

Researching group assessment: jazz in the conservatoire

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This article presents the results of research into methods and scorings for jazz assessment in Trinity College of Music, London, focusing on the possibility of introducing group assessment. It considers the advantages of group assessment methods, contrasting these with the more traditional approach, firmly established in conservatoires, of evaluating individual musicians. We question the role of jazz within the conservatoire, exploring not only the way institutions may transform jazz practice, but also the ways jazz may contribute to the evolution of higher education. The research formed part of a larger grant aimed at curricular development at Trinity College of Music. As such, we present it as an example of research's potential for immediate impact upon education policy. The project is also unusual in its use of students and instrumental professors not only as subjects of research but as participators fully involved in their own self-assessment and development.

Introduction

Over the last 2 years, Trinity College of Music has been engaged in a 3-year project, which was commissioned by the College Executive; is managed by Elisabeth Barratt; and involves a collaboration between students and staff. The objective of the 3-year project is to explore the assessment of jazz in the college, to identify difficulties in current assessment methods, and to develop and implement innovative assessment strategies. We suggest that the findings and resulting curricular development in jazz at Trinity offer valuable insight for other faculties within the college, and for higher music education as a whole. With students and professors involved at all levels of the project, and with such an immediate integration between research and implementation, our engagement with assessment offers an unusual model for improving the learner's lot in music education.

A full account of the project to date, including details of project management and curricular development, is available elsewhere (Barratt, 2005). This article highlights three aspects of the research process. They have been selected as specific points of interest for those wishing to explore the complexities of assessment, the implications of jazz institutionalisation, and the benefits of inclusive practitioner research.

The first section of the paper presents an analysis of traditional, individual-based assessment methods and their implications for jazz performance. We sought to establish whether individual assessments could provide a fair and effective measure of jazz musicians' achievement. We also wondered whether current methods of assessment actually shaped the type of player emerging from the jazz course and queried exactly what qualities we should be looking for in a successful jazz musician. In the second section,



we discuss our quantitative and qualitative findings, which revealed substantial tension between assessment criteria and ideals of jazz performance external to the institution. We consider the implication of this tension for jazz musicians passing through formal education, and for performance assessment more generally. Finally, we reflect upon the research process itself, exploring the ways in which student and professor involvement may impact upon the nature of research, its integration within music colleges and the impact of its resulting curricular development.

Researching the impact of traditional assessment approaches on group improvisation in jazz

Research methods

In February 2003 the jazz faculty's working party set up a research project to establish the effects of existing individual assessment approaches upon group performance within jazz examinations and final recitals. The working party consisted of members of the jazz faculty, all of whom have several years' experience assessing performance within conservatoires. Using the college's individual mid-year assessments, in which one musician being assessed will play with a combo¹ of his or her fellow-students, the working party formed a second, informal panel by awarding marks to each musician performing. This differed from the 'official' panel, which followed the traditional practice of marking only the individual under formal assessment. Both panels used the established individual criteria inherited a few years before from assessment approaches in Western classical music, which had been applied to jazz assessments to that date (see Appendix 1). It was hoped that by assessing each member of the performing combos, we would gain insight into the nature of group music-making under assessment conditions. With no pre-existing criteria for while assessing a group performance as a whole, the working party was also keen to establish the ways in which existing individual criteria inhibited the judgement of the more communal jazz qualities of group interaction, improvisation and groove.

Building the research around 'real' assessment events was efficient and practical, and also ensured an authenticity to the students' performances that would have been difficult to maintain in a simulated assessment situation. Investigating within authentic examination situations also demonstrated the importance and relevance of the research to the college's curricular development and student experience. Assessments are highly emotive and private experiences for students: moments of vulnerability, exposure and challenge that are central to their sense of progression and achievement at college. The students all agreed in advance to the second panel's presence in their examinations; this was situated at 90° to the stage to ensure unbroken communication between performers and the official panel. Students were also assured that they could change their mind about the second panel's presence if they felt uncomfortable on the day, yet all took part. We feel this indicates an openness and trust on the part of the students that is perhaps a consequence of the researchers' integrated roles as jazz professors within the conservatoire.

The working party awarded marks to each member of nine combos, performing for 11 individual principal study jazz assessments. Six of these were for jazz vocals (1st and 3rd years), and three were jazz kit (1st and 2nd years). The individual marks awarded were

then analysed to see whether the marks attributed to the individual being officially assessed as part of their degree differed from those awarded to combo members who were not being officially assessed. Markers were encouraged to write down any additional comments they felt were relevant during their assessments and a follow-up group interview was conducted with students to reflect upon their experiences.

Results

Table 1 shows the marks given to each individual by the blind markers, with mean scores provided in the right-hand column. We found that in 67% of the trial's mid-year assessments the individual who was being officially assessed was awarded a mark that was one grading band higher than the average of marks awarded to the other members of the combo. So, for example, Vocalists A and F and Drummer I were unanimously awarded marks in the Iii classification band (60–70%) while the rest of their combo members were awarded marks that were in the Iii band (50–60%). Vocalist B and Drummer H were both awarded marks in the Iii classification band, with the rest of their combo members being awarded marks that were in the III band (40–50%). Further, the mean mark for 11 formally assessed musicians was 60.8% (a Iii), while the mean mark for all non-assessed members of the nine combos was 55.5% (Iii).

Only one third of the research project's trial assessments demonstrated the level of interactive skills expected at the corresponding level of study. In these assessments, the 'soloists' received similar marks to their combo members (vocalists C and E and drummer G). The working party's 'mock panel' felt it would have been more appropriate to award a group mark and write a group (rather than individual) report in these cases, especially as the individual marks awarded to each of the combo's players fell within the same classification band and the practice of 'individual' report writing prevented the mock panel from offering feedback to the group as a whole. These three combos had demonstrated a level of interactive playing that was well sustained for most of the performance and appropriate to the level being assessed. However, the working party agreed that the lapses in the interaction were caused by recurring weaknesses that might easily be improved on, with the appropriate guidance from a single report form.

A few weeks after the assessments, when marks had been processed and published, Trinity's Head of Jazz Faculty conducted a group interview with students involved in the assessment. She asked whether they felt the marks provided a true reflection of their contribution and whether they had comments or feedback on the experience of playing in traditional-style assessments. Overall, students were unsurprised at the discrepancy between the marks of those assessed and the other members of the combo. Many students explained that they consciously shied away from taking on an interactive role. Those that were not being officially assessed were often concerned that any spontaneity or risk taking may jeopardise the performance and that their interaction may hinder the panel's ability to assess the individual, or compromise the student being assessed. For example:

I didn't want my playing to get in the way of the assessors while they were listening to the singer (1st year pianist)

Table 1 Marks awarded over one and a half days of Jazz Principal Study Assessments (Feb 2003)

Combo	Individual	Mark 1	Mark 2	Mark 3	Mark 4	Mean Mark
A	Vocals	62	64	63	66	63.75
	Piano	52	55	52	54	53.25
	Bass	52	52	51	52	51.75
	Drums	51	52	53	52	52.00
B	Vocals	57	56	57	58	57.00
	Piano	45	46	44	46	45.25
	Bass	43	42	45	43	43.25
	Drums	42	43	44	42	42.75
C	Vocals	52	52	51	54	52.25
	Saxophone	53	54	53	55	53.75
	Piano	54	52	55	54	53.75
	Bass	52	50	52	52	51.50
	Drums	55	53	52	53	53.25
D	Vocals	68	67	68	68	67.75
	Saxophone	73	71	71	74	72.25
	Piano	55/62	58	56	58	57.80
	Bass	52	51	53	51	51.75
	Drums	53/60	57	56	56	56.40
E	Vocals	63	62	62	64	62.75
	Saxophone	62	64	64	64	63.50
	Piano	68	66	68	67	67.25
	Bass	65	63	65	66	64.75
	Drums	64	62	63	62	62.75
F	Vocals	62	60	61	63	61.5
	Piano	54	55	50	54	53.25
	Bass	48	50	51	51	50
	Drums	52	54	52	54	53
G	Drums	67	65	-	-	66.0
	Piano	68	65	-	-	66.5
	Bass	65	62	-	-	63.5
	Saxophone	66	65	-	-	65.5
H	Drums	55	55	-	-	55
	Piano	43	41	-	-	42
	Bass	48	48	-	-	48
	Saxophone	46	45	-	-	45.5
I	Drums	62	60	-	-	61
	Piano	58	58	-	-	58
	Bass	56	54	-	-	55
	Saxophone	52	54	-	-	53

I held back on my comping for a lot of the time, as I thought it might stop the panel from hearing the drummer (2nd year pianist)

I didn't want to be too rhythmic behind her scatting, in case the panel couldn't hear her (3rd year pianist)

I didn't go into a double time feel when I felt I ought to, as it might have been too busy for the markers to hear the singer (1st year drummer)

The working party's comments, written at the time of the assessment experiment, observed the effects of the students' anxieties:

It would have been hard to mark this as a group assessment because the group played so little (Blind marker 1 on Vocalist B's assessment)

Most of the time there was very little interaction and the performance was very one dimensional (Blind marker 2 on Drummer B's assessment)

The relationships between each of the singers and their band were flawed (Blind Marker 3 on Vocalist B's assessment)

It seems that many jazz students were responding to the assessment situation in ways that inhibited their musical expression. This possibility is strengthened when we consider the marks given to the pianist and drummer of ensemble D, by blind marker 1. The marker explained that the quality of the pianist and drummer's playing changed substantially, depending on who they were accompanying. Feeling that one mark could not accurately reflect the musicians' performances, he made the spontaneous decision to give two. The lower mark in both cases was awarded to reflect the quality of their contribution in backing the singer (who was being formally assessed). The higher mark was awarded for their other contributions. The mock panel's report stated that all members of the rhythm section demonstrated more interaction, spontaneity and risk taking when playing behind the saxophone solo. While this case was evidently more extreme than most, it represents a consistent pattern revealed through the blind marking results, the student interview extracts and the mock panel's comments.

Discussion

Traditional assessment approaches, when applied to jazz, were encouraging students to make allowances for the assessed musician, by moving away from the natural group interactions, the improvisatory flair, and the democratic contrapuntalism necessary for most fine jazz performance. Decisions concerning the production of ideas, as well as direction and form of the group performance, seemed to be left to the member that was being assessed at the time, which in turn appeared to generate a false emphasis on one individual within a medium that is predominantly a group activity. Under the current methods of individual assessment, ensembles would never be seen to give a fully fledged group performance: acting as a single unit, in which the individuals' egos give way to a more collective sense of performance and interplay, with a fluid and spontaneous sense of interaction, through the sharing of ideas, changing of roles, evolving implications of 'feel' and 'groove'

and the development of the often unpredictable, highly inventive and consequently unplanned.

As the panel's reports indicate, the assessment style did not only inhibit students' performances in the moment, but also the constructiveness of feedback they received. This was particularly true for instrumentalists with more traditionally supportive roles, such as the bassist, who generally pins the harmonic structure of a piece, while integrating his/her line rhythmically with the drummer and responding to ideas generated from within the ensemble. The individual-based criteria could not express or reflect the key skills required for high quality bass playing in jazz. The effects were also felt for more traditionally soloistic instruments. Without marking and assessment criteria that emphasise the need for interactive playing, front-line² players were tending to 'use' their rhythm section³ as Aebersold⁴ play-along records (over which to display their bag of licks⁵), rarely engaging in an interactive group conversation and drawing little on the rhythm section's rhythmic and motivic stimulus for their improvisatory ideas. Rhythm section players, on the other hand, often ploughed through their assessments (particularly in years 1 and 2), oblivious to everything that was happening within the rest of the band.

Equally the blind markers had found it impossible to differentiate in their awarding of marks between a stronger, but rather independent performer (such as the saxophone player in Vocalist D's assessment) and the more sensitive and aptly interactive combo members (such as the pianist in vocalist E's assessment). As the existing marking criteria currently made no reference to specific skills appropriate to combo playing, the panel was unable to identify a way of acknowledging them through the awarding of marks. Consequently musicians who were clearly better ensemble players were getting the same, or even worse, marks than those whose performances were strong, but oblivious to the activities of the rest of the group. The working party felt unable to address any of these important issues while writing individual reports as these were points that needed forwarding to the combo as a whole.

In the conservatoire setting, when intense practice and instruction centre upon performance assessments and the analysis of their results, the individual assessment approach was likely to have a profound effect on the development of the students' ensemble performance skills within and outside the assessment situation. This is particularly so because of student chamber groups' habit of staying together for the entire duration of their programme of study. Over a period of years, the group's ever-increasing familiarity with one another's style, in combination with their unbalanced assessment performances, may suppress the spontaneity and interaction which should be an integral part of their performance practice.

Jazz and the institution

This research provides some of the first quantifiable evidence of the potential rift between institutional forms of jazz learning and the realities of jazz performance among working musicians. This is of importance for jazz educators, who struggle with the ideological and musical difficulties of adapting jazz to the conservatoire setting. Charles Beale has provided valuable insight into the nature of these difficulties through his interviews with jazz practitioners who teach in music colleges. He identifies key areas of difference between

'jazz in education and jazz in the "real world"', concluding that 'the social context of education changes musical practices and the way in which [jazz] is defined' (Beale, 2005: 1). As we might suspect from our findings, tensions between jazz practice within and outside an institution can apply in many areas.

Beale explains that 'the nature of interaction in music-making changed' and the 'valued qualities in the music changed' within the institutional context (Beale, 2005: 2). While he does not touch upon formal assessment methods, Beale identifies a difference in the priorities for jazz performance in conservatoires. He suggests that interactive skills, such as the musical expression of 'fellow feeling', respect for each band member's musical 'space', and ability to respond spontaneously and sensitively to other musicians' ideas, tend to be neglected in favour of more technique-based requirements. In normal practices of jazz performance, on the other hand, the interaction between musicians is considered paramount. Jazz scholar Ingrid Monson summarizes her findings from interviews with top New York musicians in the following terms:

Nearly every musician who talked to me mentioned the importance of listening in good ensemble playing. Listening in an active sense – being able to respond to musical opportunities or to correct mistakes . . . Good jazz improvisation is sociable and interactive just like a conversation: a good player communicates with the other players in the band. If this doesn't happen, it's not good jazz. (Monson, 1996: 84)

British jazz bassist Coleridge Goode describes a similar idea:

You have a fellow feeling musically . . . I think it's only possible under those conditions – you have to have a very strong fellow feeling, so that whatever ideas one musician puts on, the others there will also respond to this in whatever way it comes to them . . . it's a matter of tossing ideas around and being appreciated by the other members of the group and they add their version to it, which makes a whole⁶

Finally, in the words of one of Trinity's jazz coaches, when speaking in the debriefing session:

Jazz is predominantly a highly interactive art form, which thrives on group performance for its development (Jazz coach)

Such statements among jazz musicians and scholars are very common (see in particular Berliner, 1994; Fischline & Heble, 2004), and lie in stark contrast to the priorities described by students as preoccupying them during assessment. There seems a danger that the most essential aspects of jazz may be distorted when they are transplanted to conservatoire settings.

It would be wrong to assume the institutionalisation of jazz to be inevitably negative, however. Many jazz musicians have long aspired to gain acceptance to mainstream society through the recognition of their music as an art form, worthy of serious and formal study. To present an image of jazz as pure, authentic folk music, which should remain untarnished by formal institutions would be sorely misleading. However, there is a clear need to develop sensitive methods of institutionalising jazz, which help to maintain, rather than subvert, its most essential qualities. We owe it not only to jazz, but also to our students, who should be encouraged to emulate the musical approaches most valued within the profession.

Following the initial research: student trials of new assessment approaches

Supported by the findings of this initial research, Trinity College of Music recommended and implemented certain key changes to its jazz curriculum. Our findings suggested that the separate assessment of each musician was inappropriate, and that the criteria for marking – inherited from the classical music curriculum – also seemed too soloistic for such an ensemble-based music. Further, it seemed possible that jazz students were failing to present key group skills during their assessments, not only because they were not being assessed on them, but because they were not receiving sufficient group coaching in which to develop these interactive skills to the appropriate level of study. As a result, the actual training students received from tutors needed to be adapted. The working party set out, then, to incorporate specific teaching and assessment methods that were geared towards group assessment, with the provision of clearly defined aims, objectives and marking criteria and a much more controlled management of student personnel. It was agreed that both the marking and assessment criteria, as well as learner outcomes, needed revising, so as to reflect the key skills of group performance (such as level of interaction, spontaneity, pulse, feel, spirit, vibe, energy, drive, cohesiveness and sensitivity). These changes could not be achieved by ‘tweaking’ pre-existing models. Instead, they involved a wide shift in perspective, truly integrating and absorbing a jazz outlook into the organisational structures of tutoring, performances and assessment criteria.

The logistical and curricular details of changes implemented by Trinity are documented elsewhere (Barratt, 2005) and can be used by anyone considering such reforms. In this forum, our aim is to consider the process and approach to research and implementation of curricular change, in which both faculty and students were actively involved.

While the jazz faculty initially developed the new group assessment criteria, there was extensive student input into the criteria’s refinement and trial. The students in all four years were asked to come up with their own assessment criteria for a group assessment, based upon the learning experience of special coaching sessions into group performance that had been arranged for them in the wake of the initial research. As one might hope from students who are in their final year, there was a slightly more detailed analysis of the group performance skills from the 4th years, demonstrating a depth of insight and mature level of articulation and conceptual finesse. The biggest surprise from reviewing the students’ criteria was the realisation that the older students saw the assessment environment as profoundly different from that of a public performance, as only the 1st years had included *Communication with the audience* in their assessment criteria. In a music whose informal processes of assessment and education have often involved the ‘trial by fire’ jam session with older musicians and informed audiences (Berliner, 1994), the separation between ‘tests of skill’ and the realities of performance is a further sign of jazz institutionalisation.

The students’ own criteria were then compared with the assessment criteria designed by the faculty, in case the professors had missed anything, or the students had informed objections to the suggested assessment of their skills. This process helped staff identify skills of group performance that may need further discussion with the students, as well as reviewing how the teaching practices employed during the special coaching sessions – to be implemented as on-going training – might be developed to enhance the students’ understanding and experience. The working party was also able to revise the assessment

criteria to include two items that had been nominated by the students but overlooked by the working party's own criteria (see Appendix 2 for the final revised criteria).

Different forms of student involvement in assessment have been described and researched by Boud (1995), Smith and Hatton (1993), Heron (1988), Blom and Poole (2004), Burrack (2002), Hunter (1999) and Hunter and Ross (1996). These studies range in their attention from peer assessment through to the 'collaborative assessment' between student and professor in attributing formal grades (Heron, 1988). Spanning several continents, none of these studies addresses a situation identical to Trinity's, yet all seem to agree that increased student involvement in the assessment process can enhance student engagement and success. This was found to be the case for our project also.

Outcome of the jazz students' group self-assessment during the mock group assessments

The effects of the new criteria were tested in mock assessments, in which jazz students were asked to mark their own performances according to the criteria they had been active in developing. Three-quarters of the faculty's students attended and participated in this exercise, which was entirely voluntary. Findings show that 70% of the marks awarded by student combos were slightly lower than the blind markers, though often within the same classification band. Interestingly, there appeared to be some correlation between a group's ability to hold a group discussion (when creating assessment criteria and when awarding themselves marks) with their ability to perform in an interactive fashion: the two weakest performances came from groups who, despite encouragement and objections from the working party, chose to be led by a single member, rather than engage in a group discussion. While these results could form the basis of an independent study on students' self-perception in music or the links between social and musical interaction, we use them here to consider the role of professors and students in the effective research and implementation of curricula. An example of the results of the trial is shown in Table 2.

Table 2 *Third-year assessment Group 1: Have you met Miss Jones, Body and Soul, Invitation*

	Assessors A	Assessors B	Students
Knowledge of repertoire	46	50	30
Stylistic awareness	56	60	50
Group sound	57	40	45
Expressive range*	52	50	75
Level of communication*	54	55	80
Rescue/coping*	52	60	95
Interaction*	59	55	70
Risk taking *	48	65	85
Substance	59	55	40
Presentation*	52	40	85
Preparation*	62	55	90

In getting the students to award themselves marks, the working party gained greater insight into the perceptions and musical thoughts of the students. This encouraged tutors to revisit skills where there were discrepancies within the marks and thus address any anomalies that were preventing a strong sense of cohesion, group sound and group process in later coaching sessions.

The analysis of the marks also emphasised some of the working party's own discrepancies (such as the assessment of *group sound*, *risk taking* and *presentation* as demonstrated in Table 2), which could be addressed by all staff in the next working party's meeting. This open approach to the analysis of assessment gradings helped to nuance the critical listening skills of both staff and students. It also fostered a shared understanding of marking criteria; something which is often lacking in assessment situations.

Student feedback from debriefs directly after their mock group assessments

After testing the newly developed group assessment criteria, the researcher again conducted a group interview with students, asking them what they thought of the process of curricular change and its results. All of the participating students agreed that teaching towards a group assessment was highly relevant to the development of their skills within the jazz idiom. For example:

It makes us think about the way we play and respond to what others are doing within the group (3rd year saxophone)

We've been shown all sorts of ways to play. Things that I'd never have thought of on my own (1st year drummer)

I thought I was a really good jazz musician until I realised that there's so much more I could be doing within the group (4th year pianist)

Being part of this exercise has made me think more about the way I learn and the way I prepare for assessments. Up until now I've tended to throw things together at the last minute, when really I should have been playing with a group all year. It's the only way I'm going to become a better combo player (4th year guitarist)

Students expressed a lot of enthusiasm for the coaching sessions, and it seemed their participation in developing the criteria had increased their level of comfort with the aims, objectives and priorities of the assessment process.

It was really helpful looking at the marking criteria, as I've never really bothered to think about what the panel are doing during the assessment. I hadn't realized before that knowing the marking scheme could really help me prepare for my exam (3rd year sax)

It was helpful having a list of tunes to learn, as often we get together for a jam, and then realize we can't have a blow, because we don't all know the same tunes (1st year pianist)

I really liked looking at small ideas and passing them around the group. It helped me feel more confident when improvising (2nd year voice)

All but three of the students were pleased to have contributed to the project's research, as they felt their input would make for a more informed outcome all round, as well as helping the students acquire a better insight into the aims and objectives of the research and its development. This point was sadly missed by the 2nd year who asked 'Why doesn't the staff just get together and work it out for themselves?'

Other concerns included a questioning of the standard repertoire on the part of 3rd and 4th years, who wanted to be playing more contemporary and even original material. Poor attendance and the absence of an incentive through the accreditation of the mock assessment had affected 70% of the preparatory coaching sessions, and some students were also concerned about the amount of time peers were spending on learning the repertoire within the sessions, leaving less time to focus on group issues.

Not everyone took the repertoire list to their principal study lessons, so we're still using coaching time for players to learn the tunes. It's so annoying and such a waste of time. I just want to get on with looking at how to play them as a combo. Why can't everyone learn 2 tunes before the session? I did! (3rd year).

Despite these caveats, all felt that their participation in the research and testing of assessment approaches had helped them gain a greater insight into the fitnesses of ensemble playing.

Observations made by the working party after the jazz mock group assessments and review of the coaches' diary keeping

It was clear to the working party that after a series of six coaching sessions, the students had demonstrated a much more developed sense of group interaction and group vibe. A majority of the combos knew the repertoire well, with individual lapses being rescued more regularly, which in turn appeared to enable the students to go out more on a limb and take more risks. Playing from memory seemed to have generated a more relaxed and interactive level of performance and there was a good level of communication with a stronger sense of listening and interaction (predominantly melodic and dynamic, rather than rhythmic). A wider band of dynamics was being employed (often led by the soloist), and many of the rhythm section offered ideas that were taken up and developed further within the group. Arrangements were more thought out (although endings were often left to chance!) and there was much more use of space and sitting out. Coaches also acknowledged that reading the Principal Study marking criteria within the coaching session had encouraged students to prepare for their mid-year assessment earlier in the academic calendar, as well as consider more deeply many aspects of the assessment that were often ignored by the students.

Some problems remained, of course. 'Feel' still lacked authenticity at times, which suggested that students were still relying primarily on lead sheets for their source material, rather than listening to recordings between coaching sessions. There was often an imbalance within the rhythm section's sound, usually caused by a lack of sensitivity to the acoustics of the room (basses were very boomy and bottom-heavy, while drummers frequently over-played the ride and crash cymbals). Guitarists and pianists were still having problems playing together (several tutors had discouraged the use of two harmony instruments within the same rhythm section, as this made for rather lumpy comping).

Recognising these concerns through collaboratively studying criteria and assessment with students offered useful directions for developing future tuition plans.

The integration of research and curricular innovation

Research suffers at times from being viewed as esoteric, unwelcoming, even irrelevant; chiefly a discipline controlled by academics disconnected from the realities of practice. While this image is frequently undeserved, it can impact not only on funding opportunities, but our ability to involve practitioners in our investigations. It also undermines our ability to build the constructive dialogues and relationships necessary for effective research with real impact upon the lives of learners. The combination, then, of student involvement in research and curricular innovation, the presence of practitioner researchers, and the privileges of a long-term funding award have in this case facilitated a positive model for integrating research with policy and practice.

The project has also worked to increase communication and the cross-fertilization of ideas between jazz and other music within the conservatoire. On considering the prevalence and importance of ensemble playing within Western Art Music, it seemed the approaches to group assessment developed within the jazz department had the potential to positively impact upon other faculties by 'rolling out' the innovations documented in this paper to several other departments. This allowed coaching staff from all faculties to collectively generate a list of learner outcomes and assessment criteria specifically tailored to the requirements of their particular group activity, whilst the undergraduate and postgraduate revalidation working parties were able to begin work on devising a College-wide marking criteria for group assessment within each of the programmes (Barratt, 2005).

Conclusion

Group activities address music 'full stop'. They are catalytic points that make music happen. Irrespective of the idiom and style of music being studied, the 'group learning' that is possible through ensemble playing offers the students an opportunity to fill in gaps that currently exist in their learning (Jazz coach)

Performance is all about creating a dialogue, which can be encouraged by teaching towards group assessments and providing a sensitively structured assessment criteria for each module (Keyboard coach)

By the end of the research project's second year (August 2004), TCM's College-wide working party, comprising staff and students from all faculties, was able to contribute successfully towards the revalidation processes of the BMus and postgraduate courses, providing the programmes' committees with clear initiatives for the implementation and accreditation of both 'group assessment' and 'individual assessment within group activities'. Having identified non-accredited aspects of the students' performance activities which might be best served by group assessment, the research project had enabled students and staff collectively to explore ways of devising assessment and marking criteria that reflect the students' learning experience within a group context. All of these outcomes could

now contribute to the project's third year of research, which would focus less on the exploration and investigation of group assessment, and more on the implementation of group assessment through the nuts and bolts of curriculum development, in preparation for the launching of the revised degree programmes in September 2005.

The various strands of research activities had instigated insightful teaching and learning experiences for those that took part, heightening the students' awareness of group performance practices and improving their understanding of learning and assessment processes. This in turn provided the professorial staff with a deeper understanding of how the students think and learn, inspiring many of the coaches to continue developing their teaching method and resources, as well as facilitating further exploration and insights into the assessment of student group activities. In effect the project became 'a group assessment within a group assessment', as the team spirit, generosity and cooperation of all who participated in the research demonstrated the essence of an ideal group collective.

Notes

- 1 A 'combo' is the jazz equivalent of a chamber group in Western Classical Music. Its instrumentation is flexible, but will typically include a rhythm section (percussion, bass, piano) and frontline musicians (saxophone/ trumpet/ voice etc).
- 2 Single line instrumentalists and voice.
- 3 Piano, bass, guitar, drum kit and percussion players.
- 4 Jamey Aebersold has put together a large number of rhythm section recordings of 'jazz standards' intended to help jazz musicians to familiarise themselves with new repertoire during their individual practice time.
- 5 Memorised phrases often acquired from transcribed solos.
- 6 Coleridge Goode, speaking at the Joe Harriott Tribute, Open Forum, Purcell Room, 23 November, 2003.

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Appedix 1 *Trinity College of Music's Principal Study Marking Criteria for the BMus programme 2001–2002*

LEVEL	DEGREE CLASSIFICATION	MARKING SCALE	TECHNICAL	INTERPRETATION	PRESENTATION
			Technical control appropriate to the repertoire set for the level. Accuracy.	Suitability and coherence of interpretative choices.	Organisation, presentation and communication.
BMus/BA LEVELS 1, 2 & 3 PG Certificate	I	80–100 (A)	Truly exceptional in all respects	Truly exceptional in all respects	Truly exceptional in all respects
NB These are threshold criteria. To achieve a particular classification the work must satisfy all the criteria for that band. Where students exceed the expectations in one or two of the specific criteria, their marks will migrate towards the top of the band (i.e. that in which all criteria are fulfilled). Markers must exercise judgement in borderline cases and make clear the reasons for their decision in the comments made.	I	70–79 (A)	Outstanding; any errors minor and unobtrusive; a wide range of techniques displayed.	Entirely convincing and appropriate across a wide interpretative range.	Confident, appropriate and engaging.
	II:i	60–69 (B)	Very good control; any shortcomings not serious; a very good range of techniques displayed.	Mostly convincing and appropriate; a small number of questionable decisions; a very good interpretative range.	Secure and appropriate; occasional lapses, but communicates well.
	II:ii	50–59 (C)	Generally secure and always fluent; technique limited in a few respects or range of techniques displayed limited in some way.	Generally appropriate, although lacking subtlety at times, or interpretative range limited.	Lacking some flair, but a generally good level of communication.
	III	40–49 (D)	Modest, but satisfactory accuracy and control.	Coherent, but some dubious decisions; lacking subtlety.	Adequate for a basic level of communication, but limited.
	TNP*	35–39 (T)	Unacceptable shortcomings that prevent a coherent interpretation.	Inappropriate, or incoherent, to an unacceptable degree. Expressive range limited.	Too introverted; fails to communicate satisfactorily.
	TNP*	30–34 (T)			
Fail	1–29 (F)	Little evidence of technical control appropriate to the level.	Little evidence of awareness of relevant interpretative matters.	Poorly presented: little evidence of care in presentation/preparation.	
Fail	0 (F)	Non-submission of work.	Non-submission of work.	Non-submission of work.	

*TNP - Taken not passed. (NB. A mark of 35% in all elements must be achieved for a pass mark to be awarded.)

Appedix 2 *Trinity College of Music's Principal Study Marking Criteria for the BMus programme*

LEVEL	DEGREE CLASSIFICATION	MARKING SCALE	PARTICIPATION	TECHNICAL	INTERPRETATION
LEVELS 1, 2 & 3 NB These are threshold criteria. To achieve a particular classification the work must satisfy all the criteria for that band. Where students exceed the expectations in one or two of the specific criteria, their marks will migrate towards the top of the band (i.e. that in which all criteria are fulfilled). Markers must exercise judgement in borderline cases and make clear the reasons for their decision in the comments made.			Preparation for lesson, commitment to subject and level of participation.	Technical control appropriate to the repertoire set for the level. Accuracy.	Suitability and coherence of interpretative choices.
	I	80–100 (A)	Truly exceptional in all respects.	Truly exceptional in all respects.	Truly exceptional in all respects.
	I	70–79 (A)	Outstanding preparation; active commitment and participation; comments are coherent and informed.	Outstanding; any errors minor and unobtrusive; a wide range of techniques displayed.	Entirely convincing and appropriate across a wide interpretative range.
	II:i	60–69 (B)	Very good preparation and commitment; responsive participation producing quick and accurate responses but with some limitations.	Very good control; any shortcomings not serious; a very good range of techniques displayed.	Mostly convincing and appropriate; a small number of questionable decisions; a very good interpretative range.
	II:ii	50–59 (C)	Generally good preparation and commitment. Participation and contribution limited in some respects.	Generally secure and always fluent; technique limited in a few respects or range of techniques displayed limited in some way.	Generally appropriate, although lacking subtlety at times, or interpretative range limited.
	III	40–49 (D)	Restricted preparation or commitment; participation sufficient to satisfy minimum requirements	Modest but satisfactory accuracy and control.	Coherent, but some dubious decisions; lacking subtlety.
	TNP*	35–39 (T)	Inadequate preparation, commitment or participation to permit a worthwhile contribution.	Unacceptable shortcomings which prevent a coherent interpretation.	Inappropriate, or incoherent, to an unacceptable degree. Limited expressive/ interpretative range.
	TNP* Fail	30–34 (T) 1–29 (F)	Little preparation; disruptive; obstructive.	Little evidence of technical control appropriate to the level.	Little evidence of awareness of relevant interpretative matters.
Fail	0 (F)	Absent without notice or due cause.	Non-submission of work.	Non-submission of work.	

*TNP - Taken not passed. (NB. A mark of 35% in all elements must be achieved for a pass mark to be awarded.)