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# A-LEVEL MUSIC

7272/P - Performance  
Report on the Examination

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7272  
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## General comments

This was the first year of entry and certification for this component of the new A-level Music specification. For this component students are required to submit a programme of music totalling a minimum of 10 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 flexible to enable all students to perform successfully regardless of musical interest, style, instrument and experience.

Overwhelming the majority of the submissions for this component were mainly solo instrumental or vocal performances with the majority of students performing music from exam syllabi from ABRSM, Trinity, LCM, Rock School etc, although there were also some interesting performances which showed that some students had explored music beyond the exam syllabi. The range and scope of instruments was wide. Vocalists (of varying styles) and pianists made up the majority of performances. However, there was also a significant number of students who played orchestral string, woodwind or brass instruments too. Quite a few students also elected to perform on more than one instrument (sometimes up to three). Much of the time this was successful, but there were some instances of disparity in terms of technical control and quality. Popular instruments and styles seemed to be slightly less common with many students performing more classical repertoire. A number of singers did mix styles however (eg musical theatre songs with romantic chansons or lieder) with varying levels of success. Those who did perform on popular music instruments (electric guitar, drum kit and bass guitar) in the main, performed RSL or Trinity Rocks repertoire. There were some examples of ensembles either as part or whole recitals as well. Music production submissions accounted for just over 2% of the submissions and were also completed to varying standards across the assessment criteria.

Most students chose pieces where the technical demands were within their current ability and were thus able to perform with a reasonable amount of confidence and conviction, playing or singing accurately and in the style and character of each piece. A small number of students chose programmes which were not within their grasp at the current time and were too technically demanding. Several singers also attempted to sing in a key which was not in a comfortable pitch range.

The majority of students met the minimum time requirement of 10 minutes. There were a handful of performance submissions which did not meet this minimum performance time. In some cases, this was due to not paying close attention to the actual performance time of the recital, but in a couple of instances students had simply added repeated sections of a piece (where no repeat appeared in the published score). In these cases, these repeats had to be discounted and potentially the result was a performance that was under time. Those performances that were under 10 minutes were often just under the threshold; however there were some instances of more significant shortages. Each piece should be 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 then should be added together to create the total time. It is this total time that must be over 10 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 10 minutes' performance time; please note that this is not counted. It is therefore vital that schools and colleges take responsibility for ensuring that the total playing time meets the minimum duration of 10 minutes.

There were also a significant number of very well-timed performances as well. Programming is a real art; many students had clearly thought carefully about this.

## 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, exam board and grade, type of evidence submitted and track number.
- It is also helpful to include a track listing.
- The attendance register should also be completed, signed and enclosed.

'Types of evidence' appeared to be a misunderstood column on the CRF. It 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 acceptable as sole evidence as the student cannot 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 or colleges for this. Often a guide recording is better than a score at conveying the student's intentions.

Where instrumental examination repertoire has been chosen it is very helpful to the examiner if the specific details such as grade, board and examination year can be included. However, it is less helpful to guess at a grade or standard if this is unknown; in this case please leave the box empty.

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 responsibility of schools and colleges to ensure that all work is submitted correctly and accurately in order to assist their students and the examiner.

The majority of students performed between 10 and 13 minutes, however, there were some excessively lengthy performances. 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 also 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 reinforced excellent playing or highlighted technical errors. However, repeats that have been added by the student solely to add time will not be assessed as part of the performance.

## Recordings

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.

Recordings varied greatly in quality. A tip for getting the best recording for the exam is to really consider when and where these recordings take place. Try to avoid the following:

- announcements – not necessary on the recording
- loud applause
- talking before or after the recording
- including both first and second takes to start a piece
- unforgiving acoustics
- intrusive click-track
- school bell ringing
- lorries reversing
- recording too close to the performer so that every slight movement is heard unforgivingly
- heavy breathing as an individual is sat too close to the recording device.

The best recordings had given careful consideration to when, where and how performances were recorded, including giving students multiple chances to produce their best performances and always checking the quality of the recording afterwards.

As stated in the specification, post-performance editing including artificial enhancements, added effects and fadeouts, 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 requirements of the specification but it also enhanced the intonation problems of some singers.

## **Assessment**

Marks were awarded in the following four areas:

- Ambition of Project (mark awarded out of 5)
- Technical Control (mark awarded out of 15)
- Expressive Control (mark awarded out of 15)
- Performance Quality (mark awarded out of 15)

### **Ambition of Project**

Full marks were frequently awarded here for solo and ensemble performances. Graded pieces above grade 7 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.

### **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.

Overall, the quality of performances was very high, with quite a number of students achieving top band marks for Technical Control for highly accomplished performances. There were several examples of some superb technical prowess. However, this was also often awarded the lowest

mark of the three higher weighted assessment criteria, with intonation, pitch accuracy and tone quality at extremes of registers being the biggest issues for performers.

### **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. Surprisingly marks were often low in this area and there was often the feeling that this may have been forgotten about, particularly in dynamic contrasts, musical phrasing and nuances. The best performances exploited these aspects of their repertoire. This is something that may need over enhancing and emphasising in order to be heard convincingly on the recording.

### **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. Frequently the styles and character of the pieces were well understood and conveyed with real ownership. Less successful performances lacked strong characteristics, and didn’t capture the varying styles of their repertoire; singers who used the same vocal tone and approach across classical, musical theatre and pop repertoire, for example.

### **Production (via technology)**

Submissions can comprise music production entirely or be a combination of solo and/or ensemble and music production (via technology). It is intended that pieces chosen for music production are commercially available. Submissions must also be a minimum of 10 minutes in length. Music production submissions must include:

- a minimum of five tracks
- at least five 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 of the original piece
- an annotation which details all the tracks and the process of production.

Overall, Music Production submissions were not as ambitious as acoustic performances due to the amount and/or choice of tracks or variety across the music. Often the task criteria were not met, there were examples of submissions where the performances were all MIDI or all audio only. In these submissions the full range of marks was not available to the performance. There were also examples where students had not inputted or performed the minimum five tracks. The information is vitally important in the annotation. Written evidence in some cases was particularly poor and this was to the detriment of submissions. Submissions that provided detailed annotations really gave the examiner an insight into the production intentions and processes involved in creating the final product enabling the examiner to fully credit the successes. Some work showed great attention to detail, hours of work and was suitably rewarded.

### **Assessment of production (via technology) performances**

Music production (via technology) is assessed against the same assessment grids as instrumental/vocal performances.

### **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 across pieces rather than one texture or level used throughout.

### **Technical Control**

This area comprises 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. Sound capture, choice of microphones and placement were generally well handled, occasionally there was clipping and/or extraneous noise at the start/end of recordings.

### **Expressive Control**

This area comprises assessment of the choice of instruments and MIDI timbres, how these have been edited, dynamic processing and dynamic shaping including use of EQ and compression (or over use). Focusing on the musicality of each individual part and then each section of the structure would be a good starting point here. MIDI tended to be done less well; with a lack of editing and manipulating to create a 'live' sound.

### **Performance Quality**

This area comprises 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. A considerable part of the challenge of music production is the combining and balancing of different sound sources, making sure that all tracks are audible, well balanced but they sit together in the audio mix. Often effects were overdone with the handling of vocals often proving quite tricky.

### **Final comment**

Examiners enjoyed many hours of wonderful listening which included some imaginative repertoire choices and examples of outstanding musicianship and playing which often exceeded the standards expected at A-level. Examiners wish to thank teachers, students and their accompanists for all the effort and enterprise which leads to such accomplished recitals.

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

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