GCSE Examiners' Report (Legacy)

Music

GCSE (Legacy)

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | WJEC

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Executive Summary

Across all three units, candidates demonstrated a broad range of musical achievement and many centres showed strong engagement with the specification requirements. The overall picture was positive, with evidence of careful preparation, creative work and secure musical understanding in many submissions. However, a number of recurring administrative, technical and assessment issues were identified which affected moderation and, in some cases, candidate outcomes.

In Unit 1 Performing, candidates presented a wide variety of repertoire and performance styles, with many centres selecting appropriate material that enabled learners to demonstrate their strengths. Solo and ensemble performances were often musically convincing, technically secure and expressive, while tailored arrangements frequently supported successful outcomes. Strong submissions were characterised by accurate performances, effective technical control and thoughtful interpretation. Administrative processes were generally completed well, and recordings were usually of a suitable standard. However, common issues included incorrect timings, unsuitable recording formats, unclear or poorly scanned scores, inaccurate mark calculations and missing documentation. Moderators also identified concerns relating to unannotated scores, ensemble parts that were doubled, candidates deviating from uploaded scores, and inconsistencies in the awarding of accuracy marks. Programme notes were often weaker than in previous years, with some candidates focusing excessively on background information rather than musical analysis.

In Unit 2 Composing, there was considerable variety in both the quality and style of compositions. Many candidates engaged positively with the creative process and produced imaginative, personal responses to briefs. Successful compositions demonstrated effective development of ideas, secure control of musical elements, coherent structures and stylistic awareness. The most successful candidates showed sophisticated handling of harmony, texture and form, particularly in the Film Music and Popular Music briefs. Free compositions were often highly individual and reflected candidates' personal musical interests. Nevertheless, moderation highlighted a number of weaknesses, including repetitive harmonic content, limited contrast, insufficient development of ideas and over-reliance on formulaic structures. Administrative issues included incorrect file labelling, missing documentation, inaccessible file formats and clerical errors. Candidate logs varied greatly in quality, with some lacking sufficient evidence of the compositional process. Concerns were also raised about authenticity, excessive teacher input, automated accompaniment features and the use of AI in evaluations and written work. Centre marking was generally more generous than severe, particularly where weaker work had been placed in the highest assessment bands.

In Unit 3 Appraising, candidate performance covered the full ability range. Stronger candidates demonstrated secure knowledge of the set works, accurate use of musical terminology and a confident understanding of musical elements, contexts and language. Listening and dictation skills were often successful, particularly in rhythm dictation. Candidates generally performed best when analysing familiar repertoire and identifying clear musical features. However, many learners struggled with specialist terminology, contextual knowledge, extended written responses and the accurate identification of musical elements. Examiners reported that some questions were frequently left unanswered, locations within extracts were often omitted, and candidates sometimes failed to select the required number of responses. The prepared works did not consistently receive the level of detailed study expected, despite their guaranteed inclusion in the examination.

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Across all units, the strongest candidates demonstrated secure musical knowledge, accurate application of terminology, effective technical skills and clear understanding of assessment requirements. The main areas for improvement relate to administrative accuracy, careful preparation and checking of uploaded materials, stronger annotation and documentation, greater focus on authenticity and musical detail, and improved development of analytical vocabulary and listening skills. Centres should continue to use WJEC support materials, past papers, professional learning opportunities and classroom resources to address these areas and prepare learners effectively for future assessments.

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UNIT 1 PERFORMING

Overview of the Unit

This year, there was once more a broad range of performing styles and disciplines presented for assessment, the last year before the new specification will be moderated. Across the entries, there was evidence of careful preparation and a genuine commitment to supporting candidates' musical development. Many centres continued to demonstrate a strong understanding of the specification and the assessment criteria, and this was reflected in the overall quality of submissions. Where issues did arise, they were often administrative or technical, rather than musical. The increased sample size aided moderation as it prevented the inevitable delays incurred by requesting additional work from centres. Again, my thanks must be given to music departments and examination officers for their prompt action in providing further work or information as required.

The main problems reported by moderators this year were:

- Incorrect timings of candidate performances
- Incorrect format of recordings and scores
- Unison sections included in overall timings
- Band 4 marks awarded for Accuracy when candidates deviated from the uploaded score.

Comments on individual questions/sections

ADMINISTRATION

Administrative procedures were generally completed appropriately by centres, with most providing the required authentication forms and clearly labelled scores. In most cases, materials were well organised and accessible. Nearly all centres submitted the required "Unit 1 Performing Timing Sheet" within the sample, either with the first candidate or in the "Admin Upload".

Most centres submitted candidate work by the deadline or by the extension deadline.

I must emphasise that the correct labelling of files is important to avoid confusion during moderation. Explicit instructions were given in the "WJEC GCSE Music NEA Upload Processes for 2026" available on the website. Files should have been labelled:

John Smith 12345 solo 1 audio
John Smith 12345 solo 1 score
John Smith 12345 mark sheet

Sadly, several centres continue to make the same errors in administration year after year, despite these issues being highlighted in previous moderator reports.

More than a few centres had to be contacted due to missing work or errors in uploading candidates' work and mark sheets. Moderators appreciated the swift responses by examination officers and music departments in rectifying issues. We thank you for this.

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The main issues moderators reported were:

- Pages of scores uploaded individually as separate JPEG files, making navigation unnecessarily time-consuming for the moderator
- Incorrect addition and scaling for levels of difficulty on candidate marksheets
- Poorly scanned scores and missing scores.

Please check recordings, scores and marksheets carefully before uploading to IAMIS.

LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

Excellent practice was observed in most centres, whereby the appropriate level of difficulty was recorded for all candidates; for example, “ESL”, “SL” or “MD”. Please do not use any other abbreviation.

It was appreciated when centres noted on their marksheets that candidate scores had been checked by the exam board, and when the pieces were taken from a graded examination syllabus. Please note that to be accepted at the stated grade, performances must be as they would be in a graded examination, using the listed score, not a different arrangement.

RECORDINGS

Recordings were generally well balanced and of an acceptable technical standard. There were issues with some recordings:

- Very quiet backing tracks which occasionally disadvantaged the candidate
- Balance issues because the recording device had been placed too close to an accompanying instrument, such as the piano or drums, making it difficult to hear the assessed candidate clearly
- An increase this year in recordings that ended abruptly. Clear start and end points remain essential for accurate application of the assessment criteria
- Candidates clearly recording themselves without appropriate supervision, evidenced by audible giggling or informal behaviour. This raised concerns about whether a teacher was present, which is not in line with the strict requirements for controlled assessment conditions. Centres must ensure that all recordings take place under appropriate supervision and reflect the required level of formality.
- An increase in WAV and video recordings. Again, centres are urged to follow the guidelines in the “WJEC GCSE Music NEA Upload Processes for 2026.” Video submissions are not acceptable, and smaller mp3 files are easier for moderators to manage than large WAV files.

Please check recordings before uploading.

SCORES

Many centres submitted clear scores and lead sheets which included all the necessary information to support marks for Accuracy. Performance directions were included, and annotations, repeats and cuts were clearly marked on the scores. Ensemble scores were marked or highlighted with the candidate’s role.
Whilst I appreciate that the preparation of scores with appropriate annotations is a hugely time-consuming task for centres, it is vitally important for the moderation of accuracy.

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The following issues were noted by moderators:

- Scores that bore no resemblance to the performance (a few which were clearly marked as having been downloaded from the internet on the day of uploading the submission!)
- Ensemble scores with no indication of the candidate's role (not evidenced in the marksheet either)
- Tab scores without rhythm or performance directions
- Unannotated scores which did not show the candidate's intention, especially vocal musical theatre songs or pop songs.

These issues led to difficulty in moderating Accuracy, as scores are vital to follow during a candidate's performance. Centres without correct scores did make it difficult for moderators to justify any band 4 marks.

More centres, this year, submitted each page of a score as an individual file.
However, there were several instances where scores had been uploaded as JPEG files. These were often difficult to open or view at a suitable resolution, which hindered the moderation process.

Centres should be reminded that scores must be submitted in a clear, legible, and compatible format to ensure fairness and consistency.

TIMINGS

It was clear that many centres (and candidates) had "gone the extra mile" to meet timing requirements by adding extra performances where necessary to avoid a timing penalty. Most candidates achieved the minimum timing requirement and several candidates where the requirement was not met were penalised accurately.
However, a recurring issue observed in several centres was that the track timing was stated on the marksheet, which occasionally even included spoken introductions by the teacher, or several candidates introducing themselves on the recordings. Some centres incorrectly included the timing for instrumental introductions and sections where the candidate did not perform. This resulted in time penalties for a small number of candidates.
There were, also, a small number of performances that fell short by only a few seconds. In such cases, the inclusion of an additional "musical" repeat would have ensured compliance with the timing requirements.

REPERTOIRE

Centres generally offered a broad and appropriate range of repertoire, which allowed most candidates to demonstrate their performing skills effectively.

Sadly, there is increasing evidence of a limited variety in the instruments being performed at GCSE with fewer classical instrumental performances. Most candidates performed on drum kit, guitar, piano, or voice.

Several centres offered sequenced performances, some of which were excellent.
Information regarding sequenced performances is detailed under a separate heading.

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SOLO

Solo repertoire was varied and there were many interesting and outstanding performances offered by centres. Moderators commented favourably on the standard of performance and our thanks must also be given to peripatetic teachers who support music departments in choosing appropriate repertoire for candidates.

Please note that solo performances must be of an individual candidate and not two singers singing in unison.

ENSEMBLE

Ensemble pieces chosen were mostly appropriate and met the specification requirements. Please note the following for future submissions (not compulsory):

- Solo Rockschool guitar pieces meet the solo requirements of the specification. The addition of a singer or someone performing the vocal melody is necessary to meet the ensemble requirement.
- The specification states that candidates should “perform a significant individual part which is not doubled”.

It is a challenge for centres to find appropriate rock songs which do not contain doubling, but equally, should a performance contain doubling of the candidate’s part by another player or singer, these sections should not be included in the timing of the folio.

There were many capable and empathetic ensemble performances that were attractive, well planned, and thoughtfully executed. In several cases, teachers had made effective decisions and bespoke arrangements to highlight candidates’ strengths. Such tailored arrangements are to be commended, as they often result in performances that are both accessible and musically engaging.

The role of peripatetic teachers in performing ensemble parts felt very pronounced this year and is testament to the crucial role these staff play in busy music departments.
A backing track is not a live part in an ensemble!

SEQUENCED PERFORMANCE

It was noted that there was a marked increase in sequenced performance submissions this year. Some were excellent, deserving of the marks awarded in the upper bands, but there was some level of confusion from centres as to what should be submitted in terms of sequenced performances:

- The live track must be performed and recorded “live in the room” with the sequence playing as a backing track.
- Centres need to be aware that for an ensemble, a minimum of two separate performers need to perform simultaneously in the room, as in a regular ensemble performance, with the remaining sequenced tracks acting as a backing track. The sequenced part must not be the “other live performer”
- The assessment of ensemble would consider how well the live parts and the sequenced parts work together as a whole.

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MARKING

It was clear that most centres had taken time to interpret the assessment criteria carefully and place candidates in the appropriate bands.

Marking was generally fair for most candidates. Where there were inaccuracies, it was often that weaker candidates had been marked very severely. Band 1 or even Band 0 marks did not always reflect the evidence within the performance. Although assessing weaker performances can be challenging, candidates who demonstrate some degree of accuracy or technical control should receive credit that reflects their achievement appropriately.

ACCURACY

Accuracy was the column most frequently marked generously, mostly linked to scores being inaccurate to the performance or lacking in detail. In several cases, it was difficult to agree with marks placed in Band 4 when the score provided very little justification for such a placement. Centres should ensure that all scores are fully annotated to support accurate assessment, and to allow moderators to verify the centre's marking decisions with confidence.

TECHNICAL CONTROL

There were many examples of technically controlled and well-projected performances across the entries. However, vocalists in the lower bands often struggled with intonation and projection and most marks awarded by centres were accurate. In some cases, balance issues, such as overly quiet accompaniment, did not fully support the candidate's performance and contributed to these difficulties. Centres are encouraged to consider the performance environment carefully, ensuring that candidates are placed in a musically realistic and supportive setting.

EXPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION

Most performances were musically satisfying and demonstrated clear musical intention. Marking in this column was judged by moderators to be secure, although balance between soloist and accompaniment was mentioned to be an ongoing issue in some centres.

PROGRAMME NOTES

The overall standard of programme notes was lower than in previous years, perhaps reflecting the fact that this is the final year of assessment.

Many centres prepared their candidates meticulously so that they produced programme notes that showed clear research and understanding of their chosen repertoire. The strongest responses discussed musical features in detail and linked these effectively to the relevant area of study.

Centres generally assessed these responses appropriately, albeit very generously in some cases.

A common issue was that some candidates spent too much time discussing historical background or biographical information and not enough time explaining the musical content of the piece itself.

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There were also some examples where technical challenges and performance demands were not discussed in enough detail. Candidates produced an evaluation of their own performance or preparation instead.

A small number of submissions were judged to have been generated or improved by AI, which was not appropriate, and as a result these were referred to the malpractice team.

May I thank all staff involved over the years in preparing their candidates for the outgoing performing unit of the GCSE qualification. Your dedication has greatly facilitated the moderation process, and I wish all centres the very best of luck with the new specification. As a team of moderators, we look forward to the performing submissions in 2027.

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UNIT 2 COMPOSING

Overview of the Unit

This year a variety of standards were presented across the full range for consideration by the moderating team. Feedback and details on the assessment are covered in the relevant sections below.

Administration

In many centres, the uploading procedures were well aligned with WJEC guidance, presenting supportive documentation which provided the relevant information needed to assess centre marks in line with the assessment criteria. The following administrative issues were reported by moderators:

- incorrect labelling of documents where the guidance had not been followed, causing some difficulty in locating the work
- insufficient and/or missing documentation
- clerical errors
- unit 1 uploaded instead of Unit 2
- inability to access some files which had been uploaded in the incorrect formats.

Most requests for the correct replacement information from centres were dealt with efficiently, though there were some delays.

Candidate Logs

These offered candidates the opportunity to directly communicate with the moderator.

Whilst this is not an assessed task, it provides valuable information about the creative and recording processes. The strongest logs outlined how ideas were generated, refined and developed over time, providing useful contextual evidence of the compositional process and supporting authenticity, particularly in live performances when others performed ideas without a score.

However, they differed wildly in the standard of completion; some were overly long and too analytical and lacking details of the composing process, some were clearly over-reliant on teacher-guidance, while others offered barely more than the authentication signatures and marks, thus lacking essential information. Some accounts did not correspond to the work submitted.

Some candidates included screenshots within the log instead of uploading them as separate lead sheets with the necessary musical information, while others included information that would have been more suitably placed in the Evaluation. Occasionally candidates chose to submit handwritten logs, some of which were rather unclear.

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Scores/leadsheets

Many scores were of a very high standard, with clear and concise presentation, though there appeared to be less detailed annotation this year in relation to expression markings, tempo indications and other performance directions).

Some lead sheets were very detailed and extremely helpful with musical examples within the text explaining their development; others offered less musical explanation and quite a few were presented without any musical annotation at all. Other unsuccessful submissions were from candidates handing in lyrics with no details of chordal and melodic content, or how other parts such as drums, bassline and strings were added, thus missing details of musical intentions such as rhythm, texture, instrumentation and other general details. This caused problems when moderating.

Recordings

Recordings were generally of a very good standard and of sufficient quality to support accurate moderation. There was a disparity noted between those evidently made in professional studios and those made in busy classrooms; in some cases, there was significant background noise which seemed inappropriate and occasionally there were balance issues.

Some candidates had recorded their DAW audio via a handheld device instead of exporting it directly, which also resulted in recordings which were less effective.

Recordings of live performances

In some logs there was ambiguity regarding who had performed live parts and, more importantly, how musical material had been communicated to performers when scores were not provided.

An enhanced performance of a composition is fully welcomed when the musical notation has been presented as a score, thus enabling other musicians to perform exactly in line with the candidate's intentions. Increasingly, candidates who are unable to sustain a vocal line choose to compose songs, and enlist the help of others to realise their ideas.

When the vocalist was not the candidate, the information was at times omitted on the log, though occasionally made clear elsewhere on in the lead sheets, and teacher support was acknowledged. Some candidates stated that guide tracks had been recorded as regards the melodic content, though in many cases these had not been uploaded as part of the original folio.

This is a matter of concern to the moderator as without sufficient evidence, it is impossible to appreciate exactly what is the work of the candidate and what is due to the interpretive qualities and musical skills of the performer. When this occurred, there was, for the most part (though not always) insufficient evidence to support the composition as being that of the candidate's own work.

Likewise, no improvisations or any other ideas not created by the candidate and played by other performers can be credited to the learner. Teachers splaying piano accompaniments from chord symbols are still adding much more complex parts, e.g. suspensions and added chords, while some centres are also widely using drum machines/auto drum function/sample/auto chord accompaniments, none of which could be credited.

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Centre Assessments

Moderators described their findings as mixed. Many centres had taken careful consideration of the assessment objectives, but some content did not relate convincingly to the bands as suggested. Inaccurate judgements were evident when the assessment criteria had not been applied correctly, resulting in marks that did not accurately reflect the quality of the work.

The marking was more often generous than harsh, particularly when dealing with a weaker cohort when it was clear that the best candidates had been awarded band 4, even though the work was not deserving of top marks.

Ideas were placed correctly in the assessment bands when work was 'highly effective' across the three columns. To appreciate what is required as 'highly effective' content as commensurate with band 4, candidates were expected to demonstrate their composing skills through the ability to present ideas which were substantial and meaningful, displaying a level of complexity that married the more challenging aspects of learning as identified in Appendix C e.g., in terms of harmony, this would include some evidence of secondary chords, inversions, 7ths, cadences and modulation – not just basic triadic shapes.

Extreme generosity was reported by some moderators when centres had recognised Band 2 as Band 4 work, though the work was repetitive and/or inconsistent, undeveloped and/or incoherent, or lacked secure control of the elements and resources.

Marks for the lower ranked candidates were more accurately placed, as centres accurately acknowledged simplistic and overly repetitive content, awkward or mishandled technical control of the musical elements and a lack of structural clarity and stylistic intention with a limited response to the chosen brief.

Some candidates submitted very short and unsubstantial pieces, which sadly showed an overall lack of overall care and effort.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Response to the chosen briefs

The coursework was varied and interesting, as many candidates engaged meaningfully with the compositional process. Set briefs were mostly approached with creativity and stylistic awareness, and many candidates responded thoughtfully to the parameters of the task.

Some centres had evidently given candidates a lot of scaffolding, including a chord plan, or chord bank, for each section. The resulting pieces often sounded very similar and had little individuality.

Insufficient contrast in the musical content was a big issue in many compositions, and a lack of variation particularly in the use of tone colour, mood, tempo and dynamics.

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Areas of Study – Set Briefs.

1. **Musical Forms and Devices**
   Compose a piece of music to celebrate an historical event to be held in St. Fagans Folk Museum

This was a reasonably popular choice of brief, covering all sorts of instruments and styles – some more suitable than others. The majority tended to be in WCT style with traditional instrumental responses, though moderators reported mixed outcomes including catwalk music, pop music, battle of the bands pieces, and one rock composition celebrating the life of a guitarist. The most convincing compositions were specific on the historical event and created suitable ideas and using appropriate resources/elements in response, resulting in musical choices that were considered and demonstrated greater coherence and stylistic understanding.

Pieces placed within Band 4 often drew upon clear Celtic influences and presented distinctive thematic material which was subsequently developed through melodic, rhythmic and textural variation. Structures were coherent and progressive, with effective links between sections. The interplay between parts was highly effective and the use of polyphonic textures demonstrated strong harmonic understanding and secure control of musical elements.

2. **Music for Ensemble**
   Compose a duet for two voices with accompaniment, to be included in a scene from a new musical entitled 'Brothers and Sisters'

Not a popular brief, but one that generated a variety of responses. The strongest contained excellent vocal writing, with secure lyric setting and effective treatment of text. Harmonic choices were rich and there was clear contrast between sections, helping to maintain interest throughout. Some candidates made excellent use of technology and produced highly stylistic and imaginative responses; these candidates understood how to write vocal harmonies and achieved a sense of interaction and balance in the ensemble including solo moments, unison, imitative ideas, sequences, counter melodies and layering of parts.

The most successful also considered the accompaniment as just as important as the two voices, though others were a little over-ambitious with the accompaniment using lots of instruments that were not really utilised effectively and were occasionally a detriment to the piece.

Pieces realised on a computer varied in standard; some candidates selecting this option clearly found the task challenging with many not displaying understanding of writing for voices. Such results were much less effective in terms of overall musical control. Weaker compositions lacked the duet aspects making them more conversational, often with piano accompaniments that lacked interest and pianistic knowledge. In these compositions, word-setting was not generally successful, and some content was often simplistic, with candidates relying heavily on primary triads and repeating material with little variation when verses returned.

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3. Film Music

Compose theme music for a film about 'Owain Glyndŵr', the Welsh man who began a rebellion against English rule in the late Middle Ages.

Certainly, the most popular brief. The strongest responses were spectacular and demonstrated secure understanding of film music conventions, with recurring thematic material, effective orchestration and thoughtful manipulation of musical elements to support the intended narrative. As expected, the brief was interpreted in many ways, ranging from orchestral scores inspired by Hans Zimmer and John Williams, to pop and rock interpretations (that in most cases were less successful, but occasionally did work). Some were generic 'film' pieces that did not relate well to the Owain Glyndŵr brief, and the logs and evaluations did not offer any clear link to the theme either.

All moderators agreed that one salient weakness in many was a lack of 'theme music' as required by the brief; quite often the music created was not thematic and more programmatic, concentrating on the 'battle element and developed the use of ostinato, sustained notes and drones. Others created a more folk like style, pulling on the use of the harp and violin to resemble Celtic music. There was a huge variation to marks given to pieces under this brief. Some demonstrated more control of the elements where others showed little control or even effort towards using them.

Marking was considered generous when the content relied heavily on sustained chordal textures based on narrow harmonic progressions with insufficient thematic development, contrast or structural shaping to justify placement within the higher bands of the assessment criteria. Some through-composed programme music introduced entirely new material in each section without revisiting or developing earlier ideas. Greater consideration of leitmotif and thematic transformation would have helped create a clearer narrative structure and stronger sense of cohesion. The more simplistic and inconsistent, limited pieces were little more than soundscapes, as candidates presented a series of unrelated fragments and sound effects with very few sounding like the 'theme music' for this character at all, utilising instrumentation and harmonies that were not appropriate.

There were candidates who misinterpreted the brief. Many Welsh princes had come via Arabia, the Orient (pentatonic) and even via Spaghetti Westerns. Again, these types of responses to the brief impacted assessment in column 3.

4. Popular Music

Compose a pop ballad for a solo singer, with accompaniment. The accompaniment may be for a small group of instruments/voices, or for a single instrument such as guitar or piano.

This brief was also very popular and mostly executed successfully, particularly suiting guitarists and singers who could play to their strengths. The best pieces included contrasts and musical ideas which were convincing and developed and written using traditional ballad structures. Many candidates demonstrated secure musical understanding, excellent control of musical elements and technology and gave detailed musical descriptions on their lead sheets.

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Candidates placed within the lower bands frequently relied too heavily on block chord accompaniments and repetitive harmonic structures, often focusing on a four-chord pattern repeated throughout. Greater refinement and development of musical ideas was needed to demonstrate effective compositional control and secure manipulation of musical material. There were a number of candidates that didn't really hit the genre of Ballad and these were often marked generously in the final column. Candidates also lost marks in the final column when there was no vocal part or no lyrics – this was not a successful response to the set brief. Finally, some pieces faded out at the end; the lack of a secure conclusion to the composition is not recommended when structure is being assessed in this column.

Some centres utilised formulaic responses which suggested that the candidates were not wholly responsible for the structure of outcome (down to the exact same number of bars in each part of the song in some instances.

Evaluations

Moderators reported that standards were varied, and the use of AI had been detected. Though some centres produced well-structured, high-quality evaluations, many accounts were descriptive rather than evaluative. Some were muddled, lacking accurate and appropriate terminology or at times, more like programme notes.

Some were extremely short and way below the minimum word requirement though at times receiving high and even full marks from the centre.

Overall, evaluations were marked consistently and many candidates used key subject specific terminology to discuss their work. A substantial number of candidates did not submit an evaluation, which clearly impacted their marks in Unit 2.

Free Compositions

There was a huge variety of free composition briefs and, in most centres, candidates were encouraged to explore their own interests rather than composing similar pieces across the cohort. This resulted in a broad range of creative and engaging outcomes. Some moderators reported extremely impressive and inventive, fantastic pieces with idiomatic writing for the chosen instruments.

In weaker submissions, as with the set brief responses, the usual issues occurred: limited quality and potential in the initial content, poor control of harmony, melody and rhythm, limited accompaniment patterns, clashing melodic lines, over-reliance on loops, lack of textural variety, ineffective use of resources and unconvincing structural focus and stylistic intention. Some pieces were too short to show development, while others were too long and lacked contrasts and coherent presentation of ideas.

Unfortunately, the briefs for free compositions were often not stated as per specification guidance and were at times vague and lacking in sufficient detail. For example, briefs such as "…write a piece for instruments" or "…music inspired by film" did not provide enough information regarding genre, style, intended mood or the musical elements required to convey specific atmospheres. Such generic intentions as "film music" – no genre given; "song" – no lyrics; "create what I wanted"; retrospective briefs which did not match the outcomes, or no free brief stated in the log, and just a title (or maybe not) as a guide. This affected credit in AO2.1c.

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UNIT 3 APPRAISING

Overview of the Unit

Unit 3 assesses AO3 and AO4. This unit is assessed via a listening examination worth 72 marks which consists of eight questions in total, two on each of the four areas of study:

Area of study 1: Musical Forms and Devices
Area of study 2: Music for Ensemble
Area of study 3: Film Music
Area of study 4: Popular Music

Of the eight questions, six are on unprepared musical extracts and two extracts set by WJEC which relate to two areas of study. The set extracts are reviewed periodically but for this examination series are:

Q1: 'Anitra's Dance' from Peer Gynt Suite (Op.46) by Edvard Grieg
Q7: 'Everything Must Go' by Manic Street Preachers

Learners are encouraged to study the scores of the set extracts in preparation for the examination. However, scores must not be taken into the examination; sections of the scores are printed on the examination paper when required for the question. The unprepared extracts played in the examination are from genres, styles or periods specified in each area of study and include examples of music by Welsh composers and/or performers.

In the examination candidates should:

- identify musical elements, musical contexts and musical language, and apply this knowledge to familiar and unfamiliar music.
- make evaluative and critical judgements about musical elements, musical contexts and musical language, using appropriate musical terminology
- complete the rhythm or pitch of a short section of music (questions will use mainly conjunct movement, though may include leaps within the major scale).

The standards achieved by candidates this year covered the whole range. It was felt by examiners that there were still many areas for development regarding the identification of musical elements and in many cases the wrong terminology was used for certain elements. As in previous years, the extended SPAG question needed more planning and preparation as there were still candidates writing about all elements of music even though many were not required in the question. Many candidates only wrote successfully about three of the four elements of music requested and as a result could not access marks in the highest band. It felt as though there were more questions not attempted than ever before and some candidates ticked one response when the question required two ticks.

This is the final examination in this specification. The overall % weighting of the appraising examination increases on the next specification and candidates/centres will have a choice of prepared works.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1

Prepared Extract – 'Anitra's Dance' (Peer Gynt Suite - Op.46) by Grieg

Many candidates stated that the tempo was Allegro, Tempo di Mazurka, fast or 160 beats per minute. Only these responses were accepted. This is a set work, and candidates should be prepared thoroughly for these questions.

Candidates had to identify three ways in which Section A2 was different to Section A. Popular correct responses were the use of imitation, longer or extended in duration and at a louder dynamic (note that a comparison was needed for the dynamic). A small number of astute candidates wrote that the violins played in octaves or an octave higher and that the melody was divisi too. A large number of candidates were unable to identify that the section ended in A minor unlike the original A section which ended in E minor or that there was an increased use of sequence.

A minority of candidates knew that the final section of the extract was the coda. Outro was not accepted in line with this era of music and a large number of candidates identified the perfect cadence at the end of the extract. Many candidates were able to identify the final chord as A minor but it had to be written in full as highlighted in the question.

A large number of candidates identified the roll was performed in the triangle part but there were quite a few unsuccessful responses naming violin and viola as the instrument. Grieg composed music as incidental music for a play. Candidates needed to be specific with the purpose for the composition, hence simply writing for 'Peer Gynt' was insufficient.

Question 2

Little Fugue in G minor by Bach

A small number of candidates recognised the oboe at the start of the extract but they were more successful in identifying the woodwind family heard. Some candidates responded with other woodwind instruments for the solo and a few mentioned string instruments.

The tonality at the start of the extract was minor but a higher percentage of candidates than expected stated major as their answer. The interval between the first two notes was a minor 3rd and the key was G minor. Approximately a third of candidates were successful in the musical language questions and worked out the melodic interval of a 5th and the pitch B flat.

Texture was more successful this year and many candidates were awarded both of the marks. The texture began monophonic and ended polyphonic. Marks were not awarded for any contradictory answers and the question asked for location in the answers where necessary, so simply listing textures was insufficient. Candidates must stop describing texture as thick and thin. A comparative term was accepted (*e.g.* thicker at the end).

The majority of candidates chose simple quadruple as the metre and there was also a hint in the printed music which highlighted the time signature. Approximately two thirds of candidates heard the trill at the end of the extract.

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Question 3

I Could have Danced All Night – Lerner & Loewe

This question assessed the accuracy of specialist terminology and the quality of written communication, in addition to musical content. There were two versions of an extract of music and candidates needed to describe and compare the use of structure, instruments, voices, rhythm and musical styles. Once again, this year, some candidates wrote about all elements of music, many of which were not required in the main question. These included tempo, metre, melody, harmony, dynamics, texture, performance techniques and articulation. Many candidates wrote information under the correct musical element headings but still included information not required. Fewer candidates accessed the higher mark bands again this year as they did not refer to all of the musical elements in the question. It was important for candidates to give locations, where necessary for the musical elements in responses as highlighted in the question (*i.e.* the version they were discussing, the section and the instrumental or vocal part. Paragraphs, lists and bullet points were accepted as in previous years.

Nearly all candidates compared the solo voices in the extract as male or female with confidence but more detail was needed at times with voice types (*e.g.* soprano, tenor). When identifying any instruments, it was felt that candidates could have identified the instrumental ensemble in greater detail by listing and describing the different sections of the orchestra in version one and comparing them with the smaller ensemble in version two. Structure was described in many different ways by using traditional forms such as binary form and using terms such as verse and chorus. The main difference in structure was no introduction in version one. Some perceptive candidates discussed the structure of phrases. Musical styles were compared positively but the description and comparison of rhythm was only achieved successfully by a minority of candidates. Most descriptions were insecure and it was difficult to examine the features of rhythm without significant location reference. Full marks could have been gained by writing a small paragraph including all of these details.

Question 4

Eira ar y Coed by Cynan

Nearly all candidates identified the harp playing the accompaniment. A minority of candidates got confused and thought it was a harpsichord. Another popular negative response was guitar. The majority of candidates correctly heard a tenor in the extract and the musical style was *cerdd dant* which is where the vocalist sings an improvised or composed counter-melody over a set harp melody also known as penillion. Many struggled to identify this specific style and were quite vague stating Welsh music.

It was felt that several candidates struggled with the question identifying metre and tempo. The most beneficial way to gain the three marks was to state the simple triple metre, slow tempo and then confirm that the tempo slowed down at the end as location was requested. Some insightful candidates noticed the rubato tempo throughout with the addition of the pause at the end. Andante and moderato were very popular incorrect responses. Locations were required for these responses, where necessary.

The vocal part was identified by the majority of candidates as legato but many struggled with the change in tonality; it began in the major key and then ended in the minor key. A large number recognised the harmony was diatonic, consonant or tonal but many words were incorrect such as disjunct, constant and consistent.

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Question 5

Top Gun Theme by Faltermeyer

For the dictation question this year, the pitches were given and the rhythm was requested. Candidates must use a pencil to avoid lots of crossings out and amendments, however, fewer responses were untidy this year and unreadable. The responses were very positive overall and examiners were asked to mark each individual note value regardless of incorrect beaming. Quite a few candidates did not allocate a note value for the first crotchet in the third bar (the last note required) and as a result could not achieve the full four marks. Overall, the marks were better this year and the average mark was higher.

Nearly all candidates identified the electric guitar as the solo instrument but bass guitar was not accepted. The majority of candidates identified either pitch bend or modulation as the feature of the music but very few candidates recognised both correct answers.

Many candidates knew that the time signature had 4 crotchet beats per bar but a small percentage did not write it in the correct place on the music. Many recognised the key as C major.

Question 6

'Children's Montage' from Kindergarten Cop by Edelman

Several candidates knew that the texture was homophonic. Few candidates achieved two marks for noting the features of the accompaniment in section one; a popular response was repetitive but examples of other answers included could have been driving rhythm, pizzicato, pedal note, syncopated and staccato. Most candidates identified two percussion instruments but drum kit or drums were not accepted nor triangle. Quite a few candidates were listing instruments which did not belong to the percussion section. Some candidates confused drum roll for a drum fill and a drag was accepted which contains two quick low volume grace notes immediately followed by an accented primary note. A large majority knew the Italian term for loud and although a number of candidates incorrectly selected string orchestra as the main ensemble, it was definitely a full orchestra as it had four families of instruments performing. The difficult part in this question was writing the key signature of D major on the stave in the treble clef. Examiners were asked to only award a mark if the two sharps were in the correct order and in the correct place on the stave.

Question 7

Prepared Extract – Everything Must Go by Manic Street Preachers

A small number of candidates identified two correct features of the drum kit part. Many candidates were either naming parts of the drum kit or stating there was syncopation and which beats the cymbals were heard which was incorrect. There were a handful of scripts which stated that a feature of the part was an accented 4^{th} beat which was quite perceptive. There were 4 bars in the pre-chorus and there was a host of different responses from 2 to 17 bars, a significant number with odd number of bars.

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The question about melodic movement was quite disappointing and a large number of responses did not achieve any marks at all. Answers were rather vague and did not give details of where the movement was different. Line three was a repeat of line one and to simply say repeated did not give enough detail. Also, when using the words conjunct and disjunct it is important to qualify where movement changes as the vast majority of music has conjunct and disjunct movement (*e.g.* mainly conjunct with disjunct movement at the end of the line). Some candidates used the lyrics in their answer which must be applauded.

The majority of candidates identified either melisma or homorhythmic voices as the feature of the chorus but very few candidates recognised both correct answers. The selection of pitches for the melodic fill was very similar and caused some issues with approximately two thirds of candidates. Sean Moore performed the drum kit part and this was the context question this year.

This question was probably the most disappointing in the examination and it is surprising as one of the set works. Candidates have scores, published notes and the foresight that it would be in the question paper.

Question 8

Moonlight Feels Right by Starbuck

A large number of candidates did not identify the chords heard at the start of the chorus; they were tonic and dominant. The keyboard instrument was a synthesizer and a large number of responses were incorrect. The characteristics of the music played by the synthesizer was allocated two marks and a small number of candidates achieved both marks. Popular responses were repetitive and conjunct.

The percussion instrument was a xylophone or marimba but many candidates stated that it was a glockenspiel – the instrument heard had a wooden timbre. Repetition, syncopation, staccato and chromatic were popular correct responses for the features of the music played by this instrument and many were unable to identify the minor tonality, jazz influences and triplet rhythms. More than half of candidates successfully selected the tempo as Allegro.

Summary of Key Points and guidance for centres

- Candidates should be at an advantage when they have studied set/prepared works as they know that both pieces will definitely feature in the examination. More time should be designated to the context, language and use of musical elements in these works.
- Candidates are reminded to read the question carefully and select two options if requested.
- Location was needed in some questions and it is essential to clarify where elements of music occurred especially when they change during the extract (*e.g.* section, instrument/vocal part). Even when location is not requested, candidates should give more clarity especially in prepared works and where there are changes in specific elements of music in an extract (*e.g.* where is the melody conjunct, disjunct, ascending, descending)
- Candidates must be encouraged to attempt all questions. Examiners stated that many questions were not attempted again this year.
- Always use a pencil when completing pitch and rhythm dictation so responses can be clear.
- More teaching focus is required on the elements of music by rehearsing key words linked to each musical element followed by listening examples to improve identification strategies.

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- The majority of the listening examination focuses on the musical elements so that should be the main focus for lesson starters. Constant revision and retrieval practice is paramount to learners succeeding with terminology even before they listen to extracts of music.

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