

GCSE (9–1)

Moderators' report

MUSIC

J536

For first teaching in 2016

J536/01/02 Summer 2022 series

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Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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General overview/Introduction

This session has seen a welcome and positive return to creating and performing live music following the enforced two-year pandemic break. Candidates, and their teachers, have risen to the challenges that this difficult situation has created, and it was evident that the quality of work at the upper end of the mark range is as good as it ever has been. These high-quality outcomes have been seen across the majority of the centres. A contributing factor to this is the reduced NEA requirement for the June 2022 session, which has enabled centres to focus on enabling their candidates to produce high-quality performance and composition work.

This provides strong evidence that there are a significant number of centres with a real commitment to music education and centres with strong music programmes.

Candidates who did well generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well generally did the following:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> rehearsed performance pieces diligently, with a combined focus on accuracy, and expression, resulting in a high standard of musicality composed pieces that demonstrated a clear understanding and application of well taught compositional devices, such as the use of contrasting keys, melodic extension, variation, and development, and a harmonic awareness of phrasing and cadences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performed pieces that were too difficult for them, resulting in a frequent errors and hesitations composed pieces that were over dependent on the repetition of short chord patterns, simple riffs, and chord note based melodic ideas. This inevitably resulted in a lack of contrast and limited development of the compositional material.

Performance

The inclusivity and relevance of this GCSE Music specification remains evident in the range and quality of work that candidates submit for assessment. Inevitably, a wide range of performing standards were encountered that covered the entire mark range of the criteria. Overall performing standards were high and there were many examples of musical excellence, which represented a breadth of ability, a wealth of musical genres and, above all, careful preparation. It was clear that, in most cases, teachers had directed their candidates to pieces of an appropriate standard that enabled them to meet their potential. Performances of popular songs and rock/pop pieces were prominent, but there were also some excellent performances on a range of orchestral instruments too.

Culturally specific instrumental performances were also evident in a minority of centres, featuring instruments such as Steel Pans, Dhol, Tabla, Djembe, and in what must be a first for this specification, a performance on a Mridangam.

Overall, the piano and voice remain the most popular option with a majority of candidates.

A small but significant number of candidates opted to submit Music Technology based performances. These included DJ decks, Launchpad, and DAW sequenced work.

Key point call out: assessing a Music Technology based performance

The defining features when assessing this work needs to be the musicality of the outcome. Where the performance is entirely based on the live manipulation of pre-recorded audio, as is the case with DJ decks or Launchpad, the dexterity of the performer is also an influencing factor on the difficulty level. Live audio is bound to sound good, and the candidate therefore needs to work actively and creatively in the performance to meet the criteria of the higher mark bands.

Key point call out: Accuracy of Performance assessment

Overall, the assessment of performance was broadly accurate in a good majority of centres. Where leniency did occur, this was often because a performance was placed in the 10-12 mark criteria band for both "Technical Control and Fluency" and "Expression and Interpretation", when intonation and technique weren't completely secure, and the delivery lacked attention to the nuances of the score. This inevitably resulted in a lack of musicality which was especially noticeable in vocal submissions.

Other rock-based performances also lacked attention to the musical detail of the piece, often because the chosen performance piece lacked the opportunity to show the level of musicality required to justify a top criteria band mark.

Composition

As with performance, compositions were submitted that encompassed all the mark criteria bands. There were some stunning compositions. These included dramatic film scores effectively scored for full orchestra, big band jazz pieces, and a whole range of wonderfully produced popular songs. Some candidates opted for classical pastiches, and many highly successful solo piano pieces and string quartets were enjoyed by moderators.

Key point call out: Assessment of Composition

Many centres overmarked the compositions of their candidates, sometimes with considerable leniency.

Often the defining factor for a composition to justify assessment in the top criteria mark band is the quality of the melodic writing, in relation to the richness of the accompanying harmonic language. The importance of quality melody lines, and the development of these within the piece is a skill for candidates to work on as part of their learning in composition lessons.

As it was, many compositions often marked in the top two-criteria mark bands were characterised by a lack of development. They contained considerable repetition of melodic ideas, utilised short predictable chord sequences, and generally lacked contrast and rhythmic interest. A large number of these compositions can best be described as motif-based compositions that depended principally on the manipulation of timbre and texture for the development, rather than on the extension and development of the motivic ideas. Motifs were often predominantly chord note based and only two or four bars long.

Another particular feature of this type of work was the over dependence on a repeating standard four chord sequence for the entirety of the piece. This type of composition frequently sounds quite beguilingly attractive. However, the actual musical content is limited, often being little more than a four-bar loop of content. This type of work was frequently, but not exclusively, as a result of composing on a DAW, where the ease of looping an idea, rather than developing an extension of the idea, seems like an easy win to many candidates. It also happens to be a style that is very prevalent in the music they tend to enjoy and digest in everyday life.

Assessors frequently marked this type of work very generously. In reality, this type of work is unlikely to justify a mark beyond the criteria of the 15-20 mark band.

AfL – meeting the requirements of the highest criteria mark bands for Composition



This is composing for an assessment, and the requirements of the upper band criteria need to be met.

In order to access the upper criteria mark bands, candidates need to be taught how to create a variety of accompaniment textures, interesting bass lines, and techniques to vary and extend an existing melody line in their composition lessons. Most importantly of course, the melody also needs to work against the harmony.

Another concern noted in this session was the role of extra performers in the realisation of a candidate's composition. At its most extreme, individual compositions actually resembled group compositions, and these are not permitted for this unit. While extra performers are permitted to assist with the recording of a candidate's composition, teachers need to be very clear about how these extra performers learn their parts. In short, the parts need to be notated/written by the candidate, and no enhancement of the given part can take place. **A note on the assessment form stating that verbal instructions were given to the other performers is not sufficient evidence.**

Some centres met these conditions extremely well indeed, and this requirement is part of ensuring that all candidate's receive a mark that is a fair and accurate representation of the standard of their work.

Key point call out: The use of extra performers to realise a candidate composition.

A chord accompaniment provided as chord symbols should be played as block chords, once per bar, unless there are extra annotations, or specific notation, supplied to the moderator as part of the score that has been written by the candidate.

A candidate may choose to write a song but lack the vocal quality to do their ideas justice. In this case, the vocal line can be composed and recorded on a Keyboard by the candidate for the extra vocalist to learn, or a sung version of the vocal line of the song could be recorded by the candidate to show the intention. This evidence should be provided to the moderator.

Instructions to extra performers to "improvise" (for example in a Drum kit part, or an instrumental interlude) can't be given as part of the candidate's assessment.

Common misconceptions

Misconception – Assessing two or more performances for the same candidate.



This situation arises when a candidate needs to perform more than one piece to meet the minimum time requirements of the specification.

Although the two pieces do not need to be recorded in one take, they should be assessed as a whole performance. If the difficulty levels of the two pieces are different, the difficulty level of the **easier** piece applies to the whole performance.

Misconception – assessing pieces with a difficulty mark of 1 or 2.



If a candidate is performing a piece with a difficulty level of 1 or 2, the upper mark criteria band of 10 – 12 is NOT available for “Technical Control and Fluency” and “Expression and Interpretation”.

The maximum mark available for the performance of an easier piece is $9 + 9 + 2 = 20$.

Misconception – the definition of Sequencing work, and the element of “Live” control.



Candidates can submit a sequenced performance as an alternative to an instrumental or vocal performance piece. Some centres use this option very successfully with a number of their candidates.

For the purposes of this specification, sequencing (realising) is defined as a computer created and controlled production (DAW) in which the candidate has created and manipulated a performance of a commercially available piece, using sequencing software through a combination of step input and real time recording. These initial tracks are then manipulated using a range of MIDI controllers and software functions to create a musical outcome.

Audio samples and clips from the chosen recording by the original artist may NOT be used or integrated within the work, as this then becomes more of a remixing exercise than a performance process.

Sequencing must include an element of LIVE CONTROL for the final recording. This can include:

- Playing one track live as the final mix of the piece is recorded.
- Manipulating the candidate's previously recorded tracks in real time (e.g., live mixing; adjusting instrument parameters; adjusting FX; live tempo changes, etc.)

Please remember to indicate the element of live control in the supporting information for the moderator – a note on the assessment form will suffice.

Misconception – “Written account” composition scores



Some candidates opt to submit a written account as the score for their composition.

There is a difference between an **evaluation** of the composition outcome and a written account that serves as a score.

A written account should be a **chronological description of the musical content** of the piece, providing details such as the structure, the chords, textural descriptions, timbral variations, dynamics and development of the thematic material.

Misconception – the assessment of Monophonic and Rhythm based compositions



Monophonic compositions for a single line solo instrument lack harmonic awareness, while conversely, rhythm only compositions lack melody and harmony.

This needs to be fully considered in the assessment process, and a mark in the highest criteria mark band is unlikely to be justifiable.

Misconception – Theme and Variation compositions



Theme and Variation based compositions, where the candidate uses a pre-existing theme, should be avoided as the melodic material and often the harmony too, is pre-determined; this severely restricts the compositional input of the candidate.

Writing a Theme and Variations using the candidates' own theme is absolutely fine.

Misconception – use of automated functions within composition software



Many candidates benefit from the availability of composition software within their centres, such as Garageband, Logic, Ableton, etc. These are excellent tools for supporting the development of composition skills.

It has long been accepted that the pre-composed sample loops available within many of these programmes should not be used as the basis of a GCSE composition, and that the use of these in any part of the composition should be declared and reflected in the assessment.

As software becomes more sophisticated, it is possible to generate stylish drum kit accompaniments and automated chord textures very easily within some of these programmes.

The use of these functions must also be declared on the assessment form. Candidates who create and develop their own textural accompaniments should receive the credit due for this, and compositions that are based on auto-generated accompaniment and drum patterns need to be assessed accordingly.

Avoiding potential malpractice

The provision of adequate performance (and composition scores) is an Ofqual requirement for this specification that OCR are required to uphold, in common with the GCSE Music specifications offered by the other examination boards.

For this session, there was an increasing trend towards providing video links to You Tube reference tracks or You Tube tutorial tracks.

Ofqual state:

- *Where, in circumstances in which a written score is not available, an awarding organisation allows the piece of music to be performed by the candidate, it must require an alternative to a written score to be submitted. Where an awarding organisation allows the performance, the alternative materials must be sufficient to allow assessors to make valid judgements against the marking criteria for the task.*

Moderators are aware that candidates lean heavily on online tutorials when developing their performance skills. It is also recognised that within certain genres of music, the score will only be a guide to the performer's intention. Nevertheless, some form of supporting evidence of the performer's intention must be provided, and this should normally be a notated score.

A lyric sheet (with or without chords) is simply not an acceptable score for a vocalist.

Key point call out: The provision of Performance scores

OCR expect reference tracks to be only provided as a last resort. Moderators were frequently able to find scores available online (usually free) for performance pieces that centres had submitted with only a reference track.

Inevitably, there may be a cost implication to the procurement of certain scores. Therefore, in future series OCR will also accept screen shots of sample pages from commercial sites, provided that there is enough of the score available to make a judgement on the accuracy of the work submitted. The Musecore website has a huge range of material available for a reasonable monthly fee. This frequently contains very recent releases.

Where YouTube (or other web links) are provided, they should be provided as a hyperlink via an online document or email. Some moderators were given lists of lengthy URLs to type in manually. Not only is this time consuming, but it is also prone to errors, resulting in an inability to access the track.

In this session, the quality of the composition scores provided by centres was generally very good. Many candidates fully notated their work using the excellent notation software that is now available to centres for little or no cost.

Candidates can deepen their musical understanding through the process of adding musical detail to the score, such as phrasing, dynamics, and articulation. Although the score is not actually assessed, musical detail that is evident from the score, but may not be so evident on the recording, can be given in the assessment.

Improvements could be made to some of the written accounts seen, and this was addressed in the misconceptions section earlier in the report.

Screenshots of the production screen of compositions produced on composition software are useful to the moderator, as they provide a good visual structural, timbral and textural overview of the composition. These were a popular format for score submission in this session, but many would have benefitted from extra annotations.

Key point call out: screenshot score submissions

Screen shots lack crucial information, most notably regarding the chord structures, the melodies, textural variations within parts such as the backing chord track, and the dynamics.

Candidates should therefore be taught to add suitable annotations (handwritten, or text boxes) to the screen shots, and perhaps add screen shots of key melodic material as well to increase the quality of this type of score submission.

The section on "Helpful Resources" later in this report contains a link to a document on the OCR GCSE Music website that provides examples of acceptable composition score formats.

There are two further potential issues to be aware of with regard to composition work: plagiarism and excessive teacher input.

It goes without saying that the NEA composition process of the candidates must be carefully monitored and supervised. Plagiarism can occur when a candidate tries to draw influences from pieces they have performed, or sometimes heard, and it can happen almost subconsciously.

Key point call out: Supervision of the composition process

Work should only be undertaken in the classroom, and the teacher is strongly advised to regularly listen in on the progress of the candidate's composition, and to make notes, so that the evolution of the composition can be traced and understood.

Candidates will also ask for feedback. Ask questions to the candidate about the work to draw attention to areas of the composition that need refining. However, the teacher should not offer solutions or suggest alternative ideas.

Helpful resources

The OCR GCSE Music website contains links to [candidate exemplar work](#) from the 2018 and 2019 examination sessions. Exemplar composition work is available for both the Integrated Portfolio and the Practical portfolio.

There is also a link from this page to an online training resource to support the moderation and assessment of the Music specification. Exemplar assessments and commentaries of compositions and performances are provided, and there is the opportunity to assess the exemplar materials, before the actual mark given is revealed.

[This link](#) contains a useful booklet that provides examples of acceptable formats for the submission of composition scores.

The website [Musescore.com](#) is a constantly evolving library of arrangements and scores. Arrangements of newly released popular songs quickly appear on this site, often in "easy play" versions which are accessible to candidates. A monthly subscription is however required.

[YouTube](#) contains a wealth of backing tracks for popular songs. Carefully worded searches will often also turn up arrangements of classic pop and rock songs that are "minus drums", "minus bass" or "minus lead guitar" for candidates to work with. A range of online tutorials for Keyboard players are also plentiful, and these are regularly updated.

The Principal Moderator is delivering an online CPD session on approaches to the teaching and assessment of the NEA element of the specification. This will take place in the Autumn term, 2022, and is bookable from the [CPD Hub](#).

The OCR Music Subject Officer, Marie Bessant is readily available to answer queries and provide help to centres. Please contact her on music@ocr.org.uk

Additional comments

The majority of the closing section of this report relates to the administration of the NEA.

In this examination session, there has been a significant move away from postal moderation, to uploading the work onto the Repository. Some centres attempting the use of the Repository for the first time found the process quite arduous and time consuming. The length of time the work takes to upload can be significantly reduced if audio files are converted to MP3 format. "WAV" files in particular end up being quite large in comparison.

The process can also be made a lot more straightforward, if the files are labelled correctly before uploading, with the candidate number and the content of the document (Assessment form; Performance score, Composition score, Performance audio or Composition audio). Most centres, both postal and Repository, were very conscientious in the preparation and labelling of the work for moderation. This was appreciated by the moderators.

The use of the interactive pdf Candidate Assessment Form as a downloadable document from the website is recommended, as it correctly totals the candidate mark as you fill in the detail. Clerical errors, where marks had been incorrectly totalled, or incorrectly transcribed onto the interchange were quite frequently discovered among the submissions, usually as a result of not using the online form.

The quality of recordings from centres was generally very good. However, there were a significant minority of cases where background chatter and general ambient noise was present on the candidate recordings. Besides being a distraction to the moderation process, this is unlikely to be an environment that enables a candidate to achieve their best work. Centres might consider requesting specifically timetabled examination recording slots within the school day, in the approach to the end of the Easter term of Year 11. This would provide candidates with a quiet environment that enables them to focus fully on delivering their best possible performance.

A few centres remain in the habit of preceding each recording with a lengthy announcement. This is no longer necessary, and moderators prefer to receive a correctly labelled recording of the work, without the extra preamble.

The vast majority of centres met the May 15th deadline for the submission of marks despite this being a Sunday. Almost without exception, any queries about the moderation sample were dealt with quickly and courteously by the centres. This was very helpful to the moderation process and was much appreciated.

Although not yet officially confirmed, the 2023 examination session is expected to see a return to the full specification requirements. This means a second NEA unit that includes the requirement to compose to an OCR set brief will need to be completed by candidates. The original minimum combined duration times of 4 minutes for performing and 3 minutes for composing will also be restored. Centres are advised to regularly check the website for updates.

Thank you for your continued commitment to the OCR GCSE Music specification.

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