

Musicianship

2014 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 2104, most students were assessed as achieving within the A, B, and C grade bands, suggesting that they were able to demonstrate success 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 the performance standards in the skills development and arrangement tasks.

## School Assessment

Assessment Type 1: Skills Development

The two tests in this assessment type, as well as being important assessment items in themselves, are a valuable preparation for the external assessment.

The most appropriate and successful tests seemed to be those which covered the whole scope of the theory concepts for the subject, 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, allowing Test 2 to 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 for the development of their skills tests. This is particularly important in the harmony section, where students should be given the opportunity in at least one of the two skills tests to demonstrate their proficiency at a challenging level. The development 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.

Teachers are asked to prepare moderation materials including task and answer sheets, and to provide evidence of how the tasks were assessed, such as annotating assessment rubrics, marks schemes, and annotations.

Assessment Type 2: Arrangement

The standard of achievement in arrangement continued to demonstrate an improvement in the quality of work produced and an understanding of standards by teachers.

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. Students are reminded that audio files need to be presented in a format that can be played in a media-playing program, and that it is not appropriate to submit original Sibelius files for moderation.

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

The most successful arrangements had a number of features in common:

* 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.
* Good knowledge of the capabilities of the chosen instruments and/or voices — students should ideally be encouraged to write for instruments and instrument groupings that are available to them and that they have some familiarity with.
* Knowledge of style — this was particularly clear in the writing when students showed evidence of having listened to or played and analysed examples of music within their chosen style or styles.
* Concise and clear written statements 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.
* Presentation of the score in either portrait or landscape format — these formats allow the easiest reading of the music without having to turn the page every three or four bars, and they 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 utilising the ‘cut and paste’ function of the arranging software.
* Selecting original melodies because they are student favourites but which do not easily have the potential to be modified and manipulated to create new music, often because they are too complex for arranging.
* Creating a commentary where the focus is not so much on the musical intentions of the arranger as on the emotions attempting to be engendered in the listener or on small events and decisions made early in the writing process; additionally, if musical quotes are used in the commentary, they should be to demonstrate an aspect of the process undertaken in producing the arrangement; quotes should also make musical sense, with instruments labelled and clefs, key, and time signatures included.
* 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.
* Not making the best use of the 32‑40 bars available by either writing an arrangement of over 40 bars, meaning that not all work can be marked, or finishing the arrangement in a hurried manner to fit within the 40 bars; an arrangement of 32‑40 bars is sufficient for students to demonstrate their skills in this area, but planning is crucial at the outset to ensure that the arrangement both starts and finishes well.

## External Assessment

Assessment Type 3: Examination

Part 1: Theory, Aural Recognition, and Musical Techniques

Question 1

Most students answered this question correctly. Those who erred found parts (a) and (c) the most difficult.

Question 2

Around half the students were able to identify and write the rhythms correctly.

Question 3

Around a quarter of all students were able to correctly identify the incorrect bar and write the rhythm correctly for all three parts of this question. Parts (a) and (b) were successfully completed by the majority of students.

Question 4

This question caused considerable difficulty, with 12% of students able to correctly identify the full rhythmic dictation. However, most students were able to correctly write at least some of the rhythm, referring to the first and last bars which included most of the material that needed to be identified in the missing bars.

*Question 5*

Over half the students were able to correctly name and complete the intervals given. Those who erred sometimes identified interval (c) as a major sixth, rather than a minor sixth.

Question 6

Over 40 % of students were able to correctly identify both excerpts, with a further 40% identifying one.

*Question 7*

Students were challenged by this question. Some struggled to identify the correct time signatures, and most incorrectly identified the first tune as having minor tonality, perhaps being confused by the minor third interval between the last two notes. A number of students gave incorrect responses for the intervals and key signatures.

Question 8

Generally, around half the students were able to correctly identify the scale type used.

Question 9

About 10% of students correctly identified both melodies.

Question 10

A few students were able to correctly write all six notes to complete this question successfully. Students would be advised to use the right-hand melody as a guide to the chord notes that have been used in the left hand.

Question 11

A few students displayed full competency in response. Many students were able to complete the first and last bars correctly but struggled in bars 2 and 3, particularly in picking the D note at the start of bar 2.

Question 12

Around 21% of students were able to correctly identify all three broken chords. Some incorrectly identified chord (b) as a diminished triad rather than augmented.

Question 13

This question was answered well by a majority of students.

Question 14

There were a variety of answers for these questions, including a range of interesting interpretations of the extended form of the abbreviated *dim.*

*Question 15*

A variety of answers were given for this question. A sizable group of students were unable to correctly identify *mezzo staccato* as the articulation in part (f).

Question 16

There were a variety of answers for this question. Students struggled to correctly identify the use of the theme in part (a)

Question17

Around 30% of students were able to successfully rewrite this melody with correct grouping. Some students forgot to take note of the anacrusis when completing the final bar with rests.

Question 18

Most students were able to correctly identify some or all of the cadences. More struggled with correctly identifying the chromatic passing notes, perhaps confused by the modulation in bar 6.

Part 2: Harmony

Question 19

The students who displayed the greatest competence substituted a C minor seventh chord in the second half of bar 6, and an F minor seventh chord in the first half of bar 7 (moving the Bb dominant seventh to the second half of the bar), completing the circle of fourths in the last four bars. Another successful substitution was the addition of the C minor seventh chord in the second half of bar 1 to complete a 1-6-2-5 common chord progression. The best extensions were to change the minor chords in bar 4 to minor seventh chords. Other students successfully made the Ab in bar 5 an Ab major seventh, or the Gm in bar 6 a G minor seventh.

Keyboard-voicing in this question is a skill in which most students demonstrated competence. 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.

Those who displayed the greatest competency in countermelody-writing generally tried not to be too complicated in writing the countermelody, but instead concentrated on creating a solid, melodic, and rhythmically complementary tune. Many used the two rhythmic motives present in the melody (four quavers followed by a crotchet, and dotted crotchet followed by a quaver) in building their countermelody rhythm. Teachers should guide students to take care throughout the body of the countermelody to avoid dissonant clashes with the melody. Those 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, producing a consonant interval with the melody.

A significant number of students were able to correctly transpose the designated extract for alto saxophone in E flat. Some students transposed down a minor third rather than up a major sixth. It is also important to note that, when transposing, all elements of the music should be included in the transposition. Students must ensure that the time signature is in the transposition.

Question 20

Students who demonstrated a strong grasp of the performance standards in this question showed a general grasp of the harmonic concepts required to answer the question appropriately. There were a few cases of missing flats on the chord symbols of the key (e.g. Eb, Ab, Bb became E, A, B). Many students picked the key of E flat as the tonic key and most used the correct chord types within that key.

The most suitable option was 1-6-2-5 in chord selection. Many students began with the progression 6-2-5-1 or 1-4-7-3, both of which were generally acceptable answers. Most ended strongly with 2-5-1. 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.

The modulations caused a degree of difficulty because the question asked for two modulations but only contained one accidental. Students needed to find another appropriate place for a modulation by permission. Some did not fulfil the requirement of two modulations and only modulated on demand through the accidental in bar 3.

The first modulation to F minor was generally well done, although common mistakes included not using correct accidentals, such as not placing a Db on the G half-diminished chord (for those who chose to use that as the 2 chord instead of Gm7), not including an E natural in the C7 chord, and modulating to F major rather than F minor, which was not the best choice within the key of E flat major.

Those who scored well in the area of modulation found a comfortable modulation by permission to C minor in bars 5 and 6, but some did not include a B natural in the necessary G7 chord.

There were several other attempts to find a place to change key by permission but very few managed it successfully as it did not fit well in the harmonic structure overall. A common error was misplacing the second chord of bar 5 rhythmically by placing it under beat 2 rather than beat 3 (the minim).

A majority of answers attempted to both extend and alter dominant seventh chords. Extension chords, particularly to the ninth were generally very well done. The most common mistakes in altered note chords included altering chords that were not dominant sevenths or choosing to alter a note that was in the melody. Students need to pay attention to chord spelling, as appropriate accidentals were sometimes missing, particularly when extending or altering chords, or within modulations.

Chord-voicings were generally well done but common errors included: voicing notes out of the middle to moderately low register, crowding extended chords in the treble clef (which created clusters of notes too close together), and not taking notice of where the top note of the treble clef sits with the melody at the same point or having large gaps in the treble-clef voicing.

Question 21

In general this question was answered competently by most students. Nearly all students recognised the need for half close and full close cadences in the appropriate positions, with just a few attempting a perfect cadence in the final bar where the melody notes imply a plagal cadence. A small number of students even added notes to the given soprano part at this point to allow a perfect cadence to be written, or did the same elsewhere in the melody line in order to create an opportunity to write passing notes.

Most students recognised and exploited the passing six-four opportunities. In some answers, leading was an issue where writing large intervals in the added parts created consecutives or overlapping of voices. A few students did not include the use of the dominant seventh at all, and some students were unsuccessful in resolving this chord once used. Similarly, others were either unable to add passing notes in their answers or wrote quaver, and even semiquaver, figures that were not true passing notes.

Students are reminded to check the key signature carefully before embarking on the harmonisation. A small number of students harmonised passing notes in the given melody with two chords rather than the one usually written. Conversely, at this point some aligned crotchet chords under the melody’s quavers on the weak part of the beat.

## 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.

Schools who 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 to ensure consistency and validity of results across the assessment group. They should also, wherever possible, confirm each other’s results by moderating across the grouping.

School assessment tasks are set and marked by teachers. Teachers’ assessment decisions are confirmed by moderators.

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