unfairly) that such a commitment and consistent routine might make their teaching less effective, as

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well as running the risk of them becoming part of what they perceived to be the political machinery of the institution.

All students spoke about the unique and special relationship they enjoyed with their professors, the intensity of the one-to-one contact and the tutor's undivided attention to their playing during lessons. All sought direct and frank communication with their tutors, with Student C, a 4th year undergraduate, contrasting the entirely healthy, totally relaxed environment created in his lessons with the false and inhibited one-to-one contact of many master classes (where students perform and work with frequently unfamiliar visiting musicians in a public arena). For him, absolute ease and openness were crucial to positive learning. Student K described his tutor as fulfilling 'a special one to one role – a person with whom you have unique contact time. You develop a special relationship with them and a mutual respect . . . '

All felt that the intimacy of the relationship developed over time – but how? For most the key to this was simply the gradual revelation of their personalities *through their playing.* Student I articulated this well, speaking of playing as 'an intimate and transparent picture of all you are'. Student B recognised that her professor identified her personality through her playing and comments that he made, such as 'I think this piece is really *you,* you should learn it', reflected his understanding of her persona. Given the limited amount of contact time and the absence of most tutors from the college environment for the majority of the time, this perceived intimacy is perhaps surprising. The majority of those interviewed thought it unnecessary to develop any relationship with their tutors socially, with many speaking of extra-musical contact as undesirable, favouring a 'healthy distance', 'personal detachment' and so on. However, three of the 12 students (all of them female, though learning with both male and female professors) felt that discussion of non-musical topics was important, that you needed to know your tutor 'as a friend', and that such contact created an important perspective and acted as a 'reality check' in what could easily become a rather insular learning environment.

Student E stated that 80% of his improvement came from the practical information and musical guidance absorbed during his lessons, whilst perhaps the remaining 20% depended on personal trust and communication with his professor, something which might develop more quickly given increased tutorial contact time.

How do students view their professors and what benefits do they feel they derive from their musical activities outside the confines of the conservatoire?

Ten of the students questioned felt that learning with an active performer was an invaluable help and inspiration, as teachers were in touch with the realities of performance pressure. Many felt that learning with performer-teachers as opposed to 'career' teachers ensured a healthy pragmatism. Professors were able to balance the idealism of their teaching goals with the occasionally harsh realities of the concert platform. A performing profile was seen to give professors credibility, since their advice on areas such as projection, nerves, fingerings, working with conductors and so on was founded on 'real' experience. Student F remarked that seeing her teacher perform enabled her to 'identify' with her more strongly and students were generally able to see that advice offered in the teaching studio worked

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for their professor on the concert platform. Student I said that his tutor's teaching '*is* his playing'.

Various studies have examined the changing role of the tutor in a young instrumentalist's development with the general finding that at a younger age, gifted musicians look for encouragement, warmth and friendliness from their teacher, but progressively seek out instrumental expertise and instruction, the ability to give impressive demonstrations, specialist knowledge and career advice (Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Davidson *et al*., 1998; Mills & Smith, 2003). Professors were generally seen as role models representing something 'to aspire to' and 'to look up to'. One student remarked that her professor was 'someone who showed you could succeed'.

However, it was not just the performing profiles of professors that were seen as important. Students felt that participation in examination and competition panels ensured their teachers maintained a sense of 'benchmark standards' and were in touch with the levels and demands of the competitive world. Teaching at other institutions was considered less important, though a small proportion of students remarked that listening to other pianists and observing different teaching methods and approaches might ensure a professor's freshness and creativity in his or her own teaching at the college.

From a more pragmatic point of view, students saw their professor's interaction in the professional world as vital for their own careers, ensuring they would be alerted to opportunities and developments, and would benefit from the 'contacts' of their professors in the outside world. Student K was typical in speaking of his wish for his tutor to be 'trained for the profession and active in it'.

To what extent do students feel that other facets of their conservatoire curriculum and environment benefit their playing?

How much do students rely on the input and inspiration of their professors and how much do they take responsibility for their own learning? There is clearly much to absorb from the rest of the conservatoire curriculum, its environment and community, and there has been some research in this area. Jørgensen (2000) proposed, for example, the possibility of professors dividing their time between teaching their students and observing them practise, also suggesting that student independence and responsibility as well as the role of the institution itself are vital components in any student's improvement.

Whilst students found their principal study lessons to be overwhelmingly the most important factor in their improvement and development at college, there were nevertheless some interesting views on which other activities were helpful.

Active listening, with cheap and easy access to concert performances, was seen as invaluable. Professional concerts represented a 'finished product' and a 'level to aim at', whilst, in contrast, student performances fulfilled a dual function, with less accomplished playing acting as a reference point for a student's own strengths and weaknesses and stronger playing providing inspiration and motivation. The college library's CD collection was also a valued tool for learning, with students listening to contrasting performances of the works they studied and, as a result, developing more solidified views and interpretations in their playing.

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Performance opportunities in general and more informal, less pressurised platforms in particular, were also important. The peer group was clearly a powerful resource, with numerous students citing discussion with other pianists on issues such as nerves, practice, concert performances and so on as a healthy forum for articulating their own views and ideas in an unthreatening environment. Kingsbury (1988: 5) examined the importance of the peer environment to conservatoire students, concluding that their feelings of self-confidence and worth 'were manifested in a complex weave of intensely ambiguous friendly-competitive social relationships'. Pianists interviewed here sought out groups of peers to perform to and many were enthusiastic about classes held by each professor for his or her own students, representing as they did the opportunity to perform to familiar faces, to receive peer as well as tutor feedback and, also importantly perhaps, to see their professor in a social situation other than the familiar one-to-one of their lessons. Presently such classes are a timetabled commitment for professors in the string department at the college, but students consequently receive slightly less one-to-one tuition in order to accommodate them. Similar classes in the keyboard department are provided for pianists only on an entirely voluntary basis by certain professors, thus creating the sense of an uneven playing field of opportunity in some students' minds.

Chamber music, with its combination of further tutorial attention and all the help, advice and feedback that collaborations created, was felt to be extremely beneficial.

Pedagogy (a keyboard-specific teacher education course that is compulsory for undergraduates in Years 3 and 4 at the college) was seen as useful in general, though not necessarily relevant in terms of students' individual instrumental development. However, one or two of those interviewed who had undertaken the course did believe that having to articulate technical and musical concepts to pupils during teaching practice forced them into a useful analysis of their own playing.

Disappointingly, the *direct* benefits to playing of aural, harmony and history were hard for many to see, though the two Joint Course students questioned (who pursue an academic university course alongside their more practical conservatoire degree) both stated that their university course in structural analysis had proved invaluable to the learning and interpretative process. Given that these particular students deliberately pursued a dual course because of their interest in both practical and academic music, these comments are perhaps not surprising.

There is possibly an element of students taking their general training for granted here. Of the 12 students interviewed, seven had early training either in specialist music schools, junior departments at conservatoires or as a cathedral chorister. Of the remaining five students, who had not received such training, three were extremely positive about the benefits of all-round musical education. Student A, a postgraduate overseas student who had taken English as his first degree, said that he lamented his lack of basic theoretical and aural training on a daily basis, envying the undergraduate students at college the help they received in that area.

For some students more diverse activities were important. Several had opted for courses such as Jazz Improvisation and Contemporary Piano (a course looking specifically at more unusual repertoire not usually covered in principal study lessons), feeling that these offered them the opportunity to broaden knowledge and to relax in a learning environment where they were not necessarily expected to excel. Student G, an undergraduate, mentioned

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sessions on health awareness and Alexander Technique as important and it is perhaps surprising that more students questioned did not mention areas such as these as directly beneficial to their playing.

Given that young instrumentalists choose a conservatoire education precisely because they wish to focus on becoming advanced instrumentalists, perhaps their lack of enthusiasm for other aspects of the conservatoire curriculum is not surprising. Kingsbury examined this kind of mind-set in his 1988 study, stating that:

> Numerous students expressed irritation about what they saw as a highly unsatisfactory institution . . . and yet were devoted to or admiring of their own principal teacher. A positive relationship between the student and the individual teacher was felt to be a necessity by almost everyone. Students who encountered serious problems in their relationship with their teacher characteristically tried for a change of tutor or considered changing institution. Other students tended to characterise their dissatisfaction with the conservatoire institution as a price to be paid for studying with a high quality private teacher, rather than a reason for possibly moving to another school. (Kingsbury 1988: 39)

To what extent are student views influenced by factors such as gender, nationality and educational background?

Given the relatively small numbers of students questioned for this article, subdividing them is problematic. However, it appears that female students might tend to emphasise the importance of a personal relationship with their tutor more than males and overseas students (with clearly quite differing educational backgrounds to those in the UK), stressing the desire for more support in early undergraduate years. Students with more specialist training pre-college generally regarded their principal study lessons as overwhelmingly the most important factor in their improvement, whilst those who had not benefited from this tended to see a greater value in all the various aspects of their general musical education at college.

Conclusions

Each relationship between young musician and professor is unique. It should be stressed that students achieve in widely varying tutorial conditions, with some thriving on longer lessons delivered every 2–3 weeks and others benefiting from a 90-minute lesson delivered on a regular weekly basis. Students also seek contrasting levels of practical support from their tutors outside lessons, and differing degrees of emotional involvement.

In the vast majority of cases the relationship of the part-time visiting professor to conservatoire student seems to work well, with students expressing satisfaction with the delivery and content of their lessons, perceiving clear benefits from the external professional activities of their professors and feeling a trust and strength of communication that is perhaps quite surprising given the fairly limited tutorial contact time and the physical absence of professors from the institution that so dominates the daily lives of the students. Good communication and a strong personal connection between teacher and student is vital

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and will certainly help to build the thick skin so essential for musicians dealing with the inevitable crushing criticisms of their student and professional lives (Lehrer, 1987). A further reason for the satisfaction and pleasure expressed in students' accounts of their lessons may lie in the careful matching of professors with students in the first instance. Many students arrive for audition having already established a rapport with their potential professor, perhaps by playing to them at summer music schools or by seeking private lessons when they are considering their future. For others, consultation lessons are encouraged by the conservatoire after audition. Relationships seem to work primarily because a great deal of time is put in to the matching of student to professor. Factors such as technical proficiency, musical maturity, personal independence, age, nationality, command of language and general personality are all considered carefully. From the conservatoire's perspective there is clearly a need to ensure that students' musical and technical needs as well as their personal wishes are fulfilled by the tutorial relationship they are assigned to. When there are problems with the relationship, students usually request a change of professor. In this department, pianists seeking such a change typically amount to 2 or 3 per year (less than 5% of the pianist numbers as a whole).

The interview material does suggest ways in which the teaching relationship can be made even more productive, however. Given that it is unrealistic for part-time tutors to attend many important rehearsals, concerts and events, routine videotaping of all student performances for later consultation is surely a worthwhile investment for all conservatoires. Currently the videotaping of any assessed performance that forms part of the degree mark is not permitted at this particular conservatoire. Students can record other performances, such as concerts and competitions – an undoubtedly valuable resource for both student and professor – but it would be even more useful from a tutorial point of view to have access to assessed performances, which in the case of pianists at this conservatoire include end of year recitals of 30 minutes' duration in Year 1, 35 minutes in Year 2 and 50 minutes in Year 3, as well as mid year technical tests. At present no research has been undertaken to explore the usefulness or otherwise of video recordings as part of the general learning process at this level and it would certainly be interesting to examine this further.

Another area which the students themselves articulated was the benefit to be derived from their peers, so might there also be a case for harnessing this powerful resource in a more imaginative and organised way? In one exploration of this, the Department of Music at the University of Ulster introduced a system of peer assessment of performance within its BMus course, finding that students developed 'skills in critical listening, research, evaluation, questioning, negotiation, oral presentation, communication and report writing . . . furthermore students gain in confidence and become more aware of their strengths' (Hunter 1999: 62). Such a scheme would perhaps be inappropriate at conservatoire level, where students with highly advanced playing skills must aspire to a wholly professional level of performance, demanding assessment by highly skilled and experienced musicians with acknowledged standing in their field. However, the introduction of peer assessment on a more informal basis could be interesting and, given the positive feedback about classes held regularly by individual professors for their students, one way forward might be to timetable these as part of the paid tutorial commitment for keyboard staff, following the example of other departments, such as strings.

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Without doubt academic and instrumental staff would stress the importance of connecting the practical and the academic in learning. However there is a danger, given the roaming nature of visiting professors, that staff will tend to work in their own educational and musical worlds, perhaps unwittingly accentuating the division between instrumental lessons and general musical education in the minds of their students. The vice-principal observed that, unsurprisingly, some part-time visiting tutors tended to have a more limited viewpoint of the college than full-time staff, praising their 'undoubted commitment and dedication to their students, though not necessarily to the institution' and further commenting that this is almost a necessity given the heavy demands of their wider professional lives. This particular college continually strives for integration between both practical and academic and full and part-time college staff, but is aware that closer communication still could lead to more fruitful and productive results.

As a part-time visiting tutor myself, I found the insights of students interviewed both illuminating and thought provoking, though the very fact of my involvement on the keyboard staff of this conservatoire might have influenced the responses I received from students, whether consciously or subconsciously. Speaking personally, whilst I can see the many positive aspects to my visiting role, I have at times found the peripatetic nature of my teaching less than ideal as my various other professional activities (as well as sheer physical distance from college) necessarily limit my attendance at some student performances and events. I have always felt that tutorial contact time counts for little if one does not see students in the performing situation, as so many otherwise unseen facets of their personas invariably show themselves here! I had expected to find students universally in agreement with this and was surprised to find that a proportion of students derived increased freedom from their tutor's absence at their performances.

I also found the differing opinions on personal contact of interest. Whilst the part-time nature of the tutorial contact keeps the teacher/student relationship fresh and vital and encourages an entirely healthy independence musically and personally, I nevertheless feel that limited contact with students can be frustrating, as the holistic picture of their education and personality is at times hard to grasp. However, students clearly feel that the positives of distance far outweigh the negatives and actually welcome the independence, both musically and personally, which it affords them. In this scenario the largely uninvasive (and rapidly proliferating) forms of communication such as text-messaging and emailing between lessons appear to be invaluable links between professor and student.

Currently, UK conservatoires exist in an environment where there is a constant battle for funding. Their respective teams of part-time visiting instrumental staff are crucial if they are to continue producing major performing talents in the way that their dedication and versatility has ensured for many years. With students already learning from professors who have quite different approaches to timetabling and delivery of lessons as well as personal contact, other factors, such as encouraging independence in the student community and ensuring the relevance of all general music studies to the instrumentalist, are areas that are worthy of further consideration. A closer look at the tutorial relationship has the potential to help UK conservatoires in the continuing quest to improve their artistic output.

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