

# Undergraduate Performance Assessment: A Guide to Requirements and Processes

## Foreword:

The following guidelines provide staff and students with information on the structures, content and processes of performance assessment at the Conservatorium. The guidelines are informed by the University's assessment policy as laid out by the Academic Board (*Academic Board Resolutions: Assessment and Examination of Coursework, 8/12/2004*).

Good assessment practice requires efficient, transparent and fair process. Examiners must act with an appropriate regard for the ethical, technical and aesthetic issues involved in assessment. Students must note their own procedural responsibilities. The experience of both examiners and students is monitored to assist the Conservatorium in ongoing improvement to learning and teaching.

## 1. The Assessment Regime:

- Students proceed through a rigorous mix of teacher assessment, jury examinations and recitals.
- For undergraduates, the second year exam is a barrier examination. A student must pass this examination in order to be admitted to the upper classes in the performance program.
- The undergraduate assessment schedule is outlined below:

### Year 1

#### **First Semester:**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes 100% of the semester's assessment. A technical exam may be incorporated into the semester grade.
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#### **Second Semester**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes 50% of the semester's principal study assessment.
- Students undergo a 10-15 minute (instrument specific) jury examination. This examination comprises 50% of the semester's assessment.

### Year 2

#### **First Semester:**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes the semester's principal study assessment.

#### **Second Semester**

- Students receive a teacher mark. This mark constitutes 20% of the semester's assessment.
- Students undergo a 15-25 minute jury/qualifying exam assessed by a panel. B.Mus 25 minutes; BMusStudies and BMusMusEd 15 minutes OR a 40 minute public recital at junior level assessed by panel (DipMus only).
- This examination comprises 80% of the semester's assessment.

### Year 3

#### **First Semester:**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes the semester's assessment in principal study.

#### **Second Semester**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes 20% of the semester's principal study assessment.

- Students perform a 40 minute public recital at junior level assessed by a panel OR a 20 minute jury exam assessed by a panel (BMusStud & BMusMusEd only).
- This examination comprises 80% of the semester's assessment.

#### **Year 4**

##### **First Semester:**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes the semester's assessment in principal study.

##### **Second Semester**

- Students receive a teacher grade. This grade constitutes 20% of the semester's principal study assessment.
- Students perform a 50 minute public recital at senior level assessed by a panel

This is the standard model of progression in years 3 and 4. Students may vary the sequence provided that, across the two years, the student receives two semesters of assessment based on a teacher's mark only and two semesters in which a recital (supplemented by a 20% teacher mark) is the major assessment.

#### **Year 4 Honours**

##### **First Semester:**

- Students receive a teacher mark. This mark constitutes 20% of the semester's assessment in performance.
- Students complete Performance Project 1 (performance project 50% plus project essay and notes 30%). This mark constitutes 80% of the semester's assessment in performance.

##### **Second Semester**

- Students complete Performance Project 2 (recital plus program notes). This mark constitutes the semester's assessment in performance.

#### **Jazz Majors**

Because of the special structure of principal study in jazz, the assessment requirements are modified as follows:

Semesters 1, 3, 5, 7: Teacher Grade 50%; Improvisation Class 50%

Semesters 2, 4: Teacher Grade 20%; Improvisation Class 30%; Jury Exam 50%

Semesters 6, 8: Teacher Grade 20%; Improvisation Class 30%; Recital 50%

#### **The following conditions also apply:**

- *Juries and exam hearings are held when scheduled regardless of whether or not the student is prepared.*
- Illness, as confirmed by a note from a physician, is the only excuse for missing a jury or second year examination. An unexcused absence will result automatically in the mark of unsatisfactory for the student for the semester. A list of each performance faculty member's students scheduled for jury examinations or 2<sup>nd</sup> year exams will be distributed at mid-semester by the scheduling office. It should be checked by the Chair of each Unit and any problems reported to the student administration office and the Head of School within one week.
- Second year exams will occur on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of the final week of each semester;
- Jury examinations will occur on Thursday and Friday of the last week of the semester.
- An exact schedule of juries and examinations will be sent from the Timetable Coordinator and the scheduling office three weeks before the end of the semester.

The chair of each unit will do scheduling for the first year, second semester jury examinations.

## **2. Teacher Assessment:**

Unlike jury and recital exams (see below), this component of assessment involves a holistic overview of a student's work across the semester. Each performance unit provides published guidelines to assist teachers and students in this assessment and teachers are invited to contribute to these guidelines. Staff should bear in mind that this mark is a measure of student, not teacher, achievement during a particular semester. The mark does not assess future potential or any other aspect of a student's performance history. Teachers are encouraged to use this assessment to reflect dispassionately on their own pedagogy. To assist in refining this assessment *staff are also strongly encouraged to attend, as observers, a range of student examinations and recitals.*

## **3. Performance Examinations:**

### **i. Preparation:**

- It is the teacher's responsibility to mentor the students in order to assure that the recital can be completed and the recital performed within the deadlines established each semester by the Dean of the Sydney Conservatorium of Music.
- Preparation should normally be completed during the semesters even if the recital is to be given at a later time.
- Students wishing to have a recital over the summer break must have the prior approval of the relevant Chair of Unit and the Head of School.
- If using musicians other than a keyboard accompanist, the student must have the recommendation of his/her teacher.
- Students are urged to submit their requests for consideration well in advance of the proposed hearing date and before rehearsals begin since the Chair of Unit may require a change in the program or in personnel for the recital.

### **ii Scheduling:**

- After consultation with teaching staff, third and fourth year students may elect to schedule recitals from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> week of semester.
- In the last four weeks of semester priority will be given to 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year recitals and Honours 7 recitals as well as written coursework and exams.
- Students choose their recital dates with Faculty mentoring.
- Three weeks prior to the recital date, a form with repertoire, dates of composers, timings and all instrumental, electronic and/or AV needs must be signed by the student's teacher, staff accompanist (if required) and Chair of the Unit and taken to the Office of Scheduling to confirm the reservation of a recital date. (Jodie Lancashire at [jlancashire@ usyd.edu.au](mailto:jlancashire@usyd.edu.au))

### **iii. Exam Structure for BMus Performance Principal Study and Diploma of Music**

<b>Principal Study Assessment: BMus, BMus Studies, BMus MusEd, Dip Mus</b>	
Principal Study 1	Teacher Grade 100 %
Principal Study 2	Jury exam assessed by Panel of 10 – 15 mins (instrument specific) Teacher Grade 50%. Panel Grade 50%.
Principal Study 3	Teacher Grade 100 %
Principal Study 4	Jury/qualifying exam assessed by panel 15-25 minutes BMus 25 mins; BMusStud & BMusEd 15 mins OR public recital at junior level assessed by panel 40 minutes (DipMus only) Teacher Grade 20%, Panel 80%.
Principal Study 5	Teacher Grade 100 %

Principal Study 6	Public recital at junior level assessed by panel 40 minutes OR jury exam assessed by panel 20 minutes (BMusStud & BMus MusEd only) Teacher Grade 20%. Panel Grade 80%.
Principal Study 7	Teacher Grade 100%
Principal Study 8	Public recital at senior level assessed by panel 50 mins; Teacher Grade 20%; panel grade 80%.
Principal Study Honours 7	Performance Project 1 (usually recital 40-45 minutes assessed by panel 50% plus project notes/essay and program notes assessed by panel 30%) Teacher Grade 20%; Panel Grade 80%
Principal Study Honours 8	Performance Project 2: recital 45-50 minutes assessed by Panel plus researched program notes Program notes 10%; Panel Grade 90%

#### Principal Study (Advanced)

**NB: The units below come into effect in 2008, subject to Academic Board approval.**

<b>Principal Study (Adv) Classes: (BMus, Dip Mus)</b>	Unit-specific performance class/week and/or unit-specific masterclasses and/or concerts
<b>Assessment:</b> Principal Study Adv 3	Practice journal, performance journal including proposal for final DipMus recital/jury exam; presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.
Principal Study Adv 4	Practice journal, performance journal, program notes for final recital; presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.
Principal Study Adv 5	Practice journal, performance journal including proposal for junior level recital/jury exam; presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.
<b>Assessment:</b> Principal Study Adv 6	Practice journal; performance journal; program notes; presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.
<b>Assessment:</b> Principal Study Adv 7	Practice journal, performance journal including proposal for senior level recital; presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.
<b>Assessment:</b> Principal Study Adv 8	Practice journal; performance journal; program notes, presentations, performances and/or other participation in unit classes as required, 100%.

#### iv. Repertoire Requirements:

For each Conservatorium award, each Chair of Unit in Performance Studies will publish a table to indicate:

- the level of repertoire difficulty
- the degree of repertoire specialisation permitted
- the duration of the examination
- whether memory is required
- whether program notes are required

Students should consult their teacher or chair of Unit for further information.

#### **v. The Provision of Scores to Examiners:**

Students will provide 5 copies of a list of all repertoire studied during the year for first and second year exams, with an asterisk (\*) to indicate repertoire selected for the jury and/or exam. The list should be signed by the student's teacher.

It is recommended that (where appropriate) students provide examiners with *one* copy of the score to be used during the examination.

#### **vi. Marking Guidelines for Performance Examinations:**

The following list constitutes the performance exam criteria. Students should prepare their performances with these criteria firmly in mind. The Conservatorium's generic performance grade descriptors (see below) provide a useful supplement to these criteria.

##### **Criteria:**

- 1 The performance, as a whole, displayed instrumental or vocal control appropriate to the level of examination.
- 2 The performance was accurate with respect to rhythm, pitch, articulation and dynamic.
- 3 The performance (where appropriate) was a faithful reading and/or memorisation of the composer's text.
- 4 The performance displayed a musically effective production, projection and variation of tone.
- 5 The candidate communicated well with other performers, demonstrating good ensemble and listening skills and leadership where appropriate.
- 6 The performer communicated an understanding of expressive, stylistic, musical and structural issues.
- 7 The performance displayed musical creativity, artistic individuality and effective audience communication.

##### **Performance Grade Descriptors:**

###### **Fail: (Below 50%)** *Work not of acceptable standard.*

Unsatisfactory technical achievement and/or unsatisfactory level of musical and artistic engagement. Limitations may be of such a scale and consistency as to call into question the student's future direction in the programme.

###### **Pass: (50-64)** *Work of acceptable standard.*

Satisfactory level of preparation and musical engagement. Some inconsistencies in musicianship, style and/or technique. Musical imagination and overall performance sense developing though some insecurity in this area.

###### **Credit: (65-74)** *Highly competent work demonstrating potential for higher study.*

Confident technique with evidence of solid musicality and some stylistic achievement. Occasional lapses indicative of unresolved technical, artistic and/or stylistic issues. Projects potential for further development.

###### **Distinction: (75-84)** *Work of superior standard.*

Excellent technical, musical and stylistic achievement. Consistently coherent and expressive performance. Some personal interpretation of the work suggesting soloist potential.

###### **High Distinction: (85-100)** *Work of exceptional standard.*

Comprehensive and outstanding technical control and musical integrity in relation to developmental expectations. Musical individuality consistently projected to create a persuasive personal representation of the work. Performance flair indicative of soloist standard. A mark of 95 or above indicates extraordinary technical virtuosity and musical artistry.

**vii. Membership of Examination and Recital Panels:**

- The first year jury will consist of a minimum of 2 members of the contracted staff, including an instrumental specialist.
- Panels for second year exams will consist of a minimum of three contracted staff drawn from within the relevant performance unit.
- For third and fourth year recitals, a panel will consist of 3 staff members including an expert in the specific instrumental area.
- The student's teacher may be on the panel as the expert member. In such cases the teacher will be present *ex officio* (without voting rights) and an additional staff member will be added to the panel as the third voting member.
- In all panels, members will be drawn, as much as possible, from within the examinee's performance unit.

**viii. Conduct during Performance Examinations:**

- During the examination panel members are expected to take notes based on the stated criteria.
- It is important that panel members hear all exams in silence. Audible asides, the exchange of comments between examiners and other acoustic gestures are extremely disconcerting for students and compromise the equity of the examination process.

**ix. Marking Procedures:**

- One member of each panel should be nominated as Chair. It is the Chair's responsibility to take notes and ensure that correct process is observed.
- Students should be marked *solely* on their performance during the examination. Prior knowledge of the student or information relating to a student's external circumstances should not be introduced. It is the performance on the day not the person or their past record that is the subject of assessment.
- At the conclusion of the examination, each panel member should privately record a mark on a piece of paper. This should take place *before* any consultation with other examiners. At this stage, the mark serves only to indicate a tentative or approximate result and grade.
- If the student's teacher is present as the expert examiner, they then offer their comment on the performance only. When this comment is complete the teacher withdraws from the proceedings and leaves the room.
- Discussion can now occur. At this stage, any divergences between examiners should be resolved. Once a mark and grade is agreed upon, examiners compile a final written report, including the assessed mark and grade.
- Panel members and examiners should submit results in a timely fashion. For any queries relating to grading procedures or submission timelines, members of Faculty should contact the Head of School or the Student Administration Manager.
- Reports and marks are to remain *strictly confidential* until after the publication of results. All students should then be provided with a copy of their examination reports. This includes the report of any dissenting examiner.

**x. Procedures for Resolving Conflict:**

- Should a serious conflict occur in relation to the final examination mark, the opinion of the majority of examiners will prevail. The divergent opinion should be acknowledged in a separate report.
- In the case of divergence in a two member jury, the midway point between the two assessments will constitute the final mark.

#### **xi. The Report:**

- Each panel should complete the standard report form in use within the particular unit of study.
- Reports should address the published marking criteria and any published special requirements of individual units. Reports should comply with general University expectations regarding appropriate feedback to students on assessment (see Foreword to this document). Good practice includes constructive attention to deficiencies and strengths.
- Deficiencies, in particular, should be clarified so that the report constructively contributes to remediation and the student's ongoing professional development. Examiners should ensure that clear explanations are given for low marks.
- The report should be signed by each member of the panel, including any dissenting examiner.

#### **4. Accountability:**

Staff are accountable for all grading decisions. Marks are monitored within and between units and teachers must be prepared to justify any substantial deviation from the norm. Conservatorium performance assessment processes are also benchmarked against comparable national and international music schools.

#### **5. Penalties:**

Penalties may be applied if performances fall short of or exceed the allowed time limit. Changes in program may also incur a penalty.

#### **6. Failure of Performance Examination:**

In the event of failure performance majors may redo the Unit of Study. In this circumstance, the student must prepare a different repertoire for examination. Subject to University 'Show Cause' provisions, the student may, alternatively, redo the course or transfer to minor performance study.

#### **7. Appeals:**

Under University policy students have right to appeal on the basis of procedural fairness or final result. Appeals should follow the processes laid out by the Academic Board of the University of Sydney. For further information consult the section titled '(Grievances) appeals' in the Conservatorium Handbook.