Questions matter

GCSE
Music

8271/P NEA: Performing Music

Report on the Examination

8271
June 2024

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Context

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

The requirements for June 2024

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 2024 but a small number of 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.

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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 centres can be found in the Performing music assessment guide available on the AQA website.

Instrument/vocal selection

A significant proportion of performances were vocalists, pianists, rock band instruments, such as electric guitar, bass guitar and drum kit. There was a noted decrease in the number of orchestral instruments and there was a small number of more unusual instruments, such as the harp, bagpipes as well as some ethnic instruments.

There were 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.

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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.

Videos are not accepted, and it is possible to export the video to audio. However, it is now acceptable to submit a video performance of DJing where the camera is positioned overhead showing the student using the controls. This format is encouraged for DJ performances as it allows the moderator to clearly see what the student is doing within the performance.

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.

Unfortunately, there were some instances where all students performed the same solo piece and/or ensemble piece within a centre. It is perfectly plausible that 2 students might perform the same piece but not a whole cohort. This is not giving those students the best opportunity to succeed. 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.

There was yet again, a very small number of submissions that 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 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. Once again, 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.

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• 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.
• 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 was 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.

The main problems were:

- YouTube links in word documents or "YouTube" written on the candidate record form
- Guide tracks being submitted where the score is readily available (this happened on numerous occasions where the student was performing a piece from an exam board)

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.

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The main problems were:

- Additional repeats inserted to artificially extend the piece (not accepted)
- Long introductions where the student is not performing
- Ensemble performance where the student is either performing to a backing track (& no other live performers) or singing in unison (& no other live performers)

Understanding the process of assessment

Moderators reported the accuracy of centre marking was again mixed this year with most (77.5%) of centres marking within tolerance.

Where marking was out of tolerance, there was more leniency and some harsh marking. Where there were examples of harsh marking, these tended to be for students achieving higher marks or almost full marks. There were still 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 on Wednesday 24th September 4-5pm.

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 some 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 in place of the aural tests for graded exams with a particular board. These are not at the same grade level as the main instrument being tested. 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.

The Dolly suite by Fauré is one piano duet that is performed by students from a number of centres. The piece is grade 3 standard and should be awarded a level of demand of 4. However, many teachers have incorrectly been awarding this piece a level of demand of 6.

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. Where contact is made with an NEA advisor to confirm the level of demand, the email can be printed, scanned and attached to the CRF.

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.

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

Administration

This was the first year in which centres were required to upload all work to the extranet. Some centres faced some difficulties in doing this, but all issues were resolved and all centres successfully uploaded work.

The main problems were:

- Centres did not include a Centre Declaration Sheet (CDS)
- Centres did not include a performance duration declaration form (PDDF)
- Some students' work was missing
- 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)
- Scores submitted with the CRF instead of as a separate pdf
- Scores were submitted as separate jpegs instead of one continuous pdf
- Scores that needed to be rotated
- Files labelled incorrectly
- 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.

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Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

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