

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator
Feedback



Summer 2016

GCE Music (6MU02) Unit 2:
Composing

KEY POINTS

There was a rise in the mean mark this year to 45.2 from 44.4 in 2015. This was attributable to a rise in the standard of compositions; 95% achieving better than half marks compared with 92% last year, and to a further sharp rise in the standard of sleeve notes; 88% achieving better than half marks compared with 78% last year with 55% placed in the higher 16/20 mark bands compared with 46% last year.

Overall, marks continue to be bunched in the 21-30 mark bands and 39% gained marks in the higher mark bands of 30+.

COMPOSITIONS

Brief 1 - From Darkness into Light - 66%

As in 2015 this brief was the most popular, being taken by 66% of the candidates and there was a wide spread of marks from single figures to full marks. Possibly this was perceived to be a little easier than similar previous briefs in that it afforded a wider range of approaches. Submissions ranged from fairly simplistic alternations of minor/major tonality to sophisticated transformations, many drawing inspiration from the tonal procedures found in Haydn's *The Creation* and Beethoven's Symphony No 5. There were, however, a number of unsuitable responses to the brief where the candidate had attempted to force fit their own piece into the closest available option.

Brief 2 - Variation structures - *A set of variations based on a melody taken wither from Africa or South America* - 13%

As with last year this proved less popular than had been anticipated, perhaps because of the challenges inherent in creating a set of variations from a melody drawn from another culture. Significantly, the most successful examples were based on more westernised melodies: national anthems proved a popular and creative starting point, doubtless because of their tendency to be based upon regular structures and singable melodies. There were a number of arrangements of Latin American melodies, some gaining very high marks for secure and imaginative instrumentation although others were limited to the establishment of a convincing feel and failed to develop the material. Examiners commented that harmony and modulation tended to be the weaker of the criteria although the opportunity to create and handle interesting rhythms was provided by the world music element.

Brief 3 - a song based on the idea of coming home - 18%

This was rather more popular this year and, like Brief 1, showed a wide spread of marks.

The majority were in a popular or jazz idiom. The standard of production using studio software was frequently very high although attention to other criteria in the mark schemes - melody, harmony and structure, for example - was missing. Many examiners commented on the number of basic verse-chorus structures and a lack of formal inventiveness in the use of pre-choruses, middles, introductions and codas. Melody writing continues to be a challenge for students who invent their melodic material at the keyboard, relying on formulae and five-finger figurations. Some candidates chose to set a dialogue, as if from a musical, and these through-composed pieces often gained high marks.

Brief 4 - vocal piece to celebrate the opening of a new building - 3%

A further significant drop in terms of take-up from last year which was a surprise, given that the brief offered a wider scope than in previous years. As in the past this was generally well done by candidates with a creative feel for vocal part-writing, the majority of pieces being placed in the excellent mark bands.

SLEEVE NOTE

This year saw the previous pattern of a year-on-year rise in marks.

88% gained better than half marks (compared with 78% in 2015). 55% gained better than 16/20 (compared with 46% in 2015).

Many responses gained full marks for questions 1 and 2 although there was a tendency to spend too long answering Question 2. Here, four points of interest are required, yet responses often ran to several pages, with an excess of creditworthy points.

In their answers to Question 3 some candidates again failed to realise that, although 12 marks are available for this particular question, 17 valid points must be made in order to secure the full 12 marks.

Not all points were valid; routine features, such as passing notes, perfect cadences and arpeggios, will only receive credit if some explanation is provided as to their significance. Furthermore, features must be both accurate and located. This is in line with the marking of the extended written answers in Units 3 and 6 in which those features that apply to the whole piece (for example 'atonal' or 'in sonata form') do not require a location, but specific features (for example 'dominant pedal' or 'imitation') do. Locations may be given in bar numbers or timings, or in sectional references (for example, 'in the introduction') or by in reference to instrumental parts (for example 'in the violin part').

ADMINISTRATION

Generally this was handled well by centres although a number of recordings were submitted as data files, some on memory sticks. Centres are referred to the specification which identifies the formats that should be used.