
GCSE MUSIC

8271/P Non-exam assessment
Report on the Examination

8271/P
June 2023

Version: 1.0

Further copies of this Report are available from aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2023 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.

Context

This year's GCSE cohort experienced the first Covid-19 lockdown during year 8 and their ability to perform music at school was heavily restricted until year 10. However, the impact of this disruption was not particularly evident in students ability to complete their GCSE Music coursework.

Many moderators reported the overall standard of performances as being similar and in some cases, higher than in previous years.

This component is 30% of the GCSE marks (72 marks).

The requirements for June 2023

The requirements for June 2023 returned to the full pre-pandemic requirement. Students were required to perform one solo performance and one ensemble performance. Where the minimum combined duration is at least four minutes with the ensemble performance lasting at least one minute.

All centres followed the requirements for June 2023 but some students did not meet either the minimum time of one minute for the ensemble and/or the combined minimum time of 4 minutes.

Specification requirements

The specification requires students to perform through one or a combination of the following methods:

- instrumental (including DJ)/vocal.
- production via technology.

The specification gives the following definitions for performing:

Instrumental (including DJ)/vocal Solo

- A single musician performing solo.
- A soloist accompanied by one other musician.
- Performance of pieces written with an accompaniment intended by the composer should not be unaccompanied.

Ensemble

- Music performed by the student in conjunction with at least one other musician (one of which must be the student being assessed), in which each player or singer has a unique and significant role (ie that is not doubled).

Solo DJ

- Using turntables (raw vinyl/CDJ) and/or Digital DJ technology (software controller/DVS) to manipulate tracks and demonstrate an understanding and use of a range of techniques. There must be a minimum of two tracks – beat matched, with respect to the structure, tonality and arrangement of the selected tracks.

Ensemble DJ

- Using turntables (raw vinyl/CDJ) and/or Digital DJ technology (software controller/DVS) to perform with one or more DJs/live musicians in which each performer has a unique and significant role (ie that is not doubled). For the student being assessed, there must be a minimum of two tracks – beat matched, with respect to the structure, tonality and arrangement of the selected tracks.

Production via technology**Solo**

- A complete performance of a pre-existing piece using music technology, sequencing and/or multi-tracking techniques to record a solo performance of a minimum of three tracks. At least one track must be performed live in real time.

Ensemble

- A complete performance of a pre-existing piece using music technology, sequencing and/or multi-tracking techniques to record an ensemble performance of a minimum of four tracks, three of which must be performed by the student and one or more tracks performed by at least one other musician in which each performer has a unique and significant role (ie that is not doubled). At least one track must be performed live by the student and at least one track must be performed live in real time by at least one other member of the ensemble.

It should be noted that the above refer to a performance rather than a piece of music. If necessary, students can offer more than one piece to ensure that the minimum time duration is met. Guidance for schools and colleges can be found in the Performing music assessment guide available on the AQA website.

Instrument/vocal selection

There was a very wide range of submissions, covering most orchestral instruments, rock band instruments, vocal performances in many genres and keyboard (both piano and electronic). There were a large number of submissions which were vocal performances, with few DJ performances and a small number of production via technology performances.

Performances must be recorded in the year of assessment – normally during the second year of a GCSE course or Year 11. There is no ruling as to how many attempts a student can have at performing their chosen piece(s) but it is the final version which should be submitted to the moderator rather than one which includes one or more false starts.

Students can fulfil more than one role in a performance: for example, they might wish to sing and accompany themselves on guitar or piano. In such cases, they have the opportunity to have their skills assessed holistically. However, it must be made clear on the Candidate Record Form what was assessed by the teacher.

Recording performances

Where a student performs more than one piece, they should perform all solos or all ensembles on the same occasion without a break in the recording. This in turn enables the teacher to make a holistic assessment.

There were some instances where a student had performed more than one piece and the performances were submitted as separate tracks. Where a student performs more than one piece, these should be on the same occasion on the same track, not separate tracks.

Most centres submitted recordings that were of a good quality and this helped the moderation process. There were a small number of recordings where the recording level was not sufficient and there were some distorted recordings. The balance between the student and the accompanist/backing track at times was such that it was difficult to hear all parts clearly.

Where a backing track is used in a performance, the track should not include the student's part.

A very small number of centres submitted videos instead of audio tracks. Videos are not accepted and it is possible to export the video to audio.

Repertoire

Repertoire is to be determined by the student and the teacher, though, of course, in many cases, peripatetic or other instrumental/vocal/technology teachers will be involved. It need not be linked to any of the four Areas of study which make up the core of the new specification and can, therefore, be in any chosen style or genre.

It should be noted that it is rarely appropriate or successful to assign the same performing task to all students in a cohort: there has been evidence of this, with very mixed outcomes. The specification was designed to enable and encourage each student to perform to their strengths.

It is pleasing to note that multiple students from a centre did not perform the same piece. Where a number of students in a centre submitted performances via technology, on occasion the same piece was selected. However, this did not necessarily disadvantage those students.

A very small number of submissions were recordings of the student receiving tuition on their instrument or performing technical exercises. The submitted recording should not include multiple attempts to perform a piece but the final version.

There were some examples of where a student performed a pop song but omitted some of the key parts. Particularly notable where the actual vocal line was not performed – vital elements of the piece's style and character will inevitably be lost, again impacting on the student's ability to interpret the style and character of the song successfully. Where a singer is not available, it is important to include the melodic line on an instrument to help the student interpret the style.

There were some instances where the student sang with another performer and a backing track. Whilst this is acceptable, the student must sing an independent part from the other performer. There were examples of students singing in unison for most of the performance and not meeting the requirements of the ensemble performance.

Notated score/lead sheet/guide recording/annotation

There must be one or more of the following documents, as appropriate to the type/genre of performance:

- A notated score, providing full performance information through musical notation.
- A lead sheet, providing a detailed framework giving structure and musical substance from which a performance can be produced that meets the composer's intentions.
- A guide recording, if no score or lead sheet is available. If students have based their own performance on a recording of another performance of the same piece, this must be submitted so that it can be accessed easily by the moderator. It is preferred that any guide recording is placed on the CD immediately before the student's performance.
- An annotation, including details of the processes, devices and techniques used that contributed to the final performance. Students must provide details of any hardware and software used.

Students may choose the type of documentation most relevant to their performance, but in the case of production/DJ performances, an annotation is essential to enable teachers and moderators to assess the work accurately. Production annotations need to include precise information regarding 'live' tracks and how they have been recorded. There were some excellent examples of production annotations which clearly demonstrated what the students had done in the process of producing the tracks. In many cases, a score and a guide recording were provided.

It is important to note that the simple submission of lyrics, even with the inclusion of chords, cannot be considered as being detailed enough to qualify as a lead sheet for any performance. This was the case for a small number of students but the vast majority of centres, provided a guide recording in addition to lyrics. A large number of centres helpfully provided a guide recording and a notated score.

Performances that are entirely improvised are not really suitable for submission. The specification states that:

In all cases, the recording of the performances must be accompanied by one or more of the following documents, as appropriate to the type of performance:

- notated score.
- lead sheet.
- guide recording.
- annotation.

If there is no guide or written material this will make moderation, particularly on accuracy, very difficult.

It is worth noting that many professional singers do not strictly follow the notated score for songs in a popular or musical theatre style. Therefore, it is acceptable to state on the score that the student used the score as a guide.

A number of centres either included YouTube links in word documents or wrote "YouTube" on the candidate record form. A link to YouTube is not accepted and the guide recording must be submitted either on the CD or USB.

Meeting minimum time requirements

The vast majority of students met the minimum time requirement of at least one minute for the ensemble performance and a combined minimum time of at least four minutes.

There were a small number of performances that did not meet the minimum time requirement since the performances were either too short or they had added repeats to the music. It should be noted that only those repeats included by the original composer are acceptable.

Instances where additional repeats had been inserted, either of sections or of the whole piece, just to extend the piece artificially and thus meet the minimum duration is not accepted. The moderator timed such performances without those repeats.

Understanding the process of assessment

Moderators reported the accuracy of centre marking was mixed this year but with a larger number of centres marking within tolerance.

Where marking was out of tolerance, there was some leniency and some harsh marking. However, there was a significant increase in students that were marked harshly to varying levels. There were examples of students being awarded 34/36 or 35/36 marks by the centre where they should have received 36 marks.

Teachers should look out for the Curriculum Connect online meetings, which are free to attend. The next Curriculum Connect meeting will be in November 2023. To provide further support around the assessment of work, the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) materials are available in the Centre Services area of the AQA website, including examples of a range of styles of composition that have achieved the top mark.

Levels of demand

The majority of centres correctly identified the level of demand, typically indicating the exam board and level on the candidate record form. There were few examples of students performing pieces that were too challenging for their ability and most performed pieces within their capability.

Teachers should be aware of piano duets that can be performed as an additional piece for graded exams with a particular board. The level of demand of the piano duets is not typically at the same level of demand for the solo pieces performed for the earlier pieces for that specific grade. Examples of piano duets where the level of demand was marked leniently by teachers, included parts where the two hands played in octaves for much of the piece and lacked independence between the two hands.

Where a teacher is unsure of the level of demand, they should contact their NEA advisor, enclosing a copy of the score to discuss the appropriate level of demand.

The teacher's comment

Teacher's comments are extremely helpful to explain to the moderator the thinking behind the award of marks. However, simply quoting sentences or phrases from the assessment grids without precise reference to the student's performance is not helpful.

There were some excellent examples of teacher comments with direct references to the individual student's performance.

There were some submissions from centres where nothing at all was written in some or all of the boxes.

Administration

This was the second year in which the opportunity to deliver the files on a composite, non-encrypted USB was available. Many centres submitted their audio tracks in this way and the work was easy to access for moderators. Some centres submitted Audio CDs and this continues to be acceptable.

An increasing number of centres submitted candidate record forms and scores on USB which is acceptable. However, please check that any pdf files do not need to be rotated and all files are clearly labelled.

The main problems were:

- Centres did not include a Centre Declaration Sheet (CDS).
- The USB/CD were not labelled with the candidate names and candidate numbers, or some students work was missing.
- The USB was encrypted.
- The candidate record forms were not signed by the teacher and the student.
- The candidate record forms did not provide information regarding the part performed by the student (particularly in the ensemble performances).
- The mark entered on centre marks submission was different to the mark written on the CRF.
- Incorrect addition on the CRF resulting in the incorrect mark being entered on the centre marks submission.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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