**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Music **42702**

(Specification 4270)

Unit 2: Composing and Appraising Music

Report on the Examination

42702 Composing and Appraising Music

In this unit, half the marks are available for the composition and half for the appraisal. Candidates are allowed up to 20 hours of supervised time to complete the composition and up to two hours of controlled time for writing the appraisal.

Areas of Study and Strand of Learning

Candidates are required to select at least two Areas of Study (AoS) as the basis of the composition. There must also be a link to the designated Strand of Learning, and for 2012 the strand was *Popular Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries*.

Candidates can choose any combination of AoS and, as last year, the most common was AoS5 Structure and Form. This is usually a sensible choice, as a recognisable form or structure is one of the main characteristics which enable a piece to sound whole and satisfying. The choice of a second AoS (and any others) should depend on the strengths of the individual candidate and the nature of the final composition. The intention is that each candidate chooses (for himself or herself) at least two AoS and then decides on a link to the strand for that year, aiming to compose in a style of their choice and for resources they understand.

A well-chosen link enables the candidate to do this: for example it was quite in order to compose an instrumental piece having chosen popular song form as the link, or to compose a song where the link is syncopation. However, it is not sufficient to state that a composition is in popular song form without giving further details, as there are many variants. As an example, a candidate who chose AoS2 Harmony & Tonality and AoS5 Structure & Form, and identified 'Popular Song Form' as the link, could give a clear outline of the piece (intro, chorus, verse 1 and so on) and include changes of key and a range of chords. Where 'Film Music' was given as the link, the type of film needed to be specified, or a detailed scenario or storyboard provided to explain the style and/or form of the composition.

When asked for the '*Focus within the strand*' on the Candidate Record Form, candidates sometimes wrote 'Popular Music of the 20th and 21st Centuries', although this confusion between the *link to the strand* and the *strand itself* was not as prevalent as last year.

The majority of candidates chose two AoS, the minimum required. Quite a few chose three and there were examples where four or even all five were chosen. The composition should exemplify the elements of music contained within the chosen AoS and there is no automatic advantage to selecting more than the minimum number.

There were a few examples where teachers had not realised that the strand for 2012 was not the same as 2011, and had advised candidates to link their work to *The Western Classical Tradition*. There were also occasions where a centre had set a common link to the strand for all candidates. This tended to result in fairly formulaic pieces and is unlikely to be in the candidates' interests.

Composition

There were signs of a slight but significant improvement in the overall standard of compositions submitted for this unit and this is most encouraging. There were some fine examples of songs and instrumental pieces which reflected the 'pop' focus. There were also many which found a focus within the strand and wrote music in a completely different style - an equally valid approach.

Candidates should have an opportunity to study the assessment criteria and be aware of the descriptors for the different mark bands. It is important to understand that the composition will be assessed in the light of the selected AoS and link to the strand together with consideration of the six *Musical Aspects* in the specification, which are a fundamental part of the assessment process and are repeated here:

- 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

Scores and recordings

For all compositions, a score and a recording must be submitted. The score can take any form appropriate to the candidate's abilities and the style of composition. In combination with the recording and the other information submitted (both on the Candidate Record Form and in the appraisal) it must enable the examiner to appreciate the final intentions of the candidate and how much is his or her own, unaided work. All stages of the composition process must be made clear to the examiner, identifying the candidate's own, original musical input and acknowledging any specific help from others. Without this information, the examiner will need to seek clarification.

Traditionally-notated scores should include all relevant performance details. Where scores are screen shots, as much information as possible must be given regarding tempo, phrasing, dynamics, articulation, and so on. Better submissions of this type included a detailed annotation with timings and/or details of the main events to listen for, thus enabling the examiner to follow the recording easily. Weaker submissions which merely included a small, dark screenshot afforded the examiner little or no insight into what was happening. On too many occasions, insufficient information was given and, without detailed information, the examiner will be unable to assess the composition accurately. Some examples of alternative scores have been provided on the AQA website.

Where Cubase (or Logic) is used as the composing tool, it is important that steps are taken to ensure that the score is quantised as well as possible.

Recordings were mostly of a very high quality, although there were again a few which could only be played through a computer. Centres are reminded of the necessity of checking that the CD has been finalised and will play on a conventional CD player.

Appraisal

In the majority of cases, candidates worked through the 6 questions in the appraisal booklet in turn. This approach ensures that all the areas are covered and gives the appraisal a clear and logical format. Keeping a log or diary of progress will help candidates to prepare their appraisal responses.

Many candidates scored fewer marks for their appraisal than for their composition; centres and candidates need to remember that the appraisal is worth half the marks for this unit and therefore deserves careful preparation. It is not anticipated, however, that candidates will need to write more than can easily be contained within the Appraisal Booklet and if the appraisal is word-processed, some two to three sides using font 11 or 12 is sufficient. There is no credit for statements about what a candidate would have **liked** to have done in the composition.

For most candidates, first two questions were quite straightforward. The third question asks, first, for details of the *process of composition*: how the piece evolved rather than an annotation of the finished piece. Candidates often wrote in generalities, for example "I came up with some chords" and "I thought of a tune". On the other hand, those that gained the highest marks provided information about their approach to matters such as

- chord progressions
- extending a melody
- deciding on accompaniment styles / patterns
- ensuring there was contrast where this was required
- steps taken to ensure the whole piece sounded 'finished'
- thought given to instrumental techniques, and so on.

The third question also asks about how the piece was *recorded*. Where a live recording was made, candidates could write about microphone placement, rehearsals and balance. But too many simply wrote that the composition was done on a computer (e.g. *Sibelius* or *Garageband*) and "the recording was taken straight from there." It is worth re-stating what was written in last year's report and the 2010 report:

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, be it 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 is involved in the performance and his/her precise role, both in the actual performance and in directing any other performers. This is particularly important when an annotation is submitted to accompany the recording.

Question 4 refers to problems encountered and how they were overcome. As last year, too many of these were concerned with technical matters, including computer problems, or with running out of time to complete the piece. However, problems of a compositional nature should be at the heart of this answer. In some cases mention was made elsewhere in the appraisal of problems and solutions, and this could be credited.

Question 5 looks for an evaluation of the success of the final piece in terms of the chosen AoS and the focus chosen within the strand. Here, the best approach was to choose sections within the composition which illustrate good use of the AoS and appropriate use of the focus.

The final question refers to 'Context'. In choosing two (or more) AoS and a focus within the strand, the candidate has effectively established the context of their composition. The context is, therefore, unique to each candidate but is also defined by a recognisable style or genre of music which has influenced the candidate. Essentially the question is about the extent to which the composition reflects the characteristics of these influences. An example here is of a candidate who chose AoS1 Rhythm & Metre and AoS5 Structure and Form with a link to a disco beat, and wrote a piece for guitars and drum kit. In this case, the candidate noted characteristics of music of this style (chords and harmonic progressions, use of rhythm and tempo, structure) and then considered how these were reflected in their own piece.

There seemed to be a trend this year to copy and paste musical examples into the appraisal. This often coincided with appraisals of great length, which raised concern about how candidates had achieved this within the allocated two hours of controlled time, given that

they are only allowed their score and prepared notes. Candidates may not copy out pre-written appraisals during the 2 hours of controlled time.

Some appraisals were very repetitive. Weaker candidates tended to write in very general terms, while the better candidates made good references to their own composition and the best examples included specific bar numbers. Overall, spelling, punctuation and grammar were not serious problems, although occasionally handwriting was challenging.

Administration

Centres are reminded of the following:

- The Attendance List should always be included. However, there is no need to enclose a Centre Declaration Sheet as this work is not assessed by the teacher.

- Announcements on the CD are unnecessary: a track listing will suffice and saves time. However, it is always vital that the track number is written on the *Candidate Record Form*.

- *Candidate Record Forms* must be signed, and the box indicating whether or not help has been received must be completed. In a few instances, there was no information about the AoS chosen or the focus within the strand, though this was sometimes clarified within the appraisal.

- For each candidate these items must be enclosed:

    – Candidate Record Form
    – Score
    – Recording
    – Appraisal

- The appraisal can be handwritten in the Appraisal Booklet or word processed and attached to the booklet. Where it has been word processed, the full booklet need not be included so long as the word processed document is attached to the completed front cover.

Conclusion

There were many fine submissions this year where the candidate focussed on two (or more) Areas of Study and chose a meaningful and relevant link to the strand. There has been an encouraging improvement this year.

The Strand of Learning for 2013 will be **World Music** and thereafter the three strands will continue to rotate in order. (Therefore, for 2014, the strand will be *The Western Classical Tradition.)* Teachers are encouraged to consider the suggestions for possible links which are given in the Unit 2 Guidance on the AQA website, while bearing in mind that this is not an exhaustive list (see
http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/newgcses/art_dan_dra_mus/new/music_materials.php?id=05&prev=05).

Further help and support, including exemplar materials and guidance on supervised time and controlled time, can be found on the AQA website.

Mark Range and Award of Grades

Grade Boundaries and Cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html page of the AQA website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion