

OCR Report to Centres

June 2012

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, OCR Nationals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

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

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

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

© OCR 2012

CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Music (J535)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
Unit B351 Integrated Tasks	1
Unit B352 Practical Portfolio	6
Unit B353 Creative Task	11
Unit B354 Listening Examination	16

Unit B351 Integrated Tasks

General Comments

The unit continues to be accessible to a wide cohort of candidates. By applying the criteria rigorously, many centres marked accurately. However, moderators reported the frequent need to make big reductions to marks because assessors had been far too generous. The specific issues commonly reported are dealt with in each section of this report.

The use of the OCR repository has made the process much simpler for both centres and moderators. The reduction in the need to prepare work to be posted is advantageous to centres, and the ability to access a centre's sample on screen by the moderator soon after it is uploaded, rather than having to wait for, unpack and sort through parcels, is a much preferred method of working. OCR recommends that all centres investigate the benefits of repository entry for the next series.

OCR technology, through repository and electronic entry, is also helping to reduce errors, but there are still many centres that have not taken sufficient care over the presentation of their entries and it is hoped that teachers will read this report carefully in order to ensure that in future they present their work in a way that enables a reliable moderation process to take place.

Administration

Over the past two years there have been changes in the administrative arrangements and these are taking time to embed into centre practice. The following points should be noted:

- Moderation samples are requested by email to the nominated person at the centre (usually the Examinations Officer). Internal communication therefore needs to enable this to reach the member of staff who has to deal with it within the shortest possible time.
- Centres receive two sample requests, one for Unit B351 and one for Unit B352. Usually the samples requested are for the work of different candidates. It is therefore important that the centre's assessor identifies exactly which candidates are required in each sample and selects the work accordingly.
- When preparing the work for dispatch, centres must keep the individual units separate. There are two workable formats:
 - A compilation CD, for each unit, containing work of the candidates requested in the sample, accompanied by a hand-list (track list).
 - Individual candidate CDs, for each unit, containing just the work for that unit.
- Assessment forms should not be sent in advance but with the sample, (or in the case of a repository entry, uploaded with the candidates' work). It is no longer necessary to send the assessment forms of candidates not requested for the sample.
- The MS1 form needs to be sent with the sample: not in advance. If using the repository this needs to be uploaded into the administrative section.
- A Centre Authentication Form, CCS160 form is required for each unit. This should be sent with the sample, or loaded into the administrative section. Results can be withheld if this form is not sent. One CCS160 form is acceptable for both units, provided that the unit numbers are clearly stated on it.
- Individual candidate authentication forms should not be sent: these are for internal use only.

Some centres, using postal submission, sent their work on data CDs. These were manageable but need to be clearly identified as such. Centres who are working in this way might consider using the repository next year as it will considerably simplify the process for them.

Whilst a number of centres are careful in their submission of work, moderators noted this year an increasing number of errors in the way that the work was presented. Some of the most frequent issues are listed below:

- Work for B353 was sometimes incorrectly sent to the moderator. B353 is now an examined unit and should be posted to the examiner as soon as the work is completed. The examiner is rarely the same person as the moderator. Separate labels for this are provided by OCR.
- A number of centres using the repository had incorrect assessment forms uploaded in candidate folders. Centres should check carefully that material submitted is for the correct candidate.
- The latest version of the electronic assessment form, provided on the OCR website, should be used to support the correct addition of marks. Errors were frequently found when the forms were completed manually.
- Both sides of the assessment form should be completed **in full** and checked carefully. Confusion was caused when incorrect candidate numbers were included, or the wrong instrument named.
- CDs should be checked to ensure that they function properly and that they contain the correct work. There were a number of instances of errors here, resulting in unnecessary communication with centres and a delay in the moderation process.
- The mark entered on the MS1 should be checked to ensure that it agrees with the total on the assessment form. Some centres sent notes to the moderator indicating that they had changed their mind over the mark since submitting the MS1. This is not acceptable, and is unnecessarily time consuming for all concerned.
- Work sent by post must be submitted on CD. Memory sticks are not accepted, and some centres had to resubmit their work for this reason.

Whilst clear identification of a candidate's work is important, it is unnecessary to make lengthy announcements on the CD. Some announcements at the start of each track were almost a minute long, and thus time consuming for both the assessor and the moderator. A correct hand list (track list) and a brief announcement of the candidate's name, number, and item (performance or composition) is all that is necessary.

Postal entries were easiest to handle when each candidate's work was placed in a folder or plastic wallet. The majority of centres now present work in this way. However there are still some centres who present work in large, bulky and totally unnecessary ring folders which are difficult to handle and costly to send.

Performing

Each year there is a shift to more popular performing styles and instruments. It is pleasing to note the diversity of candidates that are now entering the examination. Candidates may need guidance as to the most appropriate performance item to submit, and many appeared to choose to play or sing a popular song without consideration of whether the performance piece enabled them to demonstrate the skills to access the marks of which they were capable. This was often the case with electric guitarists, who performed part of a popular piece without the context of the backing group. Centres should note that the performance in this unit does not have to be of the instrument playing alone: an accompaniment is quite acceptable. Performances in a group, provided the player has a significant part, are quite acceptable, and the interaction with the other players can demonstrate the sense of style which is required for the second set of marking criteria; communication and interpretation.

Some performances of popular music consisted of a repeating set of catchy riffs and a simple melody with a small range of notes and techniques employed, thus limiting the mark available. This affected bass guitarists in particular. Some of the more popular vocal pieces presented were very challenging, but candidates did not achieve high marks because insufficient consideration had been given to the range of the song, and thus their suitability for the candidate's voice.

A small number of candidates chose to realise a piece of music using ICT. Centres are reminded that in such cases, a copy, of a CD containing the original music should be presented.

The highest mark in each category is reserved for performances which are above and beyond the standard normally expected at GCSE level. These marks have been introduced to achieve more differentiation at the top end of the scale. There were as always, some very professional performances of challenging music which thoroughly deserved the top mark available of 12 + 12 + 6. However, a major issue that moderators had to deal with was the awarding of this mark to performances that were well below this standard. In some cases, the centre had awarded 30 marks to every candidate in the cohort irrespective of the quality or difficulty of the performance. In doing this, centre assessors are effectively attempting to drive down the standard of the examination, and moderators had sometimes to make significant adjustments to marks to remedy this and maintain the year-on-year standard that OCR upholds. It is also necessary to point out that where a number of candidates are awarded the same top mark, some deservedly and some not, the assessor's failure to differentiate will have the effect of bringing the marks of the most able candidates down.

Composing

The composition in this unit needs to be specifically for the candidate's own instrument, using characteristic techniques and figurations that suit it. There were many different styles embraced, with the strongest being in the rock/pop idiom. Whilst some stylish classically focused work was seen, a lot sounded mechanical and formulaic.

Many candidates wrote melodic pieces that would suit many instruments and these failed to achieve more than two marks under the AoS 1 criteria, even though assessors tended in such cases to award more. A surprising number of compositions did not explore the technical range of the chosen instrument. For example, simply adding block or broken chords to a piano melody is not exploiting the extent of the instrument's potential, but some assessors erroneously judged this to be worthy of full marks.

Some candidates wrote compositions for multiple instruments that happened to include their own, but in which their own instrument played a minor part and did not show its full potential. The specification states on page 24 that the composition "...can be a solo or an ensemble in which their instrument plays a significant part". In some cases compositions which had been produced using technology either strayed away from having instrument specific features, or would have been unplayable on the instrument, and therefore lost marks.

The most significant issue related to the lack of information provided by assessors on the rear of the assessment form. OCR has redesigned this to make clear exactly what information is required, in the form of annotation, where the candidate is not solely performing the composition live, and/or where a score is not available. Some centres provided the detail necessary, but most did not.

There is a fundamental problem where a candidate embarks on a composition task and does not have the skill to communicate it effectively as part of the process. Too often the teacher stated that the candidate showed another performer what they wanted, and this blurs the boundary of where the candidate's composition stops and where the performer makes compositional decisions. Without evidence, such as a video of the teaching process, or a sketch by the candidate, then the performer's input cannot be attributed to the candidate. Marks in such cases were reduced, and this had a knock-on effect on the moderation parameters applied to all candidates in the centre. In future OCR will not be able to accept this type of practice unless clear evidence is provided of what the candidate's intentions were.

In relation to the use of technology to assist the composition process, some centres provided full and helpful details. However, more often just the software was named, or there was a brief and ambiguous statement which did not provide the precise clarification of the candidate's input that is needed. Where the candidate had inputted all of the notes themselves, then centres were generally ready to say so: it was in cases where pre-recorded loops or samples were used, or where technical processes had come into play which moulded the candidate's initial input into something musical and compelling, that full information was often lacking. In these cases, moderation judgements had to be made on assumptions which may not have advantaged the candidates.

Compositions must all be recorded. In the majority of cases this was done, but a few centres had to be asked to forward them.

Centres are reminded that the specification does not allow for arrangements in this unit. This is made clear in the specification section 4.1, on pages 23 and 24, which state that the piece of work presented should be a composition.

Whilst some compositions were inspired and totally engaging, many opportunities to reach the high mark bands were missed. This was mainly due to the fact that strong initial material was not sufficiently shaped or extended to deliver a result that displayed a candidate's individual style.

Overall, moderators reported that compositions were over-marked.

Commentary

The commentaries were generally securely rooted in the four paragraphs required in the specification, although there are a small minority of centres who still seem to be teaching to the legacy specification and requiring candidates to study three pieces. Well written commentaries showed real musical intellect and engagement with the chosen style and genre as well as revealing the musical maturity of the candidate. At worst they provided a perfunctory description of the piece and its composer with general statements about the performance, and a brief which did not mention the instrument.

Most commentaries were about the right length (400 words) although there were some musically mature candidates who wrote less, and whose work was considerably over-marked because it lacked depth and detail required by the assessment criteria.

The most successful commentaries kept a strong focus on the instrument and its techniques throughout the four paragraphs. Moderators were aware that some pieces by their very nature, generate more to say in the first paragraph than others, and took this into account when making their judgements.

It was often the second paragraph that was the key to the success of the commentary since the identification and discussion of relevant instrumental techniques lead to the development of an instrument-focused composition brief. Some candidates wrote with great understanding about the techniques that the piece demanded and the impact of those techniques on the communication of the style. Others gained less credit because they named techniques without referring to where and how they were used in the piece. A disappointingly large number focused only on the music itself and repeatedly referred to musical elements such as dynamics and structure in a way that had no connection with the techniques of the instrument used.

The evaluation in the third paragraph must focus on the performance of the piece that is recorded for the examination. In that way the moderator can evaluate the awareness that the candidate has of the strengths and weaknesses of their performance. Many candidates did this effectively and accurately, and it was pleasing to note their honesty in identifying how the performance went. It was interesting to see candidates correctly identifying weakness in the performance which the assessor appeared to have overlooked when awarding the performance mark. There were a number of performance evaluations that appeared to refer to a trial performance of the piece, before the final take, and this is not appropriate and was not accepted.

The composition brief was sometimes the weakest paragraph, especially when the instrument focus was lost. This paragraph should set out the way the instrument is going to be used in the composition, and the techniques to be used, with reasons why. Some candidates effectively drew on not just the piece they were performing but also a range of repertoire that they knew, to construct a musical brief. Others wrote only about structure, key and other musical elements. Composition briefs should be written before the composition process begins, whereas many were written in the past tense indicating that they had been done at the last minute, after the composition was completed.

It was helpful when teachers annotated the commentaries by ticking or underlining specific phrases or sentences which demonstrated achievement against the marking criteria. It was less helpful when annotations appeared to be correcting the candidates' work: this is not appropriate for a controlled assessment unit, as the candidate should be producing the work entirely on their own.

There was also some evidence that commentaries had been written to a formula, whereby candidates answered a series of very directed questions. The setting of questions for research purposes is good practice, but the shaping of the final commentary needs to be the candidates' own work. Occasionally when the question had inadvertently been left in, it was possible to see how little the candidate's input was into the final piece of work.

Commentaries were on the whole realistically marked although there were occasions when the highest marks were awarded by a centre for work which was well below the standard stated in the assessment criteria. Most assessors understood the need for there to be understanding of the impact of instrumental techniques, rather than just listing them, to gain over five marks. At the lower end of the scale there were some commentaries which were severely marked, or even given zero marks, where there was evidence of some writing of positive worth.

Unit B352 Practical Portfolio

The unit continues to be accessible to a wide cohort of candidates offering a range of compositional choices in particular. Evidence suggests that candidates find this unit a little more challenging than unit B351 because of the additional demand created by presenting a group performance, and because of the need to present a log of the compositional process.

By applying the criteria rigorously, many centres marked accurately. However, moderators reported the frequent need to make big reductions to marks because assessors had been far too generous. The specific issues commonly reported are dealt with in each section of this report.

The use of the OCR repository has made the process much simpler for both centres and moderators. The reduction in the need to prepare work to be posted is advantageous to centres, and the ability to access a centre's sample on screen by the moderator soon after it is uploaded, rather than having to wait for, unpack and sort through parcels, is a much preferred method of working. OCR recommends that all centres investigate the benefits of repository entry for the next series.

OCR technology, through repository and electronic entry, is also helping to reduce errors, but there are still many schools that have not taken sufficient care over the presentation of their entries and it is hoped that teachers will read this report carefully in order to ensure that in future they present their work in a way that enables a reliable moderation process to take place.

Administration

Over the past two year there have been changes in the administrative arrangements and these are taking time to embed into centre practice. The following points should be noted:

- Moderation samples are requested by email to the nominated person at the centre (usually the Examinations Officer). Internal communication therefore needs to enable this to reach the member of staff who has to deal with it, within the shortest possible time.
- Centres receive two sample requests, one for Unit B351 and one for Unit B352. Usually the samples requested are for the work of different candidates. It is therefore important that the centre's assessor identifies exactly which candidates are required in each sample and selects the work accordingly.
- When preparing the work for dispatch, centres must keep the individual units separate. There are two workable formats:
 - A compilation CD, for each unit, containing work of the candidates requested in the sample, accompanied by a hand-list (track list).
 - Individual candidate CDs, for each unit, containing just the work for that unit.
- Assessment forms should not be sent in advance but with the sample, (or in the case of a repository entry, uploaded with the candidates' work). It is no longer necessary to send the assessment forms of candidates not requested for the sample.
- The MS1 form needs to be sent with the sample: not in advance. If using the repository this needs to be uploaded into the administrative section.
- A Centre Authentication Form, CCS160 form is required for each unit. This should be sent with the sample, or loaded into the administrative section. Results can be withheld if this form is not sent. One CCS160 form is acceptable for both units, provided that the unit numbers are clearly stated on it.
- Individual authentication forms should not be sent: these are for internal use only

Some centres, using postal submission, sent their work on data CDs. These were manageable but need to be clearly identified as such. Centres who are working in this way might consider using the repository next year as it will considerably simplify the process.

Whilst a number of centres are careful in their submission of work, moderators noted this year an increasing number of errors in the way that the work was presented. Some of the most frequent issues are listed below:

- Work for B353 was sometimes incorrectly sent to the moderator. B353 is now an examined unit and should be posted to the examiner as soon as the work is completed. The examiner is rarely the same person as the moderator. Separate labels for this are provided by OCR.
- A number of centres using the repository had incorrect assessment forms uploaded in candidate folders. Centres should check carefully that material submitted is for the correct candidate.
- The latest version of the electronic assessment form, provided on the OCR website, should be used to support the correct addition of marks. Errors were frequently found when the forms were completed manually.
- Both sides of the assessment form should be completed **in full** and checked carefully. Confusion was caused when incorrect candidate numbers were included, or the wrong instrument named.
- CDs should be checked to ensure that they function properly and that they contain the correct work. There were a number of instances of errors here, resulting in unnecessary communication with centres and a delay in the moderation process.
- The mark entered on the MS1 should be checked to ensure that it agrees with the total on the assessment form. Some centres sent notes to the moderator indicating that they had changed their mind over the mark since submitting the MS1. This is not acceptable, and is unnecessarily time consuming for all concerned.
- Work sent by post must be submitted on CD. Memory sticks are not accepted, and some centres had to resubmit their work for this reason.

Whilst clear identification of a candidate's work is important, it is unnecessary to make lengthy announcements on the CD. Some announcements at the start of each track were almost a minute long, and thus time consuming for both the assessor and the moderator. A correct hand list (track list) and a brief announcement of the candidate's name, number, and item (performance or composition) is all that is necessary.

Postal entries were easiest to handle when each candidate's work was placed in a folder or plastic wallet. The majority of centres now present work in this way. However there are still some centres who present work in large, bulky and totally unnecessary ring folders which are difficult to handle and costly to send.

Performing

Each year there is a shift to more popular performing styles and instruments. It is pleasing to note the diversity of candidates that are now entering the examination. Candidates may need guidance as to the most appropriate performance item to submit, which will enable them to demonstrate their control of their instrument and their ability to interact with other parts. The group performance required by this unit does not require other live performers, although it is expected that in most cases this will access the best mark. The performance can involve interacting with a backing track or assembling a piece which uses a number of parts, using ICT.

Where individual parts in an ensemble are unclear, it is a requirement of the specification to provide a score. This is vital in the case of piano duets, vocal performances where there are two or more singers, and other performances where there is another player playing the same instrument as the candidate. In cases where there is not a score, such as with steel pan, gamelan ensembles or pieces involving multiple guitars, video evidence should be provided to enable the candidate's part to be identified. The specification does not allow ensemble performances where the candidate plays in unison with another player, or where there is a backing track with the candidate's part on it.

This year saw some quite outstanding ensemble performances submitted with a wide range of sources and combinations used. Centres appear to have realised that the quality of the other musicians in the group is very important and have gone to great lengths to ensure that a candidate's talent is showcased in the best possible way. It is extremely important to balance these performances well; this may involve several 'takes' of a recording but the resulting benefits are immense.

Some able candidates submitted performances which did not provide the opportunity to demonstrate real ensemble skill and therefore were unable to access high marks in the interpretation and ensemble awareness category. Such performances were effectively accompanied solos, whereby the accompanist followed the candidate, rather than the candidate positively interacting with another performer and contributing to the ensemble. Careful choice of piece is essential therefore in ensuring that candidates achieve their potential in this unit. Centre assessment of performances tended to be generous, with some assessors awarding full marks irrespective of the quality of the performance. Centres are reminded that the mark of 12+12 +6 should be reserved for candidates who display skills well above the expected standard for GCSE.

Compositions and Arrangements

With so many options available in this unit, moderators were presented with a great variety of work with varying standards and outcomes.

It is important in this unit that the composition is supported by a clear intention or brief, which forms the starting point for the Log and Evaluation. A number of centres submitted AoS 3 compositions which did not define the style of dance music; candidates should state the style that is being used in order to access marks under the AoS 3 criteria. AoS 4 compositions sometimes had very vague and general intentions, and this tended to disadvantage the candidate before they had started.

The most popular submission was for a group of instruments (AoS 2) and there were some imaginative pieces spanning a huge range of styles and genres. Minimalist music was a popular choice here, as were more classically orientated ensemble pieces. Less successful submissions were characterised by there being insufficient attention paid to how the parts fit together. An easy option for popular musicians was to provide a fairly basic chord sequence to a rhythm section and for the candidate to improvise using several impressive tricks and contortions with the guitar. This is not true ensemble writing and it is a misconception to imagine that this process would result in the awarding of full marks. In terms of arrangements, some candidates provided significantly simplified versions of popular songs, which took away from the compositional impact rather than adding to it.

Dance music was the next most popular option, and pieces written using ICT software were invariably successful on the surface as the listener can be easily hypnotised by the range of timbres and rhythms presented in such a professionally sounding package. Nevertheless the inclusion of pre-recorded samples and the compilation of a matrix of loops do not represent composition in the spirit of a national examination. When musical elements and shapes have been pre-decided by a third party, an essential part of the compositional and evolutionary process is abdicated and therefore the process becomes nothing more than the assembly of a music kit. In this area the assessment was often extremely generous. Candidates need to consider whether the choice of a particular dance style will enable them to demonstrate the compositional skills required by the core criteria.

To score high marks against the AoS 3 criteria, dances must demonstrate and display clear characteristics of the dance that has been chosen. As has been highlighted many times before, waltzes do not simply consist of the mechanical application of an oom cha cha accompaniment. The waltzes continue to be the most formulaic of options. Similarly there is more to a Salsa than just the clave rhythm.

There were some very compelling and imaginative descriptive pieces, many of which made good use of ICT to create an outcome which had musical impact. Mood changes were achieved through effective manipulation of musical ideas and pieces were framed within an appropriate structure. Some candidates attempted this type of composition using only one instrument, and these were less likely to be successful because of the limitations of timbre and texture. The AoS 4 option was the least popular but it did allow less able candidates to produce something of worth in that the stylistic and harmonic constraints of other options were less important.

Centres are reminded that a copy of the starting point must be sent with any arrangement submitted.

The most significant issue related to the lack of information provided by assessors on the rear of the assessment form. OCR has redesigned this to make clear exactly what information is required, in the form of annotation, where the candidate is not solely performing the composition live, and/or where a score is not available. Some centres provided the detail necessary, but most did not.

There is a fundamental problem where a candidate embarks on a composition task and does not have the skill to communicate it effectively as part of the process. Too often the teacher stated that the candidate showed another performer what they wanted, and this blurs the boundary of where the candidate's composition stops and where the performer makes compositional decisions. This was particularly the case with the AoS 2 compositions. Without evidence, such as a video of the teaching process, or a sketch by the candidate, then the performer's input cannot be attributed to the candidate. Marks in such cases were reduced, and this had a knock-on effect on the moderation parameters applied to all candidates in the centre. In future OCR will not be able to accept this type of practice unless clear evidence is provided of what the candidate's intentions were.

Many compositions in this unit made use of technology. Some centres provided full and helpful details, but more often just the software was named, or there was a brief and ambiguous statement which did not provide the precise clarification of the candidate's input that is needed. Where the candidate had inputted all of the notes themselves, then centres were generally ready to say so: it was in cases where pre-recorded loops or samples were used, or where technical processes had come into play which moulded the candidate's initial input into something musical and compelling, that full information was often lacking, and moderation judgements had to be made on assumptions which may not have advantaged the candidates.

Compositions must all be recorded. In the majority of cases this was done, but a few centres had to be asked to forward them.

Overall, compositions, particularly in the upper ranges, were over-marked.

Log and Evaluations

Moderators were sometimes alarmed to discover through reading the log that the rules of controlled assessment appeared to have been breached, because candidates wrote of a level of support from the teacher which is not allowed, or at the least should have been articulated in the compositional annotation and reflected in the mark. Teachers are advised to read carefully the rules of Controlled Assessment which OCR are required to enforce, set out on page 33 of the specification. Breaches of these regulations constitute centre malpractice.

The log and evaluation was invariably the most disappointing element of this unit. In fact, it became clear that the weakest examples had been written retrospectively as candidates could not provide enough detail to confirm the route and direction that had been taken. In many ways, the skill being employed here is the most natural and most practised of all the elements of the examination: the process of writing a diary at the end of each session.

Logs were variable in length and detail. Many appeared to be written to a formula setting out a process which was unlikely to reflect the reality of the steps that the candidate took. The log needs to be a true reflection of the process undertaken by the candidate. It should include musical thinking regarding the decisions made during the process.

Where candidates wrote evaluations that identified specific features of the outcome that were successful or otherwise, and gave reasons for this, then high marks were gained. Many candidates merely repeated aspects of the brief and the log, and thus added little to what had already been said.

The logs and evaluations were generally marked leniently.

Unit B353 Creative Task

Organisation/Administration

The majority of work arrived by the deadline of 15th May. Notable exceptions were those enclosed with B351/2 coursework and sent to the moderator rather than the B353 examiner. Please note that these are separate units and have different examiners/moderators. Centres are reminded to send the work immediately after their candidates have completed it. Most centres did this. The examining window falls before and after the Easter recess, and examiners were pleased to be able to get on with their work early, to relieve the pressure at the end of the marking period. It was noted that about a third of centres appeared to have administered the task before Easter.

In order for the examiner to check that all of the correct work has been submitted, it is necessary for the centre to send the attendance register. Also, as this unit does not employ a question paper on which the candidates write their name and number, the centre needs to take responsibility for ensuring that candidates' work is clearly identifiable. Recorded CD submissions **must** therefore be accompanied by a hand-list (track list) indicating on which track each candidate's response is. Examiners found it helpful when teachers stated the name and candidate number at the start of the track.

A small number of centres did not enclose the cover sheets on which details of individual candidates' submission are written. These cover sheets are sent to centres in advance of the examining window, with the question paper. They are also available on the OCR website. Missing cover sheets had to be chased and, whilst some centres responded very quickly, others took a while to arrive. When completing the sheet, it is most important that all of the necessary boxes are ticked and checked by the centre before dispatch. The examiner particularly needs to know which stimulus is being used. Whilst in most cases this was self evident from the music presented, in a few cases, particularly of less able candidates, it was not.

There was sometimes confusion about the ticking of the box that indicates the mode of communication. In cases where a computer generated score is presented, the "Written" box should be ticked. If ICT has been used in the compositional process and a recording is presented, then the ICT box should be ticked. The ticking of the ICT box then generates a requirement to indicate the way in which the ICT has been used. The naming of a piece of software (such as Garage Band) is insufficient on its own as it does not indicate the nature of the support that the software has given to the compositional process. Teachers must be clear and unambiguous in what they write here. For example to state simply that the candidate started with a blank screen, does not in itself tell an examiner how the software had been used after that. Teachers must state whether or not samples have been used, and in what way. Since examiners are unable to contact centres directly, enquiries on such matters became cumbersome and not always productive in eliciting the response necessary to enable the allocation of an accurate mark.

There were very few cases of CDs not working. It would save time for examiners if the centre would indicate on the CD case whether it is a data or an audio CD. Centres should note that, for security reasons, OCR does not accept work on a memory stick.

Quality of Response

The Creative Task should be an integral part of the GCSE curriculum and planned for as such. Some candidates had been well prepared for the task, and created imaginative, individual and musical work. More often, however, it was clear that candidates approached the task in an unmusical way. Candidates should have been preparing for this unit for an average of one and a half years.

There was a small number of responses which achieved the top band of marks. These responses showed craftsmanship and imagination in the use of the stimulus and development of the piece. Many responses were more mundane, either repeating the stimulus several times or having no real shape. There were also many candidates that tried hard to give their work a structure but the musical development did not flow appropriately, with phrases sounding wooden, rather mechanical with a limited understanding of scales and keys. In some centres, all candidates worked within the same formula and candidates who achieved high scores had produced pieces with good musical content. However most candidates had not developed their ideas musically and therefore achieved limited marks.

It was clear that many candidates had been taught to apply musical devices. On many occasions these devices were used in a way that did not create a satisfactory response in musical terms. Teachers should note that it is the impact of the piece musically which has the biggest effect on the marks awarded. In cases where the formula had driven both the structure and the shaping of the ideas, candidates did not have the freedom to work imaginatively and musically, and therefore very few of these pieces accessed the two top bands of marks in any category.

Stimuli

Candidates should select **one** of the stimuli on which to base their task. A small number of candidates attempted to combine two of the stimuli (words and chords for example), and this was taken account of in the marking because it limited their own creativity. The most popular stimuli were the rhythmic phrase, words and chord sequence.

Rhythmic phrase

The rhythmic phrase was successfully used by drummers and instrumentalists alike. Many managed the 6/8 time signature well and it was pleasing to hear that many drummers were comfortable working in this metre. Some candidates created a short section based on the stimulus and then moved into 4/4 time for an extended section before returning to the 6/8 time. Where the outer sections contained limited development of the stimulus the pieces scored less than half marks for response. Some candidates attempted to reshape the stimulus into 4/4 time from the start which meant that the mark was capped at 6 as the metre is an integral part of the stimulus. Centres should note that with the rhythmic phrase, the note lengths **and** the given metre should be applied. The specification provides details of the time signatures that will be used.

Note pattern

Many written versions were based on this stimulus and there were many melodies written for and played on string and wind instruments. There was evidence here of the teaching of melodic devices, and some candidates put them to good use, producing musical responses. There were also a number of formulaic responses where the musical devices were applied systematically but the outcome did not make musical sense. The weakest responses tended to use the given notes with a simple rhythm often not even recognising the key centre.

Melodic phrase

This stimulus is designed as an appropriate challenge for candidates who want to demonstrate traditional skills in two part writing by adding a descant or bass line. The test was misunderstood by a number of candidates. Sometimes the melody was extended without a second part – in other cases more than one part was added as a harmonisation. In the former case, no marks could be awarded, and in the latter case, the lowest part was marked.

There were fewer responses to this stimulus although there were a few centres where all candidates used this stimulus regardless of academic aptitude. The majority of candidates who chose the melodic phrase did so because they were able to write harmonically. Successful pieces were created that had clear cadence points and an understanding of textural writing.

There were some good responses seen: some just used the eight bars, with a musical and imaginative second part, and others where the piece extended either into an ABA structure or into an AB structure where the parts swapped round after bar 8.

Chord sequence

This continues to be a popular choice and examiners received a wide range of responses. The majority of guitarists used it, and it was also popular with piano players. Most commonly the piece unfolded as a sequence of quasi-variations on the chords, with different figurations in each. The best responses had stylistic consistency with unity and variety, and a nicely shaped ending. The less successful responses were characterised by a lot of repetition of basic strumming patterns, which ended by just stopping on the final chord of the sequence, which in this case was not the tonic.

There can be no hard and fast rule about whether additional chords are appropriate and/or can enhance the mark. There were some good responses that stuck to the chord sequence throughout, and equally there were some who later on in the piece introduced additional chords, often keeping some of the chords in the sequence, for a contrasting section. There were some responses where the chords were played through once at the start then the piece moved into a totally unrelated chord sequence which had clearly been prepared earlier. These responses gained limited credit.

Words

This stimulus proved to be a popular choice this series. There was a wide variety of responses using the words. Many candidates successfully extended the response with additional lyrics of their own – and added a piano or guitar accompaniment – to produce a substantial response within the 45 minute time frame. In some cases the prescribed text was dispensed with quickly and candidates drifted off onto words of their own, set to unrelated musical materials. These responses tended to be too long and musically unbalanced to gain high credit.

There were also some very stylish and effective unaccompanied songs. However some candidates produced an instrumental response to the set of words resulting in a mark of zero for Response and Area of Study.

Sequence of Events

There were not many high quality responses to this stimulus in this series. A number of candidates created a suitable atmosphere for the children playing, but surprisingly failed to create an effective contrast to represent the teacher appearing. The best responses manipulated the musical ideas, using some of the musical elements to effect a change of mood and create a unified piece.

Some centres submitted a notated print out of a sequence of events. As a key element in the sequence of events is often the choice of timbres, these proved to be low quality responses, besides being difficult to assess accurately owing to the multi layering. The most successful responses used ICT well, with candidates inputting their own original ideas. A number used sound effects of children playing and the lack of creative input from the candidate had a detrimental effect on the mark that could be awarded. There were some weak responses received that used just a single line melody instrument. There were few who really captured the mood of the playground using effective musical devices.

Area of Study Mark

In most cases the area of study mark was awarded for the use of the instrument (AoS 1). Most candidates produced playable pieces attracting at least two marks. By extending the range, and using techniques specific to the instrument, more marks could be gained. Full marks were rarely awarded, but those that achieved this demonstrated an understanding not just of the range, but used it for musical impact. Bowing, pedalling, characteristic tonguing, vocal melisma, and dynamics appropriate to the different parts of the instrument's range, were some of the ways that different instruments achieved higher marks.

Where ICT was used as the candidate's instrument, markers took into account the demands of the style that was being used. There were many ICT based responses that gained two or three area of study marks, and occasionally there was evidence of candidates using the full range of ICT potential within their responses. There are a number of aspects of ICT capability that can contribute to higher marks here, and these are stated below:

- Number of layers / tracks, including, where appropriate, a drum track
- Use of texture
- Appropriate timbres
- Addition of appropriate effects (panning; reverb, etc)
- Quantisation
- Balance between parts and tracks
- Editing of note velocities to create phrase shapes

Where it was possible to award marks under two areas of study, such as in the case of a pianist who played the chord sequence with a melody over the top, examiners marked the piece under both, and awarded the higher mark.

Where the AoS 2 mark was applied, examiners were looking for parts to fit together harmonically, and for textural variety between the two parts. All melodic phrases were marked in this way, and most candidates attempted some textural variety. There were fewer which were successful in the harmonic implications of the parts working together.

The AoS 4 criteria were applied to the Sequence of Events, and most responses demonstrated a basic relationship to the sequence. There were few that really created effective music to accompany the scene, so the Area of Study mark awarded was rarely higher than three here.

Quality of Communication

Most responses received were presented as recorded versions either with the candidate performing live, or with a performance generated by technology. In the latter case, there was benefit in that the outcomes were generally fluent in terms of pitch and rhythm, but less musical in terms of phrase shaping, dynamic colouring and articulation. Those candidates who performed their work were often more able to demonstrate their real musical understanding, through expressive playing but more likely to make errors, and, in the case of vocalists, lose the tonal centre through weak intonation.

Written versions were either presented by hand or using a software programme: most frequently Sibelius. Written responses created from technology were in general significantly better quality than those that were hand written, although they sometimes lacked the detail of articulation and dynamic shading to gain the highest band of marks. Some written versions contained dynamics that were musical and suited to the timbre and ranges of the instrument, and as a result gained marks in this category as well as in the AoS 1 category. Responses that contained copious dynamics and articulation which did not make musical sense, sometimes gained the same marks as those where the candidate had put no dynamics at all. For example, a crescendo on a semibreve in a piano piece may look appropriate but is impossible to perform.

It is essential that candidates select a method of communication that suits their own strengths in order to achieve their potential. Where candidates in a centre all used the same method of response, this was not the case.

Unit B354 Listening Examination

General Comments

The paper demonstrated good access for many candidates. A number of questions elicited very good marks and showed that there was a good understanding by these candidates of the various styles and genres within the specification. There were a few part questions where candidates did not perform particularly well but these were in the minority.

Once again there were some occasions where musical terminology was misunderstood and so candidates failed to score marks. Texture and cadence were two such terms and a number of candidates also did not appear to understand what a musical device might be. These terms all appear in the language for learning and regularly occur within a paper, but answers regarding them often show a lack of clarity and understanding.

It should be noted by centres that candidates should write only one answer where a question requires a single word or phrase in the answer. Multiple responses – a scatter-gun approach – will not be credited.

When answering a question referring to tempo a number of candidates chose to answer using a number of beats per minute. Whilst this is not wrong, choosing an appropriate English or Italian term would be better.

Q1A This proved to be a well answered question where candidates of all abilities were able to gain full marks and nearly all candidates gained at least five of the seven marks available.

Q1 (a) (i) The vast majority of candidates correctly identified the ‘orchestra’ as the type of ensemble playing.

Q1 (a) (ii) The majority were able to recognise that the dynamics increased and that there was a rise in pitch to gain two marks and many went on to give other answers including ‘ostinato’, ‘use of snare drum’ and ‘scalic’ to gain full marks. Some candidates mistakenly thought that the music got faster.

Q1 (a) (iii) Again many candidates were able to recognise changes in the music, including the introduction of a ‘brass’ melody, the introduction of the ‘cymbal’, the move to a definite ‘major’ key and the ‘slower’ tempo. Some candidates made good references to the dramatic nature of the passage.

Q1B This question was answered quite well by candidates of all abilities, although some were confused as to whether the music was a jig or a reel.

Q1 (b) (i) A large number of candidates correctly identified this as a ‘jig’. Some incorrectly chose the reel and one or two wrote both jig and reel and therefore did not gain a mark. The vast majority of candidates recognised that the music was from Ireland.

Q1 (b) (ii) Many correct time signatures were seen here even if the previous answer was wrong. There were however a number who did not recognise the compound metre of the music and wrote 2/4 or 4/4.

Q1 (b) (iii) All of the possible choices for this answer were underlined but a significant proportion were able to correctly identify the structure.

Q1 (b) (iv) The majority of candidates gained two marks here. They were able to recognise what it was about the music that made it suitable for dancing. Answers such as ‘steady’ tempo, ‘clear’ or ‘strong’ beat were among the most popular answers, as was the ‘fast’ tempo.

Q1C The answers to this question were quite mixed and the understanding of musical terminology was a problem for some candidates.

Q1 (c) (i) A good proportion of candidates heard that there were three beats in a bar.

Q1 (c) (ii) The majority of candidates chose the correct answer of ‘cymbal’, although few were able to spell it correctly, but there were those who chose an incorrect percussion instrument such as timpani or snare drum. Some candidates wrote hi-hat which was not an appropriate choice of instrument for this style of orchestral music. Quite a few lower ability candidates chose instruments from the string or brass family which was clearly not correct and showed a lack of knowledge of the families of orchestral instruments.

Q1 (c) (iii) A good percentage of candidates correctly underlined ‘homophonic’, but few were able to go on to give the correct meaning of this term. There were also those candidates who did not understand the terminology at all and so guessed.

Q1 (c) (iv) Most candidates were able to discern that a large venue was required for this type of composition, but some wrongly thought that it might be performed in a theatre or opera house.

Q2 The distinct sections to this music proved very helpful to the majority of candidates and many were able to write quite successfully about it.

The majority of candidates gained marks in the middle mark range with a significant number who gained marks in the top band. Nearly all candidates were able to write with some accuracy about the opening of the extract and many recognised the changes in pitch, instrumentation and texture as the piece progressed. Top band answers were gained by those who included musical detail and a sense of chronology, hearing that several ideas from the opening returned later in the extract. They were also able to recognise specific instruments rather than being vague and naming families of instruments or referring to them just as high or low. There were a few candidates who did not include any programme at all and others who just referred to the dawn breaking (the phrase that was given to them in the question) which did reduce the mark. Centres are once again advised to encourage their candidates to use the preparation page in order to make notes which can help them to organise a concise and focussed answer.

Q3 This question had parts of it that were answered very well and other parts that performed far less well.

Q3 (a) This part question proved to be very successful for the vast majority of candidates all of which gained the full four marks. Just a very few candidates failed to write in each box and some muddled the entry of the brass instruments with the percussion instruments, maybe showing a lack of aural recognition of the different instrumental families.

- Q3 (b) The most popular correct answers were 'shouting' and 'Spanish', but few candidates gained full marks here. Candidates did not focus their answers on the ways in which the voice was used but wrote about what the role of the voice might be at this point in the music.
- Q3 (c) Many candidates who focussed their answers on rhythm gained at least three of the four marks. The most popular answers were 'steady', 'repetition', 'clave', and 'syncopated'. However, some candidates did not focus on rhythm and wrote about the general features of Salsa. This did not answer the question and so did not gain marks.
- Q3 (d) There was a mixed response to this question with an equal proportion of correct and incorrect answers.
- Q3 (e) The correct answer of 'Cuba' was seen often but Argentina and Spain were the most popular incorrect answers.
- Q4** Some very good answers were seen to this question, with a high proportion of candidates understanding some of the features that might be expected in this genre of music.
- Q4 (a) This was the least successful part of the question with some candidates being unclear as to what a melodic device would be. Of those who clearly understood the question a good proportion wrote the correct answer of 'sequence'. However some wrote the word 'sequencing' which was the incorrect word and so did not gain a mark.
- Q4 (b) Despite being unclear in the previous question many candidates gained at least one mark for answers such as 'quiet' (piano) and 'staccato'.
- Q4 (c) The notation question saw a wide range of marks but many with between five and seven out of ten. As usual in this question a significant number of candidates gained marks for shape especially in bar 4, and in bar 12 many candidates recognised that the first four notes were part of a descending scale.
- Q4 (d) A good proportion of candidates gained marks for correct cadences, although some failed to recognise the end of the piece as a point of finality. There were once again candidates who did not understand this term and so wrote answers that were completely irrelevant.
- Q4 (e) The majority of candidates had a good understanding of what a cadenza is and so gained the mark here.
- Q4 (f) The majority of candidates recognised this as a 'concerto' and were able to support their answer with a suitable reason. A few did not give enough detail in the reason stating only that there was a solo and an accompaniment rather than being more specific and stating that there was a solo with *orchestral* accompaniment.
- Q4 (g) The vast majority of candidates correctly answered 'Classical'. A few had written Classical as part of their answer for part (f) and wrote dates here which have never been acceptable.

Q5 The first three parts of this question were generally answered very well but candidates fared less well in the final section where more precise detail and aural perception was required. Candidates appeared to identify well with the extracts but were not always able to focus their answers when comparing the various features later in the question. It is important for candidates always to refer to specific extracts in a comparison question. Answers that do not do this are often too vague or unclear to gain credit.

Q5 (a) (i) The vast majority of candidates recognised this instrument as a ‘trumpet’.

Q5 (a) (ii) This question was answered very well and most candidates were able to give at least one appropriate reason for why the trumpet was used in this extract and a good proportion of those candidates were able to give the required two reasons.

Q5 (b) Many candidates gained the mark here, but a few felt that the key was different so opted for an incorrect answer. Very few candidates felt that the music was in a minor key.

Q5 (c) The majority of candidates gained a mark for a suitable composer here. John Williams was the most frequently named composer. There were those who incorrectly opted for a composer that was from the Baroque or Classical period (inappropriate eras for film music).

Q5 (d) (i) Candidates who gave specific information on the tempo of the extracts often gained marks here, although some mistakenly thought that the extracts got faster. However, other candidates wrote that the extracts had *the same* or *similar* tempos, which gave no indication as to whether that tempo was fast or slow.

Q5 (d) (ii) Candidates mostly gained marks here for recognising that both extracts were ‘low’, ‘quiet’ and ‘staccato’. Less successful candidates were not clear about which extract they were referring to and credit could not be given. Other candidates listed the instruments used rather than discussing the features of what they played as the question required.

Q5d (iii) This proved to be a challenging question with few candidates gaining full marks. A number of candidates referred to instruments from all families and not just from the percussion family which was what the question required. Others were very vague about the extracts and some did not give any musical features at all.

Q5 (e) Some candidates gained marks here by giving reasons that they had not used before. Unfortunately some simply repeated information that they had already given but there were those that gained credit here for answers that had been omitted in earlier parts of the question.

Q6 This question gained very mixed responses. High ability candidates who had a good understanding of the dance style often did very well here but lower ability candidates did not focus their answers or show enough understanding of the expected features of the music to gain credit.

Q6 (a) The correct answer of ‘Country and Western’ was seen, but line dancing was seen more often. Line dance is a style of *dance* but Country and Western is a style of *music* that is played for this dance. There were a significant minority of candidates that thought this was Disco.

- Q6 (b) (i) Many candidates heard the correct answer of ‘three’ different chords, although a significant number wrote four, presumably not recognising that the chord in the last bar was the same as the one in the first bar.
- Q6 (b) (ii) A good proportion of the candidates correctly underlined ‘glissando’.
- Q6 (c) Many candidates gained a mark here, most often for ‘fast’ or ‘allegro’. Candidates that chose to write beats per minute most often gave 120 which was incorrect.
- Q6 (d) The majority of candidates recognised this music as being in a ‘major’ key. However, a variety of answers were seen and it was the question that was left blank most often on the paper.
- Q6 (e) Candidates did not always focus on the word *typical* in the question here and so wrote rather vague answers. Candidates who did were able to answer specifically and gained marks for ‘slides’, ‘strummed’ and ‘picked’.
- Q6 (f) High ability candidates wrote very good answers that described specifically the way that the drum kit was used, including answer like ‘the hi-hat played quavers’ and ‘the snare played on beats 2 and 4’. Less able candidates wrote far more general or vague answers that did not gain credit.
- Q6 (f) Some excellent answers were seen here from candidates who were familiar with this style of dance. Many candidates were able to describe and name a wide variety of dance steps. Some candidates who did not recognise this style as line dancing wrote about other dance styles and so did not gain credit.
- Q7** Generally this question was answered very well. Candidates had a good understanding of the genre and were able to apply their knowledge to the questions for this extract of music.
- Q7 (a) The majority of candidates gained at least one mark here and a significant number scored two marks. Marks were mostly gained from recognising that there were ‘soft’ or ‘whispered’ voices and the sounds of ‘marching’ feet.
- Q7 (b) The vast majority of answers were correct.
- Q7 (c) Candidates of all abilities answered well here and correctly identified various unusual vocal sounds.
- Q7 (d) This question showed good differentiation with marks ranging across the spectrum. However, many candidates gained at least four out of the five marks.
- Q7 (e) Nearly all answers were correct, with most candidates recognising that the music ‘got faster’. However, some gave answers that were more appropriate to volume than to tempo.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2012

