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AS  
**MUSIC**

7271/P - Performance  
Report on the Examination

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7271  
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## General Comments

This was the second year of entry and certification for this component of the new AS Music specification. 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 any combination of these. Students may perform on one or several different instruments. The nature of the task is sufficiently flexible to allow all students to perform successfully regardless of musical interest, style, instrument and experience.

Overall the standard of performances was high. There was a wide range of instruments presented from flute to jazz bass, and the variety of composers and styles on show was also most pleasing. Singers, both male and female, formed just over a quarter of submissions; and a wide range of repertoire, from baroque aria to songs from Jason Robert Brown's musicals, was all performed successfully. Piano also continued to feature heavily (again about a quarter of submissions), with repertoire from Bach inventions to jazz improvisations. Drums and guitar were also popular offerings (about 7.5% each), often performing pieces with pre-recorded backing tracks: despite the potential constraints of a pre-recorded accompaniment these included some of the most successful performances. About 7.5% chose to perform on more than one instrument despite there being no specific credit for doing so, other than a potential additional mark for expressive variety in Ambition of Project.

The vast majority of performances were again solo, but there were some very fine ensembles also. Pleasing links were made to other areas of the course - performances of movements from the various concerti in Component 3, sometimes with school orchestra accompaniment, were particularly welcome, and of course there were many performances of works from the Musical Theatre Area of Study. Some of the best solo and ensemble performances were given in front of a live audience: the sense of occasion this engendered often produced a performance from a student of significant quality, and schools and colleges may wish to consider this method of performance. Production submissions were few in number, but all were of a high quality; this is an option which it is hoped more students will opt for in the future.

Solo performances were generally more successful than ensembles, perhaps because the student only needed to focus on their own performance without the distractions of others. There were a number of students who performed works unaccompanied despite them being intended by the composer to have an accompaniment. This is discouraged in the specification, and should always be avoided: submissions without an accompaniment often made significant errors of timing and intonation, producing a much less successful performance.

Submissions which do not meet the requirements of the specification cannot be accepted as assessment evidence as stated in the specification, and it is a great pity when this is the outcome. Some submissions failed to meet the minimum 6 minute length of duration. The examiner carefully times each piece from the first note heard (be it student, accompanist or backing track) to the last note, and the times of the pieces are then added together to create the total time. It is this total time that must be over 6 minutes. In particular, it should be noted that "count-ins" as found on some backing CDs are not considered to be part of the performance. It is vital that students and schools and colleges take responsibility for ensuring that the total playing time exceeds the required minimum. Schools and colleges are also reminded that an ensemble must feature no more than eight musicians and that the student's part should be clearly audible on the recording; more than eight musicians in an ensemble will result in a performance being considered inadmissible.

## Administration

Schools and colleges should submit the following:

- All performances on one (or more as required) composite audio CD with tracks in student number order. Each piece within the overall performance should be recorded on a separate track without any announcement 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. The CRF has changed in a number of areas from the previous year, and there is now a column for Grade and Exam Board information.
- It is also helpful to include a track listing.
- The attendance register should also be completed, signed and enclosed.

As with last year, some schools and colleges had a tendency to submit work with significant amounts of additional bulk in the form of envelopes, folders etc. Enclosing each student's CRF and supporting paperwork in a document folder, without any additional fastenings, is perfectly sufficient. All performances and supporting evidence should be supplied on one audio CD (unless more are required due to the number of students), appropriately protected. While most schools and college took great care over the submissions there were still some recurring issues: scores with missing pages or pages assembled into a booklet in the wrong order, last year's CRF being used, recordings cut off before the end or starting halfway through, recordings presented either on a data CD or USB stick. 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.

'Grade and Exam board', a new column on the CRF this year, had not been completed in a significant number of cases. This information is important for the marking process, and if it is readily available both grade and examining board should be entered on the CRF to facilitate assessment.

'Type of evidence' appeared to be a misunderstood element on the CRF in some cases, with some schools and colleges submitting evidence which did not necessarily reflect the student's intentions. If the student has used a recording as the basis of their performance then it is vital that this be the primary evidence submitted. While a score or lead-sheet is generally helpful to the examiner, this should not be the only evidence submitted unless it is the basis of the student's performance. Submitting more than one type of evidence, indicating the primary source, will always be welcomed. Where insufficient or inappropriate evidence is submitted the examiners will contact schools and college for this. It should be noted that a production cannot be assessed without an annotation, and this must therefore always be included with a production submission.

Most students performed between 7 and 9 minutes' worth of music, which is appropriate. There were however some very long performances (over 10 minutes); while it is vital that the student be certain to have played for the minimum length of time, very long performances give greater opportunity for mistakes and it is advised that these are discouraged.

Quality of recording continued to be variable. This is the only evidence the examiner has from which to assess the performance and it is therefore important for schools and college to take great care over recording quality. Balance between soloist and accompaniment should allow the soloist

to be clearly heard, but this does not mean the soloist's part need be excessively loud. In general, microphones should be placed where a listener would be most comfortable hearing the performance (generally at least 2 to 3 metres away) as this is likely to result in a clear and balanced sound. Some schools and college placed microphones far too close to the soloist resulting in a distorted sound with odd stereo effects as the student moved their instrument, and this made the assessment of the performance more difficult. Some recordings were very quiet: checking the recording before submission is vital, and normalising the recording (increasing the overall volume, a one-button operation in most audio editors) is recommended.

There seemed to be confusion regarding 'post-performance editing':

- recordings of pieces within a performance may be made separately
- extraneous time on the recording before and after the performance may be trimmed
- normalising an audio track is also permitted
- the combining of more than one take of a single piece into a performance through splicing, or the addition of post-performance effects such as reverb is what is being referred to by the phrase 'post-performance editing', and these practices are likely to result in a piece not being accepted as assessment evidence.

Detailed advice on the recording of performances is to be found in the document 'Notes and Guidance: Recording Music Performance' which is available on the AQA website.

### **Assessment – Instrumental/Vocal**

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. In some cases students made unsatisfactory repertoire choices in a belief they needed to achieve expressive variety, or elected to include a less-than satisfactory ensemble or a performance on a second instrument for the same reason. Assuming more than one composer or style has been offered most programmes are likely to be deemed to contain sufficient expressive variety. A performance of a single Einaudi piece does not demonstrate expressive variety, but the first and second movements of a Beethoven sonata almost certainly will. Some students continue to perform pieces at a level that precludes technical and musical confidence rather than playing a simpler programme at a high level. The specification is designed not to penalise lower Ambition of Project: it is always better to consider first what is going to achieve more successful results in other areas of the mark scheme. It is advised that full marks here at the expense of multiple marks elsewhere is not a good exchange.

### **Technical Control**

Assessment in this area focuses not only on accuracy of pitch and rhythm but also accuracy of intonation and tone production across the instrument's range. In order to achieve high marks all four of these criteria need to be focussed on equally.

### **Expressive Control**

Assessment focuses on the chosen tempi and the extent to which dynamics, phrasing and articulation have been carefully observed. Most scores will contain significant guidance for the student in this area. Where a score does not contain such guidance, for instance a Baroque keyboard work, stylistically appropriate expression should be employed. Sometimes these finer details were neglected by the student; 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. While communication through the recorded medium is more difficult than it is live, many students achieved well here – as has already been noted, those who were being recorded in a live performance situation generally communicated through the recording more successfully.

### **Assessment – 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 input 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 available on the Secure Key Materials section of e-AQA.

Music production is assessed in the same four areas as Instrumental/Vocal, with marks being awarded in the same proportions.

### **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. Most submissions achieved well in this area.

### **Technical Control**

This comprises assessment of accuracy, articulation, phrasing, microphone placement and sound capture. Intonation of instruments and singers is also considered here. Generally marks achieved here were high, with occasional issues with intonation of singers in particular proving problematic.

### **Expressive Control**

This comprises 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**

This area assesses 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 should explain what the student was trying to achieve and provide useful information which informs the examiner's assessment. In some cases students were aiming to produce a reworking of the original, in others a track as near as possible to the original was being sought – both are valid aims and were assessed accordingly.

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

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

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