

Online Examinations - A Year On Jenny Macmillan

I have now run a second set of online exams, nine in total, at each Level from 1 to 5. The two external Examiners were Marzena Jasinska-Siudzinska and Kristinn Orn Kristinnsson and, between us, we agreed how we would conduct the exams. The following format worked well and I thought it would be useful to share this with others.

Examinees were asked to record and put unlisted on YouTube their performances of the **Twinkle variations and the graduation piece**. **The Examiners also chose a piece** for examinees to record and **talk through the teaching points**, speaking to the camera.

I always ask exam candidates to give a **Level recital** a few months in advance of the exam. These past two years, these recitals have had to be videoed. The **Examiners watched these videos** which demonstrated the ongoing improvement in the playing standard. Having had the opportunity to see and hear candidates perform their complete repertoire for the Level, Examiners did not feel the need to hear further pieces on Zoom during the exam – though they could have asked, had they wished.

We are now much more adept at teaching online, so recording a trainee living in, say, Spain or Slovenia, teaching a child in, say, Northumberland or Kent in the UK, while I was watching in Cambridge, UK, didn't seem such a monumental task as it had done in spring 2020. **The YouTube links to these teaching recordings were sent to the Examiners.**

The ESA requirements for the written work are highly relevant to Suzuki teachers. For instance, writing an article on SUZUKI™ Philosophy – teachers need to be able to discuss the philosophy with every potential new Suzuki family, and setting their ideas down in writing

is an excellent way of organising their thoughts so they can present and discuss the topic logically. All the written assignments are important and useful, so I ask **examinees to write briefly – often just a few bullet points – on each topic in the Syllabus**. They complete their portfolio two months in advance of the exams, so they can be reviewed and improved as necessary, and still giving the **Examiners** plenty of time to **study the written work**.

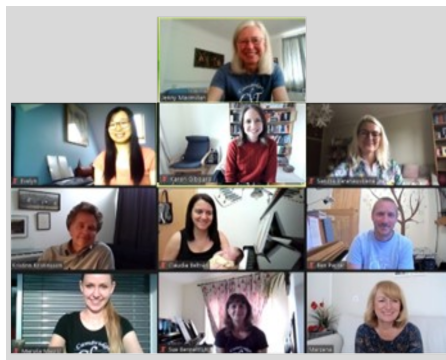
I had written a **paragraph about each exam candidate**, and sent these, together with **previous ESA exam reports**, to the Examiners. It was noted that, in the future, it would be useful for them also to receive a **brief CV from each exam candidate** so they can see, for instance, where they gained their initial musical training.

Marzena already had experience of running exams online as part of the ESA's pilot project of Continuous Assessment. She had found it useful to ask the **Examiners to write their own reports on each exam candidate**, which were then consolidated into a single report. So I followed this precedent, asking the **Examiners to send me their reports a week in advance** and which I then **combined into a single report**. It was remarkable how similar the two reports were on each candidate, even to the extent of both using the same specific adjective to describe the candidate's playing or written work ("subtle", "natural", "deeply studied")! There were only a couple of instances where comments differed a little, and we were able to discuss those on the day of the exams.

With all this **advance preparation**, we agreed we would **need only 30 minutes for each exam** – 15 minutes viva with the candidate

and 15 minutes to finalise the written report. The **Examiners started by discussing the draft report and then talked to the candidate before finalising their report**.

As a result of such thorough preparation, the **Examiners didn't feel the need to quiz candidates** during the exam. They were **more interested in giving feedback** than on drawing more out of the candidate – for instance, they might have chosen to initiate an interesting discussion on some aspect of SUZUKI™ Philosophy, perhaps linked to the candidate's own experiences. So, in some ways, the exam felt like a slight anti-climax to the examinees. However, the important point was that we all agreed that the examinees received a rigorous exam – they had to show that they could **perform the repertoire**, had **mastered the teaching points**, were able to give an **encouraging and successful lesson to a child**, and had **understood Suzuki philosophy**. Moreover, there had been no particular problem with quality of recorded sound.



Normally, when in my studio in Cambridge, we have a party after the exams. This, of course, is not really possible online. However, we all gathered on Zoom at 6.00 pm that evening for congratulations, chat, group photo and an online drink. This was an opportunity for exam candidates and Examiners to get to know each other better, and I think was appreciated by all.