



A-level **Music**

7272/P NEA Performance

Report on the Examination

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General comments

For this 2024 examination series, the assessment requirements remained the same as stated in the specification and students were required to perform for a minimum duration of 10 minutes. Recordings of the performance coursework were to be completed during the assessment window between 1st March and 15th May.

As with previous years the majority of students exceeded the minimum time requirement. Performances between 11 and 12 minutes were most commonly seen by examiners. There were also a minority of students who did not meet the minimum time requirement, in some cases missing the threshold by a few seconds. Where performances fell short of the minimum time requirement a marking penalty was applied.

Examiners enjoyed listening to a wide range of repertoire. These included 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. Examiners heard a wide variety of instruments from all instrumental families and groups, as well as music production, all with a full range of attainment. It was notable, similarly to last year, that a considerable majority of students performed on the piano or sang.

Students may choose to submit a group performance for their coursework. Unfortunately, there has been 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 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.

There was some misunderstanding regarding the submission of evidence to support a student's performance this year. Alongside the recordings students must submit either a score, a lead sheet or a guide recording. To be clear, a guide recording is the commercially available recording from which a student has learnt, created and modelled their performance. This is common in pop, jazz and musical theatre submissions. Students should be encouraged to submit the evidence which best represents how they have learnt the music and created their performance. For the majority of students this will be a score. For submissions where a lead sheet was submitted, students often wrote a short annotation explaining the structure and any notable performance features to fully inform the examiner of their intentions.

For Music Production submissions, as well as a score, lead sheet or guide recording, students must also submit a detailed, written annotation for each piece which fully explains the production process and their intended outcome.

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. However, there were many examples of students who judiciously selected music that may have achieved less marks for AoP but 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. It is worth highlighting that 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 mark awarded for level of technical control was often the lowest mark awarded across the main criteria. 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.

There was often a correlation between students whose performances were not technically secure and a lower level of expression and overall performance quality.

Expressive Control

Again, this year, it was considered by examiners that there was an improved focus on the expressive features of the music leading to many highly musical performances. 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 bland performances without contrast, nuance and control. Sometimes this was due to selecting repertoire that didn’t allow for much expression.

Performance Quality

This was often the criterion where students were most successful, and examiners enjoyed many engaging and assured performances in which the student had taken real ownership of the styles presented. There were also submissions 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 again 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.

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 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 generally 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, they were seemingly not integrated or blended with the other parts and so marks were restricted to the lower mark bands. Very often it was the vocal tracks which sounded ‘alien’ to the rest of the track.

Again, this year, examiners heard productions which demonstrated a great deal of passion, a huge amount of work, time and attention to detail and were awarded accordingly. For students submitting music production there were clearly high levels of engagement and expertise. The overall quality of music production submissions continues to improve each year.

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. This year there seemed to be an increase in recordings using a mixing desk where the student’s part was recorded on one track and the backing track or accompanist recording on another and then each track panned to separate sides. This is not helpful for an examiner. No parts should be DI’d. An ambient recording of the performance in the room at the time of the recording is the best recording to assist the examining process.

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, a plea from examiners to please avoid recording applause and cheering at the end of a piece.

Administration

Examiners would like to thank centres for adapting to the Digital Media Portal (DMP) and for uploading their students' work in an organised and timely manner. This greatly assisted examination. There were less administrative issues to combat this year although it is vital to check that the correct recordings, CRFs and evidence has been uploaded for each student. Most commonly examiners had issues with mislabelled recordings, missing sheet music and uploads that didn't match the details on the CRF.

Advice was issued on the specific labelling of uploads, and this was particularly helpful when followed.

A few reminders about the Candidate Record Form:

- 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 should be submitted as WAV or MP3 (minimum 128kbps) files. Video submissions are not accepted. Each piece should be recorded on a separate track.

One PDF per student with the scores, lead sheets, annotations in the correct order would be appreciated. If a score is available, please submit this.

For Music Production – sheet music/guide recordings **and** the student's detailed annotation/commentary for each piece is required.

A Centre Declaration Sheet does not require uploading as this is an examined unit and therefore this form is unnecessary.

Closing comments

Once again, examiners greatly enjoyed the range of performances submitted and the continued quality and engagement with performing from A level Music students. Thank you to students and centres for the organisation of the performance coursework submissions.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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