

Principal Moderators' Report

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Music
(5MU02) Paper 1

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Principal's Report

OVERVIEW

This is the fifth year of the 5MU02 specification and it is pleasing to see a wide range of compositions submitted. The standard of presentation in the main remains of high quality. The work of the teacher/examiner in preparing the submissions is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

Although the specification is well established, there are still some issues which continue to occur regarding the choice of areas of study. Whilst the majority of submissions can be clearly identifiable within two different areas of study, some submissions include two which are very similar in style. It is clear that the specification encourages a wide area of musical genres to choose from. Teachers are encouraged to use this breadth of content to develop candidate's individual skills and strengths.

Area of Study 1

As in previous years, the most popular submissions featured compositions in Ternary Form. The more successful of these used Introductions/Codas and demonstrated significant development in the A2 section. The use of a contrasting B section (inspired by the Chopin Prelude) was widespread, but many candidates simply repeated the A section. This was a disappointing feature in 2015, as there seemed to have been a movement away from this tendency in previous years. Candidate realisations of their own compositions were most refreshing.

In contrast to 2014, the use of Ground Bass styled compositions was more frequent. These often incorporated the use of technology. Although some of these works tended to be a little formulaic and reliant on copying of existing melodic segments, some outstanding examples were received, making full use of musical and technological resources.

The use of variations upon an original theme continues to be used to challenge candidates. The best examples of these developed the themes in highly original ways. It was clear that some candidates were hindered by the choice of original theme which provided little harmonic or melodic inspiration.

Area of Study 2

Minimalism continues to be the most popular genre submitted in this particular area. Some teacher/examiners seemed to be over generous in awarding marks for lengthy pieces, which, although making use of interesting original cells, lacked the application of minimalist techniques in order to justify such marks. Moderators noted an increasing number of submissions which submitted screen shots as scores with no further information. This prompted moderators to contact centres for further information. The writing of a simple commentary would also demonstrate the candidate's intentions in such situations.

Serial pieces are also a popular choice for candidates in area of study 2. At their best, they demonstrate an imaginative use of rhythm and textural contrast. Many candidates submitted work which tended to be formulaic, often combining permutations of the rows which resulted in a mechanical effect. Candidates are to be congratulated for their use of resources in this particular area, demonstrating a clear understanding of the chosen instrument's potential.

Once again, the Song from a Musical was used by several teacher/examiners to accommodate a second pop song submission. Candidates who clearly enjoyed writing in this genre often submitted short comments on the score, linking the musical material with stage action along with synopsis of the entire plot. Whilst, the latter is unnecessary, the former is to be welcomed, once again highlighting the intentions of the candidate.

Area of Study 3

Club Dance continues to inspire many candidates. Often, teacher/examiners do not state the technological input made by the candidates. There is opportunity to do this on the final page of the MUS200 form. This allows teacher/examiners to credit the work of candidates who have manipulated samples and created their own drum loops. Often, compositions in this genre suffered from a lack of textural clarity and did not capture the essential stylistic features. Further to this, scores were simply submitted as screen shots, often reduced in size to allow the score to print on one sheet of A4. Further exemplification of the candidates intentions is needed. As mentioned earlier in this report, such additional comments can serve to challenge the candidate and offer a pedagogical approach to teachers in this area.

There was a decrease in the number of Blues submissions. The majority of these tended to offer slight additions to the original 12 bar structures, with some improvisation upon the opening themes. These were often generously marked by teacher/examiners. As in other areas of study, the most successful of these were realisations by the candidates themselves. It is important that information is given in such situations in order to illuminate the role of the candidate within the composition.

Popular songs were submitted in abundance for this area of study. Although submissions realised using musical software are still plentiful, there is a pleasing trend towards the live performance of these songs. Once again, the Teacher/examiner should record on the MUS200 forms the roles of the performers so it is clear which elements of the performance are the candidate's work. Lyrics should always be provided as part of the score; a simple chord / lead sheet is not acceptable.

Area of Study 4

As in 2014, this area of study drew the fewest compositions. African drumming tended to be de rigeur for this particular area. Candidates utilised the opportunity to explore cross-rhythms, polyrhythms and extensive textural contrasts in order to maximise the available marks. As in earlier series, there were some highly imaginative fusion pieces, often exploring the folk idiom. Raga pieces continued to be a popular choice, although few of these explored the rich melodic potential of the genre.

Teacher Examiner Assessments.

There was a concerning trend in 2015 of MUS200 forms in which the teacher/examiner simply repeated the exam criteria, or, in extremis, failed to make any comments at all. Examples of excellent practice include detailed comments to support the teacher/examiner marks, often quoting motifs used in the score and highlighting structural/rhythmical devices. The more detailed comments generally cite bar numbers to qualify their awarding of marks. Such practice is to be encouraged and helps to justify the awarding of marks in each criteria.

Scores

On the whole, these signified the intentions of the candidate, particularly in Area of study 1, where score-writing programmes were used. As mentioned earlier in this report, a growing concern is the submission of screen shots which give little indication as to the resources being used in the composition, before even addressing the use of rhythms and melodic motifs. Whilst it is fully acceptable to provide a suitable score for the genre submitted, screen shots must include information which will help teacher/examiners and moderators to make an appropriate assessment. Centres will be contacted to provide further information if scores of this nature are received in future submissions.

Some centres are still providing individual parts when ensemble pieces are submitted. These are not necessary as a full-score fulfils the requirements of the syllabus.

Arrangements

Several centres submit arrangements in place of original compositions. Although a minority of these showed excellent manipulation of the given stimulus, many did not reflect the opportunities available to develop the work further. The Arrangement criteria should be used as a guide to encourage candidates in this vein.

Use of the Marking Criteria

Core Criteria

As the specification has become more embedded, it is noted that the demands of each criterion (with a few exceptions) are being applied more successfully.

Teacher/examiners attention should focus on the brief set when applying criterion A. The style and standard conventions need to reflect the brief. On occasions, moderators have reported full marks being awarded for compositions which do not reflect the chosen brief. Similarly, criterion B was awarded full marks by some teacher/examiners when instrumental parts were unplayable. This caused particular problems for candidates using notational-programmes and teachers are encouraged to offer advice in this particular aspect of the process. Criterion C allows teacher/examiners to award candidates who show creativity and development in their compositions.

Optional Criteria

Whilst these are generally applied well, moderators often make adjustments to these criteria in order to benefit the candidates.

As in previous years, the use of Option H (dynamics) is often inconsistent. Simply adding dynamics to the score is not enough to secure an award of 5 marks. Scores are often submitted with no dynamic markings, often failing to reflect the subtleties demonstrated in live realisations.

Criterion I (Use of technology) is alarmingly misapplied to scores generated using notation-software programmes such as Sibelius. This has been an increasing trend during the 2015 series. The criterion is often neglected when compositions reliant on musical technology are submitted.

Administration

Each centre will receive an E9 report which will include feedback from the moderator on issues which occurred with the submission. Teacher/Examiners are encouraged to read these in order to inform future practice.

With regard to future submissions, the following should be noted:

- (1) The MUS200 form should be photocopied as an A3 sheet. The scores/commentaries for each candidate should be placed inside. (please note, A4 folders, polypockets, display books are unnecessary)
- (2) The CD should include the compositions in candidate number order.
- (3) A track list must be included with the CD and the track numbers noted on the relevant MUS200 form (track announcements with centre/candidate numbers are superfluous when the track list is supplied)
- (4) Check that the candidate and teacher/examiner signature is present.
- (5) Please ensure that the work of the **highest** and **lowest** candidate is included within the requested sample. If they are not, please add these to the submission.
- (6) Please ensure that the submission arrives prior to the deadline. (This will allow more time to contact the centre if any further materials or clarification are required)

Once again, many thanks to all teacher/examiners for their hard work in preparing submissions for the 2015 series.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

