

GCE

Music

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H143**

OCR Report to Centres June 2018

About this Examiner Report to Centres

This report on the 2018 Summer assessments aims to highlight:

- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice 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.

The report also includes links and brief information on:

- A reminder of our **post-results services** including **reviews of results**
- Link to **grade boundaries**
- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme

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H143/01 Performing

1. General Comments:

Many of the video submissions were of live public performances, with audience present and a real sense of occasion. The larger spaces (and additional audience in some instances) – such as theatres, churches or drama venues - had a clearly positive effect on the performers, allowing them to project more, and with a sense of purpose and integrity, especially when there was an audience present.

Conversely, some performances given in smaller spaces, (eg practice rooms or offices, even stairwells) tended at times to lose some of the sense of involvement and communication with a lack of projection sometimes not fully apparent.

In terms of the positioning of the camera and performers, the most successful were those that were filmed centre-on, from the front. Sometimes performers were filmed with their backs to the camera which was less helpful from a visual point of view, or with the music or music lectern obscuring singers.

Where performing was presented involving ensembles or duets, centres made it clear who the candidate was (both on the video and the essential Cover Sheet), and there were some examples of nifty camera work and rehearsed stage managing where an ensemble transitioned seamlessly into a solo with piano. The Coversheet is a vital document which carries much important information – order of pieces, repertoire and timings and should also include indication of the grade of the music presented.

Care should be taken to ensure that the sound quality of recitals is as high as possible – there was certainly some variation here. Additionally, backing tracks should be balanced well against solo playing, so that details and finesse in varying dynamics and tone can be projected. However the board is grateful to the many excellent (usually unnamed) piano accompanists who supported candidates in a wide range of styles, while often also operating as cameraman and announcer.

In general performances were uploaded to the OCR Repository via Interchange, the capacity of which has now been increased hugely. Some centres chose also to send work in hard copy to the Examiners (using the yellow labels for the sending of attendance registers) in a “belt-and-braces” approach, in a variety of formats: USB, sound cards, DVD), but the **repository should be used in 2019** and beyond. Ideally files should be “zipped” wherever possible for ease of downloading, along with copies of the music and the Coversheet.

There were some problems accessing some formats of recording - whether from the repository or the post - and there were some mishaps in loading up the correct work to the correct candidate’s folder. Some CDs were damaged in the post, though centres were prompt to replace them.

The range of styles and instruments/voices presented was again wide: jazz groups, madrigals, string quartets, saxophone improvisations, concerti, Lieder, musical theatre medleys and tuned percussion solos, to cite just a few. In most cases a good range of techniques and contrast was demonstrated, although some recitals fell short of the six minute minimum: **recitals which do**

not achieve this timing will receive zero marks. Repertoire should be of at least grade six standard to access all mark bands under the heading of “Technical Control”.

Some recitals began confidently but lost technical poise, precision and detail as the pieces progressed or modulated, or when textures became more challenging. Candidates opting to play or sing from memory should be mindful of the performance directions and markings on the scores as these were at times overlooked or under-projected.

H143/02 Composing

1. General Comments:

There was a significant drop this year in the number of candidates submitting work for this component. Overall, centres made good use of the Repository and the majority of submissions were uploaded correctly and clearly. With a very small amount of candidates, the use of excessively long file names resulted in some problems with opening the file. A few centres submitted hard copies of all work, which was also clearly presented.

All candidates met the requirements for length. Some candidates for Brief 6 submitted a piece without a clear principal instrument as specified in the brief. This had an impact on the mark for Response to the Brief.

Brief 1 was popular and candidates produced work showing clear familiarity with the style. The highest scoring candidates varied the return of the Rondo theme, covered a range of keys beyond the usual dominant and included pleasing details such as passing modulations and fluent use of inversions. Writing for the ensembles was idiomatic and successful on the whole, if sometimes with a relentless *tutti* texture.

Brief 2 compositions were variable in quality. There was a clear understanding of style for most submissions but a lack of harmonic variety and textural invention in some pieces. The higher-scoring candidates varied both the roles of the instruments and the music in each verse, as well as exploring some more colourful harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary. At the lower end, pieces were coherent but lacking in strong character and the backing was often rather too simple, particularly with drum and piano parts. Vocal parts were generally fluent in both shape and setting of lyrics.

Brief 3 compositions were similarly mixed. Candidates had a good understanding of the rhythmic and gestural aspects of the style, but the lower-scoring candidates did not match this with harmonic understanding or effective writing for the instruments. Several works had unconvincing and unstylish harmonic progressions and there was often weak writing for piano, with low thick chords in the left hand colliding with the bass. Some pieces stuck to a standard 3-chord blues progression throughout, which affects the mark for technique: more is expected at AS level. As with Brief 2, the best work showed an attention to detail in instrumental writing, particularly drums.

There was only one submission for Brief 4.

Brief 5 had clearly inspired the candidates, as the standard was high here. There was an often impressive ambition and skill at orchestral writing and the highest-scoring work matched this with strong themes, dramatic gestures, inventive harmony and a breadth of vocabulary to do justice to the range of the brief. Work that covered the whole story was sometimes rather too long and lost impetus, but the work for this brief was very pleasing.

Brief 6 inspired a range of approaches, from solo piano to electronic scores. Most candidates took a fairly obvious approach, with grand slow-moving music for the vastness of space and heroic/uplifting themes for astronauts/ISS. There was a sense of mystery for most submissions but a rather limited harmonic and rhythmic vocabulary in the less successful pieces. An

excessively static work with little sense of forward motion meets some of the aspects of the brief but will not show a strong command of techniques.

Synthesised and sequenced work was appropriate but too often, there was a lack of care and detail in the choice, shaping and treatment of the timbres and their combination.

With the Learner-set Brief, there are still frequent problems with the brief itself. Too many candidates are writing a very long commentary and analysis, which can gain no credit: it may be useful for the candidate but there is no point in submitting it. The weakest briefs talked about the details of the piece in the past tense with descriptions of each bar or section. A successful brief should be concise and set out clear requirements for performing forces, venue, occasion and musical style or approach. There are plenty of good models: the OCR briefs themselves and exemplar material.

However, some centres submitted excellent briefs along the lines just given and they will feature in future INSET and online resources.

As for the Response to the Brief, even good briefs resulted in some disappointing work, usually by setting a task for which the candidate does not have the necessary vocabulary. For example, if a candidate can only use diatonic vocabulary, there is a problem when the brief specifies tension and drama, or is for a tribute to a composer that depends on a lot more. The brief also needs to allow the candidate to demonstrate a range of appropriate techniques: a pastiche of Einaudi is not likely to show much range, although the candidate in question did produce work that is considerably more inventive than the model.

The range of briefs was stylistically wide, sometimes adapting a Section 1 brief, sometimes continuing the style explored in composition 1. The general comments on composing 1 applied here as well. Some reasons for lower marks include missed opportunities for variation (exact Da Capo, identical song verses, unchanging riffs), limited key or harmonic range and workable but unadventurous writing for instruments.

Having said that, there was much work that was pleasing, showed a convincing link with AOS topics and a command of style and techniques that was a clear advance over the standard at GCSE. Centres are commended for their preparation of candidates for this component.

H143/03 Listening and Appraising

1. General Comments:

Examiners were encouraged by the overall performance of candidates in Listening and Appraising. There was a positive response to both Areas of Study 1 and 2, and the prescribed works by Haydn and Nina Simone were mostly well known and understood.

The format of the paper did not appear to cause difficulties for candidates. This year there were more lines provided for answers in Section B. Frequently candidates were able to write a full answer within the space. Candidates with larger handwriting often used the additional answer pages.

There were a few examples of candidates not answering dictation/notation questions. Examiners cannot know whether a candidate chose not to answer or wrote in the Insert but did not copy the final answer into the Question Paper. Centres may wish to remind candidates that Examiners do not see the Insert: an answer must be written in the Question Paper if it is to get any marks.

The published mark scheme is a useful resource for teaching and learning. For some questions, there is a detailed list of possible answers, given as guidance to Examiners. Candidates are not expected to include all these points in the space and time available in an examination, but they are good examples of the type of answers that are required to access the highest mark bands.

The essay questions were mostly well answered. Many candidates were fully prepared to discuss the prescribed works and give examples, which demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the music.

Examiners were pleased to note many answers in which ideas were clearly structured in paragraphs and presented in a logical sequence, either (i) going through events in the music in the order in which they are heard, or (ii) dealing with aspects of the discussion in turn (for example, discussing in Miles Davis Q.5, bebop and Charlie Parker first, then a paragraph on experiments in jazz in the 1950s, followed by a summary of cool jazz, then paragraphs on each of the soloists). Introductions and conclusions were generally concise and purposeful.

Candidates should read the question carefully. At AS level the essay questions target Assessment Objective 4 (AO4): 'use analytical and appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music'. This means that in addition to writing in detail about the repertoire and its background, candidates are expected to demonstrate what may be called 'thinking skills'. The best answers showed both a high level of engagement with the music and background and an ability to address the different issues presented in the question. The questions were worded to take in a number of related ideas. Some candidates sensibly took the precaution of underlining key phrases as a reminder of the strands to be addressed in their answer:

Q.5: 'the music of So What ... new thinking in instrumental jazz ... different approaches taken by the soloists'

Q.6: 'the vocal forces (in Purcell) ... contrasting textures ... an appropriate anthem for a coronation'

Q.7: ‘expanding instrumental techniques and orchestral colours ... how Tchaikovsky ... illustrate(s) the story’

Q.8: ‘whether *Sinfonia antartica* ... (is) characteristic of an English national style ... melody and harmony’

Some candidates found it difficult to evaluate and make critical judgements. They were able to write a detailed analysis of the music but were less flexible in selecting relevant information to answer the question. Sometimes attempts at ‘bar-by-bar’ analysis of a whole work were at the expense of summarising or grouping ideas together in order to reach a conclusion. Bar-by-bar analysis can be useful, for example in Section B, in which candidates are often expected to comment analytically on a given extract. However, in preparing for the Section C prescribed works, Examiners suggest that centres should not overuse bar-by-bar analysis of scores in their teaching. They should encourage candidates to develop their contextual knowledge and their skills and enthusiasm as attentive and independent listeners through a range of activities, including research and discussion.

The published specification gives guidance on the scope of each Area of Study in the sections headed ‘Outline’ and ‘Focus for learning’. The bullet points under ‘musical elements’ and ‘conditions and context’ are a useful list: candidates should be prepared as a bare minimum to write about the prescribed work (and its related background) in relation to these headings. For Section C centres should consider selecting and analysing example passages, which illustrate these headings.

2. Comments on Individual Questions:

Q.1(a)

The majority of candidates were correct in identifying ‘F sharp’ as the opening pitch.

Q.1(b)

The chromatic movement in bar 5 was challenging for many, and there were some awkward leaps in bar 6. A few candidates were confused by the tied notes in the rhythm in bar 6, not realising the same pitch was required for both notes.

Q.1(c)

‘Counter melody’ was the most commonly identified answer.

Q.1(d)

Similarly, ‘saxophone’ proved no problem for almost all candidates.

Q.1(e)

There were a number of completely correct answers. Most candidates realised that the chord in bar 20 was a dominant.

Q.1(f)

Most candidates were able to explain the vocal performance at least in part. At least one example was needed to gain full marks, along with several other points. An example should include a description and a location (most easily identified by a lyric, a bar number or both), for example, ‘a slide on ‘Me’ in bar 5’. Most answers included a number of examples but missed

more general points, such as ‘louder’, ‘higher’, and ‘more swing’. Centres may wish to provide opportunities for candidates to build up their experience of this repertoire: listen and discuss the vocal techniques of Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra and others, looking for examples of swing, variation in timbre and phrasing, and so on.

Q.1(g)

There were many correct answers. Candidates should be aware of changes in technology over time. Some lost marks because of their lack of knowledge of early recording techniques and underlined inappropriate answers.

Q.1(h)

Most candidates understood the limitations of recording in the 1930s. Good answers were able to comment on the recording conditions of the period and on the equipment that was available. Comments on the unavailability of more modern equipment (‘no autotune’) were not successful in showing that candidates knew about 1930s recording.

Q.1(i)

Many candidates were aware that the Foxtrot was a dance, but others were not able to offer a convincing explanation. Some incorrectly thought it was a recording company. Centres are encouraged to teach candidates about ‘the effect of audience, time and place on how the songs are created’ and ‘the historical and social context’ (AS specification, Area of Study 2). This should apply to both to unfamiliar repertoire in Section A and prescribed works in Section B.

Q.2(a)

There were a number of very good answers. Beethoven’s original dynamic markings are simple – a *cresc.* and a *fp.* Examiners allowed some leeway with the *cresc.* (see the mark scheme), with a maximum of 2 marks for showing a sustained crescendo from bar 18². More precise listening was required at the end: answers had to show a diminuendo or *p* after the C sharp in bar 23¹ in order to gain the mark.

Q.2(b)

There were a number of detailed answers, which identified precisely the ‘scherzoso’ features in the music. Candidates responded well to the two-note motif, the use of rests, the antiphony between the piano and violin, and the contrasting dynamics and accents. Explanations of rhythmic features were sometimes vague. A few candidates tried to explain ‘playful’ as a description of children at play: wider experience of listening to a Beethoven ‘scherzo’ would perhaps have helped avoid that.

Q.2(c)

Most candidates were aware of some features of sonata form. Occasionally candidates did not read the question carefully, giving an outline description of sonata form without investigating how the extract matched the description. The best answers were able to explain more than just ‘the first subject in the tonic key’ and go on to mention later sections (transition, second subject, codetta), refer to a modulation to the dominant and to the double-bar repeat printed in the Insert.

Q.2(d)

Candidates were usually able to give some relevant information on instruments of Beethoven’s time, not always precise. Discussion of the fortepiano tended to compare it with the earlier harpsichord, whereas comparisons with the modern piano would have been more relevant. The best answers were able to link knowledge of the instruments with what was being heard in the recording.

Q.3(a)

Most candidates were able to attempt this question in some detail. Examiners were looking for answers, which described different examples of texture and explained some of the contrasts in timbre in the extract. There were some very good answers by candidates who understood the distinctive timbre of the flute/woodwind as a group in antiphony with the strings and/or full orchestra. To reach the higher bands of marks, candidates described a few passages in some detail, for example, 'Bars 210-213: melody is played by flutes and violins in octaves, accompaniment in minim chords, reinforced by brass and timpani'.

Weaker answers tended to overuse a limited number of descriptive labels. Terms such as 'thick' and 'thin' are not appropriate at this level of study. Even more technical words such as 'homophonic' and 'polyphonic' lose their meaning and value after a few repetitions. In the middle to low bands of marks, a few answers consisted of a list of bar references and the briefest of descriptions ('bar 200 – monophonic; bar 204 – polyphonic; bar 210 – melody-dominated homophony').

Q.3(b)

Most candidates had at least a general awareness of Haydn's employment by Prince Esterházy and the impact of London on Haydn and his music. Many answers had a good level of detail and were able to refer to examples from the Military Symphony and/or others. Examiners were encouraged by answers that placed the prescribed work into the context of the audience of the period.

Q.4(a)

Many candidates knew the extract well and made a series of relevant comments in explaining words and music. Most candidates were able to discuss melodic techniques. The availability of a score in the Insert helped with harmony and tonality.

Q.4(b)

There were a number of effective comparisons of alternative performances of 'Tomorrow is my turn', most often featuring Rhiannon Giddens or the original French version by the song's composer, Charles Aznavour. Many answers were able to list musical details, particularly tempo, metre and instrumentation. Learners should be encouraged to develop their understanding of vocal styles and technique: at least some of the answer should have been about the singing. The best answers were able to engage with the interpretation and its expressive effect, with some understanding of the song's impact or purpose.

Q.5

Candidates responded well to the 'new thinking' in Miles Davis. It was pleasing that many candidates knew the prescribed work thoroughly. There were detailed summaries of the qualities of the soloists, with informed comments on their playing style. Many of the answers confidently outlined the position of cool jazz in relation to bebop, referring to Davis's earlier work with Charlie Parker.

Q.6

There were very few answers offered on the Purcell question. However, Examiners enjoyed reading detailed and informed accounts of the coronation anthem.

Q.7

Candidates were generally very familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*. There were many detailed answers, with much information. The best answers focused consistently on writing about the orchestra and its techniques, with examples from various points in the score. Candidates were able to select passages, which illustrated the growth of the orchestra and the development of new sounds by the addition of instruments such as the harp and cor anglais. The best answers attempted to relate the orchestration to the illustration of the story.

A number of candidates appeared to be writing everything they could remember about the music without necessarily answering the question. Detailed explanations of themes and harmony were not relevant. Examiners understand the challenge of teaching the prescribed works. We would encourage centres also to consider both the 'musical elements' and 'conditions and context' in the specification (see page 11, Area of Study 5).

Q.8

Vaughan Williams did not attract any answers from candidates. The mark scheme shows some of the issues which could be discussed. It will be noted that the question asked about the prescribed work and its related background, in this case the 'national style'. Centres are reminded that the related background should be studied along with the prescribed work.

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