



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Music
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Responses to the Question Paper were very similar to the pattern of the last few years. The full range of marks appears to have been accessible. Markers reported that the minor adjustments to Question 6 in this year's Question Paper (common to both Courses) appear to have succeeded in giving clearer instructions to candidates, helping them to give more direct answers.

Markers reported that some candidates appeared to be unprepared for the literacy tests in Question 4. There were still a few examples of candidates failing to understand how to complete Question 6 where multiple ticks were entered rather than following the detailed instructions concerning the maximum number for each column.

There was a small but steady increase in the number of candidates being presented for Performing with Technology. New software continued to lead towards more obvious similarities between the methodology used in producing folios for Sound Engineering and Production and MIDI Sequencing; this has resulted in a more obvious overlap of the two areas of musical technology as many Sound Engineering candidates make use of software packages as opposed to digital, multi-tracked hardware.

There were no changes in the grade boundary marks.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates continued to achieve remarkably high standards in Performing (accounting for 60% of the final mark). Several candidates achieved the maximum mark of 30 in both of their instruments.

Several Sound Engineering folios included submissions that were of almost professional quality. A few MIDI Sequencing candidates produced imaginative work, using a range of controllers and other effects in a most creative way.

Within the Question Paper, multiple-choice questions were well answered (Questions 1 and 3).

Areas which candidates found demanding

Markers' comments were concerned with poorer responses to some questions. In Question 2 of the paper a prescribed piece of music was used in which candidates could gain 1 mark; the audio example used in the paper resulted in a very poor response suggesting that centres are not using materials (a DVD of the excerpt and background notes) supplied to all centres by Learning and Teaching Scotland.

The full range of marks was not available to several candidates who had been unable to produce full-length prepared programmes for Visiting Assessors and for the recorded performances submitted as part of the Technology folio.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Presenting centres have had the opportunity to refer to four previous years' Specimen and Question Papers produced by SQA at this level; each uses the same format of questions as outlined in the present Course Assessment Specification, Part 1 which details the structure of the Question Paper (first published in 2006). Evidence gained during this year's examination procedures suggests that there are still a number of centres basing their preparation of candidates on older styles of questions and formats of papers that were replaced during the review of Music Courses leading to the new style of Question Paper (first used in 2007). Some materials submitted by centres as evidence for Appeals suggest that certain centres are misguiding their candidates leading to difficulties in the manner in which candidates respond to specific types of questions and resulting in unacceptable evidence for the purposes of appeals.

The majority of candidates fail to identify chord progressions each year (Question 4 (g) in this year's paper) and centres are encouraged to offer more practice in this area based on the only keys that may appear in this paper (C, G and F major, A minor) and the only chords within these keys that may be included (I, IV, V and VI).

A substantial number of candidates failed to gain high marks in Questions 7 and 8; centres are advised to make a careful study of how marks have been allocated in previous years (Marking Instructions are available on SQA's website). Too often candidates chose to give lists of instruments at the expense of a wider range of answers dealing with the composers' use of tonality, rhythm and compositional techniques.

Centres are again reminded that all necessary paperwork for the Performing examinations in May must be available by the agreed arrival time of the Visiting Assessor. Centre staff should complete all of the required details on the candidates' mark sheets including the correct title and the timing of each piece in the prepared programme. It is also essential that centres supply a list detailing the order in which candidates will be presented for the Performing exam.

Too often candidates failed to include eight parts in their multi-tracked submissions within their Sound Engineering folios. Sound Engineering submissions may use the option of stereo recording techniques as an alternative to multi-tracked recordings. With the increased use of software packages the requirement to produce a well-edited final version from three takes (with a minimum of 4 microphones and four performers) is now more readily available to many centres. This option is only available at Advanced Higher level; it continues to offer a new, enriching and challenging experience to candidates and is worthy of consideration where it is impossible to fulfil the requirements of the multi-tracked option (8 or more parts). Centres should remind candidates that any instrument recorded with more than one microphone (such as drum kit or piano) counts as only one part.

In centres with several entries for Sound Engineering, each candidate should be responsible for making the initial recordings used in their folios, not merely producing an edited version of someone else's 'takes'.

Candidates submitting a MIDI Sequencing folio must include a stereo, audio recording of their completed piece in addition to a MIDI/audio file. The session log must include details of the equipment and software package used in order that the candidate's file may be scrutinised by the Marker. Candidates at this level are required to use at least one audio track within their submission and logs should include details of the processes used in recording the audio content.

When making the final audio copies of folios for Music with Technology, centres should ensure that only candidates being presented at one level (such as Advanced Higher) are included on any one CD, clearly listing the appropriate track numbers to be marked for each individual.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	1118
Number of resulted entries in 2010	1205

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark — 100				
A	55.4%	55.4%	668	70
B	27.1%	82.5%	326	60
C	11.7%	94.2%	141	50
D	2.2%	96.3%	26	45
No award	3.7%	100.0%	44	–

General commentary on grade boundaries

While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Head of Service and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.

SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as Arrangements evolve and change.