



# **General Certificate of Secondary Education**

**MUSIC 42702**

**Composing and Appraising Music**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## 42702: Composing and Appraising

As expected, few centres submitted work for this unit this year. This is understandable because the work had to be undertaken by students quite early in the course and submitted at the beginning of their third term, while certification will not take place until 2011.

Nevertheless, there were 125 candidates from nine centres. The standard was very wide-ranging with just a handful of submissions gaining really high marks. This is the result of several factors connected with this new approach to composing and its associated appraisal. Most candidates achieved higher marks for the composition than for the appraisal, with 32% gaining half marks or more for the composition compared with about 22% for the appraisal.

### The Composition

Candidates must select at least **two** of the five Areas of Study (AoS) as the basis of their composition and must ensure that it is linked to some aspect of the designated Strand of Learning. For this year, the strand was The Western Classical Tradition, and it will be the same for 2011. It is not necessary to link every element within the two AoS to the strand, as some candidates attempted to do, but there must be a clearly identified focus. This might be something specific such as a recognised group of instruments (e.g. a string quartet, a brass quintet, a flute trio) or a named form (examples might include binary, ternary, rondo, arch-shape or theme and variations). The link might perhaps be the use of a recognisably western tonality or a style or genre: examples here might include jazz, ragtime, a ballad, a lullaby, a fanfare, and so on. Other possible links might be more general, such as the use of syncopation, a drone, a particular time signature, modulation, a cycle of fifths or contrast between major and minor.

There are many approaches to the teaching of compositions. For example:

- some teachers might like to present the idea of a link through a specific compositional brief
- others might prefer to see how the compositional skills and interests of individual students develop before suggesting possible pairings of AoS and then introducing exercises and compositional tasks which will further enhance abilities and techniques
- others might look to the performing skills of students and focus compositional techniques around these, looking to aspects of timbre and idiomatic writing
- some students might come to the course with preferences in composition already established, such as song-writing, working through piano, writing for a particular combination of voices and/or instruments, and so on
- teachers could give students appropriate listening and appraising tasks to stimulate ideas.

Candidates might prefer to adopt an approach based on a specific brief which focusses on the strand and links to two or more AoS. Examples for the Western Classical Tradition could include:

- concerto – contrasting resources would link to texture/melody, structure/form AoS and could be used in a variety of genres including songs and instrumental compositions
- sonata – links well with harmony/tonality, structure/form AoS, and again can be evident in a variety of genres including songs and instrumental compositions
- chamber music – the idea of a composition for a small group of performers in a more intimate session which could link with all the AoS.

For the future the following suggestions for the other two strands may be helpful.

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*Popular Music of the 20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Centuries (this is the strand for 2012)*

- music theatre – the scope is endless here in terms of linking and songs; incidental music and dramatic music would all easily link with any of the AoS
- film – links well with all AoS and again can be evident in a variety of genres including songs, instrumental compositions, descriptive/action music
- jazz – the idea of a composition for either a small group of performers in a more intimate session or a larger group and again could link with all the AoS
- pop songs – again links well with all the AoS in a variety of genres.

*World Music*

- music in its various forms from other cultures but could include songs, instrumental music and perhaps the use of particular instruments associated with a particular culture – again can be linked to the different AoS
- music from Latin America – dances with their characteristic rhythms/metre and also form/structure, instruments used (timbre).

However, compositions will also be assessed in relation to the musical aspects set out in the assessment criteria in the specification. These are:

- the imaginative use of sound
- a sense of musical balance
- the creation and development of musical ideas
- an understanding of the chosen medium
- the appropriate and idiomatic use of instruments, voices and other sound sources
- appropriate uses of musical elements, devices, techniques and conventions

To access the higher marks bands, compositions must be capable of matching the descriptors found there. Thus, to gain a mark in the 20–17 band, a composition will need to be stimulating, interesting and satisfying, having a sense of completeness with evidence of development of musical ideas. There will be a successful and imaginative creation of ideas in relation to the chosen AoS and the focus within the strand. There will be idiomatic writing for the chosen instruments, voices and/or sound sources and the submitted score will contain performance directions appropriate to the genre of music chosen.

Thus, taking the case of a candidate who has combined AoS2 Harmony & Tonality and AoS5 Structure & Form and written a song, it can be seen that the ambition within the composition will have a direct bearing on the final marks awarded. The possibilities range from a very short, basic song for solo voice with a simple accompaniment using primary chords to an extended song structure which includes an introduction, verses, chorus, bridge, *Middle 8*, and an outro, incorporating sophisticated harmonies, seventh chords, variety of texture including backing vocals, modulation(s) and so on.

For all compositions, a score and recording must be provided. The recording must be on a CD which can be played on standard equipment or on a mini-disc recorded in standard-play mode. Please check these before sending them to the examiner. For example, in a bid to check out various aspects of the recording, a candidate might have muted one or more of the voices. It is essential that these are restored before the final recording is made. Or, if working via computer software, a candidate will inevitably have revised the piece as it progresses. If earlier versions of the music have been saved, it is essential that the final version is recorded and matched to the score before submission to the examiner.

Although the quality of the recording itself is not assessed, it is obviously important for the candidate to be confident that the recording illustrates his or her final intentions and for the examiner to be able to listen to an accurate representation of the score provided. Please do not send MP3 or *Sibelius* files or recordings made using any other software program.

The score can be in any one of several formats, depending on the type of composition, the nature of its recording and the preferences of the candidate. The important thing is that the score accurately reflects the intentions of the candidate and bears close resemblance to the music presented in the recording. As stated in the specification, a score can be in a format that is appropriate to the particular genre of music presented, for example it could be:

- in staff notation
- in graphic notation
- in tab
- an annotation, that is, a written account which details the structure and content of the music
- a combination of some or all of these.

If scores are omitted the marking process will be delayed.

### **The Appraisal**

The Appraisal can be written within the Appraisal Booklet or word-processed and attached to it. In both cases, the Appraisal Booklet must be included and, on the front, the candidate should give details of the two Areas of Study chosen.

On the second page of the booklet are six questions which should form the basis of the candidate's responses. Candidates can prepare answers in advance of the controlled time during which the appraisal is completed, and can take their notes in with them. When candidates are preparing their appraisal responses, they should be encouraged to keep a log or diary of progress. A possible approach might be for the six questions to be set out as a workbook, to which comments could be added as the composition progresses.

Answers should be detailed and specific: generalised statements are of little value. The first question can and should be answered succinctly and precisely: candidates should identify the two AoS chosen and make clear the focus within the strand. In this year's submissions this was not always made clear from the outset of the appraisal, which led to some confusion later in several cases. A minority of candidates simply chose four different elements rather than two AoS, stating, for example, that their composition used rhythm and texture along with timbre and structure. This shows a lack of understanding of the requirements of this component. Some candidates merely went on to state that their composition was linked to the Western Classical Tradition: again, this is not sufficient as it lacks a particular focus for the link to the strand.

Candidates are asked to give reasons for their choices of AoS. In most cases, this is likely to be that these are the elements which candidates feel most confident in using, and they should amplify this. At some point within the appraisal, this should lead to a full explanation of how these elements have been used within the composition. In particular, candidates should beware of simply writing a commentary on the completed composition; what is needed is a description of its evolution – the ways in which the various ideas were generated and developed.

Precise detail should be given at all times. For example, rather than state, 'I tried out a few chord sequences until I came up with one I liked', the candidate would be better advised to write

something along the lines of ‘I decided that the best way into my composition would be to base it on a good chord sequence. I experimented at the keyboard with several until I decided to use G Em C Am G/D D7 G, as I felt that this formed a strong progression and clearly established the tonality of my music.’ The candidate might go on to elaborate on the ways in which these chords were to be realised and the choice of instrumental and/or vocal resources. Reference should also be made to the form or structure of the piece (though this might have been done already, if this is the focus within the strand.)

When writing about the process of gaining the recording, candidates should make sure that their role in this is clearly identified.

- where a recording is obtained directly from a computer software program such as *Sibelius*, it is most likely that the candidate will have inputted all the notation and added the performance detail, but this needs to be stated
- where a candidate has used a more performance-linked program such as *Cubase* or *Garageband*, it should be clarified how the tracks were entered, whether step-time, real-time, by the candidate or by other musicians
- where a performance is achieved by acoustic means, it is important to know whether or not the candidate was involved in the performance and his/her precise role, both in the actual performance and in directing any other performers. This is especially important when an annotation is submitted to accompany the recording.

Candidates are asked to evaluate the success of their piece in terms of the chosen AoS and the focus within the strand. It will not be sufficient merely to state that the piece is successful because it has, for example, used rhythm and metre, timbre and dynamics and fits within the Western Classical Tradition.

Of the six questions, the one which has caused most confusion seems to have been the final one: “What is the relationship of your composition to its context?” Candidates should comment on how their composition fits in with others written in this style, and how it compares with other compositions of this type or genre. For example, reference might be made to other songs upon which the style is based and any similarities between the ways in which elements of harmony, tonality, structure and form (if AoS2 and 5 have been chosen) have been used.

Matters of spelling, punctuation and grammar are assessed in the appraisal. Although it is important that the candidate’s meaning is easily discernible, occasional errors will not have a major impact on marks.

Comprehensive information on all aspects of this unit can be found on the AQA website in the Teacher Resource Bank, together with examples of compositions and appraisals. Importantly, it must be remembered that there is no single approach to this composition: the aim should be to enable each candidate to adopt an approach which plays to his or her strengths. Trying to find a formula which can be applied to all is much less likely to result in compositions which show individuality and imagination.

It is **not** envisaged that candidates should write more than will easily fit into the Appraisal Booklet; if produced as a word-processed document it would probably be of no more than two or three sides of A4. However, it is unlikely that just a few sentences will be capable of covering the issues in sufficient detail to enable the candidate to access the higher mark bands. It must be remembered that the Appraisal is worth half the marks for this component and candidates have up to 2 hours in which to write it.

## **General**

For each candidate the Candidate Record Form must be sent with the composition and appraisal. The form must be completed with all the information requested, including the section at the top of the second page. The remainder of the form will be completed by the examiner, who will add comments to support the marks awarded for both elements of this unit.

Overall, many candidates did tackle this unit in the correct way and this bodes well for next year.

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

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