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# A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/P Non-exam assessment  
Report on the Examination

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7272/P  
June 2023

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Version: 1.0

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## **General comments**

For this 2023 examination series, we returned to the assessment requirements as stated in the specification and students were required to perform for a minimum duration of 10 minutes. Recordings of the performance coursework also reverted to being completed during the assessment window between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 15<sup>th</sup> May.

The majority of students exceeded the minimum time requirement. Performing between 11 and 12 minutes of repertoire was most commonly seen by examiners. There was a minority of students who did not meet the minimum time requirement for this series, in some cases missing the requirement by a few seconds. Noticeably this year, several students fell short by 1 minute or longer. Where performances fell short of the minimum time requirement, a marking penalty was applied.

Examiners saw a wide range of repertoire including graded examination pieces, music by composers and artists from the Areas of Study in the specification, and a whole range of other pieces across classical, jazz, pop, musical theatre and film music. As was the case last year, a considerable majority of students performed on the piano or sang, however, examiners also heard a wide variety of instruments from all instrumental families and groups, as well as music production, all with a full range of attainment.

## **Assessment Criteria for Instrumental/Vocal**

The assessment criteria for this component is unchanged from the published version in the specification.

### **Ambition of Project**

Students who achieved the full 5 marks for this criterion performed music that was more technically demanding than music set at grade 7 for practical music examinations. Where several pieces of differing standards were presented, examiners would take the average standard in order to assess the mark in this area. The majority of students did achieve the full 5 marks here, but there were many examples of students who judiciously selected music which achieved less marks for AoP and this enabled them to maximise their marks in the other criteria.

Also considered was the 'expressive variety' presented. It was extremely rare to not find any expressive variety within a 10 minute programme. Expressive variety can be found within a specific style, period or genre and it is not necessary for a student to deliver a programme that covers every musical period, for example.

### **Technical Control**

In general, examiners found that the level of technical control was slightly less secure than last year. This is likely to be due to a return to the full length assessment demands. Fluent and secure performances with limited errors of pitch and rhythm were awarded marks in the highest mark band. Performances in which intonation was not fully secure, or featured consistent rhythmic inaccuracy, could not achieve a mark in the top band. The most successful students in this area also demonstrated a mature tone quality across the full instrument or vocal range.

Students whose fluency was interrupted and had not mastered the technical requirements of their chosen repertoire and/or their instrument were restricted to marks in the lower three bands.

## **Expressive Control**

The most successful students had a strong ownership of the expressive features of their performance including tempo, tempo changes, dynamic contrast, shaping of phrases and articulation. Where the repertoire selected was limited in the scored or notated expressive features, the most successful students delivered their own musical interpretation. Less successful students delivered a bland performance without contrast, nuance and control, and this was often due to selecting repertoire that didn't allow for much expression, or the student not taking ownership of their performance.

Overall, examiners saw that there was an improved focus this year on the expressive features of the music, leading to many highly musical performances.

## **Performance Quality**

This was often the criterion where students were most successful and examiners saw many engaging and assured performances in which the student had taken real ownership of the styles presented. There were also occasions where the repertoire selected limited the student's ability to fully engage in the style 'with real flair', and therefore the top mark band was unattainable. When presenting pieces of contrasting styles, examiners would expect to see this reflected in the performance. For example, with singers, a change of vocal tone and delivery for different styles, characters, moods etc. was positively credited in this criterion.

On the increase this year were group performance submissions, particularly in the Jazz idiom. Examiners greatly enjoyed many small group performances which enabled students to fully demonstrate their performance skills idiomatically within this genre. Unfortunately, there was also an increase in the number of larger ensembles which are not permitted in this specification. Ensembles must total no more than 8 players and the student must be playing an undoubled part which must be audible to the examiner when listening to and assessing the performance. In some cases, this year, there were performances submitted with ensembles greater than 8 players and these could not be assessed as part of the recital programme.

Worth noting is the importance of a good accompanist to the success of a student's performance. Examiners did hear performances where the accompanist wasn't supportive of the soloist and often inflexibility, dominating balance and incorrect notes directly affected the quality of the student's performance. Students should be encouraged to rehearse with their accompanist well in advance of recording their submission as this is an integral part of preparing for their performance. Similarly, for students that perform with a backing track, sourcing a good quality backing track is to be encouraged and time should be taken to rehearse effectively with the track prior to recording.

Overall, the most successful students performed repertoire that was well within their technical capabilities, allowing them to fully master the techniques demanded, musically interpret the expressive features and deliver a performance with assurance, command and in many cases, stylistic flair.

## **Assessment Criteria for Production**

The assessment criteria for this component is unchanged from the published version in the specification.

### **Ambition of Project**

Students who achieved the upper marks in this area presented submissions with high musical and technical demands. This included large amounts of tracks (any combination of midi and audio) which required careful editing, balancing and mixing, demonstrating great technical skill but also high levels of musicality. Examiners heard some ambitious projects which had clearly been inspired by current professional producers.

### **Technical Control**

Accuracy of rhythm and pitch, in comparison to the original score or guide recording, was often very secure, as was the capture of audio. Often the intonation of vocal parts wasn't as secure and, as a minor slip, would result in a mark in the 10-12 band. The most successful students paid great attention to articulation and phrasing, in particular the editing of midi tracks. This attention to detail was often a key factor in the awarding of marks in this area.

### **Expressive Control**

Examiners heard and read about some incredibly creative approaches to achieving the desired timbres for recordings, which often demonstrated a student's determination to achieve the exact sound. Where sounds and timbres had been successfully selected but lacked the same level of attention and editing, marks were restricted to the 10-12 band. Similarly, to instrumental performances, examiners were listening for contrast in dynamics and musical shaping of each part. Compression and EQ were occasionally awkwardly applied, resulting in an overall sound that was too contained and lacking in depth. Where they were used successfully, students really understood how to manipulate both to accomplish their required sound.

### **Performance Quality**

There were some excellent examples where students had completely captured and emulated the sound of the original artist or producer. The annotation or commentary provided by the student really aided the examiner in understanding what the student was aiming to achieve with their production, and could therefore be credited accordingly. The most successful students created a final mix in which all parts 'sat' effectively and were well balanced and blended according to the desired sound. Where tracks stuck out unmusically, were seemingly not integrated or blended with the other parts, marks were restricted to the lower bands. Very often it was the vocal tracks which sounded 'alien' to the rest of the track.

Overall, examiners heard productions that demonstrated a great deal of passion, a huge amount of work, time and attention to detail and were awarded accordingly. For the students submitting music production, there were clearly high levels of engagement and expertise. Additionally, for students who are not as confident or experienced in instrumental or vocal performance, this may be a performance option to consider.

### **Recordings**

For instrumental and vocal performances, examiners are solely assessing a student's performance based on the recording provided. Ideally this should represent the balance and quality of performance achieved in the room at the time of recording. Overall, examiners felt that there was an improvement in the quality of recordings submitted this year.

When assessing performances, examiners listen through good quality headphones. This is particularly relevant for music production submissions where students should be encouraged to produce their final mix to be listened to through headphones rather than monitors.

Some recording guidance:

- Avoid using a device, or a setting on a device, that automatically adjusts the levels up and down or equalizes the volume
- Don't be too close to the microphones. Imagine the microphone is an audience member; they should be at least a couple of metres away
- Ensure that the recording device is set to stereo and not mono
- Set the levels beforehand so that the loudest bit of the performance is around -3 to -5 on the meters – in other words, not at zero, but as close as you dare get it. A lot of submissions were very quiet, but the bigger issue occurred when the recording clipped and distorted the whole way through
- Avoid panning the backing track/accompanist to one side and the soloist to the other
- Check the balance between the accompanist/backing track and soloist.

Additionally, as has always been the case since the introduction of this specification, it is not expected that the full performance is recorded in one take. Each piece should be recorded individually on a separate track, and pieces can be recorded as many times as is required during the assessment window.

Announcements at the start of recordings are not required.

Finally, please avoid recording applause and cheering at the end of a piece.

## Administration

Examiners would like to thank centres for adapting to the new Digital Media Portal (DMP) at short notice, and for uploading their students' work in an organised and timely manner. This greatly assisted examination. This year there were some administrative issues with a new system. It is worth highlighting here what should be included for submission, what is to be avoided and how to organise material for the DMP.

To be uploaded to the DMP:

- For each Student, a Candidate Record Form (CRF) – please check that it is the correct form for the year of examination and also **please upload as a Word Document**. Do not convert to PDF.
  - Please label in the following way:  
**Centre number\_7272P\_Student number\_CRF**
  - Pages 1 and 2 should be completed by the centre and the student.
  - The front page should be signed by the student and the teacher (this can be an electronic signature such as typing names in the relevant box)
  - On page 2, details of the music and recordings should be completed including the grades of the music if the piece has previously been on an examination syllabus. It is helpful for the examiner if you can provide accurate details of any examination syllabi or grade. It is also important to state the instrument the student is performing, whether they are singing or submitting music production.

- The recordings:
  - Recordings should ideally be on separate tracks and clearly labelled:  
**Centre number\_7272P\_Student number\_Piece1** etc.
  - Guide recordings should be labelled as:  
**Centre number\_7272P\_Student number\_GuideRecPiece1**
  - Recordings should be submitted as WAV or MP3 (minimum 128kbps) files
- PDFs of the sheet music, lead sheets, annotations. If a score is available, please submit this. **One PDF** per student with the scores, lead sheets, annotations in the correct order would be appreciated.
  - Please label in the following way:  
**Centre number\_7272P\_Student number\_Scores**
- For Music Production – sheet music/guide recordings **and** the student's detailed annotation/commentary for each piece is required.

To be avoided:

- Mislabelling recordings and paperwork
- Converting CRFs to PDFs
- Centre Declaration Sheet – this is not a moderated unit therefore this is unnecessary
- Announcements on recordings
- Uploading video submissions – these are not permitted for this component
- Uploading the Composing coursework

Examiners did frequently discover missing music, recordings that finished early, or incorrect recordings or scores that had been uploaded. These were generally rectified quickly, however, it is important that centres provide the best and complete evidence for assessment. Please take time to check that all the correct evidence has uploaded successfully to the DMP.

Please check that:

- All pages of all sheet music are included and are readable
- The correct, complete recordings have been submitted
- The coursework is for the correct component

### Closing comments

Examiners greatly enjoyed the range of performances submitted and the continued quality and engagement with performing from A level Music students.

### Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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