



General Certificate of Secondary Education

MUSIC 42704

Composing Music

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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42704 Composing Music

The candidate entry for this unit in the first year was very small with only a few centres deciding to complete the controlled assessment in the first year of the course. As a result of this, there is limited evidence on which to base a detailed report, but there were some findings which might help centres and candidates to avoid common pitfalls in subsequent years.

There are several changes in the new specification with a whole new emphasis in relation to the brief. In the legacy specification, candidates had to compose in response to a Special Events brief. In the new specification candidates are able to compose in any style or genre of their choosing, but in response to two or more of the Areas of Study. Since each Area of Study encompasses two of the musical elements, it is important that the presented composition shows evidence of careful use of at least four of the musical elements. This means that the choice of brief and the development of the brief are crucial to the assessment process especially for candidates wishing to access the higher mark bands. Candidates have up to 25 hours in which to complete their compositions.

Giving / choosing the brief

It is envisaged that the greater flexibility allowed by the new specification will allow candidates the freedom to compose within their own preferred genre and develop their own style, utilising their own performance skills and personal listening preferences if they so wish. In this manner, candidates will be able to work confidently and have greater control of all aspects of the composition including the recording. There is also greater scope for candidates to use technology performing skills in the development of their composition, in addition to traditional performing skills. Within this broad framework, teachers will be able to focus on enabling candidates to use a wide variety of compositional techniques in their writing, thus producing well structured, coherent, stimulating and imaginative pieces. Within any given cohort, there should be great variety and candidates will be able to develop their music in response to the selected Areas of Study. In some instances, it may be perfectly possible for candidates to produce excellent compositions without even necessarily considering melodic or harmonic implications, for example by selecting *Rhythm & Metre / Timbre & Dynamics*. It is, however, important that whichever Areas of Study are selected, candidates are able to evidence their understanding of how they have developed their ideas in the course of the piece. In the first instance, this should be done on the Candidate Record Form (CRF).

Completing the Candidate Record Form

On the whole, most candidates had done this correctly by completing the first three pages themselves. The amount of detail here did, however, vary enormously. The more successful candidates went into considerable detail on page 2 of the CRF explaining *how* they had used the Areas of Study rather than simply stating *which* areas had been used. On the other hand, there were some candidates who had missed the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding here. For example, many candidates had selected *Rhythm and Metre* as one of their Areas of Study but in some cases, despite using some sophisticated syncopated ideas in their work, this was not mentioned. In other examples, even basic references to the time signature were missing. In most cases, the more successful candidates had also written considerable detail on page 3 of the CRF explaining the process of composition and the nature of the recording. This is particularly important in compositions where other musicians have

contributed to the recording of the composition and the candidate has not included a detailed staff notated score. In these circumstances, the candidate needs to explain how other musicians have contributed to the recording, detailing the amount of help given by those musicians. This is crucially important in circumstances where candidates have not produced staff notated scores and other performers are performing on the recordings. Candidates need to explain how the recording has been produced, stating the extent to which the recorded material consists of their own ideas and the extent to which it relies on the contributions of the other musicians. There were a few examples this year where this was not clear, for example in a group performance of a composition consisting of drums, guitar, piano and vocals. In this example it was not clear if the candidate had performed any of the parts and the score contained only very rudimentary detail that would not enable a performance without additional advice / instruction. This situation made assessment and moderation extremely difficult and should be avoided wherever possible.

Selecting and developing the Areas of Study in the composition

Most candidates who entered compositions this year had selected their Areas of Study carefully and there was evidence of this selection in the work presented. Unfortunately, there were others who had made an inappropriate selection. It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to change the selected Areas of Study if, during the course of the work, it becomes clear that the composition is developing in another area. In order to access the higher mark bands, it is important for candidates to be able to demonstrate evidence of use of most, if not all, of the musical aspects listed in the specification:

- 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.

In some cases, candidates had failed to do this in relation to their selected Areas of Study, particularly in examples where the music relied heavily on repetition of very simple musical ideas without sufficient development or contrast. Some examples of inappropriate choices made this year were:

- Texture & Melody – where the melodic content was not strong and there was little textural variety. Melodic content tended to be based around a limited narrow range of notes with little structure.
- Structure and Form – where the structure was based on repeated four bar patterns with little development of ideas or contrast, or where the structure lacked cohesion and tended to ramble
- Timbre & Dynamics – where the timbral capabilities of some of the chosen instruments were only explored in a limited manner and where there was little or no dynamic contrast (for example where the writing for piano was not idiomatic, relying heavily on left hand block triads)
- Rhythm & Metre – Where there was no clear sense of pulse and the use of rhythmic note values was limited to quavers, crotchets and minims.

The use of ICT in composing

An increasing number of candidates are using ICT in creating their compositions and this is to be encouraged. Generally, there is evidence of an improving ability to use music software proficiently to create imaginative and stimulating work. Most compositions have been created either by using a score-writing programme such as Sibelius or a sequencing programme such as Cubase, and candidates are continuing to use these with growing confidence. However, there were examples this year where the use of these programmes inhibited the *development* of compositions and these examples generally fell into two separate areas:

1. Some candidates using Sibelius to compose presented rhythmically limited pieces. This was largely down to restricting the selection of rhythmic note values very often to quavers, crotchets and minims, no doubt due to the method of selecting note values and placing them on the staff.
2. Some candidates using Cubase or other sequencing software often fell into the trap of pasting short, simple two or four bar phrases with the result that the music presented often became excessively repetitive, even in circumstances where they had created additional layered parts.

Presenting the musical score

Another change from the legacy specification is the manner in which the work is presented in the score and (formerly) the annotation. Now, a score is understood to be any written format that is appropriate to the particular genre of music presented. This could include:

- staff notation
- graphic notation
- tab
- a written account detailing the structure and content of the music
- a combination of some or all of these.

The important thing to remember is that the score, however it is presented, should closely follow the music presented in the recording and be appropriate to the genre of music presented. A traditional staff notated score will be appropriate for many submissions, but for other genres, for example a song for guitar and voice, where the candidate is the performer, a lead sheet with performance detail directions would be wholly appropriate. This year, the presentation of scores was mixed. On the whole, staff notated scores presented using Sibelius were generally coherent although some lacked performance detail. Staff notated scores using Cubase were often less coherent and legible, and frequently not quantized or formatted prior to printing. Scores that were a combination of tab, graphic notation and written account sometimes lacked musical detail and seemed to have limited reference to the music presented in the recording. In these cases, candidates might have benefitted from being given a template or guide that would have enabled them to detail the structure of their music more coherently.

Assessment

The assessment section of the Candidate Record Form is not dissimilar to the corresponding section for the legacy specification. It is important that the teacher gives as much information in this section as possible, making up, when necessary, for any deficiencies in the writing in the candidate section. Referring to the Assessment Criteria is a helpful way of providing evidence for marks awarded, and where teachers had done this assessments tended to be more accurate. Unfortunately, there were some examples where teachers had simply written 'none' in each of the first four sections and just a few words in the final section. This was not helpful to

moderation and assessments tended to be lenient in relation to the assessment criteria and therefore the AQA standards. Help and guidance relating to assessment is provided each year in the form of standardising material; it is also available in the **Guidance and Exemplar work / Teacher Resource Bank** sections of the AQA website and from AQA Controlled Assessment Advisers who can be contacted via email or telephone.

Mark Range and Award of Grades

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