

GCSE (9-1)

Moderators' report

MUSIC

J536

For first teaching in 2016

J536/01/02/03/04

Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

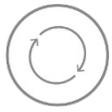
Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

General overview

In this, the second session of the new J536 specification, it has been obvious that the vast majority of Centres have adapted well to the expectations of this specification, and are considerably more comfortable with the requirements. Overall Performing was the strongest element in each of the two components and moderators were able to appreciate some outstanding solo and ensemble performances. By comparison, composition work is often less accomplished, and centres commonly leniently assess this element.

As a result of the revised Ofqual guidance on minimum duration times, there were a number of incidences of Learners submitting performances that lasted for less than the required combined duration time of four minutes. Where this was the case, OCR have applied a sliding scale of mark reduction that relates to the number of seconds by which a performance was under time; the shorter the combined performing time, the greater the mark reduction.

	AfL	<p>Some Centres unnecessarily submitted additional performances, despite the candidate achieving the minimum duration with just two performances.</p> <p>This can be to the detriment of the Learner, especially if the two pieces are of an unequal standard. It is in the Learner's best interest to only submit the two best pieces, one for each unit.</p>
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No penalty was applied to submissions in which the combined duration of the compositions was under three minutes, as shorter compositions are self-penalising anyway.

There were a few examples of ensemble performances that lasted less than a minute. These were penalised through a reduction of 50% to the mark applied to the "Expression, Interpretation and Ensemble Awareness" criteria. Centres were alerted to this via the "Clerical Error" process. Often these ensembles arose from the performance of pieces that lasted considerably more than a minute, but actually contained less than a minute of ensemble work relating to the candidate being assessed. More specific detail on this is available in the section relating to Ensemble performing later in the report.

Ofqual have also adjusted their requirements on the provision of score evidence to accompany performance work for this session, thus enabling reference recordings to be submitted to the moderator. It is however important to note that if a notated score exists this does not replace the need to provide it, even if this means purchasing one. Composers have a right to earn an income from their material, and selling copies of the sheet music is a part of this. A small number of centres did supply reference recordings for this session, and most of these were appropriately provided. Rap music in particular is a genre for which a reference recording is actually necessary. Drum kit accompaniments to popular genre pieces are also less likely to be notated, thus necessitating and justifying a reference recording.

	Misconception	<p>An on-going issue with the provision of score material is vocal scores that are submitted purely as lyrics, sometimes with the chord indications as well. This is not a score; as with any other melodic instrument, a vocal score must include the melody line.</p>
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The linear nature of the qualification reduces the importance of grade boundaries for the separate units, as grades are awarded on the total mark achieved across all three components, as opposed to the marks achieved for each unit. Nevertheless it was the opinion of the June 2019 awarding team that the standard of work represented by the grade boundary mark for Grade 1 and Grade 7 should remain unchanged from the June 2018 session (at 48 and 15 respectively). The grade boundary mark for work representing Grade 4 was reduced by one mark (to 37) for this session in both the NEA units to reflect the quality of the performance and composition work that had been assessed with this total.

Performing

Overall the assessment of performance was found to be accurate from the majority of centres. Where marks needed to be adjusted the majority had been too generous and thus had to be adjusted downwards. Very few centres had been too severe in their marking of performing. The most popular choice of instrument continues to be the voice, with piano following closely behind.

The quality of the submissions was often excellent with a wide range of abilities heard from quite an elementary level to way beyond GCSE standard. There were very few performances from candidates at a very basic level this year.

	Misconception	The awarding of 6 for the difficulty mark was still used quite liberally by many centres. The inflated difficulty marks tended to be for vocalists. Repetitive pieces with a fairly narrow vocal range and relatively straightforward rhythms rarely exceed a difficulty mark of 4.
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The repertoire and range of pieces was frequently taken from contemporary pop, or musical theatre, which confirmed that vocal performances were very much the most popular choice for most candidates. This, at times, posed questions as to the level of difficulty of some of the music. Some accompanists did little to disguise a piano part that consistently doubled the vocal line, thereby potentially reducing the difficulty mark awarded, if the candidate is being led by this. Whilst considering accompaniments, the rise in popularity of recording to backing tracks played back on computers or even mobile phones has given rise to some accompaniments being unevenly balanced, which can sometimes be to the detriment of the Learner.

In some centres, there was a clear emphasis on Learners selecting graded exam music that demonstrates musical competencies more clearly through the technical content of the music. Whilst for the majority, this is a successful strategy; there were also a number of candidates who found themselves struggling for technique as they were working on music that was too difficult for them.

	AfL	In the context of GCSE Music, Learners are always better advised to perform easier pieces well, than to submit pieces that are at, or just beyond, the limit of their performing technique.
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Whilst there were few incidences of very weak performances, some Learners denied themselves the opportunity of reaching the highest mark bands by paying little attention to the score markings or other indicators that pointed to an accurate and successful outcome. Some songs were sung accurately with pitch and intonation of good quality but lacked attention to the detail of the music or the implied nuances that the composer intended. The most successful vocal performances were often those involving repertoire from musical theatre. Some electric, lead guitarists relied on their abilities to create and improvise semi-elaborate 'solos', some of which were excessively distorted and gimmick laden, and therefore not always justifying the highest band of marks.

	AfL	Drum kit performances commonly revolved around the incessant repetition of predictable, rock and pop patterns of four rather than utilising the potential and dynamics of what is often quite an extensive array of cymbals and drums. Drum kit players should be encouraged to show a variety of dynamic, articulation and touch within their performance piece, even though this detail is not necessarily a demand of the score.
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	Misconception	Centres are reminded that a Learner's own composition should not be performed as part of Unit 01/02. This is clearly stated in the specification.
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Beatboxing, rapping and DJ-ing were not overly popular styles utilised by candidates in either unit this year. Overall the sequencing option for performing was also a less popular option, but there were a number of centres for which this was the preferred option with the majority of their candidates. Some of this work was most impressive in terms of the attention to detail that had gone into producing a musically convincing performance. As with all technology performance based work, the provision of documentation that evidences the work and techniques applied by the candidate is of a great help to the moderator in the justification of the assessment. Assessors should also clearly indicate the element of live control that has gone into the final sequenced mix.

	Misconception	Technology based performance work should not include substantial elements of commercially sourced samples or audio. The assessment outcome should focus purely on the editing and manipulation of material programmed and real time recorded by the candidate. The use of commercial material in DJ-ing is of course essential. The difference here is that it must be mixed, edited, and manipulated in real time as part of the performance.
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For the first time, performance work on the Launchpad was submitted for this session, thus once again proving that the specification has the adaptability and flexibility to evolve as new performance practices and technologies enter the musical arena.

Ensemble Performing

There were a minority of candidates who performed with a piano accompaniment or backing track that offered limited ensemble opportunities. When Learners played with other Learners the outcome was invariably fresh, vibrant, and honest. There were many true examples of genuine collaboration and interplay between enthusiastic young musicians.

On a practical level, some centres created problems by not ensuring that the Learner's was the most prominent part in the recording. On some occasions it was necessary to replay a recording several times to gain a full and complete picture of the Learner's contribution.

	Misconception	Arrangements of popular songs were most often used as a way of including several Learners at one time; however, it was clear that there was some variance in the difficulty level of individual parts even though they had been assessed at the same level. For example, though a bass part is an important part of a pop ensemble, the root notes of chords played as minims or crotchets are not valued as highly as an elaborate lead guitar part that might involve a solo section.
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'Bolted-on' parts in ensembles (where a second, simple harmony part is added to what is essentially a solo performance) did not offer the breadth of opportunity for a Learner to display a range of ensemble skills. Some repertoire did not give Learners the opportunity to demonstrate to assessors their ability to recognise and handle parts working together.

There were a few ensemble performances that had very little ensemble interaction and therefore the mark had to be brought right down for the Expression, Interpretation and Ensemble Awareness criteria mark. At the extreme end of this were performances that were (usually) sung to a backing track, with alternating solo lines for the Learners, with occasional unison, and even more occasional harmony. The actual ensemble interaction in these pieces was invariably considerably less than a minute, thus not

meeting the specification requirement. In these cases, as explained at the start of the report, the “Expression, Interpretation and Ensemble Awareness” criteria mark was halved via the Clerical Error process, prior to the moderation of the whole centre being applied.

Composition.

There were many highly musical and successful compositions. In particular, Learners enjoyed the ability to use technology to create their pieces. Through the application and use of a variety of computer software programmes, they were able to layer their ideas or notate a detailed score. Screen shots of the composition software’s graphic notation were very helpful, especially if they were then annotated to describe exactly what was going on in the composition process. Generally, the vast majority of centres take the provision of composition score evidence extremely seriously.

	Misconception	A screenshot on its own is not sufficient detail for a score.
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	AfL	<p>Some submissions accompany the screenshots with impressive detailed written analyses of the content of each section of the composition. These often reveal the higher musical understanding of the Learner, and are a great help in justifying the assessor’s award of a high mark.</p> <p>Others annotate just the screenshot itself, providing information relating to the overall structure of the piece, the chords used in each section, or pointing out where the figurations of the chord patterns have been changed to vary the textural content.</p> <p>In Film music compositions, details of the programme can also be added to the score.</p>
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A number of centres submitted composition score evidence as written accounts. The key fact is that the chosen method of score submission must provide the moderator with all the musical detail and content that enables the chronology of the composition to be followed in lieu of a “traditional” score. In many cases, this was done well by the Learner. The moderator was provided with a wealth of musical detail that included the use of chords, textures and figurations, structure, dynamics and tempo. However, some inadequate submissions said very little about the musical content of the composition; some were more evaluative, or talked about the inspiration behind the composition, and this is not a requirement of the specification.

	OCR support	<p>Further guidance on acceptable methods of score submission can be found at Detailed guidance on acceptable submissions can be found at: http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/379273-composition-for-integrated-portfolio-and-practical-component.pdf</p>
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Overall, the majority of compositions submitted used technology in one form or another. It has been encouraging to see an increasing number of Learners using ICT to produce their compositions, managing software and other add-ons with impressive understanding and assurance. However, the ease by which themes and fragments can be copied, pasted and partially extended can lead to the loss of key elements such as musical structure, development and modulation. Adding many strands of different timbres, based on the repetition of a single idea was not always successful, particularly if the initial idea lacked quality. The reliance on repetition of patterns, some of which were basic and standard in their construction, was a common feature of those compositions that used Garage Band and Logic.

	Misconception	<p>Timbres and effects are often used to great effect in creating a soundscape that is pleasing to the ear; assessors need to beware that such pieces are often musically simple, despite the superficially impressive outcome.</p> <p>This was frequently the case with the AOS4 “atmospheric” style compositions submitted for Unit 03/04; it was also a significant cause of lenient marking in Unit 01/02 as well.</p>
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The use of score writing packages such as Sibelius and Musescore also remains a popular option. This can enable Learners to write impressively virtuosic pieces for a variety of instruments. On occasions this can stray into the realms of impossibility, and while this is not necessarily significantly detrimental to the assessment, it should be avoided.

	AfL	<p>If using score writing packages, it is good practice to encourage Learners to add musical performance detail to the score, such as dynamics, articulation and other performance directions. This is very good preparation for higher level courses in Music such as A Level.</p>
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	Misconception	<p>Centres should be aware that compositions based on standard chord patterns, such as the 12 Bar Blues have to be exceptionally creative to justify marks in the top two criteria band for composition. This is because so much of the composition material is provided to the Learner, in terms of the chords being used, and the use of standard clichés within the piece (e.g. a walking bass pattern or a boogie woogie style piano accompaniment).</p> <p>Likewise compositions that are entirely based on a four chord pattern throughout may not have the musical creativity and contrast to access the higher mark bands.</p>
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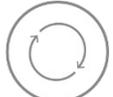
There were many compositions that had been marked far too high by centres. Centres that were found to be out of tolerance gave out marks in the top band (26-30 for Unit 01/02, and 21-24 for Unit 03/04) quite freely. Many were assessing compositions higher than the 11-15 / 9-12 band that had significant repetition or a lack of musicality. Compositions in the highest band for either unit should be musically accomplished, and stylish, through which the Learner displays excellent development of ideas, as demonstrated through the advanced use of a wide range of the musical elements. Compositions in the 21-25 / 17-20 band should also be musically successful, with the development of musical ideas again being a priority, through the use and exploitation of a range of musical elements.

	Misconception	<p>The two most significant and complex elements (in terms of their successful interaction) are melody and harmony. It is therefore difficult for compositions that focus, for example, on rhythmic development (with only limited, or even non-existent use of melody and harmony) to access the top two mark bands.</p> <p>This is of particular relevance to Unit 03/04 Rhythms of the World compositions where a number of centres submitted predominantly rhythm only “Samba” or “African Drumming” compositions.</p> <p>These invariably sound impressive, and stylish, but the assessment outcome is restricted because of the lack of understanding evidenced of melody and harmony.</p>
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In Unit 03/04, examples of all four areas of study were seen in the compositions with the most common being AOS4 and AOS5. All eight stimuli were used with the image, set of words and chords being the most popular.

Most Learners were careful to use the stimulus required for composing although some did not use the stimulus exactly as it appeared on OCR's original paper. Also, some learners chose not to introduce the stimulus until later in their compositions thus potentially inhibiting the marks they received for the "Relationship to the Set Brief" criteria.

Unfortunately, some centres had clearly not read and assimilated the requirements of the unit before the start of the year. This led to some Learners used the wrong stimulus for the Area of Study chosen, thus reducing the "Relationship to the Set Brief" criteria mark.

	AfL	Carefully read through and consider the Briefs and stimuli with the Learners, as part of the preparation work for the composition in this unit.
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Whilst many Learners made effective and creative use of their chosen stimulus, there were also a significant number of cases in which the connection between the Area of Study rubric and the stimulus was tenuous to say the least, most frequently in those that used the Image stimulus. The image suggested a mysterious figure alone in a dark wood. Learners who captured this mood in the opening section of their composition inevitably made an immediate statement in terms of meeting the OCR brief, regardless of the direction they decided to take the composition story from then on.

	AfL	It is expected that all the stimuli will be developed as the composition progresses. Endless repetition, as an ostinato for example, will not lead to high marks.
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In some cases, the use of the stimulus was obvious through its repetition and overt appearance throughout; by the same rule, some stimuli were mixed up and even disguised so well that the most experienced musician would find difficulty locating them. It is therefore helpful to annotate the score accordingly to clearly show the use and application of the stimulus within the composition. This is particularly important for AOS4 Film Music compositions, when the Learner's interpretation of their chosen storyline is key to the justification of the "Relationship to the Set Brief" criteria. Overall, there were some fantastic submissions relating to AoS 4 Film Music that had used technology in order for the learner to combine and extend ideas using both a selection of instruments and various digital effects.

The AOS5 brief requirement to write a song suitable for a school assembly was given serious consideration by a number of Learners through the lyrics of their songs. This helped to justify high marks against the "Relationship to the Set Brief" criteria. However, in actuality most songs were suitable for a school assembly and the quality of the music and the successful application of the popular genre were the most influential factors in the set brief mark.

Moderators listened to many compositions using the AOS5 composition brief where there were no lyrics transcribed into the score neither in the performance of the piece. Thus, where this was the case, the "Relationship to the Set Brief" mark was significantly reduced as it did not meet the criteria of a song within the "Conventions of Pop".

	AfL	If the vocal line is not present on a recording, the lyrics should be written under the melodic line on the score. Providing lyrics separately to the notation simply does not make musical sense, and leads to a detachment in the Learner's mind as it often transpires that the lyrics don't actually fit the notation provided.
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Compositions written for AOS2 were generally of a high quality, often demonstrating a clear understanding and application of well taught compositional devices, such as the use of contrasting keys,

melodic extension, variation, and development, and a harmonic awareness of phrasing, modulation and cadences.

Common misconceptions

Vocal scores should include a melody line. It is not sufficient to only submit a copy of the lyrics.

Learners must perform an individual part simultaneously with a second performer for at least one minute within the chosen piece, in order to meet the specification requirements for ensemble performance.

Learners should perform a commercially available piece for Unit 01/02. Performance of a Learner's own composition is not permitted.

Technology based performance work such as sequencing, should not include substantial elements of commercially sourced samples or audio. The assessment outcome should focus purely on the editing and manipulation of material programmed and real time recorded by the candidate.

A screenshot on its own is not sufficient score evidence. This should be annotated with additional information about the musical content of the piece.

Compositions that make only limited use of melody and harmony are unlikely to access the top two marking criteria bands.

Avoiding potential malpractice

Pleasingly, the 'use of others' in the recording of composition work only seemed to be an issue this year in a limited number of submissions. However, there were still a few instances where moderators had to request further information from the centre to be able to effectively mark the compositions. The specification clearly states that where other musicians have performed in a composition, the parts played must be performed exactly from the notation provided by the Learner. No stylistic enhancement is permitted, even if the learner has verbally communicated their intentions to the other musicians. Compliance with this regulation is expected in order to avoid potential malpractice investigations.

Centres are once again reminded that arrangements are not permitted as a composition option for this specification.

Score evidence should be provided for all performance and composition work.

Centres should ensure that song lyrics to both performances and compositions are appropriate. Where there is doubt regarding the suitability of certain language, or sentiments, the material should not be submitted.

Additional comments

The vast majority of centres uploaded their marks this year well ahead of the 15th May deadline. Centres responded very efficiently to meet the three-day turnaround following the sample request to upload or send their samples. Most centres were very well organised and presented their work clearly with quality recordings.

	Misconception	<p>The majority of assessors completed the overall timings boxes on the rear of the candidate form for performances and compositions.</p> <p>There was a few this year who did not understand that this meant the total duration for both units, and not the duration for each unit.</p>
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The repository is an increasingly popular platform for the submission of coursework. However, Moderators are equally happy with postal submissions, with recordings on either CD or USB. CDs can be data CDs as opposed to purely audio. If using an encrypted USB to submit candidate work, please remember to send the password directly to your moderator.

There are some centres that continue to unnecessarily announce centre and candidate details at the beginning of each track. A tracklist to accompany the CD is all that is required.

The odd centre still submitted one CD per candidate while others provided one CD of all performances and a second CD of all compositions. Swapping between CDs lengthens the moderation process; presenting the work on one CD, with the candidate performance followed by the candidate composition is the preferred option.

Whilst most candidate assessment forms were completed accurately and to a good standard, there were, as ever, several clerical errors. Centres are reminded of the requirement to check their additions before submitting marks to OCR. Use of the interactive assessment form from the website is the preferred option in order to avoid the clerical errors.

When centres had to be contacted, moderators commented that examination officers/Heads of Music responded swiftly and were very helpful. Most resolved any issues by return, and this was greatly appreciated.

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