



Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback
Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Music (9MU0)
Paper 01: Performing

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MUSIC GCE - COMPONENT 1: PERFORMING (9MU01)

Report of the Principal Examiner – July 2025

It is pleasing to report that in the third year of the return to the original specification and assessment arrangements (after the years when special measures were adopted owing to the interruptions caused by the Covid lockdowns), there has been further evidence that the majority of centres are able to respond ever more efficiently to the demands made upon them for the systematic presentation to the exam board of the necessary materials for assessment and examiners have been able to handle the challenge of sustained accuracy of assessment across the three marking scheme grids in the short time available to them.

It is noted that A Level Music has seen a continued decline in the number of learners. There may be more than one reason for this but where a centre has had to withdraw from offering music teaching and opportunities for older teenagers, including both GCSE and A Level, on grounds of cost, it is reducing its commitment to the universe of knowledge and experience. Music has been a recognised part of a fully rounded education for well over two thousand years. Its power to order mental activity and to express thoughts and dreams that go beyond words has been researched and documented many times over. The demands of the Music A Level course are wide and searching: analysis of scores, reading a score so as to ‘hear’ the music in one’s head, creativity supported by technique in composition, dexterity in playing an instrument and equivalent attention to vocal techniques in singing, and careful listening which involves training the memory to retain sufficient detail of the structure of a piece that can only be revealed in however many minutes or hours it takes to perform. In addition to these skills, self-confidence and emotional expression are developed in performance, as is the ability to integrate into an ensemble, and an introduction is made to earlier as well as geographically wider-placed societies in the study of music’s many varied contexts.

A General View of Learners’ Work

There was again this year, as might be expected, a very wide range of achievement in Performing. Examiners awarded full marks to substantial numbers of learners, aided of course by the scaling for the More Difficult level, which takes all marks of 40 and above out of 48 up to the total of 60 out of 60. There were very few final marks below 20.

It is entirely right that those learners who are able to earn high marks across the three grids of the marking scheme in a recital where the majority of the music played is at Grade 8 or higher (i.e. of Diploma standard) should have that recognised in their eventual result. The Standard Difficulty Level is appropriately set at Grade 7 and, for recitals in which most of the music performed is at that level, there is still a scaling up process which brings a mark of 48 out of 48 up to 60 out of 60. It should be emphasised that when determining the appropriate Difficulty Level, examiners are basing their decisions not on the proportion of the recital which is at the higher Level but on the proportion of the basic requirement of eight minutes which is at that level. For example, a recital with one Grade 8 piece with a duration in performance of anything over four minutes with the remainder of the eight minutes at Grade 7 would be accepted as More Difficult overall, regardless of the total length of the recital. Similarly, one Grade 7 piece with a duration of four minutes or more with the remainder of the eight minutes at Grade 6 or lower would be rated as Standard. Where items at more than two different levels are offered,

with none lasting as long as four minutes, examiners must determine a fair average, as required by the specification, 'taking into consideration the relative length of pieces'.

Most examiners reported hearing at least a few, in some cases more than a few, recitals of outstanding achievement. These were spread across the wide range of instruments and voices offered and across the very wide range of musical styles presented. To reach Level 6 on one or more of the three marking grids is only possible with much hard work and real talent. Such recitals give great pleasure to even the most hardened of examiners, who not only rejoice in the success of the learner but also delight in the musical treat that they themselves experience.

There was perhaps some limited evidence that centres have responded to previous advice to learners to offer pieces that are within their capacity, with slightly more recitals rated 'Standard' or 'Less Difficult' overall. The extra marks that may be obtained for better performance of simpler music may well be more than a higher Difficulty Level scaling would bring.

The range of instruments offered was similar to previous years though perhaps a little wider. Piano and voice continue to dominate the lists by quite large margins, with voice growing more than piano given the wide range of repertoire that can be offered in a vocal recital. Virtually every instrument that might appear in a symphony orchestra was represented, some several times over, and there were also instruments from the world of the brass band. There were several organists, reflecting perhaps recent efforts by the Royal College of Organists to ensure that more state schools have access to a suitable instrument on which young people may learn to play the 'King of Instruments'.

There was a slight increase in the number of recitals offering more than one instrument. There are no extra marks for the versatility on show but it is pleasing to see some learners wanting to display their ability on more than one instrument. Several of these recitals included one or more vocal items as well as instrumental music. Those who plan to present more than one instrument or voice in their recital should be clear that the recital will be assessed as a whole, so it is important to have the two skills on show at more or less the same level of accomplishment. A lesser performance on a second instrument may well pull down the overall mark.

Some Alerts, Advice and Specification Infringements

- i) Information on duration given by centres on the PAS forms has in the main been very helpful to examiners but there still seem to be one or two misunderstandings. Introductions played by an accompaniment should be included in the timing of the piece, except in the case of very long examples, usually the expositions of concerto movements. The same applies to postludes (or outros), very often a short passage sustaining the mood of a song. On the other hand, counting and click beats before certain kinds of music should not be included, as they are not normally a part of the musical score.
Learners are advised not to choose a recital programme for which the timing may lead to problems. Any PAS form which indicates a total duration of 8 minutes plus a

few seconds will be checked by the examiner. Too often, the closeness of the overall duration has misled centres into mistakes, whether they have been aware of a shortfall or not. Learners should not seek to add a few seconds to the overall duration by holding final chords for excessive lengths. In one case this year, the final chord of a piano piece in three/four time was notated by the composer as a dotted minim tied to a crochet followed by two crotchet rests, without any suggestion of a pause. The player held the chord for very much longer than the four beats indicated. In this case, there were also other reasons why the recital was rated 'short' and penalised for that reason.

Learners are advised not to choose too long a programme, particularly in the case of brass players and singers. To start another item after a full eight or more minutes have been performed is quite unnecessary and more likely to diminish the overall impression than to enhance it.

Centres are asked to check their addition of the total lengths of the different pieces included in the recital. There were several obvious arithmetical errors on PAS forms among the submissions this year.

- ii) Information given by centres concerning Difficulty Levels has mainly been very helpful, aided no doubt by the new Pearson DLB. Misunderstandings sometimes arise when the DL given in the booklet is for a whole sonata or similar but the performer is offering just one movement. It cannot be assumed in such a case that the given DL is appropriate for the one movement being offered. Most centres were clear about when they were giving estimates of a DL rather than reflecting some hard information. In cases where an examiner decides that it may be necessary to change a suggested DL, there will always be consultation with a team leader or among team leaders.

The increase in the number of accredited grade exam boards has been noticed, with the possibility that some may have significantly different gradings for some items of repertoire from the well-established boards on whom we have relied so heavily.
- iii) We are aware of how much we depend on the availability of accompanists. However there continues to be a number of recitals in which the recording seems to favour the accompaniment rather than the learner. The reason may be that the accompanist is playing too loudly and sometimes, if nervous, also affecting the pacing of the music. More likely the reason may be that not enough consideration has been given to the placing of the microphone. It is obviously wise to check before a full recording is made that the microphone has been placed to get the best possible balance between soloist and accompaniment.
- iv) Centres are asked to be vigilant in the transmission of scores via LWT. In some cases, scores arrived with pages missing or in the wrong order. An examiner has every right to expect that, if a mark is going to be awarded for accuracy, it should be absolutely clear what the composer has notated. Even where some element of improvisation is involved, the stimulus must be similarly clear, as the specification also calls for the accurate performance of stimulus material.
- v) The number of recitals submitted with no evidence of an audience being present seemed to be fewer this year. Centres are reminded of the importance of this specification requirement, which arises from the theme common to all components of this specification, that music is understood to be a form of communication. The context of that communication demands the presence of listeners, however few in

number.

It is no longer a requirement that learners announce their name, candidate number and the titles of the pieces they are going to perform. However, where performers did this confidently and clearly, they were probably taking an important step towards establishing the degree of communication between themselves and their audience to which reference is made in the highest Levels of grid 3 of the marking scheme. It should, nonetheless, be understood that the existence and quality of announcements in no way affects the assessment of the recital.

- vi) A very small minority of learners signed their PAS forms with illegible writing and a few of these even crossed out their own signatures. All learners should be aware that this requirement is an important part of the authentication process.

The Marking Assessment Grid

Most centres are fully aware of the way in which the marking assessment grid is constructed but, when learners are having their instrumental or vocal tuition either privately or at a different centre from the one where other components of the A Level Music are being taught, it is possible that they may not be fully aware of the provisions of the marking scheme. It should be made clear to them what aspect of their performing is covered by each of the three grids and what is implied by each of the six Levels on each grid. This should give clearer focus to their preparation for the recital and also, when their result is known, help them to understand more fully the examiner's comments on the mark sheet and how their mark has been arrived at.

Examiners are asked first to consider the appropriate Level for any given submission, starting from level 6 and moving down as necessary. Once a Level is chosen, the top mark for that Level will be awarded if the performance fully matches all the descriptors for that Level. Where a lower mark for that Level is awarded, examiners are asked to make it clear why that is so. Examiners are also asked to link the wording of their comments closely to the descriptors in the chosen Level of each grid.

Conclusion

I am aware that many people may be involved in the preparation of learners for the three demanding components of A Level Music and in the efficient handling of the uploading of their work to make it available to Pearson and then to examiners. In the case of this component, Performing, some learners will have had perhaps a number of different instrumental or vocal tutors over the years, perhaps up to nine or ten years in some cases, since they first started playing their instrument or singing. Members of the music staff and exams officers of the centres will have been involved during their years 12 and 13. To all these people, and above all to the learners themselves, I and my colleagues, both in the examining team and on Pearson's ever-efficient supporting staff, offer many thanks for so much diligent cooperation and congratulations to all who have completed the A Level Music course.

Principal Examiner for Performing for GCE Music.

