

Report on the Units

June 2010

J535/R/10

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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.

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Music (J535)

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Chief Examiner's Report

This is the first year that this specification has been offered and, since it has only been taught for a year, it is likely that the majority of candidates entering were in Year 10. Since there was only a relatively small number of candidates in this cohort, these comments are based on a limited range of work.

Unit B351 Integrated Tasks

Performances

There was a range of popular and classical instruments presented for assessment with a very small number of sequenced performances.

Assessors coped well with the change in the criteria which required separate marks to be awarded for fluency and interpretation. What many assessors did not understand, however, is that the top mark in each of these categories should be reserved for performances which are outstanding in all respects. This recognises a level of achievement that has not been categorised previously. Therefore too many good (but not outstanding) performances were awarded this top mark when it would have been appropriate to award a mark in the band below.

The same applied to the difficulty marks and many pieces that comfortably warranted a 5 for difficulty were incorrectly awarded 6 marks here.

Compositions

The standard of compositions entered for this unit was high and there was clear evidence that candidates were able to do well because they were writing for an instrument that they understood.

Most compositions in this unit were accurately assessed with a tendency on the part of a small number of assessors to be generous. In a very small number of cases, the top mark was awarded too readily. Assessors need to be aware that the highest mark out of 15 should be reserved only for highly imaginative and original pieces.

Commentaries

The new commentaries were generally well tackled and it is clear that the requirement to write four paragraphs provided a structure within which candidates could focus their responses appropriately. There were very few examples of irrelevant information being provided. Almost all centres were using the proforma found at the back of the specification for their candidates' responses. There were some good commentaries, but not many that were worth marks in the top band, which requires real musical thinking to be shown. Overall the commentaries were marked a little generously but usually only by a mark. There was a small minority of commentaries which were awarded very high marks for saying very little.

Unit B352 Practical Portfolio

Performances

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Whilst the increased focus on ensemble awareness for the performance in this unit has clearly supported students in producing musical performances, there was a small minority of performances where the candidate did not display enough empathy with the other parts to warrant the marks awarded.

Centres are reminded that it is not acceptable to submit group performances where the performers are all playing or singing the same part. In such cases the performances are invalid.

Compositions

The unit offers opportunity to compose in a huge range of compositional styles, and it is hoped that in time candidates will benefit from the flexibility offered by the open-ended nature of the composition tasks.

It was therefore disappointing to discover that this year not many candidates were exploring these new opportunities. The majority of compositions presented were waltzes and there were a large number of these that were rather mundane and which relied on a formula. The next most popular choice was Disco, with a few candidates composing for combinations of instruments and voices based on Area of Study Two. There were very few arrangements or descriptive pieces.

The marking of compositions was overall quite generous and this generosity was greatest where candidates were using a heavily prescribed structural formula.

There was a small number of candidates who had used samples to create their compositions. This is only acceptable if the full nature and extent of the samples is declared. It is essential that the centre declares clearly the extent of the candidate's work and if such a declaration is not possible then the work is not appropriate for submission for the examination.

In some cases worksheets were helpfully presented alongside the composition outcome, and in this way the centres could make explicit which ideas were not generated by the candidate.

Log and evaluation

The composition logs and evaluations are a new requirement. The pro-forma in the specification was used in most cases. Many candidates wrote very bland statements about the process of composition, and in some cases groups of candidates appeared to be writing the same thing. Moderators are looking for individuality here and sometimes wondered whether the logs did truly reflect the process that the individual candidate had undertaken.

Centres are reminded that when using the pro-forma in the specification, all of the information should be completed entirely by the candidate, including the notes section.

More worrying were those comments made by candidates that revealed the teacher had engaged with the candidate in the composition process. It needs to be pointed out that within the new requirements of controlled assessment, there is a limited amount of guidance that can be given once the controlled time starts, and that all guidance should be logged. The nature of the guidance allowed is set out on page 33 of the specification.

In most cases the log and evaluations were marked generously by centres.

Unit B353 Creative Task

The wide range of styles that the Creative Task generated gave clear evidence that candidates are benefiting from the wide range of stimuli on offer and the lack of restriction on the content of the composition.

Five of the six stimuli were seen in frequent use: only a very small number of candidates used the melodic phrase.

Guitarists and drummers were seen making particularly good use of their improvisatory skills and many enjoyable and successful pieces were heard in which candidates were able to demonstrate the variety of techniques that they could use.

There was a significant decrease in the number of written tasks: now that the task has opened up new opportunities for performers on all instruments, many more chose to perform their pieces and this enabled some musical responses.

The stimulus that generated the most mediocre responses was the words. Many vocalists restricted their pieces to a very small range of notes, with repetition rather than development, and had difficulty staying in tune throughout the song.

The use of ICT in some cases restricted the creativity of candidates. This became a particularly acute problem with the descriptive stimulus where some candidates used substantial orchestral samples cut and pasted together. Whilst credit could be given for the use of technology to communicate the response effectively, little credit could be offered for the quality of the response because the musical ideas were not created by the candidates.

Unit B354 Listening Examination

This was the first time that the listening paper was available for the new GCSE specification. The course has only been running for one year and consequently the number of centres opting to enter candidates for the exam was very limited. Most candidates who entered this exam will have been in Year 10 and although a number of pleasing answers were seen some candidates seemed ill-prepared to sit the exam at this stage.

Questions based on styles that were also part of the legacy specification seemed, in some cases, to be answered more fully than those in some of the new areas. This may be because teachers at this stage in the new specification are more familiar with them than the focuses for learning.

It is important for teachers to familiarise themselves more fully with the style of answers that will be required for Area of Study 4 - Descriptive Music. Many candidates used vague or general language that lacked specific musical detail. In order to access high marks for these questions, candidates must listen carefully and identify correct and specific musical features that link to the nature, mood or story of each extract.

It is important for teachers to recognise at this stage that the use of correct terminology for specific styles is required. A feature like 'call and response' may be a suitable answer for Salsa but it is not suitable for a Classical concerto. Likewise describing a tempo as 'upbeat' is suitable for disco but not for the waltz.

Q1A This question was generally well answered, perhaps in part because it was a familiar focus for study that was retained from the legacy specification.

Q.1A(i) The vast majority of candidates were able to recognise that there were 4 beats in a bar.

Q.1A(ii) Most candidates were able to identify *hook* as the correct answer.

Q.1A(iii) A number of candidates scored full marks here, with *fast / upbeat, 120 bpm, synthesised instruments* and information about the use of the *drum kit* or *drum machine* being the most popular correct answers. Some candidates did opt for more general language like 'catchy beat' which is not specific enough to gain credit.

Q.1B Many candidates were able to recognise the style of this extract (Indian Classical Music), although some mistook it for Bhangra. It is important for candidates to learn which styles occur in each area of study so they are able to focus their listening on correct features. Indian Classical Music is a focus for learning in Area of Study 2 whilst Bhangra is a focus for learning in Area of Study 3. This question referred to Area of Study 2 – shared music, and so Bhangra was not appropriate.

Q.1B(i) Most candidates correctly underlined *Indian Classical Music*. The most popular incorrect answer was Bhangra.

Q.1B(ii) A good number of candidates were able to hear that the drum was the *tabla*, although some thought that it might be the Dhol drum that is linked to Bhangra.

Q.1B(iii) Most candidates recognised one of the melody instruments correctly as the *Sitar*.

Q.1B(iv) Candidates did not appear to have a good understanding of the features of this style and few correct answers were given. The most popular incorrect answer was Call and Response, which is not a melody pattern but a melodic device.

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Q.1B(v) Few candidates gained the full 4 marks here but most candidates were able to score at least 1 or 2 marks recognising the use of *unison*, *imitation / repeat* or *alternating*.

Q1C This question required candidates to give musical features, not general ones. Statements like 'it was eerie' do not describe anything in the music and so will not gain marks. This kind of statement must always be used in conjunction with a musical feature, for example 'the music is dissonant which makes it sound eerie'.

Q.1C(i) There were not many full mark answers for this question with many vague and general comments being made about the 'atmosphere', not the music. However, marks were gained for answers like *short notes*, *use of vibrato and tremolando*, *clashing notes* and *high pitched notes*.

Q.1C(ii) Many candidates were able to gain marks here with lists of possible technology, including *synthesiser*, *looping*, *multitracking*, *sampling* and *use of computer*. Some candidates described the 'effects' of technology rather than the devices or processes used, giving vague answers such as 'used to make the music louder'

Q2 Parts of this question were answered quite well, especially the sections that required descriptions of the effect created by the large forces that played this extract and the features of the end of the extract.

Q.2 (a) Some candidates only heard the string section and did not understand that a full *orchestra* was used in the accompaniment.

Q.2 (b) Most candidates were able to identify that the tonality of the extract was *major*.

Q.2(c) There was a fairly equal number of correct and incorrect answers here.

Q.2 (d) Although many candidates gave a lengthy description, few gave musical details beyond the basic elements of tempo (*fast*) and volume *loud* etc. Their ability to link to the 'effect' was generally good, however.

Q.2 (e) Many candidates were able to give *tenor* or *bass* as the correct answer although some opted for the incorrect generic 'male'.

Q.2 (f) Few candidates gained full marks but many gained 1 or 2 for identifying that the music was *lower*, *slower* and *thinner in texture*.

Q.3 This is a new style of question, being used for the first time in this specification. It requires longer prose answers to demonstrate accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Those candidates who did not respond in this way were not able to access the highest band of marks. However, it is also important for teachers to recognise that the identification of musical content is the most essential aspect of the answer. Answers containing description alone will also not be able to gain marks in the higher bands. A 'link' idea can only be credited once, so repeated reference to 'dashing or chasing about' would not gain further marks and simply writing 'chase' would gain no marks as it is in the question.

Q.3 (a) Whilst many candidates recognised that the music had two or four beats in a bar a number of candidates did not write a time signature and so were not able to gain the mark.

Q.3 (b) Most candidates recognised *allegro* as the correct tempo with *moderato* being the most popular incorrect answer.

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Q.3(c) High marks were limited here, with most of the answers being very basic or general. The use of the word 'chase' in the question clearly inspired some candidates to be imaginative and there were some good descriptions of the chase, but the musical detail required to support these descriptions was lacking and so the marks given were mostly in the lower bands. Candidates need to develop their skills in this area in order to deliver musically accurate and detailed answers that have a sense of chronology and some links to the programme. Answers that list a few points like fast, loud, getting louder and use of cymbal crashes will only be placed in the lowest mark band. Candidates should try to avoid vague comments such as 'there is a lot going on' or 'something is about to happen'. In order to help candidates demonstrate a depth of understanding, they might find it useful to make notes on their ideas during the first and/or second hearings and then organise their thoughts into prose in the subsequent hearings. In future papers a blank page will be left for this purpose.

Q.4 This question was not well answered with many candidates having a poor understanding of the required musical and historical features and the melodic notation was quite mixed.

Q.4 (a) Most candidates correctly identified the solo instrument as the *flute* with the clarinet as the most common incorrect answer.

Q.4 (b) Few candidates were able to identify the features heard in the accompaniment. It was apparent that candidates did not understand all the words listed for them to choose from. It is important for teachers to be aware of the language for learning from which all of these words were taken.

Q.4(c) The notation question had one full marks answer and a few answers that were nearly full marks. A good number of candidates benefited from marks given for shape, particularly in bar 4 and one or two candidates identified the A# in bar 6, which was encouraging.

Q.4(d) Those more able candidates who understood the word 'ornament' gained a mark for *trill* but those less able did not understand the terminology and wrote inappropriate answers like 'a dotted note'.

Q.4 (e)(i) There was a mixed response for the musical history period with all papers seen. The most popular answer, however, was the correct *Classical*, but a number of dates were seen as well which did not answer the question.

Q.4(e)(ii) A few candidates were able to give correct answers to support the musical history period, such as *balanced phrasing*, *medium sized orchestra* and *simple harmony* but many weaker ones gave answers such as 'Classical style strings' or general answers like 'calm', which were not acceptable.

Q.4 (f) Some candidates did not understand the term cadence and so answered incorrectly but those who did understand were mostly able to correctly identify *perfect*.

Q.4(g) A good number of candidates were able to recognise that this extract would be most likely to be performed in a *concert hall*, but a surprising number wrote 'theatre' as if the music was operatic, even though Opera is not in any of the Areas of Study.

Q5 As a style that was also part of the legacy specification, this appeared to be more familiar than some of the new styles. No doubt teachers are more confident teaching this style and the questions relating to the features of the style were answered quite well overall. The comparison grid was less well answered, showing a lack of understanding of musical terminology. It is worth noting at this point that with comparison questions candidates do not get marks for saying the same thing in two ways, for example 'the texture of Extract B is thicker' and 'the texture of Extract A is thinner'. This only wastes candidates' time and gains them nothing.

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Q.5 (a) Most candidates were able to gain marks here with many recognising *um cha cha*, *fast* and *triple time*. Other answers such as *strong first beat of the bar* and *slow harmonic rhythm* were also seen but less often. There were, however, those weaker candidates who did not give specific information but instead just wrote 'the rhythm' or 'the use of strings', which are far too vague to gain credit.

Q.5 (b) Many candidates were able to correctly identify a *trill* or a *turn*, although some wrote the names of ornaments that were not present in the music, like 'a mordent' whilst others wrote the name of the instrument playing it.

Q.5(c) Most candidates had learnt the names of waltz composers and the majority correctly wrote *Strauss*. There were also a number of Classical composers given; it seemed that some candidates linked orchestral music to 'classical' and therefore a composer of that period.

Q.5 (d) A good number of candidates understood the nature of the dance steps, recognising that it needed to be danced in *partners* with *groups of three steps*, although there were a number of candidates who wrote vaguely about moving in time with the music.

Q.5 (e)

Tempo – few marks were gained here because many candidates seemed to assume that the tempo of each extract would be different, rather than listening carefully to the music and hearing that the two extracts were in fact *the same or a very similar tempo*. Most candidates incorrectly thought that Extract B was faster than Extract A. Some did gain a mark for recognising the change of tempo at the end of Extract B.

Instruments used for the melody – many candidates gained marks here for recognising that both extracts *used strings*, and/or that Extract B *used brass*. However the finer point of Extract A having a *solo violin* and Extract B having *lots of violins* was rarely commented on.

Dynamics – those candidates who understood the word dynamics were able to hear that Extract B *was louder* than Extract A. Candidates who did not understand this term often wrote incorrectly about pitch or articulation.

Texture – once again those who understood the term texture were able to recognise that Extract B *was thicker* than Extract A, but those who chose incorrect answers often wrote about dynamics here. Some candidates wrote about homophonic or polyphonic texture, which was not appropriate here.

Q6 Salsa, the style on which this question was based, is also part of the legacy specification and appeared to be answered well in the main. One thing which should be noted, however, is that the number of marks given for each of the questions in the grid should be taken into account by candidates. If three marks are allocated then three features must be stated in order to gain full marks. Some candidates wrote only one feature in each box and so were not able to access full marks.

Q.6 (a)(i) Most candidates recognised the *trumpet*, with several correctly opting instead for *trombone*. There were some candidates who incorrectly heard a saxophone.

Q.6(a)(ii) The correct term of *comping* (found in the language for learning) did not appear to be familiar to many candidates with most opting for walking bass or counterpoint.

Q.6(b)

The brass in the introduction – there were some vague answers here, with ‘introduces the piece’ and ‘set the mood’ being seen several times. These are implicit in the question and so will not gain marks. However, a pleasing number recognised a variety of features including - *they played the melody, used syncopation and were high pitched*.

The voices – *call and response* and *solo and chorus* or their Spanish equivalent *pregon a choro* or *Sonero / choro* were given most often, but few candidates actually gave four points and so reduced their potential for marks considerably. Other popular correct answers were *shouting, high pitched and in Spanish*.

The percussion instruments – *repetition* or *ostinato* was the most popular correct answer but *Clave rhythm* was also seen as well as *they played throughout* and *maintains the pulse*.

Q.6(c) The majority of candidates gained marks here for *loud* and/or *fast*. However some did not write about the music but gave rather more general answers such as ‘lots of room to dance’ or ‘like a celebration’.

Q.7 The word ‘describe’ in this question did not always elicit a suitable response. A description needs to be more than one word, so more thought is required and more detail needs to be given in order to gain full marks. The true/false answers appeared to help candidates to focus at the end of the paper.

Q.7(a) Many candidates heard that the music was *low* and that there were *many rests* in the music. They did not, however, go on to give any detail, which limited the marks in many cases.

Q.7(b) Nearly all of the candidates gained at least one mark here, with the majority gaining three and some managing to score full marks.

(i) Most candidates gained a mark for recognising that the *bassoon* played the melody, probably because they know that this is a low-pitched instrument.

(ii) This proved a little more difficult with some candidates not recognising that the interval of the first two notes was not an octave.

(iii) Those candidates who understood the word ‘legato’ were able to hear that this was not the articulation used for this extract.

(iv) Many candidates were able to recognise that the music was in a minor key.

(v) This was the part of the question which was most often answered incorrectly with many candidates failing to understand the concept of compound time.

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