A-LEVEL

MUSIC

7272/C: Composition
Report on the Examination

7272
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General Comments

In this second year of the new specification, examiners were again treated to some excellent creative work from students, embracing an ever-widening range of styles and influences. That diversity is equally apparent in all aspects of the work, whether that is the level of ambition, the technical means of communicating the musical ideas or, of course, in the final marks awarded.

Centres seem to have demonstrated a little more confidence in the requirements of the new specification and it was heartening to see that this year very few submissions failed to meet the minimum duration of four and a half minutes, which is for the two compositions combined. Where work did not meet this specified minimum, this year saw the introduction of a penalty (on a sliding scale depending on the severity of the shortfall) applied to the final mark.

Composition 1: Composition to a Brief

As last year, very high quality work was seen for all seven of the briefs. The most successful work seen showed careful consideration of the brief and an inventive interpretation of it. However, students also failed to read the brief carefully, omitting crucial details (the given structure or instrumentation, for example) or miscopying the given stimulus material.

Although examiners always consider the submitted work as a whole, the mark scheme has a section for meeting the brief. In cases where compositions do not meet the brief in one or more aspects, this will adversely affect the mark for otherwise worthy creative work. Examples of brief infringement seen in this examination series included:

- miscopying of chorale melodies and bass lines

- miscopying, alteration or omission of lyrics

- Not following the given structure of the brief (relevant to briefs 5 and 6)

- not writing for the specified ensemble (relevant to briefs 2, 5, 7 and, to a certain extent, brief 3)

- writing beyond the time limits (brief 3 and brief 7).

The mark scheme descriptors for use of the brief range from 'Rudimentary use is made of the Brief' up to 'Imaginative use of the Brief fundamentally informs the composition'. Where no discernible reference to the brief could be found (for example, a composition following brief 2 that was not a song and had no sense of protest or celebration), the work could only score zero.

As with last year, Brief 1 (Chorales) was the most popular, with just under half of all students electing to attempt these exercises. Brief 3 accounted for another fifth of submissions, then Brief 6 (around 12%). Regardless of the tasks set, the most effective work was always successful in trying to transcend the limitations imposed and to do something creative and imaginative with the stimulus material. It is therefore in students' best interests to consider fully the possibilities offered by each brief at the selection stage before committing to the task of composition.

Brief 1: Chorales

Following this brief required the completion of two exercises: one where melody and bass were given and one where only the melody was provided. A (small) number of students elected to make changes to the given material in their solutions and this inevitably compromised the mark received. It is important for students to understand that the given melodies and bassline are immutable and

that care should be taken to ensure that these have been copied correctly before attempting to work the exercises.

Although students may choose whether to submit their chorales in open or closed score, closed score submissions (two staves, with Soprano and Alto on the treble stave and Tenor and Bass on the bass stave) tended to show greater control and technical fluency. Writing in open score is a harder task and hardly any of the handful of submissions of this type profited from the decision.

The majority of submissions for this brief demonstrated knowledge of appropriate technique and style. Examiners look for evidence of:

- ability to modulate

- good choices of keys in the wider tonal context of the chorale

- strong cadences

- idiomatic writing for the individual voice parts, as well as good spacing amongst them in the formation of chords

- quaver enrichment, usually through suspensions and passing notes (auxiliary notes tend to be less idiomatic than these, but can be made to be effective)

- a strong and purposeful bass line in exercise 2, driving progressions forward with interest.

Technical errors commonly found in solutions included the following:

- consecutive 5ths and octaves (including those that occurred by contrary motion), as well as consecutive unisons

- unprepared dissonances (4ths, 7ths and 9ths)

- dissonances (7ths, 4ths and 9ths) that fail to resolve downwards appropriately

- awkward melodic intervals, such as augmented 4ths and 2nds or, in some contexts, diminished 4ths and 5ths (these can both be acceptable if the note following the diminished interval moves back on itself by a semitone, e.g. G – C# - D. Unidiomatic diatonic 7ths (major and minor) were also found

- wide spaces (greater than an octave) between Soprano and Alto or Alto and Tenor, leading to poorly spaced chords

- inappropriate doubling of the major 3rd in chords

- unsuitable use of second inversion chords

- use of diminished triads in root position.

It should also be reiterated that chorales have as their basis sung hymn tunes. Although not stated, the melody has an implied text and therefore the number of syllables in the soprano should be matched by those found in the lower parts. A lack of consideration for this resulted in needless repeated notes and over-long notes.

This year saw a lot of students making questionable choices about tempo for the chorales. The advice has always been that students should make a musically informed choice of tempo based on the solutions that they present. Examiners saw solutions at 50 BPM which were predominantly in a

stodgy crotchet-based texture, whereas there were also very intricate, carefully worked-out chorales which were left at the default tempo of the chosen software – usually 100 BPM – that sounded rather garbled when played back. Finding an appropriate tempo for the solutions that are presented is an important compositional decision and one which students should be encouraged to take.

Exercise 1

The vast majority of students identified and deployed perfect cadences as implied in the following bars and keys:

Bar 3   B flat
Bar 6   F
Bar 8   C minor
Bar 13 F
Bar 15 B flat

The cadence in bar 10 and the subsequent start of bar 11 was a challenge. The two obvious solutions to the cadence are an imperfect cadence in G minor and an interrupted cadence in F, both of which can be made to work. The chord in bar 11^1 works best as V^7c in B flat, setting up the passing modulation through G minor in bar 11^4-12^1 before cadencing in F major. In this case, doubling the 3rd in bar 11^3 was unavoidable and thus acceptable.

One feature of this exercise was the starting of each phrase on a minim in both soprano and bass. More effective solutions could be found which mirrored this in the inner parts, but there was also opportunity to vary this texture, such as in bar 3, where an inner part could go from D to E natural in the second half and help signal an early modulation to F.

Opportunities to deploy suspensions and passing 7ths at cadences were taken by a number of students. Diminished sevenths were also successfully deployed in bars 4^4 and 11^4.

Exercise 2

This E minor melody has eight phrases, including a tricky final phrase in long notes. A certain amount of planning was required to find a strong tonal plan for this chorale, especially as it was possible to harmonise all four of the first phrases in E minor (and thus spend a lot of the chorale treading water tonally).

- The **first phrase** (bars 1 - 2) was harmonised by virtually all students as a perfect cadence in E minor, often with a familiar and stylistic ii^{o7}b – V – i cadence with passing seventh. The anacrusis and repeated B at the start was a challenge here: some change to the chord in the opening two crotchets of the chorale would seem sensible and options included:

  - moving from i to ib (perhaps with a passing quaver in the bass)

  - two E minor chords, but with an octave leap in the bass and perhaps some other movement in the inner parts

  - V or Vb to i. A passing seventh could be made to work here, but a full crotchet's worth of this dissonance is not particularly stylistic. V^7c is even less so at the very start of a chorale.

- The **second phrase** (bar 2^4 - 4) encouraged a lot of good solutions that featured contrary motion bass lines, usually opting for an imperfect cadence in E minor. A few bold solutions treated this

entirely in B major, which can be made to work but is a tonal outlier in this key and unlikely in this style, especially without some kind of balancing tonal gesture on the flat side. A more stylistic approach would be to treat the approach to the cadence with a secondary dominant gesture and keep the A# late in the phrase (IVb – V^{7}b – I in B major could work here, for example).

- A number of students used the **third** and **fourth phrases** (bar 4^4 - 8) to set up imperfect and perfect cadences in G major and this has the advantage of moving the second quarter of the chorale into the relative major and thus demonstrates sound tonal planning. These two phrases also seemed to elicit the most crotchet-based solutions, where keeping the quaver movement is desirable as far as possible. An alternative in the **fourth phrase** is to treat the cadence as a Phrygian in A minor. This has the advantage of avoiding three G major cadence in a row and provides a pleasing variety to the range of cadences that can be offered.

- The **fifth phrase** (bar 8^4 - 10) presented another challenge, with the repeated Gs in bar 10. Some students who cadenced in G major in bar 8 spotted the opportunity for a passing modulation to A minor going into bar 9 (via a strong chromatic bass line G – G# - A, with a: V^{7}b deployed at the end of bar 8). The melody in bar 9 prevents a straight V-I in G major (because of consecutive octaves, soprano and bass), but an approach via Vb works well. More effective solutions for the cadence included passing through C major (with a colourful use of F natural) before a final G major chord. Choosing to stay in C major for bar 10 was possible, but it makes the following phrase seem far more extreme, suggesting as it does a move to D major (modulating up a tone is inelegant and unstylish here).

- The **sixth phrase** (bar 10^4 – 12) contains another trap if choosing to cadence in D major, namely the danger of parallel fifths under the D and E of the melody. Alternatives from the second half of bar 11 include:

  - Ic – V – I (though without a bass lower auxiliary on Ic, to avoid consecutives. An octave drop in the bass here works well to keep momentum through the cadence)

  - vi – V – I (Ib works well just before this)

  - Ib – V – I (a passing note in the bass needs to be avoided here in order to prevent consecutives).

It is possible to cadence in B minor, but this is tricky to negotiate as the E in the melody needs to be treated as a seventh. A small number of students were able to make this work convincingly.

- In the **seventh phrase** (bar 12^4 – 14), there was opportunity to mirror the melodic sequence of bars 13 to 14 in the harmonisation, but a number of elegant solutions here included passing through A minor on the way to a cadence in G major. Both perfect and interrupted options are available here and, whilst an interrupted cadence is relatively scarce in chorales, it is a viable option, even if it does suggest ending on a E minor chord, especially if students then follow up with a tierce de Picardie in the final phrase. Equally valid is a Ic – V – I progression in G major, where the characteristic lower auxiliary decoration in the bass can be used without fear.

- The **final phrase** (bar 14[4] to end) presents an obvious challenge, with its conclusive rhythmic augmentation and very long final note. Less effective solutions immediately matched the melody with a slow harmonic rhythm and this has the effect of putting the brakes on a little early and makes the final note unpalatably long if left entirely undecorated. Many students took the opportunity to decorate this long final note with suspensions, double suspensions, lower auxiliary decoration and, perhaps most stylishly, one final excursion through A minor en route to a tierce de Picardie finish. Resourceful students who are familiar with Riemenschneider had an opportunity to see how similarly long notes might have been handled in other chorales and it was clear that a number of students had analysed and synthesised good examples in their own solutions. The most important thing that distinguished the more effective attempts at this conclusion was a reluctance to slow down the harmonic rhythm until the very final bar and this required carefully planning and potentially some experimentation to engineer a satisfying finish. Many students took the opportunity for a stylistic tierce de Picardie in the final chord.

It is worth noting that some students treated the presentation of their chorales rather less well than that of their free compositions. Examiners will always take the solutions as the primary evidence for arriving at a mark but, even in chorales, the quality of the score is a consideration that is transparently part of the mark scheme.

Examples of poor editing found by examiners included the following:

- not creating an anacrusis in the score for exercise 2, putting in three beats' rest before the chorale begins. Similarly, leaving the final note as a semibreve instead of a dotted minim (technically a copying error) shows a lack of care and understanding of the nature of an anacrusis in the first place

- voice parts not properly differentiated in short score with tails pointing in the correct direction.

- setting the exercises for Piano (the default instrument in a popular scorewriting software package) and leaving this Instrument named in the score. Whilst it is true that many musicians learn the craft of chorales through playing back at a keyboard, writing for choir at least reassures the examiner that the student understands the choral context of the chorale. Given that the brief makes reference to adding voice parts, writing for piano could be viewed as an infringement of the brief (though it was not considered as such this year). It can also be argued that the choral sounds produced by software, however aesthetically objectionable the aural experience, sustain the lines rather better than a piano and can help students to hear their solutions more accurately, especially with regard to tied notes and accidental clashes between parts

- a lack of control of tempo. Although notating this could be claimed to be unstylistic in a baroque era chorale, so too is notating with the lack of text and not writing the upper parts in open score with C clefs! Most important is controlling this on the recording so that the student's desired tempo is reflected, whether or not the tempo marking is then 'hidden' within the score. Notating it on the score does, however add an extra layer of reassurance for the examiner that the student has considered the appropriate speed for his or her solutions.

Brief 2

The invitation to compose a song to mark the UK's exit from the European Union elicited a range of responses, both for and against the political situation. Success here was driven by:

- how well the chosen lyrics were set

- how convincing the mood of the song was

- a satisfying and logical structure

- Idiomatic and creative writing for the forces, both instrumental and vocal.

Examiners were treated to a range of persuasive and cleverly composed songs, in a variety of styles. Some tapped into the Punk genre for an in-your-face protest; others preferred a more laid-back, satirical vibe. Students took the opportunity to quote the National Anthem, drew inspiration from patriotic marches and demonstrated sophisticated use of musical devices to make their points. It was wonderful to see the range of artists from whom students had drawn inspiration, and many had clearly taken time to study examples of political satire, rallying anthems and protest songs. At the lower end of the mark scheme, songs were rambling, the underlay of lyrics unclear or vocal lines unconvincing, making the communication of a message (surely the essence of this brief) troublesome.

Brief 3

Composing four mood-specific vignettes for a film commission appealed to a large number of students – this was the most popular brief after chorales (Brief 1). Students had the option to arrange the four given moods into an order of their choosing and this allowed some freedom in terms of creating a stand-alone piece if desired, or sticking to a set of four miniatures.

Although the given theme was provided as a unifying factor, students could have done more to make their four vignettes feel like a set. Some attempted this by composing all four vignettes in ternary form, but this had the disadvantage of working better for some moods than others ('tense and menacing' suffers a little from this, for example).

The provided motif was used competently by the majority of students, though some did not take the opportunity to develop it (treating the lower auxiliary sub-motif in sequence or inverting the distinctive large intervals, for example). Some students did take the opportunity to rhythmically displace the theme from an upbeat to a downbeat, which worked well. Others saw the opportunity to turn the theme into an accompanying ostinato, over which a new theme could be deployed.

There were different interpretations of the instrumental limitations placed on students by the brief. Most composed for a fixed ensemble of up to ten players (which could have included common doubling) and used all or a subset of this 'mothership' ensemble across all vignettes. Others chose to provide a different ensemble of up to ten players for each vignette. Although not the original intention of the brief, it was allowed as an interpretation of it (though in the real world, a composer is unlikely to hire more musicians for a recording session than necessary if this is only for a selection process where selection is not guaranteed). In the spirit of this, writing one vignette for solo piano was perfectly acceptable and was made to work effectively; writing all four for piano solo was a stretch of the word 'ensemble' from the brief and thus was considered an infringement. Finally, a few students restricted themselves to up to ten sound sources in their sequencer, many of which were not real instruments. Although this is not strictly in the spirit of the brief, this was accepted.

Brief 4

Students with a passion for musical theatre seemed to enjoy the challenge of setting the given lyrics to form a duet. Some inventive approaches included interpreting the lyrics sarcastically and adding additional lyrics to give additional colour or context to the duet. A few took the opportunity to write instrumental interludes, for example taking inspiration from the dance styles suggested by the lyrics to form a dance break in the duet. This worked less well as an outro to the song; a better ending was achieved by bringing back the duet at the end, which allowed also for a little variety in the handling of the two voices together.

Although the text where the two protagonists sing together is short, more could have been done to write creatively for the two voices together. A number of students simply had both singers in octaves or unison, others in simple harmony. Not many expanded this section or made use of other ways of using the voices together (such as imitation).

As is often the case in music theatre, the dramatic modulation towards the end of the duet is an accepted part of the style. However, some students did not place this well within the duet, did not modulate smoothly or chose an outlandishly contrasting key that didn't quite sit well with the duet's tonal origin.

Some very stylish work set the given lyrics with pleasing and catchy melodic lines and handled the challenging scansion of the lyrics well. Colourful and characteristic harmonic turns and logical musical structures were also seen in a number of successful compositions. Less effective submissions for this brief struggled to present a convincing sense of style and drama, contained poor melodic contour or confusing underlay in the notation. A very pleasing number of students provided good live performances of the vocal lines, which helped to bring intentions to life. However, here as in any case where live vocals are provided, care must be taken to ensure that the recording matches the score. There were examples in this brief where one of the vocal lines was omitted entirely from the score (inevitably compromising the overall mark) and many where the vocal lines did not follow the score accurately. In the handful of cases where vocal lines don't match the score because they are ungratefully written or overly awkward to sing, the student did not work with the singer to find a compromise and update the score accordingly. In cases where recording and score don't match for other legitimate reasons (e.g. inadequate rehearsal time), submitting a software-generated recording of the vocal parts in addition to the live recording is good practice.

Brief 5

This brief provided students with guidance on instrumentation, structure (with solo sections stipulated) and a chord progression to articulate the given structure. However, some students chose only to use to the first eight chords, and this proved extremely limiting given the internal repetition already inherent in that part of the progression.

With so many elements provided as part of the brief, it was important for students to show some creativity in the handling of these to compose stylish work. Some very fine examples chose to infuse their pieces with a Latin or funk flavour, for example, thus taking the opportunity offered to choose a suitable groove for the music. Other features of successful work included:

- Fluent solo writing, with a logical yet improvisatory feel

- Good interaction between solo instruments and the rhythm section, capturing the essence of a live performance

- Creative use of the progression to mix up harmonic rhythm, to provide effective turnarounds and smooth joins between the sections

Less effective work tended to demonstrate a weak sense of style outside of the given elements, unlikely or stilted solo writing, predictable harmonic rhythm and, especially, a foursquare rhythm section, with little variety in the drum writing and accompaniment textures.

An important element of handling this style effectively is the balancing of the bass line between the bass and harmony instruments. Some less effective solutions had confusing disagreements between the bass line and the left hand of the piano, for example, suggesting a less secure handling of harmony and awareness of sonority.

Brief 6

The challenge to write a lullaby for instrumental ensemble appealed to a significant minority of students. Here again, a given structure was provided, and most managed to follow this. A few did, however, either misread the structure and ended with a repeat of the A section, or slavishly copied and pasted their B section to conclude, with no change on the repeat. Both of these were seen as minor infringements of the brief.

Compound time was understood and deployed well by the majority of submissions for this brief. However, a few did not really convince in their handling of it, with music that sounded like it was in 3/4 time. This might have been intentional cross-rhythm, but it seemed to undermine the lilting character that compound time affords and which, ultimately, could have provided the lullaby with a rocking feel that might be conducive to sleep.

Although students used a wide variety of folk instruments as part of their ensembles, a few stretched this definition a little – whilst a music box is certainly not a classical instrument, it is perhaps equally difficult to argue for it as a folk instrument, given that there can be no folk repertory for a device that is manufactured to play back a predetermined piece with no variation. In addition, there was opportunity for students to imbue their lullabies with a folk flavour to give the composition a distinct style. Some students took this opportunity with both hands and created music that had a lullaby character but also an interesting folk element; in less successful submissions, the music was devoid of either.

Brief 7

The brief provided an 8-note row and a stipulation to write two short pieces, either for piano or for a trio of melodic instruments. Success in this brief required students to inhabit a serialist idiom and this produced some interesting work. Serialism has inspired a number of different approaches from composers in the past century or so, but some common hallmarks are:

- greater importance placed on texture, timbre and dramatic gesture

- motivic rather than melodic discourse

- importance of register and sonority in the chosen instrument(s)

- greater consideration given to rhythm, either as a unifying factor or as an important means of logical development in its own right

- strong contrasts (pitch, dynamic) and a fragmented texture.

Examples of creative work here used a pre-existing stylistic model (eg waltz or march) to help give the music character whilst restricting the pitch content of the music. Others created an intricate network of motivic cells or set of chords with the row.

It is difficult, given the opportunity for transposition, fragmentation and transformation of the row, to understand exactly the processes some students went through in manipulating the original source material in their compositions. The programme note was critical here and some students missed an opportunity to enlighten examiners as to their intentions in creating their pieces. Others meticulously annotated the score, which was not necessary but very helpful in clarifying the compositional process.

Composition 2: Free composition

Students continue to demonstrate their unending creativity, with a wide variety of genres, styles and levels of ambition on offer again this year. A number of free compositions drew inspiration from the areas of study that students had covered during the course (for example, piano pieces in a romantic style or baroque-inspired instrumental suites). Others took the opportunity to inhabit a genre that appealed to them outside the course (writing in an epic prog rock style or for a consort of recorders, for example). Given that, for this submission, the student is effectively creating his or her own question, it is important to once again emphasise that, whilst inspiration may come from anywhere, the nature of the project and its scope should be chosen carefully to best enable the student's talents to be fully demonstrated at the advanced level required in the specification.

What this means in practice is to follow a genre in which the student feels comfortable, but with which a certain level of complexity and creativity can be written into the piece. Having one eye on the published mark scheme can be useful here, but the bottom line is that the music submitted should not be in a style that is overly restrictive (and therefore precluding access to the upper bands for ideas, contrast, development, structure and musical elements) nor overly ambitious (meaning that a successful style is too hard to inhabit or that technical control will suffer).

Examples of submissions which are overly restrictive include:

- songs based on a simple verse-chorus structure, based on the same short chord progression

- minimalist piano pieces with very little logical development

- pieces that remain in the same key throughout, that are entirely diatonic or have a harmonic rhythm that never changes.

Aspects of submissions which set an improbable challenge include:

- writing effectively for large orchestra

- writing effective virtuosic writing, particularly for piano. Examiners heard a number of pieces that would have sounded impressive when played back in software but were impossible to play in real life.

- writing in an advanced harmonic idiom or complex time signatures.

One genre which presents pitfalls across both of these danger areas is the submission based on film music, especially where Hans Zimmer has been taken as the model. Zimmer's style often revolves around intricate layering over a simple harmonic progression, for example, the 'four-chord trick'. Because of his reliance on music production techniques (which is taken in his music to an

extremely high level), this style can seem seductive on the surface, but it is hard to replicate with the requisite degree of subtlety. In addition, Zimmer's style relies on a wide and colourful sonic palette. Students without a good grounding in orchestration or a mastery of the sound sources in their sequencers can end up writing music that is either unfeasible for an orchestra or simply lacks the variety to sustain interest. Finally, music composed for film is often simpler in construction in order to best serve the visuals it accompanies. A whole level of subtlety in synchronising with image, reflecting dialogue or simply generating pace through an action cue is lost when that music is divorced from its intended context. It is, of course, entirely feasible to write well in this genre at A-level and examiners did see good examples; but it is far easier to write music of limited success if the student has not considered dramatic context, good orchestration or suitable variety and development in ideas.

Teachers have a role in shepherding students towards choices that will work best for them. Some students will be inspired by music they love; others by writing for instruments that they know well. Yet others will have a passion for music production, which opens up a range of other genres. The planning stage of this composition is incredibly important, regardless of the challenge students set themselves, and students will find it easier to compose if they have a clear idea of what it is they are trying to achieve in the end. For many, this process is easiest away from software, whether with an instrument, sketches on paper or brief ideas recorded on a phone for referral and refinement later. This process is just as important in music production-based styles, where the temptation to loop and copy passages is strong and a clear sense of the proportions and overall effect of the music is difficult when working in a strictly linear way.

Administration

Examiners recognise that the administration of composition submissions can be a challenge. There are a number of elements that need to be submitted together and the sheer variety of submissions that some centres have to manage from their students can pose logistical and technical issues. Examiners appreciate the care and attention that goes into the vast majority of these submissions.

Despite this and comments made in last year's report, there are still a few issues that have arisen again this year and so some comments bear repeating:

Notated Scores/Lead Sheets/Aural Guides

Students have the option to submit one or more of the above three types of written evidence to show their intentions, in addition to the programme note. Although this evidence will always be heard in conjunction with the submitted recording, it is important to consider which is the most appropriate written submission for each student. It is tempting to think that a score is always the most useful, but this will only be the case if all of the required information is there, in a clear and legible way. Some points to bear in mind:

- **Scores exported from sequencing software** may not accurately reflect the recording if left unedited, and students who are less comfortable with notation may fail to pick up on this, simply trusting the software to produce the score. Issues that were found in this series included:

    - overly complex rhythmic notation arising from unquantized MIDI data

    - incorrect spelling of accidentals

    - incorrect key signatures

- 'key switch notes' (used to trigger different articulations of a sampler instrument, for example) left in the exported data, resulting in notes appearing in the score which are not intended to be played and are in any case out of range

- drum notation based on keyboard strokes rather than standard drum configuration

- incorrectly labelled sound sources

- inappropriate clef choices

- music notated in the wrong octave (as a result of other MIDI transpositions or transformations not transferring accurately to the score)

- audio parts that had been recorded into the software not being notated at all, including vocal parts, important rhythm guitar lines and instrumental solos.

Where scores were deficient in a number of these areas, examiners were left in a quandary as to how to assess the work. Students are almost always better served by providing a suitably detailed **aural guide** in place of a deficient score.

- **A set of parts** is not an acceptable substitute for a score, whether partially complete or not (e.g. drums and bass created in a sequencer exported as a score, supplemented with separate, handwritten guitar parts in tab). Moreover, parts do not need to be submitted in addition to a score. Where a student is used to handwriting parts rather than notating in score, a **lead sheet** or **aural guide** would be a preferable alternative.

- **Aural Guides** varied considerably in quality. The purpose of this written annotation to the recording is to help guide the examiner through the composition. A few pointers to bear in mind here:

    - an accurate **timeline in minutes and seconds** is practical for examiners to follow. References to bar numbers are not, though referring to the *number of bars* in a section might be appropriate

    - screenshots which show the score section of an idea can be very useful. Screenshots of clearly audible reverb settings are far less useful

    - the prose description should try and explain how the ideas develop through the composition and should refer to structural terms (e.g. verse, bridge, transition, outro). Remember that the aural guide is provided as an alternative to a score and so can provide valuable written evidence to support the student's intentions in the recording

    - score notation is far more instructive in most cases than piano roll notation

    - a simple explanation of what effects have been used to shape a given sound is preferable to several screenshots of the effects used

    - a summary of chord progressions using guitar symbols can be very useful in helping to identify sections aurally

- **Additional analyses/commentaries from teachers** were seen in a very small number of cases. Although almost certainly well-intentioned, it is not the place of the teacher to lobby on behalf of students, or to attempt to persuade an examiner towards a specific interpretation or appreciation of students' work. It is solely the responsibility of students (who may of course act on the advice of their teachers) to create the written evidence to support musical intentions. Any additional commentaries submitted by teachers will simply be ignored by examiners.

- **Discrepancies between score and recording** happened frequently this year, usually as a result of live performances being a part of the submitted recording. This can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, examiners appreciate hearing live performance as an element of the submission and this can go a long way towards bringing students' work to life. On the other hand, however, where the live element does not match or even improves on the submitted score, examiners need to balance the style of the music versus the part the recorded discrepancy has played in the overall submission. This happened where vocal or solo parts were recorded live, or where files in scorewriting software were then exported to sequencing software to produce a superior recording. If there are significant discrepancies between the score and recording, then submitting both synthesised and live recordings is best practice and many centres did this. It should be remembered that examiners will always consider the practicalities of a live performance of a piece, even where a synthesised recorded from software is provided. Wherever a score is submitted, this will always be seen as the primary evidence for the submission.

- **Quality of score editing** again varied considerably this year. There were examples of clear, detailed and well-edited scores that would be worthy of professional publication. At the other end of the scale, some scores were presented with the bare minimum of information, leading to unclear intentions or notation that precluded practical performance. Some points to bear in mind here:

    - a score should contain all the performance directions necessary for a good performance without the composer present. These include:

        - appropriate staves and labels for the forces used

        - dynamics

        - tempo indications

        - expressive markings (including articulation, slurs and phrasing)

        - technical directions (including use of mutes, specialist directions like pizzicato, pedalling or flutter-tonguing)

        - any other helpful instructions (including fingering, bowing)

    - the larger the number of staves, the more practical it is to reduce the stave size in order to fit the music onto as few pages as possible for the music to still be legible

    - spiral binding and booklet format for scores is unnecessary, as are staples. The easiest way for an examiner to deal with the submission is to have all of the submitted printed evidence on loose sheets of A4 paper (A3 should be avoided), or fastened simply with a paperclip, with the Candidate Record Form (printed as an A3 double-sided sheet) wrapped around it.

Recordings

The majority of students export recordings straight from software and this is an extremely practical way to submit these. Where live performances (or live elements against a computer-generated accompaniment) are present, please take care to ensure that there are no significant discrepancies between score and recording, as outlined above. Reference to this in the programme note or providing a completely computer-generated recording provided alongside the live version is good practice here.

When exporting audio from software, ensuring that it is CD quality audio (.wav or .aif, at 16-bit, 44.1kHz depth and sample rate) will help ensure that timings in the software are preserved in the final recording. Consulting your software's instructions or enlisting the help of technical support or IT departments might be helpful here if necessary.

CDs occasionally had missing tracks or were in a format that were unplayable. Please do check that submissions are on a standard audio CD, as this is what examiners expect. USB sticks are not a preferable alternative.

Please do not make centre or student announcements on the CD. They are unnecessary if the track numbers have been recorded accurately on the CRF, they slow down examiners and simply create more work for all concerned. A separate track listing for the CD(s) can be very useful, however.

Candidate Record Forms (CRFs)

Virtually all centres submitted the correct 2019 CRF for Composition, available from the AQA website. It is important that each CRF has two signatures completed (one from the student and one from the teacher). A separate coursework submission form is not required as centres do not mark the work.

Final comment

Examiners greatly appreciate the hard work that goes into the preparation, creation and administration of the composition component of this specification. It is an area where students can shine through their individuality and creativity, much as they can in performance or through a well-crafted essay. There was some truly outstanding work seen and heard this year, with imaginative responses to all seven briefs and some highly interesting free compositions.

It is accepted, however, that not all students relish these challenges and, indeed, some teachers also find this area a challenge to teach. It is hoped that, in these cases, productive use can be made of year 12 in developing and honing creative skills beyond the level attained at GCSE and that teachers will see this challenge as an opportunity for CPD or additional training.

What has been clear from the past two years of submissions for this new syllabus is that students have an unending capacity for creativity and examiners have once again been struck by the variety, ingenuity and individual expression that has come across in students' compositions. Congratulations are due to the students and their teachers for this continued collective hard work.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.