

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

**Music**

**Qualification area**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
Included in this report**

**Music Higher**

## Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2002	3091
Pre appeal	3024

Number of entries in 2003	3325
Pre appeal	

## General comments re entry numbers

Although final numbers are not available it would appear that the rise in Higher candidates is similar to last year with in excess of 300 candidates opting to sit Higher. As could be expected the most popular option was Performing extension with Sound Engineering and Midi Sequencing seeing the type of rise that could have been expected year on year as centres became more familiar with the requirement and more able in terms of equipment to offer this option. However Extension listening and Inventing remained static in terms of popularity. Of more interest was the reduction in candidates opting for Music with Accompanying (28 down to 20) especially when the numbers opting for extension performing had increased by about 300. One could expect that these would be the candidates (2969) who would be most likely to choose the performing option.

## **Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report**

The grade boundary at C resulted in a rise of 2.3 % on last year's figures at this level. This resulted in 16.6 % of candidates gaining an award at this level.

The grade boundary at B resulted in a rise of 4.1 % on last years' figures at this level. This resulted in 34.8 % of candidates gaining an award at this level.

The grade boundary at lower A resulted in a reduction on last year's figures of 6.6% of candidates receiving an award at this level. This resulted in 38.5% of candidates gaining an award at this level.

The grade boundary at upper A resulted in a reduction on last year's figures of 0.7% of candidates receiving an award at this level. This resulted in 5.8% of candidates gaining an award at this level.

## **General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries**

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as syllabuses evolve and change

## **Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area**

Again as a team we are aware that we must be vigilant in terms of the grade boundaries and the pass mark in order to retain an element of rigour about the subject and its standing.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

### Listening Core

Candidate response while on a par with previous years resulted in a lower average mark in this paper. Certain aspects of the exam would appear to have contributed to this reduction. As mentioned in last year's report we felt as a team that the abuse by candidates of the format of Q6 i.e. the comparison question had resulted in the average mark for candidates being 9.5 out of 12. In many cases this was being achieved by candidates merely listing in any order and under any specific heading e.g.. melody, harmony any and all of the concepts they could remember, whether they were relevant or not. Altering the marking scheme to credit candidates with placing the concept in the correct box or boxes (since some concepts can feature in more than one area) resulted in a more realistic passmark for this type of question which ought to involve the higher order skill of comparing and contrasting. Literacy and the identification of concepts from early periods of music appears to be a problem for many candidates.

### Listening Extension

A minimal increase in the number of candidates that chose this option is disappointing considering the overall increase of over 300 in Higher Music. The response in the commentary aspect of the exam was not as positive as last year's cohort. Candidates researched information but appeared to merely record the information without expressing their own opinions or showing insight into the facts they had researched. It should be informed by their experiences in the other elements of the exam and the course in general, not the mere regurgitation of information from a book or a programme from a concert. There was a significant reduction in the average mark.

The literacy and the comparison question again seem to be the defining question for candidates in this exam and again some candidates performed poorly in these questions. These are the questions that one could expect a reasonable response in from 'extension listening' candidates.

### Midi-Sequencing

Centres seem to be more aware of the requirements in Midi Sequencing and perhaps because of a 40% rise in the number of candidates choosing this option the average mark dipped slightly. Of concern is the number of candidates that choose materials from the internet or commercial sources and merely download them without any alteration or amendment. More technology input is required from candidates.

### Sound Engineering

A similar issue exists within this exam where candidates are using commercially produced materials without using their own knowledge and understanding of the syllabus and its requirements. A rise of 60% in the number of candidates choosing this option is encouraging.

Central marking was again endorsed by markers, because of instant access to discussion, and in all cases resolution of issues that in the past required another few weeks. Examiners in Sound Engineering and in Midi Sequencing endorsed the fact that perhaps another day was required to ensure that there was not a last minute rush to complete the marking.

The following remain as issues for some centres:

- A stereo master with 2 contrasting pieces with at least 5 parts in each piece.
- A separate session log for each piece
- At least one piece should use effects/processors
- A stereo master submitted on cassette tape or CD format
- The technique of punching –in/out and bouncing should be used during the recording process for each piece

### Inventing Extension Folio

Generally centre submissions were in line with SQA requirements. In a few cases the geography of the composition was basic and centres should be reminded that although in essence this is an audio folio it is essential that information is made available to markers to allow a valid and reliable assessment of candidates' folios.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well**

Candidates appear to be better prepared for many of the aspects of the exam that are assessed externally. In particular the performing elements continue to improve and there are fewer problems generally in this area.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty**

Some candidates were less ready for some aspects of the exam e.g. task levels were not always appropriate and time continues to be a factor in some candidates' performances. Some issues mentioned above in respect of the technology exams continue to be a concern with SQA requirements. Candidates ought to be reminded in the early stages of the course of the minimum requirements for each exam.

## **Recommendations**

### **Feedback to centres**

Issues relating to candidate responses in Listening Extension, Sound Engineering and Midi Sequencing continue to cause problems for markers. Centres should be reminded of requirements for these exams and candidates should be advised accordingly. In terms of the changes in marking for Question 6 in Higher Core and Extension, centres are reminded that candidates are required to place the concepts in the correct columns and not in a random way. Only concepts in the correct columns will be credited with a mark. This is the same information that was available to centres in last year's report.