

**GCSE Music
Summer 2008**

Chief Examiner's Report

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Grade Boundaries

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Mark Range	400-368	367-329	328-281	280-233	232-207	206-181	180-156	155-131	130-0

This year there was an increase in the numbers taking the subject, and once again a large percentage achieved high grades – a tribute to the excellent standards and dedication of teachers in our schools.

Listening and Appraising

The paper followed the pattern of previous years, with similar types or questions reflecting the full depth and breadth of the syllabus. The examining team felt that all questions differentiated well, and none were outside the scope of the syllabus. We noted that the 'extra' page given for the final question was made use of by a large percentage of the candidates.

There are still some matters which continue to cause us concern.

Many candidates still have difficulty writing briefly in coherent English, something which we like to see in the descriptive, 'level' questions, of which there was only one this year.

Too many still rely on vague generalisations, sprinkling answers with terms such as *repetition, sequence, imitation, homophonic, polyphonic*, or phrases such as *there are lots of, "scat singing"*.or *"walking bass"*...or *"word painting"*, without referring to specific points in the music or the supplied texts. Lists of vague unrelated comments will not be awarded marks. Comments must be linked to text or music to have any validity. The 'free response' question received a more holistic approach to assess what a candidate has said, so 'ticks' on the candidate's text were not used to indicate marks obtained.

We would like to remind candidates to be as clear as possible in their presentation, preferably using ink, writing legibly and making any notation or figures clear – particularly their school and candidate numbers. They should not use *tippex* to erase text nor make any use of 'red' ink, as examiners use this during the marking process and it can lead to confusion.

We cannot emphasise enough how important it is for candidates to read the rubrics carefully. Much time is spent in deciding the exact phrasing of a question to assist candidates in giving a more specific response. This is particularly important where the question asks, for example, to *"choose two of the following"* or when a particular number of lines have been numbered to indicate how many comments are required. In either instance, only the correct number of required responses is assessed by the examiners.

Some of the responses to questions on the *Set Works* were disappointing. Too many candidates were unable to spell the titles, composer's names or identify particular musical 'periods'. It should be mentioned once again that *Musical Traditions in Ireland* is the only acceptable title for this area of study.

Question 1

Extract: *The Trout Quintet*, Schubert (4th Movement Var: 3)

This question, structured in a similar way to the opening question in previous years, was based on the 3rd variation of the movement. Being one of the more 'popular' set works it was surprising that more candidates did not achieve full marks here.

- (a) Although a large percentage knew the names of the 5 instruments in the quintet, it was surprising how many did not. We did occasionally find 'horn', 'trombone' and 'oboe' amongst the suggestions offered.
- (b) Any candidates who had listened to the work attentively over the two year period would have known the instruments playing the theme in this variation. Unfortunately, many could not identify the instruments.
- (c) Almost always correct.
- (d) (i) Usually correct, though too many gave 'trout quintet' as the song title.
 - (ii) In spite of many wild guesses as to whom the composer was, the majority knew it was Schubert.
 - (iii) Most candidates knew Schubert was a composer from the 'Romantic' period. A few made other choices, some setting him pre-Beethoven in the Classical era.

Question 2

Extract: *La Rejouissance* from *Music from the Royal Fireworks*, Handel

- (a) (i) Filling in the pitch of notes on a staff seems each year to be a skill which fewer and fewer candidates can master. This was a 'Set Work' and the passage chosen a most accessible one in the movement. Although a large number did gain full marks here, unfortunately a huge number either didn't answer it at all, or like a lottery, filled in any series of notes in the hope of one or two being correct. A few ignored the information given in the rubric (bars 4&5) and the bracket above the staff, and tried to fill in bars 2 & 3 instead.
 - (ii) Almost invariably correct.
- (b) (i) & (ii) A large number chose the correct cadence and most knew that there was a change of key in bar 8. Not all candidates knew into what key the music had modulated.

- (c) (i) & (ii) The tonality was almost always correct, but there was a huge divergence of opinion as to what type of work the ‘Royal Fireworks’ was. Being a set work, it was disappointing more candidates could not answer this correctly.
- (d) (i) & (ii) Well answered and almost everyone knew the music was by Handel, and the period to which his music belonged.

Question 3

Extract A: *Blue Skies*, Rogers and Hart performed by Frank Sinatra
Extract B: *Blue Skies*, Rogers and Hart performed by Ella Fitzgerald

This type of ‘comparison’ question is used each year, with slight variations. Examiners felt that the results were much better this year with many scoring very highly. The poorest results were in the ‘similarities’ where far too many said, either it was the ‘same song’ or the ‘same lyrics’ or the ‘same tune’ in each performance. No marks can be given for comments which reflect what is actually in the rubric especially when the text is given and a candidate says that both are singing the same words! Most do try and link their comments to ‘both performances’ either directly or by implication. Those who do not are not completing the requirements of the question.

Question 4

Extract: *Brandenburg Concerto No:2 (3rd Movement)*, Bach

This was probably the most difficult question, yet there were places where all candidates could score. It did however differentiate well, and was deliberately placed in the middle of the paper.

- (a) A small number recognised all four instruments, the recorder and oboe being the instruments most difficult to identify.
- (b) In (i) & (ii) almost everyone was able to identify the music as polyphonic or contrapuntal, and able to relate it to the area of ‘Music for Celebration’.
- (c) In parts (i) & (ii), once again almost everyone made the correct choice as Baroque, but providing reasons for this seemed very difficult. A good many did do well here but a large number gave very vague answers with no content.

Question 5

Extract: *Mack the Knife*, Kurt Weill arranged and sung by Westlife

- (a) (i),(ii) & (iii) Most knew the title of the piece and the work from which it came, not all knew the composer – too many decided it was Frank Sinatra or Ella Fitzgerald.
- (b) Rather than making this a ‘level question’ we divided the answer into six headings with 2 marks for two relevant comments in each. This probably was an advantage to weaker candidates but many confused ‘pitch’ and ‘dynamics’ (eg “*the pitch was loud*” or “*the*

dynamics were high”). Too few recognised the ‘vamping’ at the beginning or were able to correctly pinpoint the modulations or the number of singers involved.

Question 6

Extracts from:

Fair Day, Harty – An Irish Symphony
March, Field Marshall Montgomery Pipe Band
African Sanctus, Fanshawe
The Bucks of Oranmore, Hughes Band

This type of question with short answers and short extracts from Set Works, was used again this year as a more ‘accessible’ question before the longer Q.7.

- (a) (i), (ii) & (iii) The majority identified the composer, though the spelling was not always correct. Most identified the song title, though a few gave the title of the movement instead. A bigger number named the area of study correctly this year, though we still had quite a few ‘Irish Traditional’ answers.
- (b) (i), (ii) & (iii) Very well answered. The vast majority of responses were correct.
- (c) (i), (ii) & (iii) Answers by candidates were almost all correct
- (d) (i) & (ii) Most candidates knew the title but in (ii) not all gave two correct answers.

Question 7

The Birth of Nicolas from St Nicolas, Britten

This question followed the pattern of previous years by giving the candidates a well structured piece on which they had freedom to write as they chose, bearing in mind the areas that were suggested they highlight. The full text was also provided. It was decided not to give a few introductory questions again this year but to let the candidates have the full range of marks for their answers. It proved to differentiate well between the levels of ability, and many candidates scored highly here. It was felt that most candidates were able to write a lot more on this question than in similar questions in previous years. The majority of candidates using the extra page already ruled on the back cover of their booklet.

There was a lot to get to grips with here, and although we had the wide variety of responses as expected, too few linked the music to the text, which was disappointing. One of the reasons for choosing this piece was the highly individual and striking way in which the composer uses the music and the instruments to illustrate the words. The best answers tackled the piece as a whole, followed the structure which was apparent from the text and detailed the musical events some of them linking to the text.

The poorer answers were either a vague series of sentences with little definite information, or a list of phrases or words without reference to the text.

The difference in the answers to this question and Q.7 last year were quite marked. This question received better answers most of which were in either Level 2 or 3 category.

In future papers, candidates might think of using the first playing of such a piece to jot down the musical events as they happen in rough, to get an idea of the shape and content, and use the remaining playings to fill out the details.

Performing and Appraising

Once again the examining team thank the schools for their hospitality and assistance again in conducting these examinations. Also those teachers who were so well prepared for the visits with prearranged orders of candidates, lists of pieces and exam numbers.

We note once again that in some schools examiners are kept waiting when they arrive, due to last minute rehearsals or administrative problems. It is most important that pupils are ready to begin at the approximate time given, and that there be no long 'waits' between candidates. Most examiners have to keep to strict timetables and may have more than one school to visit on any given day. Some examiners are happy to continue working through morning break or lunch periods, and some are not. This needs to be prearranged with the examiner concerned before they arrive.

We really appreciate schools providing maps/directions before visits, and it would be most helpful if information was available on parking facilities. Most examiners will arrive on time but if parking space is limited it can cause unnecessary delays and a certain amount of frustration. Arrival times are approximate and examiners do everything in their power to be at schools in good time to conduct these examinations. The format of the Practical Examination remains unchanged and sufficient time was allocated to all the examining team so that the examinations could be conducted in a relaxed manner.

Once again the majority of candidates scored highly, with many outstanding solo performances, and some novel and highly enjoyable ensembles.

It should be noted that candidates do not receive more marks by playing pieces beyond the required standard. It is better to play a more straightforward piece well than stumble through a more complex one. One solo piece or ensemble piece is all that is required but they must be of a reasonable length ie long enough for the examiner to assess what the candidate can do. Pieces lasting less than a minute are not acceptable, just as pieces of four to five minutes or more can be unnecessary.

Teachers may remain in the room during the examination but it is expected that they will position themselves at a discrete distance from the pupil and the examiner, and avoiding any eye-contact with the pupil except if they are fulfilling the role of accompanist. On no account should a teacher at any time sit beside the visiting examiner or attempt to take part in the discussion section, or prompt the pupil. It is inappropriate for a teacher when present in the room to 'mark' or 'record' their student's performance and then expect to compare this with the examiner.

It must also be emphasised that no other person should be in the room unless they are involved in accompanying a candidate, after which they must leave. On no account should any other person besides the candidate's class teacher be in the room if the examiner decides to comment on the performances. Any conversation between the teacher and the examiner at this point is highly confidential. Should the examiner choose to divulge any marks after the examination, such matters are **highly confidential and should not be written down or divulged to pupils, parents, peripatetic staff or other teachers.**

At no point is the visiting examiner permitted to enter into an argument with a teacher over the marks awarded nor should a teacher challenge the visiting examiner's ability to carry out their task. Visiting examiners have attended briefings with the Chief Examiner where an accepted standard is laid down.

If a teacher wishes to challenge any outcome they must ask for their candidate's work to be referred to the Chief Examiner who will examine the case fully.

It would be appreciated if the examinations were confined to one room only and not asked to move to different rooms during the examination.

Candidates who are unavoidably absent for the examination may be examined at a later date. Visiting examiners will issue forms to teachers for those with genuine reasons to be examined later. These need to be completed and returned to CCEA.

There has been an increase in the number of candidates from different ethnic backgrounds entering the examination. In cases where a pupil has a minimal grasp of English, it would be appreciated if someone could be provided to translate for them during the Viva part of the examination. This person would only be in the examination room for this part of the examination.

Solo Performance

Again this year we had a great variety of pieces using a wide range of instruments and styles. It has been mentioned above that the length of the pieces should be long enough to allow an examiner to assess the ability of the student. Usually the pieces presented are well within the required limit. A few candidates chose to present more than one piece, and provided this is within the time frame there is nothing to stop anyone doing this. It does make the examiner's assessment more difficult though, and the assessment would be based on the total performance. If a second piece is less successful than the first, it could affect the candidate's expected mark. It should be remembered that the examination does not unfortunately reward candidate's versatility if they present a very long piece or two pieces performed on different instruments.

Most candidates however do well and understand the syllabus requirements. Their performances are very 'musical' carefully phrased with attention to dynamics and the intentions of the composers. It was not surprising to see large numbers gaining full marks here. A wide range of instruments were offered, orchestral, traditional and modern/electric.

There was another noticeable increase in the number of singers again this year and it was pleasing to see that few singers now hide behind a music stand or a copy of their song when taking part in the examination, allowing them to communicate with the listener. Teachers are to be congratulated for their accompaniments to instrumentalists and singers. Only occasionally were pieces marred by insensitive playing.

Accompaniments help to give candidates confidence when they perform. It is unfortunate if pupils have to play complicated pieces without the appropriate accompaniment.

Ensemble Performance

Once again we congratulate schools on the high standards achieved in this part of the examination.

For examiners this is a very enjoyable part of the examination, and once again a great variety of ensembles were presented. Ensembles using pupil's compositions and cleverly arranged traditional music figured once again. The best of these being pupil organised and directed. Unfortunately the pupil/teacher-pianist as an ensemble still exists, and unless there genuinely is no alternative this should be eschewed. This part of the examination is an opportunity for pupils to experiment, and the excellent results show that many take full advantage of this.

It was more apparent this year that teachers were still occupying pivotal roles in ensembles. If possible, teachers should not take part in ensembles unless absolutely necessary and in such circumstances should avoid taking a 'leading' part.

More use is being made of 'backing-tracks'. This is acceptable for solo performances if no other accompaniment exists and if used, should be set at an appropriate level. They are not however acceptable in ensemble work. How can pupils be assessed when relating to a backing-track? In extreme circumstances if they *have* to be included there should be sufficient *numbers of other pupils* within the ensemble for them to relate to.

It is also important that any candidate performing in an ensemble should be able to be heard by the examiner. Surrounding the candidate with a huge amount of other sounds from other instruments or amplification puts them at a disadvantage, and can make a true assessment extremely difficult. This can be particularly frustrating during performances by Rock and Pop groups. It is possible for those playing electric guitars to control their volume and the assessment of the performance takes careful note of this. It is also essential to curb the enthusiasm of some of the drummers in the rock groups. Too often, when they themselves are not being assessed, given the opportunity, they may tend to push the tempo forward and drown out the part which is being assessed. It has been noted that there was a big improvement in this area this year, but some schools still need to be aware of this.

It is recommended that candidates presenting the Bagpipes as a solo instrument or ensemble with a side drummer should do so in a large space if possible.

The Discussion

There was a wide range of responses in the discussions this year. Candidates should be prepared to:

- talk about the piece they have just played, it's background and any problems they may have had during the learning and performing of it;
- be able to link their piece to an area of study;
- explain the three areas of study and talk about any of the set works that particularly appealed to them and correlated with their performance programme.

Most pupils seemed better prepared for this and many gave interesting explanations of their pieces, how they linked to the areas of study and the difficulties they had encountered during the learning process. Examiners noted that others however seemed unprepared and sometimes rhymed off a lot of irrelevant information which had been learned beforehand. Hopefully the above points will assist teachers in this preparation. Weaker candidates were inclined to repeat information learned specifically for the discussion, whether relevant or not.

Principal Moderator's Report

It is an established trend that as a specification becomes embedded, the quality of work presented, reaches higher standards. It is most encouraging to report another year of very high standards in the composition component. A higher number of candidates gained full marks for their folios with many of these showing great sophistication and flair. It is again important to note the significant amount of time and effort taken by centre staff and candidates in presentation of their work and generally excellent quality of scores, tapes, CDs and MiniDiscs.

The majority of centres included recordings of their compositions, although fewer candidates submitted hand-written scores. Increasingly sophisticated notational software programs are well used in the majority of centres, yet it is interesting to note, however, that many candidates chose not to submit recordings of their work, even though these had been created via Sibelius etc. It is not, however, a requirement to submit recordings and scores for this specification.

The assessments made by teachers, in the vast majority of cases, were accurate and correctly reflected the calibre of their candidates' work. Where judgements were lenient, these focused on the development of the composition (criterion (i)) and the assessment of commentaries. As this current specification comes to an end, it is disappointing to note, that despite previous indication of the causes of lenient marking, some centres do not appear to have heeded the message. Full marks for commentaries require a full, analytical account of the composition, a sound knowledge of the development of the compositional processes undertaken, reflective evaluation of the final outcome and contain few grammatical or spelling errors.

A marked increase in the quality of recordings submitted suggests the frequent and knowledgeable use of in-house equipment, which is to be applauded. For some centres, however, the use of professional recording studios is their preferred option. The moderation team must be sure that the candidate commentaries **fully** explain the processes involved in these recordings. There was clear evidence from the Summer 2008 moderation, that a sizeable number of the recordings gave an added sophistication to the candidates' work, which had not been fully explained in their commentaries. In the worst cases, the candidate commentary only alluded to a single line melody, yet the recording employed multi-instrumental, vocal and sound synthesis forces. It is disappointing to note that, too often, centre staff had authenticated the work as being the candidate's own and given no qualifying comments on the Candidate Record Form.

Music for Celebration and *Musical Traditions in Ireland* Areas of Study were most popular and were well handled in the majority of centres. Links to *Music for Celebration* were less tenuous than in the previous year and there was a greater propensity to well-structured, stylishly-developed and balanced rock/pop songs with well-established references to the features expected. Candidate lyric-writing skills and research shown in choosing appropriate texts are commendable.

There was a much greater programmatic element in the work of candidates in the *Musical Traditions in Ireland* which is most encouraging. Traditional suites of Slow Airs, Jigs, Reels etc, were again popular and many brought new insights to the genre which is key to higher marks in this Area of Study due to the formulaic nature of Traditional Irish/Ulster-Scottish

dance forms. Greater instrumental participation should not be interpreted or marked as ‘developmental’ unless it increases the number of independent melodic/rhythmic lines or adds to the textural/timbral complexity of the composition.

Musical Arrangements were again in decline in popularity. There were some outstandingly creative arrangements, but in general, this was the least well-handled option. Too often ‘arrangements’ were merely transcriptions of original melodies for other resources, lacking in melodic, rhythmic, textural, timbral or harmonic depth and certainly not reflecting the requirement that original music should be presented in a new light exhibiting varying degrees of flair and imagination.

Many candidates still to fail to adhere to specification requirements to include the **original** music with their arrangements, (especially important when urban/rock songs are chosen for arrangement).

It is encouraging to see the positive trend, (for centres who use class-based compositional tasks as teaching tools) of individual outcomes showing clear differentiation between candidates and allowing creativity and freedom of choice.

The pressure on centres at examination time is understandable, but this year there was a greater instance of arithmetical errors and non-compliance with authentication procedures by centre staff. 39 computational errors would have disadvantaged 23 candidates and in some of these, the margin of error was in excess of 15 marks! Some centres had multiple arithmetical errors which did change rank order. Centre staff are requested to pay particular attention to totalling across the criteria and totalling down for the final folio mark. Care should also be taken in transferring total marks to the green TAC1 form.

It is a requirement of this specification that all Candidate Record Sheets are countersigned by candidate and teacher and that all Annotation sheets are signed by the candidate.

As previously alluded to in this report, the use of technology in the composition, presentation, notation, editing and recording of work increased again this year. It is most encouraging to note the increase in the technical knowledge shown by candidates in handling a wide range of school and home based media. There were fewer examples of work where candidates had not clearly indicated the use of the pre-programmed tracks or downloaded files. Teacher assessments accurately reflected the original work of candidates in the vast majority of centres.

Although there was very little use of floppy disks for moderation, a large number of centres had submitted CDs which had not been correctly formatted for audio playback. Audio files must be saved as .wav files. It may be worth previewing each CD in an ordinary stereo CD player prior to submission to ensure the CD is playable without the aid of a computer’s media player. Care should also be taken over MiniDisc formatting, allowing this medium to be played on a standard MiniDisc player.

It is commendable that the high standards of last year have been maintained in 2008 and centre staff are encouraged to continue their good work and focus on the areas of concern noted in this year’s report.