

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator
Feedback



Summer 2016

GCE Music (5MU02) Unit 2: Composing
Music

This is the sixth and penultimate year of the 5MU02 specification, which is now well-established. The general standard of work and the quality of centre assessment continues to be high, accompanied by generally good presentation, quality of recordings and scores. Centres are, once again, thanked for their diligence in this matter. That said, there continue to be issues with administrative matters and the setting of compositional briefs.

The majority of teacher examiners make clear the required connection between the composition and the chosen area of study, but many still fail to do so, or make a connection which is very tenuous (and sometimes inappropriate). In some cases compositions were submitted without any indication of the brief to which the candidate was working: this is not acceptable. A number of candidates presented second compositions which were obviously derived from the same area of study as their first composition but were credited with a tenuous link to another area of study: such pieces will not score highly for criterion A (Use and development of ideas) and the assessment of compositions such as these is likely to fall within the basic or limited assessment grids. The space provided on page two of the Mus form for the brief should clearly indicate the starting point of the composition and its relationship to the relevant area of study.

Some centres continue to set formulaic composition briefs which entail most or all of their candidates submitting compositions which derive from the same brief and starting point. The resulting compositions tend to be very similar in nature and are, once again, unlikely to score highly for criteria A (Use and development of ideas), B (Exploitation of the medium) or C (Structure and form) as these are to a great extent dictated by the brief. The specification offers a significant breadth of choice and teachers are encouraged to allow candidates to work to their individual strengths and preferences.

Area of Study 1

Most compositions were, once again, in ternary form, with the higher scoring pieces containing intros and codas, alteration/development in the A2 section and a modulation in the B section, but a significant number of candidates simply cut and pasted the A sections and/or used completely unrelated material for the B sections. Similar tendencies were seen in rondo form pieces. There were fewer examples of theme-and-variation and ground bass pieces. Many of the ground bass pieces again incorporated the use of technology. There were, once again, a number of high quality piano compositions inspired by the Chopin Prelude.

Area of Study 2

As noted over the past few years, minimalism continues to be the most popular choice of composition in this area of study, by a considerable margin. There were some excellent examples of minimalist pieces but there are still too many that are compromised by brevity or longevity. Pieces which are too short do not allow for idiomatic development, whilst the longer pieces are often very repetitive. To score highly, minimalist pieces must contain several elements of the genre such as augmentation, diminution, phase shifting, phasing, rhythmic development and displacement. Whilst there were fewer serialist pieces, many of these were of very high quality, demonstrating excellent understanding of the genre, but there were also many which were functional and often very short. The trend for submitting a second popular song disguised as a song from a musical continues: centres are again reminded that the connection to a dramatic stimulus must be made clear, but it is not necessary to submit a synopsis of the entire plot.

Area of Study 3

There were, once again, a significant number of popular song compositions and many of these were very good. Once again, there was a noticeable difference between pieces which were realised using technology and those performed live - the latter tended to demonstrate better word setting and more idiomatic melodic writing. There continues to be a decline in the number of blues compositions but some very good jazz pieces were seen. Club dance continues to appear as a formulaic brief from some centres and it is noticeable that there is some blurring of the edges between this genre and minimalism, with a number of centres submitting samples in which all the candidates offered minimalism as composition 1 and club dance as composition 2, with the club dance piece demonstrating further use of minimalist techniques. A significant number of club dance pieces were found to have been constructed using pre-recorded loops from software packages and centres are reminded that the use of loops and/or samples must be clearly identified on the MUS200 form.

Area of Study 4

Area of Study 4 continues to generate the fewest compositions but those pieces that do appear are frequently very good. There were, once again, a number of pieces inspired by Capercaillie and quite a lot of fusions of various styles and genres. There were fewer African Drumming and Raga examples this year, but many of those seen were imaginative and successful.

ARRANGEMENTS

As previously noted few candidates submit arrangements, but some very good examples were seen. Centres are requested to provide as much information as possible regarding arrangements, particularly where candidates have used downloaded samples or loops. Teacher examiners (and candidates) should refer frequently to the assessment grids for arrangements (which differ considerably from those for compositions) during the process.

SCORES

The presentation of scores and commentaries continues to improve, but there are still too many instances of poorly presented, monochrome screenshots submitted with no annotation: these are insufficient to comply with the requirements of the specification and centres submitting such work will be requested to supply further information. A number of centres sent commentaries instead of scores even though the work had clearly been produced on computer and a screenshot or score must have been available - this is perfectly acceptable where the commentary provides better or additional information but this was not the case in many instances. Centres are, once more, requested not to provide sets of individual parts instead of a full score.

TEACHER EXAMINER ASSESSMENTS

The majority of teacher examiners provided detailed comments on the Mus forms. The best of these referred directly to specific features of the work justifying the marks awarded for each criterion, using bar numbers or other means of identification, and these were very useful. Some teacher examiners, however, simply quoted from the assessment grids without explaining why the particular mark was chosen; regrettably, a significant number of teacher examiners failed to make any comments whatsoever.

USE OF THE MARKING CRITERIA

As noted in reports over the past couple of years, there has been significant improvement in the application of the assessment grids and, whilst there were some submissions in which the marking was found to be very haphazard, the majority of teacher examiner assessment seen was found to be generally accurate, consistent and in line with national standards.

Core Criteria

When assessing criterion A (Use and development of ideas), teacher examiners should bear in mind the brief set, take into account the style in which the candidate has chosen to compose and focus on the standard conventions applicable to the style. It is, as noted above, difficult to apply criterion A when there is little or no indication of the intended brief or the style and standard conventions being assessed. Similarly, for criterion B (Exploitation of the medium), the highest marks are applicable when the candidate clearly chooses instruments and/or voices which are idiomatically right for the style chosen and then demonstrates an understanding of how those instruments and/or voices should and could be exploited. In some cases, parts appear to be unplayable and in many other instances the instrumental writing is quite limited - simple articulation, phrasing and dynamic markings often serve to demonstrate awareness in this respect. Turning to criterion C, there continue to be few compositions that demonstrate genuinely imaginative use of structure, but many teacher examiners continue to award high marks for pieces which are structurally quite straightforward. Compositions justifying the "excellent" mark band should demonstrate development of the chosen form with subtle additions/alterations to the underlying structure, and/or clear examples of internal structural devices within the overall form.

Optional criteria

Once again, the application of the optional criteria has shown notable improvement over the past two or three years, but moderators still find it necessary to make adjustments to the chosen criteria where some candidates could score higher marks with different criteria.

The most commonly used were, as ever, D, E, F and G. As noted in previous reports, Criterion H (Dynamics) is often over-assessed and teacher examiners should take care that this criterion is used appropriately and effectively. Candidates generally do not sufficiently exploit the use of crescendo and diminuendo to justify the highest marks. Criterion I (Technology) continues to be generally underused in situations where the creative use of technology features as part of the composition process, but conversely it is often applied inappropriately - centres are referred to guidance contained in the Administrative Support Guide which is published annually, online.

ADMINISTRATION

Centres are, once again, referred to the E9 report submitted by moderators following the completion of the moderation process. These frequently offer detailed feedback on teacher examiner assessment, especially when it differs from the national standard, as well as commentary on the submission in general. Teacher examiners are requested, wherever and whenever possible, to access the E9 report prior to submitting Enquiries About Results requests.

As in previous years the following points should be noted.

- Prepare the MUS200 form properly so that it is presented as one folded A3 sheet containing four A4 sides;
- Check that each composition derives from a different Area of Study;
- Check that all signatures are present.
- Ensure that the students track is correctly labelled in the appropriate box on the MUS form;
- Provide a track list;
- Ensure announcements of candidates' names are on a different track to their compositions (though announcements of candidates' names are not necessary if the track number has been advertised on both MUS Form and track list);
- Check that the CD works in an ordinary CD player, and on more than one machine;
- 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.
- Please check transfer and arithmetical processes.
- Please ensure work is sent to the correct moderator before the stated deadline.

There was a marked increase this year in instances of work being sent to the wrong moderator - this greatly delays the moderation process and significantly increases workloads.

Once again, many thanks to teacher examiners and other centre staff for their hard work in preparing and submitting samples of work for the 2016 series.