

Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

June 2011

GCSE Music
5MU01 Performing Music

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GCSE Music 5MU01 Performing Subject Report July 2011

The new specification requirements for performing this year have provided centres with even more scope to enable their candidates to show their best. There was, however, little change to the style of performances this year. The anticipated widening in the range of performances, brought about by the greater scope of options given in the new specification, did not occur. Overall, the range of performances was broadly in line with last year and sequencing and recording options made for about 2% of the pieces moderated.

With regard to the use of instruments, the survey of moderated performances which is carried out by the team of moderators showed that the range of performances remains relatively unchanged: strings and woodwind performances were of a similar number, but there were far more brass instruments this year. The quality of guitar playing continues to improve and there was a significant increase in guitar performances.

Instrument	2011	2010	Change
Piano	20.4%	18.4%	+2%
Keyboard	3%	5.3%	-2.3%
Female Voice	17.6%	18%	-0.4%
Male Voice	5.3%	5.7%	-0.4
Guitar (acoustic and electric)	26.3%	20%	+6.3%
Brass	3.8%	2.5%	+1.3%

Whilst the voice remained a popular choice, the overall quality of these performances was felt to be lower. There were significant issues with the amount of preparation and the quality of outcome with female singers in particular. Singing along to vocal tracks with little development or characterisation of the voice was a great shame, particularly as there were some instances of some good voices that were just under-prepared. These performances were biased towards the popular end, and music which tended to be sung in the style of a performer. Often the moderator was sent a lyric sheet, and in these cases, centres were contacted as these are not adequate to act as score. It may be that the centre would be better served to send a commercial recording in lieu of a score for future reference.

The range of sequenced performances was quite narrow. Some centres exploited the possibilities of the computer programmes very well, and others kept to a more straight-forward approach, sequencing scores of classical pieces. As in previous years, the range of standards was great: some centres producing an excellent range of performances, elegant and musical, whilst at the other end, pieces often appeared to have been input into the computer with little consideration to timbre, articulation and dynamics, all of which are so vital here. Teacher Examiners (TE) should take care when marking and ensure that they apply the criteria carefully, particularly if the options are new to the TE. A number of centres had

entered candidates where the TE had clearly stated they did not understand the work undertaken.

The realisation option has enabled sequenced compositions to be marked more clearly. TEs would be well-advised to look at both the realisation and sequencing mark schemes side-by-side when marking these performances as this will help to inform the final mark. The realisation option has given moderators more flexibility to more accurately assess some ethnic or traditional pieces. Some centres have used this option but there were few ethnic examples moderated and it was not as widely used as had been anticipated.

The other least-used options were *Directing an Ensemble* (1 example moderated), *Rapping* (6 examples), *Beat boxing*, (1 example) and *DJ/electro-fusions* (3 examples): all were well-presented and were good examples of their genres.

There were many excellent performances presented for moderation this year. The vast majority of the pieces received high marks (ranging from 21-27) and it is important to note that there was a significant number of outstanding performances, which moderators commented upon in their reports. On a different note, more candidates performed their solo pieces without the accompaniment this year, which can only serve to lessen the quality of the final outcome. It is quite worrying and is to be strongly discouraged; a solo piece written with an accompaniment should be performed with that accompaniment.

In the marking of these solo performances and traditional ensemble performances, most TEs had marked consistently and accurately. Although the marks tended to be rather high, particular care should be taken to ensure that the ranges of the centre marks are not too generous. Moderators pointed out a number of instances where a TE had over-marked the highest candidate and under-marked the lowest.

When marking, the TE comments are vital for the moderators to come to an understanding of the TE marks. TEs are recommended to use the descriptors to support their marks. The use of hyperbolic language was common and the reference to particular matters such as pupils with sore throats etc, is irrelevant for the purposes of marking. Applying any form of special consideration is not within the remit of the moderators. If relevant, centres should request special consideration through their examinations officer.

The accuracy marks must be applied carefully. Some TE's apparently mark their work live, without listening to the CD recording because there were many instances of pieces full of wrong notes being marked with *accurate performance*. It must be said that most performances are mainly accurate, gaining at least 8/9 marks. Likewise with the interpretation, the moderator is listening to the use of dynamics, phrasing and articulation here; different instruments will have different approaches. Most TE's made sensible comments, but too many made impossible comments, including comments on intonation for a piano or keyboard performance.

Again, as last year, several candidates were disadvantaged by the submission of long pieces requiring a high level of concentration. Consideration should be given to shorter pieces that will represent candidates' abilities effectively.

With the ensemble pieces, every possible combination seemed to be presented and there have been some stunning ensemble performances this year (including a saxophone group and a string quartet as well as some superb piano duets). These help to show that teachers are considering this aspect of the course far more. However of the two performances, the ensemble tended to be the least successful for many candidates. Frequently, where there were issues, they were found in a whole centre, rather than individual candidates.

Of most concern for this year has been the fact that too often, many centres have ignored the criteria for the ensemble. This has resulted in candidates being penalised. A student whose ensemble performance is, in fact, a second solo, can only be marked for their accuracy. The ensemble element being incorrect, it will not be marked. This can lose candidates 18 marks. This procedure has been carefully applied this year and is less harsh than the old specification, where similar problems seemed to occur, despite the fact that the specification is very clear on the matter.

A new and more worrying trend has been the use of theatre style song duets. Here the songs are often simply one solo followed by another with a few bars of unison singing or harmony. One example seen by the Principal Moderator had a 64-bar piece in which the candidate sang 24-bars solo, was silent while the other singer sang for 24-bars followed by 4-bars of piano solo, 8-bars of unison singing and 4-bars of harmony, therefore the candidate had only performed in ensemble for 12 bars of the 64, approximately 7%. In such a piece, it is very difficult for the candidate to achieve the higher marks as they will have failed, within the context of the piece, to realise the full extent of the ensemble criteria. TE's should consider carefully whether there is enough genuine ensemble activity for this to enable the candidates to achieve.

Finally, it is so important to make it clear which part is being marked in the ensemble. Often ambiguous terms such as *voice* in a duet with piano accompaniment were all that had been given. Clarity is imperative and also means that the moderator does not have to contact the centre.

The majority of multi-tracked ensemble performances were as "engineer". There was a great range in the quality, with mostly very good recordings and with some extremely expert ones using equipment and techniques far beyond that which is required for GCSE. It was felt that, in these instances, the advanced techniques should be acknowledged. To that extent, the moderators were instructed to award the *More Difficult* level to recordings involving 8 or more tracks. The unity of ensemble is an important aspect of marking. Some recordings were marked down because it is the engineer's job to ensure that issues of tuning and timing are tackled. These are all

aspects of the task. There were some recordings submitted in which another take would have been useful to eliminate errors.

Where candidates had performed on one or more tracks or sequenced a track, the main issues were found to be with the final mix. Creating a noise-free, well-balanced recording can be quite difficult and centres which use this option would be advised to use a range of pieces for the submission. Listening to different mix-downs of very similar recordings is not always as straight-forward as it may seem. There was one particularly fine recording in which the candidate had recorded all the individual tracks and produced the final mix, and there were other candidates who did similar things.

The biggest overall issue this session has been with the application of the Difficulty Levels. These have been re-written to be clearer and in general they have been well-judged. However changes have occurred and there were significant occasions when the levels were mis-applied. With many pieces, there was no issue, but some pieces have changed their levels from the old to the new specification and where there was ambiguity, the clearest way forward was to look at each descriptor and choose the level at which it applied to the piece. There are nine descriptors, so the outcome will usually be quite straight-forward. Some centres which had doubts actually copied the relevant page from the specification and highlighted the descriptors to reinforce their reasons: this is good practice and would provide clarity for all. Changes made to the Difficulty Levels were by far the biggest reason for marks to be changed significantly.

The administrative aspects of the moderation process were made far more difficult this year with too many centres ignoring the guidelines for submission and by not taking care with the work sent to moderators.

Omissions and errors were significantly greater: far too many centres sending work late, with arithmetic errors and missing scores. This is a trend with which the senior moderators are concerned and it is hoped that this aspect of the assessment process will be greatly improved next year.

The guidelines are put in place to

- ensure a common approach to the assessment process
- ensure that there is clarity
- ease potential difficulties where there are many personnel involved.

Centres are asked to check carefully these guidelines before next year's submission. They are straight-forward and make the process an easy one.

The issues that held up moderating this year were as follows.

- The four pages that make up the mus form should be photocopied into an A3 booklet. This is to provide a natural folder in which to place the scores. It ensures that plastic wallets are not required

- Centres are asked to stop sending their work in plastic wallets - moderators find them awkward, particularly when sealed up with tape and Edexcel cannot use these when storing the candidate's work as it increases the weight of the submission.

The documents are not able to be filled in online to try to ensure schools to comply with this simple photocopying procedure. In the end, there are still four separate pieces of paper, but with the front being the only piece that has the candidate's identity on it, there are potential difficulties.

The CD recordings are so simple to produce these days, yet it is surprising at the lack of care and attention that has been given to this, the most vital aspect of the submission which contains the actual candidate's performance.

This year's problems have included:

- tracks with varying recording levels – from inaudible to ear splittingly loud
- unnecessarily complicated announcements. (All that is required is one announcement at the start of the CD naming centre and the exam, with one just announcement naming the candidate and number before their 2 performances)
- track lists not present
- Sseparate CD for each candidate and even for each performance in some instances. This resulted in one centre sending over 30 CD's for their 10 candidates. Only one was necessary
- commercial CD sent separately (the recording could be placed after the candidates performance if possible).

Scores should be placed inside the booklet. The absence of a score will lead to a moderator contacting the centre before the moderating process will begin. If there is no score, then no moderation can take place.

Finally, in this first year of the new specification, it was found that the standards of the performances continue to be good, the lowest marks are rarely awarded and these tended to be where only a part submission had been made. We hope that TEs will play particular attention to the administrative aspects, keeping their presentation simple and within Edexcel guidelines, which helps to make the moderating process straight-forward.

The moderating team would like to thank the many centres which presented their submissions carefully, marked accurately, and provided them with performances of a very high calibre.

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