



External Assessment Report 2011

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

The pattern of responses in Performing, Performing with Technology and in the Question Paper was very similar to previous years. Markers commented that they had found the Question Paper to be appropriate and that the full range of marks was accessible. A number of candidates scored particularly high marks.

The number of candidates being presented continued to rise, especially in the Music with Technology option. 10% of candidates were presented by centres with no previous experience at Advanced Higher Music or by centres who were returning to presentations at this level.

Staff in centres appeared to be gaining confidence in presenting candidates at an appropriate level, with fewer candidates achieving low marks.

There were no changes in the grade boundary marks.

Areas in which candidates performed well

It was encouraging to observe that, in the Question Paper (worth 40 marks), the average mark for Performing with Technology candidates had shown an improvement. The Performing marks for the same group of candidates (worth 30 marks) had also improved, but the most obvious sign of overall improvement was in the Technology folios (also worth 30 marks). The standard of these folios proved that candidates were able to create near-professional recordings. Appropriate digital recording equipment, improved software and knowledgeable staff, combined with better recording facilities in many centres, had helped candidates to produce quality recordings. A wide range of musical genres included a range of cover versions of rock and pop styles and a welcome increase in the number of candidates successfully recording traditional Scottish music. Many Sound Engineering folios included quite outstanding performances by candidates and their fellow pupils.

In an analysis of the Question Paper candidates scored well in the multiple choice questions 1 and 4.

In the Performing component, Visiting Assessors reported that the already high standards of performance have continued to improve this year, with a number of candidates achieving full marks in their instrumental or vocal programmes.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Question Paper included several testing questions designed to stretch more able candidates without creating too many impossibilities for weaker candidates. Question 2 led to some confused responses, mainly because the style of music used in the excerpt had not been included in previous papers.

In Question 3 (f) many candidates were unable to identify the missing note and to give this note its correct value.

Question 6, the comparison question, was fairly poorly answered. Some candidates appeared to be uncertain of the procedure for answering this type of question, the basic format of which has remained unchanged for several years.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

When preparing for the Question Paper centres should try to ensure that categories of concepts such as styles, timbre and structure become familiar to candidates, and that significant differences are clearly identified during the learning and teaching process. Centres should encourage candidates, when answering Questions 7 and 8, to choose concepts from a variety of categories rather than concentrating too much on restricted areas of the concepts lists.

In the Performing with Technology option there are still centres which were problematic during the Central Marking of the folios. All candidates were eventually awarded an appropriate mark, but a number of these marks could only be awarded following requests for replacement copies of CDs. Staff in centres should check that the required recordings are formatted, playable and, where appropriate, finalised before they are sent to SQA for marking.

Centres are again reminded that all parts of the required documentation for the Technology folio must be included in each candidate's submission. Missing sections included music scores or performance plans for Sound Engineering (not a requirement for MIDI Sequencing) and stereo audio recordings in addition to MIDI/audio data files for MIDI Sequencing.

In Technology folios centres should give careful advice about the basic requirements, eg the need for eight parts when a candidate in Sound Engineering records using multi-track techniques. The full range of marks will not be available to candidates who have less than this required minimum, or where candidates produce a folio that does not adhere to the required minimum time — three minutes for MIDI Sequencing and six minutes for Sound Engineering and Production. It is disappointing to note that almost all candidates from a few centres failed to meet the basic requirements of timings and numbers of parts or tracks. This could have been avoided.

Similarly, Performing programmes will not be eligible for full marks if the candidate presents a programme which lasts for less than 15 minutes and 10 minutes (in Instrument 1 and 2 respectively) in the Performing option or 10 minutes in the Technology option.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	1205
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	1299
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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	60.5%	60.5%	786	70
B	27.3%	87.8%	355	60
C	8.5%	96.4%	111	50
D	1.4%	97.8%	18	45
No award	2.2%	100.0%	29	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.