

**GCSE Summer Music
Summer 2009**

**Chief Examiner's and
Principal Moderator's
Report**

GCSE MUSIC

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Grade Boundaries

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Mark Range	400-367	366-330	329-281	280-233	232-207	206-181	180-156	155-131	130-0

LISTENING & APPRAISING

Chief Examiner's Report

This year's paper discriminated well over the wide range of abilities. Once again a large percentage of candidates achieved high grades – a tribute to the excellent standards and dedication of teachers in schools.

The paper followed the pattern of previous years, with similar types or questions reflecting the full depth and breath of the syllabus. The examining team felt that all questions differentiated well, and none were outside the scope of the specification. With so much content in the final extract the 'extra' page provided was made use of by most candidates.

There are still some recurring matters which cause us concern and need to be mentioned again this year.

Many candidates still have difficulty writing briefly in coherent English, something which we like to see not only in short answers but also in the required response in the final 'level' question.

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' or 'terraced dynamics', without referring to specific points in the music or the supplied texts. Lists of vague unrelated comments will not suffice – they must refer to text or music to have any validity. In marking the final question a more holistic approach was applied again to assess what a candidate has said, so 'ticks' on the text were not used to indicate marks awarded.

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 on the exact phrasing of a question to assist candidates to give a particular 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.

Too many candidates are still unable to spell the titles or composer's names of the set works. 'Musical Traditions in Ireland' is the only acceptable title for that area of study, and we were pleased to see that the majority of candidates did use this correct title in question 6.

- Q1**
- (a) This question was structured in a similar way to the opening question in previous years and being one of the more ‘accessible’ set works, it was surprising that many candidates did not achieve full marks.
 - (b) Some candidates had a problem with the term ‘melodic instruments’ and although a good many achieved the four available marks, a large number did not – often including the bodhrán or instruments which were not playing in the piece at all.
 - (c) Most candidates scored full marks by identifying the bodhrán and the audience noise as an indication of the ‘live’ performance.
 - (d) This question posed difficulties for some and there were a very wide range of possible answers accepted. However it did prove an early discriminator within the paper.
 - (e) The majority knew that this was a reel – a small number opted for the ‘slip Jig’.
- Q2**
- (a)
 - (i) Completing the pitch of the notes on a stave seems to be still a problem for many candidates. This theme from this set work is probably the most accessible part of the movement, and although a large number did gain full marks, unfortunately a number either didn’t answer it at all, or filled in any series of notes in the hope of one or two notes being correct. A few ignored the information given in the rubric and the bracket above the stave, and tried to fill in bars 7 & 8.
 - (b)
 - (i) The cadence was correct in most papers.
 - (ii) The ‘trill’ sign wasn’t always on the correct bar and sometimes the bar was identified by a ‘mordent’ or ‘turn’ sign. In many cases, however this question was not attempted at all.
 - (c)
 - (i) The modulation wasn’t always correct – often the single word ‘major’ or ‘minor’ appeared or merely a letter name.
 - (ii) The response to this question was invariably correct.
 - (d)
 - (i)(ii) Most candidates answered correctly – a few however named the song incorrectly as the ‘trout quintet’.
- Q3**
- (a) This type of comparison question is used each year, with slight variations. As these two arrangements were so widely different, candidates were only asked to name ten differences between them. The results were very mixed. Too many candidates still ignore the instruction to refer to both in their answer. This can be done by specifically comparing similar passages in each or by inference.

Many candidates did well, but a large number failed to do so by not linking their comments to both performances. To say ‘there is a drum-kit in B but none in A’ or ‘there is a triangle in A and a trumpet in B’ will not do. Comments need to focus on similar elements which are treated differently in each performance.
 - (b) Most candidates pointed to the upbeat nature of the performances, the

celebratory words and the major tonality.

- Q4**
- (a) As the question asked was judged as somewhat ambiguous, it was decided to award all candidates a mark on this question.
 - (b) (i)(ii) Candidates tended to get these two questions mixed up, often writing comments appropriate to either question in either space. Examiners took note of this and awarded marks for any answers which were pertinent. Neither question was well done, which was surprising considering it was from one of the set works.
 - (b) (iii) This question (and also Q7) highlighted the misconceptions some candidates have as to what makes a piece ‘celebratory’. To say that it is ‘fast’ or ‘loud’ will not do – comments such as these need filling out, using terms like ‘lively’ or ‘upbeat’. There were plenty of possible answers but many candidates failed to spot some of the most obvious ones.
 - (c) (i)(ii) Answers to these questions were invariably correct.
- Q5** Many candidates found this a difficult question, yet there were opportunities for all candidates to obtain marks. It did however differentiate well, and was deliberately placed in the middle of the paper.
- (a) Most candidates scored highly in this question, and although the bracket on the manuscript did not include bar 12 as stated in the rubric a majority of candidates did ‘x’ the note there. Those who relied on the manuscript rather than the rubric were not penalised, examiners gave all candidates the half mark available in this bar.
 - (b) A good many candidates were correct, but it was surprising that quite a number opted for the incorrect answer.
 - (c) (i)(ii) Only a small number identified the clarinet here and even fewer the bassoon playing the accompaniment. Many were able to describe the music played by the bassoon and quite a few identified the side drum towards the end of the passage.
 - (d) With only six marks available it was possible to gain these by making a few general comments. Often the instruments were incorrectly identified as was the change to the major key. Some commented on the soft pizzicato chords at the end.
- Q6** This type of question, with short answers and short extracts from set works, was used again this year as a more ‘friendly’ question before the longer Q7. The large majority of candidates scored full marks.
- (a) (i)-(iii) The majority identified the instruments, though some thought they were Uilleann Pipes. Most identified the band, and most named the area of study correctly this year with just a few answering incorrectly with ‘Irish Traditional’.
 - (b) (i)-(iii) Very well answered - the vast majority were correct though not everyone was able to spell the composer’s name correctly.
 - (c) (i)-(iii) Responses to the questions were almost all correct.

- (d) (i)-(iii) Most candidates knew the title (with varying degrees of spelling accuracy) and also the suite and its composer –who was occasionally mistaken for Harty.

Q7 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 highlighted areas. The full text was also provided. There was much to write about here which is why the number of marks for this question were slightly increased. However we had the wide variety of responses as expected, but too few linked their answers to the text.

It proved to differentiate well between the levels of ability, and many candidates scored highly. It was felt that most candidates wrote a lot more on this question than in similar questions in previous years. The majority of candidates making use of the extra page already ruled on the back cover of their booklet.

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. Many candidates seemed to think it was in ‘strophic’ form, and many spent all their efforts in writing about the celebratory aspects, ignoring the many things that were happening in the orchestra and the voices. A minority wrote at length without communicating any facts at all.

The best answers tackled the piece as a whole, followed the structure –which was apparent from the text – and detailed the musical events linking them to the text where appropriate.

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 visiting examining team thanks 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.

It is somewhat disheartening to have to repeat again the following points made in previous reports which have not been addressed by some schools.

- In some schools examiners are kept waiting when they arrive, for 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 and/or directions before visits, and it would be most helpful if information was also 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 assessment remains unchanged and sufficient time is allocated to all the examiners so

that the examinations can be conducted in a relaxed manner.

- 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 it must be of a reasonable length. This year there seemed to be a large number of candidates presenting pieces of one minute or less. After completing a two year course of study this is not acceptable. Pieces need to be long enough for the examiner to assess what the candidate can do. However pieces lasting more than five minutes are unnecessary.
- Teachers may remain in the room during the examination but it is expected that they will position themselves at a distance from the pupil and the examiner, avoiding any eye-contact with either – 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.
- It would be preferable and appreciated if the examinations were confined to one room only and examiners were not asked to move to different rooms during the examination.
- There has been an increase in the number of candidates from different ethnic backgrounds entering the examination. In cases where a pupils has a minimal grasp of English, it would be appreciated if someone could be provided to translate for them during the discussion element of the examination. This person should only be in the examination room for this part of the examination.

Candidates who are unavoidably absent or physically incapable for the exam may be examined at a later date. Visiting examiners issue forms to teachers on the day of the visit for those candidates with genuine reasons for a re-scheduled examination. These need to be completed and returned to CCEA.

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 how 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 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 specification 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 including, orchestral, rock and traditional.

There was another noticeable increase in the number of singers again this year and it was pleasing to see that relatively few singers now hide behind a music stand or a copy of their song when taking part in the exam, allowing them to better communicate with the listener. Teachers are to be congratulated for their accompaniments to instrumentalists and singers – occasionally however there were instances where candidate’s performances were marred by insensitive heavy-handed playing.

Accompaniments help to give candidates confidence when they perform, it is a pity if pupils are left to play complicated pieces without any accompaniment whatsoever.

ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE

This year a large number of candidates scored highly, with many novel and highly enjoyable ensembles. However there was a feeling amongst examiners this year that in some cases ensembles seemed unrehearsed and appeared to be put together at a very late stage. There also seemed to be more teachers taking part in ensembles. We understand that with small numbers this can often be a necessity, but we would encourage schools to make this part of the examination as ‘pupil based’ as possible.

It was more apparent this year the teachers were still occupying pivotal roles in ensembles. We see the teacher’s role as guiding, arranging and preparing. An ensemble which includes a teacher tends to be teacher led.

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.

Last year we highlighted the increased use of ‘backing-tracks’. Again we need to emphasise that this is fine in the solo part of the exam – if no other accompaniment exists – and if used should be set at an appropriate level, before the performance that ensures a good balance between the track and live performers. They are not however appropriate in ensemble work as they tend to dictate the tempo which is a very ‘personal’ matter for the candidate.

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 rock groups – too often, when they themselves are not being assessed, given their head, they 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.

We noted this year that in some ensemble performances there was one or more other participants playing the same part as the candidate. This must be eschewed as it is impossible in such cases to hear exactly what the candidate is contributing to the group. This does the candidate a great disservice.

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 to the discussions this year. Candidates should be prepared to:
- Talk about the piece they have just played, its background and any problems they may have had during the learning and performing of it.
- Be able to explain how their piece links to the relevant area of study.
- Explain the three areas of study and talk about any of the set works that particularly appealed to them.
- Make a very brief comment on one of their compositions

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 by once again listing the above points teachers will be able to help candidates in their preparation. Weaker responses included repetition of information learned specifically for the discussion, whether relevant or not.

COURSEWORK

Principal Moderator's Report

It is encouraging to report that the standard of this component has remained consistent this year. A large number of candidates gained full marks for their folios with many of these showing great artistry and flair. The calibre of such work bodes well for these candidates if they choose to progress to studies in GCE Music. It is again important to recognise the significant amount of time and effort taken by centre staff in presentation of their work and the generally excellent quality of scores, tapes, CDs and MiniDiscs.

Although fewer candidates submitted hand-written scores, the majority of centres included recordings of their compositions. Increasingly sophisticated notational software programs are skilfully used by the majority of centres. Many candidates chose to provide recordings with their scores created via Sibelius and other software programmes. Whilst it is welcome, it is not, however, a requirement to submit recordings **and** scores for this specification.

In the vast majority of cases, assessments made by centres were accurate and correctly reflected the calibre of their candidates' work. Assessment of commentaries and the development of the composition (criterion (i)) continued to account for most cases of leniency noted this year. It is disappointing to reflect, that despite previous indication of the causes of lenient marking, some centres do not appear to have heeded the warning and consequently had marks reviewed at Post Moderation. 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 no grammatical or spelling errors.

A further marked increase in the quality of recordings submitted suggests the frequent and knowledgeable use of in-house equipment, which is to be applauded. A smaller number of centres made use of professional recording studios. The moderation team must be sure that the candidate commentaries **fully** explain the processes involved in these recordings. There was again, clear evidence from the Summer 2009 series of exams, that an unacceptable number of recordings gave an added sophistication to the candidates' work, which had not been fully explained in accompanying commentaries. It is disappointing to note that, in such cases, centre staff had authenticated the work as being the candidate's own and yet gave no qualifying comments on the Candidate Record Sheet.

Music for Celebration and *Musical Traditions in Ireland* Areas of Study proved most popular and were artistically handled by the majority of candidates. Links to *Music for Celebration* resulted in many well-structured, stylishly-developed and balanced rock/pop/urban songs with well-established references to the features expected. It was most encouraging to note the attention to detail paid by candidates in writing or researching appropriate texts.

There was a less programmatic element in the work of candidates in the *Musical Traditions in Ireland* Area of Study, but those who did choose this option were particularly effective. Traditional suites of slow airs, jigs, reels etc., were popular and a large number brought new insight to the sometimes formulaic nature of Traditional Irish/Ulster-Scots dance forms. The Moderation team would remind centres that larger 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 continued to 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 or re-orchestrations of original melodies from other sources and lacked melodic, rhythmic, textural, timbral or harmonic depth and did not reflect the requirement that original music should be presented in a 'new light exhibiting varying degrees of flair and imagination'. Too many candidates still fail to adhere to specification requirements to include the **original** music/sound sources with their arrangements. This is 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 exam time is understandable, but this year there was a much higher instance of arithmetical errors and non-compliance with authentication procedures by centre staff. 44 computational errors would have disadvantaged 31 candidates and in some of these, the margin of error was in excess of 12 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 TAC 1 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. Large numbers of unauthenticated work had to be returned to centres to ensure compliance in this respect.

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, downloaded files or material from media-sharing websites (e.g. www.youtube.com etc.). Teacher assessments accurately reflected the original work of candidates in the vast majority of centres.

A large number of centres had submitted CDs which had not been correctly formatted for audio playback. 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 2009 and centre staff are further encouraged to continue their good work and focus on the areas of concern noted in this year's report.