AiM
ASSESSMENT IN MUSIC

Assessment in Music: Consensus moderation of claims for learning outcomes in music courses.

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Introduction

The *Assessment in Music* project (AiM) is concerned with academic standards as they are applied in higher education music institutions across Australia. It focuses on learning outcomes at a program level, drawing on the experiences of staff and students across a range of degree programs and musical sub-disciplines (jazz, musical theatre, music technology, popular and classical music) for the purposes of identifying core, best-practice learning transactions and assessment processes. Because no program-level assessment is conducted, an understanding of outcomes at the program level is developed through analysis of the assessments associated with each of the core courses within a program, and the accumulated assessments are regarded as a proxy for program-level assessment.

The project's main research question is "to what degree are assessment standards and practices in higher music education in Australia aligned with the Threshold Learning Outcome Statements developed for the Creative and Performing Arts?" Concurrent with renewed interest in consensus moderation as a means of ensuring the validity of assessment approaches, shortcomings have been identified in the assessment of a broader suite of skills development for careers in the performing arts. Royce Sadler identifies consensus moderation as "the processes used to reach a general agreement about what quality assessment and its outcomes 'looks like'; it ensures that the judgments of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker" (Shapland et al., 2011). The primary purpose of consensus moderation in assessment is "to ensure appropriate and consistent quality of assessment and its outcomes" (ibid.). The approaches and strategies in this project are intended to provide an evidence base for the ongoing development of more comprehensive assessment practices in music and other creative arts disciplines. This will be achieved with particular regard to the degree to which assessment and enunciated intended learning outcomes are constructively aligned, as described by Biggs (1999, 2008).

The project focuses on approaches to summative assessment of learning outcomes, particularly as they relate to the assessment of graduate attributes and national Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). The project's main goals are:

- To evaluate the alignment between assessment, curriculum structure and pedagogical practices and employ a consensus moderation methodology to assure valid and reliable assessment of standards of student achievement of graduate outcomes.
- To provide an analysis and critical review of approaches and methods of standardised assessment in music and their impact on student learning.
- To report on the range of approaches used to collect and store assessment information about student learning both in Australia and internationally, and how assessment is used to inform decisions about how to improve learning.
- To focus on the Australian experience in higher education and to contextualise this internationally through the involvement of European colleagues in the reference group who will be invited to provide feedback on the project throughout.
- To provide exemplars of assessment practices in music that connect via graduate attributes to learning outcome statements for the creative and performing arts.

The ALTC Creative and Performing Arts TLOs are necessarily non-specific because the Creative and Performing Arts include creative writing, dance, screen and media, drama and performance and visual arts as well as music and sound. Therefore some degree of contextualisation in the discipline of music is needed as the first step in developing a shared understanding of standards of achievement of the Creative and Performing Arts TLOs. Arriving at a consensus as to how existing assessment tasks in music relate to TLOs for the broader Creative and Performing Arts sector should enable the subsequent development of consensus about how well those tasks measure levels of achievement of those TLOs. Other project goals include the creation of a repository for assessment items and processes and student responses to assessment tasks in music that will inform decisions about music learning and teaching at both national and international levels. The project team encourages participants to access and share course profiles or descriptions, banks of assessment tasks, criteria and rubrics, along with sample student responses and examiner networks via the project website: http://assessmentinmusic.com.au/

Results from the initial data collection indicate a deviation from anticipated results. While the project team anticipated that consensus moderation would lead to a reduction in claims for relationships between assessment items, TLOs and graduate attributes, this was not the case, with several courses showing increases in such claims. The results of focus group sessions have shed some light on the ways in which the TLOs relate to assessment practices; however, it is envisaged that further dialogue with course coordinators and lecturers will assist in understanding the reasons for these unexpected findings.

Context

As traditional Conservatoire teaching takes place in isolation, often without external validation, assessment practices have been largely at the discretion of individual institutions. This is particularly true for the assessment of musical performance. The recent work of Heather Monkhouse (2007) has provided a comprehensive audit of assessment practices in Bachelor Degrees in music in Australia. Her study reports, not surprisingly, that success measures tend to emphasise performance ability. While this may have been acceptable in the past when the development of this relatively narrow set of skills was the accepted goal of higher education in music, the desired outcomes for students now include broader skills development for sustainable careers in the arts, as represented in the national TLOs for the Creative and Performing Arts sector.

The host institution has recently undertaken a thorough review of its Bachelor of Music (see Carey & Lebler, 2012) and has also engaged in a number of previous projects concerning peer and ensemble assessment within in its programs (see for example Lebler, 2008a; Harrison, Lebler, Carey, Hitchcock, & O'Bryan, 2012). While ensemble and solo performance have constituted a major component of assessment tasks in music courses, the use of other forms of assessment such as peer, self and/or group assessment have been restricted in their application in the Australian context. It is not clear how existing assessment practices might be constructively aligned with TLOs as recommended for the Creative and Performing Arts.

Methodology

Drawing on the work of Sadler (2007, 2009, 2011), the host institution, Griffith University has made accountability in teaching and learning outcomes a priority as part of its university-wide focus on assessment, It employs consensus moderation to ensure consistency of marking, using exemplars of previous student responses to the same or similar tasks to develop shared understandings of the standards to be applied in the assessment of student achievement. In this process, academics consider a range of student responses to a particular assessment task and share their views on the standard of achievement demonstrated by these responses. This produces a common understanding of what standards are represented by the grades and marks awarded in the assessment process. This approach has been adopted at the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University (QCGU) as part of a Griffith University move towards consensus moderation, to assure standards of student achievement within and between areas of study.

Elements of the consensus moderation approach have been adopted for the AiM project, and have been used in reviewing the alignment between learning and assessment and national TLOs in tertiary music programs. Project team members have worked independently, then discussed their views to reach consensus on initial findings. It was anticipated by the team that this methodology would also assure consistency of interpretation of the TLOs in the specific context of music.

In part, this project will evaluate the effectiveness of this approach, specifically to ensuring rigor within music assessment practices. A similar process will be undertaken at the partner institutions as a means of working towards the goal of inter-institutional consensus on standards of student achievement. This will provide a means of ensuring comparability of the grades used to measure student achievement, both within and between courses and programs of study, and also between the partner institutions, providing a model for moving towards sector-wide consensus on such matters in a particular domain.

Summary of relevant literature

Inquiry into the quality and effectiveness of assessment practices is presently a focus for many Australian tertiary institutions, and several OLT research projects. Current research demonstrates that what and how we choose to assess can have significant consequences for students' learning and their academic futures. Design, implementation and revision of effective assessment which is "fair, appropriate, valid, reliable, transparent, authentic, manageable and engaging" (Shapland et al., 2011) is essential to ensure consistency. Providing students with emic knowledge of the assessment process and developing the ability to monitor the quality of their own work have been identified as critical graduate attributes.

Preceding data collection, the AiM project team reviewed current research into assessment practices in Australia. Prominent themes include peer- and self-assessment, criteria-based assessment, alternative assessment practices, the role of tacit and prior knowledge in assessment, sustainable assessment, authentic assessment, formative feedback, the fidelity of assessment practices, the assessment of individuals in group projects, and student assessment of teaching. A summary of relevant literature covering a wide range of disciplines with particular attention being directed to assessment in music can be found on the AiM website.

Of particular relevance to the project are documents, policies and studies by the host institution and national regulatory bodies, as well as other OLT projects which address the relationship between learning, teaching, assessment and learning outcomes. The most significant document is the *Creative and Performing Arts. Learning and Teaching Academic Standards Statement* (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2010). In March, 2010, a Discipline Reference Group was formed to draft Creative and Performing Arts Learning Outcome Statements. These statements represent national standards for graduates in Bachelor and coursework Master degrees in the visual and performing arts, and they are likely to be important in the context of Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency accreditation processes. Important considerations for the development of these academic standards are contained in similar documents produced by tertiary bodies in Europe, the UK and North America, with particular attention being given to the 'Dublin descriptors' as they have been interpreted in the 'European Tuning project 3'. The statements are few in number to allow higher education providers to identify other standards which are specific to their own discipline offerings. The UK benchmark statements in the Creative and Performing Arts have been valuable guiding examples of such advanced standards.

Detailing the general attributes of graduates in the Creative and Performing Arts, this document states that graduates will typically be able to demonstrate

> a range of skills and knowledge relating to the discipline of their choice and will have the capacity to think creatively, critically and reflectively. They will be able to communicate effectively in a range of modes and contexts and will have the capacity to produce works, artefacts and forms of creative expression for public display. They will be able to work independently and to collaborate with others and can be expected to have a sound knowledge of national and international developments in their discipline. (Australian Learning and Teaching Council 2010, p. 11)

The six threshold learning outcomes upon completion of a bachelor degree in Creative and Performing Arts include the ability to:

1. Demonstrate skills and knowledge of the practices, languages, forms, materials, technologies and techniques in the Creative and Performing Arts discipline.
2. Develop, research and evaluate ideas, concepts and processes through creative, critical and reflective thinking and practice.
3. Apply relevant skills and knowledge to produce and realise works, artefacts and forms of creative expression.
4. Interpret, communicate and present ideas, problems and arguments in modes suited to a range of audiences.
5. Work independently and collaboratively in the Creative and Performing Arts Discipline in response to project demands.
6. Recognise and reflect on social, cultural and ethical issues, and apply local and international perspectives to practice in the Creative and Performing Arts Discipline.

The Office of Teaching and Learning has funded several projects which address the relationship between assessment, graduate attributes and learning outcomes. These also constitute important references for the AiM project. The ultimate goal of these projects is to examine ways of providing more effective assessment and improving the quality of assessment judgments in relation to learning outcomes and graduate attributes.

The *Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes (AAGLO)* project (Barrie, Crisp, Hughes, & Bennison, 2012) has been undertaken by The University of Sydney, The University of Queensland and RMIT and centres on the "shared need for student assessment in universities to deliver convincing evidence to relevant stakeholder groups of achievement of stated learning outcomes for graduates" (Barrie et al., 2012). A key objective of the project is to raise awareness and to organise active participation by establishing productive dialogue among Australian and international universities. The project aims to ultimately identify assessment tasks in a range of disciplines that "generate convincing evidence of achievement of graduate learning outcomes" (Barrie et al., 2012). This objective aligns with one of the major goals of the AiM project, which is to identify a set of assessment tasks for music which best correlate with the CAPA TLOS.

The *National Graduate Attributes* project (Barrie, Hughes, Smith, & Thompson, 2007) investigates institutional strategies and policy issues related to embedding and assessing graduate attributes. The study aims to explore curriculum renewal strategies to achieve graduate attributes in Australian universities and builds on previous research into successful embedding of graduate attributes in curriculum and assessment.

The Hunters & Gatherers project (Lawson et al., 2011) is a multi-institutional project including the University of Technology Sydney, Queensland University of Technology, RMIT University, Bond University and the University of Southern Queensland. The aim of the project is to review current practice in Assurance of Learning and to make recommendations on future practice. This will be achieved by the mapping of learning objectives that relate to graduate attributes across units of study in a program. The project team will conduct "an audit across disciplines subject to accreditation in Australian universities to evaluate current methods of mapping graduate attributes and their impact on the curriculum and also to review the systems used to collect and store data" (Lawson et al., 2011). This information will be critically analysed to investigate the range of approaches for mapping and collecting assurance of learning data adopted by Australian universities and to develop strategies on curriculum mapping and data collection.

As the association between assessment tasks and graduate attributes is key to the mapping process, the findings of these two projects is expected to provide much important data to inform the process of the AiM study. Internationally, the Association of European Conservatoires Polifonia Working Group on Assessment & Standards is undertaking similar work in the European context, and collaborative relationships have been established through the Innovative Conservatoire project with the Polifonia project and a number of other European institutions interested in assessment and standards (see http://www.innovativeconservatoire.com).

At the host institution, attention has been given to designing tasks which assist students to independently evaluate their own work and develop skills to continue to assess the effectiveness of their work after they graduate. Several key articles in the AiM summary stress the importance of such skills and knowledge as essential graduate attributes. Lebler (2008a) recommends that assessment processes "reflect the kinds of evaluations we would like our students to be able to employ after graduation" (p. 2). Spiller (2011) lists a variety of reasons to engage in self-assessment, including that it "encourages a focus on process" and helps students "deepen their understanding of what constitutes quality outcomes in a specified area" (p. 3).

In assisting students to be inducted into the assessment culture, Bloxham and West (2004) address the concept of tacit knowledge as a crucial part of assessment. They suggest that written criteria and grade descriptors alone are not sufficient to initiate students into the assessment culture of their disciplines, as such tacit knowledge or connoisseurship involves years of "observation, imitation, dialogue and practice" (Rust, O'Donovan & Price, 2005, p. 152). Therefore, educators must commit to sharing their knowledge and experience in order for students to fully make sense of the evaluation of their work.

The research of Rust et al. (2005) shows that students will not achieve a meaningful understanding of assessment unless they actively engage with the assessment criteria in some way, such as taking part in marking exercises and moderation. They assert that assessment should be an integrated aspect of learning: "Acquiring knowledge and understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards needs the same kind of active engagement and participation as learning about anything else" (p. 237). Ultimately, suggests Sadler (2010), the crucial test of a student's understanding of abstract criteria is not whether they can define it formally, it is whether they can use the criteria to explain judgments about their own work and to make assessments about quality in the work of others.

Boud (2010) also emphasises the importance of helping students improve and certify their learning, as well as equipping students for the learning and assessing they will need to do after completing their course and the challenges they will face after graduation. The *Assessment Futures* (Boud 2010) project website provides "a rich source of information and inspiration for those setting, designing or redesigning, assessment tasks" to facilitate change in the emphasis on assessment of current learning to assessment that values "self-directed, self-managed and self-evaluated learners". Boud introduces the concept of sustainable assessment (2000), or assessment which builds skills for future learning, advocating that assessment move from being the exclusive responsibility of teachers to being an important part of students preparing themselves for their own future learning needs. By extension, Boud claims that for students to become effective assessors of their own and others works, the development of sustainable assessment skills should become "an explicit learning outcome" (2000, p. 10).

Anticipated outcomes

It is anticipated that the approach and outcomes of the AiM project will have significant applications in other programs within the host institution, particularly in the Queensland College of Art and other elements of Griffith University that include the Creative and Performing Arts. Outcomes of the project will also have particular relevance for the University of Newcastle and the University of Tasmania which are both implementing reformed Bachelor of Music programs. The inclusion of National Council of Tertiary Music Schools (NACTMUS) members as part of the project's reference group will ensure the 23 Australian Universities who are NACTMUS members will be familiar with the project and its outcomes.

Description of process to date and initial results

The process of collecting data is three-fold and involves the mapping of assessment tasks and refinement of assessment strategies for all undergraduate courses at QCGU through the use of consensus moderation.

Stages one and two have been completed by the project team. There were significant challenges in mapping the 350 core undergraduate assessment items at the host institution and ensuring that all team members had a shared understanding of the aims and details of the process. The mapping of assessment items was both complex, and time consuming. However weekly meetings allowed the team to touch base on their progress, accept responsibility for particular tasks and refine strategies for the collection of data.

In the first stage of the process, the team collated the learning objectives for each undergraduate assessment item and mapped the relationship between these assessment tasks and the nineteen Griffith University Graduate Attributes (GGAs). These were further aligned with the Creative and Performing Arts Threshold Learning Outcomes. The initial analysis indicated that all Griffith Graduate Attributes (and by extension, CAPA TLOs) were assessed repeatedly. Given the extensive research already undertaken into the Bachelor of Popular Music (BPM) (For example, see Carey & Lebler, 2012; Lebler, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2012; Lebler, Burt-Perkins, & Carey, 2009) this instance is used as an example in this report, but similar findings apply to the other study areas. In the BPM program, looking at data from semester 2 in 2011 and semester 2 in 2012, the least frequently assessed Griffith Graduate Attribute was E1, *Awareness of and respect for the values and knowledges of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Peoples* which was assessed twice in the 2012 course profiles. On average, Griffith Graduate Attributes were each assessed more than 20 times in semester 2 2011 in the 34 assessment activities analysed, and more than 18 times in semester 2 2012 over 23 assessment items. This translates to the Threshold Learning Outcomes in the Creative and Performing Arts being assessed between 28 and 34 times across the duration of the degree program. If the claims in course profiles are valid, then the required learning outcomes are being thoroughly assessed in this program. These Threshold Learning Outcomes in the Creative and Performing Arts data are represented in Figures 1 and the change from 2011 to 2012 is represented in Figure 2.

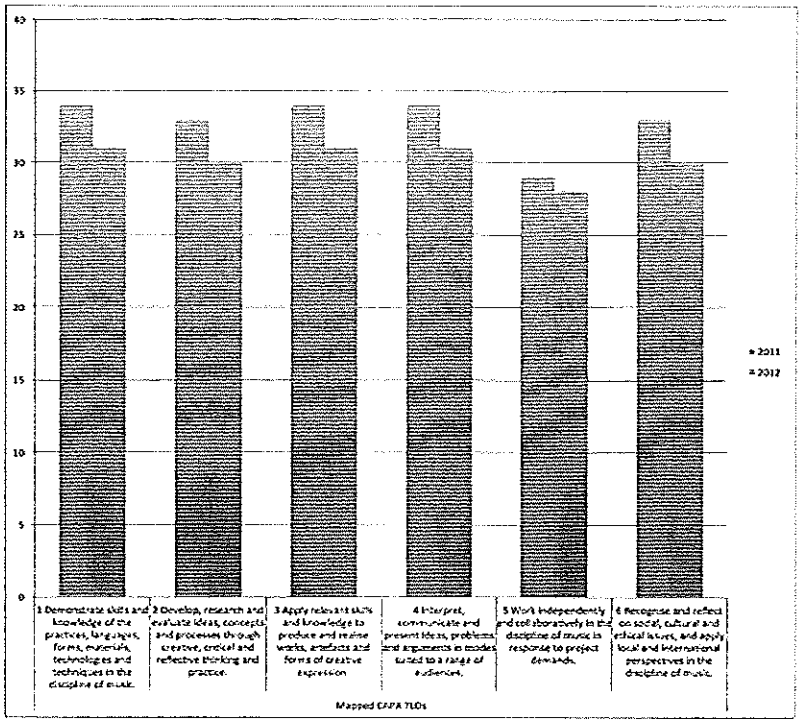

Figure 1 BPM CAPA TLO assessment

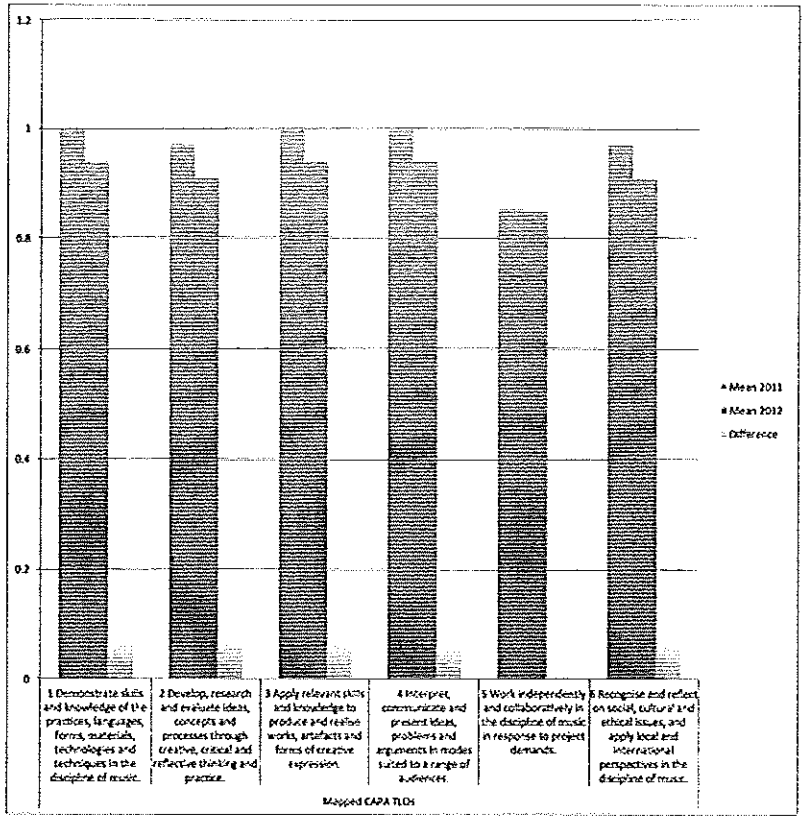

Figure 2 Changes in mean claims for BPM CAPA TLO per assessment item

The test applied in consideration of the validity of a claim that a particular Griffith Graduate Attribute was being assessed by a particular assessment item was that all students achieving a pass mark for that assessment item *would* have demonstrated that attribute, not that they *might* possibly have demonstrated that attribute. An analysis of the initial mapping of assessment items revealed that existing claims for alignment seemed excessive. Particularly noticeable were the large number of courses that claimed to be assessing for capacity to *recognize, reflect and engage critically on social, cultural and ethical issues, and apply local and international perspectives.*

As a result, a form of consensus moderation was requested whereby QCGU staff members responsible for the design of course profiles consulted with another academic to ensure they were in consensus as to the claims made for the assessment of Griffith Graduate Attributes and where necessary, modify selected QCGU assessment practices to improve alignment. A second mapping was then conducted. Assessment tasks were further categorised to align with the new Griffith Assessment type titles.

The results of the second mapping have revealed unexpected outcomes regarding the effects of consensus moderation. The team's hypothesis was that consensus moderation regarding claims in course profiles for relationships between assessment items and graduate attributes would reduce as a result of consensus moderation processes; this proved not to be supported by the data. This has prompted the team to look more deeply at the data to identify particular courses which have increased the number of assessment items, and the analysis of these data is currently underway.

In the third stage the team will engage in a more detailed and in-depth investigation into the research data. This will require the team to engage with teaching staff in order to identify the reasons why there has been some increase in the number of assessment items and learning outcomes in certain courses. The team will conduct workshops on the writing of learning outcomes that will reflect current Australian Qualifications Framework levels of learning statements and extend the frame of reference to Griffith Graduate Attributes. To measure the effect of this intervention, comparisons will then be made between courses convened by participants before and after this activity and those convened by non-participants.

In order to identify current levels of awareness of and perceptions about assessment, the team has engaged with teachers at the host institution to discuss the perceived relationship and relevance of the six CAPA TLOs to current assessment practices. All interviewees agreed that current methods of assessment successfully addressed the CAPA TLOs in an ongoing, developmental manner. While assessment items generally do not correlate directly to these individual outcomes, it is assumed that all are covered in a general sense. During discussions teachers displayed some concern about appropriately interpreting the level to which students could be seen to achieve - to what degree should students "demonstrate skills"? - and questioned if the CAPA TLOS represented a professional industry standard. If so, questions were raised about how best to consider the assessment of students who come to degree courses after many years performing as professionals, as opposed to students with a shallow background in the arts.

Tacit individual criteria and standards were seen to play a central part in the assessment process. While external criteria were very important, teachers often made judgments according to a students' perceived ability and according to each student's unique combination of experience and prior training. The role of holistic assessment initiated much animated discussion. While teachers understood the importance of each of the six TLOs, they acknowledged that they did not necessarily amount to an effective judgement of a whole performance. Assessing with a Gestalt frame of reference using tacit criteria was a prominent theme. In general, given adherence to both external and internal subjective criteria, interviewees agreed that gross disagreement in panel assessment almost never occurred, and that when significant differences were noted, agreement was always reached through consensus. Further focus group sessions with teachers and students at the host institution are planned for early 2013.

Future directions

The team will engage in a more detailed and in-depth investigation into the data as the third phase. This will require the team to engage with teaching staff in order to identify why there has been some increase in the number of assessment items and learning outcomes in certain courses. The team will conduct workshops on writing learning outcomes that will reflect current Australian Qualifications Framework learning statements and extend the frame of reference to Griffith Graduate Attributes. To measure the effect of this intervention, comparisons will then be made between courses convened by participants before and after this activity and those convened by non-participants.

European colleagues have expressed interest in the AiM project because the need to articulate assessment standards is common in the European context. Indeed, the Association of European Conservatoires Polifonia Working Group on Assessment and Standards are engaged in an equivalent project and the maintenance of the closest possible relationships between these projects will have mutual benefit.

Dissemination

Dissemination activities for the AiM project have to date been well received and provided the team with valuable feedback on the project. Opportunities to apply the principles from the project to similar local and international projects have also presented themselves. Presentations have taken place at *The Creative Arts Learning and Teaching Network Conference*, Sydney (April, 2012), *ISME World Conference*, Thessaloniki (July, 2012), Joint meeting of *CALTN and DASSH Associate Deans* (September, 2012), *Innovative Conservatoires Symposium*, Kallio-Kuninkala, Finland (October, 2012). Further dissemination will take place at the Performance Studies Network Conference, Cambridge in April, 2013.

Conclusions

The AiM project is concerned with academic standards in higher education music institutions for the purposes of identifying core, best-practice learning transactions and assessment processes. The central tenet of this paper deals with the degree to which assessment standards and practices in higher music education in Australia are aligned with the Creative and Performing Arts Threshold Learning Outcome statements. At this point of the project, the process has revealed a nuanced picture of the assessment practices at course level and, consequently at program level. It was envisaged that the consensus moderation process would reduce claims in course profiles for relationships between assessment items and graduate attributes. This was not always the case and an analysis of particular courses which have increased the number of assessment items may reveal the causes for this unanticipated anomaly. While this could be perceived as a methodological shortcoming, the overall process has enhanced awareness within the project team at QCGU and, through the dissemination undertaken to date, in national and international fora. The process used by the team has always been a core objective, particularly in the light of the desire for the replication of the project in other CAPA disciplines. A key conclusion therefore lies in the description of the methods and processes of the AiM project for possible use in other related contexts. The team is confident that the further investigations undertaken in phase three, the workshops and international synergies will result in enhanced assessment practices in music, and across the sector.

To assist in achieving this aim, the project team welcomes contributions via the project web site: http://assessmentinmusic.com.au/contribute/ In particular, the team encourages the sharing of course profiles, banks of assessment tasks, criteria and rubrics, sample student responses and examiner networks.

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