

Moderators' Report

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Music
5MU02 Composing Music

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GCSE Music 5MU02 Composing

This fourth year of the 5MU02 specification has seen an established and settled pattern developing. An improvement in presentation, quality of recordings and scores this year has been encouraging and centres are thanked for their diligence in this matter.

Area of study/setting of compositional briefs

Teacher examiners are requested to make the connection between area of study and composition clear. Candidates presenting second compositions that are clearly related to the same area of study as their first composition but are credited with a tenuous link to another area of study will not score higher marks for criterion A "use and development of ideas within the chosen area of study". The assessment of compositions such as these must 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.

General comments on the area of study

Area of study 1

Most compositions were in ternary form. The higher scoring pieces often contained intros and codas, alteration/development for A2 and a modulation in the B section. Candidates writing in a minor key frequently use the harmonic version with its augmented 2nd whereas the melodic scale would often be more suitable, especially for singers. There are fewer centres using purely using cut and paste for the A sections and completely unrelated material for the B sections in ternary pieces. Many candidates used and adopted the ternary form to the musical style of their choice.

Other popular forms in this area of study include rondo, variations and ground bass.

The trend of presenting high scoring piano pieces based on the Chopin model pleasingly continues.

Many centres present songs using the various forms apparent in this area of study. This is quite acceptable but the form to which it is connected must be made clear in the brief and in the teacher examiner comments on the MUS form.

Area of study 2

As stated in the 2013 examiners report, minimalism continues to be by far the most popular choice of composition in this area of study. It should be noted that these compositions can be compromised by

brevity and one would expect compositions in this genre to be slightly longer than time limits indicated in the specification in order to unfold the necessary slow musical changes. To score highly, these pieces must contain several elements of the genre such as augmentation, diminution, phase shifting, phasing, rhythmic development and displacement.

Serialist pieces tended to have tone rows clearly labelled with lots of contrast (in the style of Peripetie). Low scoring compositions showed little variety of rhythmic interest and textural contrast with some misjudgements in the use of tone rows and textures.

Regrettably the trend to try and submit a second "pop song in disguise" as a song from a musical continues. Centres are reminded that the connection to a dramatic stimulus must be made clear.

Area of study 3

Several Adele/Coldplay style songs were heard this year of which many were quite successful. The trend towards candidates producing live vocals on the recording of their composition continues and this pleasing development has resulted in improved word setting by the candidates. Higher scoring pop songs use; varied textures, drum patterns altered for different verses with sophisticated fills, distinctive guitar riffs and bass lines that have both a melodic and harmonic function. It would be pleasing to see the inclusion of more advanced and typical keyboard parts in pop song submissions. It is recommended that centres find suitable examples to introduce students to the many and varied techniques of keyboard writing in popular music.

Lesser scoring compositions in this genre come from candidates who often submitted words with chord patterns, making it difficult to tell which parts had been specifically composed and which were "busked" by members of the ensemble.

Blues pieces are still very popular but it is to be welcomed that fewer compositions using a simple repetition of the 12 bar sequence with simple riffs are submitted. The best pieces included well-developed melodic lines, improvised fills and imaginative use of the resources and medium.

Club dance pieces were numerous and overall of good standard. The higher scoring pieces were musically convincing, using studio equipment effectively. They showed how the candidate had manipulated samples, composed drum loops and structured their composition by layering tracks. At the lower end of the mark awards the candidates didn't really exploit the possibilities. As in previous years, candidates can be too wrapped-up in the technology side and neglect the musical content. It was refreshing to hear imaginative work where candidates had actually created their own samples or loops.

Could centres please provide more guidance on what is classified as the candidates own work as many software packages come with pre-recorded loops?

Downloading Samples

The trend of downloading samples of previously recorded songs from the internet has been popular this year. This can create problems with moderation and centres are requested to outline the extent and nature of the candidates work in compositions of this nature. The reverse side of the Mus form has ample space for this information to be provided.

Area of Study 4

Although this continues to be the area where fewest compositions are submitted, it generally produces the most intriguing. A number of these were fusion pieces inspired by Capercaillie. We also heard some pieces that were a Fusion of Dance and Bhangra. These were often highly imaginative and successful.

Compositions that feature African Drumming and Raga were more plentiful this year. The best African Drumming compositions explored the features of cross rhythms, polyrhythms and call and response.

It should be noted that in this area of study Reggae is regarded as main stream pop and not as world music.

Scores

The presentation of commentaries and screenshots has improved this year. Please note that a poorly photocopied screenshot with no annotation will be insufficient as a score and centres will be requested to supply further information. A number of centres still send inadequate commentaries instead of scores, which is surprising, as often the work has clearly been produced on computer and a screenshot or score must be available.

Some centres provided a set of parts, rather than a score. This is not acceptable.

The standard of traditional scores continues to improve as the use of Sibelius prevails in most centres.

Teacher Examiner Assessments

Many teacher examiners provided detailed comments on the MUS forms. Teacher examiner comments referring directly to aspects of the composition using bar numbers were very useful. Regrettably, some teacher examiners merely quoted from the exam criteria grids and some teacher examiners failed to make any comments whatsoever.

Use of the Compulsory Core Criteria

A pleasing trend this year has been an increasing awareness of the demands of each criterion. The guidance of the Teacher/Examiner was in evidence here as candidates attempted to follow the demands of the brief.

Use of Criterion A was not always successful as often the style and standard conventions were neglected. In the use of Criterion B, there were often rather narrow attempts to exploit resources. Although the parts rarely appeared unplayable, some instrumental writing was limited in terms of variety. Pedal markings for piano, bowing instructions for strings and phrasing etc are simple things to add to the score that will increase candidates awareness of writing for instruments. Generally Criterion C was used effectively, although there were not many compositions that demonstrated imaginative use. Adding middle 8 sections, bridge passages etc, to songs and linking passages, intros and codas in AOS 1 pieces can enhance marks. Compositions in the excellent grid should show development of form with subtle alterations within the overall structure.

Optional criteria

As with the compulsory criteria, greater awareness of the musical demands of these was more evident this year. Moderators did make a few adjustments to the optional criterion where some candidates could score higher marks with different criteria.

The most commonly used were D E F and G.

The weaker criteria are often used sparingly and over-assessed by teacher examiners. Dynamics (H) should be used appropriately and effectively. Candidates do not exploit the use of crescendo and diminuendo enough and teacher examiners may consider addressing this issue. Technology (I) continues to be an underused criterion especially considering the extent of music technology used in compositions.

It is worthwhile perusing previous years examiner reports for more detailed comments of the use of compulsory and core criteria.

Arrangements

Not many centres enter arrangements. It is requested that, when doing so, teacher examiners should supply as much information as possible. This is particularly important as a number of centres are using downloaded samples and loops as the basis for arrangements.

Administration

Many moderators give detailed feedback on teacher examiner assessment especially when they feel it differs from the national standard. It is advised that teacher examiners please refer to these as they can provide useful guidelines for future teaching strategies.

As in previous years the following points should be noted.

- Check that the sound is actually on the CD.
- Provide a track list.
- Ensure that the students track is correctly labelled in the appropriate box on the MUS form.
- Ensure announcements of candidates' names are on a different track to their compositions. Announcements of candidates' names are not necessary if the track number has been advertised on both MUS Form and track list.
- 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.
- Please ensure work arrives before the posted deadline.
- Please check transfer and arithmetical processes.

Many thanks to all teacher examiners for their hard work.

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>

