

SPOTLIGHTS

Welcome to our Spotlight series.

Real success in the real world.
Day after day we witness how Apple technologies truly enrich the lives of students and staff, transforming the way they live, learn and work.

Spotlight is our way of capturing and sharing with you great examples of great practice and innovation from Higher Education.

We hope you enjoy these wonderful stories of success.

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ABRSM

A progressive workstyle

Equipping ABRSM examiners with an iPad loaded with bespoke applications has led to a progressive workstyle with a wide range of benefits, including increased job satisfaction.






Context

About ABRSM

ABRSM is the UK's largest music education body, one of its largest music publishers and the world's leading provider of music exams, holding over 650,000 assessments annually in more than 90 countries.

They are a registered charity, that also make significant donations towards music education initiatives around the world.

Founded in 1889, they have a long history, but their mission has stayed the same: to enrich lives by inspiring achievement in music.



The challenge

A company-wide digital transformation.

ABRSM wanted to modernise existing, paper-based methods of conducting and marking exams and make all examining materials digital. In doing so, they hoped to reduce the administrative burden both for examiners and ABRSM staff and to solve the problems of a range of legacy processes, including:

The need for examiners to complete candidate details by hand on every mark form.

Delay or loss of mark forms in the post between the examiner and ABRSM.

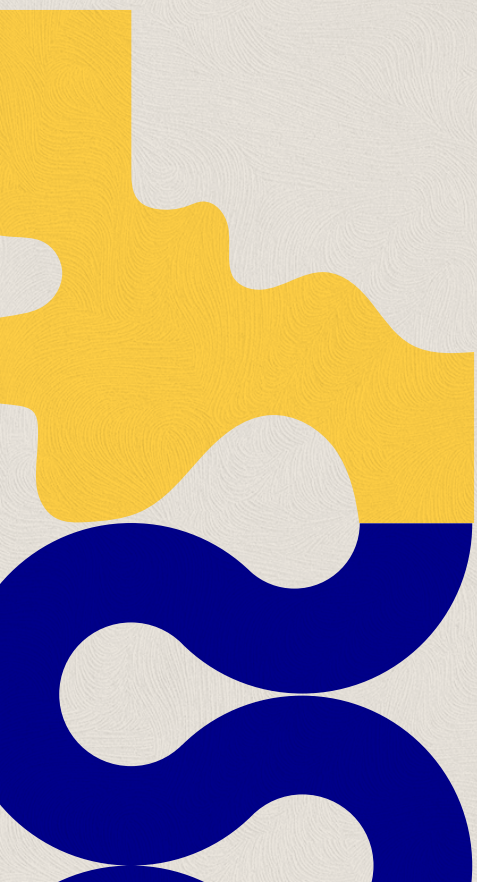
Excessive time spent editing or rewriting mark forms.

The physical strain of transporting marking books and examination records on examining day.

A desire to reduce the environmental impact of heavy organisation-wide reliance on paper-based resources.

Protect ABRSM confidential tests by removing the possibility of lost or compromised test books.

Together, we recognised that the goal was to equip their examiners with a handheld device loaded with a bespoke application that contained all the tools they could need to do their jobs better, faster and more easily.



The solution

Using iPad as a platform to evolve.

“In many ways, Marcato is to ABRSM examining what Satnav is to driving, reducing the task load and enabling greater focus on the core task – in this case, musical assessment.”

— John Holmes, Chief Examiner

What is Marcato?

The project involved the supply of iPads to each individual examiner, along with an Apple Pencil.

A bespoke application installed onto iPads and distributed to each examiner, giving them instant access to all necessary examination materials in the palm of their hand.

Launched UK-wide to ABRSM examiners, this new working method has eradicated paper-based administration, and delivered a host of other benefits too:

Resources & information: a single source for examiners of all examining-related resources.

Collated exam materials: integrated materials for conducting exams.

Diary management: the ability to offer availability and accept work.

HR admin: a tool to update personal details and preferences.

No physical burden: all the tools to manage examiner workload on one device.

Reduced admin: several processes now fully automated.

Increased security: confidential test materials are now on screen and password-protected.

Why iPad?

Total equality across examiners

Examiners are issued with an ABRSM iPad, giving each individual equal access to the same technological resources, so that nobody is disadvantaged by not having easy or regular access to technology.

Accessibility tools & adaptability to working style

Examiners can configure their device set-up to fit their personal needs. This includes adjusting the brightness of the screen to reduce glare and tinting the screen with a colour of their choice to avoid eye-strain and help processing, as well as adjusting font size.

Control over work-style

Examiners have free choice over their input method, being able to either write with the Apple Pencil, or type using the on-screen or an external keyboard, allowing them to optimise their method of working according to personal preference and strengths.

Handwriting recognition

In the past, some examiners had raised concerns about the quality and legibility of their handwritten reports, and Marcato has allayed this concern completely. The Apple Pencil and handwriting recognition software processes all styles of writing.

Ease of use

The mass appeal of Apple products means that many examiners have pre-existing experience using iPads. For those that don't, the ABRSM offer training and support.



The impact

“Marcato has a real feel of being designed for examiners by examiners. It has been great, in particular, to feel that it is possible to concentrate (even) more on the candidate and their experience of the exam.” – ABRSM examiner

Examiner experience

While the pandemic has impacted the usual cadence of exam delivery, regular polling of those who have got to use Marcato has been very positive in comparison to the legacy model. Cited improvements include:

All relevant tests and materials, and only those that are relevant, are presented by Marcato during the exam process.

The end-to-end examining experience is more time-efficient for examiners by removing any need to prepare paper mark forms ahead of exam day, return completed forms to ABRSM via post, or pack the correct selection of tests and syllabuses to take on any given exam day.

Marcato minimises (and in some cases eliminates) the possibility of examiner error in an exam situation.

Learner/candidate experience

The in-room exam experience now involves less admin, meaning fewer interruptions for each candidate.

The examiner’s attention can now be focussed more fully and consistently on the candidate.

The chance of exam-delivery errors is lower, meaning less risk of inadvertently upsetting a candidate’s composure during their exam.

Results turnaround is faster, meaning less wait time and anxiety before receiving results.

“Marcato has been transformational for me. I’ve been examining for 20 years now, and like many examiners, I was anxious about using Marcato, since I’m not tech savvy. However, I find that I’m well up to time, and I’m sure that’s in part due to Marcato and the seamless way in which it takes you through each exam.” – ABRSM examiner

The unexpected benefit.

Examining in COVID-times

An unexpected benefit of all examiners having access to iPads loaded with Marcato was that the ABRSM were able to continue examining throughout the pandemic: following remote examiner training, and a relatively small update to Marcato, the ABRSM launched their all-new digital exams.

A welcomed result

Reducing the administrative load has enabled examiners to focus more on what they are truly there for, which is to focus on the candidate's needs and empower them to do their best.

By removing much of the peripheral work of examining, the ABRSM have been able to make the examining process both more enjoyable, and more efficient, for all this involved.

John Holmes, Chief Examiner said: "ABRSM examiners are all musicians, and were drawn to examine for ABRSM by a love of music – not of exam admin or handwriting neatly on mark forms. They became examiners to help learners become inspired and motivated by their musical achievement – which Marcato enables."

The future

The ABRSM have now adopted Marcato as the only mode of exam administration for its entire community of UK-based Grade examiners. The natural next step will be to develop the offering to support their Diploma offer, which includes the DipABRSM, LRSM and FRSM across Performing, Teaching and Directing, and are currently still examined on paper.



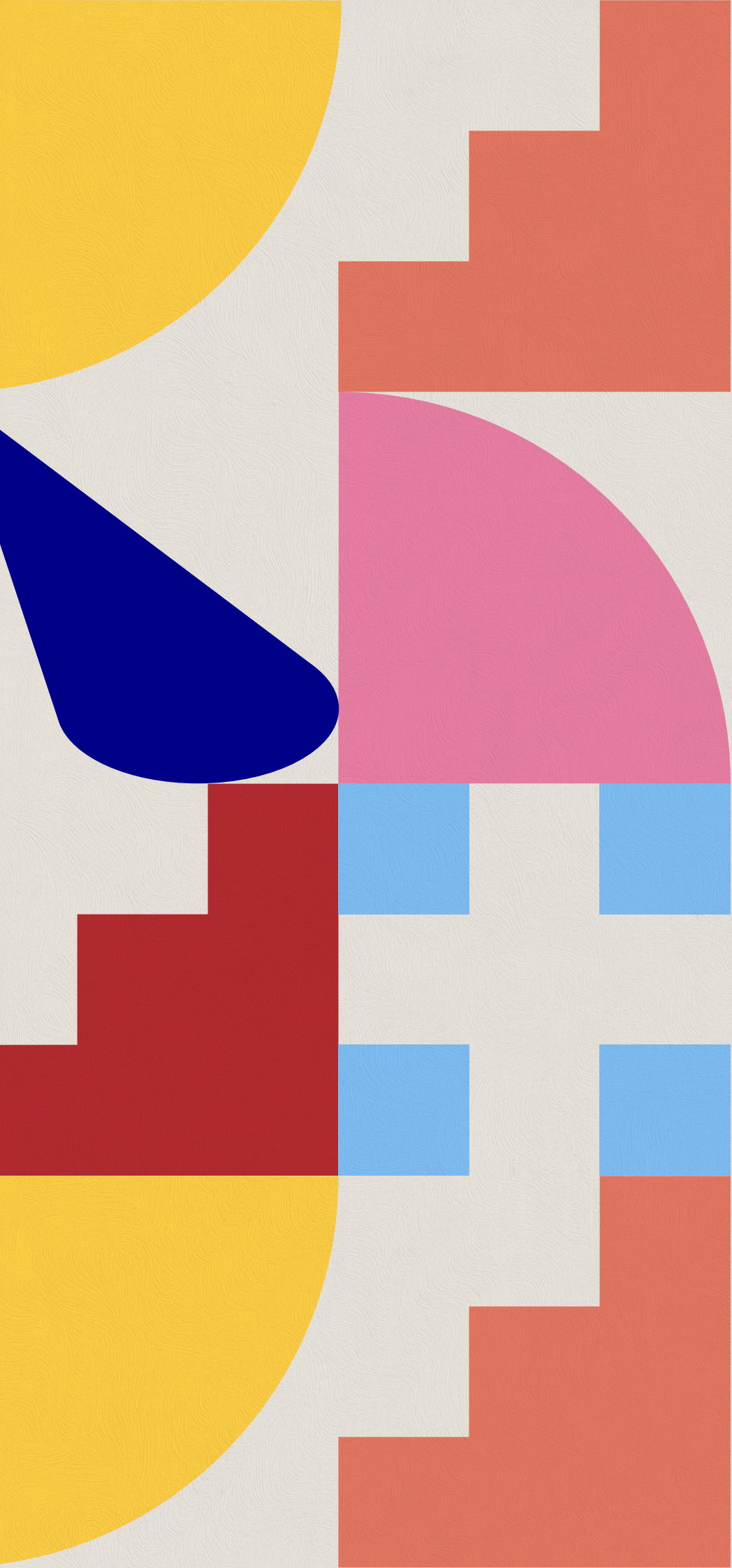
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