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## The Representation of Music Analysis in UK Undergraduate Curricula

Rebekah Donn and Ian Pace

The role and very nature of music analysis continue to be contested in British musicological circles. While the US-style strong distinction between ‘historians’ and ‘theorists’, which often informs appointments, has never been so strong in this country, nonetheless more rigorous and systematic analysis took some time to take hold, long held in suspicion compared to the more *ad hoc* traditions found in the work Donald Francis Tovey, Hans Keller, Alan Walker and others. This changed gradually from the early 1980s, with the appointment of Arnold Whittall as the first Professor of Theory and Analysis in 1982, the founding by Whittall and Jonathan Dunsby of the journal *Music Analysis* the same year, giving a platform for such work, the founding of the SMA in 1984, and then the publication of three overviews by Nicholas Cook, Ian Bent and Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, in 1987-88.<sup>1</sup> Other tendencies in musicology emerging around the same time, including those from ethnomusicology, cultural studies, popular music studies of certain varieties, and some forms of historicism, could however equally take music study further away from the systematic study of music analysis.

If in 1996 Tim Howell could outline a tripartite division of the field into ‘the three S’s: Schenker, Semiology and Set-Theory’,<sup>2</sup> today the field has changed and expanded considerably, to incorporate New *Formenlehre*, form-functionalism, sonata theory, corpus studies, schema theory, the study of partimento, neo-Riemannian and other transformational theories, Fourier analysis, topic theory, and the analysis of performance and recordings. Furthermore, these and other techniques have been used for the analysis of popular music, film music, and non-Western musical traditions.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, certain departments in the United Kingdom have gained concentrations in analysis in the intervening period as a result of particular faculty expertise: Birmingham, Durham, King’s College, Leeds, Liverpool, Royal Holloway and City, University of London, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Southampton, from which many SMA trustees have come.

Nonetheless, these are all Russell Group institutions except for Royal Holloway, where the focus on analysis has diminished, especially with the departure of J.P.E.

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Cook, *A Guide to Musical Analysis* (London: Dent, 1987), Ian Bent, *Analysis* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) and Jonathan Dunsby and Arnold Whittall, *Music Analysis: In Theory and Practice* (London: Faber, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> See Tim Howell, ‘Music Analysis: Back to Basics?’, *British Journal of Music Education*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1996), pp. 123-134.

<sup>3</sup> Popular music analysis is not new, and can be found in founding texts such as Richard Middleton, *Studying Popular Music* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1989) and Allan Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993). A more recent text is David Temperley, *The Musical Language of Rock* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). An overview of approaches to analysing music and sound in film can be found in James Buhler, ‘Ontological, Formal, and Critical Theories of Music and Sound,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Film Music Studies*, edited David Neumeier (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 188-225. A good sample of analysis of non-Western musics can be found in Michael Tenzer and John Roeder (eds.), *Analytical and Cross-Cultural Studies in World Music* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Harper-Scott,<sup>4</sup> and City, where the BMus course which featured a fair concentration of analysis has recently been suspended. There are a reasonable number of musicologists whose works bridges the realms of history and analysis, but a fair percentage of these tend to opt for the older, more ad hoc approaches. While a few more dedicated music analysts have had positions in post-1992 institutions, in none of these has the discipline taken a firmer hold.

But what part does analysis play in undergraduate curricula? We have studied the full range of curricula across the sector as of mid-2023, the time of writing, for evidence of modules which feature either music theory or analysis, including those where it might be implicit. Particular attention has been paid to those places which dedicate modules to music analysis, the most likely sites of more systematic instruction in the field. Our results are divided by region (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland) and institute type (Russell Group, Mid-Ranking, Post-1992, Colleges of Higher Education or Others, Conservatoires, and Alternative Education Providers).

The question of how to define ‘analysis’ is not unproblematic in this context. Some institutions offer modules specifically labelled as ‘analysis’ (of whatever type), and as such, appear to represent the discipline more strongly. Others may appear to represent it less strongly while including a similar concentration of implicit analytical study due to the general focus of the programme. As such, we have looked carefully at the content of modules in order to quantify the representation of analysis as accurately as possible. All information is taken from institutions’ own websites (and as such dates from May-June 2023, and is always subject to change), with some further elaboration from contacts at the departments in question. Where we refer to ‘theory’ as distinct from ‘analysis’, we refer to the general study of basic music theory and harmony and/or counterpoint which are typically undertaken in the earlier years prior to the study of more systematic music analysis. Our interpretation of the representation of music analysis in UK undergraduate music curricula is set out below.

## **England**

Explicit music analysis modules feature in almost all curricula of all Russell Group departments, except those in Bristol and Southampton, where it is implied. In York, it is only to be found in the plain<sup>5</sup> Music course, while at Nottingham, the BA Music and Music Technology has just more basic music theory.

Amongst mid-ranking institutions, Royal Holloway has Theory and Analysis in Year 1, and options in more specialised analysis in Years 2 and 3. City had a double module in Analysing Music in Year 2 of their BMus course (as well as a double theory module in Year 1), but as mentioned earlier, this course has now been suspended, provisionally replaced by a new BA Music Performance and Production, the contents of which are not yet confirmed.<sup>6</sup> Brunel, Hull, Kent and the Open

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<sup>4</sup> For this former SMA trustee’s account, see J.P.E. Harper-Scott, ‘Why I left Academia’, at <https://jpehs.co.uk/why-i-left-academia/> (accessed 24 June 2023).

<sup>5</sup> We use the term ‘plain’ to refer to music degrees which are not named in a particular area of musical study (e.g. BMus (Hons), BA (Hons) Music).

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.city.ac.uk/prospective-students/courses/undergraduate/music> (accessed 24 June 2023).

University feature some basic core music theory but not analysis, as to a lesser degree does Sussex (as just part of one module on their BA Music). Goldsmiths and Surrey focus simply on Harmony, while neither theory nor analysis are represented at Keele, though this department, like those at other mid-ranking institutions Kent, SOAS and as of recently City, does not offer a plain 'Music' degree. One notable anomaly is Salford, which features a compulsory module in semiotic analysis in Year 1 within the BA Popular Music and Recording.

The post-92 departments generally have at most some basic theory and/or harmony, or some focus on this is implied by the wider course content. This is the case at Bishop Grosseteste (on their BA Music and Musicianship), Canterbury Christ Church (on their BA Music only), Chester (on their BA Music Production, and BA Music Production and Performance), Chichester (implied across a range of courses), De Montfort, Edge Hill, University Centre Grimsby, Lincoln, London Metropolitan (on their BSc Music Technology and Production), London South Bank, University of the Arts London (just a little in their BA Music Production, linked to composition skills), Manchester Metropolitan, Middlesex (except on their Music Business course), Nottingham Trent (very basic on their BA Music Production and BA Music Performance), Oxford Brookes, Plymouth (implied on their BA Music, and a little on the BSc Audio and Music Technology), Portsmouth (as part of the Composition module on the BSc Music Technology), Ravensbourne and Sunderland. An exception to this rule is Huddersfield which offers a plain BMus similar to those found in many mid-ranking and Russell Group institutions. Here, Introduction to Analysis (Year 1) is compulsory, while various analysis modules are available as options in later years, as well as on their BMus Performance and BMus Popular Music.

On the other hand, there is none at Anglia Ruskin, Bath Spa, Bedfordshire, Bolton, Bournemouth, Brighton, Buckinghamshire New, Central Lancashire, Coventry, the University of the Creative Arts, Derby, East London, Falmouth, Gloucestershire, Greenwich, Hertfordshire, Kingston, Leeds Art, Liverpool John Moores, Plymouth Marjon and Southampton Solent. Leeds Beckett is a marginal case, since it does appear to require some notation skills for Music Production, while UCEN Manchester has just some general musicianship on their BA Vocal Studies and Performance only.

Amongst Colleges of Higher Education and other related institutions, there appears to be some theory on the BA Music Production at Newcastle College University Centre, but almost none at other institutions – Greater Brighton Metropolitan College, Burnley College, Loughborough, Middlesbrough, Rose Bruford College, South Gloucestershire and Stroud and West Suffolk.

The conservatoire sector in England is varied in the representation of theory and analysis. While several do offer what appears to be a systematic approach to topics such as harmony and counterpoint, others do not mention theory or analysis at all. Analysis appears to be most strongly represented at the Royal Academy of Music, where there are a number of modules named in the subject. By contrast, the Leeds Conservatoire does not mention analysis on any of its programme descriptors. In others, such as the Royal Northern College of Music, 'analysis' is mentioned within some modules, but it is unclear what exactly is meant in this context. It is of interest to note that module descriptions on conservatoire websites are typically less detailed

than those found on university websites. Therefore, it is more difficult to ascertain the prominence of individual areas of study on such courses.

There is however a fair amount of music theory in the courses of several Alternative Educational Providers (AEPs), which were encouraged by the government at the time of the 2017 Higher Education and Research Act, and stand to become a more prominent part of the music HE landscape, as they acquire degree-awarding powers and access to student loans.<sup>7</sup> The greatest concentration of theory is to be found at the London College of Creative Media's Music Performance and Production course, which includes five different modules on Harmony and Theory (as well as two on a foundation year), a Year 1 Applied Theory module on the BMus Commercial Music Technology (though the BA Commercial Music only has any theory in the foundation year), and Year 1 and Year 2 modules featuring Harmony on the BMus Composition for Film, Games and other Media. The Academy of Contemporary Music includes a module in Applied Theory, Aural Skills & Critical Listening on the BA Music Composition and BA/BSc Music performance, but not the other courses. The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance also has modules featuring some theory on their BMus Popular Music Performance, BA Creative Musicianship, BA Songwriting, and more bespoke modules with a type of theory on their BA Music production for Film, TV and Games and BA Audio Engineering and Production, though none on BA Creative Music Production and BA Music Business and Entrepreneurship. The Liverpool Media Academy may have a little in one module of their BA Music Performance and Industry, but none on their BA Musical Theatre. At the British and Irish Modern Music Institute (BIMM), a range of courses featuring Popular Music Performance and Songwriting do include an elective module in Theory and Analysis of popular music. There is no explicit mention of theory or analysis on the courses at Futureworks, SAE Institute or Waterbear College.

## **Wales**

As with Scotland and Northern Ireland, university provision in Wales differs significantly from that in England in terms of the number of higher education institutions available. In Wales there are currently seven institutions offering music degrees (six universities and one conservatoire), and of these, only Cardiff and Bangor University (both mid-ranking) offer plain music degrees with a strong focus on modules such as harmony and counterpoint, or any which specifically refer to analysis. Meanwhile, the University of Wales Trinity St David, University of South Wales and Glyndŵr University, Wrexham offer an appreciable variety of vocationally orientated degrees in areas such as Musical Theatre, Popular and Commercial Music and Creative Music Technology. The Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama offers a plain BMus, BMus Jazz, and BA Musical Theatre and music theory is mentioned on the first two of these in the context of a module on musicianship. While the strong focus on Western Classical Music at this institution undoubtedly ensures the curricular centrality of staff notation, information about the course does not suggest that a more in-depth approach to music theory or systematic approaches to analysis are provided here.

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<sup>7</sup> See Tom Williams, 'Johnson: OfS hasn't stopped universities "operating like cartel"', *Times Higher Education*, 14 March 2023.

## **Scotland**

In contrast, it appears that theory/analysis provision at degree-level is slightly more strongly represented in Scotland than Wales. Here, there are nine providers of music degrees: six universities, two further education colleges and one conservatoire. The Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow (both Russell Group) offer a selection of plain music degrees as well as a similar number of music degrees which are technology- or industry-focused. Within the plain degrees, modules in harmony and counterpoint are compulsory in the early stages, with various analysis-based modules available as options in the later years. The plain BMus at the University of Aberdeen (mid-ranking) takes a similar approach, with harmony compulsory at the outset and a module named in music analysis compulsory in year 2. The BA Music at Edinburgh Napier University (post-92) also broadly favours this approach, with harmony and counterpoint compulsory in the first term and available alongside other analysis modules thereafter. On the other hand, the Universities of the West of Scotland and the Highlands and Islands (both post-92) offer a variety of degrees in subjects such as Popular Music, Commercial Music and Applied Music. While course information provided about these does refer to 'Applied Music Theory' in one case (UHI, BA Popular Music), it is unclear how this should be interpreted.

In recent years New College Lanarkshire and Edinburgh College have begun to offer vocationally focused music degrees, thereby widening the provision available in areas such as popular music and sound production. These degrees appear, from available information, similar to those found in many post-92 institutions where the use of staff notation does not appear central to the programme.

Outside of the university sector, the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland offers a plain BMus as well as a number of specialisations at undergraduate level. Module descriptors for these are less detailed, but do not imply an in-depth approach to theory or a formalised approach to analysis.

## **Northern Ireland**

Music degree provision in Northern Ireland is unique in the UK, insofar as the region has only two universities and no conservatoires. Queen's University Belfast (Russell Group) offers five music degrees, two of which (the plain BMus and BA Music Performance) feature a compulsory harmony module in year 1 followed by the module Classical Analysis in year 2 (also compulsory). The latter is also available as an option for two of the degrees which focus more on music technology. Meanwhile, Ulster University (mid-ranking) also provides a strong focus on harmony and associated skills within a variety of compulsory musicology- composition- and orchestration-based modules in years 1 and 2. Based on this, it would appear that out of the four UK regions, music theory and analysis are most strongly represented on degree programmes in Northern Ireland by virtue of being available on five out of the six music degrees which exist in the region.

## Statistical Summary of Student Numbers

These findings are further underlined by parallel research undertaken by Pace in 2023 in which the numbers of students at each type of institution are analysed.<sup>8</sup> Referring to the university and conservatoire sector, Pace provides the following statistics for 2020-21 entrants (an unusual year because of the pandemic, but roughly in line with figures for previous years):

Institution Type	No. of Students	% of Students
Russell Group	1778	19.9%
Mid-ranking	775	8.7%
Post-92	4534	50.7%
Conservatoire	1853	20.7%

Here, it can clearly be observed that the post-92 group dominates in terms of student numbers compared to all other institution types. While AEPs and HE/FE colleges are not listed here, such courses are typically similar in emphasis to those found at post-92 institutions. Thus, it can be deduced that such courses account for an even higher percentage of students than the Russell Group, mid-ranking and conservatoire institutions combined.

## Conclusions

It is clear from the information detailed above that, in general terms, the types of undergraduate music degrees available at UK universities – and therefore, the availability of training in music theory and analysis – are largely determined by the nature of different institutions. In the case of practically all Russell Group universities with music departments, long-established plain music degrees with a strong (though not exclusive) focus on Western classical music theory and analysis are available.. Conversely, most post-92 institutions offer vocationally focused music degrees (with a few notable exceptions), in music technology, musical theatre, or in performance (generally commercial performance, unlike most of the conservatoires) which reflect the institutions’ histories as technical/vocational training colleges. In these cases, the necessity to read staff notation, and therefore engage with music analysis systematically, often does not feature on these programmes. In terms of degree-type, mid-ranking universities show more variety, with different combinations of ‘academic’ and ‘vocational’ degrees. More research is required to understand why this should be the case, however it seems possible that this may relate to the age and history of the institution. For example, while Goldsmiths, University of London offers a variety of degrees with a more popular music and technological slant, the University of Aberdeen offers a single plain BMus modelled on those typically found in Russell Group institutions. This appears consistent with Goldsmiths’ history as a technical college and its becoming a full college of the University of London only in the

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<sup>8</sup> See Ian Pace, ‘Music in UK Higher Education 1: Departments and Faculties’, 23 April 2023, at <https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2023/04/23/music-in-uk-higher-education-1-departments-and-faculties/> (accessed 24 June 2023). The HESA data from which these numbers were derived was used publicly by permission in the context of a range of earlier articles for *Times Higher Education*.

1980s,<sup>9</sup> contrasted with Aberdeen's status as the 5<sup>th</sup> oldest university in the UK.<sup>10</sup> In the case of further and higher education colleges, the vocational focus of such degrees is largely consistent with the wider history of post-92 institutions.

However, despite the overwhelmingly vocational nature of many degrees offered by private providers, these institutions do seem to emphasise the role of music theory in general in comparison with similar degrees offered at other types of institutions, although at the time of writing the reasons for this are not known. In the case of conservatoires, courses generally demand engagement with staff notation by virtue of their frequent focus on WCM, but it appears that the role of systematic music analysis within this is not widespread. As mentioned earlier, there is now a sustained tradition of analytical work relating to music outside of the Western classical tradition, but this has made few real inroads into courses in commercial music (those in non-Western musics are tiny in number), perhaps reflecting a common eschewal of prior notational or theoretical prerequisites for undertaking such degrees, as well as some of the background of popular music studies in British cultural studies, often undertaken by those with no specific musical expertise.<sup>11</sup> To study the workings of popular music, jazz, or other traditions *as sound* (the aspect of such music most often experienced, as a presence when such music serves as background in hotels, shopping malls, clubs, and so on), one would usually need to enrol on a pure 'music' degree.

Systematic approaches to music analysis, then, are almost entirely the preserve of the plain music degrees found at Russell Group and a couple of those at mid-ranking universities, and students would be unlikely to find training in this almost anywhere else. Therefore, only those who have attended such institutions would be likely to have the training to be able to practise musicology in the manner demanded by Julian Horton in his article on the musicological necessity of analysis.<sup>12</sup> Thus, these findings highlight an important access issue within music education. It is well-acknowledged that high-ranking universities generally attract more students who have received the rigorous prior musical training which in recent times, following cuts to state provision, are often associated with an affluent background, while others such as post-92s are more often associated with 'first generation' students. If, then, systematic music theory and analysis training is largely the preserve of high-ranking institutions where admissions are typically more competitive, this highlights a significant disparity in the training available to students from certain backgrounds. If systematic music theory and analysis is largely the preserve of competitive high-ranking institutions, students wishing to study classical music but without the necessary prior training are unlikely to be provided with systematic training in music analysis (or perhaps theory in general), thus arguably limiting an important facet of their overall musical understanding. This indicates a failure on the part of other institutions to find

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<sup>9</sup> A.E. Firth, *Goldsmiths College: A Centenary Account* (London & Atlantic Highlands, NJ: The Athlone Press, 1991), p. n8.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Anderson, *British Universities: Past and Present* (London and New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> For more on this, and the role of cultural studies in producing 'musicology without ears', see Ian Pace, 'Roll over, Beethoven: on musicology's culture wars', *The Spectator*, 9 October 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Julian Horton, 'On the Musicological Necessity of Musical analysis', *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 103, issue 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2020), pp. 62-104. A forum on this article will follow in a 2023-24 issue of *Music Analysis*, drawing upon a roundtable mounted as a plenary session at the conference on *Music and the University* at City, University of London, in July 2022.

new ways to themselves provide the foundations for such education which students have not received elsewhere.

To conclude, it is clear that the music HE sector has changed vastly since the founding of the SMA. While in the pre-1992 era, it would have been practically unthinkable for music graduates to have no grounding in musical notation or theory, this has become acceptable due to the different foci of the selection of music degrees currently offered, and the basic need for departments to continue to recruit students when provision of the standard Music A-Level has declined significantly.<sup>13</sup> However, what this may mean for the UK music sector as a whole is more complex. While the expansion of the sector as described above undoubtedly provides exciting potential for cross-disciplinary scholarship between different areas of musicology, the authors are concerned by the decline in traditional music literacy which appears to have accompanied this expansion, not least the fact that it is now widely possible to graduate in music without requiring to learn musical notation. Those who do so, if they become music teachers in primary and secondary schools, will also often be unable to teach it to others. Further research is required to assess the effects of these changes more fully. In a forthcoming larger article, the authors intend to explore the impact of these changes on diverse aspects of the UK music sector such as music graduate employment trends and the representation of traditional music literacy within UK school music education.

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<sup>13</sup> According to a major recent study, there was a fall of over 38% of schools and colleges offering A-Level music between 2010 and 2018 (with a 38% drop in entries), and a fall of 31.7% of institutions offering Music Technology (with a 10.6% drop in students). 'Music Education: State of the Nation' (2019), Report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Music education, the Incorporated Society of Musicians and the University of Sussex, at [State-of-the-Nation-Music-Education-WEB.pdf \(ism.org\)](#) (accessed 14 April 2023), p. 15.