

OCR Report to Centres

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Music (J535)

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Unit B353 Creative Task

There were 699 entries for the examination this series. Centres should note that this is the last time the unit will be offered in the January assessment series; from June 2014 all units must be taken in one sitting, at the end of the course.

Administration

Most of the work arrived with the examiners on time, at or before the end of the examining window and only a small number of centres had to be reminded to send their work. Marking was made straightforward when work was presented clearly and with sufficient annotation to clarify what the candidate had done. There were one or two occasions where centre contact was necessary to clarify some aspect and this protracted the marking process.

Centres should bear in mind the following points when presenting the work:

- Where a compilation CD is presented, a track list stating each candidate's name and number must be provided
- It is not necessary to repeat lengthy announcements on the CD if the track list is clear
- The cover sheet should provide details of the ICT used, and this includes basic things such as the functions of the keyboard
- Teachers should check that the correct stimulus box has been ticked on the cover sheet. Errors in this can lead to the candidate's work being incorrectly marked
- If the stimulus is transposed or rewritten for the candidate, that version must be presented with the work
- The stimulus in the final version should be played or inputted by the candidate, not by the teacher. The only exceptions, stated on page 28 of the current specification, are with the melodic phrase and the chords, where the stimulus may be played (recorded or live) whilst the candidate performs their additional part.

The quality of responses for this series was generally high and examiners enjoyed a number of musical and satisfying compositions. To achieve high marks overall, candidates need to demonstrate genuine musical understanding that goes beyond mere adherence to a set of rules within a predefined structure. Devices and compositional techniques should contribute to a musical satisfying and stylish outcome. Formulaically produced pieces that lack musical impact are unlikely to achieve more than half marks in this unit.

Response

(a) Rhythmic Phrase

Most candidates made a genuine attempt to maintain and develop the rhythm throughout the piece. There were several successful drum kit responses which consisted of a set of variations making full use of the kit. A minority of responses only stated the stimulus at the start, and then reverted to a set of standard riffs and fills, returning to the stimulus at the end. This type of response does not fulfil the requirements of the task and would not achieve a mark beyond the 4-6 band, as it does not make satisfactory use of the stimulus.

Some candidates used the stimulus as a starting point for a melody, generating a unified whole by referring to elements of the stimulus throughout. There were some very successful responses submitted in this way, in both written and recorded form. Examiners found that in some centres candidates were using ICT and looping the stimulus in the background and composing unrelated materials over it. In such cases low marks had to be awarded as the stimulus was not being used.

It is good practice to record the stimulus for the candidate to refer to during their practice time, and this was particularly important with the rhythmic phrase to ensure that the candidate uses the correct rhythm in their final performance. Of all of the stimuli, the rhythmic phrase more often is incorrectly stated in the outcome.

(b) Note Pattern

Able candidates who performed on melodic instruments achieved well here, and there were also some well constructed written versions. Candidates who used imaginative and stylish rhythmic shapes from the start of their piece tended to do well. Many responses were in ternary form and the best maintained some aspects of the pitch pattern in their central sections. Where the middle section relied on a set of musical devices, perhaps planned in advance, this detracted from the quality of the whole piece as the section bore little relationship with the preceding or succeeding sections.

A few candidates took the first note down an octave. It is important that the shape of the pattern is maintained.

(c) Melodic Phrase

Most candidates understood that the purpose of this task is to compose a second melodic part (either a descant or a bass line). There were no reported examples of a second part not being added but there were still some that were chordal. In such cases, the lowest note is taken to be the second part.

Most candidates chose to extend the given phrase with a well-related phrase of their own. The responses were overall successful and candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the principles of two-part writing. Sometimes the responses were over complicated. There were some interesting exploitations of more advanced harmonic techniques, such as modulation to the dominant at the end of four bars, and a move towards the subdominant on the second line. Such opportunities will always be built into the stimulus in order to provide challenge for the more academically inclined candidates. There were no examples reported of candidates attempting the task without the skills needed to do so.

(d) Chords

This was a very popular option this time. The chord sequence will not always start on the tonic, and this time there was no tonic chord in it. Successful responses therefore found resolution of the sequence on the tonic at the end and at appropriate points during their piece. The less successful responses only used the chords given and did not extend them.

Almost all guitarists used this stimulus and presented sets of variations on the sequence, and those who did so imaginatively and stylishly, with interesting rhythms and textures, scored well. There were many less successful responses which lacked real musical interest and tended to be overlong.

A small number of candidates did not understand what a D7 chord is, and used D minor instead, often homing in on the E minor chord as the tonal centre. Some of these were musically quite successful and gained some credit for this, but the incorrect use of the stimulus prohibited the higher mark bands.

(e) Words

This was also a popular option which generated the widest range of achievement. There were some very successful responses, both accompanied and unaccompanied, although block chord accompaniments sometimes helped the singer to stay in tune but added very little to the quality of the response.

Many successful responses extended the given words with additional verses written by the candidate. Care needs to be taken that additional words stay true to both the mood and the metre of the verses provided. Many candidates repeated lines of words and provided musically consistent extensions through doing this.

Less successful responses tended to use a narrow range of notes (often only a fifth) and repeated one musical idea on almost every line. Some candidates attempted to enhance their responses using technology (such as by multi-tracking) although these were rarely successful.

(f) Sequence of events

There were very few of these this time and therefore it is not possible to make general comments.

Area of Study Mark

There were few unplayable written responses and, where candidates composed for more than one instrument, examiners took into account the increased range of techniques that were used. There were a few cases of candidates deliberately trying to cram in as many techniques as they could, at the expense of the quality of the piece. A number of candidates used ICT as their instrument, and those who used a range of functions effectively were able to access high marks.

Candidates who composed a melody over the chord sequence were assessed against the Area of Study 2 criteria and therefore, to achieve a higher mark, needed to demonstrate understanding of how to compose a melody to fit the chords. Some candidates composed melodies that bore no relationship to the chords and did not even share the same tonal centre. It is therefore important that candidates select a stimulus which they can use with musical understanding.

Responding

Most responses were recorded either live or using ICT. Live recordings enabled candidates to control a range of musical elements in performance and therefore achieve higher marks. Some computer generated recordings were mechanical in their impact and did not enable the candidates to demonstrate higher levels of musical understanding. Unquantised and unbalanced recordings using ICT could only gain very limited marks.

Written pieces need to state the instrument to be used; if they do not, and it is not clear from the score, then Area of Study 1 marks cannot be awarded. There were a few candidates who lost marks in this way.

Some written responses were carefully annotated with tempo, dynamics and articulation appropriate to the instrument and style of the piece and in this way achieved marks in the top band. Candidates should be reminded that a tempo and dynamic mark should be stated at the very start of the piece to gain full credit for using these elements.

Unit B354 Listening Examination

General Comments

This paper was accessed well by a high proportion of the candidates. A number of questions gained very good marks, which showed that there was a good understanding of the requirements. Centres are clearly more confident with the content of the specification and answers that showed good aural awareness of the individual styles were often evident. There were a few part-questions where candidates did not perform particularly well, but these were in the minority.

There were a number of instances where good use of correct musical terminology was seen, particularly in questions 1A, 6 and 7. However there were still instances of musical terminology not being understood and 'tonality' in question 2 (a) (i) was one example of this.

It was good to see that some of the points made in previous reports had been addressed. For example, there were far fewer candidates who wrote more than one answer for a single word response than in previous papers.

Where candidates need to give features of the music in answer to the question, centres should be reminded that sometimes simple responses that get straight to the point fare better than rather wordy, vague descriptions.

Q1A This question was answered very well by the majority of candidates. Many scored full marks and nearly all candidates gained at least six of the eight marks available.

Q1 (a) (i) The vast majority of candidates correctly identified 'jazz' as the style of music playing.

Q1 (a) (ii) The majority of candidates were able to recognise that there were 'four' performers in the extract with the most common incorrect answer being three.

Q1 (a) (iii) Many candidates were able to give two correct features of the solo instrument. 'Improvisation', 'swung rhythms' and 'ornamentation' were the most common correct answers seen. There were a few candidates who gave the name of the instrument or wrote vague answers about dynamics and tempo which were not appropriate here.

Q1 (a) (iv) A very good proportion gained full marks or three out of four marks here. Candidates were able to identify instruments and then go on to describe what they played. The use of correct musical terminology appropriate to jazz was good to see.

Q1B This question was answered well by candidates of all abilities with most candidates scoring at least four out of the six marks.

Q1 (b) (i) Most candidates gained at least two marks here and able candidates gained very good marks with answers such as 'phrases get higher', 'ornamented melody' and 'legato' while less able candidates referred to such features as changing dynamics or calm and flowing, which were not specific enough to gain marks. Some candidates wrote about the bird rather than the music which did not gain any credit.

- Q1 (b) (ii)** Most gained at least one of the two marks. The majority of candidates recognised that there was a long chord but were far less certain as to which family of instruments played it.
- Q1C** This part of question one was answered least well, but many candidates were able to gain at least four of the seven marks available.
- Q1 (c) (i)** Some candidates were able to recognise the ‘cymbal’ as the opening sound but were not always certain as to how it was played, although some good descriptions were seen. The ‘single drum beat’ was the next most popular answer. Some candidates wrote about the music heard later in the extract and so did not gain credit.
- Q1 (c) (ii)** Most candidates were able to give at least two ways in which technology was used with ‘synthesiser’, ‘sampling’, and ‘looping’ being the most popular. Some wrote answers such as ‘to make the music repeat’ which did not relate specifically to the technology and so did not gain credit.
- Q1 (c) (iii)** This proved challenging for many candidates. The most popular answer was ground bass which was not correct. It was disappointing to see that the musical term ‘ostinato’, which is one of the most important features of the club dance style, was not correctly identified.
- Q2** Some good answers were seen in the longer part questions with higher ability candidates scoring well throughout.
- Q2 (a) (i)** Although the correct answer of ‘minor’ was seen it was not the most popular answer. The incorrect answer of major was seen most often but there were a disappointing number of candidates who did not understand the word tonality and wrote inappropriate answers like loud or long.
- Q2 (a) (ii)** The majority of candidates gained a mark here although there were some incorrect answers such as ‘to set the tempo’ which is not possible from a sustained chord.
- Q2 (b) (i)** Most candidates gave the correct answer of ‘reel’, although the incorrect answer of jig was sometimes seen. It was encouraging that very few candidates wrote both jig and reel which had been a mistake made in previous papers.
- Q2 (b) (ii)** Some very good answers were seen here with many candidates identifying correct instruments such as the ‘violin’ and ‘accordion’ with other features such as ‘fast’, ‘2 or 4 beats in a bar’ and ‘repeated melodies’ being among the most popular. Sadly some candidates wrote bandoneon here which is the instrument associated with the tango, not with the reel.
- Q2 (c) (i)** There were mixed responses here. The correct answer of ‘5’ was seen quite often but all answers were seen with 4 being the most popular incorrect answer.
- Q2 (c) (ii)** Answers here were spread across all the options.
- Q2 (d)** A good proportion of candidates had correctly learnt the relevant steps for the reel and some good answers were seen, many giving enough information for more than full marks. A minority of candidates wrote about the wrong dance, particularly American line dance, and gained no marks.

- Q3** Candidates appeared to find this extract very accessible and they wrote well about its musical features with some good links to the programme.
- Q3 (a)** The majority of candidates gained marks in the middle and top band mark range, many with five or above. Candidates wrote well about the general features of tempo, dynamics, instruments and a good proportion went on to expand on these features with more detail, and it was those candidates who are able to access the highest mark band. Some very perceptive responses were seen showing that centres had prepared their candidates well.
- Q3 (b)** The most popular answer was John Williams, which, although incorrect, (the composer was James Horner) was quite acceptable to gain the mark. There were those weaker candidates, however, who wrote the names of Classical composers and even Strauss was seen.
- Q4** The answers to this question were quite mixed. The notation was generally answered well but the other part-questions were not, with the identification of bar numbers being least well answered.
- Q4 (a)** The majority of candidates correctly chose a woodwind instrument but were not sufficiently familiar with the specific timbres to give the correct answer of 'oboe'. The answer most often seen was clarinet.
- Q4 (b)** The marks for this notation question were generally good and the majority gained at least half marks. There was a significant number gaining seven or eight out of ten but few gained full marks. As usual in this question, a significant number of candidates gained marks for shape especially in bar 3. Some candidates recognised the sequence following on from bar 2 but went up instead of down. Some weaker candidates appeared puzzled by the semibreves and left them out. Bar 40 was a little more challenging for some candidates who incorrectly tried to extend the sequence of the previous bars. Some candidates wrote notes below the stave without leger lines which means that they could not gain any credit.
- Q4 (c)** Some candidates were able to identify quite clearly the music played by the bass guitar; such answers included 'descending', 'scale', 'slides' and 'dotted rhythms'. There were others, however, who used vague terminology such as quiet, or low and those who wrote incorrect statements about the walking bass or the chords played by the bass guitar. There were also those who wrote about the voice, which did not answer the question.
- Q4 (d) (i)** Some candidates were able to identify where the strings entered but there were also a very wide range of incorrect bar numbers given.
- Q4 (d) (ii)** Most candidates were correctly able to identify where the piano played a trill, although there was a significant number of candidates who wrote bar 35 or 37 instead of 'bar 36'.
- Q4 (d) (iii)** Very few candidates were able to identify where the brass entered the music.
- Q4 (e)** The vast majority of candidates were able to recognise that the 'snare drum played on beats 2 and 4'.

- Q5** Candidates often find the comparison question challenging, but in this paper the question was generally answered quite well. Able candidates gained very good marks overall, particularly in the early parts of the question, but there were also some good responses in the boxes of the final part of the question. Centres should be aware that failure by candidates to clearly identify to which extract they are referring when making comments results in no credit being given.
- Q5 (a) (i)** Many candidates were able to give the name of a group who might have performed the disco song. The most popular choices were 'The Bee Gees' and 'The Jackson 5' which although not correct, were suitable choices.
- Q5 (a) (ii)** Not as many candidates were able to name a group for the Bhangra song and a number left this question blank. There was however, a good proportion who wrote either 'Alaap' or 'Panjabi MC' which were both suitable choices.
- Q5 (b)** A high proportion of candidates recognised that 'Extract A was faster than Extract B', but there were those who felt that they were both the same. Some candidates only wrote about one of the extracts and so were not able to gain any credit in a one mark comparison question.
- Q5 (c)** The majority of candidates recognised that they both had four (or two) beats in a bar. A small minority of candidates wrote about tempo, which was not appropriate, and some chose three beats in a bar for one of the pieces. It is important for candidates to remember that comparisons can be similarities and not just differences.
- Q5 (d)** The majority of candidates gained a mark for recognising that 'Extract B used sampling and Extract A did not'.
- Q5 (e) (i)** Able candidates generally answered this question well. They were able to give some detail to the music played by the drum kits and they also recognised the use of the 'Dhol' playing the 'chaal' rhythm in Extract B. Weaker candidates wrote very vaguely about there being more percussion in one of the extracts and sometimes they simply listed parts of the drum kit giving no detail as to what they played. Neither of these approaches gained credit.
- Q5 (e) (ii)** This proved to be the most challenging of part (e). Candidates often did not write clearly about the guitars and most answers were very vague. Common mistakes made by candidates were to write about the use of the sitar in Extract B, which was not relevant, and it appeared that candidates did not realise that the Bass Guitar, which was used in both extracts, could be discussed here.
- Q5 (e) (iii)** This was the most well answered part of (e) where many candidates gained credit by referring to the language used in both extracts, the use of 'backing voices', 'male singers', 'unison' in Extract A and 'call and response' in Extract B.
- Q6** Generally, able candidates responded very well to this question, but there were also a good proportion of other candidates who were aware of the genre of the extract and who were able to apply correct musical terminology to their answers.
- Q6 (a)** Many candidates of all abilities scored well here by giving basic features such as 'loud', 'ascending' and 'scalic'. Others popular answers from high ability candidates were 'homophonic', 'minor' and 'legato'.

- Q6 (b)** A few candidates correctly identified the ‘added loud drum beats’ on the ‘off beat’ to score full marks. However, the majority of candidates wrote incorrect answers regarding the dynamics and the number of instruments playing.
- Q6 (c)** Many high ability candidates knew that this extract came from an ‘oratorio’ but weaker candidates were not aware of this and most often wrote symphony.
- Q6 (d)** Some very good answers were seen here and marks were gained most often for ‘loud’, ‘fast’, ‘minor’, ‘staccato’ and ‘homophonic’.
- Q6 (e)** ‘Melismatic’ was a word that some candidates had learnt, but the majority were clearly not familiar with term despite it being part of the language for learning.
- Q6 (f) (i)** Many candidates gained a mark here for ‘large hall’ or ‘church’. There were a number of candidates who wrote opera house or theatre despite the fact that opera is not included in the areas of study.
- Q6 (f) (ii)** Some good responses were seen here but some of those who wrote opera house in part (i) went on to talk about the need for staging which is not appropriate for a piece of music such as this.
- Q7** Generally this question was answered well. Candidates of all abilities were able to access all parts of this question quite successfully.
- Q7 (a)** The majority of candidates gained at least two of the three marks here, with answers such as ‘harp’, ‘strings’, ‘quiet’ ‘slow’ and ‘legato’ being the most popular.
- Q7 (b) (i)** The vast majority of answers were correct.
- Q7 (b) (ii)** Candidates who understood the word ornament in the question gained a mark for ‘trill’. There was a minority of candidates who did not know what an ornament was and so answered inappropriately.
- Q7 (b) (iii)** Most candidates were able to relate what they heard to some aspect of a bird to gain the mark.
- Q7 (c)** A high proportion of candidates gained full marks here.
- Q7 (d)** This question was quite well answered, but fewer candidates gained full marks here than in earlier parts of this question. “Louder” and “thicker” were popular answers that gained marks.

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