

# Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE in Music  
(6MU02) Paper 1

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## Principals' Report

There was a further rise in the mean mark this year, up from 42 in 2014 to 44.4. This was partly attributable to an improvement in the standard of compositions with 2% more candidates this year achieving better than half marks, however, there was a marked rise in the standard of sleeve notes with 9% more achieving better than half marks.

There were some significant changes in the distribution and popularity of the briefs, with many more attempting Brief 1 this year (a take-up of 61%) and a fall in numbers opting for Brief 2.

A typical submission consisted of a composition with marks in the low 30s and a sleeve note with marks in the mid-teens.

### COMPOSITIONS

Overall, 92% gained better than half marks compared with 90% last year. There was an increase in the number of compositions in the 31-35 excellent mark band (38%) and a fall in the number that were bunched in the 21-30 band, down from 63% last year to 54%.

Most compositions achieved well in the core criteria of coherence and use of forces and there were many imaginative responses to the chosen brief. Harmony continues to be the weakest of the three optional criteria and, as in previous years, many examiners commented on the number of candidates that demonstrated a narrow vocabulary of chords and an inability to devise and manage a coherent tonal plan.

There was a sharp increase in the number of CDs submitted in an incorrect format. The specification requirement is for a standard audio CD that can be played on a conventional CD player. This year examiners were sent a variety of MP3 and .wav files or CDs in which the student work had been saved in a folder, rendering it unplayable.

Most pieces met the required 3 minute length.

#### **Brief 1 – *The River's Journey* – 61%%**

This proved a very popular option and was chosen by the majority of the candidates (compared with 37% for this brief last year). Overall, this was done very well, with 41% achieving marks in the excellent mark bands. Evidently this was a very accessible brief and many candidates were able to create atmosphere with arpeggios, harps and raindrop effects. There was, perhaps, a more episodic element (arguably, less of a *process*) in the way in which the piece was structured – many opened with drops of water or ideas to suggest a small stream which then passed through towns and cities before opening out into an estuary - and this may have led to its increased popularity and success. There was a number of effective minimalist examples and many of the accompanying sleeve notes paid homage to the

wide range of models upon which students had drawn when preparing their compositions.

### **Brief 2 – Variation structures – *A piece based on a ringtone* – 16%**

This proved less popular than had been anticipated, perhaps because of the challenges inherent in creating an extended piece from a relatively short fragment. Predictably, many chose standard ring tones, including the famous Nokia one but, given that almost anything could have been downloaded and installed on a mobile, there were surprisingly few extended melodies or themes taken from wider afield. Those who met the challenge tended to do well, with 94% gaining better than half marks. One particularly memorable submission consisted of the Nokia ringtone as the subject of a very impressive fugue.

### **Brief 3 – a song based on the idea of meeting – 15%**

The range of work for this brief was more typical of previous years with a wide spread of marks. In the past this particular brief has tended to attract the weaker candidates and, as in 2014, the results suggest that many did better by choosing other briefs, helping to explain in part the overall rise in the composition marks. Students offering a song in which they accompanied themselves at the keyboard often produced rather dull keyboard parts although guitar-based songs tended to do well.

Many examiners commented on a lack of ingenuity in terms of structure, with many pieces lacking convincing contrast or which felt unbalanced in the pacing of verse, chorus and middle.

### **Brief 4 – a vocal piece to celebrate a joyful occasion – 8%**

A significant drop from last year (15%). As in the past this was generally well done and included many texts drawn from the liturgy that demonstrated secure part-writing for the voices and idiomatic vocal writing. A number of pieces were submitted in the gospel tradition and most included an accompaniment.

## **SLEEVE NOTE**

The questions remain the same each year. This year there was a rise in the standard, compared with a fall in 2014.

78% gained better than half marks (compared with 69% in 2014 and 80% in 2013).

46% gained better than 16/20 (compared with 28% in 2014 and 50% in 2013).

Most candidates managed to achieve full marks for question 1 and also attract credit for making multiple points in question 2. Candidates achieving a low mark for the sleeve note tended to be those who failed to answer question 3 adequately although a significant number of sleeve notes included a question 3 answer that ran to several pages.

Common problems were failure to provide examples of features such as specific chords and devices like suspensions and instrumental effects – a comment such as ‘the piece includes a dominant seventh’ requires a little more detail in terms of location and/or function in order to attract credit. Also, a significant number of candidates appear to equate the 12 marks for this question with 12 points that have to be made – a point that has been made in previous years’ reports. In fact, the mark scheme operates a sliding scale such that 17 points are required for full marks.

Many examiners commented on inaccurate use of terminology, with textural terms such as monophonic and imitation being incorrectly applied and chords, such as the German sixth, being incorrectly identified.

### **ADMINISTRATION**

Apart from an increase in the number of unsuitable CD recordings, as reported above, there were few administrative problems this year. One point that arose several times in the examiners’ reports was the size of scores. Some were submitted on A3 pages (or larger), or had been carefully bound in wallets and portfolios. A simple set of A4 pages is all that is required. Moreover, this size is much easier to pack when the examiner returns the marked work to Edexcel.

## **Grade Boundaries**

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