



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Music
Level	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

The candidate entries for 2010 again show an increase on the previous year. The preparation and improvement in performance in the external components of the exam identified in the last few years have again been maintained. There appears to be a more consistent application by centres of the advice offered since the inception of the reviewed Courses in Music. The attainment in the Performing examination has been maintained and there has been an improvement in the Question Paper attainment this year. Markers and Visiting Assessors made favourable mention of the standard of preparedness and results in the external components of the exam.

Almost all of the candidates presented for the Higher Music performing components of the exam were presented at the correct NQ level. There were fewer referrals to the Principal Assessor on the standard of pieces presented and, again, centres are commended on their partnership with SQA in exam preparation through the Approval of Repertoire project.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The support available from departmental staff and instrumental staff has again resulted in an improvement in the Performing component of the exam with some outstanding performances exhibited over a range of instrumental categories. The strength of Performing remains a skill exhibited by most candidates. The changes brought about by the introduction of sampling a few years ago seem to be embedded within centres in the preparation for the administration of this part of the exam.

The overall increase in candidates for Higher Music has resulted in an increase in candidate entries for the Music with Technology Course, and again there are indications of an improvement in candidate performance. Candidate performance in Technology Folios, following the guidance offered since 2007, continues to improve, though a few aspects of the Technology Folio still require a more focused approach both from candidates and centres. Markers again commented favourably on the increased understanding of standards, the improved preparation and presentation of folios and increased centre expertise in both the MIDI Sequencing and Sound Engineering and Production options.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Generally, candidates' responses in the Higher Question Paper continue to show an encouraging improvement. There appears to be a better understanding and application of concept knowledge from Access to Intermediate 2 levels, resulting in an overall improvement in responses to the higher order demands of the Question Paper. However, some aspects of the preparation of candidates for the literacy and comparison-type questions still requires a little more focus in adhering to the requirements in each of these specific questions.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are commended for the effectiveness of their responses to the issues raised in external assessment reports over the last few years. Most of the issues raised in recent reports have now been addressed and the improved performance by candidates bears testimony to the work undertaken by centres and candidates.

However, some Visiting Assessors reported that there were a few centres not fully prepared for their visit.

Centres should note that:

- ◆ Candidate Mark Sheets must be completed and be available to the Visiting Assessor. Details of the instruments or instrument and voice being professed, the pieces to be performed and all prepared times of pieces must be clearly indicated.
- ◆ Candidate Mark Sheets must be completed in pen (not pencil) by centre staff. This Mark Sheet is the formal record of the assessment event and it is very important that it is completed accurately.

In a few cases, prepared performing programmes were short of the minimum time required.

Among issues raised by Markers in the Music with Technology folios were:

- ◆ some misunderstanding of assessment criteria
- ◆ some files not meeting the time requirements
- ◆ better understanding of standards overall
- ◆ improved work in centres linked to improved resources — equipment and expertise
- ◆ candidates better prepared, material saved properly and log books much improved

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	4513
Number of resulted entries in 2010	4597

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	43.8%	43.8%	2013	70
B	32.0%	75.7%	1469	60
C	16.4%	92.1%	753	50
D	3.0%	95.2%	140	45
No award	4.8%	100.0%	222	—

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.