

GCSE Examiners' Report

Music

GCSE

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 component.

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	Eduqas 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.eduqas.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 Eduqas 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 component level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.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	Eduqas 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.eduqas.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 Eduqas 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 Eduqas

Contents	Page
Executive summary	5
Component 1: Performing	6
Component 2: Composing	10
Component 3: Appraising	22
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	28

Executive Summary

The Eduqas GCSE Music Principal Examiners' Report for Summer 2025 offers a comprehensive review of candidate performance across Components 1 (Performing), 2 (Composing), and 3 (Appraising).

Component 1 saw an increase in centre participation and a diverse range of instruments and musical styles. While administration was mostly efficient—with accurate mark sheets and clear uploads—issues were noted with missing annotations on scores, unsuitable ensemble choices, and over-marking of simplistic pre-grade 1 pieces. Problems with recordings, such as poor acoustics and editing violations, occasionally hindered moderation, and some centres submitted incomplete or incorrectly formatted scores.

Component 2 presented a wide disparity in marking accuracy. Though many candidates demonstrated creative flair, technical control and structural coherence were inconsistently judged. Over-reliance on loops, repetition, and uncredited use of pre-existing material were common pitfalls, especially in DAW-generated compositions. Some set brief responses showed stylistic awareness and inventive ideas, yet many missed essential criteria like excitement in film music or vocal lines in song-based tasks. Free compositions often reflected personal interests, but inadequate briefs and similar outcomes across centres suggested constrained creativity. Administration was particularly problematic in this component, with late submissions, incorrect file formats, and incomplete candidate logs complicating the moderation process.

In Component 3, the appraising exam revealed persistent weaknesses in musical vocabulary, theoretical understanding, and familiarity with set works like *Badinerie* and *Africa*. Many candidates struggled with dictation, pitch accuracy, and describing musical elements with precision. However, some showed genuine musical insight when comparing versions of pieces or interpreting film music excerpts. Structured answers and appropriate terminology were uneven, and candidates frequently misidentified key features or focused on irrelevant sections of the music.

Overall, while many centres submitted commendable work and responded promptly to queries, inconsistencies in internal marking, gaps in musical understanding, and recurring administrative issues were noted across all components. To improve future outcomes, centres are urged to consult assessment criteria thoroughly, ensure candidate-authored content is clearly distinguished, and maintain robust documentation and submission practices. Enhanced familiarity with set works, accurate score preparation, and careful use of music technology will be critical in addressing areas of weakness and supporting students in achieving their full potential.

MUSIC

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Summer 2025

COMPONENT 1: PERFORMING

Overview of the Component

This year saw an increase in the number of centres entered for Eduqas GCSE Music, and it is hoped that all centres welcomed the new uploading of candidates' folios to Iamis. Moderators reported that performing folios contained a great variety of instruments and styles reflecting individual candidates' interests, and it was pleasing to note the mix of new with traditional music.

The main problems reported by moderators this year were:

- Administration errors
- Lack of annotation on scores
- Unsuitable ensemble choices
- Inflated marks for very simple pre-grade 1 pieces.

The moderation team thanks all centres for their submissions and prompt responses to moderator queries.

Comments on individual questions/sections

ADMINISTRATION

Overall, administration was handled well by most centres. Files were clearly labelled, which made navigating the moderation process straightforward. Most marksheets were thoroughly completed and accurate, with timings, difficulty levels, and candidate roles clearly indicated. Nearly all centres uploaded the required materials, and in most cases where there was missing work, incorrect folios uploaded or additional samples required, centres responded promptly. Moderators were grateful for the centres' co-operation in this.

All the information regarding the uploading of material may be found on the website. Centres should consult the following document:

GCSE NEA upload process [This document is updated annually.]

It should be noted that all candidates must be listed on the Timing Penalty Sheet, not just the candidates who are under time (timings must be accurate from the candidate's entry, not the duration of the recording).

Scores should be uploaded as one PDF file, not individual pages.

Zip files should not be uploaded.

Please upload recordings as MP3 files if possible.

A welcome addition to the mark sheet was the box with "Details of other live parts," and most centres completed this correctly. It should be noted that a "backing track" does not constitute a "live part".

LEVELS OF DIFFICULTY

Levels of difficulty were generally well-indicated and agreed. The criteria for assessing levels of difficulty may be found in Appendix A of the specification. Many centres are sending scores to the exam board to assess their level of difficulty, and it was useful for moderators when centres stated this on the mark sheets.

This year, there were some submissions, especially piano duets, which were taken from duet books claiming a graded standard. These are not necessarily equivalent to accredited exam board pieces, and centres must continue to assess such pieces against the criteria in Appendix A.

Please also see the following document, which is available on the website:

Selecting repertoire for Eduqas GCSE Music Performance

RECORDINGS

Recordings were generally of excellent quality, appropriately formatted as MP3s, but some had issues with balance and clarity. The candidate's performance must be distinguishable from other performers in the recording, and care must be taken as to where the recordings take place; some performances were recorded in acoustically poor spaces (for example, large halls with excessive reverb). Occasionally, the recording device was placed too close, causing distortion.

It must also be noted that recordings must not be edited before submission; moderators reported that several centres cut recordings, resulting in abrupt endings.

SCORES

Many centres submitted scores that were clear, accurate to the performance intentions, and annotated where deviations occurred. The most successful lead sheets and tab scores contained the melody (where applicable), rhythmic patterns and performance directions. Centres had often highlighted the part of the candidate on ensemble scores, which was helpful for the moderation process.

It is important to note that if a score or lead sheet is not submitted, marks in band 4 for Accuracy should not be awarded.

Moderators reported that many scores this year were not annotated to indicate the candidates' intended performances. Whilst this is time-consuming for centres, annotations are vital to support marks for Accuracy.

There were several centres that either submitted scanned sheet music which was in the incorrect page order, omitted pages or submitted photographs of scores which did not contain all the music. **Please submit scores in PDF format as one file.**

A final note regarding scores – a score or detailed lead sheet must be submitted. The exam board will not accept reference recordings or links.

TIMINGS

Most candidates met the minimum timing requirement, and where timing penalties were incurred, they were correctly and fairly applied across the sample.

Some candidates fell just short of the required timings, sometimes by as little as five seconds, and in several cases, the addition of a musical repeat would have enabled them to meet the 4-minute minimum requirement.

Performances must be timed from the entry of the candidate and not include sections where the candidate is not performing.

REPERTOIRE

Most centres submitted an appropriate repertoire for both solo and ensemble performances, and moderators commented on the wide range of instruments and styles offered by candidates. Most candidates submitted 2 pieces (some with “musical” repeats inserted, with a few submitting 3 or 4 performances to make up the 4-minute minimum time.

It is not recommended that a candidate submit the same piece twice as a solo and an ensemble, albeit different parts; and performing the same part for both solo and ensemble is not acceptable.

Whilst it may have helped a centre to have all candidates performing the same ensemble, it was felt by moderators that some candidates were unfairly disadvantaged as their part was often either beyond their capabilities or so simple that the evidence to award high marks was not offered in their particular part.

Concerns around ensemble choices were a recurring theme. Several centres submitted pieces which were “solo with accompaniment”. Examples of such practice were piano solos with a drum part added, duets where the candidate performed the melody throughout, often in octaves, or a solo singer with a band accompaniment. Such performances did not offer the candidates the opportunity to display the evidence in the context of an ensemble, which would be necessary to award a mark in the upper bands across all three assessment columns.

There were a few centres that submitted two short pieces for the ensemble. Please note that the one-minute minimum requirement must be contained within one ensemble piece. If an ensemble is submitted that is less than one minute, it cannot be awarded a mark in the top band, in any column, as there is insufficient evidence to support this.

If a candidate has submitted a solo piece or a piece with a recorded backing track as an ensemble, a mark of zero must be awarded for ensemble and the piece assessed as a solo. For example, if the non-ensemble scores 30 (as a solo) and the second solo performance scores 30, the calculation of the total mark will be $(0 + 30 + 30) \text{ (divided by 3) (multiplied by 2) } = 40$.

Please refer to the following documents on the website for guidance on repertoire:

Eduqas ensemble performance guidance

Eduqas ensemble flowchart GCSE

Producing a Sequenced Performance for Eduqas Music GCSE

MARKING

Moderators reported that centres generally submitted accurate and fair marks across all three assessment strands, showing a secure understanding of the assessment criteria.

If candidates are deserving of full marks (of which there were many), centres should not hesitate to award such marks.

There were fewer examples of candidates being double penalised under Accuracy and Technical Control. Single errors in intonation will affect marks for Accuracy, whereas more consistent intonation errors should be penalised under Technical Control.

There were, unfortunately, too many instances where candidates were awarded high marks for Accuracy when the performance did not match the score. As previously mentioned, any deviations from the score must be marked clearly in advance to the recording to justify centre marks.

It is worth pointing out that performance directions are one of the strands for Accuracy, and it may well be in the centre's interest to add dynamics, etc, to a score which does not contain published dynamics.

This year, however, saw a large increase in very simple pre-grade one pieces, for example, one-handed simple piano pieces. Such pieces do not provide the evidence required to access marks in band three or four across the three columns.

For further information regarding applying the criteria, please see the amplification of the criteria available on the Eduqas website.

MUSIC

GCSE

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 2: COMPOSING

Overview of the Component

Composing – AO2

(Compose and develop musical ideas with technical control and coherence)

Candidates were required to compose two compositions, one in response to a brief set by Eduqas, along with a free composition. In total, Component 2 is worth 72 marks, as each composition is marked out of 36 marks. For clarification: there are no penalties in this Component for candidates not reaching the minimum time requirement, or for exceeding the maximum time requirement. Assessment must reflect the musical content: short pieces are often self-penalising as they lack sufficient development of the initial ideas, while very long compositions are often overly repetitive, or lack structural focus. This report will feedback on the main issues which moderators faced this year. It will focus initially on the centre assessments, but also on administrative procedures as there were many shortcomings which hindered the moderation process. Though the report is detailed, centres are advised to consider all requirements thoroughly.

Centre Assessments

Moderators this year reported that centre assessments were extremely varied. Accurate judgements were acknowledged when careful consideration had been given to the assessment grid when awarding marks. Inaccurate judgements were evident when the assessment criteria had not been applied with sufficient rigour, resulting in marks that did not accurately reflect the quality of the work.

In many cases, the marking was more often generous than harsh, particularly when dealing with a weaker cohort; the best candidates in a centre might still not be deserving of top marks.

As a general observation, it seemed that judgements were usually quite well placed at either end of the range, as standards are more obvious when the outcome is excellent or limited. Mid-range pieces were often assessed too generously. The judgements suggested by some centres were inconsistent across the range. There were many examples where centres had awarded Band 4 ('skilful' and 'highly effective') to pieces, when in fact, Band 3 ('generally effective') or even Band 2 ('simplistic') was more appropriate, particularly when ideas were repeated rather than developed. In such instances, marks were often a whole band – if not two bands - out. Some work had been considered as Band 3 when, for example, the harmonies were dissonant (though clearly not meant to be) and the outcome was lacking in rhythmic interest and melodic focus and flow.

There were also examples of harsh marking, though this situation was far less common. When the compositions had received the benefit of excellent performing and recording facilities, occasionally the quality of the recording had been assessed rather than the musical content of the piece. Centres using Logic Pro, Sibelius, Musescore often submitted high quality work with creative ideas and the centres were marking them accurately. A portion of centres were using Bandlab and their candidates were copy/pasting loops; often the marking was incredibly generous as the work was under-developed and lacked evidence of technical control of the musical elements.

Top placed Band 4 candidates were able to use advanced creative techniques such as modulation, polyphonic writing, and effective instrumentation. Their work demonstrated contrasts in mood, clear structural development, stylistic awareness and skilful development of ideas. Any candidates/centres unsure of what exactly constitutes 'highly effective' must refer to subject expectations in the Appendix for GCSE Music, and judge how well the candidate has shown their musical understanding and control of elements as itemised there. In contrast, many Band 3 and below candidates showed limited development of their musical ideas and depended on repetition as the main device to extend their work, instead of introducing multiple ideas and developing them using musical elements such as texture, dynamics, or harmony through various compositional devices and techniques. This was not always reflected correctly in the marking.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO2.1a Creativity and development of musical ideas

At the top of the banding, ideas were highly effective. Melodic ideas were musically shaped and rhythmically interesting, supported by interesting, appropriate chords and explored, contrasted and extended using a variety of devices. Many candidates produced extremely creative and impressive compositions.

However, moderators reported that assessment in this column was the most inconsistent. Many compositions placed in Band 4 for this column could not be agreed, as the content did not fulfil or match the relevant criteria. The main issues noted by moderators were the quality of the initial ideas and the lack of development.

Common weaknesses were identified as:

- Extremely simple melodic or triadic ideas maintained throughout the whole piece.
- Meandering or disjunct melodies with no sense of phrase structure, focus or balance.
- A lack of understanding of key, chords and cadences.
- A reliance on limited and repetitive chord sequences throughout the piece
- A lack of skilful development, as opportunities to develop were missed, or development was only partial, with limited motivic manipulation, or copy and paste in DAWs without change.
- An over-reliance on repetition as in the use of repeat marks, or exact repeats of a section.
- Use of loops or pre-existing samples where candidates described how they mixed or produced the track, rather than creating musical ideas themselves – (samples, given chord progressions, 12 bar blues, use of a chord generator)
- Insufficient contrast and variation, particularly in the use of tone colour, mood, tempo and dynamics.

Some candidates remained too dependent on musical influences and ideas that were not their own. Please advise that credit cannot be given for anything that is not their own work, as such practices risk crossing the line into the realms of malpractice and plagiarism. Furthermore, any use of technology that generates the musical ideas for the candidate cannot be given credit: candidates are required to create their own ideas to show their understanding of the musical elements, therefore the arranging of pre-existing musical patterns is not what is required. Some centre assessments were extremely inaccurate, over-crediting content that was limited and static. Conversely, some lower-marked compositions showed more creativity than was reflected in the centre's assessment: for example, where centre marks were in Band 3, yet candidates had demonstrated highly effective development of a successful motif and in many cases included a countermelody, created musical shapes with interplay between the parts and including some highly effective contrasts throughout.

AO2.1b Technical control of musical elements and resources

The strongest compositions were extremely effective and sophisticated as candidates controlled the elements with mature musical understanding, writing well for the chosen instruments, from solo pieces to full orchestra. Such work was usually credited fairly with marks at the top of Band 4 and agreed by moderators. However, over-awarding was still evident. Many centres gave credit for the use and control of music technology, not fully considering how the elements had been used and controlled. Marking was often seen to be in the top band, despite a wide variety of musical elements not being evident. Though candidates often demonstrated competence in software and DAW use, this did not equate to showing a secure understanding of musical content and compositional techniques. Mention was made of soundscapes (such as space exploration/ haunted house/horror film tracks) as compositions which used monophonic chromatic ideas and rhythm and pitch as sound effects, often displaying no more than a limited understanding and control of the musical elements.

Many centres were too generous, often awarding Band 3, when a Band 2 was more suitable. In some cases, moderators reported that simple content and partial development (Band 2) had been assessed as Band 4.

To ensure appropriate judgments of technical control, please advise candidates of the following.

- **Melody:** Ensure melodic ideas consist of balanced phrases that are not solely dependent on basic motifs and short patterns
- **Harmony:** Display an appropriate understanding of harmony at this level by not over-using root position chords, and include interesting harmonic content that is well varied and a secure support to the melodic ideas, refining the work to avoid unintended and awkward dissonances
- **Rhythm:** Ensure appropriate rhythmic balance and musicality, some contrast and musical interest
- **Instrumentation:** Even when DAWs are used to compose, candidates must consider the designated instruments and should not include ideas that are impossible in real performance (e.g., inappropriate spacing or positions for piano/keyboard, not composing chords for a single line instrument, impossible double stopping for strings or not extending beyond the range of the instrument or voice)
- **Texture:** Ensure some evidence of textural control through variation and contrasts (i.e., not all melody and basic chordal accompaniment throughout a piece).
- **Expression:** Performance directions were not always considered.

AO2.1c Structure and stylistic coherence

The marking in this column was more accurate, possibly as it is obvious whether the outcome has successfully fulfilled the brief. Centres were able to credit candidates appropriately for well-structured work with pieces which captured a sense of the intended style and character.

Marks were lost in this column when:

- a composition was coherent but did not fit the brief
- the organisation of a piece was unclear
- the overall structure of a piece was ineffective (lacking contrasts, overly long, meandering)
- uneven handling of musical ideas and formulaic structures detracted from the overall cohesion.
- the stylistic intention / character had not been successfully realised
- no brief had been provided, and it was not possible to credit the musical intention.

Candidates must be advised:

- To ensure there is a clear overall structure (or description of ideas and events if programmatic/cinematic), including transitions and a convincing conclusion. Fade-outs must be discouraged, as they do not demonstrate control over musical closure, and repeat marks avoided as this impedes development.
- To refine ideas to ensure musical conviction in terms of coherence and stylistic intention.
- To provide more appropriate briefs for the free compositions, clearly outlining audience, occasion, and stylistic intent. Greater autonomy in task design and individual choice of brief would help reduce the prevalence of formulaic outcomes and support more distinctive and individual musical voices.

Response to the chosen briefs

The coursework was extremely varied and interesting in style and creativity, and many candidates engaged meaningfully with the compositional process responding thoughtfully to the parameters of the task. Some moderators felt that the standard of compositions was lower than in previous years with candidates not providing compositions that developed ideas or used resources in a 'highly' effective way, stating that there were 'gaps' in musical understanding, especially in the mid/low-range compositions. A number of portfolios demonstrated imaginative starting points and a willingness to experiment with musical ideas, but these were not always sustained with technical consistency; much work was competent and stylistically aware, even when development or structural control was limited. There seemed to be an increase in the number of candidates just submitting one composition.

Areas of Study

1. Musical Forms and Devices

Compose a piece of music for a concert held by a local historical society which makes use of more than one type of cadence.

This was a reasonably popular choice. Candidates who used this brief to display their understanding of the Western Classical Tradition were the most successful, presenting clearly structured, well-balanced phrases and correct inclusion and placement of cadences. Many provided a traditional notated score that demonstrated their thoughts and intentions, writing for simple chamber ensembles, instrumental soloists or duets and using a variety of cadences to modulate and extend phrases. Some harmonic content was advanced and impressive. There were one or two exceptions where a rock or jazz piece fulfilled the brief convincingly. For lower-marked candidates, this felt more like a technical exercise as the content of the cadences often consisted of block chords, not always very well controlled. Weaker submissions were extremely basic and did not display a sufficient grasp of harmony or phrasing: rather than carefully constructed phrases and cadences, candidates used triadic four-bar patterns and counted this as their use of cadence, so the brief was not fully recognised or achieved successfully. In limited outcomes the work suffered from a lack of cadences, very occasionally not even in evidence at the end of a piece.

2. Music for Ensemble

Compose a vocal trio, with or without accompaniment, to be performed in a wedding ceremony. Choose suitable words or write your own.

This was a less popular choice. The pieces submitted in this option covered lots of different styles and genres – some very successful, displaying highly effective control of vocal harmonies, word-setting, textural variation, displaying strong stylistic awareness and musical understanding. Most chose suitable lyrics (some interestingly using Latin texts). The best recordings were ones that incorporated 'live' vocals. Weaker compositions (which were in the majority) were inconsistent and rather limited in terms of technical control, particularly with regards to the melodic and harmonic material and the word-setting. The overuse of unison singing in some pieces impeded further textural development and contrasts. Sometimes the writing for voices was not always controlled well with insufficient thought given to the vocal ranges. The accompaniments – when included at this level - were often chordal and very triadic. Some pieces featured very static rhythmic writing which clearly has a place, but was at times overused, making the pieces stagnant and lacking in development. Some instances of a capella vocal trio writing exported from a DAW or similar, gave no real guide to intent. Finally, some candidates did not acknowledge the fact that a wedding is meant to be a joyous occasion; in these circumstances it was felt that the response to the brief was not a successful one and this affected credit. Moderators questioned whether this option was suitable for some candidates.

3. Film Music

Compose music for the opening scenes in an exciting documentary film about space exploration.

This set brief was easily the most popular, with some excellent and exciting outcomes, both orchestral and in a digital style using technology. The most successful took inspiration from the likes of Holst and John Williams; these pieces were predominantly orchestral, and the candidates demonstrated their control of the instruments and elements, focussing on developing melody and using various devices to extend and contrast the content.

In terms of overall structure, there was some success with candidates who based their ideas around a journey through space (through composed). Others did not manage to create a coherent and well-structured piece of music with adequate musical development of ideas. Many candidates saw this as a music technology exercise and were clearly more absorbed in the technical rather than the musical aspects. Moderators found it more difficult to award creativity in lots of drone/texture based compositions, which though appropriate to the style of a space documentary offered soundscapes with sustained ideas which did not progress or develop. The use of sound effects and samples was common, and the structures were compromised with fade outs at the end – the ‘floating off into space’ imagery. These were not effective in terms of demonstrating the candidate’s musical knowledge or technical control of the elements; the results included little melodic or harmonic content as short motifs were layered up, and randomly littered with percussion sounds and vox samples of countdowns and JFK speeches. There were some very weak compositions in this brief consisting of very basic synth sounds on a DAW.

Many candidates missed the word ‘exciting’ in the brief. Therefore, though some submitted chordal and beautiful ‘Hans Zimmer’ like compositions, the outcomes were sparse, relying on static harmonies and textures and lacking rhythmic interest, individual creativity, development and...excitement. This affected marks in all columns, and many of these compositions had been too generously marked by the centre as the expected stylistic conventions of the genre such as **leitmotifs** or recurring thematic ideas were missing. Their absence weakened the expressive and structural coherence.

4. Popular Music

Compose a song to be performed by a student group in a county 'Battle of the Bands' competition. Choose suitable words or write your own.

Similar issues as regards the response to the brief were evident here also, as many candidates submitted instrumental pieces which lacked a vocal line or any lyrics. As a result, the work struggled to fulfil the brief, which very clearly stipulated that it was a song with words/lyrics that was expected. Some candidates submitted a 'lighter' pop song which did not always fully meet the requirements either. Musical styles ranged from 1930s jazz to nu-metal with most candidates composing to a verse/chorus/middle 8 structure. Fade-outs were common (which have been advised against in numerous reports). Lots of examples of rap/hip-hop/drill trap and EDM tended to be repetitive and lacked development - a change of key, chordal progressions or accompaniment style would have enhanced the result.

The most successful songs were those recorded by the candidates themselves – multi-tracking their own instrumental lines as well as vocal harmonies, with moderators identifying a few superb examples which were stylistic, musically coherent and highly effective. Many centres were fortunate to have access to excellent production facilities (though this did not affect the overall mark as it was the musical content that is considered).

Less successful results included examples that again had been viewed as a music tech project with the emphasis on effects, pre-existing loops and ideas. Some candidates did not deviate from a standard I-IV-V-I chord pattern, and this clearly limited their creativity. Some candidates included written lyrics and stated that they could be sung with the track but with no guidance as to how. Others were not naturally singers, and their vocal lines were not 'singable', or did not work with the lyrics chosen. Word-setting was stronger when a singer was performing. Despite detailed feedback issued previously, there were many examples where candidates had found others to perform their work, without evidence or explanation as to how these ideas had been taught. Please note that guide tracks **must** be included when the notation is not available. Moderators all commented on the difficulty – even impossibility - of being able to discern the exact input of the candidate.

In conclusion moderators agreed that candidates were latching on to one part of the set brief but often not responding to the whole thing – and this cost them marks:

- In the first set brief, there was evidence of all sorts of research into historical societies – all very imaginative, but the intention to include cadences was at times overlooked.
- Wedding trios were often solo wedding songs with backing vocals and not trios as such.
- Many candidates latched onto the 'Space' brief but looked no further than that word; some compositions were totally devoid of excitement or were engrossed in events about alien invasions and the like.
- The 'Battle of the Bands' frequently missed a recorded vocal line with lyrics, which is essential for full realisation of the compositional intent.

Free Compositions

A wide range of styles were in evidence, often reflecting individual musical interests and skills. It was encouraging to see that many centres supported their students in taking a creative and independent approach. It was also noted that some centres imposed rigid frameworks regarding structure and idea development. While such guidance is important, excessive constraints appeared to limit student creativity and autonomy; in some centres there were similar outcomes, especially with the space brief and EDM free compositions. Free composition briefs varied considerably in quality. Some were well-conceived and clearly articulated, allowing candidates to write with a strong sense of purpose and audience. Others were ineffective and did not follow the exam board convention; they lacked sufficient detail, omitting key contextual information, thus limiting the moderator's ability to assess the alignment between brief and outcome. In a minority of cases, the final composition bore little resemblance to the stated brief.

In some centres the free brief was very similar to the Eduqas brief chosen, resulting in two similar pieces of music being submitted in a portfolio. Some candidates chose the same brief for both compositions which is not what is required in this specification.

Many of the issues already highlighted for concern in the set brief pieces obviously also apply here, namely avoidance of awkward endings/ fade-outs, repeat marks, repetitive patterns, overly long pieces and the like. Previous Principal Moderator reports have frequently advised against the use of existing chordal patterns (such as 12-bar Blues ideas) and solo drum pieces. Both are acceptable, but candidates must be encouraged to be imaginative and creative with the Blues style to ensure individual creativity can be credited, and candidates must be made aware that a solo drum piece cannot access the full range of marks as the technical control of such musical elements as melody and harmony will not be displayed.

Administration

Moderators are tremendously grateful to all centres that follow guidelines and upload all the necessary documentation correctly as required. This ensures that the moderation procedures can be followed with ease. Unfortunately, feedback from moderators this year has been negative in many cases.

Issues included:

- Late submissions, well past the deadlines and any extensions that had been granted
- Outdated marksheets
- Missing GDPR declarations, marksheets, candidate details, and missing work (audios/scores/leadsheets)
- Clerical errors (mismatches between lamis and candidate labelling, incorrect marks input to lamis)
- Muddled labelling (including mixing up the set brief piece and free)
- Component 1 uploaded instead of Component 2
- Unnecessary duplication of tracks
- Incorrect file formats (including zip files) which could not always be accessed
- Mismatched audio and scores
- Submission of individual parts/pages rather than one supporting score or explanatory leadsheets (some candidates uploaded over 20 files on lamis)
- Incomplete candidate logs

Centres were generally (though not always) quick to respond to requests for additional work or corrections to their upload. Unfortunately, due to the half term break, there was a wait for some requested items which delayed the moderation process.

Centres are reminded that careful attention to administrative accuracy is essential to support a fair and smooth moderation process.

Uploading

For clarification, five files are expected:

- Candidate Log (with both authentication signatures)
- Composition 1 (set brief) audio
- Composition 1 score / lead sheet
- Composition 2 (free brief) audio
- Composition 2 score / lead sheet

If a candidate needs to upload additional guide tracks to explain and demonstrate how parts have been taught to performers, that is permitted. Otherwise, any supporting work which contains multiple screenshots or pages must be combined in a single document.

Candidate Logs

This is not a logbook, though described by many as such. There is no requirement to detach the marksheet; please upload the entire candidate log which includes the marksheet at the end. Moderators acknowledged that many candidate logs were well-written especially in confirming compositional authorship and the realisation of the brief, as the candidates gave reasoning and explanation of what, why and how they have made their musical choices. While the candidate log is not assessed, it is a crucial requirement. Most logs were word-processed which made them easy to read and allowed candidates to rework their drafts. Some were handwritten and less easy to read at times.

Overall, the quality and depth of content varied considerably. While some were a tremendous aid to the moderation process, others were extremely limited, and of little or no help to the moderator. All questions in the log **must** be answered. The requirement for candidates to explain details of musical ideas not their original work was too often ignored or lacking in detail. This is particularly important as it directly affects the credit. It is understandably difficult for the centre to realise a candidate's dependence on non-original content at times, but as the teacher has to sign a declaration confirming the work is original, the acknowledgment of any work that is not their own is crucial and must be understood by all candidates. Many candidates used automatic drummers, or pre-recorded loops in the DAW, and/or relied on arpeggiators and synths to produce/arrange the harmony and texture. Although there is a musical element of this in the selection of appropriate ideas or sounds, it does not exemplify the candidates' understanding or control of elements. In supporting this, please advise that not all technology is suitable for examination purposes at GCSE standard; candidates must avoid those that consist of drag and drop loops and vocal samples, as these cannot be credited as their own work. This specification is aimed at the candidate's understanding, use and control of the musical elements that are of their own creation, not an arrangement of pre-created patterns available otherwise.

Candidates often did not acknowledge all performers or submit lead tracks to help the moderator understand the extent of help they had with realising their composition. This situation was often unsatisfactory as the candidate's input and creativity was not clear and therefore could not be credited by moderators. Candidate logs must clarify how the candidate led the creative process—simply stating they "told the performer what to do" is not sufficient to ensure authenticity. Please refer to previous reports and requirements for clarification.

Teacher Comments

These are not essential, but extremely useful for clarification when there were issues (such as only one piece submitted, or candidate absences/missing scores or lead sheets/school refuser). Some candidates referenced a composition teacher out of school who had supported them, but no details as to the extent of the help had been given. This is clearly not satisfactory and must be taken into account when marking and explained, either by the candidate in their log or in the teacher comments.

Scores and Lead sheets

Many scores and lead sheets were of excellent quality, but others were very basic screenshots (often unannotated, which is of little use to the moderator). In some cases, candidates submitted PowerPoint presentations which included the necessary information. When the documentation is minimal, it was often difficult to see how the piece had been constructed, especially in terms of structure and development. In general, those created using notation software were better than those that submitted screenshots from a DAW. There is no need for both scores and leadsheets for the same composition; candidates must be guided on the clearer option. Many weaker candidates failed to provide accurate or worthwhile scores and/or annotations, if any at all. A huge proportion of DAW screenshots (predominantly BandLab) gave no indication as to which instrumental sound belonged to which MIDI track and many remained unedited; in such cases, a detailed written account would have been a more appropriate way of submitting written evidence of the composition. There are good examples of how to successfully do an annotated screenshot from DAW available from the Eduqas Music team.

Lead sheets for vocal pieces or songs were frequently not successful with issues such as missing lyrics, missing chordal and melodic outlines, melodic content not explained, or chords and/or lyrics noted on the leadsheet not matching with the audio. Some candidates who provided just lyrics and chords for their lead sheets did not explain details or musical intentions of rhythm, texture, instrumentation and other general details, which caused problems when moderating Ao2.1b. Candidates who compose by ear could use the ***'If there was no score or other performers were involved'*** section of the composition log to include photographic evidence along with annotated rehearsal notes and the chord patterns employed. This could be an effective alternative to a traditional score or leadsheet, particularly for candidates who have weaker literacy skills.

Recordings

Audio tracks taken directly from the software were clear, though recordings varied from being of a professional quality, to live takes in a noisy classroom. Clearly vast differences in technology were available in different centres. Recordings generally matched submissions, although some issues with balance, clarity, and synchronisation (particularly when combining live and MIDI elements) were noted. In a few cases, recordings lacked key components (for example, missing vocals in song-based briefs) which affected the realisation of the compositional intent. Not all centres submitted recordings in the file formats as requested.

Moderators identified issues such as:

- Poor audio quality (e.g., recorded onto a phone).
- Unbalanced recordings where some lines were inaudible or too quiet.
- Some parts too loud (e.g., candidates overused automation with volume and reduced middle harmonies and rhythmic content too much, focusing on drum and melody lines).
- Audio files frequently missing the beginning or end of the music.
- Audio files with built in DAW metronome still audible.
- Audio files over-running for, in some cases, 10 mins plus.
- Instances of people talking before, during and after live performance recordings (some moderators reported of teacher conversations about confidential school issues). Centres are reminded to remain professional and provide uninterrupted performances without conversations or other material.
- Some recordings differed slightly from the score, and this discrepancy was not always noted in the candidate log. Instances where candidates had recorded vocals were always easier to follow than those where there were not, and these tended to be more successful.
- Some centres had uploaded earlier versions of a composition or recorded over a previous version without editing any overlaps.

The importance of carefully checking all audio tracks was stressed by moderators. Best practice advice for candidates was outlined clearly in the Principal Moderator's Report for 2024, which is still available on the Eduqas website.

Summary of key points

- The Assessment grid for Component 2: Composing, the Guidance for assessing Component 2, plus additional advice for composing within the areas of study can be found in Appendix B of the Music GCSE specification.
- Correct procedures for completion, guidelines for uploading and expectations are available on the Eduqas website, and much advice has been given in previous Principal Moderator reports.
- Continued engagement with exemplar materials and standardisation resources would be beneficial for some centres to ensure correct administrative procedures are followed and achieve greater consistency when assessing the coursework.
- Keep the requirements of the GCSE Music assessment criteria for Composing at the forefront of all musical decisions made and guidance given. Assess to the assessment criteria in the specification, not to the standards of the centre cohort.
- Check all recordings for balance/missing parts/interference/background noise.
- When other performers have been involved in recording a candidate's composition, either the notation or a guide track performed by the candidate should be included. No credit can be awarded for the relevant ideas otherwise.
- All loops/autoplay/auto-accompaniments/auto chord patterns/arpeggiations and non-original content must be clearly credited by the candidate in the relevant section in the candidate log.

MUSIC

GCSE

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 3: APPRAISING

Overview of the Component

Just under fourteen thousand candidates sat the appraising examination this year. This produced consistencies with previous exam papers which are worthy of comment.

Once again, candidates appeared to be comfortable with the general format of the appraising examination, however some of the more problematic issues were as follows:

- Questions on the set works (*Badinerie* and *Africa*) were delivered for the fourth time this year. Whilst some parts of each question were able to be answered simply by listening to the extract and examining the score, the majority of the questions required learning to have taken place in advance. Unfortunately it was frequently apparent to examiners that very little, if any, preparation had occurred and centres are encouraged to ensure that their candidates are as familiar with all aspects of the set works as possible. In particular, candidates need to be able to identify the theoretical aspects of both works and should be familiar with chords, cadences, compositional devices and modulations.
- Describing musical features and elements continued to cause problems for many candidates. When asked to describe the constituent ingredients of a melody, for example, candidates should focus primarily on pitch and rhythm and should not include any references to performance techniques of any kind. When describing the constituent ingredients of texture, instrumentation, tonality and harmony they should be using the appropriate musical vocabulary associated with these specific musical elements. Unfortunately, many candidates failed to use relevant vocabulary or made references to other, unrelated, musical elements instead.
- The dictation question continued to cause problems for many candidates this year. A significant number failed to write the time signature in the correct place on the score and the majority failed to identify the key of D major. Many candidates found it difficult to complete the pitch of the melody and this musicianship skill continues to need further development.
- Candidates demonstrated a significant amount of musical awareness when comparing contrasting versions of the same piece of music. However, some found the organisation of their answer problematic and provided answers referring to the original version of the piece rather than the contrasting version on which the question was based.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Question 1 SET WORK – Section A from *Badinerie* (Musical Forms and Devices)

- (a) Well answered, with a significant number of candidates securing full marks.
- (b) Reading the viola clef proved to be tricky and only a small number of candidates correctly identified the pitch of the first note.
- (c) Whilst the second answer was more successful, this question caused significant issues for most candidates.
- (d) This was slightly more successfully answered than the previous question, although for the majority it was still problematic.
- (e) The responses to this question were very hit and miss and frequently either totally correct or totally incorrect.
- (f)(i) & (f)(ii) These questions were well answered with most candidates scoring at least one mark for each. For (fi) the most popular answers were *anacrusis*, *arpeggios*, *plays the melody*, *sequences* and *trills/ornaments*. For (fii) the most popular answers were *quavers*, *on the beat*, *broken chords*, *accompaniment* and *staccato*. Although two marks were allocated to each of these questions, it was not stipulated that candidates had to restrict themselves to only two answers and this proved to be beneficial to the overall success rate.

Question 2 2nd Movement from *Beethoven's Symphony No 7* (Musical Forms and Devices)

- (a) An equal spread of each option.
- (b) Almost entirely correct.
- (c) An equal spread of each option.
- (d) Approximately half of all candidates were correct.
- (e) Mostly correct.
- (f) Mostly correct.
- (g) An extremely mixed bag of responses as tonality clearly caused issues for many candidates.
- (h) Almost entirely correct.
- (i) This was fairly well answered with most candidates including the words *faster* and *louder* in their answer, scoring at least two marks. The other most popular answers were *different instruments*, *solo section* and *improvised*. This question contained a clearly designated line for each answer, therefore only the first answer on each line could be credited and everything else was ignored. Fortunately most candidates were, on the whole, careful to write only one answer on each line. A word of caution though is that candidates were required to restrict their comments to the version stated in the question; in this case version 2. Those who provided answers explaining the ways in which version 1 was different were not awarded any marks.

Q3 Who Will Buy from Oliver! (Music for Ensemble)

- (a) Hardly any candidates achieved two marks, however most were successful with one correct identification.
- (b) The most popular answers were *arpeggios* and *glissando*. Unfortunately many said *plucked/pizzicato* or *arco*.
- (c) Very hit and miss.
- (d) Fairly well answered.
- (e) Very hit and miss with a significant number thinking that it was more than an octave.
- (f) Well answered with most candidates achieving at least two out of three marks.
- (g) Candidates found this term difficult to define and there were numerous extremely creative answers, many of which had nothing to do with tempo.
- (h) Rather hit and miss although there were more correct answers than incorrect ones.
- (i) Well identified.

Q4 Sing, Sing, Sing (Music for Ensemble)

- (a) Well answered with most candidates achieving at least two out of three marks.
- (b) For every candidate who identified the walking bass there was at least one who said that it was syncopated.
- (c) Many students thought that they could hear a wide range of woodwind instruments, with the saxophone being a particular favourite.
- (d) It was surprising how many candidates said *mezzo forte*.
- (e)(i) & (e)(ii) These questions caused problems for the majority of candidates as they struggled to use vocabulary correctly associated with each of the four musical elements. Additionally, whilst the instrumentation and the harmony could be described in fairly general terms, the texture and the tonality changed during the extract and, as such, candidates were required to provide locations (at the start / during the middle / at the end) in order to achieve the marks. In terms of the instrumentation, despite being told not to simply list instruments, that is, in fact, what many candidates went on to do.

Q5 *Por una cabeza* (Film Music)

- (a) This was fairly successful with the most popular answers being *conjunct*, *high pitch range*, *sequence* and *ornaments*. Many simply said disjunct. No one commented on the structure of the melody.
- (b) As with all questions concerning harmony, the responses to this question were very hit and miss.
- (c) This was also fairly successful with the most popular answers being *minor*, *louder*, *piano*, *thicker texture* and *more instruments*. Unfortunately many candidates described features found in Section A which therefore scored zero marks.
- (d) Many candidates found it difficult to verbalise their descriptions for this question. The most popular answers were *accordion*, *countermelody* and *higher pitch range*.
- (e) Mostly correct.
- (f) Fairly well identified.
- (g) Despite being presented with the structure (A B A1) at the beginning of the question, this was very poorly answered.
- (h) Candidates were required to talk about the musical elements included in the music and link them to the scene that was described in the question. Many did so extremely successfully. However, some only listed the musical elements whilst others only described the nervousness of the young woman. Neither of these interpretations was awarded a mark.

Q6 *Jaws* (Film Music)

- (a) Mostly correct.
- (b) Roughly half of all candidates identified the semitone.
- (c) Candidates seemed pleased to have the opportunity to discuss the suspense and horror of a piece of music that was extremely familiar and, as a result, many answers scored full marks. The most successful answers discussed the use of structural devices, instrumental techniques, textural devices, dynamic effects, the use of tonality and harmony, melodic features, rhythmic features and compositional devices and linked them to the action in a number of interesting and creative ways. There were significantly fewer candidates this year who simply offered a list of musical features without any links to the purpose and intention of the music. Similarly, there were fewer candidates who kept repeating the word(s) suspense and horror as the links at the end of each statement.

Q7 SET WORK - *Instrumental from Africa* (Popular Music)

- (a) Whilst many identified the correct section, a wide variety of answers were given, many of which bore no resemblance to the structure of the piece.
- (b) Similarly, for candidates who were unfamiliar with the piece the answers to this question were merely flights of fancy.
- (c) This was fairly well identified.
- (d) This was very hit and miss.
- (e) Approximately a quarter of candidates were correct.
- (f) & (g) Familiarity with the set work was the key to the success of these questions and this was immediately apparent when marking the candidate responses. Many were not awarded any marks as they chose to talk about Verse 2 rather than the extract.
- (h) This was a theory based question which usually meant that either both or neither of the answers was correct.
- (i) As with questions a, b, f and g, knowledge of the piece was crucial. The vast majority simply said *chorus*, which wasn't specific enough to be awarded a mark.

Q8 *It's Getting Better* (Popular Music)

- (a)(i) For the most part, the responses to the dictation were either totally correct or totally incorrect, however there were occasions when one or two marks were awarded.
- (a)(ii) Mostly incorrect.
- (a)(iii) Approximately half of the candidates were correct.
- (a)(iv) Almost all candidates were correct.
- (a)(v) Approximately a third of candidates were correct.
- (b)(i) Despite the fact that the majority of correct answers were 3/4 rather than 6/8, there was a high success rate with this question.
- (b)(ii) Good success rate for this question, and nearly all candidates remembered to state the word 'major' in full.
- (b)(iii) Unfortunately many candidates said F instead of F#.

Summary of key points

- It is imperative that candidates are as familiar as possible with the set works.
- Candidates should be familiar with each of the musical elements and should be able to utilise appropriate musical vocabulary when describing them.
- On the exam paper, where a specific number of answers are required – for example, two – only the first two answers will be considered. Candidates must not write more than one answer on a single line as only the first answer will be credited.
- Where no specific number of answers are requested, candidates are invited to describe as many musical features as possible and examiners will credit all correct observations.
- Negative answers will not be credited, and a candidate who describes what is not present in a piece of music will not receive any marks. However, this will not be the case when candidates are required to compare two pieces of music.
- Tick box answers should not exceed the number of ticks stated in the question.
- With regards to the longer answer question, candidates are advised to discuss a range of musical elements ensuring that they are linked to the purpose and intention of the music.
- For the completion of the dictation question, candidates are advised to write in pencil so that any amendments to the score can be made as easily and as clearly as possible.

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 2240 4300**

Email: music@eduqas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [GCSE Music | Eduqas](#)

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