
AS
MUSIC

7271/P – Performance
Report on the Examination

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General points

This was the first year of entry and certification for this component of the new AS Music specification. For this component students are required to submit a programme of music totalling a minimum of 6 minutes performance. The chosen repertoire can be solo performance, ensemble performance, music production or a 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.

There was a wide range of performances submitted this year and the overall standard of performing was considered to be more polished than for the legacy AS performance unit. Pleasing to hear was the range of instruments that were performed and the variety of music from Lin Manuel Miranda to Mozart, Rap to Folk, and everything in between. There were some common trends, including a higher percentage of singers, and particularly male singers, than for previous performance units. The songs of particular artists such as Adele and Ed Sheeran featured quite significantly, as did the songs 'With You' from Ghost and 'Burn' from Hamilton representing their current popularity alongside some favourites from shows such as Les Miserables. There were also a significant percentage of pianists, commonly performing graded pieces from a range of exam boards, as well as more popular classics. Worth mentioning at this point was the submission of offensive lyrics and content in some rap/vocal performances this year. This is an examination and content and language should be suitable for this purpose. Examiners are not expected to listen to anything deemed to be offensive.

Overwhelmingly the majority of performance programmes were solos on a single instrument or voice. On occasions where two solo instruments were performed there were sometimes varying degrees of success. There were few ensemble performances; ranging from really good examples of students who perhaps did not shine as soloists, but regularly perform with and respond well to playing with others to, what often sounded like, an extra piece to make up the time or to ensure "expressive variety" but where the performance quality and/or level of ambition was not as strong as the rest of the performance. As stated in the specification, an ensemble must feature no more than eight musicians and the student's part should be clearly audible on the recording. There were very few Music Production submissions but it is hoped that this may become an area of growth.

A key aspect of the performance is the minimum time requirement of 6 minutes, as stated in the specification. There were some performances, a minority, that did not meet this required 6 minutes minimum of performance, and these submissions unfortunately were awarded a mark of zero overall. Each piece is 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 are added together to create the total time. It is this total time that must be over 6 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 6 minutes performance time; please note that this is not counted. It is therefore vital that both students and schools and colleges take responsibility for ensuring that the total playing time exceeds 6 minutes.

Administration

Schools and colleges should submit the following:

- All performances on one (or more as required) composite CD with tracks in student number order. 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, type of evidence submitted and track number. Although there was nowhere to indicate this on the CRF in this series, providing details of any grades and exam boards is extremely helpful to the examiner when assessing Ambition of Project, and will be included on the CRF for the June 2018 series.
- It is also helpful to include a track listing.
- The attendance register should also be completed, signed and enclosed.

‘Types of evidence’ was a clearly misunderstood column on the CRF. It basically refers to the notated score, tab, lead sheet or guide recording that has 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. 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, you can submit both. In particular, guitar tablature scores which are pitch based only, and give no indication of rhythm, are not accepted as sole evidence as the student cannot possibly have created their performance from this tab alone. In this situation, a guide recording alongside the tab is essential. If not submitted, examiners will contact schools and colleges for this. Often a guide recording is better than a score at conveying the student’s real intentions.

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 schools and colleges 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 school or college’s responsibility to ensure that all work is submitted correctly and accurately in order to assist their students and the examiner.

This is now an examined unit and not teacher assessed. There were a few submissions which had been completed by schools and colleges and total marks awarded. Pages 3 and 4 of the CRF are for examiner use only as this is an externally assessed component.

The majority of students performed between 7 and 9 minutes, however, there were some excessively lengthy performances. Obviously, the longer a student performs for, the more opportunity there is for human error and it is not recommended that students play more pieces than is necessary. Some good practice here is to edit down lengthy introductions or accompaniments so that we hear the student performing for as much time as possible. Notated repeats are permitted and often reinforce excellent playing or highlight technical errors. However, repeats that have been added by the student solely to add time will not be assessed as part of the performance.

As the examiner is 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. As stated in the specification, post-performance editing including artificial enhancements, added effects and fade outs, 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 not only was this against the spirit of the specification but it also enhanced intonation problems of singers.

Assessment

Marks were awarded in the following four areas:

Ambition of Project (marked awarded out of 5)

Technical Control (marked awarded out of 15)

Expressive Control (marked awarded out of 15)

Performance Quality (marked awarded out of 15)

Ambition of Project: Full marks were frequently awarded here for solo and ensemble performances. Graded pieces above grade 6 or pieces that had similar musical and technical demands meet the requirements of the top mark band. There were very few cases where 'expressive variety' was not shown. However, a performance of a single Einaudi piece, for example, does not demonstrate expressive variety.

Technical Control: Assessment focuses on intonation, accuracy of pitch and rhythm, fluency, tone and technique. It is 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.

Expressive Control: Assessment focuses on the chosen tempi and subtle control of these, dynamics, phrasing, articulation; essentially the 'musicality' of the performance. Often the finer details can be neglected but it is the control of these nuances that lifts and shapes a performance.

Performance Quality: Assessment focuses on the overall performance, the chosen style, command and communication of the performance. Examiners are 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.

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.

Music production submissions must include (or cannot be assessed):

- A minimum of four tracks
- At least four 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
- Submissions **must** include an annotation which details all the tracks and the process of production. There is a detailed document providing guidance on this on eAQA.

Similarly to instrumental/vocal performances, music production is assessed in the following areas:

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 within a piece rather than one texture or level throughout.

Technical Control: 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.

Expressive Control: Assessment of the choice of instruments and MIDI timbres, how these have been edited, dynamic processing and dynamic shaping, use of EQ and compression (or over use) Focusing on the musicality of each individual part and then each section of the structure should be a good starting point here.

Performance Quality: Assessment of style, balance, blend, panning, use of the stereo field and effects as appropriate. Examiners are listening for a high-quality recording where tracks are balanced and blended but still clear. The annotation is useful here for explaining to the examiner what the student was trying to achieve and can often provide useful information which informs the examiner’s assessment.

Although submissions were small in number this year, it is hoped that increasing numbers of students will see music production as an alternative and creative performance option.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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