



## Student Transitions: Example of transitions practice

**Title:** Bridging from HND to Degree year 3; Popular Music

**Transition(s) the practice supports:** HND – degree transition in music

**Abstract:** This project was initiated to address issues with students articulating from HND music to the third year of the BA (Hons) Popular Music Performance programme at Perth College UHI. These issues were around music literacy and analysis, and academic skills.

### **Description:**

Students articulating from the 'home' HND and from other Scottish colleges were presenting with widely differing levels of skills and knowledge in the detailed analysis and understanding of musical material and with sometimes little or no background in reading and understanding key theories and critical material.

This deficit was highly variable and there was a need to establish a baseline level of understanding which would enable the students to more readily achieve the learning outcomes at degree level.

To address the deficit an SQA HN unit called Music History and Analysis: Access to degree was developed. This was, through the auspices of the HN Qualifications Support Group, then adopted as an optional unit in the second year of the HND Music framework.

The unit has two learning outcomes:

*On completion of the Unit the candidate should be able to:*

- 1. Demonstrate understanding of the cultural and social context of music*
- 2. Demonstrate understanding of, and aptitude with, musical and technical aspects of a specific genre of music*

*An important aspect of the unit are the assessment tasks, which are mandatory and were designed to cover a wide range of musical skills and knowledge which were absent from the HND music programme as developed some years earlier.*

## **Outcome 1**

### **Evidence requirements**

*Candidates will need written or oral evidence to demonstrate their knowledge and/or skills by showing that they can undertake academic research and produce an academic essay of 2000 words which:*

- *Describes the historical, social, cultural and musical context and content of their chosen musical genre*
- *Demonstrates a basic understanding of important critical theories and theorists.*
- *Apply a system of academic referencing and create a bibliography*

## **Outcome 2**

### **Evidence requirements**

*Candidates will need evidence to demonstrate their skills and/or knowledge by showing that they can:*

- *Undertake harmonic analysis using a roman numeral system*
- *Undertake melodic analysis*
- *Transcribe melodic and chordal material in a score format*
- *Undertake textual analysis of lyrics*

Internally, the unit and class developed from it was used as an articulation class for students who desired to progress to the degree programme. Externally, Perth College UHI made possession of this unit part of the requirements for articulation' along with a grade A or B in the Graded Unit 2, and all Scottish Colleges with regular articulation to Perth adopted it as part of their programmes.

## **Reflection**

Reflecting on the application of the unit across the sector, a few observations:

SQA did not allow references to specific texts in their unit descriptors, so there was some variance around the exact theorists and thinkers studied by each college. While key texts were specified in the support notes, these are not mandatory. The level of some texts used to generate the essay in outcome 1 was very variable. SQA's guidance at the time was that wherever a written assessment was specified, there should be an oral alternative, and many students arrived at Perth having still not undertaken any academic writing, having achieved the outcome through a presentation, often of substantially lower academic rigour.

The skills described in analysis and transcription again were not specific enough, and open to a great deal of interpretation; again some students appeared to have passed the unit with very low levels of music literacy skills. While this is not necessarily a barrier in a popular music programme, the possession of these skills is a key extra employability skill, and one which all university popular music programmes seek to develop.

The incorporation of the unit gave an opportunity for the colleges who were more serious about this aspect of music to devote staff time and resources to it, and in some cases this paid dividend in smoothing the transition to degree study, or at least giving students a more realistic idea of the challenges ahead.

One lesson to be taken from this is that HND qualifications are not written in stone, and there are opportunities to work with the qualifications support teams to devise ways to support transitions – if there are deficits in student knowledge or skills, universities should be looking for ways to work with college before the point of articulation.

**Contact details:** name and email address of key person (with their permission agreed before submission) who can discuss the case study in more detail.

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**All examples provided will be posted to the Enhancement Themes website with the intention of including them in the National Transitions map.**