

Examiners' Report/  
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE Music (5MU02)  
Composing Music

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Summer 2012

Publications Code UG032722

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5MU02 UNIT 2 COMPOSING  
Principal Examiner's report 2012

The standard of composing has continued to improve in this the second year of the new specification. The more creative work tends to result from centres that allow students to choose from all areas of study to suit the instruments they play and the music they understand. The principle "from the known to the unknown" is often the best strategy in producing work that the students intend and fully understand. Many candidates have taken trouble to present their pieces carefully and neatly, and some have written the old style brief in addition to their scores to explain their work.

Pleasing trends have been the improvement of administration, much clearer presentation of scores, better quality recordings and live vocals presented on the recordings of songs.

### **GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE AREAS OF STUDY**

There has been an improvement in the range of music presented from the original stimuli of the set works in the areas of study. Many centres have used aspects and techniques of each area of study as the original stimulus rather than the genre of the pieces from each area of study. For example many of the students enjoy writing songs and there have been submitted songs from all areas of study.

It is important that the relationship of a piece from an area of study must be perfectly clear. When two songs have been submitted it is important to explain in the brief at the top of page 2 of the MUS Form how the composition is related to its allotted area of study. For example a song using Rondo form is perfectly acceptable as an entry from AOS 1. A song with a dramatic /literary stimulus is acceptable from AOS 2. A song with folk influences is perfectly acceptable from AOS 4. In all cases the original brief from the area of study must be made clear or this can affect the mark awarded for criterion A, "Use of development of ideas". For example an obvious pop song entered as an area of study 2 "song from a musical" that has no real dramatic content, obvious stimulus or any explanation in the brief by student or teacher examiner of how the piece is related to area of study 2 could well be assessed as "Makes only a minimum attempt to develop musical ideas in accordance with the chosen area of study" (2 marks).

#### **Area of Study 1**

Most commonly submitted pieces were ternary form and rondos. An increasing number of ground bass pieces have appeared this year. They were mainly weak pieces which were based on layering of different strands without displaying much development. The stronger pieces in this area of study display internal development within their individual sections. The weaker pieces are merely cut and paste pieces of two ideas. The "Raindrop Prelude" continues to inspire work of a high standard with some interesting and imaginative piano figurations. Some songs were submitted for this category and the successful ones were based on the structures studied in this area of study. This area of study provides ample opportunity for creative work based on the formal procedures of the genre.

### Area of Study 2

Minimalism was by far the most popular choice. Regrettably, some students presented pieces which consisted of simple layering of several ostinatos. Many low scoring compositions completely ignored typical minimalist features such as phrasing, note addition, subtraction and rhythmic development.

Fewer serial pieces were submitted this year but of the pieces submitted many contained fewer errors of row transposition and were generally imaginative and of a high standard.

Compositions inspired by "songs from a musical" were very popular; however some pop songs were entered into this category without any reference to their context in musical theatre.

### Area of Study 3

There were more blues pieces submitted than last year. Some were very creative using extended harmony, interesting textures and developed form. In too many cases however they can be formula driven and uninspired.

Word setting in pop songs has improved this year. Many pop songs contained live vocals on the recording. This was a most welcome development as the candidate's ability in word setting is apparent. Regrettably many pieces still use a computer "ah" voice for the melody line and included words that do not scan with the rhythm of the melody. Obviously the words came as an afterthought. It was very pleasing to note the development of interesting guitar figurations, drum and bass lines to gain full marks in criterion B. Accompaniment styles were more impressive this year.

Quite a number of centres produced dance pieces, but many were not submitted with annotated screenshots. Many only came with limited commentaries. Other students present pages and pages of unquantised scores. This made it quite difficult to ascertain which samples were pre-recorded and which were composed from scratch by the candidates. The use of pre set loops MUST be specified on the MUS form in order for the moderator to make an adequate assessment of the teacher examiner marks. Dance pieces merely manipulating pre recorded loops were very low scoring.

### Area of Study 4

The majority of pieces are either fusions or folk inspired. African drumming pieces were presented with varying degrees of success. The better pieces in this genre showed cohesive development and some variations of texture and rhythms. At the other end of the scale the pieces were just simple overlaying of rhythms.

### **SCORES**

The majority of scores are produced on Sibelius. These are generally of excellent standard and easy to read. However students should pay attention to labeling the instruments on their score.

Pop songs were often presented as lyric sheets with chords added and tabs provided for the odd guitar break. Providing information is provided alongside comments about instrumentation and intention, this is a simple and easier way of presenting a score. However lyric sheets with no other indications are insufficient. When commentaries were used, these tended to be accurate, describing the chords, musical elements used and the form adopted. Weaker

ones merely gave a literal account with very little musical content. Some centres produced hand written scores and these were generally of a high standard.

Annotated screenshots can be an excellent way of presenting a dance piece. The higher scoring centres produced work that indicated; voices used, form of the piece, changes in texture and any music technology processes that occurred. The weaker ones proved of very little value and were very difficult to read. Teachers are requested to address this issue in future years and provide as much information as possible for the moderator to understand marks awarded. When screenshots were used for more conventional music, especially when trying to indicate such subtle nuances as the changes in minimalism they were insufficient.

Scores printed from Cubase, Logic and Reason were often many pages long, were unquantised and impossible to read.

### **TEACHER EXAMINER ASSESSMENTS**

A high proportion of teacher examiners assessed the work of their students accurately. When confusions did arise over teacher examiner assessment it was generally over inappropriate choice of optional criteria or confusion over criteria. Teacher comments have improved with many using the wording from the assessment grids from the specification and giving specific musical examples to support their awarding of marks. Many teacher examiners annotated scores, which in the case of minimalist scores was very helpful. It should be considered that when a mark of 5 is awarded the teacher examiner should point out what is imaginative or excellent about the piece.

Regrettably some teacher examiners offered no comments at all on their students MUS forms.

### **USE OF THE COMPULSORY CORE CRITERIA**

#### *Criterion A*

Most students scored between 3 and 4. The principal moderator would like once more to highlight the phrase "chosen area of study". Where the chosen area of study is unclear then the marks awarded can be affected. Some centres indicated the wrong Area of Study.

#### *Criterion B*

We still have examples of high marks being awarded for work that does not exploit the medium. Careful choice of instruments is called for here. As many of the recordings presented are electronic, many students do not hear the inappropriate scoring of instruments as they would in a live performance. Many instruments are not used idiomatically.

#### *Criterion C*

It was encouraging to hear work that aimed for internal development within the formal structure. Many centres achieved high marks for incorporating this technique into their work. Many pop songs attempted more unusual structures and did not rely too much on endless repeats of sections. At the lower end of the scale too much "cut and paste" is employed producing arid, unimaginative work. Some teachers are too generous in this section. We have had examples of blues pieces being awarded 5 marks for criteria simply by using 3 statements of 12 bar blues.

## **USE OF THE OPTIONAL CRITERIA**

Teacher examiners are generally quite successful in awarding the most appropriate optional criterion. Many centres struggle for the third one however. Criterion H is often the third criterion and credit is often given for compositions that contain few and largely inappropriate dynamic markings.

Teacher examiners often confuse criterion B with criterion F. In criterion F, credit should be awarded for texture when there is clear awareness of the combination of instruments and textures.

Teacher examiners often awarded marks for harmony in criterion E without bearing in mind that credit is also awarded for accompaniment style .

For criterion D, melody, we had many marks of 4 awarded for melodies that were simply arpeggiac and slavishly following the chord structure. Such melodies can be functional and lack real shape.

In the assessment of criterion G, rhythm, we found many examples of too much credit being awarded for the statement of an interesting rhythm without any development or meaningful exploitation of that rhythm.

It is worth reminding centres that note input into Sibelius does not gain credit for criterion I, music technology. To gain upper marks in criterion I we must see examples of sound manipulation.

## **ARRANGEMENTS**

Some arrangements were submitted and the original stimulus was not included. It should not be assumed that because a piece is well-known, the inclusion of the stimulus is not needed.

## **ADMINISTRATION**

It would aid the moderation process if centres could ensure that they:

- Provide all the compositions on one CD.
- Provide a track list.
- Ensure that the students track is correctly labeled in the appropriate box on the MUS form.
- Ensure announcements of candidate's names are on a different track to their composition.
- Check that each composition comes from a different Area of Study.
- Provide an A3 sheet folded so that the MUS form comes as one sheet.
- Check that all signatures are present.
- Check that the highest and lowest scoring candidates are included in the starred sample. If they are not they should be included along with **all** the other candidates in the starred sample.

This year the moderators reported work mainly arriving before the deadline and fewer transfer and arithmetical errors.

The presentation of work to the moderators is usually of an excellent standard and our thanks go to the teacher examiners who ensure that this is so.

It was pleasing, as ever, to hear the range and standard of work presented. Thank you for your hard work.

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