



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music (9MU0)
Paper 01

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The second year of the life of the 2016 Specification saw assessments of candidates' work for the Performing component run smoothly, by and large. The fundamental changes to this component in the new Specification seem to have been well understood by most Centres. The wide range in quality of recitals is to be expected but, perhaps even more than last year (though the mean mark was extremely close to last year's), there were some outstanding submissions. Several examiners made comments to this effect.

For most A level candidates, the Performing component is the one with which they feel most comfortable. This is understandable since many of them may be presenting a recital on an instrument which they have been playing for several years, in some cases ten years or more. It was a real treat to listen to some of these submissions and in a tiny handful of cases the quality of performance was truly memorable. One recital in particular included a performance of a great masterpiece played without any loss of fluency or sense of structure but with the conviction that every single note was a jewel of great price. Our congratulations go to all candidates who achieved these very high marks and especially to those few who made such a deep and at times moving impression.

This is very much in contrast to the Composing and Appraising components, for which serious study may only have started in the two years before GCSE is taken. It also accounts for the quite large numbers of candidates who gain full marks for Performing, assisted by the scaling up of raw marks of 40 to 48 (out of 48) to 60 (out of 60) for programmes which qualify as 'More Difficult'. However, this does not disguise the challenge which the Standard level of Grade 7 presents to a not insignificant number of candidates who may only have begun to learn their instrument during their secondary school years.

Examiners as well as candidates welcomed the change in the rules concerning under-length submissions. News of this decision came from Ofqual to the examining boards rather late in the academic year but Edexcel nevertheless found time to devise a system of graded penalties where recitals did not meet the minimum requirement of eight minutes performing time. A small number of submissions were penalised in this way. Centres are asked to state on the Performing Authentication Sheets the duration of each item of a recital. The number of discrepancies with these timings suggests that the rules concerning this matter are not always understood. The timing should include the whole piece as performed, including any introduction in an accompaniment (long sections as in the expositions of classical concertos are usually omitted). They should not include any 'count-ins' where there is a recorded backing accompaniment, nor any time between the end of the performance and the moment when the track ends.

There is still a need to remind some candidates and their teachers that they are well-advised to choose programmes that are within their ability at the time the recording is made. In Grid 1, this is the substance of the second bullet point at all Levels from 1 ('beyond the current ability of the performer') to 5 ('within the current ability of the performer'). The potential difference in marks is between 1 and 14 for that one Grid alone. In most cases, a performance of Standard level pieces which lie much more obviously within the performer's ability is likely to result in a raw mark which is considerably higher than

it would have been for MD repertoire played less well and which with the scaling up for S Level gives a significantly higher final mark. All of this is to say nothing of the additional satisfaction (and peace of mind) that comes from playing something well.

Some recitals were too long. In a few cases, candidates began a fourth or fifth new piece after ten or twelve minutes. These additional pieces are hardly likely to tell an examiner something that has not already been made clear. In a few cases, there was audible evidence of performers at this stage suffering from tiredness. This was true not only among wind players and singers but also other instrumentalists.

Finally, a few requests and reminders to Centres:

1. Candidates should announce themselves at the beginning of their recital. This is part of the Authentication process and should be on the same track as the recital. This announcement should be audible. Very often, this announcement is made with the candidate some way from the microphone. It would be perfectly acceptable for the candidate to move a few paces to their instrument after making the announcement.

2. The recital should take place in front of an audience. The Specification calls for a minimum of two persons but there is much to be said for arranging for this audience to be larger than that if at all possible. This requirement is in line with aspects of the other components of Music A Level which are intended to remind all candidates that music is a means of communication. The only evidence for the presence of an audience is likely to be applause. There was some such evidence in a few recitals this year which clearly went beyond a dutiful response and conveyed an immediate and spontaneous expression of pleasure on the part of the listeners. This is very much to be welcomed but it should be understood that examiners will not allow this to affect their assessment of the recital.

3. Candidates must produce scores of the pieces that they are performing. A list of appropriate alternatives to scores may be found in the Specification. It is not appropriate to produce only a reference recording where a score of a given piece exists.

4. CDs and USBs should be packed carefully, preferably in a padded envelope. There should be a clearly written track list, corresponding to the tracks listed on the PASs. CDs and USBs should be clearly labelled with the number of the Centre. In the case of USBs, a luggage label or something similar which can be tied to the stick may be the best way to present these.

5. Recordings should be carefully balanced between candidate and accompaniment. There was a significant number of recitals submitted this summer where the accompaniment was too loud in relation to the candidate. This was often caused by inappropriate placing of the microphone. Centres would be well-advised to check that recordings are well-balanced in this respect before making the recording that will be submitted for the examination.

Our thanks go to the many Centres where administration covered all the above points very satisfactorily – and indeed, many other considerations involved in this component. We are most grateful to the many

teachers who handled all these matters in exemplary fashion and, indeed, in doing so gave their candidates the best chance of success.

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