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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Music (8MU0 01) Paper 01

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This was the first year of a new Specification in which there were many differences from the former specification. Perhaps the most fundamental of these was the change to external examination but there were other important differences also, including the requirement for a six-minute recital and the increase in standard difficulty level from Grade 5 to Grade 6.

A further difference in the assessment process is that this is now levels-based rather than mark-based. There are six levels for each of three grids, assessing technique (control of instrument or voice), fluency and accuracy, and expressive control. The raw mark produced by these assessments is then enhanced for 'Standard' (Grade 6) and 'More Difficult' (Grade 7 and above), but remains unchanged for performances that are mainly of Grade 5 standard or below.

On the whole, these and other changes were managed well, both by centres and their candidates and by examiners, most of whom had worked on the old specification. However, not all centres seemed to be familiar with all the detail of the new requirements and there are several important lessons to be learned from this year's experience.

Before listing matters which need more careful attention by some centres, all of them clearly described in the specification, it should be said that a few submissions were of outstanding quality. One in particular, from an overseas centre, consisted of a performance of an astonishingly demanding piece for piano solo by Liszt, played not only with immaculate virtuosity but also with a subtlety of touch and pacing that would have drawn roars of appreciation from the most sophisticated audience. On the other hand, there was quite a lot of evidence that many candidates were tempted by the extra marks for 'Standard' and 'More Difficult' repertoire to perform works that were beyond them at the time of the recording. Candidates should note the references to 'beyond the current ability of the performer' in the assessment grid 1. Level 5 (out of 6) is only reached when 'the demands of the music are within the current ability of the performer'.

The recitals are required to last for a minimum duration of six minutes. This does not include statements by candidates to introduce themselves, tuning, and pauses between pieces or movements (page 13 of specification). A surprising number of candidates submitted performances below this timing and therefore received no marks. The six-minute minimum and penalty for short submissions is stated clearly on p.13 of the specification:

The performance must last a minimum duration of 6 minutes. Students submitting performances below this timing will receive no marks.

The candidate must submit a score or other written material with the recording. The various kinds of score, etc, which are acceptable are listed on pages 14-15 of the spec. Those using guitar tab scores should note the requirement for an indication of rhythm. The very wide scope of acceptable material included here should enable candidates to comply

with this requirement whatever the nature or style of their performance. It is essential that this requirement is heeded to enable assessment to take place, and candidates who do not do so receive no marks, p.15:

Performances that are not accompanied by acceptable scores or lead sheets cannot be assessed.

It is essential that the requirements for announcements are fully understood and acted upon by all centres. This includes an announcement by each individual candidate (page 14 of specification); this is part of the authentication process, which also includes the signed statements made by the teacher and the candidate on the authentication form.

Recitals are required to be in front of an audience of at least two people, of which one must be the teacher (page 14 of specification). It is helpful if the audience applauds appropriately, so that there is evidence on the recording of the presence of an audience.

If a candidate chooses to perform a piece that has an accompaniment or is part of an ensemble, the accompaniment or ensemble must be present in the performance (page 9 of spec.).

Not all centres gave sufficient attention to the process of recording. In particular, the position of the microphone in relation to the candidate and any accompaniment, should be judged so as to convey the candidate's performance with sufficient clarity for assessment.

It is helpful to examiners if recordings are made so as to be playable on ordinary CD-playing audio equipment. Some recordings were submitted using formats that could not be played without conversion.

Finally, a word of thanks to the many teachers who advised candidates, supervised the recording process and arranged for submission of the work to Edexcel for assessment. It is hoped that the changes in the specification for this examination will have been welcomed by many and that their successful introduction this year will lead to an even smoother process in future years.

