**VCE Music Style and Composition 2017–2022**

School-based assessment report

This report is provided for the first year of implementation of this study and is based on the School-based Assessment Audit and VCAA statistical data.

All official communications regarding the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) Music Style and Composition Study Design are provided in the *VCAA Bulletin*. It is recommended that teachers subscribe to the VCAA Bulletin to receive updated information regarding the study. Schools are required to alert teachers to information in VCAA Bulletins, especially concerning assessment schedules. Important Administrative Dates and assessment schedules are published on the School administration page of the VCAA website.

GENERAL COMMENTS

This is the first School-based Assessment Audit undertaken in Music Style and Composition as part of the reaccredited *VCE* *Music Study Design 2017–2022*.

The main change for the revised VCE Music Style and Composition study is that only one work is nominated for study in Unit 4 rather than two. This reduction in workload gives students more time to focus on the composition they create for the Externally-Assessed Task. The study retains an overall mix of responding to, analysing and creating music.

Unit 3

The School-based Coursework tasks for Unit 3 relate to Outcomes 1 and 2 and are very similar in nature and intent to equivalent tasks in the previous study design.

All schools audited were using the 2017–2021 VCE Music Study Design.

In general, the tasks developed by each school in the audit used very similar formats and instructions for the assessment tasks. In all cases, the task designs mirrored the formats of Section A and Section B in the published Sample Examination materials. This was appropriate.

Teachers should be aware that the tasks they design must allow for the demonstration of the ‘highest level of performance’ and be ‘flexible enough to cater for the full range of student performance’. This advice is provided in the [*2017 Assessment advice for the VCE*](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vce/2017_Assessment_advice_for%20the%20VCE.docx) which is published on the VCAA website.

In some cases, the wording of questions remained somewhat general, and used a limited range of question stems. For example, all questions in an Outcome 1 task required students to describe aspects of the music.

A variety of question types and formats is encouraged across the tasks for both Outcome 1 and Outcome 2. For example: identify, describe, discuss, analyse etc.

It is advisable to use terminology from the study design when framing tasks or writing questions. In general, the use of established terminology was very good. Occasionally there was use of terms that were certainly musical, but might cause some confusion if this was the sole term that used to describe an element of music.

There was evidence of some confusion concerning the awarding of a satisfactory result for an outcome. A student will satisfactorily complete an outcome if the teacher has seen evidence of the understandings and skills outlined in study design. Satisfactory completion is not required to be tied exclusively to performance in the School-assessed Coursework task.

Outcome 1

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to aurally analyse music and make critical responses to music.*

Tasks

Assessment tasks in this area are based around students forming written responses to short excerpts of music that they have not heard before. Music extracts chosen for the task should be from a range of styles, geographical locations and eras.

All schools audited prepared tasks that were in line with the intentions of the outcome. In general, the format for this task involved one test-based session of around 60 minutes. Students were asked to respond to four separate extracts.

The range of music styles represented in the extracts was diverse. Excerpts came from many styles including traditional Western European music, modern contemporary styles, non-Western traditions, jazz and music theatre.

In all cases, the general formatting and length of the task mirrored Section A of the examination.

In some cases, extra care might have been taken in the length of music excerpts. Tracks that run for three minutes or more may work against giving students the chance to consolidate responses if, for example, there are three playings within an expected 12-15 minute section of the task.

Editing the extracts down to perhaps 1’00” – 1’30” may also allow for more targeted questioning, and clearer assessment guides.

While in general, questions associated with the excerpts all revealed a clear knowledge of the understanding and skills that need to be assessed, two things might be considered:

1. A variety of question types (e.g. identify, list, describe, discuss, explain), along with a number of question formats (e.g. short answer, paragraph, more extended response) should be encouraged. This will allow for a variety of responses as well as supporting clearer differentiation of student achievement.
2. Questions that are targeted to specific musical characteristics in an excerpt can allow students a pathway into their response. For example, rather than a generalized question such as:

*Discuss the use of repetition and contrast in this excerpt.*

A more targeted question might be:

*There are two clear sections in this extract. The first section features a great amount of repetition. The second section contrasts greatly to the first.*

1. *Identify and describe three ideas that repeat in the first section*
2. *Discuss how contrast is achieved between the two sections.*

Assessment

In all schools audited, the assessment task for Outcome 1 was held towards the end of the unit. There was generally at least a week between assessment tasks for Outcome 1 and Outcome 2. This is appropriate, giving students the chance to build on skills throughout the Unit before assessment.

In general, assessment criteria and marking schemes were based on published VCAA performance descriptors. These were available to students well before assessment.

Performance descriptors are published as a guide for teachers. Actual weightings and marking schemes for any task may then be created by teachers and communicated to students before the task.

In a couple of cases, there was some confusion about the weighting of components, with an implication that all criteria were weighted equally. This needs to be addressed so that students have a clear understanding of how their response will fit into the overall marking scheme – and the areas in which they need to focus.

Outcome 2

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and describe the use of the elements of music and compositional devices in music works, and discuss the style and the context from which the works emerged.*

Tasks

While the study design nominates three different methods for assessment: a report, responses to structured questions or a multimedia presentation, all schools chose to assess student achievement through a test based around structured questions. This can be seen as a reaction to the fact that Section B of the exam is structured in this way. Such a format does help in preparing students for external assessment.

In this area, students are asked to study two separate short music works (one of which must be Australian). They investigate the characteristics of the work itself, how it fits into an identifiable music style and the contextual influences on the creation of the work.

All schools correctly included one Australian work. The other work chosen for study was, in all cases, from the Western European tradition (for example Bach, Berlioz, Strauss, Beethoven).

All Australian works featured orchestral writing, generally within the art-music tradition.

Teachers are encouraged to investigate other styles and/or instrumental settings for selected works in order to expand students’ understanding of different stylistic concerns. This may also better reflect contemporary music environments.

In one case, workload issues could have been a problem due to the number and length of works covered. This was rectified after initial feedback in the first round of the audit.

Assessment

In all cases, schools chose a structured question test as the assessment tool.

As with Outcome 1, assessment tasks were held towards the end of the unit, and were clearly based on previous exam-style formats. This format was also in line with the published sample examination material for the 2017–2021 study design.

Assessment criteria and marking schemes were largely based on published VCAA performance descriptors. Again, these were available to students well before assessment.

There was some confusion about the weighting of components, with an implication that all criteria were weighted equally.

As with Outcome 1, in formulating questions there was also a tendency to rely on generalised concepts (e.g. *Choose one of the listed elements and discuss its use in the work*), rather than targeted specifics (e.g. *Describe how the composer treats the melodic material in this work. In your response, you may like to refer to any variations at the medium and micro level*).

By targeting specifics within a work, teachers can provide students with a clear pathway for responses, as well as creating a more structured assessment/marking scheme.

Outcome 3

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to create two original music exercises and describe the relationship between the exercises and the source music studied.*

Tasks

Note, this outcome contributes to the EAT rather than to School-assessed Coursework. There are two separate creative response tasks associated with Outcome 3. These take the form of two short musical exercises created in response to music studied in the unit.

All schools understood the nature of the task and the need for a clear connection between the stimulus work and the final response. All schools also were clear in outlining the nature of the musical task: 12–16 bars or 25–30 seconds, 2–5 instruments, in notated and audio form.

Some schools provided a step-by-step guide to completing each exercise. This can provide an effective approach for students, but care needs to be taken to make all processes achievable for an outcome that requires only a very brief 16 bars or 25–30 seconds.

Two things need to be considered in designing this task:

* there is no mandate to use all three compositional devices (repetition, variation, contrast). Only one is required in each exercise

and

* the main aim of documentation is to provide evidence of links between the original work and the response. The necessity to annotate/document all element treatment and all device use, in addition to explaining technical/practical factors and influences will almost certainly overrun the 150 word limit for each exercise. All these aspects need to be covered in the Outcome as a whole, but a more streamlined annotation/documentation process for the actual task is encouraged.

Assessment

In general, 2-3 weeks were allocated to completion of the creative tasks, and students were required to complete this work in the second half of the Unit. This is appropriate as the study of the selected works is necessary before completion of this task.

Teachers generally relied on previously published criteria and marking schemes to assess this component of the Externally-assessed Task. Specifications and criteria for the 2017 task are available on the VCAA website and teachers are encouraged to refer to this information.

Unit 4

GENERAL COMMENTS

There was one major change in the structure of Unit 4 in the revised VCE Music Study Design. While the nature of the three outcomes remained very similar, only one music work is now specified for study in Outcome 2 (rather than two works in previous years).

All schools were aware of this change, and provided evidence of designing programs and assessment tasks associated with only one work in this outcome.

Some schools did, however, exhibit some confusion about the expected nature of tasks associated with Outcome 1 and Outcome 2.

As with Unit 3, it should be emphasised that assessment tasks in these two outcomes should be within a limited timeframe, and focus on the key knowledge and skills as outlined in the study design. Appropriate formats for assessment tasks are also provided.

Outcome 1

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to aurally analyse music and make critical responses to music.*

Tasks

As with Unit 3, students are required to provide aural analysis of, and written critical responses to, four excerpts of music in the following format: responses to structured questions.

It needs to be emphasised that written responses should be based on a purely aural analysis of music excerpts, and those excerpts should be previously unheard.

Music scores should not be used within this assessment task.

As with Unit 3, music extracts perhaps between 1’00” – 2’00” are generally more conducive to targeted questioning, and clearer assessment guides.

A diversity of music styles, instrumentation and time period is encouraged, as well as a range of question types. In general, this is occurring.

Using the general formatting and length of mirrored Section A of the sample examination is a good starting point for designing this assessment task.

Assessment

Most schools used the published performance descriptors to design their marking schemes. It is again important to realise that teachers should publish actual weightings and marking schemes for any task.

There was some confusion about the weighting of components, with an implication that all criteria were weighted equally.

Outcome 2

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to analyse and explain the use of the elements of music and compositional devices in music work, and discuss the style and the context from which the work emerged.*

Tasks

The *VCE Music Study Design* offers three formats by which students can be assessed for this outcome: a written report; written responses to structured questions, or a multimedia report. A combination of these formats is also acceptable.

In most cases teachers designed tasks with structured questions relating to the chosen work. In some instances, it appeared that extended periods of time over a number of weeks were dedicated to the tasks. Teachers are reminded again that assessment tasks should be discrete, and within a limited timeframe.

It is also important that teachers are very familiar with all the key knowledge and skills associated with the outcome to avoid designing tasks that are weighted to one area of analysis (e.g. treatment of the elements of music), but have little focus on another area (e.g. the use of repetition, variation and contrast).

All schools successfully studied a work (or a collection of small works) that were created after 1950.

Assessment

Most schools used the published performance descriptors to design their marking schemes. As with Outcome 1, it is important to realise that teachers should publish actual weightings and marking schemes for any task. There was some confusion about the weighting of components, with an implication that all criteria were weighted equally.

Outcome 3

*On completion of this unit the student should be able to create, document and evaluate an original work.*

Tasks

For Unit 4, students must submit a main work of 2–4 minutes in both audio and notated form. Documentation of the creative process of 900–1100 words must accompany the work.

This submission, along with that of Unit 3, makes up the Externally Assessed Task (EAT) which is assessed by a panel from the VCAA.

Schools successfully communicated EAT requirements to students. This was generally done by reproducing the 2017 VCAA EAT guidelines.

A number of schools included an ongoing requirement of a “composer’s diary” during the creative process. This is a worthwhile activity, and can provide useful evidence that can frame final documentation.

In general, the Unit 4 EAT can benefit from scaffolding the process. For example, teachers might include a specific timeline during which documents such as an original statement of intention, or structural plans are submitted. This can facilitate advice feedback and provide opportunities to check that all aspects of the assessment criteria will be covered successfully.

Such scaffolding will also provide evidence for ongoing authentication.

Assessment

While the EAT is assessed externally, teachers must also assess both Unit 3 and Unit 4 submissions, and include an individual EAT Marking Sheet along with each submission.

All schools used the provided EAT Marking Sheet.