

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

MUSIC

H543

For first teaching in 2016

H543/01/02 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

General overview/Introduction

Now in its second year, the performing Units H543/1 and 2 are well established. Centres are thanked for the time and care taken in ensuring candidates are prepared and supported in this section of the qualification. Thanks are also due to the accompanists, often busy teacher within the centres, who play such a vital part in these performing units.

There was a pleasing array of instruments offered for both H543/1 and 2, with the majority of work being successfully uploaded to the OCR Repository. While the Administration section is a useful place to upload registers and authentication sheets, the candidates' work itself should not be uploaded to this area – something that happened again this year in a few cases. Also, centres are reminded to upload composing submissions to the appropriate separate section of the Repository rather than putting them with the performing work.

In order for examiners to accurately assess candidates' work for H543/2, the cover sheet needs to be included detailing which items are to be considered for the two sections of the examination. Centres should also check that the appropriate form has been used, depending on which component candidates are being entered for. Centres are also kindly asked not to upload each page of scores as separate items, and to check that they are the right way up. For the performance itself, compressing files is desirable in order to help both the upload and download time. Candidates' performances should be recorded separately to avoid files being too large either to upload or download.

Where centres could not upload work to the Repository, a variety of formats were present for work sent to examiners such as CDs and USBs. There is always the risk of work arriving broken with the former.

Centres are strongly advised not to send work on USBs that have been locked, encrypted or only work on particular kinds of computer. There were several instances this year where examiners could not access candidates' work for this reason. There is the risk of results being delayed for these candidates.

As this is a performing examination, the quality of recording is important, and in some cases, sadly the resulting sound was not always conducive to the candidates being heard at their best. There are a number of things centres can do to check in this respect:

- make sure the candidates are helpfully centred and not too far away so that they are clearly visible
- identify candidates if they are part of an ensemble
- check that they are not obscured by music stands
- make sure the recording level is accurately set (some recitals were very quiet this year)
- where candidates are being accompanied, make they are nearer to the microphone than the piano

Performances were recorded in a variety of venues, with some centres treating the examination as a concert, giving it a clear sense of occasion. With correctly balanced recording, this provided a most conducive atmosphere. Generally, performances given in larger spaces resulted in more of a sense of performance than if they were recorded in very small rooms.

Section 1

Once again, a wide variety of instruments was presented. While most recitals were for solo instruments, there were some ensemble performances, often candidates being part of a jazz band or vocal ensemble. For any ensemble performance, centres are advised to check that the role that the candidate plays does demonstrate a suitable level of involvement. It is understandable that they will not play continuously (e.g. wind players in jazz band) but ensuring that candidates are featured clearly and audibly, having some solos to play, is in their interest.

Most recitals consisted of music which could access the full range of marks available, being comparable to at least grade 6 standard of public examination material. Where this did not happen, then candidates' mark for category 2, technical control, was adjusted accordingly. Sometimes candidates performed music that was unfortunately too difficult for them.

Centres are reminded that in Section 1, candidates need to perform at least two pieces which demonstrate contrast in some way. Recitals in this section are assessed according to three categories:

1. Knowledge and fluency. Here, examiners are assessing how well candidates know the pitch and rhythm of the music performed. This category also assesses their critical understanding of the music being played.
2. Technical control. This area assesses a range of technical skills appropriate to the instrument.
3. Realisation of performance markings/conventions. Here, elements which bring the music to life, such as phrasing, articulation and dynamics are considered, and also candidates' aural awareness in general of the music being performed.

Section 2

In Section 2 (of H543/2), at least one piece needs to be played. For this section, there are two assessment categories:

1. Interpretative understanding. This area considers the "candidate and the instrument" – i.e., how well the music is played in terms of its knowledge, technique and performance markings/conventions.
2. Stylistic and aural interpretation. This area considers the "candidate and the audience" – i.e., how well the music is communicated.

There is thus a further emphasis on performing and communication in the Section 2, focused study, and centres are encouraged to help their candidates realise this. Recitals performed with authority and a clear sense of performance and communication were able to access the higher marks here.

For both sections, it is important that where a backing track is used, the balance between this and the soloist is checked carefully, as the resulting aural effect can have a clear impact on the assessment, as stated in the criteria. This is also true for the balance in ensembles.

Most common causes of centres not passing

One of the causes of candidates not scoring as highly as expected is due to under time recitals. For H543/1, the minimum length of recitals is 6 minutes. For H543/2, the minimum length is 10 minutes. It is very pleasing to report that there were no under time recitals this session.

Common misconceptions

A misconception that can occur is that performing more difficult repertoire will benefit candidates. As stated above, the minimum grade at which the full range of marks is accessible is grade 6. If music is of a grade 6 standard, there is nothing further to be gained by performing music of a higher grade if it is too difficult, and much to lose.

Additional comments

There were quite a few instances this session, of candidates performing very long recitals. The minimum lengths of 6 minutes and 10 minutes respectively for H543/1 and /2, were sometimes considerably extended, with the result that sometimes candidates clearly tired and performed less well during the latter part of the recital, thus lowering their overall mark unnecessarily.

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