



## **General Certificate of Education**

**MUSIC 2271**

**MUSC6**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## MUSC6

In this first year of this unit, it is very encouraging to be able to report on so many fine performances, both acoustic and technology-based. Candidates and teachers are to be congratulated for the way in which they have tackled this unit.

### **Solo acoustic performance**

The majority of submissions were of acoustic performances and, as is to be expected in a subject where most of the candidates are fine performers, the standards were high. In many respects, such a high standard was to be anticipated as this component replaces the live performance in Unit 6 of the previous specification. It was a joy and privilege to listen to many extremely good recitals, where candidates were obviously well-prepared and had given much thought to the content, balance and variety of their programme. A word of thanks and recognition should also go to the accompanists who tackled some very demanding pieces in their own right.

Recordings were mostly of a very high quality but it is essential that, before the full recital is performed, test recordings are made to ensure that the balance on the CD or mini-disc is good and reflects what was heard live. There were a few occasions where the accompanying instrument (usually a piano) tended to overpower the candidate or where a recording was distorted, thus detracting from the aural experience and making assessment more difficult.

The Level of Demand mark is now just 10% of the overall total and so there is really no need for candidates to overstretch their technique just to gain maximum marks here: it is more likely in such a scenario that they will lose marks in one or more of the other assessment areas to such an extent that the small gain will be more than offset. Better to choose pieces which the candidate can perform comfortably and confidently even at the expense of being awarded 4 or 5 for Level of Demand rather than 6. The benefits in terms of Accuracy, confidence in Communication and ability to respond to the Interpretative requirements of the pieces will more than compensate. Certainly, unless the candidate is absolutely confident and has the necessary techniques, there is no need to go beyond Grade 8 or its equivalent.

Scores are needed to enable the examiner to assess the accuracy of the candidate's performance. Where that performance intentionally differs from a submitted score, this should be noted. Differences might be to dynamics or to tempo or, in the case of some modern pop songs, the performance might well change some rhythms and/or pitches while retaining the basis of the printed music. There will be some occasions where the candidate did not learn the music from a score but learned it aurally: in such cases, a benchmark recording should be submitted and the candidate's intentions made absolutely clear, for example by including a lead sheet. Similarly, where there is an element of improvisation in the performance, candidates must make the basis of that improvisation clear: it might be a melody, a chord sequence, a rhythm, or a particular style. Again it is preferable that a lead sheet be provided to clarify the candidate's intentions.

As it is the first year of this examination, it was perhaps inevitable that there were a few misunderstandings. In respect of the actual recording of the recital, centres should bear in mind that:

- this can be done in front of an audience (as many were, and very well-received in most cases) or can be done in a less formal situation

- it can be done in one 'take' or individual pieces can be recorded separately and the full final recital edited together
- there is no need to exceed the suggested upper time limit of 15 minutes: candidates should easily be able to demonstrate techniques to a very high standard well within that time through a careful choice of pieces: this year, there were quite a few which were well in excess of fifteen minutes, going up to eighteen minutes and, in one case, over twenty minutes
- the recording, if all done at one time, should be paused in between pieces: an examiner does not need to listen to comments between performers, to papers being rearranged ready for the next piece, to extended silences, and so on
- where a false start is made to a performance, this should not form part of the final recorded submission
- performances must be of the whole movement or piece in 'one take': the examination is an assessment of a live performance and, as such, submissions which edit together sections of several performances are not admissible and are outside the spirit and ethos of the examination
- the over-riding aim of the acoustic option is to replicate the feel of an actual live performance in front of an audience

With regard to the actual recitals, the following points might be of benefit to candidates and teachers when determining the content of the recital programme:

- where a piece has a very long introduction before the candidate's first entry, this should be shortened in a musically satisfying manner. The same procedure should be adopted where there is a lengthy coda which does not involve the candidate
- there is no need to play repeats unless it adds something to the performance: for example, by the addition of ornamentation where appropriate, or within *da capo aria* form
- the specification requires 'variety' within the recital, whether of period, style or technique. It is most unlikely that this variety will be demonstrated sufficiently if only one movement of a work is chosen
- where a recital falls substantially short of the recommended minimum duration of ten minutes, it is unlikely that the candidate will be able to demonstrate the necessary skills and techniques to access the highest marks across the assessment areas.

Within the context of this examination, it is quite permissible for a candidate to play along to a backing track. Several did this, whether performing a pop song, a song from a musical, or one of the many such recordings available through the Rockschoo! examination system. However, it is not acceptable to play or sing along to the original recording, as happened in a very small number of cases. The obvious issues here are, first, doubling in a way which can obscure the part being assessed and, second, the recording offering undue support to the candidate.

### Technology based performance

In the case of both technology options, there were some excellent examples of work, although the second option was the more popular. Centres should remember that it is only in the case of Option 2 that **two** recordings are required: the initial version and then the mixed-down, final version. Option 1 combines sequenced tracks with audio tracks and this needs only the final version for its assessment. However, it is an essential requirement of the specification that the candidate includes both audio and sequenced tracks if choosing Option 1; the ratio of these tracks is at the discretion of the candidate, but both must be present.

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Similarly, with Option 2, the specification requires that the submission includes both vocal and instrumental tracks, although the ratio is left to the candidate. Thus, an instrument-only submission is not acceptable.

In all cases, it is vitally important that candidates provide examiners with information as to the hardware and software used, their capabilities and the process of achieving the recordings. Please make clear which technology-based performance is being attempted by making use of the appropriate box on page two of the *Candidate Record Form* and by identifying, in the case of the first option, precisely which tracks are sequenced and which are audio.

Where a candidate submits a technology-based option which does not meet the requirements – whether because there are insufficient tracks or because, in the case of Option 1, there is not a combination of sequenced and audio tracks – the full range of marks will not be available to candidates; they will have failed to meet the requirements of the examination and will not have demonstrated skills to the degree required by this specification.

Given that this is a new specification, it is vital that its requirements are studied closely and adhered to. Any perceived lack of clarity should be followed up through checking the information on the AQA website ([www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)) and, if further help is needed, contacting the Music Department at AQA, Guildford.

### **All performances**

It was gratifying, given the new, wider range of options within this specification, that there were such varied examples: recitals on one instrument or on two instruments, submissions combining an acoustic performance and a technology-based one, work consisting entirely of one of the technology-based units and examples where candidates had entered a piece in each of the technology-based options.

Where the submission combines an acoustic recital with a technology-based option, a recital about half the length of that required for the normal acoustic submission will suffice: thus, the expectation would be that the candidate would play for five to seven minutes plus the technology-based performance. This should ensure that both performances still remain within the upper limit of fifteen minutes.

### **Administration**

In a minority of cases, teachers assessed their candidate's performance: this should not be done, as this unit is examined and not internally assessed.

Please take care when packaging CDs: they should be enclosed in a padded envelope or bubble-wrap to ensure that they are not broken in transit: this is particularly important where a centre has only a small entry numerically as the other material will not provide the necessary level of protection. Very occasionally a CD was broken on arrival and this caused delays in the marking process.

Please remember to include the following in future years:

- the completed *Candidate Record Form* with pages 1 and 2 completed
- information as to the voice/instrument(s) to be assessed (the 2011 CRF has been amended to make this clearer)
- titles of pieces performed
- where relevant, the grade of the music, the relevant board (eg ABRSM, Trinity/Guildhall, or Rockschool) and the year it was set (this can be written on the photocopied score)

- scores or lead sheets and/or benchmark recordings
- CD (or mini-disc) of recitals (having checked that they are complete and playable on standard equipment).

## **Mark Range and Award of Grades**

Grade Boundaries and Cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA website.