2021 Music studies Subject Assessment Advice

Overview

Subject assessment advice, based on the 2021 assessment cycle, gives an overview of how students performed in their school and external assessments in relation to the learning requirements, assessment design criteria, and performance standards set out in the relevant subject outline. They provide information and advice regarding the assessment types, the application of the performance standards in school and external assessments, and the quality of student performance.

Teachers should refer to the subject outline for specifications on content and learning requirements, and to the subject operational information for operational matters and key dates.

Teachers are also encouraged to utilise the resources provided on the SACE website. This includes the clarifying materials provided in PLATO, which is helpful in both providing ideas for designing assessment tasks and in applying the performance standards to the students work.

School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Creative Works (40%)

This assessment task allows students to apply their musical understanding, skills, and techniques by presenting a folio of their own creative works, which could include performances, compositions, or arrangements.

The students also present a creator’s statement, in which they provide evidence of their learning as they reflect on their creative works.

The more successful responses commonly:

* performed solo or ensemble works demonstrating strong instrumental or vocal skills along with a highly developed understanding of the music and style they were utilising
* produced compositions and/or arrangements that demonstrated a range of skills and with scores that utilised correct score conventions
* produced well-planned arrangements intentionally and successfully in a style different from the original work used
* presented well organised creator’s statements which discussed higher order musical elements, making good use of musical literacy terms along with tables and/or musical examples to inform the text/script

The less successful responses commonly:

* produced scores of compositions/arrangements lacking in normal score conventions, such as inappropriate transposition and lack of dynamics, tempo markings etc. or works that lacked coherence due to insufficient planning
* performed solo or ensemble works demonstrating less developed instrumental or vocal skills and lacking a solid understanding of the music and style they were utilising
* presented poorly organised creator’s statements which lacked details and failed to discuss higher order musical elements, using ‘cut-and-paste’ musical examples which failed to inform the text/script

Teachers need to ensure that students are clearly identified at the start of videos of ensemble performances and that part-testing is included in the evidence provided for ensemble performance students. It is also extremely helpful if sheet music is provided for both solo and ensemble performances, and audio provided along with the scores for both student compositions and arrangements.

Assessment Type 2: Music Literacy (30%)

Students complete three literacy tasks, allowing students to manipulate musical elements, apply and refine musical literacy skills, deconstruct, and analyse musical works and/or styles and synthesise their findings.

At least one of the three tasks should be a composition or arrangement, allowing the students to demonstrate their practical skill and application in manipulating musical elements. Compositions and arrangements presented used a range of styles and instrumentation from funk to string quartets. Variations were often included as a task in AT2 and many of these were successful works which included a sound knowledge of the capabilities of the instruments used, a good use of harmony and detailed and correctly presented scores.

The more successful responses commonly:

* created musical works that clearly demonstrated higher order skills and knowledge appropriately matched to the given task, such as well-planned and organised arrangements utilising a style and instrumentation the student was obviously familiar with
* responded to music with written work, such as analyses, which were enhanced through the discussion of higher order musical elements. Annotated scores were used effectively to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of key musical elements such as structure, compositional devices, harmonic language, rhythmic motives
* demonstrated a highly developed understanding of and response to music through competent completion of complex aural and harmony skills tests which reflected the difficulty level of Assessment Task 3
* synthesised their findings in well written or produced responses, which began with an opening paragraph that outlined the purpose and intent of the document/presentation and included thoughtful discussion of musical elements with the helpful use of musical excerpts where appropriate.

The less successful responses commonly:

* created musical works that did not demonstrate a working knowledge of the instruments included or the style used, or which were lacking in planning, structure, or form
* responded to music with written work, such as analyses, which were lacking in depth and focussed mainly on basic musical elements, such as tempo and dynamics, rather than higher order elements, such as compositional techniques
* demonstrated a less developed understanding of and response to music through less than competent completion of complex aural and harmony skills tests at difficulty levels significantly below that expected in Assessment Task 3
* synthesised their findings in less competent written or produced responses, which included basic discussion of musical elements with overuse of musical excerpts to pad out the document with little appropriate explanation.

Teachers should indicate which LAP applies to which group of students where two or more schools are grouped together for assessment purposes. It is also important that all support materials are included to help with the moderation process, such as an audio file for all compositions and arrangements, along with a score for each audio file. Submission of the source material for arrangements, though not subscribed, is also extremely useful in helping to ascertain the students arranging skills and knowledge.

External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination (30%)

While the questions in the 2021 examination were similar to the 2020 and previous examinations, the marks allocation was different along with aspects of the organisation of the exam.

The total number of marks was reduced to 120 (from 170), and these were evenly distributed (40 marks for each) between the three areas of knowledge and skills being assessed: aural recognition and dictation, compositional techniques recognition and analysis, and creative music notation.

The students also were provided a formula sheet and a number of the questions were given with the student’s ability to use this sheet in mind. Teachers should ensure all students are familiar with and able to utilise the formula sheet to solve problems in different contexts.

Question 1

Students generally found these five aural recognition questions relatively easy, with over 70% of students answering at least four of the five parts correctly. The most successful students were able to correctly identify the option as Option 4 in part (b) instead of the other most obvious choice which was Option 1.

Question 2

Students found this rhythmic dictation question somewhat more difficult. However, more than one in three of the students were able to correctly notate the entire rhythm. The most successful students were able to recognise the effect of the anacrusis on the final bar and ensure this bar had only a crotchet and quaver.

Question 3

Students also found this interval recognition question tricky, with less than 45% of students able to correctly identify and notate the two intervals. Less successful students incorrectly identified the interval in part (b) as minor sixth rather than the correct diminished fifth (or tritone).

Question 4

This question was the most successful in the whole paper for the students, with over 50% correctly identifying the harmonic minor scale in part (a), and the mixolydian scale in part (b).

Question 5

This melodic dictation question proved to be more difficult with less than 15% of students notating the entire melody and answering the two additional questions correctly. Successful students recognised the raised sixth and (E natural and F sharp) in the fourth bar of the melody (the ascending form of the melodic minor scale), and the F sharp in bass clef of the accompaniment as the leading note in part (b).

Question 6

This melody completion question was the first creative question in the paper, and students generally did well, with almost 60% of students gaining either three or four marks out of the total of four. The more successful students made use of the rhythmic motives present in the given start, used a discernible cadence to finish their melody, and ensured their melody had appropriate range and contour.

Question 7

Students generally found this set of questions somewhat more difficult, with just under one-third of students gaining at least ten out of the total of twelve marks. The more successful students correctly identified the pedal point created by the bassoon in part (c), identified the E7/G# chord in part (d) and correctly identified the climax of the work in bar 13 and supported this with explanations of dynamics, pitch, and rhythm in part (e).

Question 8

This question, which relied totally on the aural skills of the students with no musical score provided, was also difficult, with just over 20% of students gaining at least eight of the ten marks on offer. Less successful students struggled with discussing texture and timbre and repeated themselves (saying the same thing in a slightly different way) rather than giving new points. Students are encouraged to read the question carefully and ensure their answers pertain to the musical element they are being asked to discuss.

Question 9

In this question analysing an arrangement of a folk tune over 40% of students gained at least eight marks out of the total of ten. The more successful students recognised the change in time signature, the use of more complex rhythms, some syncopation in the melody and the use of longer notes in the melody which resulted in one bar of the original melody becoming two bars in the arrangement in part (a). They also recognised the use of chord extensions, inversions, and chord substitution in part (b) and the filling out the harmony and adding countermelody in part (c). Less successful students often identified the trumpet and violin as playing the melody in part (c).

Question 10

In this comparative analysis question almost 40% of students were able to gain at least eight out of the total of ten marks. More successful students identified the thinner and contrasting use of texture in Dimitri’s Dream in comparison with the homophonic texture in Waltz for Erica in part (a), and the obvious changes in time signatures, the use of complex or irregular grouping in Dimitri’s Dream, the consistent use of quavers in Waltz for Erica in part (b). Less successful students found part (c) difficult and approached this by naming musical elements they saw (such as dynamics and articulations) rather than identifying compositional techniques as the question stated.

Question 11

Students were able to complete the three parts below the given melody in this question generally well, with half of students gaining at least nine out of the 12 marks. The most successful students wrote parts which were lined up under the correct beats of the melody, enabling students to see if the harmony being created was consonant or dissonant, especially when non-chord notes such as passing or auxiliary notes were added. Additionally, the added parts used movement against long notes in the melody and vice versa, parts one and two used smooth voice leading, and the bass part primarily used minims.

Question 12

Half of the students were able to correctly complete this grouping question including adding the ties in bar three and between bars three and four.

Question 13

Overall students provided strong harmonisations for their chosen option with well over half of the students gaining at least 18 marks out of the total of 24.

Option A

The most successful students selected and spelled their chords carefully, and applied correct voice leading in the parts. Strong chords were used at cadence points, and higher-level skills demonstrated in utilisation of chord inversions and dominant seventh chords as appropriate.

Option B

The most successful students selected and spelled their chords carefully and applied correct smooth part writing in the chord voicings. The modulation to F minor in bar three was recognised and correctly facilitated, and higher-level skills demonstrated in utilisation of extended and altered-note chords as appropriate.