

GCE Examiners' Report

Music

GCE

Summer 2025

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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.

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

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Units 1 and 4 Performing	6
Unit 2 Composing	9
Unit 3 Appraising	15
Unit 5 Composing	19
Unit 6 Appraising	25
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	29

Executive Summary

In Units 1 and 4 (Performing), live assessments were well received and generally delivered high personal standards from candidates. However, timing issues persisted—some candidates failed to meet minimum performance lengths, particularly when using backing tracks or performing extracts. While live accompaniment was preferred, there were instances of missing or inadequate backing tracks, impacting musical coherence. Administrative efforts were largely effective, with a few lapses in form completion and clarity around candidate details. Performance choices sometimes lacked balance, with over-ambitious selections or inconsistently challenging repertoire affecting marks.

Unit 2 (Composing) reflected strong candidate engagement and creativity, especially in free compositions. Logs often demonstrated detailed musical intent and influence, though some veered into unnecessary analysis or omitted key information. Western Classical Tradition compositions were mostly successful but occasionally lacked stylistic authenticity. Technical and expressive control was generally solid, though harmony and development were weaker in some submissions. Uploading and labelling of work showed noticeable improvement over previous series.

Unit 3 (Appraising) presented a mixed picture. Candidates responded well to some questions, especially in Rock and Pop and Jazz areas, with accurate identification of chords, rhythms, and timbral features. However, questions involving intervals, harmonic context, and composer identification were frequently left unanswered. Written responses varied widely—some demonstrated mature analytical skills and musical understanding, while others lost focus or provided superficial commentary. Familiarity with set works and contextual knowledge is essential, though a few candidates confused composers or genres.

Unit 5 (Composing A Level) echoed strengths from Unit 2 but revealed a concerning trend: many candidates deviated from the required Western Classical Tradition style in the first composition. This led to limited marks despite impressive musical content. Free compositions showed creativity and individuality, though some lacked structural coherence or development. Logs ranged from insightful to insufficient, with administrative oversights like missing scores and incomplete recordings still present.

Finally, Unit 6 (Appraising) revealed thoughtful responses in impressionism and musical theatre, though many candidates struggled with harmony and tonality analysis. Comparative essays and contextual writing varied; stronger candidates demonstrated stylistic awareness and drew on a broad range of examples. Nationalism and choral music essays were often knowledgeable, but some confused works or failed to develop answers with enough musical depth.

Across all units, strong teaching and careful administration contributed to high standards, but issues with stylistic knowledge, development techniques, and harmony understanding remain key focus areas for future improvement.

MUSIC

GCE

Summer 2025

UNITS 1 AND 4 - PERFORMING

Overview of the Unit

Units 1 and 4 are assessed by Visiting Examiners who visit centres between March and May, assessing live performances.

Candidates at AS, and A Level Option B are required to present at least 2 pieces giving a combined total of 6-8 minutes, and for A Level Option A they must perform at least 3 pieces giving a combined total of 10-12 minutes.

The standard level of difficulty is Grade 5 at AS and Grade 6 at A Level.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Once again, a warm welcome was given to all examiners. The majority of candidates performed to their highest personal standards and seemed to enjoy the experience of performing live.

Timing:

There were still some issues with candidates not performing for the minimum time again this year. Please note that the visiting examiners time from the start of the candidate's first note to the end of the candidate's final note of each individual piece performed. Short rests, which are written into the work by the composer in order to give the performer a rest, would be included in the time. However, if there were long periods when the candidate was not performing (eg) a DC return to a long introduction, a 2nd verse in a duet which is sung by another singer, or a 32 bar break for solo piano in a jazz piece, or other long interludes when the candidate is not performing, these would not be included in the time. Centres should carefully check the timings of each piece (allowing for a slightly quicker performance on the day due to nerves) but should not enter these timings on the mark sheet. The visiting examiner will be responsible for timing the individual pieces as they are performed, live. Please note that, when using a Backing Track, the length of the candidate's performance is not necessarily the total length given of the track.

I should also like to mention the following when giving consideration to the candidate's choice of programme:

Live accompanist v Backing Track:

In most cases, and if at all possible, the flexibility and support afforded by a live accompanist, is preferable to using a Backing Track. Standards of accompaniment were very good on the whole. Some centres now bring in professional accompanists.

Missing Backing Tracks:

On a few occasions this year, candidates have chosen to perform pieces which require a backing track WITHOUT the necessary Backing Track, resulting in the candidate accompanying a vocal which is not heard or resulting in some silences which would be filled by the track. This is musically unsatisfactory.

Performing Extracts:

Performing extracts of pieces can be musically unsatisfactory and can devalue the concept of the recital.

Page turners and audiences:

Do arrange for a page turner if this is necessary or helpful to the candidate. There is no restriction on others, whether members of staff, students or parents and friends, being in the examination room as long as all mobile phones are turned off, and the examiner is not overlooked and can conduct the examination properly.

Unaccompanied pieces:

Once again, the physical support given by an accompanist is preferable to a candidate being “out on their own”. Whilst we realise that unaccompanied pieces, in particular, studies, often form part of the repertoire of many public exam boards, these are not always suitable for this examination. There are exceptions, of course, such as the JS Bach unaccompanied violin or cello works, but these should only be programmed by the most accomplished candidates.

Performances given from memory:

Although this is to be commended, it is not a requirement of this exam. The examiner will allow a restart but not a second attempt. If a breakdown occurs well into the performance, “picking it up” is sometimes an issue when there is no score to refer to.

Second instrument or voice:

As this is not a requirement of the exam, there is no advantage to be gained by performing on more than one instrument or voice. Candidates should only perform on more than one if both are of an equivalent standard.

Administration, Paperwork and Preparation:

In most cases, the administration and timetabling of the examinations was excellent with many centres providing running orders. In the case of longer sessions at colleges and where there are consortium arrangements between centres, please continue to build into your timetables comfort breaks for the examiners. Allowing 15 minutes, possibly 20 minutes for the longer recitals, for each candidate seems ideal in most cases. Please be aware of school bells and tannoy announcements which may impact on your candidate’s performance. If at all possible, please timetable AS and A level examinations separately. Please note that examiners may arrive up to 30 minutes before the examinations are due to commence in order to set up and ensure a prompt start. Thank you for reserving a parking space for the visiting examiner, especially if you aware that parking is an issue at your centre.

Most centres had downloaded the correct forms as required but, in some instances, these had been completed by the candidates themselves. Please double-check these for accuracy. Candidates’ full names, rather than shortened forms or nicknames, should be entered on the forms. In addition, forms need to be completed neatly and legibly. In some instances, examination numbers were missing from the forms when they were given to examiners. Please include the names of composers, in addition to the titles of the pieces to be performed.

Links to Areas of Study:

Links to Areas of Study are no longer required.

Examination rooms were, on the whole, fit for purpose. Please ensure that the instruments used, particularly the pianos, are in good working order (including the pedals) and have been recently tuned, and take care with the positioning of upright pianos. Some centres choose to use electronic keyboards.

In cases where the standard of the repertoire is known, it would be helpful if this information was given on the form.

Most candidates provided copies of their music for the examiners. Photocopies of the originals on A4 paper need to be made as the examiners will take these away at the end of the session. Please ensure these are complete and pages are in order, and are correctly labelled with the candidate's name and number. Please ensure that the music provided accurately reflects the performance being given, especially when downloading tab from the internet. In order to achieve the top marks for accuracy, singers must ensure that the vocal line has been added to lead sheets rather than just lyrics and chords. Please clearly mark any repeats, cuts or any other modifications on the copies. In addition, ensure that the edge of the music has not been cut off on the photocopy.

There were many excellent performers but some candidates need to give more careful consideration to their choice of programme as some are over-ambitious. Conversely, the occasional candidate performed a lower standard piece (amongst more difficult repertoire) which resulted in a lower overall mark. When using a backing track, please ensure that the track is a true backing track, with the candidate's part omitted, not a complete recording which includes the part the candidate is performing. Backing tracks should not be streamed live from the internet but should be downloaded and checked. In some instances, extracts from works were performed. It should be noted that the playing of extracts will, in most cases, lead to **a lowering of the level of difficulty** for the work performed.

There is no requirement to perform an ensemble at AS or A level but some candidates choose to include an ensemble piece in their programmes. On occasions, more care is needed in choosing ensemble repertoire in order to ensure that the individual parts are significant and of the required standard. These parts must not be doubled by any other performer. Candidates also need to be aware of the technical challenge afforded by their own compositions. Teachers and candidates should familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria.

Performers need to ensure that they pay attention to the performance directions on the music. Some drummers and guitarists are not aware of the need for contrast, especially of dynamics. Audible click tracks are not permitted. However, if a backing track is used by the candidate, through headphones, it must also be audible to the examiner (without the click). Some singers lack projection and communication due to over-reliance on their music. If the music or lyrics are needed, it would be preferable for them to be placed on a stand, slightly to the side of the performer. Best practice includes rehearsing the performances "in situ", giving careful consideration to the position of the candidate in relation to the accompanist and the examiner; try to create the sense of occasion by involving other students and use this as an opportunity to check all the equipment which will be used. Give careful consideration to the position of an audience if present on the day, behind, and not encroaching on, the examiner, especially considering the recording equipment the examiner is using. As per examination guidelines, there should be no mobile phones present in the examination room (other than that being used by the examiner as a timer, which is preset to Airplane Mode.)

Please carry-out sound checks in advance of the examination

In most instances, electronic equipment had been set up and sound-checked in advance allowing the examination to proceed without hold-ups. Take care with the positioning of microphones and consider carefully whether microphones need to be used for an acoustic performance, especially in a small room or classroom.

On the whole, the feedback from the examining team was very positive and I am very grateful to all those involved, including the team based in the office in Cardiff.

MUSIC
GCE
Summer 2025
UNIT 2 COMPOSING

Overview of the Unit

General Comments

Administration

The majority of centres adhered to the correct administration procedures, and this element was much stronger compared to previous years. All examiners noted the positive attempts by centres this year. However, incorrect log sheets were used by some centres. Please be aware that the correct ones are available to download from the website, and these are the ones which should be used in future submissions. It is also particularly important that both teacher and candidate signatures are added, especially in the GDPR section. Very few centres did not upload within the time constraints.

Uploading work/Labelling

The examiners noted a few issues this year, but far fewer than last year. There were very few missing or incorrect uploads; examples of these were missing candidate numbers, or logs that would not open. There were one or two instances when the labelling was unclear, and reference had to be made to the candidate log to work out which composition was the brief, and which was the free. As always, it is highly recommended that the candidates and teachers check the files carefully before they are uploaded, so that they are the correct ones, and that they open and work. If there were any discrepancies, problems or omissions this year, the centres responded efficiently and quickly.

Candidate Logs

Logs were generally good this year, with most efforts well processed and very clear. There were many extremely detailed logs, where there was much over-analysis of the music, rather than giving details of the process of composition; this is the crux of what the examiners are looking for. Bar-by-bar analysis is not required, especially where full scores are provided.

Good examples of candidate logs included clear intent and explanation, a relevant link to the brief, a list of musical influences, the composing process, including structure, tonality and harmonic devices, noting any advice received from the teacher and the chosen software. The examiners were always pleased to read clear detail and musical intention in the logs.

On the other hand, there were very brief logs, which gave no valid information, and did not mention any relevant detail on the composing process. These scant efforts did not include detail on musical features or the planning and refining process.

The musical influences mentioned in the logs mainly showed excellent in-depth research and interests. These are always interesting to read and give further insight into how the composition was initiated and created. It is also encouraging to see that teachers' advice is noted and acted upon by candidates during the creative process. However, there were instances of candidates failing to mention any musical influences in their logs; in some cases, there was mention of twentieth century composers and rock and pop groups linked to the Western Classical Tradition brief.

The influences should be noted with as much detail as possible, especially perhaps in the free composition; for example, noting 'a string quartet' or 'a piano piece' does not impart enough musical or stylistic detail or any valid link to a composing brief. As regards film music in the free composition, the examiners need to know about the story line, characters or mood; this is vital when marking the response to the brief.

Most candidates who used quotes of existing pieces were clear about this in their logs. It was sometimes unclear, in the absence of a full score, how some parts had been created, as this was not clear in the logs. The candidates (and subsequently the teachers) should always confirm that the completed work is their own, and the candidates must always cite any material that is not theirs in the appropriate space in the log. When there was no score and other performers were involved in a live recording, it was often not at all convincing how the candidate retained responsibility for the creation of the musical content. Guide instrumental or vocal lines, either sung, or played on keyboard by the candidate must be included. Examiners can only assess what work is clearly the work of the candidate.

Scores and Recordings

The majority of candidates provided good standard and well-presented conventional scores, fully marked with musical directions, dynamics and tempo markings. As always, ICT was effectively used to create professional scores. Notation and sequencing programmes used included the extremely popular MuseScore this year, with other candidates using Sibelius, Capella, Cubase, Logic Pro, Flat, BandLab and GarageBand.

Many screenshots were produced this year, mainly for the free compositions. There was some detailed written evidence to explain the processes undertaken to create the piece to accompany the screenshots or lead sheets. However, it is important to reiterate here that the specification states that a score or a detailed written description of the composition accompanied by an outline of the melody and chords is required. It is also worth reminding centres that if a pop or rock song, or similar, is composed, the chord symbols and lyrics should be provided. Please bear in mind that screenshots are not acceptable unless they are annotated in detail. This has been mentioned in previous examiner reports.

Recordings were mainly computer generated and well balanced generally, with quite a few live recordings this year, and it is as ever a joy to listen to these live performances of compositions. It is good to note that there were fewer examples this year of an imbalance in recordings.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Composition 1 - The Western Classical Tradition - Brief Composition

Once again this year, most candidates produced imaginative and artistic compositions, which were inventive and creative. The examiners will always be assessing the response to the brief, and this should be at the forefront when creating a musical piece within the various WCT styles. It was obvious this year that there was good focus on the teaching in many centres, providing a firm foundation for creativity.

There were some noticeably short and simplistic works, which had several abrupt and unrelated sections which interrupted the flow and therefore lost momentum. There was also particularly good evidence of well balanced and coherent compositions with excellent instrumental variety and interesting thematic material, as well as appropriate harmonic language and fluently lyrical melodies.

Brief 1: Compose a short vocal piece with instrumental accompaniment to be performed at a christening or naming ceremony. You may use one or more voices and choose (or write your own) appropriate words.

This was chosen by a suitable number of candidates, with some choosing very suitable lyrics, for example from the Bible or various poems. The influences mentioned included Schubert, Mozart, Brahms and also a few contemporary composers, which did not truly adhere to the WCT style. However, there were excellent songs here, providing a sense of calm to fit the occasion, and creating suitable structures and textures. The piano was by far the most used instrument for the accompaniment, and there was almost always a sense of partnership between the voice and piano. The word setting was generally good, with very few candidates not understanding the use of correct emphasis on syllables. It was good to note an attempt at word painting by some candidates. Others however struggled with word setting to ensure the natural flow of the text, and also to create a piece in WCT style. It was noted by examiners that more variation was needed at times to include contrast in both melody and accompaniment, aiming for more colour and interest. There were a few examples where the accompaniment was rather fligid, tending to overpower the vocal part.

Brief 2: Compose an instrumental piece in scherzo and trio form, intended for performance in an outdoor summer concert at Portmeirion in North Wales.

This was a very popular choice by candidates this year, and the majority showed good understanding of the structure of a scherzo and trio while capturing the required character. There were many string quartets or woodwind and brass ensembles, as well as a few piano renditions. Influences included many Baroque and Classical composers, as well as some early Romantic works. It was noted that the trio section was almost always contrasting in style and content; however, some wrote a much slower trio section which tended to interrupt the flow and change the overall character. Some works used a much slower tempo overall, which therefore affected the light-hearted nature of the brief. On occasion, the musical content was lacking adventure, with narrow melodies not sufficiently exploring the full ranges of the chosen instruments. However, there were instances of colourful harmonies and well used modulations, effective use of instruments and textures, and sensible melodies, with the most successful compositions creating balance and fluency throughout.

Brief 3: Compose the opening section of a piece of programmatic music which reflects the beauty and grandeur of any section(s) of the Wales Coast Path. You may choose to write for voices, or instruments, or a combination of both.

This was also an extremely popular choice by candidates. It was assumed by examiners that they would be reading about the candidate's selection of the section(s) of the Coast Path, but this was not always the case, as many wrote generally on 'the coast' or 'the sea'. Centres need to be assured that this did not hinder the overall assessment, but examiners appreciate as much information as possible in the candidate logs. The overall feel of the majority of these works was programmatic, and almost always Romantic in nature. Most were written for a larger ensemble or orchestra, with occasional piano solos or solo and accompaniment. There were some compositions which utilised a harp to represent Wales. There were some highly successful and interesting compositions, which were very imaginative and used a satisfactory manipulation of the original ideas and an appropriate harmonic style. Many of these compositions scored highly. It was pleasing to note effective use of instrumental timbres as well as some musically shaped melodic ideas. There were other efforts which resulted in being remarkably close to film music, which is not truly considered to be a WCT composition, and which lacked a sense of structure or thematic and harmonic content.

Brief 4: Compose two sections of a longer choral SATB piece displaying augmentation and/or diminution to be performed at a centenary celebration event. You may select (or write) your own text, and the piece may be accompanied or unaccompanied.

There were very few examples of this brief choice, although it appealed to some of the more experienced singers and choristers. The range of the vocal lines was sometimes inappropriate, being far too high for sopranos or too low for basses. Word setting was not always successfully manipulated. There were some works which used accompaniment and this generally enhanced the vocal lines. The main drawback here was that the brief mentioned '*displaying augmentation and/or diminution*'. Some candidates struggled with this feature, and wrote ineffective sections, or ignored it completely. The better works included suitably contrasting two sections of music, good part writing, and fitting choices of words. There were very interesting and appropriate compositions here which gained good marks.

Composition 2 – Free Composition

Overall, the free compositions tended to be more successful, with many candidates scoring a higher mark here. It is always a pleasure to read about, and listen to, compositions where candidates created music according to their own strengths and interests. It was encouraging to note candidates exploring their creativity a little more, with some imaginative musical writing noted.

Here are some examples of the varied genres that examiners encountered this year:

- Film music and TV drama themes
- Jazz, Blues, Fusion
- Pop, Ballad, Rock, Indie
- Musical Theatre
- Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionism, Minimalism
- Conventional forms – Binary, Ternary, Theme and Variations, Piano miniatures
- Video game music, Animé
- Programme music
- Choral pieces, Hymns
- Welsh music
- Music based on nature, the environment and climate change

There was a clear outline noted in the brief and log, showing effective planning and distinct intent. Candidates would be well advised to give this requirement careful consideration as their work is assessed directly in outcome to the selected brief. It was encouraging to see such an incredibly wide variety of music which showed that the candidates composed to their strengths; this is highly commended. However, there were still some centres where all candidates produced the same type of free compositions, almost akin to a class activity; please aim to allow candidates free rein in their second compositions to follow their own musical interests.

The better efforts used well-structured and texturally interesting pieces which were very much stylistically aware. There was evidence of musical imagination and creative control, well-applied harmony, sensible melodies and effectively handled musical elements throughout. A strong sense of development was apparent in many works which is to be applauded.

In other works, harmony was a problem for some; the control of cadences and any attempt at modulation left much to be desired, and there were occasions where the melody and chords were at odds. In many cases, too much reliance was placed on the three primary chords, especially in rock and pop compositions, and candidates were therefore somewhat limited. Some compositions were very long and lost an overall sense of structure and unfortunately became repetitive. As mentioned previously, there were songs without lyrics or chord symbols, and film music which did not mention a genre, scene character or mood.

Creating Musical Ideas

Centres are reminded that the Creating Musical Ideas column directly refers to the candidate's response to the brief. Teachers are to be commended for their guidance to lead the candidates on an appropriate musically creative path, and in many instances, give sound advice which is acted upon during the composing process.

The compositions which responded to one of the four set briefs mainly showed good understanding of the Western Classical Tradition style, and the created ideas were well within the scope of the chosen musical periods. It was encouraging to see that the musical language, techniques and conventions of the chosen styles and genre of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods were used well.

Many candidates wrote musically on their initial concept, particularly in the free compositions. The compositions demonstrated strong initial ideas and careful thought about form and structure, thus responding well to the chosen brief. There were very few compositions which lacked structure. Most candidates ensured that musical ideas were effective throughout the composition.

Sometimes, there were sections which lacked clear phrasing or organisation of the original musical ideas. There were many compositions which lacked clarity and understanding when transitioning sections or modulating key. Unfortunately, there were a few limited attempts which lacked structure and provided an insecure, or very little, foundation for the compositions; these tended to be unconvincing and unmusical.

Developing Musical Ideas

It is worth reiterating here that in the WCT Brief composition, there is no discrete column for Developing Musical Ideas, but it would be expected to see changes in melodic, structural or harmonic lines, so that the music is moved forward. In the Free compositions, development of musical ideas is assessed, and examiners expect competent growth using a range of compositional devices to further the initial ideas.

Many compositions used a range of musical devices to create and develop melodic ideas. Textural contrast was a strong feature of many compositions this year, as well as sections in related keys. Most pieces were coherent as a result of establishing a clear structure or distinct sections within the piece. It was quite evident this year that candidates were far more confident using development techniques. There were fitting examples of imitation and sequence, and the cycle of fifths was a very common feature in many efforts.

Some free compositions were so short, that there was little scope for development. The links to the initial musical ideas were tenuous in some instances. There was much repetition, based on the same melodic ideas and/or chords throughout. There were candidates who wrote in contemporary styles, where there was a lack of variety and general development of the initial ideas. Many rock and pop compositions relied heavily on repetition of the initial appropriate ideas, not truly demonstrating sufficient development.

Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

In the assessment for this column, examiners were looking for effective and secure technical control of the musical elements, communicated effectively with expressive control. This year, technical and expressive control was a strong feature in many compositions. Most compositions showed a good understanding of keys and cadences. Many compositions included expression markings and used a variety of tempo, dynamics, articulation, texture and harmony to express musical ideas. On the whole, most compositions used instruments well, making wise choices in ensembles and various styles of music. Instrumental and vocal requirements were suitable, realistic and sensible. There was evidence of strong and distinctive compositions which were characterful and well managed.

There were very few compositions which demonstrated little or no control of resources and instruments and lacked technical and expressive control. In these, the musical understanding was lacking, at times making the overall outcome inconsistent and incoherent.

Summary of Key Points

- Continue with correct administration according to WJEC guidelines, using the correct forms, labelling, adding signatures, checking and uploading compositions and logs.
- Aim to write as much detail as possible on the candidate log, including details of influences (composers and pieces), any software used, and any help or feedback given; the process of composition is most important here.
- Avoid overlong bar-by-bar analyses on the log.
- Ensure that the brief for both compositions is completed on the candidate log; examiners assess 'the response to the chosen brief' in the first column.
- Always check the Assessment Criteria, taking note of the two-column format in the Brief Compositions, and the three-column format for the Free Compositions.
- The first composition, following one of the briefs set by the WJEC, must be in a Western Classical Style which illustrates an understanding of the musical language, techniques and conventions of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods.
- Research instrumentation, techniques, styles and general theoretical understanding in order to employ a variety of elements.
- Remember that no marks are awarded for existing musical ideas or an interpretation of an idea by a performer that is not the candidate. Credit can only be given for ideas (including expression and interpretation) that are the work of the candidate.
- Always aim for a composition with a beginning, a middle and an end, displaying musical growth and coherence.
- Aim for refining, improving and modifying musical ideas and elements to create a unified composition.

MUSIC

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 3 APPRAISING

Comments on individual questions/sections

AREA OF STUDY B – ROCK AND POP 1965-1990

Question 1: Every Breath You Take – Sting / The Police

- (a) Encouraging answers here – most got this correct, as they didn't have to mention the 'major', with some only naming Ab rather than Ab major.
- (b) This was also well done, with many candidates noting enough to get the full three marks.
- (c) A good response here, with the majority succeeding. However, there were some vague answers of 'Verse / Chorus' where the mark was not awarded.
- (d) Another well answered question – most candidates knew the term syncopation.
- (e) Hit or miss here; not many wrote 'interrupted', or left it blank.
- (f) This was well done – candidates certainly know their chords symbols and which notes are used. Only very few left this blank.
- (g) A very poor effort, and many left it unanswered. Many wrote Bb major instead.
- (h) A really good attempt here, but surprisingly many unanswered – surely in this tick-box type of question, the candidates should tick one box!
- (i) A definite problem here – naming intervals confuses many candidates.
- (j) Not a bad effort here – there were many options on the mark scheme, and many answers fulfilled the four marks awarded. The most prevalent answers were syncopation, repetition, higher range. A small number of candidates mentioned other features rather than the vocal melody which were not awarded marks.
- (k) So many wrong answers here – surprisingly! Many noted the Pet Shop Boys.

Question 2: Different timbres and music technology...

There were some particularly good and solid accounts here, again probably reflecting their interests as pop/rock enthusiasts! However, there was the usual trick of not answering the demands of the question and wandering very far away from the topic. On the other hand, there were some fabulous accounts of music technology in particular, with many good features written about. The examples comprised a wide range of the usual groups such as Beatles, Pink Floyd, Queen, Stevie Wonder, Abba and ACDC, with some unusual songs from the Disco era, Earth Wind and Fire, Jimmy Somerville and Zapp and Roger. The better candidates wrote maturely and efficiently with conviction, explaining quite clearly what was needed. At the other end of the spectrum, only some songs or performers were mentioned, missing out on answering the demands of the question. Some candidates clearly have an in depth knowledge of specific instruments and their effects and this came over in some of the responses.

AREA OF STUDY C – MUSICAL THEATRE

Question 3: Another Op'nin', Another Show – Kiss Me Kate

- (a) Not a good attempt here, especially as both instruments had to be in the correct order. Trumpet was constantly mentioned, as well as violin, and I even came across one male voice!
- (b) This was well answered; but again, as in Rock and Pop, some candidates just mentioned 'verse and chorus' instead of the full answer.
- (c) A pretty good response here – the added sixth was well known.

- (d) Many got this correct – very pleasing.
- (e) The key was well known, and quite a few got the modulation answer correct also.
- (f) This was a very poor and weak response; many noted A major only.
- (g) This was fairly well answered, and many wrote logically on each lyric line. Many candidates wrote the default answers (on anything vocal related) of syllabic/melismatic.
- (h) A very good attempt here; not many wrong.
- (i) This was not so well answered – the most obvious answer was the long sustained note in Line 19 and the added chorus.
- (j) Despite being one of the set composers and a very well known song, many candidates got this wrong.

Question 4: Appropriate moods and settings in either Richard Rodgers or Andrew Lloyd Webber

The obvious problem here was the fact that many ignored **either** Rodgers or Lloyd Webber and instead wrote copiously on both composers. Only very few got really mixed up – a handful only. There quite a few prepared essays here too, with not too many relevant facts on settings and moods. The better candidates mentioned many musical styles linked to certain songs and/or musicals, and many wrote well on various settings and musical styles, instrumentation and structure. There were the usual run-of-the-mill examples of relevant songs, but also some surprises such as ‘Bali Ha’i’ from ‘South Pacific’, songs from ‘Evita’ and more unusual features from ‘Jesus Christ Superstar’. Many mentioned the musicals rather than the songs within them but still got their points across in a musical way. It was good to see that the candidates used abbreviations e.g. POTO, SP, JCS – always good as time is short. Some weaker candidates mistakenly mentioned Les Mis by Lloyd Webber, Hairspray by Lloyd Webber and Hamilton by Lloyd Webber also! A few also wrote about Cole Porter!

AREA OF STUDY D – JAZZ

Question 5 – Let’s get Lost – Chet Baker.

- (a) An excellent response here.
- (b) Also good here.
- (c) The candidates who choose the Jazz option always know so much about chords and chord symbols – a really good attempt here to name the notes and explain the meaning of the chord.
- (d) This was well answered – again chord related.
- (e) There were many good references here, but not many bar numbers; this question specifically asked for bar numbers.
- (f) A good attempt by many candidates here; most gained a mark here.
- (g) Another good effort here.
- (h) Most candidates knew both terms well, easily gaining the full two marks.
- (i) It seems that a general question such as ‘Describe the music....’ always brings out the best in the candidates – well answered as expected.
- (j) Most got the performer correct, only a few went for Dizzy Gillespie or left it blank.

Question 6 – Role of the rhythm section

Many candidates knew what they needed to do here and did it quite well. The music examples were also diverse and interesting, and there was some logical writing on the whole, from big band to bebop and finally cool jazz. Some candidates misunderstood rhythm section and decided to write about the importance of rhythm as a feature.

AREA OF STUDY A – WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION

Question 7 – Divertimento

- (a) This was reasonably answered, perhaps because there was a range of bars within some answers; it also makes a great difference if the chosen excerpt is a slow-moving one, as in this case. Examiners ignored the instruments' names, which was a good thing, as hardly any candidates mentioned them. Very few candidates left this question blank.
- (b) The dotted quaver and semiquaver (rhythm) flummoxed a few candidates, but there were some average to good marks gained here, with a handful gaining full marks. There were some blanks however.
- (c) This was also well answered, with only a few incorrect answers.
- (d) This was well answered on the whole.

THE SYMPHONY

Question 8 – Comparison

Most candidates used the two-column format, and I was generally encouraged by the majority of responses; I think this type of question improves year on year as the candidates know they can write in bullet points, and they also know what to look for. Only a handful wrote extremely briefly, and one or two left it blank. On the other hand, those candidates who wrote in paragraphs seemed to waste so much valuable time, writing 'In Extract 1, there is....' followed by 'In Extract 2, there is....' etc. It should be noted that bullet points are a perfectly acceptable format in these comparison answers. However, there were some candidates (which happens every year) who threw everything at this – all manner of terms and musical elements, some of which were not applicable to these two extracts! There were very popular answers such as diatonic/chromatic touches, correctly noted dynamics, smaller/larger orchestras, homophonic textures, solo instrumental sections, sequences and repetition.

Question 9 – Haydn Symphony No. 103 in Eflat – 'Drum Roll'

- (a) Most candidates knew the reason behind the title.
- (b) There were many errors here; it is quite obvious that transposition of instruments is not taught sufficiently.
- (c) Again a well answered effort, with the majority getting this correct, and very few unanswered here. A few candidates threw away a mark by only selecting one tick box answer when two were needed.
- (d) The candidates either knew about simple and compound time, or not! There were some unanswered efforts here.
- (e) Rather a mixed response here, which is unusual as the candidates have the score in front of them!
- (f) This was well answered, with many giving enough detail to gain the three marks. Many also wrote bar numbers.
- (g) This was not so well done. The anacrusis and melodic inversion were fine, but there were some blanks on the melodic diminished 4th and minor 7th.
- (h) Candidates were obviously happy with this question, and much information was divulged. It was also pleasing to see logical accounts with bar numbers followed by the relevant comments.
- (i) It is becoming increasingly clear that many candidates don't know the terms harmony and tonality. Many here wrote on texture and instrumentation. Keys were very few and far between, and cadences were also missing in many answers, knowledge of tonicisations – were also largely missing. Questions on harmony and tonality seems to continue to challenge candidates, despite their regularity each year on the paper. The stronger candidates who gained four or five marks wrote clearly and knowledgeably.

RELIGIOUS CHORAL MUSIC

Question 10 – Comparison

As in the Symphony extracts, the two column/bullet point/short paragraph format was well utilised, rather than an essay-type answer. Most candidates mentioned the main features required, with some full comparisons of many stylistic features, and some candidates reached the top two bands of marks. The main features mentioned were the minor keys, chromatic touches in Extract 2, the soloist sections, the added SATB chorus, the opening instrumental introduction in Extract 2, and the usual mention of syllabic/melismatic singing.

Question 11 – Mozart Requiem

- (a) Most candidates knew Allegro, but not many ventured as far as 'assai'. Luckily the mark scheme accepted 'quite' or 'very', so many gained a mark here.
- (b) The meaning of 'Dies Irae' was very well known.
- (c) The meaning of the Köchel number was not well known – there were references to the key, the intervals, the date and how many bars there were in the work.
- (d) A good effort here – again they had the score in front of them.
- (e)
 - (i) 'Trombones' was the most popular, with only the most astute noting the 'trumpets'.
 - (ii) There were many candidates who decided not to answer this part (transposition again!)
- (f) There were hardly any full marks here, with the melodic augmented 2nd unanswered by many.
- (g) Candidates wrote fairly well here, with the most popular answers being the perpetual semiquavers, the brass fanfares and the syncopation.
- (h) Tonality was better answered than a combination of harmony and tonality in the Haydn. Most candidates wrote logically with bar numbers, and mentioned many keys and tonicisations. However, there was some irrelevant information in some answers, and there were also some candidates who left it blank, losing five very valuable marks.

MUSIC

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 5 - COMPOSING

Overview of the Unit

General Comments

Administration

There were a few missing signatures this year, and incomplete recordings. Scores were also incomplete, with a few instances of only the last page of the score being submitted, and one recording where the voices were muted. The briefs sections on the candidate logs were left blank, which resulted in some guess work by the examiners. It is worth reiterating that both teacher and candidate must confirm that the creative work is solely that of the candidate, and that any work not composed by the candidate must be acknowledged in the appropriate space in the log. However, this year there was a general improvement in centre administration which must be congratulated.

Uploading work/Labelling

Please be aware that it is highly recommended that candidates and/or teachers carefully check the files before they are uploaded, so that they are the correct and complete ones, and that they can be opened and played correctly.

Candidate Logs

There were some excellent logs created this year, all with appropriate detail on the chosen brief, the initial ideas, the manipulation of the music and the refinement and improvement to create a complete and musical composition. There was a definite clear understanding of the brief, genre, style and process of composition, with a strong sense of intention and growth of the music from its initial ideas. Within these detailed accounts, there was always a logical attempt to write clearly and musically on the actual process of creating and composing the music. Best practice regarding logs always includes a clear process to research and listen, compose, refine and improve compositions. As mentioned in the Unit 2 report, bar-by-bar analyses are not required, especially when full scores are provided.

Conversely, there were a few weaker attempts which were far too vague and missing valid information. It should be noted that all logs should include (as noted on the log template): *'details of pieces which influenced you, any software you used, and any help or feedback you were given. Explain how the choices you have made are linked to the brief. Give details of any musical ideas in your piece which are not your original work. e.g. quotes from other pieces, loops / samples / chord realisations from your software or elsewhere, or ideas composed or suggested by other people. If you chose to ask another person to perform for you, you may also submit a recording of a guide track which you used to show the performer what to do'*. Many logs omitted such descriptions, and the lack of relevant detail was noted by examiners.

The range of influences mentioned in the logs were vast and varied, and the named composers or styles of music gave examiners an insight into the music composed by the candidates. Once again this year, as in Unit 2, there were many cases of not mentioning influences at all. References were made to many WCT composers in the brief compositions, with some twentieth century composers added by some. The free compositions were influenced by various composers and styles, naming musicians such as Lin Manuel Miranda, Yiruma, Ella Fitzgerald, Williams and Zimmer, to name but a few, as well as several contemporary pop and rock artists.

Scores and Recordings

ICT was effectively used to create professional scores. Notation and sequencing programmes used included Musescore, Capella, Sibelius, Logic Pro, BandLab and GarageBand.

Most candidates created scores which were clear and of high standard. Some of the scoring was rather odd, for example a violin in the bass clef, and a single piano part separated into four staves. There were other instances of not including further musical detail on the score such as dynamics, expression and articulation. Those who chose to provide lead sheets mainly wrote fully and accurately, with well annotated screenshots. Please bear in mind that single screenshots (sometimes in a very small size font) without any relevant annotation or information are not acceptable, and rather meaningless; examiners need as much information as possible in order to assess the compositions. There was a minority of candidates who chose not to produce any kind of score, only a brief written description.

Recordings were mainly computer generated and well balanced generally, and there were quite a few live recordings this year, particularly so in the vocal compositions.

Comments on individual sections

Composition 1 - The Western Classical Tradition - Brief Composition

It clearly states in the Briefs Submission document each year that: *'You are reminded that all four briefs are set in the context of the Western Classical Tradition and the response to the selected brief must result in a composition in a Western Classical style which illustrates the understanding of the musical language, techniques and conventions of the period (i.e. Baroque, Classical and Romantic eras). You must choose a suitable style or genre from these periods'*.

In accordance with this, in this first composition, examiners are judging and assessing the response to the brief, and especially the musical context of WCT. The higher range of marking cannot be awarded if a composition is not within the WCT style. It was noticeable this year that a sizeable proportion of candidates chose to compose outside the WCT style, writing works which were not related to Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods; this was a disappointment to examiners. There was hardly any effort to write music including the harmonic, rhythmic, melodic, structural or textural conventions of WCT. There were examples of unresolved harmonic progressions, dissonances, rambling melodies, not enough textural contrast, and over use of a theme. There was sometimes a tendency to stay on an idea for too long, showing a lack of imagination and a loss of focus. Some very short works were not convincing at this level, falling into the limited or inconsistent band of marks.

However, these were very much in the minority, and generally there were many excellent interpretations of the various briefs within the WCT style, which is indeed very encouraging.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Brief 1: Compose a short vocal piece for two or three voices, making use of countermelodies and/or descant for performance in a regional Festival for Voices. You may select or write your own words, and the piece may be accompanied or unaccompanied.

There were not many submitted examples of this particular brief this year. Sometimes the style was not always successfully reflected. However, examiners noted some positive vocal writing overall, with suitable word setting and sensible vocal ranges. It was also noted that *'making use of countermelodies and/or descant'* showed confusion in some efforts, with candidates writing overly homophonic textures.

Those candidates who chose to write homophonic accompaniments missed opportunities to add colour and contrast through musical material in the vocal and instrumental parts.

Brief 2: Compose a short instrumental quartet to celebrate World Book Day. You may base your composition on any children's book or poem.

This was one of the more popular choices of brief, and there were some excellent and descriptive examples in a variety of styles. A diverse range of literature was chosen, from classic stories to the more contemporary, using authors such as Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, J. M. Barrie, Roald Dahl, Dr Seuss and Julia Donaldson. These compositions were mostly successful, but sometimes more detail was required in the logs as to the chosen book or characters. Many pieces worked well as quartets (mainly string), and some truly demonstrated the characteristics of the chosen literature in an effective way. Some candidates chose more unusual combinations to convey the chosen story, which showed originality and good creativity. Sometimes the more modern cartoon-type books led to slightly more modern pieces in a more cinematic style, but generally there was imaginative and inventive writing using sufficient musical thought and ideas.

Brief 3: Compose the opening section of a piece of programmatic music which reflects aspects of the story of Blodeuwedd. You may choose to write for voices, or instruments, or a combination of both.

This was another popular choice by many candidates, and it was good to see that meaningful research had been done on the characters and story, which was then translated into stylistic and idiomatic compositions. The responses varied greatly in style and standard. The programmatic element was sensibly apparent, and there were some dramatic through-composed works, some of which linked to a recurring motif for the character of Blodeuwedd. The mentioned influences were very much Romantic related, and there were some instances of the music tipping over into a more contemporary and film-like style. Nevertheless, the majority of candidates who chose this option composed effectively within WCT, with episodic and well-balanced compositions on the whole. There were some sophisticated and inventive compositions, showing good control of melody, harmony and structure. Instrumental timbres were clearly used to evoke the mood and drama of the story or characters. The weaker compositions showed a struggle with the programmatic concept and more context in the log would have been more worthwhile.

Brief 4: Compose a setting for SATB, with or without accompaniment, of any or all of the following words: ‘Stabat Mater dolorosa.....’

There were a few candidates who chose this brief, and the majority of these wrote confidently for SATB with some adding a piano or organ accompaniment. There were issues regarding poor word setting, some strange part writing and a very wide vocal range. Many efforts were considered to be hymn-like, and the majority of the candidates captured the sad or sombre mood of the words. There was also evidence of good technical and expressive control of the musical elements, and an attempt had been made to create interesting parts for the voices. The compositions were stylistically successful on the whole. The weaker compositions were sometimes simplistic and static with unclear vocal lines and unrelated harmony and melody. Unfortunately, one candidate wrote for solo soprano, and therefore lost marks in the Creating Musical Ideas column for not fulfilling the brief.

Composition 2 – Free Composition

As in Unit 2, there was a vast range of chosen styles in the free compositions. It is encouraging as always to see that candidates follow their own musical interests, and it was clear that there was more freedom here for candidates to compose in any style or genre, than in Unit 2 compositions.

Teachers again need reminding that examiners assess the response to the brief in the first column of the assessment criteria, and in that respect, as much information as possible is required in the candidate logs. Candidates should aim to write clearly about features such as occasion, mood, style and themes in their logs; all this information will ultimately assist the examining process.

Here are a few examples of the genres encountered this year:

- Jazz, Blues, Latin American
- Pop, Rock, Heavy Metal, Electronic, Shoegaze
- Welsh music
- Musical Theatre
- Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionism, Minimalism, Experimental
- Theme and variations, rondo and sonata forms
- Many string trios this year
- Film music: sci-fi, horror, romance, mental health
- Video game music
- Christmas Carols
- Incidental music for various occasions
- Choice of another composition from the set briefs (this is perfectly acceptable)
- Percussion ensembles (inspired by a workshop for Young Composers)

Many of the free compositions were sophisticated, innovative and inventive, resulting in higher band marks. These were well balanced, coherent and impressive efforts, which showed a clear understanding of intent and musicality. There was evidence of instrumental variety, interesting textures and structures, lyrical melodic lines and appropriate harmonic language, including well planned and executed cadences. Both musical understanding and sophisticated technical control were used effectively and maturely. In these free compositions there was strong evidence of musical development, which was skilful, focused and interesting in many works.

On the other hand, there were inconsistent efforts where there was not always sufficient development or harmonic variety to gain the higher band marks. At this level, simplistic and elementary compositions will not score highly; examples of short content, erratic structures, repetition of material, no clear melodies or insecure harmonic progressions all fall into this category. This year, there were still examples of film music without a story line, pop songs without lyrics or chord symbols, and some compositions that seemed incomplete.

Creating Musical Ideas

There were so many compositions which demonstrated effective, clear and competent handling of musical ideas, with most displaying an appropriate structure. It was pleasing to listen to and assess so many sophisticated and mature compositions which had effective initial ideas and strongly reflected the response to the chosen brief. These compositions showed an artistic starting point with excellent research into the chosen style or genre, and further exploration of harmony, melody, texture and structure. There was sensible handling of musical ideas and candidates seemed to have thought carefully about the initial ideas and how to handle them successfully. The writing was mostly skilful and highly creative which successfully reflected the musical intent.

Some compositions were inconsistent as the melodic ideas lacked musical understanding and were simplistic and elementary. Many ideas lacked direction and fluency, with very brief phrases. Sometimes the piece did not match the brief in any way. There were examples of over-long compositions, well over seven or eight minutes; these tended to use repetitive ideas or sections, not venturing further with the initial ideas.

Developing Musical Ideas

Teachers should be aware that in the WCT Brief composition, there is no discrete column for Developing Musical Ideas, but it would be expected to see changes in melodic or harmonic lines, so that the music is moved forward. In the Free compositions, development of musical ideas is assessed, and examiners expect competent growth using a range of compositional devices to further the initial ideas.

Successful development will always demonstrate growth and a genuine attempt to vary the initial material. Examples of this would be extending the melodic lines, adding interest to the rhythm, varying the instrumental or vocal textures and using the many compositional devices to broaden the initial ideas.

Careful planning was evident, allowing functional and effective expansion of the music, sometime in innovative and interesting ways. Coherence was achieved by using motivic amendments, sequence and imitation, modulations and varied dynamics and articulation; all these elements, and many more, enabled subtle differences in the composed music, achieving a coherent and well-balanced submission.

However, some compositions were too simplistic for this level and generally struggled with musical development. These works were reliant on repetitive chord patterns or melodies and did not display skilful use of elements and resources. Shorter pieces impeded the candidates' efforts to demonstrate sufficient development or expansion.

Technical and Expressive Control of Musical Elements

In the assessment for this column, examiners were looking for effective and secure technical control of the musical elements, communicated effectively with expressive control.

There were many compositions which demonstrated effective control of harmony, key and use of instruments. There were sophisticated compositions which showed skilful technical control of many of the musical elements. There was a clear command of instrumental timbres and melodic lines to enable the confident and positive creation of the music. The musical elements were utilised in a sophisticated manner, all demonstrating clarity of thought and coherent composing. The impressive harmony, textures and structures all created impressive compositions.

There were a few compositions which lacked understanding of writing for specific instruments and needed to demonstrate further knowledge and understanding of using brass instruments for example. There was sometimes a lack of musical understanding of harmony, structure and melodic control. Some of these works lacked variety and planning, instrumental or vocal colour and control, and musical focus and knowledge. Clarity was sometimes absent, along with an appropriate response to the chosen style.

Unit 5 – Option B

There were some interesting and musically adept examples within the extended Option B compositions, and the overall standard was encouragingly good. The second composition was almost invariably linked to pop and rock, musical theatre or jazz. The third composition involved more free concepts, where candidates wrote on briefs including video game music, more classical genres such as sonata form, Impressionism or Neoclassicism, and more contemporary works comprising fusion, indie, heavy metal, folk and programmatic works.

Some of these compositions demonstrated an excellent musical understanding of the different genres, and there were effective musical ideas and sensible treatment of musical elements generally. As mentioned above, the overall standard was good, despite some inconsistent efforts, where it was felt that the third composition was rather rushed and tended to be shorter and less complex. More musical and creative understanding of the style was needed to gain marks in the higher band.

Summary of Key Points

- Continue with correct administration according to WJEC guidelines, using the correct forms, labelling, adding signatures, checking and uploading compositions and logs.
- Aim to write as much detail as possible on the candidate log, including details of influences (and compositions), any software used, and any help or feedback given; the process of composition is most important here.
- Avoid overlong accounts on the log, in particular bar-by-bar analyses.
- Ensure that the brief for both compositions is completed on the candidate log; examiners assess ‘the response to the chosen brief’ in the first column.
- Always check the Assessment Criteria, taking note of the two-column format in the Brief Compositions, and the three-column format for the Free Compositions.
- The first composition, following one of the briefs set by the WJEC, must be in a Western Classical Style which illustrates an understanding of the musical language, techniques and conventions of the Baroque, Classical or Romantic periods.
- Research instrumentation, techniques, styles and general theoretical understanding in order to employ a variety of elements.
- Remember that no marks are awarded for existing musical ideas or an interpretation of an idea by a performer that is not the candidate. Credit can only be given for ideas (including expression and interpretation) that are the work of the candidate.
- Always aim for a composition with a beginning, a middle and an end, displaying musical growth and coherence.
- Aim for refining, improving and modifying musical ideas and elements to create a unified composition.

MUSIC

GCE

Summer 2025

UNIT 6 APPRAISING

Comments on individual questions/sections

AREA OF STUDY F

STRAND 1 - IMPRESSIONISM

This was the most popular choice from centres.

Question 1: Debussy – Reflets Dans L'eau

- (a) Most candidates were correct here, with very few 'octatonic' and one or two blanks.
- (b) Not a bad effort here – many candidates gained two if not three marks by naming the added Db, the Eb dominant 9th and the Eb pedal. The stronger candidates went further and had obviously learnt the work well.
- (c) Some candidates noted the contrary motion, and a few noted the parallel chords in the RH, the most common answer was homophonic.
- (d) Some misunderstanding in the answers with some candidates describing the 'B' section. Some candidates recognised it was 'B2' and part of an overall rondo form.
- (e)
 - (i) This was not well known at all.
 - (ii) This was much better – many mentioned the triplets, the RH rather than LH and the higher register, gaining the full two marks.
- (f) This was well written by many candidates, naming the various motifs and scales as well as the melodic shapes and references to the other works such as *En Sourdine* and *La Mer*. A few candidates wrote about Ravel's *Ma mere L'Oye* which was not needed in this answer.

STRAND 2 – CHAMBER MUSIC IN WALES

Question 2: Plowman – Night Dance No. 2

- (a) Ticks were hit or miss here, with many getting the 'blues' correct, but not the 'Aeolian'.
- (b) This was poorly answered; perhaps the most popular answer was the bare fifths F# and C#, and some wrote on the various notes and bars.
- (c) It was very difficult to gain the two marks here; some mentioned Dance 1A, but chose to forego the pairs of dances.
- (d)
 - (i) This question was answered well, the main answer being the same rhythmic pattern in both extracts.
 - (ii) The differences were also well answered – the most common answers being the trill in the flute and the use of quintuplets.
- (f) Once again, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of these answers – a good sense of comparison, many terms mentioned, and the references to Bach and the blues influences. The weaker efforts were written on one piece only, or wrote very little information on the use of melody.

STRAND 3 – POPULAR MUSIC IN WALES

Question 3: Another Source – Kizzy Crawford

- (a) This was not well answered, with many noting a third or a fourth interval, or nothing at all.
- (b) This on the other hand was well done. Good listening by the candidates!
- (c) Candidates knew the structure well, with many gaining the full two marks here.
- (d) Most candidates knew the cello, with just a few violins in the mix.
- (e) Mixed answers here, very few candidates recognised the horn.
- (f) Pizzicato was very well known.
- (g) Generally well answered, a few mentioned Classical, with the majority naming Jazz.

Question 4: If you tolerate this... – Manic Street Preachers

This was very well answered, with many candidates mentioning the features within the song, and still taking the time to write on MSP's general musical style, with many relevant examples of other songs. The majority of candidates obviously knew the group and the music well, and answered accordingly. The weaker efforts were written very briefly in a limited manner.

STRAND 4 – AMERICAN MUSICAL THEATRE

This was the most popular choice from centres.

Question 5: - Chanson – The Baker's Wife - Schwartz

- (a) Not a bad effort here, with many candidates being awarded the full two marks. The more popular answers were the use of anacrusis, the syllabic singing and the longer note on 'même' at the end.
- (b) This was well answered with many gaining two marks for clarinet and oboe. There were some rogue answers of flute and saxophone, but generally well answered here.
- (c) On the other hand – this was poorly answered. Very few recognised the celesta, with glockenspiel, xylophone, marimba and vibraphone being common answers.
- (d) Again this was poorly answered, with many going for the strophic answer, and some naming 32 bar structure. The first A section was almost always omitted except in the very perceptive answers.
- (e) Hemiola was not generally known, and only named by a handful of candidates.
- (f) Sequence was well known, with many gaining a mark here. The alternative answers were imitation, syncopation and repetition.
- (g) Not many got the decade correct – rather poor effort here. This is one of only a few works by Schwartz and contextual knowledge here was surprisingly lacking.

Question 6: The Story of Lucy and Jessie - Follies - Sondheim

This was generally well answered. Obviously, some centres had researched Stephen Sondheim's style really well, and the other relevant songs mentioned were from a wide range of musicals, such as *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Into the Woods* and many from *Assassins*. The descriptions of the 1930s pastiche style were very well noted with many candidates writing clearly. There was great detail on the structure, melodic material, and orchestration, but not so much on the harmony perhaps. The stronger candidates wrote well on the pastiche elements in other relevant songs, whereas the weaker candidates only mentioned songs without going into detail and relevance.

STRAND 5 – JAZZ LEGENDS

This was the least popular option..

Question 7: The Mooche – Duke Ellington

- (a) A very good attempt here, with most gaining the mark.
- (b) This was also well done, with many getting the correct order.
- (c) Another excellent response here, with many knowing the type of mute.
- (d) It was quite easy to gain the full two marks here, with many valid references made regarding the musical features. Once again, the rather open-ended question suited many candidates.
- (e) This was not so well answered – most named the double bass, but there were either blanks or guitars named instead of banjo.
- (f) The jungle style was known to many, with the two marks fully awarded in many scripts. The most common answers were the muted brass and the growling effect.

Question 8: It ain't necessarily so – Miles Davis

The open-ended question on use of instruments suited the candidates, and many wrote well on a variety, without just naming the instruments, but also noting how they were used.

There was evidence of knowledge on Miles Davis' general music style too, with much contextual knowledge. Many candidates were clearly familiar with his collaboration with Gil Evans in this question.

AREA OF STUDY E: THE WESTERN CLASSICAL TRADITION

Question 9: Symphony - Dvorak

A range of marks for this question, which is to be expected with the aural dictation element.

- (a) A majority of candidates identified the first pitch and generally the rhythm was answered better than the pitch. The triplet crotchets were sometimes written as triplet quavers. Many candidates only concentrated on the rhythm only, and many omitted the question altogether.
- (b) The first error (rhythm) was the better answered of the two. Some circled the correct location but failed to follow through.
- (c) Many pupils picked up upon the wording of 'type' of chord and answered correctly with the diminished seventh.

THE SYMPHONY

Question 10 – Symphony No 1 Brahms – Movt 4

- (a) This tick box was well done – only very few blanks here, and the occasional wrong tick.
- (b) This was well answered too; and it was encouraging to see that the majority of candidates mentioned the correct bar numbers, and wrote logically throughout the section.
- (c)
 - (i) Not many candidates knew the closing section, with many noting the recapitulation or the transition.
 - (ii) The comparison, even though this should be expected by now, was not well answered on the whole. Not many gained the full four marks here. However, there was enough detail in the mark scheme to ensure at least three of the four marks. Many gave far more than four statements to gain the full marks.
- (d) This question was not well answered at all. 'Harmony and tonality' does not mean melody, instrumentation, structure, dynamics – all these were mentioned in some form or other. Very few wrote clearly on keys, chords etc. The better candidates wrote very many valid and relevant statements, all assuring full marks here.

Question 11 – The rise of Nationalism (use of modality, dance and folk music)

This essay was well done by many candidates, with many relevant symphonies mentioned, and a good account of Nationalistic traits in many suitable examples within symphonic music. Among the expected composers such as Mendelssohn, Smetana, Sibelius and Dvorak, there were also less obvious ones mentioned such as Lalo (Symphonie Espagnole), Bartok (Kossuth), Vaughan Williams (A Sea Symphony) and Ives (Three Places in New England) – all demonstrating wider research and delving deeper into the music and genre. There was suitably good reference to Nationalism with some musically mature and perceptive essays written in a thorough and logical manner. Some candidates need to be aware that the quality of written communication and use of specialist vocabulary are both assessed in this question, and bullet points or short phrases are not acceptable. These unfortunately fell into the weaker category, noting mixed-up facts and generally not enough relevant detail.

RELIGIOUS CHORAL MUSIC

Question 12 – Verdi Requiem – Liber Scriptus

- (a) This tick box question was generally well answered.
- (b) Some candidates did very well here, with focused writing on the mezzo soprano soloist, as well as suitable links to the meaning of the text. Many candidates gained the full five marks here.
- (c) There were some effective descriptions of the achievement of dramatic intensity, with all facts linking well to the music itself. Candidates always seem to favour this detailed analysis type of question.
- (d) The terms harmony and tonality once again confused a few candidates. However, many mentioned the keys and chords, gaining the full four marks.

Question 13 – Discuss masses (excluding Requiem masses) and different approaches.

This was not well written by many candidates, with some falling into the trap of discussing Requiem masses in general. There seemed to be so much historical and social detail in many essays this year. The better efforts were excellent, with much relevant detail within musically mature essays, as well as referencing many significant and pertinent masses. These were perceptive and thorough, with convincing detail, and obviously displaying full knowledge of masses. Some candidates need to be aware that the quality of written communication and use of specialist vocabulary are both assessed in this question, and bullet points or short phrases are not acceptable. These unfortunately fell into the weaker category, noting mixed-up facts and generally not enough relevant detail.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 22404300

Email: Music@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [AS/A Level Music](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

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Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

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