

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Music

Qualification area

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

Music — Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	3,503
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Number of entries in 2004	3,829
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General comments re entry numbers

There has been a healthy increase of approximately 8% in the number of candidates entered for Higher Music this year. The increase has resulted in a 2% rise in the number of candidates who gained a pass award. Performing extension was again the most popular option. The expected increase in Sound Engineering and Midi Sequencing numbers is not immediately obvious, but it is expected that the emphasis in schools on technology will gradually impact on numbers.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

There was an increase in almost 400 candidates in this year's exam. The distribution shows the normal bias towards the strength of the performance element of the exam equation, with 50% of the exam marks being awarded for performing. The awards favour the higher bands with 44.1% of candidates being awarded an 'A', and 94.9% of candidates passing the exam.

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There is a reduction in the number of awards at Upper A with 5.2% against last year's figure of 5.7%. There is a reduction in the number of candidates being awarded a lower 'A' with 38.9% against last year's award of 40.0%. There was an increase in the number of candidates who received an award at 'B' (0.6%) with 33.3% against last year's figure of 32.7%. There was an exact replication of the increase at 'C' this year (0.6%), with 17.5% gaining a 'C' against last year's figure of 16.9%. There was an increase of 0.4% in the number of candidates who received no award 5.1% against 4.7% last year. The changes in awards may have been the result of the increased number of candidates who were presented for the exam (almost 400) and the appropriateness of candidates being presented for the exam at this level by centres.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	44.1	44.1	1,637	168
B	33.3	77.4	1,233	144
C	17.5	94.4	652	120
D				
No award	5.1	100.0	188	

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 arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The grade boundaries were agreed in line with those of the last few years and the exam was consistent with the standard of previous years.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Performing

Visiting Examiners reports on this years' procedures indicate that there was no real problems other than the issues that perennially rise in the performing exam i.e. failing to meet the required level of performance time and referrals on task level content being inappropriate. However there were less than in previous years indicating that centres are being perhaps more comfortable in decisions regarding appropriate repertoire in line with SQA requirements. The partnership with instrumental teachers has again helped to provide the support which candidates require.

Technology

In **MIDI-Sequencing** the major issue that arose in some of the centres' responses was the uncertainty in some candidates' attempts to save their work in the manner requested each year in the paper. The range of programmes used in different centres and the knowledge and understanding of the fundamental process involved in saving work in MIDI is still a slight concern. The uptake is up slightly on last year just about 3% (128 from 104).

In **Sound Engineering** there was an increase of uptake just over 20% (215 from 178) in the course despite the fact that there were greater resource implications for centres in offering this option. Performance again seems to have improved in this option and centres seem to be more comfortable with the exam. The publication of marking instructions in 2004 will clarify some of the issues that Markers have raised over recent years in this exam and centres will welcome this guidance.

Inventing

There were still the issues of short programmes and inappropriate levels of content in the application of the Composing Task Level Descriptors (CTLDs), but these were dealt with during the Moderation process and there were good examples of candidates' work which were identified for exemplification of standards.

Inventing Extension

There is a small increase in uptake in this exam 11% (182 from 167) and the quality of response was slightly better than last year. Programme notes which were not informative and inappropriate presentation of scores were again in evidence.

Listening

Candidates demonstrate an understanding of concepts within music and are able to respond to them under exam conditions. The higher order skills of the listening exam are done fairly well, but the comparison question requires candidates to insert answers under the headings given in the rubric of the question.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

As last year, there appears to be an improvement in candidates' performance and the level of preparation by centres has also improved.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

The quality of presentations which come from the majority of centres is high. This endorses the partnership of teaching staff teaching staff and instrumental teachers for their combined application in preparing candidates for the exam. Responses in Inventing Extension and Listening Extension seem to indicate some confusion among some centres about exact requirements.