



Pearson
Edexcel

Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Music (9MU0)
Paper 01 Performing

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Introduction

After the two years during which candidates had been awarded teacher-assessed grades, the return to external assessment for this very important stage in the educational pathway of so many young people brought with it two changes. The change to submission by Centres of candidates' recordings and related material by digital rather than postal means was very much welcomed by examiners, once a few initial problems with connections and other technological matters had been resolved. It is hoped that exams officers and others responsible for meeting this new challenge were equally happy with the new method. I would certainly like to thank all those involved for their diligence and competence in this respect.

The second change was the reduced minimum length of the recitals submitted by candidates from eight minutes to three. This was in recognition of the interruptions to the normal processes of teaching, learning and practising suffered by many if not all candidates over the period of the pandemic restrictions. This change was for 2022 only and Centres should be aware of the need to check the information concerning arrangements for 2023 and beyond, when it is assumed that there will be a return to eight minutes, as in the current Specification.

A General View of Candidates' Work

Many examiners were pleased to report that standards of achievement were on the whole very well-maintained compared with the years up to 2019. Very few candidates were awarded final marks for this component lower than 11 and at the top end there was the usual sizeable number of full marks, mostly of course aided by the scaling for Difficulty Level, which raises a mark of 40 out of 48 to 60 out of 60 in the case of recitals of Grade 8 or higher music.

It may be that some candidates choose repertoire with the Difficulty Level too much in mind. They would be well-advised to look more closely both at the descriptors for each of the three criteria and the various Levels in the Performing Assessment Grid and at the effects of the Difficulty Level on the raw mark awarded. With regard to the latter, a candidate of reasonable general ability who can perform well in Grade 7 pieces might expect to achieve a raw mark of say 33 with a mixture of Level 4 and Level 5 marks (10 + 11 + 12). A raw mark of 33 becomes a final mark of 41 at Standard Difficulty Level. A similar candidate choosing Grade 8 pieces will need to achieve a raw mark of 27 (perhaps a mixture of Level 3 and Level 4 marks, say 8 + 9 + 10) for that to become 41 as a final mark. The provisions of the first assessment criterion in particular should be studied carefully by candidates before deciding whether to offer Grade 7 or Grade 8 repertoire.

There was the usual very wide variety of instruments and voices submitted. A small increase was noted in the number of popular music recitals, e.g. on electric, or bass guitars, or drum kit. Many singers also chose music theatre repertoire in preference to classical songs or arias. Almost all possible instruments were represented, including the (alas) rarer orchestral instruments,

such as oboe, bassoon, french horn, viola, double bass, and harp.

Most candidates responded to the temporary three-minutes requirement with a recital of suitable length, perhaps of up to five minutes. There were quite a few recitals that exceeded the normal eight minutes and a small number that went beyond twelve minutes. Candidates should be aware that all recitals are assessed as a whole and that they may be doing themselves an injustice by continuing for so long, particularly in the case of wind instrumentalists and singers where physical tiredness may become evident. The number of short recitals was unsurprisingly very few. These were penalised on a sliding scale that reflected the proportion of time by which they were short.

Some Alerts, Advice and Specification Infringements

Centres are reminded that quality of recording is important. Wherever possible, use high quality recording equipment in an area where there is no background noise. With regard to this, several recordings were noted to be marred by noisy evidence of a break for other pupils in the same Centre and in one or two cases by the ringing of a bell denoting a change of period.

Quality of instruments is also important and wherever possible the use of a digital keyboard in preference to a decent piano should be avoided, even for accompaniments. It is appreciated, however, that this may not always be possible.

Very careful consideration should be given to balance between a performance to be assessed and any accompaniment, including, perhaps particularly including, backing tracks. Again, it is well realised that in some Centres there may be difficulty in engaging a suitable pianist and we are grateful for the many players who step in to provide the sometimes difficult accompaniments for candidates. Whether the person providing a piano accompaniment is a suitably accomplished player or not, it is always possible to check the position of the microphone in relation to the candidate and the piano. Accompanists are politely reminded that it is not they who are being assessed. A few notes omitted in a difficult passage in their part will not in any way affect the assessment of the candidate. Above all, a sympathetic ear for the performer is vital.

There were several problems with the scores uploaded for some candidates. Centres are asked to ensure that scores in reasonable condition are uploaded the right way round and in an upright plane. Where scores for more than one piece are required, it is preferred if these are uploaded as a unit and in the order in which the items are performed on the recording.

Centres are reminded of the Specification requirements for all pieces that form

part of a recital to be performed 'live and uninterrupted'. This clearly precludes incomplete performances of any one piece. Editing of recordings is regarded as a serious infringement of the Specification.

The Performing Marking Assessment Grid

Most candidates for Music A Level are familiar with the grade exams run by some of the Music Colleges and other awarding bodies. In this country, there is a very extensive and highly-developed system, with the leading such institution, the ABRSM, examining candidates of all ages in over ninety foreign countries in addition to tens of thousands in any normal year in the United Kingdom. For some Year 13 students in this country, the experience of taking an exam on their instrument or in singing is already one that they have undergone, perhaps many times, as they pass through the grades from one to eight and even beyond to diploma level. Until recently, such an exam would almost certainly have involved live performance in the real presence of a music examiner, though the pandemic has encouraged most of these bodies to create opportunities for remote assessment.

Candidates for Music A Level who may have had extensive experience of and benefited greatly from the grade exams should be aware of the many important differences between the assessment criteria for those exams and GCE A Level. It is strongly recommended that all candidates and their teachers make themselves familiar with the Pearson Performing Marking Assessment Grid which is published in the Specification and can be found online.

The Performing Marking Assessment Grid has three broad criteria, each of which is marked out of 16. These are 'Technique', 'Accuracy and Fluency' and 'Expressive Control, Style and Context'. Assessment is level-based, with six different levels, and the marks awarded for each of these three criteria lead to a combined mark out of 48, which is known as the raw mark. The Difficulty Level scaling is then applied to create a final mark out of 60. The three criteria are discussed separately below.

In the paragraphs that follow, the Grid has been read from the bottom to the top because that is the way it reads in the Specification. However, examiners are advised to mark from the top downwards, in other words to look first at the highest level that at first it seems might be appropriate. They are also advised to award the top mark for that level where the work offered appears fully to meet all the descriptors for that level.

Technique

A careful reading of the three descriptors for each level will reveal the breadth of the issues covered by just this one criterion. The first deals with immediate

aspects of technique appropriate to the instrument or voice, including fingerwork for most instrumentalists, ability to produce notes punctually and breath control for wind-instrumentalists, and breath control and diction for singers. It will be seen that across the six levels, the descriptors range from 'poor', through 'limited', 'basic', 'convincing' and 'assured' to 'complete' for level six.

The second descriptor concerns assessment of the technical control which a candidate brings to the particular items being presented. Here, they range from 'beyond the current ability of the performer' at level one to 'within the current ability of the performer' at level five. For level six, it is implied that such a question is not even an issue. As stated above, those candidates who may be hovering between choosing Grade 6, 7 or 8 repertoire should consider this descriptor very carefully. Singers should bear in mind that an item which requires them to use extremes of their compass or beyond may be affected by this descriptor.

The third descriptor covers the important area of tone quality control and intonation. This includes the ability not only to create tonal contrast but to exploit this feature appropriately in performance. Again, the descriptors at different levels indicate the increasing demands of this feature as the level rises.

It will immediately become obvious that the mark awarded for this criterion has to be a 'best-fit' mark, taking so many different considerations into account. This may be even more so if the recital includes more than one item, as many do. Separate pieces are not marked separately. The assessment is holistic. The examiner's comments on Examiner Mark Record sheet will normally indicate how the eventual mark has been arrived at.

Accuracy and Fluency

For this criterion, there are five descriptors at level one and four at each of the other levels, but it should be noted that the last two descriptors for each level deal with improvised and ensemble performances respectively. The first two descriptors at level one and the first for each of the other levels deal with accuracy of pitch and rhythm. The next descriptor at each level deals with fluency, including matters of hesitation and/or omission. It will readily be noted that there is a similar step-by-step increase in the level of demand as in the first criterion 'Accuracy' and as the levels rise. The assessment is also likewise on a holistic basis, taking into account all the various matters covered by the descriptors.

Expressive Control, Style and Context

In this case, the descriptors for each level are headed by a more general and

overall view, from 'Very few interpretative skills evident ...' at level one through to 'A mature, individual and imaginative interpretation ...' at level six. The descriptors that follow deal with inconsistencies of tempo, use of dynamics, phrasing and articulation and the degree of communication revealed by the candidate. As before, the mark awarded will be arrived at on a holistic basis, taking these many different, though related, features into account.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the matters discussed in this Report explain the methods by which assessments have been conducted this summer and will help Centres as they start to prepare next year's cohort of candidates. In conclusion, I would very much like to add my congratulations to all candidates who reached Advanced Level this year, with special congratulations to those who achieved high marks for this component. I would also like to thank the many people involved, but particularly the exams officers and music teachers for the very successful manner in which they coped with the new technology and for the mainly very smooth conduct of the examination overall.

