

Circular S/IF/50/11

March 2011

To: eg The Principals of Post-primary Schools and Directors of Further and Higher Education

For circulation to: eg All Heads of Department and Examination Officers

GCSE Music

Guidance on Ensemble Performance

Effective from the first assessment of the New Revised GCSE in the 2011 Summer Examination Series

Ensemble performances must consist of a minimum of two live musicians performing undoubled*, independent parts that are played simultaneously.

Ensembles should not be so large that the candidate is disadvantaged because the examiner is unable to identify and assess their individual contribution.

Rock groups, in particular, should ensure that a good balance is achieved so that an examiner can clearly identify the candidate's own contribution to the performance. It is advisable and acceptable that groups using amplification carry out a sound check prior to their performance.

If a soloist performs with an accompanist (eg. piano or guitar), it is permissible for the accompanist to use this performance for their ensemble performance assessment, but not for the soloist.

Backing tracks, whilst not encouraged, are also permitted in ensemble performances. However, there must always be a minimum of two live performers including the candidate within the ensemble. Teachers and candidates should also bear in mind the possible limitations imposed by the use of a pre-recorded backing track in relation to both the 'sense of ensemble' and 'response to other members of the ensemble' marking criterion.

Only the candidate being assessed need be a candidate entered for assessment. For example, the remainder of the ensemble could be students in other year groups at the school, or indeed not students at all. If a parent/other adult is included in the ensemble, it would be important to ensure that the adult does not 'lead' the group and by doing so disadvantage the candidate in respect of Ensemble Performance marking criteria (iii), where they are encouraged to exhibit '...confidence and ability to take the lead...'. With this in mind, where possible it may be better to avoid altogether participation of teacher, parent and/or tutor.

Candidates must **not** present the same music for their solo performance **and** ensemble performance.

The maximum duration for the ensemble performance (as with the solo performance) is 5 minutes. Whilst in the specification there is no minimum performance duration, in order for a candidate to access the full range of available marks, it is strongly advised that **each** of the solo and ensemble performances should be of **at least** 1 minute duration so as to enable the examiner to make an accurate assessment.

The Discussion for each candidate needs to be completed immediately after the performance to which it is related.

* In Irish Traditional Music, it is accepted that there will be occasions in a performance where a part may be doubled. In this case, it should be ensured that the candidate being assessed has opportunity to take a solo part/s exemplifying the level of performance to which s/he is capable of during any given performance.

If you have any queries regarding the content of this circular please contact:

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