



## **STUDENT PROGRESSION POLICY AND INFORMATION AND POLICY ON GRADE EXAMINATIONS January 2014**

As a musical education organisation, Coole Music & Arts works towards developing a path of progression for all its students. To this end we continually review the overall development of students and aim to provide musical activities that will enhance students' classical musical education in a practical yet enjoyable and social way. The path of progression is monitored by the teacher and discussed with students and parents on a regular basis and the results of the students' individual work are presented in the end-of-term concerts twice yearly. For Coole Music & Arts, the most important measurement of our success is how well we provide a rounded musical education and how well our students are able to integrate and perform with others in quality music-making at a high technical level.

Practically speaking we therefore work as a concert/performance-based, not exam-based organisation. There are now four orchestras, and multiple chamber music groups that our students can join and several performance opportunities are presented throughout the school year.

If families wish to additionally avail of an independent assessment of a pupil's progress, there are different examination bodies in place. In Coole Music we facilitate ABRSM exams if the student, teacher and parents consider it a helpful and beneficial step. However, Coole Music does not consider grade exams an *essential* part of a musical education. While they can give an aim for practice and a sense of achievement, there are many other options to motivate practice. It should also be noted that exam syllabi are not intended to provide a complete curriculum or choice of repertoire to the exclusion of all other music. If a pupil is losing interest and not practicing, we believe that doing an exam 'to give them something to aim for' can sometimes help, but not always. Acknowledging the loss of interest and exploring other ways to increase motivation (such as a change in repertoire or even instrument) may be the way ahead.

It is also good to note that grade exams are not *required* for the Dept. of Education Junior or Leaving certificate practical music exams which are purely based on performance standard. Students sitting state exams need to be able to perform at the appropriate level, but having completed grade exams is not a requirement. The same counts for orchestra auditions which are always based on the student's ability to play, not exam results.

That said, one scenario where it might be advisable for students to become familiar with grade exams is to lay the groundwork for a teaching diploma from a particular examining body if teaching music is a path the student intends to follow. However, there are many different courses and qualifications available to those who choose teaching music as a career, so all factors should be explored and taken into consideration.

For Coole Music students who wish to enter for exams we have formulated the following policy:

Entering for an exam through Coole Music needs to be discussed and agreed upon by the three people involved: pupil, parent and teacher. It is important to establish that a student will actually benefit by entering for an exam. Parents and pupils should read the exam regulations online and be fully aware of the costs involved before committing to an exam entry. The cost of piano accompaniment, which typically includes one rehearsal session, should also be factored in. Payment for exams is required in advance and ABRSM will only refund entry fees for medical reasons. The teacher will help with ensuring that the 4 elements of an exam are covered. They are: a) Three Pieces; b) Scales and Arpeggios; c) Sight-reading and d) Aural Tests. Teachers/students should understand the ABRSM marking system (see below) and prepare for all aspects of the exam, not just the prescribed pieces. As a general guide, students can be considered at the correct level if they can start preparing the exam material approximately 6 weeks before the exam; they should be at the exam level before entering for it as it represents a validation of a standard reached, not work in progress. Written feedback on exam performance is provided by ABRSM.

ABRSM exams are offered 3 times a year and typically take place in Galway, unless a 'special visit' exam centre has been arranged by Coole Music in Gort. It is the parent's responsibility to notify our Administrator in writing (via email) of their child's intent to enter for an exam and submit payment on time. Regulations regarding exams can be downloaded from the ABRSM website, e.g. photocopies of music are not acceptable (students should have the prescribed ABRSM book which can be purchased through music shops like Opus II or from the ABRSM website).

It is not necessary to do exams in sequence: if a child has completed Grade 1, their next exam could be Grade 4 (when ready for it!). There is however, a specific ABRSM pre-requisite that a Grade 5 Theory exam or Practical Musicianship Exam must be successfully completed prior to students entering for grades higher than 5.

### **ABRSM Marking System (out of 100)**

#### Pieces or songs (marked out of 30)

Three pre-prepared pieces listed in the syllabus are performed by the candidate.

#### Scales and arpeggios (marked out of 21)

All scales and arpeggios are played from memory. Examiners will usually ask for at least one type of scale/arpeggio required at each grade.

#### Aural tests (marked out of 18)

Aural tests assess the standard of a candidate's 'musical ear'. The examiner will deliver each test following a set of spoken words and instructions. Each test will require either a spoken, sung or clapped response.

The speed and accuracy with which candidates respond to the aural tests can tell the examiner a lot about the candidate's musical make-up and help to form an overall picture of the candidate's abilities. Listening leads to learning and is fundamental to any musical training programme, especially one that involves performance.

#### Sight-reading (marked out of 21)

In the sight-reading test the examiner gives the candidate a piece of music they have not previously seen. The candidate is given up to half a minute in which to look through the music and, if they wish, try out any part of the test before they are required to perform it for assessment.