2023 VCE Music Inquiry externally assessed task report

General comments

The externally assessed task (EAT) required the submission of a folio consisting of three music items and documentation related to the student’s chosen Area of Investigation.

For the three music items, students could choose to submit two performances and an original work or one performance and two original works. The original work could be a composition or an arrangement of an existing piece.

All parts of the submission needed to relate directly to the student’s chosen Area of Investigation. Because of this, the documentation component becomes an important feature as it sets up the Area of Investigation itself, provides evidence of understanding via analysis of two works, and points out how the practical music items connect to the music area under focus. Assessors use the documentation presented as a guide for assessing the other items in the folio.

The published performance descriptors, marking guide, study design and VCAA supporting materials assist students to make informed decisions about choosing their Area of Investigation focus, and indicate how practical items will be assessed.

It is worth restating the study design’s definition of an Area of Investigation:

Students choose their own Area of Investigation. This may be:

* a style
* a performer
* a creator
* a musical genre.

Students analyse at least two works from their chosen Area of Investigation. They explore the treatment of music elements, concepts and compositional devices in these works and discuss how this treatment influences their own musical output. Students reflect on their personal context/background as they uncover and describe connections between the works and their own music making.

Some students’ stated Area of Study proved very narrow and had a purely performance focus. This made it difficult for students to score high marks in relation to the analysis of two works that represented the main focus area.

Things like treatment of elements (e.g. types of harmony used, overall textural arrangements, use of rhythmic feel, form) across the two works were ignored by some students in favour of specific performance techniques (changes from head to chest voice, vibrato techniques in the left hand on guitar).

Performance-related elements are completely legitimate to analyse and connect works. However, the other, more composition-based elements need to be considered.

There was a very wide range of music styles covered across the cohort. From late 19th-century Romantic piano works through to funk-inspired groove-based pieces; from 1970s Australian rock to disco, thrash metal and indie pop. This range confirmed that the student-centred nature of the subject provides a senior music pathway for all types of musicians.

In most cases, files were presented in acceptable formats as outlined in published guides.

Performances needed to be videoed and ‘announced’ by a supervisor at the start. It is also a requirement that any school identification should be removed from the submission. In a small number of cases, this was not done. While the quality of recording is not officially taken into account for assessment, the more that an assessor can make out the assessed student’s performance within an ensemble, or over a backing track, the more chance there is that high marks can be awarded.

In some cases, it became obvious that care had not been taken in obtaining a clear and accurate mix of the student’s live performance and the accompanying sounds. At times it became difficult to assess a student’s accuracy or control of their instrument. There is no limit to the number of preparatory recordings or live takes that can be completed before a final live recording is submitted. It is worthwhile making sure that performances are clear, appropriate to the overall stylistic sound, and are indicative of the student’s true abilities.

Pieces should also be tailored to the student’s performance. In an ensemble, long solos by other instrumentalists who are not being assessed simply use up time. They do not add to the assessed student’s performance.

Students also needed to submit at least one original work, either as an audio file or as another video file. The original work could be a composition or an arrangement. Students were free to complete this part of their folio in a number of ways: a live recording, a multi-tracked recording, digitally generated sounds, or a combination of any of these.

There were some very high marks awarded in this area where students engaged with a wide variety of elements of music and concepts to create or arrange a work that was demonstrably related to their Area of Study.

However, in some cases, there seemed to be some misunderstanding of the nature of this music item. This generally occurred when students chose to arrange a piece, rather than write a completely original work. While some students did very well with arranging an existing piece so that it sat clearly within the Area of Investigation focus, some struggled with the notion of arrangement. Simply performing a piece at a slower tempo, or omitting one section from a written chart, does not really constitute a new arrangement. This affected the total number of marks that could be awarded.

While the first two published criteria are focused on the performance(s) and original work(s) themselves, Criterion 3 is based on how well these practical items indicate an understanding of the selected Area of Investigation. The published expected qualities for this criterion states that at the highest level, this music-making ‘demonstrates a range of clear and appropriate, observable links in both performing and creating/arranging that clearly illustrate direct influence of the investigated works as articulated in the documentation’.

This criterion brings together the documented analysis and information about the Area of Investigation and the practical music-making items. High marks were awarded where assessors could connect specific performance and compositional/arranging techniques to the analysis and information in the documentation provided. If these links were articulated clearly, the connections were even more apparent. It was difficult, however, to award high marks if there were few or no links to the music under investigation.

This reinforces the need for clear, succinct documentation. The documentation component should be aiming to provide information to ensure that assessors are clear about the Area of Investigation, can see in-depth analysis of music works, and are given clear indications of how the performance(s) and original work(s) are related to the focus area.

Specific information

The statistics in this report may be subject to rounding resulting in a total more or less than 100 per cent.

The criteria were equally weighted with a maximum mark of 25 for each.

Criterion 1: Performing

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| % | 0.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0 | 0 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 7 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | Average |
| 8 | 4 | 5 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 18.8 |

There were some exceptionally good performances from a number of students. These were across a broad range of music styles. The highest achievers demonstrated a high degree of technical ability and knowledge across their instrument (including voice). This was coupled with the control and clear intention necessary within the music that was the basis of their Area of Investigation.

This also meant that the interpretation of a range of elements and concepts were consistent with the music being performed: tempo, rhythmic phrasing and expressive dynamics in late Romantic works; rhythmic groove, crisp attack and accents in group funk; subtle vocal colouring and phrasing choices in contemporary song.

Some performances were strong, but students were limited by their choice of work. Works selected for performance should enable the performer to ‘interpret a wide range of elements of music and concepts’. Simply repeating four chords on rhythm guitar for an entire song without variation will generally not demonstrate a wide range of technical skills or interpretation choices.

Criterion 2: Original work

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| % | 3 | 0 | 0.4 | 0 | 0.4 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | Average |
| 5 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 11 | 18.3 |

There were some exceptional original pieces created. Because the work(s) could be submitted in a variety of formats, and were not limited to live performances, many students took the time to work within the digital realm to either layer live sounds, create their own sounds or make use of notation-based software to realise the final product.

A number of students chose to perform their own pieces and provided another video of their performance(s).

While the audio quality of original works is not a factor taken into account for assessment, submissions that had been carefully recorded or produced allow assessors the chance to hear works clearly. For the most part, audio quality of original works was higher than in recorded performances.

The highest marks were awarded to works where students had engaged with a wide range of elements and used them to create music that was clearly influenced by the Area of Investigation, and the works they had analysed.

In some cases, students who had not scored highly in Criterion 1 did much better in this criterion as it enables creative decisions to be made over time before final completion.

Students should also be made aware of the creative aspects involved in an arrangement of an existing work. If the work comes directly from their chosen Area of Investigation, there is less chance for creative engagement across a range of elements. Whereas taking a piece from another style/genre and re-arranging it to suit the Area of Investigation focus allows clear creative choices to be made and assessed.

Criterion 3: Music making

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| % | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 0 | 2 | 0.8 | 0.4 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 2 | 0.8 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 7 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | Average |
| 3 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 13 | 3 | 7 | 17.9 |

This criterion is based on how the student’s music making (Performing and Creating) demonstrates an understanding of the chosen Area of Investigation.

For the most part, if a student performed clearly within the music focus area, and also produced a work that could be linked directly to that same area, high marks could be awarded. Highest marks were given when there were a number of observable links to both the performance(s) and original work(s). These could be clearly assessed if they had been articulated in the accompanying documentation.

This criterion became problematic for assessors if the documentation was generalised or unclear. Links to appropriate performance and/or compositional techniques often needed to be searched for in order to award marks.

Assessors are looking for direct links to student performance(s) as well as to the original work(s). Clear links to both should be articulated in the documentation.

Criterion 4: Documentation

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Marks | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| % | 0.8 | 0 | 0.8 | 1 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 4 |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | Average |
| 7 | 7 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 17.0 |

Overall, this was the criterion that caused the most problems.

Documentation is important as assessors use it to frame their assessment of the practical items.

Along with pure text, students were free to use charts, diagrams, music examples or other non-text-based items throughout the documentation.

Some chose to use PowerPoint (or similar) to present their information. No marks were awarded for backgrounds, graphics or special transitions. Most often, the use of these tended to get in the way of information presentation. Multimedia can be used effectively; however, the intended outcome must always be kept in mind.

Problems were created if links to music examples were being used. If audio/video is used as part of the documentation, this should be embedded within the file. No external links should be used.

The EAT Specifications document set out clearly what was required:

* a description of the Area of Investigation (development of the proposal presented in Outcome 2, Unit 3)
* an analysis of two works selected from the Area of Investigation that explores the use of music elements, concepts and compositional devices
* a description of the connections between the works, and a discussion of their influence on the student’s own music making
* an explanation of how the student’s own performance(s) and original work(s) are linked to the Area of Investigation
* appropriate documentation of the original work(s).

Some of the highest marks were awarded to students who simply laid out their documentation to match the first four dot points given, and then provided another document for their original work. This ensured that all requirements were covered. Assessors could clearly see outlined intentions.

Area of Investigation description

Most students understood this requirement. However, some areas were extremely narrow, and very much performance focused. The Area of Investigation should be confined to a style, a performer, a creator or a musical genre.

A description of the Area of Study was often quite short. This can be appropriate if it succinctly sums up the main music focus and adds a small amount of context.

Students should also not waste words. The following are examples of succinct descriptions.

Area of Investigation: An investigation into solo acoustic guitar works and styles 1960-1980.

Many solo acoustic guitar players from the 1960s and 1970s looked to the heritage of the American South using blues-based techniques including percussive slapping and consistent rhythm provided by the thumb. This playing style was also adopted by the British folk scene and expanded to include more jazz-oriented sounds, as well as the combination of melody and harmony over a recurring alternating thumb pattern.

Area of Investigation: Contemporary soul fronted by female vocalists.

This investigation examines contemporary soul music. This style of music emphasises funk and establishing a groove, and this investigation looks at the importance of rhythm section and the inclusion of horn lines. These works come from artists that cross genres, taking influence from jazz, soul, blues, funk and RnB. The works feature a female vocalist.

Analysis of two works

Two works needed to be analysed. These works should have been representative of the music that made up the Area of Investigation. This analysis should have been done in terms of how the elements of music, concepts and compositional devices are treated within both works.

Teachers should be aware that these elements, concepts and devices form the basis of all analysis of music across the study design. Students need to be familiar with them and know how to investigate their use in analysing music.

At times there was evidence of only very brief internet-based research that simply included things like creation/release dates, band members and generalised comments.

The best analysis responses described the use of relevant elements and devices. They were purely analytical, and concentrated on how the music is put together – the types of harmony used, melodic shapes and phrases, textural arrangements. Further analysis covered specific performance aspects – a singer’s use of different vocal techniques, guitar playing techniques, idiomatic pianistic requirements.

Connections between the two works

If the two works represent examples of the Area of Investigation, then there should be direct connection between the two. This does not have to be ‘influence’ as in Unit 3. The works should share similar approaches.

Often the best responses either outlined and described 3-4 specific connections or provided clear-cut comparison information in table form.

The influence of these works on the student’s own music making was covered in different ways. Some offered a brief statement of how the works and the general music area had influenced their musical journey in terms of being introduced to the style/performer and where it had led. Others used this as a basis for explaining the links to the practical music items presented in the folio. Either was acceptable.

Students need to be careful about linking modern works via lyric content. While lyrics may affect musical choices, connections should be made solely through the musical approaches.

Links to performance(s) and original work(s)

The best responses outlined specifically how the student’s performance(s) and original work(s) linked directly to the Area of Investigation.

Again, this was vital in relation to Criterion 3. If the links are not articulated, then the assessment of ‘understanding’ the Area of Investigation via the practical items becomes problematic for assessors.

It is also worth stating that the links should be noted for both performance(s) and the original work(s). These links will be different.

Two questions should be posed:

* ‘How does my performance reflect the performance aspects of the Area of Investigation?’
* ‘How does my original work reflect the compositional/arrangement aspects of the Area of Investigation?’

If these two ideas are articulated clearly, it ensures that performance(s) and original work(s) fit securely into the Area of Investigation, and it allows assessors a simple path to assess understanding via the practical items (Criterion 3).

Original work documentation

A wide variety of strategies was employed here.

In general, there were three main styles:

* a notated full score
* notated excerpts along with a structural outline
* screen shots of a digital multi-track file with extended annotated explanations.

All of these fitted the EAT Specifications document that stated: ‘Information should be provided for the reader to understand the relationship between the documentation and the audio/sequenced recording. The reader should be able to follow the piece visually.’

It should be noted, however, that simply providing a screenshot of a computer screen without explanation could not be awarded marks.

Word count

The requirement to fit all documentation into 800 words proved very difficult for many students.

Assessors were instructed to be quite lenient if word count exceeded the limit by a small amount.

In some cases, where the word count was clearly excessive (some up to two or three times the limit), marks for this criterion were affected.

Teachers and students should refer to the examination specifications for the current year when preparing for the externally assessed task.