

## External Evaluation of University of Bergen Music Therapy 5-Year Master Program, 2023.

### **Evaluation of completion, dropout, candidate production & evaluation form**

The current report provides a comprehensive overview of the completion, dropout, and candidate production rates for the program. It is clear that there is significant variation in the completion percentage, candidate production, and study points produced per student. While the report suggests that this may be due to COVID-19 pandemic years and the length of the program, resulting in interruptions or delays due to life events, it is difficult to assess whether this is the only factor contributing to the variation. Suggested measures to manage interruptions or delays are sensible, but further analysis of potential causes of the variation should be considered. Overall, this text provides a comprehensive assessment of the program, but more critical analysis is needed to identify potential areas of improvement. It might be connected with other aspects such as learning environment or program community and a more systematic evaluation procedure including a clear and representative student voice is recommended to understand the variations better. Furthermore, it is relevant to evaluate if there are specific modules that students tend to fail and if this affects dropout and completion rates. In our conversation with the study counselor, it was evident that there are some obstacles and difficulties if and when students fail specific courses especially in the first years and when modules are offered across studies such as the "Psyk" module.

### **Evaluation of Learning Environment**

The Studiebarometeret 2022 survey indicates that the learning environment in the music therapy program is relatively good, with a rating of 3.7/5 for the social environment and 3.5/5 for the academic environment among students. However, the result is slightly below the average for music education in Norway and 0.8 points below the performing programs at Griegakademiet. The program conducted an open survey in spring 2023, indicating that students have good academic and social relationships with faculty but wish to see more follow-up on feedback and suggestions. Some students feel disconnected from the program, and efforts to promote a sense of community should be a priority to prevent attrition and attract future applicants. The program plans to participate in activities that create a sense of community among students across study programs, and a revision of the "Musikk, kultur og samfunn" course to emphasize more experiential and student-centered learning is expected to strengthen the program's sense of community.

It is important to highlight the need for a stronger emphasis on quality assurance in the evaluation of the learning environment. While the Studiebarometeret provides valuable insights into student perceptions of the academic and social aspects of their programs, it is essential to ensure that these evaluations are conducted using rigorous and reliable methods that enable meaningful comparisons between student cohorts across years.

The physical facilities for the music therapy program have been a major area of concern for several years, with insufficient space for too many people, too few rooms for individual and group practice, and limited reading and study areas. Recent reports continue to highlight these challenges and call for flexible learning spaces that can accommodate both theory and practical

instruction. However, progress has been made in terms of acquiring music technology equipment and creating an active learning environment for students. Further efforts are needed to expand the technology lab, maintain equipment, and develop procedures for upkeep and ordering of supplies.

While it is positive that the study program has a program board responsible for leadership and quality assurance, the frequent turnover in leadership roles over the past five years raises questions about the stability and continuity of the program. Additionally, while monthly meetings between the program coordinator and program board are helpful for communication, it is important to ensure that there is a strong connection and collaboration between the researchers and teachers who are responsible for delivering the program content. This connection is crucial to ensuring that the program is up-to-date and relevant to current research and music therapy practices. Therefore, it is important to consider ways to strengthen the link between the program board and the teaching staff, such as involving them in the decision-making processes and providing opportunities for regular feedback and communication. While it is very important for leading researchers to have opportunities for research leave, PhD supervision, and administrative tasks, it would likely strengthen this Master program if all relevant professors in the milieu (many of whom are world-class experts) had clear opportunities to lead, collaborate and invest in the success of the Master program. Preferably, we would have had a conversation with staff as well to include their point of view on this matter (and all other matters). Unfortunately, this was not possible due to lack of time. This entire report should therefore be seen in this perspective.

In our conversation with students February 22th 2023 they provided feedback on various aspects of the music therapy program at UiB. They highlighted issues related to learning environment such as communication and organization. The students are generally positive about their teachers and appreciate their availability to answer questions. However, they feel that there is a lack of clarity on who is responsible for supervision and communication between teachers and researchers. There is also some confusion around the roles of study counselor, mentor, and class representative.

Additionally, they provided feedback on facilities and equipment, noting that while the quality of the equipment is good, the physical facilities are substandard, with unattractive and poorly maintained rooms that negatively impact their attitudes towards their work.

The students have raised concerns about favoritism, unfair treatment, and lack of clarity on whistleblower policies. They also note issues with attendance measurement, reading lists not being available or updated. Finally, the students have noted the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, including gender-neutral pronoun use and room for sharing differences.

### **Teaching, learning & justification of choice of subjects.**

#### Music

The report outlines the importance of musical skills and a reflective understanding of music as a cultural, social, and health-promoting phenomenon for the professional practice of music therapy.

It seems students have a desire for more music in general, with a specific emphasis on more opportunities for group musical engagement and the use of music technology and digital tools. The current program offers solid opportunities for musical instruction, but there is a need to strengthen the integration of the elective course on music therapy basis instruments, specifically in relation to the use of singing and music therapy techniques.

A clear and concise assessment of the music program is provided, highlighting areas for improvement also based on feedback from students. It is clear that the program demonstrates an understanding of the importance of integrating technology and digital tools into the program to prepare students for the increasing role of music production in music therapy practice. The report also emphasizes the need to revise the program to integrate better the use of singing and other musical instruments in music therapy techniques.

In our conversation with the students February 22 2023, they expressed concerns about the curricular structure, which they feel does not meet current professional needs and does not provide enough opportunities for social interaction and community building. Students noted that the program lacks musical diversity, with a focus on late twentieth-century rock band music, and that the theory and practice aspects of the program are too separated.

#### Relational skills and practice

It appears that there is a recognition of the importance of developing strong relationship skills and therapeutic practices in the program. The curriculum includes courses and practical experiences that aim to provide students with the necessary knowledge and skills to be successful in their role as music therapists. However, there are areas for improvement in this regard. Students have expressed a desire for more hands-on training and practical experience in the field, as well as a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the music therapist. Additionally, the current report notes that revisions to the curriculum may be necessary to better incorporate training in areas such as conversation techniques and relational theory earlier in the program.

While it is encouraging to see that efforts are being made to improve the quality of relational skills teaching in the program, it is important to be critical of the effectiveness of these efforts. While it is important to continually strive to improve the quality of education and training in music therapy, it is also important to critically evaluate the effectiveness of these efforts and to consider other factors that may impact the success of music therapists in their role such as educational professional competence and pedagogical competence in this direction for relevant teachers.

In our conversations the students agree that there seems to be a heavy emphasis on theory, with less focus on therapy, leading to repetition and little collaboration between teachers. There is a need to intertwine theory and practice more. Students also suggest that teachers are responsible for course structure and ensuring progression between modules and semesters. Some students feel that the first year should include more music and practical work, including case material and role-play, while others suggest more self-exploration through self-experience and group supervision.

## Internationalization

The University of Bergen (UiB) music therapy program is highly regarded for its research outputs and international visibility. Several renowned authorities in the field are part of the faculty. UiB hosts major music therapy journals and leads several consortia and outreach projects.

However, the current report discusses the need for greater internationalization citing a lack of opportunities for student exchange and limited block practice abroad. It is suggested that increased internationalization would make the program more attractive to prospective students and create a more diverse and stimulating learning environment. The proposed solution is to revise the study plan to better facilitate student mobility and exchange with relevant programs and institutions abroad. While the argument for increased internationalization is valid, the passage lacks specific details about the current limitations and potential benefits of student exchange. Additionally, it does not address any potential challenges or costs associated with implementing the proposed solution.

In our conversations with the students, they also suggest more internationalization opportunities and note that the Polyphone program and research activities potentially are gateways to society and more connection with the world.

### **Recommendations for the programme.**

The 5 year Music Therapy Programme at Bergen University seems to produce highly skilled, well reflected and independent candidates that can meet the need of society and adapt to a changing world. The programme is carefully thought-out and includes relevant modules across music, therapy and theory with skilled teachers, dedicated administration and good access to world-leading research and world-leading researchers. Below is a list of suggested further developments for the programme to the benefit of students, teachers and administration.

**Quality assurance:** The program needs to improve its quality assurance measures to ensure that the learning outcomes are being met and that students are adequately prepared for the profession.

**Communication:** The program needs to improve communication with students, both in terms of providing clear information about the program and its requirements and in terms of providing timely feedback on assignments and assessments.

**Increase community identity:** UiB should create opportunities for teachers and students to get to know each other socially, develop friendly rituals that create a unique and pleasant environment, and use students' pronouns correctly.

**Diverse and elaborated teaching:** The program should incorporate more diverse and elaborated teaching methods, including more experiential and practical learning opportunities including enhancing musical diversity and development by including different kinds of music, like electronic music and music from beyond Europe and North America, and provide more chances for students to grow as musicians to become better music therapists. Another focus is to integrate theory and

practice and teach theory that is rooted in practical problems, and practice that acknowledges the research base for actions.

Relational skills & practice teaching: The program should focus on developing students' relational skills and providing more practice teaching opportunities throughout the program to ensure that students are well-prepared for the demands of the profession.

Link between research and teaching: The program needs to strengthen the link between research and teaching to ensure that students are being exposed to the latest research and best practices in the field, and that faculty are engaged in the success of the programme including ongoing professional development.

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