



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Music

42704

(Specification 4270)

Unit 4: Composing Music

Report on the Examination

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COMPOSING MUSIC

In 2010, there was only a very small candidate entry for this unit. This year saw a much more substantial entry with a much wider range of musical genres and styles explored by candidates. The change from the legacy specification from the prescriptive special events brief to the new open brief based on areas of study appears to have been embraced by the majority of candidates. It was intended that this would enable candidates to utilise their performing skills and listening preferences much more than hitherto and certainly, this year, there was some evidence of this happening. However, it is important that teachers and candidates realise that it is the extent to which they use and develop musical ideas within their chosen areas of study that will determine the final assessment.

Giving / choosing the brief

The most successful work this year came from centres where compositions were varied and diverse. It was not uncommon to see an enormous range of work from these centres including pastiche, neo-classical, experimental, jazz, rock and pop styles for a wide range of instruments and voices. In these cases, candidates were clearly composing music which interested them and much of this work was well structured, coherent, imaginative, stimulating and idiomatically written for the chosen instruments and voices.

Almost without exception, moderators reported the opposite in examples where centres had used a prescriptive brief given to all the candidates to follow, the most common of these being the twelve bar blues. This might be an entirely appropriate choice for a candidate with experience of the blues as a performer, for example guitar players; but more often than not the outcomes, whilst following the twelve bar, three chord pattern, lacked the sense of style and idiomatic writing required to access marks in the higher bands. Other examples of prescriptive genre-based briefs seen this year included Jigs, Tangos, Waltzes and Latin dances such as the Salsa. In general, prescriptive genre-based briefs given to all candidates should be avoided wherever possible. Other examples reported by moderators included situations where candidates had been given an opening four- or eight-bar phrase or an opening chord sequence upon which to base the composition. Again, this should be avoided since it often stifles creativity and results in many compositions sounding the same. It would be hoped that by the time the 25 hour controlled assessment starts, candidates would have sufficient skill and knowledge to be able to select, invent and develop their own musical ideas.

Areas of Study

All candidates should select at least two areas of study that are relevant to their work. There were unfortunately many examples this year where only one area of study had been selected and in some cases none at all, and this information had to be requested before moderation could proceed. Teachers should remember that the assessment must be based on the selected areas of study and the extent to which the candidate has been successful in the use of them. It is therefore extremely important that candidates not only select the relevant areas of study, but explain carefully on the Candidate Record Form the extent to which they have been used. Successful candidates had clearly referenced the subject content section on page 6 of the specification, the most successful ones electing to explore some of the higher order aspects of the area of study. For example, successful candidates selecting **Rhythm & Metre** used a wide variety of rhythmic patterns including dotted rhythms, triplets and syncopation often with changes of metre and tempo as well. Successful candidates selecting **Harmony & Tonality** included a wide harmonic palette, a range of appropriate cadences and modulation in their work. They often explained this carefully on the Candidate Record Form demonstrating a complete understanding of the compositional process.

Less successful candidates tended to use the areas of study in a less stimulating and interesting manner and, in some cases, made inappropriate or even random choices in areas of study. In many cases, the music tended to rely heavily on repetition of short, basic ideas with limited development of musical ideas. These included:

- **Rhythm & Metre** – lack of discernible pulse with note values limited to quavers, crotchets and minims. This was often seen in compositions where Sibelius had been used.
- **Harmony & Tonality** – limited use of a small number of chords often selected with little thought to harmonic progression and sometimes creating incoherence with melodic ideas.
- **Texture & Melody** – melodic ideas that lacked shape, structure and direction often based around a narrow range of pitch. Texture lacking variety.
- **Timbre & Dynamics** – lacking any dynamic contrast. Instrumental timbres explored in a limited manner perhaps within only a narrow pitch range for the instrument or, in some cases, instrumental / vocal parts that were unplayable.
- **Structure & Form** – structure limited to repetition of simple two- or four-bar phrases with little or no development of ideas, or where the structure lacked coherence and tended to ramble.

The Candidate Record Form (CRF)

The CRF is crucial to the candidate's submission. The information presented here can give insight into the compositional process and gives the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of how they have used the areas of study in their composition.

The first three pages must be completed by the candidate and not the teacher (apart from the teacher's signature on the first page.) Moderators reported several examples this year where it appeared that the teacher had done this for the candidate. In cases where the candidates had completed the first three pages themselves, the amount of detail varied considerably. The most successful candidates included plenty of information on page 2 of the CRF explaining *how and why* they had chosen the areas of study rather than just stating *which* areas had been used. There were some candidates who had missed the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. One of the most common areas of study selected was Structure & Form, but many candidates did little to explain what the structure was that they had used or how they had developed their work within the structure.

Whilst some candidates had also presented plenty of information on page 3 of the CRF relating to the method of composition, many had glossed over this giving very little information and in some cases no information at all. Sometimes this made moderation very difficult especially in relation to the following two areas:

1. The use of software packages

It is vital that candidates acknowledge the use of software packages and in particular, where pre-prepared samples and loops have been used. There were some examples where candidates had presented work that was exclusively made up from samples and loops from software packages with little or no original *composed* material at all. It must be remembered that in these cases *candidates will have demonstrated a rudimentary understanding of the ideas in relation to the areas of study* and, as such, can only qualify for marks in the lowest band.

2. Help given by other musicians in the recording process

This presents no problem in circumstances where candidates have produced a detailed musical score for the musicians to perform from. However, if a very simple lead sheet is produced, perhaps with lyrics to a song and accompanying chord symbols such as C / Am / F / G etc, additional information must be provided to explain how the recording was achieved, remembering that candidates can only be awarded marks for the material they have composed and not for the contributions of others. For example, there were many examples reported where the recordings contained sophisticated drum, guitar, keyboard, bass guitar and vocal parts, none of which had been recorded by the candidate and none of which had been scored. In these cases, it was difficult and sometimes impossible to be able to assess what the candidate had in fact composed, because without detailed scored material there was very little evidence of original work. Centres should make every effort to ensure that these types of situations are discouraged so as to avoid any confusion. Of course, circumstances in which candidates perform the majority of parts themselves through the use of sequencing and / or multi-tracking are perfectly acceptable since intentions will be entirely clarified (so long as sufficient information is given on the CRF).

The Musical Score

One significant change from the legacy specification is the manner in which the work is presented in the score. We now refer to any written material that represents the music presented in the recording as a score, and the specification defines this as follows:

- 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 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 single voice with guitar accompaniment where the candidate is the performer, a lead sheet with performance directions would be entirely appropriate. If additional parts are added such as lead guitar and drums, then additional guitar tab plus notation of the drum rhythms would suffice.

The presentation of scores was extremely varied this year from the outstanding to the non-existent. On the whole, staff notated scores from *Sibelius* were generally very good, though sometimes lacking in performance detail. Scores from *Cubase* were often acceptable, but sometimes not properly formatted prior to printing. *Written account* type scores varied enormously and whilst many were very good, some lacked musical detail with only modest references to the overall structure of the music presented. This was often improved in circumstances where candidates had been taught to write perceptively about their music, perhaps by having been given a template upon which to base their writing.

Continued development of the use of ICT

There is no doubt that ICT in music continues to enable candidates to produce imaginative and stimulating compositions in circumstances where they have been taught to use a varied and appropriate number of compositional techniques. As in previous years, most candidates had used either score writing packages such as Sibelius or sequencing packages such as Cubase. There were some superb compositions this year from candidates using these types of software packages. Unfortunately, there were also some examples that were less satisfying and, generally, these fell into two areas of deficiency:

1. Some candidates using sequencing packages tended to rely too heavily on repetitive, short, layered ostinati /riff type passages with little or no development of the musical material. Cut and paste had often been used to excess resulting in very little variety and contrast in the music.
2. Some candidates using Sibelius appeared to have been restricted in their work because of the method of step-writing involved. This was particularly evident in cases where rhythmic note values had been limited to quavers, crotchets and minims with little attempt to explore dotted rhythms, use of triplets and syncopation.

Controlled Assessment

Whilst many centres seemed to have grasped the change from *coursework* to *controlled assessment*, unfortunately there were some that had not understood this concept and many problems occurred at moderation.

Teachers must be able to confirm that the work submitted by each candidate is their own unaided work. To ensure this can be done, all work, with the exception of research and preparation, must be completed under **informal supervision**. Informal supervision means that, as the teacher responsible for assessment, you must ensure that:

- in cases of collaborative work, the contributions of individual candidates are recorded accurately
- plagiarism does not take place
- work can be authenticated as the candidate's own
- sources used by candidates are clearly recorded and acknowledged

Candidates do not need to be under direct supervision at all times. It is, however, expected that the majority of work submitted for assessment will be carried out in the classroom. In this way, you can state with confidence that the work submitted has not been plagiarised or downloaded from the Internet.

Candidates may need to complete some work outside the classroom, for example they may need access to musical instruments not available in the classroom. This is acceptable if the teacher has supervised a significant proportion of the work in the classroom and is happy that the quality of work subsequently submitted is of an identical standard as that seen in the classroom. In short, it is the teacher's responsibility to be able to authenticate that the work submitted is solely that of the candidate concerned. If you have any doubts about the authenticity of work completed at home, you will need to question the candidate about the content / nature of the work undertaken or the candidate will need to complete the same work again in the classroom.

The above information regarding controlled assessment conditions can be found on the AQA website in the GCSE Music Teacher Resource Bank. The circumstances described below

are all breaches of the controlled assessment conditions which moderators reported this year:

- *Compositions that had been completed at home.* The bulk of the work must be completed in school so that the teacher responsible for assessment can verify that it is the work of the candidate and that it has been completed during the 25 hours.
- *Compositions recorded outside the centre unsupervised.* Compositions may be recorded outside the centre but only when this can be supervised and verified by the teacher responsible for assessment.
- *Excessive teacher input,* for example, where a significant proportion of material had been given to the candidate or where ongoing support had been excessive to the extent that the outcome appeared to be more teacher work than candidate work.
- *Group compositions where it was not possible to clearly identify the work of the candidate.*

In addition to the above, there were also, sadly, a few examples of direct plagiarism where candidates had deliberately submitted music written by established composers or recording artists. Teachers are advised that it would be helpful to remind all candidates *frequently* that this is unacceptable and to alert them to the possible consequences of plagiarism and malpractice.

Assessment

Assessment was, as in previous years, very varied in its accuracy. Many centres assessed their candidates fairly and accurately with detailed reference on the CRF to the assessment criteria. A few centres undervalued their candidates' work but a good number also overvalued the work in relation to the assessment criteria, some by up to three or even four mark bands. In many of these cases, the teachers had often written very little or nothing at all on page 4 of the CRF, making moderation very difficult.

Centres that provided more information, especially in the final paragraph, were often more accurate in their assessments. In addition to referencing the detail of the assessment criteria in the specification, they also made links to their candidates' work by drawing attention to specific details in the music. The two real examples below were not untypical and serve to illustrate the difference:

Example 1:

Any background information which helps to justify your marks and which will facilitate moderation. Please refer to the assessment criteria wherever possible

'This is imaginative and largely satisfying. There is a sound understanding of musical ideas in relation to the areas of study. The song is clearly well structured with an introduction, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, outro. Texture and Melody is represented by a build-up to all parts entering in bar 9, guitar out at bar 31, all parts in again for the next verse. Bar 58 onwards is more homophonic, the melody initially moving by step then becoming arpeggio based in movement. Use of major 6th leap at bar 24 and 26 works nicely as does the 6th again in bar 27 to the 5th in bar 28.

This song works well and I placed it in the 25 – 21 band for the above reasons and also because some of the notated guitar parts are not always scored as they sound. The candidate composed the song by singing and playing first and notating last.'

Total Mark 25

Example 2:

Any background information which helps to justify your marks and which will facilitate moderation. Please refer to the assessment criteria wherever possible

'None.'

Total Mark 30

Mark Range and Award of Grades

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

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