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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**MUSIC**

**SUMMER 2017**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?!=en>

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### **Annual Statistical Report**

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## **GCSE MUSIC**

**Summer 2017**

### **UNIT 1 PERFORMING**

#### **Administration**

This year marked the fond farewell to the visiting examiner. I would like to place on record my thanks to all members of 'Team Guy' who have supported me since 2000. There are some examiners who have been with me since I was appointed. Many centres commented how sad it was that there will no longer be a visiting moderator.

Most centres followed the WJEC guidelines correctly: forms having been downloaded from the WJEC website as advised. Some staff however needed prompting re omissions of AOS, total number of candidates, performance monitoring log and signatures with their paperwork.

Reading through the final reports of my moderators this year makes for pleasing reading. They continue to report how efficiently the moderation system operates, with sufficient time allotted to each candidate within the two hour period.

Each report without exception refers to the important role of the peripatetic staffs. Centres appear to be well prepared for last minute substitutions which often occur on the day of the moderation. Only one examiner reported trouble with electronic equipment where a student electrocuted himself in rehearsal prior to the moderation.

It appears that the WJEC moderation has been an eagerly anticipated 'event' in most centres. Many schools had arranged for the 'meet and greet' session prior to the sample moderation. This has been standard practice over the years: not only does it calm the nerves but allows you to explain the recording process.

I always found the interaction between Heads of Department and myself to be informative and to be constructive when deciding on the correct boxes. I hope that the experiences of moderating controlled assessment samples since 2011 with a visiting moderator will prove beneficial and useful to music departments next year. I know many centres are slightly apprehensive about the new system.

#### **Repertoire**

On the whole the chosen repertoire was very well suited to candidates' abilities and aptitudes. The majority of pieces heard in most centres were in the X 3 difficulty range. They also reflected the individual musical interests of the candidates.

The Rock School and Trinity Rock and Pop grade 3-5 repertoire proved very popular with the guitarists and drummers. I was pleased to hear some commendable improvised solo passages by both guitarists and drummers this year.

Musicals and current pop songs were popular again this year with vocalists: however a note of caution when advising young singers regarding choices. Some of these songs are too demanding regarding tonal imbalance between the upper and lower registers. One often hears a distinct vocal separation between registers which inevitably lead to a lower performance mark.

I was pleased to read of many excellent ensemble performances. They included brass and string quartets and even steel bands. The majority of performances qualified for the top multiplier. It is imperative, regarding balance and empathy, that vocalists use a microphone when singing with a rock band. Some examiners reported that the 'pop vocal ensembles' were often a solo split up into dialogue with each singer taking a few lines each.

In preparation for next year, be careful when counselling candidates regarding choices. Also be aware of the constrictions and rigidity that backing tracks can impose on ensembles who attempt to show interaction and empathy.

## **Assessment**

Last year more than 20 centres were scrutinised after presenting marks on IAMIS which were **higher** and **lower** than the agreed marks on the day of the moderation. I trust that no similar evidence of this will be encountered during this year's scrutiny. Remember that recordings of every 2017 candidate must be available for scrutiny until October of this year.

The majority of centres applied the criteria accurately and objectively despite sometimes being a little disappointed with the delivery of some of their candidates at the time of the moderation. I found that only brief and amicable discussions were required to arrive at acceptable marks to both moderator and staff.

Some candidates were concentrating solely on managing the notation with little or no regard to the expressive and stylistic elements of the scores.

Some pianists, often of a high standard, had no option but to perform on digital instruments which clearly impeded their dexterity and their range of tone and expression.

This year again the high standards were maintained and commensurate with the abilities of the students in the sample.

Finally, I wish on behalf of all my moderators to commend the work of so many music staffs who dedicate their endeavours in the promotion of their subject: they strive to maintain standards despite the increasing pressures and reduced resources which are imposed upon them.

# GCSE MUSIC

Summer 2017

## UNIT 2 COMPOSING

This report is based on feedback received from the seven members of the moderating team for GCSE Music.

### Centre administration

Moderators commented on the fact that many centres adopted excellent practice in the presentation of the material, including all of the necessary documentation in their submission. Unfortunately, they also reported on inaudible tracks, unclear labelling on CDs, missing staff and candidate signatures, and missing or inaccurate track lists – all of which delayed the moderation process; one centre failed to submit any scores, leadsheets or candidate logs, which was totally unsatisfactory. Hopefully such issues will be resolved and improved if it becomes possible to upload the work in the new specification next year.

### Timings

This was an issue in some centres when the coursework did not reach the minimum time requirement. Some of these 'shorter' compositions also included repeat marks, and were played at a very slow tempo - which did not help the situation. (Moderators reported that some of these were still awarded high marks by the centre. This was not considered appropriate).

### Candidate Logs

It was so pleasing to note that the quality of some of the candidate logs was excellent. Unfortunately, moderators also commented on the rather disappointing quality of many the candidate logs this year, some of which seemed to have been completed as an afterthought, seemingly having perhaps been placed a little low on the priority list. This may well be a reflection of the fact that no marks are awarded for these - but the reality is that moderators rely on the logs for a great deal of often necessary information in order to understand the composition process. Informative logs enable moderators to understand the thinking, working and intentions behind the musical ideas. Links with the Area of Study need to be explained, and why certain musical features were selected; how they were used, developed and refined, with exact and specific details of teacher advice included. Many comments were described as 'superficial', not explaining the process of discovery that has taken place. Once again, many candidates failed to offer adequate explanation of their film music pieces and there were examples of such compositions which did not appear to be well thought out; the best examples included detailed screenshots with clear declarations in the logs stating the candidate was responsible for all content. Candidates must always state when patterns played by instruments such as drums and guitars have been created by GarageBand; this was not always clear – and what may be obvious to the candidate is not always obvious to the moderator.

In terms of the use of music technology, lots of the candidates made a good effort to mention the software they had used, via their logs. There was a wide range of programs in evidence, with some evidently more successful than others; Sibelius and GarageBand seemed to be the most popular, with Logic, Cubase and MuseScore often mentioned as well (along with others). It was clear that much use had been made of 'preset' or looped sounds in GarageBand by some candidates, but this was not always specified in the log. Interestingly, some candidates actually indicated that they felt somewhat limited by the software they were using.

Several centres produced folios that were extremely varied in style and in the forces for which the candidates were writing. It was a pleasure to see candidates in these cases referring in their candidate log to their performance and listening experiences and the impact this had on their composing. This serves to contrast with those examples of 'set class tasks' such as ragtime or waltzes which seem to limit the creativity and imagination of the candidates, and ultimately make it harder for them to access the highest aspects of the marking scheme.

### **Scores / Leadsheets**

A good number of candidates relied on screenshots for their leadsheets; many of these lacked suitable and sufficient annotation, and did not offer the additional musical explanation as required. At the opposite end of the scale, some candidates offered incredibly detailed information even when they had submitted the musical scores. Generally, the quality of scores was excellent.

There were examples of notated melodic lines, with chords included, where the melody had been scored and recorded by the candidate (or sometimes a teacher) and where quite a sophisticated accompaniment had been 'created' from the accompanying chord symbols / basic triads. No details were included as to whether the candidate had any input into the accompaniment – apart perhaps from working out the triads to be used. When an accompaniment has been 'realised' and performed in this way by someone other than the candidate, the specific details must be explained. Credit can only be awarded to ideas composed (and developed) by the candidate.

### **Appropriate tasks**

Most of the tasks set were appropriate for the candidates. However (despite previous advice that this is not considered best practice) there are centres which continue to issue 'class tasks' - and also centres whose candidates had approached compositions in the same 'step-by-step' manner, with very similar methods. Moderators felt that in almost all cases, this led to outcomes which lacked individuality and expression, and left little room for personal expression and creativity. There were the usual examples where the candidates had all created theme and variations on existing themes and harmonies; in such compositions the original contribution is limited. Incorporation of external musical ideas such as these (persistent examples are the Pachelbel or Michael Nyman ground bass or the use of very simple nursery thymes as thematic material) will not be awarded any credit; only the ideas of the candidate are assessed and given credit. Theme and variations were more successful when the candidates composed their own theme.

In another centre, almost every candidate had composed a string quartet; whilst the top end of the sample had coped with the task, it was evident that those at the lower end had struggled with the task and had used repetition ad nauseam. In general, candidates who had succeeded in composing effective ensembles had explored various textures, using antiphony and imitation as well as various other devices. The weakest simply used block chords split between parts and were highly repetitive. Other less suitable tasks included solo drum kit pieces, which meant it was difficult for candidates to access the full range of marks in the current specification.

### **Recordings**

More work was submitted on USB this year, which of course is absolutely fine. Moderators commented on lack of track lists, track lists not in rank order, or track lists that were incorrect. Some USBs contained files with no names or titles and no indication of which pieces were which - when there were no 'conventional scores' it was very difficult to tell which piece was which and this wasted a lot of time. There seemed to be more centres than usual this year that announced the tracks rather than gave a track list; this is not required, and is actually less helpful in the process of moderation. One centre had compiled all recordings onto one long track, with no indication of where the individual tracks started or finished.

Tracks taken directly from software such as Sibelius and GarageBand were usually of really good quality, and there were a number of live recordings of quality that ranged from poor to excellent. Some pieces had evidently been recorded on phones or hand held devices; in itself this is not necessarily a problem, but there was background noise such as other class members talking /playing on guitars. The balance on recordings at times was not considered sufficient when it proved too difficult to hear all parts clearly. Some moderators needed to request replacement tracks for a variety of reasons, most of which were promptly provided by the centres involved.

### **Areas of Study**

Many candidates correctly identified a suitable area of study, and offered excellent reasoning in their logs as to how their musical decisions reflected and supported the link. This was not always the case, however. No one area of study dominated outright, though tenuous reflections of Music in Wales were again noted, and often many seem to opt for Musical Forms and Devices as something of an afterthought.

There were a number of examples of candidates who linked both pieces to the same area of study, or failed to state the area of study altogether. There were many incidences of the areas of study being incorrectly named e.g. 'Blues Music', 'Film Music' and 'Form and Structure'; on occasion entire centres gave the wrong names to the areas of study.

### **Content**

Moderators commented on a huge variety of work across the spectrum, ranging from excellent to weak and repetitive; standards range from rudimentary and basic to mature, satisfying and musically imaginative work. Some centres had clearly encouraged candidates to pay attention to the concept of creative manipulation of the elements and the development of material, which reflected a realistic grasp of the application of the criteria. This is very encouraging. In other centres the lack of 'development' of the initial ideas was still highlighted as an area of some concern; in addition the correct use of cadences, and a variety of chords (with inversions), including true changes of key, was sadly lacking.

Several candidates achieved full marks and their portfolios demonstrated an excellent understanding of an array of musical rudiments as they were able to develop themes in a very creative and mature manner. These compositions also showed good awareness of a range of musical structures and genres, and ICT had been exploited in imaginative ways. An increasing number of centres are using Apple Mac computers, and current software and as such, pupils are able to access really realistic sounds.

Compositions achieving lower marks lacked sufficient direction and invention, often falling short of the time requirement. Many of these lack sufficient development, and in the use of such structures as Ternary or Rondo, opportunity was not always taken to offer variation or further manipulation of material in the recurring A section. Candidates who submit minimalist compositions must consider the requirements of the assessment criteria if they wish to secure higher marks, as their musical understanding – including that of sufficiently varied melodic, rhythmic and harmonic substance - must be evidenced and utilized within their work, and this genre does not easily offer this opportunity. It was also felt that some pieces at the lower end of the range did not show sufficient reflection as to how the separate parts related to each other. Candidates seemed intent on ensuring bars were based on chords (usually primary triads) and movement outside the recognised triad was often very limited.

As far as the style of music is concerned, the obligatory 12-bar blues (where candidates offered predictable patterns, working and harmonic structures), serial pieces (rarely completed with a true understanding of the style) and minimalist compositions were ever present, rarely completed to a high standard with imaginative working. Only the most able of students achieved high marks when composing within these genres.

Having already mentioned that drum kit pieces are often limiting, I must also mention those compositions based on a three-chord or four-chord 'trick', repeated throughout. There seemed to be a rise in these – maybe as a direct influence of the 'Musical Futures' teaching approach; this is good practice to encourage understanding, but has its obvious limitations as far as examination approaches go. Pieces constructed in this way often begin well but fail to venture to more interesting harmony, and neglect modulation and variety in many aspects. Many pieces were also structured upon the build - up of 4 bar melodic and / or rhythmic patterns; additional layers were added to change texture and create additional interest, but there was no real development in evidence. Some candidates decided to compose "Cerdd Dant". As had been mentioned in previous reports, this is also limiting as candidates had been given the "cainc" and therefore were only responsible for composing the melody.

Moderators reported examples of extremely impressive work submitted which was a delight to hear; this was noted particularly in '*Forms and Devices*' with the imaginative use of rhythmic devices to manipulate and develop, with well-crafted syncopated passages, good use of rhythmic augmentation and some creative use of triplets and crotchets to achieve cross-rhythms etc. Conversely, at other times simpler rhythmic features would have settled ideas somewhat (dotted rhythms, rests, anacrusis, balance of patterns etc). Imaginative work was also presented in 'Stage and Screen', with excellent compositions from a few candidates, who employed ambitious forces with real style, selecting suitable timbres carefully and thoughtfully, and scored their material effectively, with maturity and obvious understanding. Film pieces are always a popular choice, and it was a pleasure to see that have some candidates had gone to great lengths to explain the narrative (one candidate had included a lovely booklet explaining the themes in the film).

Quite a few songs were presented this year, the most successful of which had been recorded live, usually by the composer. Those who had taken to Sibelius to notate their songs seemed to be restricted from composing melodic lines that were natural and meaningful. Many Sibelius-notated songs had erratic rhythms with poor balance of phrases and word-setting.

A concluding piece of advice needs to be made to candidates who submit songs where vocal lines were not realized as the majority of these songs lacked sufficient appreciation of lyric writing. It is highly recommended that centres should explore all possibilities to ensure somebody sings these songs, thus allowing candidates to reflect on the rhythmic and melodic structures of each phrase. Some songs were excellent, with a phenomenal sense of style shown in some cases (e.g. some Gospel type songs in particular).

In terms of writing for voices and / or instruments, many candidates composed with clear understanding of the resources. Instruments were usually carefully selected to match the candidates' chosen style. Timbres were often used well to create colour and mood, which was sometimes a real strength, with some candidates taking advantage of the wide sound palette available to them via their chosen software. Some had tackled orchestral forces to an astonishing standard, and it seemed evident that they were used to listening to orchestral works, perhaps even following scores so that they knew how to treat sections and vary textures effectively. Some of the string playing was well attempted and there were also some successful woodwind quartets. Writing for the harp on the whole was successful, but as with string instruments, the effects that can be used on the harp were not explored enough, and could have been an easy welcome addition to the works presented. ['[www.composingfortheharp.com](http://www.composingfortheharp.com)'] has been suggested in some reports –this is a useful website allowing students to learn about the various effects that can be used by a harpist]. There were examples of well worked piano pieces, but once again this is chosen by some as a resource rather too readily, without background research or understanding of writing for the instrument.



Overall, many candidates had a good basic grasp of harmony and were able to construct basic chord patterns and find suitable chords to fit with their melody. At the higher end, there was evidence of sophisticated working; cadences were competently handled, there were suspensions and prepared modulations. Many of the rock, pop and jazz type pieces used added chords quite successfully, and there were some colourful chord progressions. Other candidates made little effort to move away from the primary triads in root position, which hampered their marks somewhat. Constant changes of style, key, instruments, instrumentation, amongst other features, meant that some compositions sounded like a number of very short pieces played in succession rather than one coherent whole.

With the advent of the new specification, I would like to suggest that candidates need to:

- Spend quality time on the initial material and planning to produce effective material which offers potential for development
- Aim to present and control a wide variety of musical elements to show contrasts of tone, colour and mood
- Plan and organize the musical ideas to achieve a coherent outcome
- Be more alert to cadences and key - when cadence points are successfully negotiated, the general structure of the music and melody writing benefit
- Ensure that melodic lines have musical 'shape', i.e. appropriate phrase structure and balance
- Write suitable (and sufficiently varied) chords to accompany the melodic line
- Try and create an accompaniment which provides interest and supports the character and mood of the piece
- Develop the initial material through such devices as sequence, imitation, modulation, textural variety - even perhaps augmentation, inversion and diminution for the more able candidates
- Re-visit, refine, improve and develop - don't be satisfied with the first ideas!

### **Teacher Assessment**

Moderators were in close agreement with many centres as regards the overall assessment of work, and it was clear that the work had been carefully monitored and controlled with discerning judgements made when considering the outcome in terms of the assessment criteria for this unit. On occasion, we come across work that deserves more credit. It was clear that some centres had tried to perhaps 'hedge their bets' a bit, although there was usually a clear sense of rank order. In other cases, the criteria had been less accurately applied (and in a number of centres there was very little consistency). Marks at the lower end tended to be realistically marked (and, indeed, harshly marked in some cases) – it continues to be at the top- and mid-end of the range that the work tends to be over-marked pieces. In centres where most candidates had created fairly simple pieces (e.g. using Garage Band with lots of pre-set sounds), a candidate who had created a piece of music with a score, for example a solo piano piece, was almost 'automatically' marked higher, even though it was in itself quite simple. Credit was often over-estimated for pieces which lacked a clear sense of structure, or – most commonly- those which showed very little development.

As stated in previous reports, the only way to agree with regard to the relative merits of candidates' submissions is to apply the assessment criteria realistically; in this way we will be able to work together to produce consistency of standards.

**Teachers are urged to attend CPD in continued preparation for the new specification, and access the support material online.**

## GCSE MUSIC

Summer 2017

### UNIT 3 APPRAISING

- Q.1 A large percentage correctly identified the tonality and type of group, although many wrongly chose *String Quartet* instead of *String orchestra*.
- Q.2 Most candidates correctly identified the **solo instruments** section apart from the minority of candidates who confused the *Violin* with the *Guitar* in Extract B. The **Compositional Device(s)** section was quite well-answered this year. There are still some candidates who are guilty of ticking more than the maximum of three boxes!
- Q.3 The responses to this comparison question (Solveig's song from the Peer Gynt Suite by Grieg) are much improved again this year, with many gaining full marks. The majority of candidates appear to understand the need to assign answers to the appropriate boxes in ((i)a) **Melody**, (i)(b) **Accompaniment**, (ii)(a) **Tempo** and (ii)(b)

#### Time signature.

Any references to instruments/voices in (iii) **Other points of interest** are disregarded and viewed as double credit answers as will be seen in the mark scheme.

- Q.4 (a) The third **rhythm** was correctly answered by the majority
- (b) Many wrongly answered *Presto* instead of **Allegro**.
- (c) Many correctly identified the **trumpet**, but very few identified the **oboe** as the other wind instrument in the extract.
- (d) The majority identified **Baroque** as being the correct period.
- (e) **Homophonic** was correctly underlined by most candidates.
- (f) **Major** tonality was also underlined by the majority
- (g) Many correctly identified the **Perfect** cadence, although quite a few thought incorrectly that the extract ended on a plagal or an imperfect cadence!
- Q.5 Candidates should be aware by now that only the **first point** in **each line** is marked in this question. We still see up to three correct responses on the first line (a) and lines (b) and (c) empty.

**Extract A:** Many simply gave *fusion* as an answer without *mentioning the fusion of rock and symphonic/classical styles*. Quite a few correct responses included *amplification, sequences and pre-scored/improvised music*.

**Extract B:** Many incorrect responses included references to *minimalism and horror film tracks!* The more astute answers correctly alluded to *Aleatoric* or *Chance* style and the *unconventional playing techniques*.

**Extract C:** The responses here were very pleasing on the whole. Having correctly identified the *minimalistic style*, candidates gave some excellent answers including *ostinati*, *metamorphosis*, *multi layered textures*, *pedal* etc.

- Q.6
- (a) Quite a few correctly identified the **3/4** time, but there are still some candidates who were not awarded the mark because **it was not written in the correct position on the stave.**
  - (b) Many correctly identified the key of **F major**. Some answered incorrectly giving the key of the *relative minor Dm* (which was the correct answer to section (g))
  - (c) This was well-answered: credit however was only given when **the appropriate Italian term** was placed correctly on the score above the stave in Bar 1.
  - (d) Many candidates correctly inserted the **two quaver rests** although we saw many incorrect crotchet rests inserted on the score!
  - (e) Only a minority of candidates succeeded in getting full marks for the pitch dictation. The stepwise movement in Bars 7 and 8 were quite well answered, but bars 9 and 10 proved more challenging.
  - (f) The majority correctly identified the **Perfect cadence** in bars 11-12, but only a minority correctly identified the **Interrupted cadence** in Bars 19-20.
  - (g) Many correctly identified **D minor/Relative minor/Submediant minor** as the modulation in bars 17-20. Some answered incorrectly giving D major as the new key.
- Q.7 Responses ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory. The candidates achieving maximum marks showed astute powers of interpretation and secure knowledge of the musical elements e.g. glissando on the harp.

I am pleased that most centres have taken note of my report for the past few years regarding the limitations governing the number of acceptable responses. Answers this year were not littered with multiple comments re dynamics, rubato and anacrusis as in previous years.

Some candidates however persist in listing instruments eg, timpani, flute, harp and strings at the beginning of their answer *without any reference to line numbers*. They are not awarded any marks of course since it states in the rubric of this question: **You should relate your comments to appropriate line numbers!** Generic statements re instrumental families should be avoided. Specific instruments such as flutes and clarinets should be named rather than being referred to as just woodwind.

It was pleasing to note how many candidates correctly identified the Binary form and the orchestral bridge (6 bars) between lines 11 and 12.

Q.8 Once again there was a good standard of responses this year to the evaluation question. Use of correct musical terminology in the answers has improved. Many answers were very detailed and included specific references to stimuli and use of software. The proportion of candidates awarded top box (7-8) has shown an appreciable increase this year. However the majority of candidates achieved a 5-6 mark.

Thankfully only a few candidates evaluated a solo rather than the composition. The considerations suggested in the bullet points at the beginning of the rubric could vary annually according to the question.

There are still far too many errors however in grammar, spelling and punctuation. Some of the handwriting was so poor that the DRS software magnifying menu tool had to be used to assist with deciphering the handwriting.

***Please note: It is a requirement that questions are varied from year to year and therefore, in future examinations, the evaluative questions will be more specific. Centres are advised to ensure that candidates can evaluate the process of performance and that of composition.***



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