GCSE

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Music (J535)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

B351 Integrated Tasks

This is the third year in which a full cohort has taken the unit, and it is clear that it continues to allow candidates to focus on their own individual specialism. Its introduction coincided with changes in administration procedures and, over the three series, the issues surrounding the presentation of work have diminished. However, there are still some administration and marking issues that have had to be dealt with by moderators, and these are outlined in this report. Overall the response from centre staff when contacted by moderators has been positive and OCR thanks teachers for their co-operation in these respects.

Administration

There are two entry codes for the unit: B351/01 for repository entries and B351/02 for postal entries. Most centres are still choosing to post work to the moderator, although there were occasions where centres had mistakenly entered for the repository, when they intended to send work by post.

Most centres now use simple and easy to handle packaging when sending materials by post, often with each candidate's work in a single plastic wallet. There is no need to provide work in large files and boxes or to wrap CDs in excessive amounts of tape and binding; most submissions arrived with moderators in good order with a minimum amount of protection.

Some centres are now sending all the work as data files on a CDRom, thus avoiding having to send anything on paper. This considerably helped the process of moderation. Centres that do this would find it a simple step to use the OCR repository, which saves the trouble of posting and allows for immediate access by the moderator. The number of centres using the repository is very slowly increasing.

Centres are reminded of the list of accepted file formats in the Appendix of the specification. Flies should not be saved in formats which are associated with specific software, such as Sibelius.

Each centre receives two separate emails giving details of the samples that are required to be sent to the moderator or uploaded onto the repository. The sample for each unit is likely to be different and there were still a number of instances of moderators having to contact centres to request additional work because the same sample had been sent for both units.

A few centres are still sending their B353 work to the moderator despite this unit being entirely separate from the moderated units. B353, the Creative Task, should be posted to the examiner immediately after it is completed and not held until the controlled assessment deadline, which is almost two weeks after the window for the completion of the Creative Task.

Centres are reminded that there is now no need to send all of the assessment forms with, or in advance of, the sample. Moderators found it particularly helpful when centres sent the work requested in candidate number order. In one or two cases, centres sent all of their candidates' work to the moderator irrespective of the sample request. This is unnecessary and adds to the weight of the package and is more time consuming for the moderator.

Most CDs were well produced but there were occasional missing tracks or incorrect track listings. Where this was the case, centres were generally quick to resolve the issues. A small minority of centres still write the track listing on the CD itself, which means that it is invisible when in the play-back device. The most convenient way of presenting the recordings is to have one compilation CD for each unit. The practice of recording all of the performances for both units on one CD and all of the compositions on another significantly increases the moderator's work and is strongly discouraged.

With a clear track list, the announcements on the CD can be kept to a minimum. In extreme cases announcements before each item lasted up to a minute and these significantly delayed the process. It is helpful (but not essential) to place the name of the candidate and the title of the piece of work at the start of the track, but further information is superfluous, especially if it is stated elsewhere.

Most centres provided a CCS 160 (Centre Authentication Form) this year. Centres are reminded that this form must be received by OCR before grades can be issued for their candidates. If the teacher is unable to authenticate the work of a candidate, then it should not be submitted.

There were no clerical errors this year when centres used the online Candidate Assessment Form, which totals the marks automatically. The use of this form is strongly recommended. The form is reviewed and updated annually so centres should check that they are using the most recent version.

Moderators were disappointed by the lack of detail provided on some of the Candidate Assessment Forms. This document is two sided and needs to be completed by the teacher in full; there were several instances noted where the candidates had clearly been involved in the completion of the form. The importance of this document is crucial to the fair allocation of marks for each candidate. At best, the amount of detail provided meant the moderator had an easy task in understanding the teacher's thinking and, in most cases, concurring with the judgements made. At worst, the moderator had to make further contact with the centre; thus making the process more stressful for the teacher and more time consuming for the moderator.

General comments about the unit

It is pleasing to report that many centres are embracing the fundamental theme of this unit, namely that each of its constituent parts integrate together to form a package of work that reflects the candidate's skills and knowledge of their own instrument and its music. The very best work consisted of carefully chosen repertoire that demonstrated skill and dexterity with careful attention to musical detail. In choosing a piece with which they were comfortable, and that demonstrated a range of techniques and characteristics specific to the instrument, candidates could approach the task with confidence. As a result they invariably produced a composition that revealed understanding of a range of musical features and facets of their chosen style or genre leading to the awarding of the highest marks. The impact of the Commentary is often overlooked in that this document, worth only 10 marks, is the key to success as it reveals the candidate's knowledge of their music, the techniques of their instrument, and the journey that they have undertaken. The Commentary was generally the weakest part of many candidates' work, as on many occasions it failed to offer clear reasons for choices and decisions that had been made. The weakest examples consisted of a description of an instrument, an acknowledgement that the performance has taken place and a list of items to include in a composition.

The repertoire presented for performance was both varied and interesting. It was clear that reality entertainment shows, such as The X Factor, had played an important part in influencing the choice of song presented by many singers. Musical theatre is in decline as far as the selection of solos are concerned, and it would appear that fewer candidates are preparing music from ABRSM or Trinity syllabi. There is a continuing shift to more popular instruments and styles, and a significant decline in candidates offering orchestral instruments. More and more pianists are presenting jazz influenced solos and there is a distinctly contemporary flavour to the musical choices being made and less evidence of classical 'masters'.

Performing

Performing was generally the most accurately assessed aspect of the unit. However there was some significant over marking towards the top of the range, with full marks often being awarded

to performances which had notable shortcomings. Centres are reminded again that the top marks must be reserved for performances that are of a quality and difficulty beyond the standard normally expected at GCSE. The purpose of this is to offer a challenge to the small but significant number of candidates whose performing standard is very advanced and who are at or beyond the standard expected for high marks at Advanced level.

Performances in the 9-11 band should be well controlled and musically articulated. Teachers generally seemed to be able to differentiate between this band and the band below, where performances would have some technical and musical shortcomings. Within the 9-11 band however, the marking was often too generous. Teachers are encouraged to use the range of marks within the band fully and not just award every performance the top mark in the band in which it belongs. In the lower ranges the marking was generally accurate since it is very clear when a performance fails to be fluent or musical.

Playing with a backing track is an acceptable mode of performing, although it is essential that the candidate's part is not already being played on the track. There is a recent tendency for candidates to play along to backing tracks that they are listening to through headphones. This does not enable any assessment of the musicality of the candidate's part and it is impossible to verify externally that the candidate's part is not on the track. Similarly if ICT is used in any way to enhance or manipulate a performance this needs to be declared, and failure to do so amounts to malpractice which could lead to serious consequences for the candidate and for the centre.

There were still a few able candidates who performed accompanied solo pieces without the accompaniment. Whilst ensemble interaction is not a prerequisite for high marks in this unit, it is often not possible to carry off a musical performance of a piece where there is an essential ingredient missing. In the same way, guitarists or drummers playing just their own part in a piece intended for an ensemble often could not gain high marks for communication and interpretation as the essential interaction with other parts is not demonstrable.

In this unit it is expected that the vast majority of candidates will perform music that is commercially available. This is set out in the current specification in the section headed Suggested Repertoire. There are a small number of performing contexts where this is not possible, and these are stated in the same paragraph. Only if it is impossible to perform a piece attributed to someone else is a candidate's composition allowed and only then if it can be related to the features of a performing style of a particular artist. There were a few cases of candidates performing their own compositions where the mark had to be disallowed.

Composing

The most successful compositions were those that candidates were able to play themselves, using their knowledge of their instrument to good effect. Many candidates wrote melodic pieces that would suit many instruments and thus did not explore the characteristic figurations and range of the instrument in a way that could earn high area of study marks. Candidates who used ICT to create and communicate their work need to ensure that they have not strayed beyond the boundaries of the capabilities of their instrument.

The assessment against the core criteria was generally a little generous, and the boundary between the 9-11 and the 12-14 bands was often set too low. To achieve 12-14 the composition should have musical and stylistic impact as well as demonstrating more advanced compositional techniques appropriate to the style. A composition in the 9-11 band might contain a number of musical devices and techniques but have less impact as a piece of music.

The most significant issue in verifying the marks awarded related to the way that the candidate chose to communicate their composition. If a composition is not performed entirely by the candidate, or written as an accurate score from which someone else performs, then the

specification requirement is that a detailed annotation must be provided. Many centres failed to do this.

The annotation must offer the moderator a body of clear evidence as to the exact input of the candidate. Too often moderators were expected to accept that the candidate indicated to another performer what they intended, where it was clear that the performer, using their instrumental and musical skills had created a stylish piece of music. In such cases a shadow of doubt hangs over the composition as to how much of it was actually composed by the candidate. Part of being a composer involves being able to communicate the musical intention in some way directly. This year, moderators were proactive in contacting centres and asking for evidence and were pleased that in many cases such evidence existed, although centres had not thought to supply it. In a few cases, however, it was clear that the final product had been assessed as being all the candidate's work whereas in fact it was not, and the work submitted could have been viewed as malpractice.

Centres are also asked to be honest and detailed in their annotations relating to the use of technology in the composing process. Simply naming the software is not sufficient: detail must be provided relating to the processes used to develop, shape and sustain patterns and in particular information about the use of samples must be provided. Moderators noted that some compositions which consisted exclusively of samples and loops were awarded high marks where the composition processes bore no comparison to those which would have been involved in creating the piece from scratch. Teachers were rightly keen to make clear cases where every note had been composed by the candidate, but were seldom detailed or specific enough when this had not been the case. Comments such as "started with a blank screen" or "no additional samples" are not helpful in providing clarity of detail.

Whilst moderators have no desire to be suspicious of the teacher's intentions, they also have a responsibility to uphold the integrity of the examination, which they cannot do if important information is withheld from them and it is not crystal clear what the candidate's input is.

Commentaries

The quality of the commentaries is improving steadily although it is still often the weakest part of the unit. Generally commentaries were generously assessed at the top of the range, and severely assessed at the bottom. There is a growing and disturbing tendency for commentaries to be written to a formula where all candidates write answers to very direct questions, and then present their work in paragraphs with the questions removed. Such work cannot achieve high marks as the candidate's input is over directed.

Centres are reminded that the commentary should have the instrument and its techniques at its heart. Many able candidates made the mistake of not focusing on this, but wrote more about the piece: its structure and the interaction of the musical elements within it. These commentaries could not be awarded high marks. In particular the composition brief often did not make sufficient reference to how the instrument was going to be used, and just referred to the musical elements selected.

In the second paragraph some candidates wrote a lot of detail about instrumental techniques without relating them to the piece. Here the work would have been enhanced by reference to specific passages, sections or bar numbers.

Teachers are reminded that they cannot edit the commentaries undertaken under controlled conditions: there were some examples of teachers correcting mistakes in candidate's work and this could constitute malpractice.

B352 Practical Portfolio

Candidates have the benefit of a wide range of compositional choices for the controlled assessment work of unit B352. However, there is evidence to suggest that the group performances, as well as the need to present a log and evaluation of the compositional process, still make this unit a little more challenging than unit B351. It is very positive that the changes in the administrative procedures have now become more embedded into centre practice. Nevertheless, there are still issues over administration and marking that moderators have had to deal with and these are outlined below. When moderators have contacted centres the response has generally been positive. OCR thanks teachers and examination officers for their co-operation.

Administration

Centres either enter all candidates for the repository (B352/01) or for postal submission (B352/02). The latter remains the most popular option, although there were instances where repository entries had been made but some or all of the work was unnecessarily sent by post. If the repository is used, all material, including candidate assessment forms, should be uploaded. There is still quite a low take up of the repository option but moderators speak positively about the accessibility of materials. Centres are encouraged to explore the option of uploading their work into the repository for submission in future years.

The quality of the presentation of controlled assessments was generally good. Many moderators commented on the ease with which they were able to follow each package of work and quickly identify the strengths of each submission before completing the process of moderation. 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.

Fewer centres seem to be using the online form this year whereby the marks are calculated automatically. There are fewer clerical errors as a result of using this form so its use is encouraged. Teachers have access to the OCR website for all of the necessary forms needed for the completion of a sample of work. It was therefore perplexing to find some teachers generating their own, personalised assessment forms which did not meet the requirements of the examination. A number of centres are incorrectly still using older versions of the form.

The Centre Authentication Form, CCS160, is required for each unit. This should be sent with the sample, or uploaded into the repository. 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. A large proportion of centres are now sending these with samples as a matter of course. On the other hand, there continue to be several instances where individual candidate authentication forms were sent with candidate's work. These should not be sent to moderators but are for centre use only.

After sending marks to OCR, centres receive an email giving details of the sample that is required to be sent to the moderator. When preparing the work for dispatch, centres must keep the individual units separate. It is also both unnecessary and inconvenient for large centres to send all of the work to the moderator. Except where centres have 10 candidates or fewer, no work should be despatched until the receipt of the email containing a candidate list. There is no need to provide work in large files and boxes or wrap CDs in excessive packaging. A plastic wallet for each candidate in the sample is the preferred option.

Centres are reminded to check carefully that material submitted is for the right candidates. Moderators report that there are still a number of centres that sent the B351 and B352 work of candidates selected for one unit not realising that different samples are requested for each unit.

There were several instances where centres had to be contacted because work had been sent for the same candidates in both of the units.

A few centres are sending the B353 examined unit with the sample. Please remember that B353 (the Creative Task) is now an examined unit and it is crucial that this is sent to the examiner <u>immediately after it has been completed</u> within the centre. There is a separate earlier deadline for this examined unit.

Recordings of candidates' work sent to the moderator should be either a compilation CD, containing work of the candidates requested in the sample, accompanied by a track list, or individual candidate CDs for each unit containing just the work for that unit. Centres are reminded of the accepted file formats listed in the specification. Please note that Sibelius files are not accepted. In the few cases where centres were contacted to request the correct material to be re-sent, teachers responded quickly to resolve the issue.

The presentation of the CDs is still variable. Centres are reminded that CDs should be formatted for use in any audio output. If centres wish to submit work electronically then they should ideally enter via the repository. However, some centres send all the work as files on a CD-ROM: this worked well from a moderating point of view and if centres find this more convenient it is to be encouraged.

It is important that CD recordings are checked by centres before sending. However, there are still cases where this check does not take place. This resulted in incidences of part-recorded performances, compositions that were cut off before they ended, some recordings where only one channel could be heard in the playback and copious extraneous background noise interfering with the quality of the recording.

Teachers need to consider the placing of the microphone when recording ensemble performances. It is important that the moderator is able to hear the actual performance and contribution that the candidate has made to the ensemble. Difficulties with balance were most evident in the recordings of pop and rock music. If the candidate's part is not easy to hear then additional evidence in the form of a score or video is required.

Moderators were disappointed by the lack of detail provided on some of the Candidate Assessment Forms. The new style assessment forms are a big help but there are still many centres not completing these properly. This document is two sided and needs to be completed by the teacher in full; there were several instances noted where the candidates had clearly been involved in the completion of the form. The importance of this document is crucial to the fair allocation of marks for each candidate. At best, the amount of detail provided meant the moderator had an easy task in understanding the teacher's thinking and, in most cases, concurring with the judgements made. At worst, the moderator is left guessing or presuming, which leads to further contact having to be made with the centre; this makes the process more stressful for the teacher and candidates, and more time consuming for the moderator.

It must be noted that it is not acceptable to just write that the candidate determined or directed how parts should be played; some further written or recorded evidence is required. A vast amount of time was spent contacting centres to get answers about how the composition parts were conveyed to the other performers on the recording. It is imperative that centres give as much information as possible about the composition process. Some centres presumed that the teacher writing a detailed description of the process solved the problem. They failed to realise that it was evidence of what the candidate did that was required, not confirmation from the teacher that the candidate did indeed teach or demonstrate the required part to others.

Centres are asked to be honest and detailed in their annotations relating to the use of technology in the composing process. Simply naming the software is not sufficient and detail must be provided relating to the processes used to develop, shape and sustain patterns and, in

particular, information about the use of samples must be provided. Moderators noted that some compositions consisting exclusively of samples and loops were awarded high marks where the composition process bore no comparison to that which would have been involved in creating the piece from scratch. Teachers were rightly keen to make clear cases where every note had been composed by the candidate, but were seldom detailed or specific enough when this had not been the case. Comments such as "started with a blank screen" or "no additional samples" are not helpful in providing clarity of detail.

Some centres sent no evidence whatsoever. Where this was the case, moderators did their best to contact centres to ask for additional information. Many centres were very grateful for the support given to them and were keen to learn for next year. Others stated they never knew this was the requirement.

General comments about the unit

Moderators were pleased to hear some very strong ensembles that revealed advanced skills in musicianship. Candidates selected repertoire from a wide range of sources, though it appeared that rock and pop ensembles were by far the most popular. Whilst many pieces offer the opportunity to perform in a reasonably complex ensemble setting in terms of instrumental combination, some of the music was insufficiently challenging, in terms of harmonic and rhythmic content, to warrant a high mark for difficulty even though the overall effect might be outwardly impressive. Many vocal duets consisted of alternating vocal parts and not combined harmonic textures; again, this revealed limitations. When dealing with larger ensembles it is essential that the moderator receives a copy of the music that is being performed so that the candidate's contribution can be easily recognised.

Candidates who chose to submit a composition for a group of two or more instruments overwhelmingly chose the pop genre as their stimulus. Moderators listened to a wide range of ensembles and interesting combinations that invariably consisted of the generic combination of guitars and drums with added vocal; centres are reminded that, although permitted, the writing of original lyrics does not form part of the assessment. Dance compositions remain a popular choice, with the waltz continuing to be the most popular. Tango, salsa, disco and club dance were also frequent choices. The descriptive music option was less frequently chosen.

The submission of arrangements was fairly sparse across the cohort of candidates this year. Where they were submitted, moderators found them to be well-crafted pieces demonstrating an ability to draw on a wide range of interesting musical timbres. Many had used live ensembles to create their final recording. The majority of candidates appropriately included the original stimulus for their composition process.

The most disappointing element of the unit was the Log and Evaluation. Most moderators reported that many of the logs were no more than a list of times and actions with very little attention to why things happened, how the process developed, and what was needed to be done in the next stage of construction. These simple and important elements of reflective writing seem to have been overlooked and some of the work was clearly undertaken retrospectively. It was also disappointing to note that a number of candidates failed to submit a Log and Evaluation and thereby restricted the number of marks that could be awarded.

Performing

Although performing was marked accurately by many centres, moderators reported that there was a tendency to over-mark across the range but in particular at the top. In many instances 12+12+6 appeared to be the default mark. It should be reiterated that in order to challenge the more able performers, the top band in each category represents a standard above that which would normally be expected at GCSE level, and should be reserved for exceptional performances. Too many rock guitarists were automatically given 12+12+6.   It was the difficulty

mark in particular that was often used very liberally by centres. Typically moderators were finding that a difficulty of 6 was given for quite a simple song or instrumental piece where a more appropriate difficulty mark should have been 4. Thus, in many instances, marks were moderated downwards.

Performances assessed in the 9-11 band should demonstrate confidence and fluency with good technical control appropriate to the demands of the music. Frequently this was not the case and marking was too generous. It was often intonation that was fairly poor in either a vocal or instrumental performance and therefore a mark in the 6-8 band was more appropriate. The mark for interpretation and ensemble awareness however was mostly accurately applied by teachers.

There were occasions where performances failed to meet the assessment requirement. For example, whilst it is accepted that a backing track can be used to support a performance it is not acceptable for a candidate to simply double the part being played on a track.

Centres should note that where individual parts in an ensemble are unclear it is a requirement to provide a score for the moderator. The specification does not allow ensemble performances in unison with the same timbre. Such pieces performed with substantial unison, for example a vocal chorus with separate verses sung by more than one candidate, do not allow candidates to score highly in the interpretation and ensemble awareness category. Similarly, a candidate performing in a brass band where others are doubling the same part does not demonstrate effective interaction with the other players. Where a second part has been added to what is essentially a solo performance this does not allow the candidate to demonstrate high levels of ensemble awareness.

Some centres had not provided full information about the part the candidate was playing in the ensemble and centres had to be contacted to give full details. There were a handful of centres marking the candidate as an individual performer within the ensemble and therefore not taking account of the ensemble balance, accuracy and interaction with the other players.

Composing

The more successful compositions were those created through the use of recording software to multi-track and layer ideas. In particular, guitarists seem to be particularly effective at using the technology available to them. The assessment of composing was a little generous at the top end, especially against the core criteria mark. To achieve 12-14 marks the composition must have a strong sense of style with imaginatively developed musical ideas. A piece gaining a mark of between 9 and 11 needs coherence and a sense of style. Often a piece worthy of a mark in the 9-11 band was inflated to the next band. It should be noted that drummers were often seem to be given excessive credit for regurgitating a series of standard rock rhythms interspersed with a few fills. Compositions awarded full marks need to be musically compelling and convincing.

A number of centres that submitted AoS3 compositions had ill-defined dance styles. Centres should clearly define the style that is being used. There is still evidence from a small number of schools that a formulaic approach is taught and this stifles individual creativity. There was evidence that previous advice relating to waltzes had been heeded in that there were fewer examples of repetitive 'um cha cha' pieces with little structure or melodic development.

Descriptive music is often undertaken by less able candidates who find it challenging. Many approach it in the same way as the Sequence of Events that is part of Unit B353 (Creative Task). As a consequence, some of the examples presented were limited by their brevity and an inability to relate the music to the story in any clear way. The most successful examples consisted of music that represented 'the whole thing', perhaps with some motives included to

represent parts of the description, though these examples were few and far between. In order to achieve high area of study marks the candidate must clearly define the detail of the programme.

Centres should be cautioned about teacher assistance, often uncovered in the Log. The candidate 'sung the part, taught the part to someone else', 'played the ideas for the teacher to copy' were comments that were too common to be comfortable and there were many centres that had to be contacted for further clarification. Centres need to be reminded that clear evidence of what the candidate composed is required. Annotation where no score is available is an area of concern as this was often weak or missing.

Many centres are being more precise about a candidate's input to a composition, especially when they have used a programme, such as Garageband, which also contains built in loops and samples. Good practice, seen from a number of centres, was the use of a screen shot of the composition page in which loops are clearly indicated. This makes it much easier to see what original material has gone into the composition.

Log and Evaluation

The marking of the Log & Evaluation was often too generous. Inappropriate credit was given when logs didn't exist or there was insufficient musical reasoning. Many teachers awarded full marks when candidates simply provided a list of what was worked on every lesson.

However, there were some detailed Logs that gave full descriptions of the composition process, along with an explanation of what the candidate had hoped the outcome of each stage of the process would be. The best Evaluations talked about why certain techniques and ideas had been used in the composition and why they had worked so well. These achieved a mark in the 9-10 band for musical understanding. The less effective Evaluations simply stated how good the piece was. Frequently moderators had to reduce marks down to the 3-5 band.

B353 Creative Task

The Creative Task is now in its third full year of examination and there is clear evidence that the majority of centres are teaching composition skills effectively to candidates, thus enabling them to achieve well in this unit. Well-prepared candidates can achieve a good mark by composing within a clear structure, and then applying their own musical realisation effectively to the written or performed outcome.

The range of stimuli offered within this unit is intended to enable all candidates to access a starting point that suits their musical skills and interests. However, examiners marked work from a number of centres where all candidates worked to the same stimulus. This was most prevalent in written responses, which were often formulaic, where entire groups of candidates followed what appeared to be a predestined sequence of steps to produce an outcome that was complete but sounded unmusical. Centres that do not enable their candidates to work with the stimulus most appropriate to their skills and ability may be doing their candidates a disservice.

Administration of the Examination

There were significant issues with a number of centres that appeared to have ignored the final date of the period in which the examination must be conducted. The final date of 5th May was clearly publicised to centres on the OCR website, and by a specific and direct communication to all centres in an OCR Notice to Centres. Despite this, examiners received a large number of scripts well after the 5th May deadline, resulting in a significant delay in the marking of these scripts while OCR established when the examination had actually been taken. Centres are therefore reminded that the Attendance Register is an important document and should be signed and dated **on the day that all candidates complete the examination**. The candidates' recorded and written responses, their cover sheets and the Attendance Register should then be posted **immediately** to the examiner. On no account must the work be retained in school until a later date and particularly it must not be confused with the submission of units B351 and B352, which have a deadline of 15th May. Similarly, the work for B353 should be posted to the designated examiner and not to the moderator of units B351 and B352 – these are separately assessed units.

A number of centres still failed to provide cover sheets at all – these are essential, and again marking was delayed while such omissions were corrected. Other (occasional) problems included the lack of a track list to accompany the recordings on the CD – examiners sometimes had to assume that the CD was in candidate number order. Furthermore, a small number of centres sent each candidate's work on a separate CD. It is preferable for the examiner to receive one CD containing all the tracks clearly labelled.

There continues to be some uncertainty in centres about which box to tick on the cover sheet when some aspect of ICT is involved in the communication of the response. The following advice is offered as clarification:

- If the response has been produced on a score writing package such as Sibelius, but it is actually to be assessed purely from the score – tick WRITTEN.

- If the piece is a multi-tracked response involving multiple tracks and/or layers, contrasting timbres, possible use of MIDI controllers and additional FX to enhance the final mix – then tick ICT. The candidate's use of ICT is then assessed under the Area of Study criteria.

Quality of Response

As in previous years, examiners were strict in their application of a capped response mark to work that did not make a reasonable attempt to use the chosen stimulus. The stimulus is the common ground against which the work of all candidates can be measured; if candidates choose to ignore or only partly use the given stimulus, then the full range of marks cannot be awarded no matter how creative the response actually is. This cap also applied to responses where candidates had made only a token attempt to include the stimulus (perhaps in the first four bars of the piece) before embarking on a much longer section of their own making that bore very little relationship to the stimulus.

Examiners also commented on the length of some responses. There was a significant number that lasted over three minutes – and some more than five. In the context of a 45-minute examination, this is extremely lengthy, especially as the longer responses tended to lose their way, and ended up with fewer marks because of this. Many relatively short responses (from 45 seconds up to around a minute) achieved good marks because the response was focussed, organised, well rehearsed and musically performed.

Area of Study

In most cases the area of study mark was awarded for the use of the instrument (AoS 1). A playable piece will attract at least two marks, and this is therefore the minimum AoS mark for a recorded response. By extending the range, and using techniques specific to the instrument, more marks could be gained. The use of chord functions, variations of strumming and picking patterns, pedalling, characteristic tonguing, vocal melisma, and dynamics appropriate to the different parts of the instrument's range, and applied in a musical context, were some of the ways that different instruments achieved higher marks.

For written responses, in order to assess a task against the criteria for AoS1, it is essential that the instrument is named. There were some very occasional examples of written scores from which examiners were unable to deduce the intended instrument. These received an AoS mark of zero.

Where the AoS 2 mark was applied, examiners were looking for parts to fit together harmonically, and for textural variety between the two parts. Some chord responses, and all melodic phrases, were marked in this way. Most candidates demonstrated an understanding of both harmony and texture, but with varying degrees of success.

The AoS 4 criteria were applied to the Sequence of Events, and refer specifically to how successful a candidate was in successfully depicting the clear changes of mood of the storyline. There were four clear elements to the sequence and when these were clearly outlined and attempted the overall effect was natural, successful and satisfying. In some examples, examiners had to stretch their imagination to its limits to appreciate any discernible connection between the music and the events.

Communication

Most candidates chose to perform their response. Examiners heard a number of outstanding and stylish musical performances that gained top band marks. The majority of performances were in the 5-6 and 7-8 mark bands. At 5-6, performances were reasonably fluent but lacked musicality. In the 7-8 bands, performances had shape and musicality but were often let down by some wrong notes and/or hesitations – most likely caused by having to perform under the pressure of a timed examination situation. Marks of 4 and below were the least common, and these marks were awarded to various degrees of struggling performances, characterised by frequent wrong notes and a general lack of fluency.

Examiners reported that the quality of communication for the written responses has improved significantly. Many scores are produced on score writing software, with Sibelius being the most commonly used. In addition to accurate notation, successful scores also indicated the instrument for which the response was written, along with good detail (musically applied) of tempo, dynamics, articulation and phrasing. Some instrument specific detail was also used successfully, most often bowing detail on string parts and pedalling on piano parts.

Less successful communication was evident in some written responses – typified, for example, in the use of extreme dynamic contrasts (from *fff* to *ppp*) all within the space of a few bars.

The guiding principle must be that the score should contain all the information required to enable a performer to deliver a musically convincing performance of the response.

Rhythmic Phrase

There was a mixed response to the 3/4 phrase used this year. Candidates who used it as a basis for a melodic response tended to do well when they composed a structured response that continued in the same style.

Although there were some notable exceptions, candidates who performed on the drum kit rarely sustained or correctly developed the phrase. Some drummers appeared to have a contrasting middle section in 4/4, while others tended to put an additional rest in at the end of the phrase creating a disjointed 7/4 feel to the response. Candidates of lower ability tended to revert to standard rock patterns very early on.

Note Pattern

As is usually the case, candidates were able to access this stimulus at a variety of levels. A number of responses were effective, often high level, compositions demonstrating a range of compositional techniques, sometimes including complex harmonic accompaniments. Good responses were typically in ternary form and introduced a contrasting B section in the relative minor or dominant. By introducing some rhythmic idioms, such as sequence or repetition, it was possible to gain high marks for a piece that demonstrated a sound knowledge of melodic composition. The weakest responses tended to use the given notes with a simple rhythm often not even recognising the key centre. Some candidates using a keyboard percussion pattern often failed to demonstrate melodic phrases, seemingly using the relentless rhythm to create over long rambling pieces without structured development.

Melodic Phrase

This test was better understood this year but some centres still need to be clearly aware that the additional part should be a descant or bass line and not chords or a number of other parts. Most candidates however provided an appropriate response. Some responses produced excellent second parts, sometimes extended and developed, while only a very small minority continued the phrase without adding a second part (therefore receiving a response mark of zero). The majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding of harmony. The best responses were those that found the modulation and were able to write a moving part rather than a static one.

Chord Sequence

This continues to be one of the two most popular choices of stimulus, with a wide range of responses. The stimulus clearly lends itself easily to guitarists and keyboard players, although there were some interesting submissions using ICT. Simple responses strummed the chords, perhaps changing the rhythm slightly, but there was a number of multi-tracked pieces (on both keyboard and guitar) with good melodic lines that achieved high marks. Some candidates

appeared to be able to create substantial pieces in the time allowed. The key centre of C major was understood by most candidates.

Centres must be clear that any performance of the stimulus as an accompanying part by an additional performer (which is permitted for this stimulus) can only be added in the last five minutes of the 45 minutes supervised time – and not rehearsed alongside the candidate throughout the 45 minute period. The teacher may record the stimulus at the start of the examination time for the candidate to use as a reference point. Accompaniments performed by a second player should not be used to enhance the candidate's actual work.

Set of Words

This proved to be an extremely popular choice again this year. Many excellent compositions were submitted and showed a real engagement with the lyrics and a sense of personal style. There is clearly a large number of gifted and talented song writers in schools who have considerable creative talent and performing ability. Many of the best examples developed a verse-chorus format, sometimes adding their own lyrics and forming a bridge passage that added to the impact of the piece. Alternatively, there were simple, unaccompanied pieces that re-stated the words and presented a single vocal line with a small range that was repeated for both verses. In this option there was a wide range of achievement and, as a result, the stimulus proved an interesting and valuable discriminator.

Sequence of Events

This attracted relatively few responses this year. There were one or two outstanding examples that examined the sequence in depth and left the listener in no doubt as to the progression of events. Many other responses contained one good idea that created the feeling of fear and tension quite successfully, but very few candidates were able to continue this thematic development into the other aspects of the story. Many candidates used ICT for this option and the least effective consisted of indiscriminate layering of sounds (often loop / sample based sound FX) that did not succeed in conveying the story or mood with any impact.

Important information regarding the examination of the Creative Task in June 2014

Centres are reminded to consult the new specification for examination in 2014. Although the actual content of the Creative Task will not change, there are changes to the weighting of this unit, and, more importantly, to the assessment criteria that will be applied to this unit for next year.

B354 Listening Examination

General Comments

This paper performed well and saw a greater percentage of marks above 80 than in previous years, the highest mark being 98. There were many parts of this paper where candidates of all abilities were able to access good marks. The majority of candidates understood the rubric and some very good responses were seen. Candidates have shown a developed awareness of the areas of study and some good musical language was used at many levels.

Most candidates appeared to understand the musical terminology, with timbre and articulation being the only exceptions. These words were particularly challenging for middle and lower ability candidates.

Q1 All three musical extracts for this question were accessible for candidates of all abilities and many high marks were seen. There was evidence of some very good understanding of the varied genres from each of the areas of study.

Q1a(i) Many correct answers were seen although some candidates ticked the box for the incorrect answer that also contained a triplet.

Q1a(ii) The correct answer of ostinato was the most popular, but the incorrect answer of syncopated was underlined by a significant proportion of the candidates.

Q1a(iii) All answers were chosen but the correct answer of '1' was underlined most often.

Q1(iv) Many good answers were seen to this part question with 'minor', 'low' and 'crescendo' being the most popular correct answers.

Q1a(v) A high proportion of candidates recognised that the 'melody and / or brass had stopped playing' and many candidates were able to give two correct points although there was only one mark available.

Q1b(i) The majority of candidates were able to recognise the correct musical shape as the middle option, with some weaker ability candidates choosing the top option. Very few chose to tick the third box.

Q1b(ii) The majority correctly underlined 'lieder', with a significant few opting for pop ballad or a cappella. Disco was almost never chosen.

Q1b(iii) Again the correct answer of 'soprano' was underlined more than any other with the incorrect alto being the next most popular choice. Those candidates who had limited understanding of the vocal terms occasionally chose one of the male voice options.

Q1b(iv) All the answers were underlined here with a significant number of candidates clearly not understanding the term tonality or having a concept of how each one of them might sound. However, the correct answer of 'major' was the most popular with minor next, possibly because of the quiet, slow nature of the music. Inappropriate answers of atonal and chromatic were chosen by candidates who did not understand this style.

Q1b(v) Voice and piano both playing 'slowly' and 'quietly' were the answers that most often gained credit. Some weaker ability candidates repeated words from the question which was not successful with some high ability candidates writing detailed answers about the 'rocking chordal style of the accompaniment to the sustained vocal line' which also gained full marks.

Q1c(i)   The vast majority of candidates correctly identified 'tango'.

Q1c(ii) Those who correctly identified the style were, in nearly all cases, able to name the 'bandoneon' or 'accordion' as the first instrument heard.

Q1c(iii) Some very good responses were seen to this question with musical answers such as 'accents', 'staccato' and 'pauses' being among the most popular. The most popular dance steps were 'leg flicks', 'legs intertwined' and 'head snaps'. Some answers were very vague naming music and dance steps which are suitable for most dance styles, not specific to the tango, and so were not worthy of credit.

Q2   The majority of candidates were able to write some accurate observations about this music.

Q2(a)   Many candidates were able to gain full marks here. Most full mark answers were for three correct musical statements and two appropriate feelings of the girl. Musical answers most often seen were 'slow', 'soft' and 'alternating notes'. There were candidates who were able to gain full marks for just musical answers but a few candidates gained no marks because they only wrote about the girl's feelings and so no credit could be given. Some candidates wrote about the girl's movements rather than her feelings and so gained no credit for their answers.

Q2(b)   The majority of candidates scored two marks out of three here. 'Legato', 'slow' and 'high' were the most popular correct answers.

Q2(c)   The correct answer of 'clarinet' was seen most often but all the other woodwind instruments were also seen including flute, which was given in the question above. Some instruments from other families of the orchestra were also seen, which showed misunderstanding of orchestral families from some candidates. The term timbre was not understood by many candidates, despite an explanation as part of the question, and some very inappropriate answers were seen. The most popular correct answers were 'mellow', 'warm' and 'rich'.

Q2(d)   Many candidates were able to select an appropriate composer for this extract, although there were a significant number of Baroque or Classical composers given, which was not correct for this area of study.

Q3   The extended writing question was not taken from Area of Study 4 this year. It was an extract from a waltz and many answers seen were of good quality, which showed an understanding of the music that was heard.

Q3(a)   The majority of candidates gained marks in the middle or top marking bands. Candidates who chose to write with a sense of chronology gained the highest marks. These answers were often quite detailed and yet concise and gave a good range of points with a clear sense of understanding. Many candidates were able to identify the 'ternary' structure, some with precise detail of the music and this was often linked to the changes in dynamics and tempo. High level answers included detail of the rising nature of the melody, the use of trills and sustained notes from the horns in the middle sections. More basic answers often referred to the 'um cha cha' accompaniment and more general statements of the violin melody, the general fast tempo with crescendos and accelerandos.

Q3(b)   The majority of candidates were able to identify a suitable composer here, although a number of composers who were not associated with the waltz were seen.

Q3(c) Many candidates had learnt that the waltz originated in the city of 'Vienna' and answered correctly. Some candidates wrote the country of origin which was not correct and others knew that the city began with the letter 'V' but wrote incorrect answers such as Venice and even Vietnam.

Q4 A wide range of marks were seen in this question with a significant number of candidates having a good understanding of most of the questions.

Q4(a) Some very good answers were seen to this question. Many candidates saw the sequential nature of both passages and were able to answer accordingly and, if not absolutely correct, gained significant marks for shape. Some candidates were challenged by the need to use leger lines and simply wrote notes heads above the stave which were impossible to distinguish, but a very good proportion of higher ability candidates gained between 8 and 10 marks. Very few candidates who attempted this question did not gain marks.

Q (b) A good proportion of the candidates recognised this as a 'sequence'.

Q4(c) The majority of candidates correctly chose 'imperfect' as the answer but all the other possible cadences were seen.

Q4(d) A good proportion of the candidates correctly circled a note with a trill, the E natural in bar 14 being the most popular correct choice.

Q4(e) This appeared to be the most challenging question on the paper and only a few candidates gained full marks. Some were able to gain one or two, most often for 'counter melody' and 'interweaving'.

Q4(f) A very good proportion of the candidates know that this accompaniment was a 'continuo' part with 'ground bass' being the next most often underlined.

Q4(g) The majority of answers were correct here although all musical periods of composition were seen including ones that are not studied as part of this specification.

Q5 This question differentiated well. Parts (a) and (b) of this question were generally answered very well indeed but part (c) proved rather more challenging for some.

Q5(a)(i) The vast majority of candidates were able to give an instrument that played the melody. The 'violin' was the most popular answer.

Q5(a)(ii) The majority of candidates were able to recognise this instrument as a 'flute'. A few mistook it for a piccolo and there were those who thought that it was a clarinet.

Q5(b) The majority of candidates gained at least three marks out of four for these part questions. There were those candidates who did not understand some of the musical terms used and so were not able to identify the features correctly. An ascending chromatic scale fell foul of this in a number of cases as did pizzicato.

Q5(c) Candidates who wrote organised and well thought out answers did very well in this question but they were in the minority. Many candidates repeated the answers they gave in describing the music when they wrote about the movements. These answers were often unfocussed and resulted in limited marks. Some candidates repeated themselves several times throughout the question and so gained limited credit.

(i)   Most marks were gained by the recognition that the melodies in both extracts were high. Only higher ability candidates were consistently able to add some more accurate answers and these often referred to the use of sequences and the difference in range of the extracts. Some candidates incorrectly referred to the accompaniment and others wrote too vaguely to gain credit.

(ii)   Correct answers here referred to both the fish and birds being small and the basic response of fish swimming and birds flying.

(iii)   A good proportion of candidates recognised that 'Extract A had longer notes' or that 'Extract B had a faster rhythm' for the full two marks.

(iv)   Candidates who were successful in identifying correct features of the rhythm in part (ii) were often able to recognise that the fish would 'move more slowly' than the birds.

(v)   Candidates who understood the term articulation were often successful, hearing that Extract A was 'legato' and Extract B was 'staccato'. Once again some candidates did not refer to the melody and so did not gain credit and there were a significant number of candidates who did not understand the term articulation and so were not able to answer correctly.

(vi)   The most popular correct answers here were the 'smooth' nature of fish and the 'fluttering' nature of birds.

Q6   Candidates from centres where Gamelan had been well taught were very successful in this question, although there were a significant number of candidates who wrongly wrote about Indian Classical Music.

Q6(a)   The majority of candidates were able to gain some marks for recognising the 'metallic' nature of the instruments. There were many candidates who could correctly name many Gamelan instruments and so were able to gain full marks.

Q6(b)   Some good answers were seen to this question with 'short', 'stopped' notes and 'pauses' being some of the most popular correct answers. Once again there were some very vague answers that were not worthy of credit.

Q6(c)   A good percentage of candidates gained a mark here for a correct type of scale.

Q6(d)   The vast majority of candidates gained the full two marks for hearing that the music 'got faster' and 'more instruments were added'.

Q6(e)   Many candidates correctly underlined 'heterophonic'.

Q6(f)   The majority of candidates gained a mark for correctly underlining 'Bali' although there were a significant number who thought the music came from India.

Q7   Generally this question was answered well. Most candidates had a good understanding of the style and were able to apply their knowledge of this style to their answers for this extract.

Q7(a)   Nearly all answers were correct, with most candidates recognising that there were 'two' or 'four' beats in a bar.

Q7(b)   Many candidates were able to identify several correct ways in which technology had been used with 'synthesiser', 'reverb', 'drum machine' and 'panning' being among the most popular answers.

Q7(c)(i) Candidates who recognised this extract as Bhangra were often able to identify the correct rhythm of 'chaal' although many incorrect answers were seen the most popular being rag.

Q7(c)(ii) Again candidates familiar with Bhangra were able to identify the use of the 'dohl' drum with the incorrect answer of tabla being seen quite regularly.

Q7(d) The five true / false questions generally saw candidates gain at least three out of the possible five marks. Most candidates recognised the correct language, the use of syncopated rhythms and that the extract ended with an instrumental section. The bass guitar was not always heard and many candidates thought that there was only one solo voice, which was not correct.