



---

# A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/P: NEA Performing  
Report on the Examination

---

7272  
June 2019

---

Version: 1.0

---

---

Further copies of this Report are available from [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2019 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

## General comments

In this second year of certification for this component of the A-level Music specification, the performing task remained the same. Students were required to submit a programme of music totalling a minimum of 10 minutes of performance. The chosen repertoire can be solo performance, ensemble performance, music production or any combination of these. Students may perform on one or several different instruments. The nature of the task is flexible to enable all students to perform successfully regardless of musical interest, style, instrument and experience.

The overall quality of performances was, once again, very high and many students were awarded marks in the top band for all four criteria of the mark scheme. The opportunity to record each piece separately, and on repeated occasions within the assessment window, has enabled the majority of students to prepare fully and then produce their best performances.

The vast majority of students performed music of either very high, or of a substantial musical and technical standard, and were awarded a top mark for Ambition of Project. However, it was also very pleasing to see that there was a greater range in the standard of material chosen, and that more students this year had selected repertoire which, although of an easier standard, was of the appropriate technical and expressive standard for their technical ability. Much of the repertoire performed was from syllabi of the main instrumental examining bodies (TCL – both classical and rock and pop, ABRSM and RSL). Many students had thought carefully about their programme choice, and there were many examples where students had given thought to scope and variety in their performances. Many students had clearly played to their strengths and performed music that they clearly enjoyed and could play competently. Some students, however, had not considered the appropriateness of their repertoire, and there were some instances where there was little expressive variety evidenced across the programme. Some students had also clearly overstretched themselves and selected repertoire that was not within their technical grasp at the time of recording the assessment. This had an impact on all areas of the assessment grid, since they were not only unable to demonstrate competent technical control, but they were also unable adequately to exhibit control of the expressive elements with the programme and demonstrate command over the stylistic aspects of the performance. Choosing repertoire that is both appropriate and proportionate in terms of variety of expression, and also falls within the technical competence of the student, whilst still providing an adequate level of challenge is something that students and teachers should think carefully about in the planning stages of this component.

The range and scope of instruments that examiners saw was broad, with singers and pianists in the clear majority. Popular styles and instruments were seemingly more marginal than in previous years, and those who did perform popular music styles on instruments such as electric guitar, drum kit and electric bass in the main, performed RSL or Trinity repertoire very successfully. Many singers elected to select repertoire from classical grade syllabi (including some musical theatre songs), and some singers mixed styles (eg musical theatre or pop songs with romantic chansons or lieder), and this was largely successful. There were many male singers this year of whom the majority chose a more traditional programme.

The remaining students performed on orchestral string, woodwind (including many recorder players this year) or brass instruments, and the majority of these performed repertoire taken from either ABRSM or Trinity syllabi. A few students also elected to perform on more than one instrument. Much of the time this was successful, but there were some instances of disparity in terms of technical control and quality.

The majority of performances heard were solos, with some students choosing to perform ensemble repertoire within their programme – there were very few instances of programmes that were completely based on ensemble repertoire. However, when submitted these were often by musicians performing at the highest standards, often in a Jazz idiom, and performing within an ensemble enabled these students to demonstrate fully their performing skills.

Interestingly, this year examiners also saw many programmes which featured repertoire from the component one Areas of Study. Most notably this included: Mozart arias; piano music by Chopin, Brahms and Grieg; pop music by Stevie Wonder, Beyonce and Muse; and musical theatre songs by Jason Robert Brown, C M Schonberg, Rodgers and Sondheim. It is hoped that by performing this repertoire students are gaining a deeper analytical understanding which can be utilised in component one.

Music Production entries remained similar in number to last year (just over 2%), however, the overall quality was notably higher with a range of expressive variety and choice of repertoire. This included entries comprising entirely of Music Production and submissions which included a combination of Music Production with instrumental or vocal performance across the 10 minutes programme.

The majority of all students met the minimum time requirement of 10 minutes. There were a handful of performance submissions which did not meet this minimum performance time although this was notably fewer than last year. In some cases, this was due to not paying close attention to the actual performance time of the recital, but in a few instances students had simply added repeated sections of a piece (where no repeat appeared in the published score). In these cases, these repeats had to be discounted and the result was a performance that was under time. Those performances that were under 10 minutes were often just under the threshold, but there were some instances of more significant shortages. Each piece should be carefully timed from the first note heard (be it student, accompanist or backing track) to the last note of the piece. The times of each piece then should be added together to create the total time. It is this total time that must be over 10 minutes. There were clearly occasions where a performance had been recorded in one take and there had been two attempts at the start of a piece, or silence and setting up, applause, tuning etc. had been included in the 10 minutes' performance time; please note that this is not counted. It is therefore vital that centres take responsibility for ensuring that the total playing time meets the minimum duration of 10 minutes. Performances which did not meet the required duration had a penalty reduction applied to the overall mark.

At the other end of the spectrum, examiners also heard some excessively lengthy performances. In general, this was not in the students' best interests. However, there were also a significant number of very well-timed performances which allowed the student to display fully their performing capabilities.

## **Administration**

### **Centres should submit the following:**

- all performances on one (or more as required) composite CD with tracks in student number order or on a labelled USB pen drive. Each piece should be recorded on a separate track and the length of the piece (and not the length of the track) checked
- each student should have a completed Candidate Record Form (CRF) which provides the essential information for the examiner. It is important that these are completed accurately,

including the names of pieces, exam board and grade, type of evidence submitted and track number

- it is also helpful to include a track listing
- the attendance register should also be completed, signed and enclosed.

Administration from the vast majority of centres was very good or excellent. 'Types of evidence' on the CRF was seemingly more understood than last year, referring to the notated score, tab, lead sheet or guide recording that had been provided to assess the student's performance against. In some cases, students had submitted notated scores which did not reflect their performance and it was clear that they had learnt their performance from a different medium. Centres should always submit the most accurate evidence. If a student's performance has been created from a combination of a notated score and a particular recording, both can be submitted. In particular, guitar tablature scores which are pitch based only, and give no indication of rhythm, are not acceptable as sole evidence as the student cannot have created their performance from this tab alone. In this situation, a guide recording alongside the tab is essential. Often a guide recording is better than a score at conveying the student's intentions. Please be aware that from 2020 where available a copy of either the score or lead sheet must be submitted with the performance assessment.

Where instrumental examination repertoire has been chosen it is very helpful to the examiner if the specific details such as grade, board and examination year can be included. However, it is less helpful to guess at a grade or standard if this is unknown; in this case please leave the box empty. There is no need to submit work with complicated folders and lots of packaging. Simply enclose the student's work within the CRF and place all the CRFs in a document wallet folder, taking care to protect the CD(s). The majority of centres took great care over their submissions, but there were also some submissions received by examiners this year where pages were missing from scores, recordings cut off before the end and so on. It is the responsibility of centres to ensure that all work is checked, submitted correctly and accurately in order to assist their students and the examiner.

Most performances this year were well timed with the majority of students performing between 10 and 13 minutes. Some good practice here continued to be editing down lengthy introductions or accompaniments so that examiners heard the student performing for as much time as possible. Notated repeats were permitted and often reinforced excellent playing or highlighted technical errors. However, repeats added by the student solely to add time were not assessed as part of the performance.

## **Recordings**

As examiners are assessing the student completely from the submitted recording it is vital that the quality of the recording enables the student's part to be clearly audible. Balance between the student and accompanist, backing track or other ensemble members is important. Capturing the balance heard in the room at the time of recording is what examiners are looking to hear; an ambient recording.

Recordings varied greatly in quality. A tip for getting the best recording for the exam is to consider when, where and how these recordings take place.

Try to avoid the following:

- announcements – not necessary on the recording
- applause
- talking before or after the recording
- including both first and second takes to start a piece
- unforgiving acoustics
- intrusive click-track
- school bell ringing
- extraneous music/rehearsing from outside the room
- recording too close to the performer so that every slight movement is heard unforgivingly
- heavy breathing as an individual is sat too close to the recording device.

The most successful recordings had given careful consideration to when, where and how performances were recorded, including giving students multiple chances to produce their best performances and checking the quality of the recording afterwards. As stated in the specification, post-performance editing, including artificial enhancements, added effects and fadeouts, are not permitted on solo and ensemble performance recordings. There were some recordings where reverb had clearly been added post-recording to some vocal performances, and this is against the requirements of the specification. It is also worth noting that some recordings appeared to have been compressed when recording or processed, and it needed checking that the recording device had not limited the dynamic range on the final recording.

It is also worth commenting that examiners heard some excellent accompanists who performed their role accurately, were supportive of the student, sensitive to the ensemble, had clearly rehearsed at length with the student and were not over-powering in performance. Unfortunately examiners also found that this was not always the case, poor accompanying being to the detriment of the student's performance.

### **Assessment**

Marks were awarded in the following four areas:

- Ambition of Project (mark awarded out of 5)
- Technical Control (mark awarded out of 15)
- Expressive Control (mark awarded out of 15)
- Performance Quality (mark awarded out of 15).

### **Ambition of Project**

Full marks were frequently awarded here for solo and ensemble performances. More music production submissions also achieved full marks here this year. Graded pieces above grade 7 or pieces that had similar musical and technical demands met the requirements of the top mark band. Where programmes of a variety of standards were submitted, examiners assessed the overall Ambition of Project based on the proportion of time performed at each standard. There were very few cases where 'expressive variety' was not shown.

### **Technical Control**

Assessment focused on intonation, accuracy of pitch and rhythm, fluency, tone and technique. It was therefore important to focus on the technical demands of the instrument, the quality and variety of the tone produced as much as the accuracy of each individual note. Overall, the quality of performances was very high, with many students achieving top band marks for Technical

Control for highly accomplished performances. There were several examples of superb technical prowess. However, this was also often awarded the lowest mark of the three higher-weighted assessment criteria, with intonation, pitch accuracy and tone quality at extremes of registers being the biggest issues for performers.

### **Expressive Control**

Assessment focused on the chosen tempi and subtle control of these; dynamics, phrasing and articulation - essentially the 'musicality' of the performance. Often the finer details were neglected but it is the control of these nuances that lifted and shaped the performance. Surprisingly, marks were often low in this area, and there was the feeling that this may have been neglected, particularly in dynamic contrasts, musical phrasing and nuances. The most successful performances exploited these aspects of their repertoire. This is something that may need over enhancing and emphasising in order to be heard convincingly on the recording. Often, where students lacked technical control it impacted on their ability to control the expressive features of the performance. In some cases, and increasingly this year, choice of repertoire which had very little variety in expression restricted students from accessing the upper assessment criteria - often resulting in bland performances.

### **Performance Quality**

Assessment focused on the overall performance, the chosen style, command and communication of the performance. Examiners were listening for maturity, an ownership of the performance and an understanding of the pieces being performed. Well prepared and considered performances were the most successful here. Frequently the styles and character of the pieces were well understood and conveyed with real ownership. Less successful performances lacked strong characteristics, and didn't capture the varying styles of their repertoire - singers who used the same vocal tone and approach across classical, musical theatre and pop repertoire, for example. There were also examples this year of programmes featuring repertoire that had a limited sense of performance; instrumental studies for example, which restricted students from accessing the top mark band descriptors.

### **Music Production**

Submissions can comprise music production entirely or be a combination of solo and/or ensemble and music production. It is intended that pieces chosen for music production are commercially available. Submissions must also be a minimum of 10 minutes in length.

Music production submissions must include:

- a minimum of five tracks
- at least five tracks inputted or performed by the student
- at least one MIDI and one audio track
- suitable evidence: a score, lead sheet and/or guide recording of the original piece
- and an annotation which details all the tracks and the process of production.

Music Production submissions were increasingly ambitious this year, however, still not as ambitious overall as acoustic performances due to the amount and/or choice of tracks or variety across the music. This year the task criteria were mostly met, there were no examples of submissions where the performances were all MIDI or all audio only. Occasionally it was difficult to ascertain if the student had inputted or performed the minimum five tracks and this is where the information is vitally important in the annotation. Written evidence was much improved this year and where it was poor it was to the detriment of the submission. Submissions that provided detailed annotations really gave the examiner an insight into the production intentions and processes involved in creating the final product, enabling the examiner fully to credit the successes. Some work showed great attention to detail, and many hours of work, and was suitably rewarded. It is essential that an annotation and another form of suitable evidence (as detailed above) is submitted alongside the Music Production.

### **Assessment of production performances**

Music production is assessed against the same assessment criteria as instrumental/vocal performances.

### **Ambition of Project**

In order to demonstrate a 'highly complex texture' and 'considerable expressive variety' there must be a considerable number of tracks, comprising both MIDI and audio, and not just duplicated or copied tracks. There should be contrast across pieces rather than one texture or level used throughout.

### **Technical Control**

This area comprised assessment of accuracy, articulation, phrasing, microphone placement and sound capture. Marks failed to be gained here, most noticeably with MIDI tracks that were extremely accurate, but lacked editing to create a musical product. Intonation of instruments and singers is also considered here. Sound capture, choice of microphones and placement were generally well handled, occasionally there was clipping and/or extraneous noise at the start/end of recordings.

### **Expressive Control**

This area comprised assessment of the choice of instruments and MIDI timbres, how these had been edited, dynamic processing and dynamic shaping including use of EQ and compression (or over use). Focusing on the musicality of each individual part and then each section of the structure would be a good starting point here. MIDI tended to be done less well, with a lack of editing and manipulating to create a 'live' sound. Often dynamic contrast was also quite bland and lacked contrast within pieces, particular those in popular styles.

### **Performance Quality**

This area comprised assessment of style, balance, blend, panning, use of the stereo field and effects as appropriate. Examiners were listening for a high-quality recording where tracks were balanced and blended, yet still clear. The annotation was useful here for explaining to the examiner what the student was trying to achieve and often provided useful information which informed the examiner's assessment. A considerable part of the challenge of music production is the combining and balancing of different sound sources, making sure that all tracks are audible, well-balanced but sitting together in the audio mix. Often effects were overdone with the handling of vocals proving quite tricky.

### **Final comment**

Once again examiners enjoyed many hours of wonderful listening which included some imaginative repertoire choices, and examples of outstanding musicianship and playing which often exceeded the standards expected at A-level. Examiners wish to thank teachers, students and their accompanists for all the effort and enterprise which leads to such accomplished recitals.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.