



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Music

MUSC5

(Specification 2270)

Unit 5: Composing: Developing Musical Ideas

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

MUSC5 DEVELOPING MUSICAL IDEAS

This is a very interesting unit to mark, and it provides ample evidence of the enthusiasm and skills of student composers in schools and colleges. The best work in all options was inventive and ambitious, and was clearly backed by thorough tuition and detailed study of compositional models.

Almost all of the work received was presented in a clear and manageable format and was a pleasure to handle and to assess. A significant number of submissions again omitted a review of the work. It should be noted that features of the review are included in the mark scheme and its absence will reduce the marks available. Reviews should include an assessment of the work, using technical language where appropriate, and should shed some light on the compositional process and the thinking behind it. In some cases the written material simply described the score without adding any further illumination.

Organisational matters caused a few administrative difficulties and teachers are asked to note these for future submissions:

- some candidates were entered for the wrong Brief, or were entered simultaneously for two different Briefs
- different Briefs were despatched in a single envelope. To ensure that the work is sent to the correct examiner, and for tracking purposes, it is important to use the separate stationery provided by AQA
- for the same reason, recordings of different Briefs should be sent on separate CDs
- CDs should play on audio equipment as well as on a computer
- scores should be reduced to study size wherever possible. It is more laborious to assess a cumbersome score which has very few bars on a page, or is printed on A3 paper

Brief A

This option attracted a wide range of ability, including some highly imaginative and stylish solutions. The first hurdle for candidates is to make an accurate copy of the given material. In one instance a whole phrase of the chorale was omitted, and elsewhere the loss of pause marks meant that an expected cadence was eliminated. More serious problems resulted from errors in the quartet. Apart from mistakes in the notes which made the tonality obscure, many candidates omitted the tempo indication, so that the default playback speed was far too quick. This appears to have encouraged a simpler setting than required, with infrequent chord changes and little variety of texture. The fact that the given opening moves to an augmented sixth chord on a quaver beat should be a clue to the harmonic rhythm and chromatic interest possible. It was also common to find alterations in the dynamics or articulation of the given part. These form part of the question and should not be changed, but appropriate dynamics, bowing and performance detail should be added to the lower parts.

Question 1 – Chorale harmonisation

Although it is necessary to study and understand detailed matters of technique and style, the best chorale examples moved beyond mere following of ‘rules’ and showed real musical flair combined with a lively sense of Bach’s sound world. It is essential to keep the musical effect uppermost in choosing a solution, and the simple process of playing the voice parts of the chorale individually would have highlighted awkward leaps and augmented intervals.

The major key melody provided an approachable task for most candidates. A few mistook its bland appearance and did not spot the potential for modulations to B flat major (bar 6) and C minor (bar 12). Alert candidates moved to F minor in the fourth phrase, but the use of F minor at the end of the first phrase was unwise and difficult to handle. A misunderstanding of the Picardy Third progression caused some candidates to attempt to use it at an intermediate cadence. This was particularly unsettling in bar 12 as it was difficult to re-establish E flat major so soon after a C major chord.

Cadence patterns were often successful and stylish, with suitable passing notes and suspensions. It was less common to find these features used consistently and confidently in the middle of a phrase, but some writers were able to make good use of third inversions, diminished sevenths and passing modulations. There were also some very effective melodic bass lines.

Although the review often listed rules which had been followed, it was at times contradicted by the persistence of consecutives, misplaced second inversions and unwieldy bass movement. Occasionally an unusual feature was justified by reference to a particular chorale in the Riemenschneider edition. This was valuable where accurate, but sometimes drew an invalid parallel. Passing notes caused problems when they did not move by step or introduced consecutives. Semiquaver patterns need to be used with great care: the use of a 'quaver-two-semiquavers' pattern to fill a leap of a fourth in the bass is rare in Bach and often created parallel fifths or octaves.

Finally, it is important to check that modulations include all of the necessary accidentals. Where these were missing and the candidate's intention was not clear from the score, the review was often helpful in assessing whether the modulation was intended, and some credit for it could be given.

Question 2 – Classical string quartet

The first essential of the string quartet is to understand the tonal and stylistic implications of the given melody. Points which helped to earn credit were:

- a simple answering phrase in bars 3-4, maintaining the style of the opening
- harmonic movement in bar 7, perhaps treating the A as a suspension in the second half of the bar
- a smooth modulation to C major in bars 9-16, with Ic-V the best solution in the second half of bar 15
- understanding how to approach and resolve the diminished sevenths in bars 18 and 20
- interest and harmonic movement in lower parts in bars 22 and 23
- a cadence to E minor at bar 24
- inventive use of the opening material in bars 25-28, rather than an exact copy of bars 1-4
- harmonic variety going beyond repeated root position tonic and dominant chords in bars 29-32

Some of the weaknesses found in solutions were:

- failure to understand the rhythm patterns of 6/8 time
- ugly doubling of leading notes and other major thirds
- consecutive fifths and octaves, often repeated and aurally intrusive

- persistently dense textures
- harmony disturbed by the viola moving below the cello, and melody obscured by the second violin moving above the first
- ineffective use or overuse of pizzicato, tremolo and added trills
- confining the harmonic vocabulary almost entirely to tonic and dominant chords
- unlikely use of a Picardy Third at the final cadence

The best solutions had strong and interesting harmony, smooth and well-timed modulations, effective lower parts and a real understanding of string texture and technique.

Brief B

The highest quality work demonstrated skilful use of orchestral textures, jazz styles and programmatic pieces using sophisticated harmony. There were interesting ventures into pastiche of Baroque, Classical and Impressionist composers, and convincing emulation of music which the student had sung or played. In popular styles there were some strong extended structures with effective textural and timbral changes, with full exploitation of the instruments or voices chosen.

The choice of genre sometimes limited the potential of the work. It is important to realise that a rock style which works well in a club may not fulfil the criteria for an examination piece where credit is given for effective modulation and advanced harmonic vocabulary. Some submissions which were described as 'minimalist' were very restricted in their language and tonality and failed to demonstrate the necessary strength of material and continual development. In other cases the exhaustive use of a single harmonic pattern such as 12-bar blues became a straitjacket which prevented development and variety.

The option to write a work in two or three movements worked well when the format was normal for the genre, for example in a group of three settings of linked poems for upper voice choir. In other cases the movements were sometimes too short to explore their material or were too similar. It is more valuable to develop material and to move through a modulatory passage then to stop and start again with a new idea in a different key. Where the movements were clearly unrelated e.g. written for completely different ensembles, only one movement was marked. Any submission in more than one movement must be intended as a continuous performance with no more break between the sections than would be natural in concert performance.

It is valuable to be able to offer the option of free composition in this unit, but it must be borne in mind that the mark scheme criteria and the guidelines in the specification apply to all submissions and these should guide the choice of genre and content of the composition.

Brief C

There were fewer high-achieving arrangements this year, perhaps because the model set needed more initiative in arrangement than the obviously melodic piece set in 2010. There were some adventurous and stylish compositions in a pop, rock or jazz style, but some of these paid very little attention to the Brief and would certainly have been unrecognisable as an arrangement of it to an innocent ear. At the lower end, the melodic material was copied with the addition of a rock beat, and in the process much of the interesting detail in the original was lost. It was common to find the harmonic language reduced almost entirely to tonic and dominant chords, with little sense of when it was time to move on from the tonic key. Often the triple time material at the beginning was successfully transformed into four-

time to accord with a chosen style, but it proved harder to alter the final duple dance into triple time. Some candidates moved into 5 or 7 beats in a bar with some success, although there were cases where the music remained resolutely in its original form even though barred differently. Some accompaniment patterns remained unchanged for long periods, and there were examples where the required duration was achieved only by exact repetition of material which had already outstayed its welcome.

Candidates would often benefit from a more thorough study of the given Brief before they begin their arrangement. Several reviews mistook its irony and came to mixed conclusions about the mood of the piece. Few gave any indication of knowing its context although it was taken from a work which many schools have previously studied or performed, and there are performances available on YouTube.

To score highly an arrangement should show idiomatic writing in the chosen style, enterprising use of the given material and confident use of the advanced harmonies and techniques indicated in the specification. However, the Brief also provides a skeleton which is very helpful for students who do not find it easy to generate fresh material but can re-imagine ideas into a pop, rock or jazz style which they know well from experience.

Mark Range and Award of Grades

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

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion