

Musicianship

2015 Chief Assessor’s Report

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## Overview

Chief Assessors’ reports give 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, the quality of student performance, and any relevant statistical information.

In 2105, most students achieved within the A, B, and C grade bands, suggesting that they were able to demonstrate their learning against the performance standards for all assessment types. Moderation results for school assessment showed a higher proportion of students achieving in the A and B ranges when compared with results for the external assessment, where a larger proportion of the students received results in the B and C range. This suggests that students found it easier to demonstrate proficiency against the performance standards in the skills development and arrangement tasks than in the external assessment.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Skills Development

The two tests in this assessment type are a valuable preparation for the external assessment.

The most appropriate and successful tests are those which covered the whole scope of the theory concepts for the subject in both tests, including the harmony, but which did so progressively across the two tests. For example, Test 1 might be best designed to cover part of the scope of Musicianship at a less demanding level, then Test 2 should cover the full scope at a level which reflects the higher learning required for the examination. Skills development tests should be rigorously designed to give students the best opportunity to reach the highest level as described by the performance standards.

Teachers are encouraged to use the support materials on the SACE website, and to use past examinations as a guide only for the development of their skills tests. This is particularly important in the Harmony area of study, where students should be given the opportunity in at least one of the two skills tests to demonstrate their learning at an examination-standard level. The tests should be 60–75 minutes for each task. Teachers should consider producing their own skills tests to best suit both the time frame allowed and their teaching program. These tests should include a mix of ‘easier’ questions, such as multiple choice, and ‘harder’ questions, such as rhythmic and melodic dictations.

When preparing materials for moderation, teachers include task and answer sheets, and provide evidence of how the tasks were assessed, such as annotated assessment rubrics, marks schemes, and notes.

Assessment Type 2: Arrangement

The standard of achievement in arrangement demonstrated a strong understanding of performance standards by teachers and students, and a consistent quality of work produced.

Sound recordings to accompany scores worked best when MIDI voices had been chosen carefully to best represent the intention in the scoring. Drum and guitar parts need special attention. Students can make live recordings, if appropriate, as the process may help them in better understanding the capabilities of their chosen instruments. Teachers support students to create audio files in a format that can be played in a media-playing program, on a USB drive or CD. It is not appropriate to submit original Sibelius files for moderation.

Some teachers annotated their assessment decisions and comments directly onto the scores.

The most successful arrangements had a number of common features:

* A well-designed form and structure — deciding how to start, develop, and finish the arrangement successfully is an important part of the arranging process, and should be approached at the outset.
* Demonstrated the student’s strong knowledge of the capabilities of the chosen instruments and/or voices — students should be encouraged to write for instruments and instrument groupings that are available to them and with which they are familiar.
* Knowledge of style — this was particularly clear when students showed evidence of having listened to or played and analysed examples of music within their chosen style or styles.
* A concise and clear written statement that detailed the technical features of the arrangement using appropriate terminology — the well-considered use of musical quotes in illustration allows ease in associating commentary with the musical passages described.
* A presentation of the score in either portrait or landscape format, as this allows the easy reading of the music without having to turn the page every three or four bars, and the scores also resemble professionally produced scores.

Students should avoid:

* Writing for instruments, such as voice, piano, or drums, without clear stylistic structure or strong harmonic foundation, and using the rhythm section in a repetitive manner by using the cut-and-paste function of the arranging software.
* Selecting original melodies which are complex melodically and/or harmonically, which do not have the potential to be modified and manipulated to create new music, such as countermelodies and harmonic changes. Complex originals can lead to ‘arrangements’ that come close to being transcriptions, as little can creatively be added to the music.
* Creating a commentary with musical quotes that do not support the text of the commentary. Where musical quotes are used in the commentary, they should demonstrate an aspect of the process undertaken in producing the arrangement. Quotes should make musical sense, with instruments labelled and clefs, key, and time signatures included. This may mean producing the quotes separately in the scoring program, rather than just using the copy-and-paste function.
* Creating arrangements where instrumental ranges and capabilities are not understood but computer programs appear to show the music as ‘playable’ — therefore students do not appropriately transpose instrumental parts as required. A useful exercise, if possible, is to give the instrumental parts to instrumentalists who play the chosen instrument, who will soon give feedback as to the appropriateness of the writing.
* Presenting parts in the arrangement that produces music in the computer playback with the sound required, but is actually not playable by a real musician. This is a particular issue with guitar parts, where large amounts of notes are provided to get the chord sounds desired, and drum parts, where mapping is not done correctly. Students could consider producing two copies of their arrangement at the completion of the arranging process; one which plays back in the desired manner, which will be used to create the recording, and one that reads correctly, with chord symbols for guitar and correct drum mapping, which is presented for marking and moderating.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Part 1: Theory, Aural Recognition, and Musical Techniques

Question 1

Around a third of the students were able to correctly identify the time signatures and place all of the bar lines. A third more of the students were able to do the same but omitted the double bar lines at the end of the rhythms. A number of students missed the ‘four-bar melodies’ reference in the question and therefore answered with 12/8 or 2/4 answers, for which they received some credit.

Question 2

Around two-thirds of the students were able to correctly identify the three rhythms.

Question 3

Around half of students were able to correctly identify and write the four missing dotted-crotchet rhythms.

Question 4

This question caused considerable difficulty, with less than 10% of students able to correctly complete the rhythm. However, most students were able to correctly write at least some of the rhythm. Some students were unable to identify the ties between bars 5 and 6, and in bar 7, or tried to notate the ‘swing’ quavers with dots and semiquavers, which was unnecessary.

Question 5

Almost a quarter of the students were able to correctly complete the rhythmic dictation. Those who erred made a range of different mistakes. One common error was notating the four semiquavers in bar 3 as quavers.

Question 6

Over a quarter of the students were able to correctly identify and notate all three intervals. A number of students missed the B flat in part (b) to complete the Perfect 4th. The most difficult was part (c), where quite a few students incorrectly identified the minor 6th as a minor 7th. A number of students also identified the minor 6th as an augmented 5th, writing a B natural. It is an alternative correct answer, and students were given full credit.

Question 7

Almost 40% of students were able to correctly identify both rhythms.

Question 8

Generally, around a third of the students were able to correctly identify the type and write the scale used.

Question 9

Students were challenged by this question, with only 13% of students able to correctly notate the melody and identify the melodic minor scale used. Completing bar 2 correctly was common, but bars 3 and 4, in particular using the correct accidentals, were found much more difficult.

Question 10

Many students were able to complete at least a few notes correctly, although a number struggled with the correct accidental in bar 14 for the harmonic minor scale used.

Question 11

Around 60% of students were able to correctly identify both chords.

Question 12

Over 40% of students were able to correctly identify and notate both broken chords.

Question 13

Over a third of the students correctly identified both harmonic progressions.

Question 14

There were a variety of answers for these questions. Few students correctly identified the bowing mark in part (a) as an articulation. In part (b), the successful students would have looked at the score to identify the chord in bar 4 as B minor seventh, and then correctly circled the 5th and 7th quavers. Many identified the B7/D# chord in part (e) as D sharp diminished.

Question 15

A variety of answers were given for this question. Part (b) caused difficulty, a number of students incorrectly grouping in the 3/4 time provided. In part (e), the successful students used the terminology ‘gradually getting louder’ and ‘gradually getting softer’ to describe ‘crescendo’ and ‘decrescendo’.

Question 16

There were a variety of answers for this question. Some students struggled mostly with parts (a) and (b), whereas most students found parts (f), (g), and (h) much easier.

Question17

Over 40% of students were able to successfully rewrite this melody with correct grouping. A number of students were able to correctly group the notes, but omitted the double bar line at the end of the melody.

Question 18

Students generally performed much more successfully on this question. The most difficult were parts (c) and (d), where a number of students responded incorrectly.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 19

The students who displayed the greatest competence substituted an F sharp minor seventh chord in the second half of bar 3, an A major seventh chord in the second half of bar 5, or a C sharp minor seventh chord in the first half of bar 7 (moving the F sharp minor seventh to the second half of the bar), completing the circle of fourths in the last four bars. The best extensions were to change the B major chord in bar 4 to a dominant seventh chord, the E major chord in bar 5 to a major seventh chord, or the D sharp diminished chord in bar 6 to a half-diminished seventh chord.

Most students were able to demonstrate competence in keyboard-voicing in this question. Students should be careful with chord spelling to ensure that the chord symbol matches the chord voiced. A number of students erred where a major or minor triad chord was written above the music, voicing it as a seventh chord.

Students who were successful in countermelody-writing generally kept the countermelody writing uncomplicated, but instead concentrated on creating a solid, melodic, and rhythmically complementary tune. Many used the two rhythmic motives present in the melody (three quavers then a fourth quaver tied to a crotchet, and dotted crotchet followed by a quaver) in building their countermelody rhythm. Teachers should support students in creating the body of the countermelody to avoid notes that cause dissonant clashes with the melody. Students who fared best in building their countermelody used chord notes that were not already present in the melody. The best note on which to finish the countermelody was a G sharp, producing a consonant interval with the melody.

Less than 25% of students were able to correctly transpose the designated extract for French horn in F. Some students transposed up a fourth rather than a fifth as was required. It is also important to note that, when transposing, all elements of the music should be included in the transposition, including the time signature.

Question 20

Students who demonstrated strong learning in this question showed a general grasp of the harmonic concepts required to answer the question appropriately. The key of E major appeared to cause a degree of difficulty for a number of students due to the complexity of working in four sharps.

The best opening progression 2-5, 2-5 was rarely demonstrated. Other progressions were acceptable, but required a number of chords per bar, such as 1-4-3 in bar 1 and 6-2-5 in bar 2. The most successful students used chords that contained notes of the melody or used chord progressions that moved comfortably using bass movement of a fourth or other suitable common chord progressions.

A number of students successfully managed both modulations and correctly placed the chords. Others successfully identified the correct keys but the placement of chords was not ideal, particularly with the second modulation using C sharp minor seventh and F sharp dominant seventh as the 2-5 were often placed too early.

Not many students used the G sharp half-diminished seventh as the 2 chord for the first modulation to F sharp minor which was the ideal choice. However, G sharp minor seventh was acceptable also. Less successful students did not identify either modulation correctly.

Some students made errors in the use of accidentals that were numerous in modulations, particularly when they attempted to alter the dominant chord in the middle (e.g. C#7(#5) required G double sharp, C#7(*b*9) required D natural, F#7(*b*9) required a G natural).

A majority of answers attempted to both extend and alter dominant seventh chords. Students were not successful when they tried to extend and/or alter too many chords. It is worth keeping in mind that two examples of each is all that is required, and thus it is worth spending the time to choose them well, based on how they work with both melody and chord voicings. If students use more, they should make sure that they use them appropriately.

A number of students used an E sixth ninth as the final chord which was the best choice over an E major seventh. Accidentals used in a bar were not always changed back if needed within the same bar. The use of chord symbol conventions was not always well used, for example, triangle for major seventh. Some less successful students had mi7 for minor seventh rather than either m7 or –7.

Piano chord-voicings were generally well done, but common mistakes included voicing notes out of range, that is below low F in the bass clef and/or above C third space in the treble clef. Other less successful students crowded extended chords in the treble clef, which created clusters of notes too close together, or had large intervals in the right hand and small interval chords in the left hand. Smooth voice-leading was also generally well done.

Question 21

Although several students successfully used the vii b chord, and the ii and vi secondary triads, the majority of students were able to harmonise the melody correctly using mostly primary triads.

Most students harmonised bars 1 and 3 successfully with the use of the passing 6/4. A number of candidates successfully completed the final cadence with the use of Ic-V7-I, especially by spelling the V7 without the fifth, allowing for correct resolution of the dominant seventh chord. Students also made good use of the cadential 6/4 as part of the imperfect cadence at the end of the second phrase. The majority of students were able to demonstrate three different cadences successfully.

Students successfully chose to use the dominant seventh most often, as part of the interrupted cadence at the end of the first phrase. Some successful answers harmonised the third beat of bar 5 with chord IV by the use of an accented passing note in the soprano part.

Students successfully harmonised with two crotchets the rhythm (dotted crotchet followed by a quaver, in bar 1 and bar 3). Other choices would have been more successful than harmonising the beginning of the third phrase with chords ii and IV in root position which produced consecutive octaves between soprano and bass.

Quite a number of students went outside the allowable vocal range by starting their answer with a tonic chord in root position using the E below the bass stave, and/or the same note as part of the cadence ending the second phrase.

The question asked for ‘some’ passing notes. The most successful answers included several passing notes, and not auxiliary notes, and added notes which neither clashed with other parts nor created consecutive fifths or octaves. Care needs to be taken when introducing passing notes to ensure that consecutive fifths or octaves are not produced. The addition of passing notes does not remove existing consecutive fifths or octaves in the parts. It appeared that some students thought auxiliary notes were passing notes. Some students incorrectly added passing notes to the soprano part.

## Operational Advice

Teachers should ensure that they have carefully read the relevant subject operational information which is on the subject page of the SACE website. This information sets out key dates and gives assessment requirements and details for school and external assessment

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are reviewed by moderators. Teachers should include assessment decisions (in either shaded rubrics or annotations) in the package of moderation materials.

Schools that combine for assessment should, wherever possible, collaborate on the design of the skills development tests, task sheets, and assessment decisions in both the skills tests and the arrangements. This will ensure consistency and validity of results across the assessment group. They should also, wherever possible, confirm each other’s results by moderating across the group.

It is recommended for the skills tests and the external examination that students use pencil to answer the questions in order to be able to erase errors and to make their answer clearly legible for marking.

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