

## A LEVEL

*Moderators' report*

# MUSIC

**H543**

For first teaching in 2016

## H543/03/04 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
General overview/Introduction .....	4
Section 1 .....	6
Section 2 .....	3
Section 3 (H543/03) .....	3
Most common causes of centres not passing .....	3
Common misconceptions .....	4
Avoiding potential malpractice .....	4
Helpful resources .....	4



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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

There were some splendid responses in both Section 1 and Section 2, with candidates often offering apt and characterful compositions. It was evident that many candidates had undergone commendable research and discovery within their chosen areas of study, showing understanding of style, form and communication in the work. The stronger submissions showed evidence of detailed analysis and aural familiarity with the particular style, whilst less strong work tended to be either formulaic or limited in its stylistic approach.

Most submissions adhered to the chosen brief in Section 1, with instrumentation, style, character and occasion given thought and integrity in many submissions. However, some candidates misunderstood or lacked stylistic understanding of the chosen brief, whilst others did not use the required instrumentation or use the given venue or occasion to help shape the character of the music.

In Section 2, candidates invariably chose a contrasted area of study in which to compose. Styles were varied and ranged from Renaissance polyphony to folk songs, to heavy metal and many more in between. Other candidates chose the perfectly acceptable route of using the same area of study for both pieces. Whilst the responses were generally obvious in their stylistic intentions, the briefs were often not suitable. Many were written after the composition had been completed or were lengthy and vague. It is recommended that candidates follow the format of the OCR set briefs as a template; this will make sure a strong springboard for the work. The brief should contain a clear instruction for the composition, and include elements such as style, form, instrumentation, voices, source of words, venue, occasion and length/timing. It needs to be written before the composition has started and be concise, yet detailed. There is no requirement for a commentary of the composition process, although it is recognised that this is a useful learning tool within the classroom.

Candidates are required to submit a score, lead-sheet or description with their compositions in both Section 1 and Section 2. Nearly all candidates successfully included this important information, which validates the candidates' work although it does not carry any marks per se. Marks for communication in Section 1 and 2 are given with regard to the audio realisation. The communicative aspects of the music, such as performance indications, dynamics and articulations, are assessed in relation to their stylistic integrity, detail and how they contribute to the overall structural direction and shape. However, the details must be represented as fully as possible in the score or description, as examiners will use these to assess the candidates' understanding and intentions. In work submitted as live performances, it is vital that the composers' intentions are backed up within the visual material, as it is not the performance that is being assessed. Nuanced and detailed performances by musicians need to be backed up by comprehensive scores or descriptions. Furthermore, works which include an element of improvisation need to be similarly scored or described. Although it is recognised that conventions of jazz and baroque performance are not historically detailed in this way, for examination purposes, it is important that the composers' ideas are those being assessed and not those of the performers. For example, improvised solos in jazz need to be at least broadly notated unless the composer has clearly declared that they are the one playing. However, it is recognised that an improvised solo may be spontaneous and 'in the moment', and that this may differ in detail from what is written. With regard to baroque styles, the performance tradition of players adding their own details is not acceptable for this particular assessed composition. Therefore, dynamics, articulations and tempo markings must be included by the candidate within the score. Candidates who use a description rather than a score to back up their work need to do so with comprehensive detail of the composition, rather than a commentary of the composing process.

With regard to the audio realisation, recordings can be either of live performances or digitally generated. Whichever option is chosen, it is possible to acquire full marks for communication as long as the points mentioned above in relation to the audio and written work matching up are adhered to, and that care is taken to deliver as accurately and vibrantly as possible the nuances within the music. Details within the

score, such as dynamics, articulation and tempo changes, will add to the musical impact. However, there are further details which can be manipulated in digital versions as certain instructions, such as *ritenuto* or *diminuendo*, which do not always translate accurately in a digital realisation. This can be helped by adding gradual changes in tempo or dynamic using metronome marks and very detailed dynamics. In the same way, balance can be effectively managed by making sure the important melody line is given a louder dynamic than the accompanying instruments. The best digital examples were very finely managed, and care had been taken to make sure that, as much as is possible, the composers' intentions were accurately realised. Sibelius sounds can be enhanced by using inexpensive software such as *Note Performer*. Whilst this is not a requirement of course, candidates may find it satisfying to hear their composition realised with realistic colours.

In the second year of the specification, centres were largely successful in uploading work to the repository, with most work suitably formatted. The important Coursework Cover Sheet was sometimes omitted from the submission, which caused some delay in the examining process, as did missing sections from the candidate submission. Centres are asked to check carefully to make sure submissions are complete and openable. Fewer submissions were sent in hard copy this year, which is pleasing; if sending work as hard copy, please make sure that the media is unlocked and easily openable on a standard laptop – either SD cards or flash drives are suitable. The use of CDs caused difficulties and holdups in the examining process this year, and it is not necessary to lock or encrypt flash drives.

When completing the Course Work Cover Sheets, and when labelling the work, please make sure that the correct section is clearly shown and the applicable area of study accurately stated. Several submissions were unclear or contradictory in this regard; this led to examiners having to undertake lengthy investigations to make sure candidates were being examined for the area of study or brief the candidate intended.

## Section 1

In Section 1, candidates are required to follow a brief set by OCR. The briefs are released at the beginning of the academic year of the second year of study. There is one for each of the six areas of study.

The brief for **Area of Study 1**, required the candidate to write a Scherzo movement with reference to the work of Beethoven. This was a popular choice and there were many appropriate examples. Some were very creative and showed an excellent knowledge of Beethoven's style, capturing the Scherzo's wit and vivaciousness clearly. On the whole, candidates expressed some aspects of the form, with many including a contrasted trio, but were often rather slow and more like a Minuet or Waltz. Weaker examples were more formulaic and had only the broadest of structures.

**Area of Study 2** required candidates to write a jazz song, with the option of including and fusing Indian elements. About half of the examples included an element of fusion. There were good examples, but less successful examples were rather bland and did not include any jazz typical features such as extended harmony or instrumentation, and therefore came across as pop songs. Examples which included Indian ideas were sometimes rather perfunctory in their use of elements such as percussion or sitar, and did not successfully make a feature of the fusion.

There were some excellent responses to the brief for **Area of Study 3**, where candidates were asked to write a signature tune for a dance show. There were many inventive and well researched responses, the best ones being quite pithy and having a memorable melody. Those that became overly long or with too many ideas became rather diluted in impact, although they often started well. Others did not really capture the dance style or include the important melodic content.

**Area of Study 4** attracted some large-scale, vivid responses, in which candidates were required to write an anthem including a baroque orchestra, trumpets and drums, and the choice of vocal content. Candidates clearly enjoyed the challenges of the large forces and contrasted form, and there was very good understanding shown in many of the offerings.

The most popular choice of all the briefs was for **Area of Study 5**, for which candidates were asked to depict the endeavours of Scott of the Antarctic in a programmatic piece. There was a wide range of success here, and although most candidates explored the brief using a full symphony orchestra, there were effective examples which used either a smaller chamber group or less traditional instrumentation. Candidates often wrote vividly, capturing the journeying and environment in colourful textures and skilful instrumental blending. The majority of candidates showed a good understanding of the nineteenth century references and there was nearly always an element of narrative expressed in the work. Less effective compositions relied too much on the seemingly endless journey through the use of percussive effects but neglected the possibilities to depict landscape or emotion with melodic or motivic ideas.

**Area of Study 6** delivered some interesting and expressive responses. Here candidates were asked to write a piece for a fashion show using expressionistic ideas. Responses were varied and it was acceptable for Expressionism to be used in its widest sense. Compositions were often creative and edgy, fitting the brief well. Less secure examples did not fully match the stylistic requirements with the occasion and lacked direction or structure.

## Section 2

Candidates are required to write their own brief from which to respond. There were some very appropriately written and inventive briefs. However, most briefs did not show clearly the composers' intentions and were either overly long and meandering or lacking the required detail. It is recommended that candidates use the format of the OCR set briefs as a template but weave in their own ideas. It is important that they are written before the start of the composing process and set out clearly the intentions of the composer with details such as style, form, instrumentation, venue, occasion and length/timing. Many submissions were written after the composition was finished and were more of a commentary of the composition process. Candidates often lost marks here. This can often impact on the awarding of marks for *Response to the brief*, as if the brief is unclear in intentions, it is not possible to assess the response in answer to it.

Compositions were often creative and interesting, often reflecting the interests and particular music making opportunities available to the candidate, such as writing for their church choir, brass band or heavy metal group. There were many knowledgeable and effective compositions, vibrantly realised, in which it was clear that the candidate had taken great care and attention to detail. Less successful submissions were rather formulaic and lacked ideas and structure.

## Section 3 (H543/03)

Candidates are required to write three short exercises from one of the areas of study and with emphasis on either pitch, rhythm or texture. All candidates followed the requirements of the specification and there were some technically able and cohesive results. The majority of candidates chose to focus on Bach chorales, but other submissions included nineteenth century string quartet textures or twentieth century rhythms.

### Most common causes of centres not passing

Work which does not reach the standard required to pass is often lacking a clear overview and structure. Furthermore, it probably fails to reference the brief and the response may have incorrect elements of the brief. For example, using fewer instruments than stated will result in not fulfilling the criteria for *Response to the brief*. Each detail of the brief should be included, together with a character reflecting the occasion.

Some compositions were overly long and ran out of ideas and development of ideas, thus becoming rather meandering. Whilst there is no upper time limit on compositions, the more successful work was often well structured and pithy.

Candidates did not always fulfil the criteria requirements in communication. The realisation is marked, rather than the score. However, the ideas of the composer needed to be represented accurately in the score as evidence that they have understood the composing and realisation process. Therefore, details apparent in the score need to be evidenced in the score or realisation, and conversely, details in the score need to be realised in the audio. Some circumstances led to this not being clearly shown; for example, a score which has no dynamic or articulation detail paired with a realisation, perhaps of live musicians performing the music, which has nuanced and detailed performance features. This characterisation of the music cannot be attributed to the candidate unless it is clearly backed up in the score. Furthermore, if a composition has elements of improvisation, there needs to be evidence provided in the score or description that the ideas are those of the composer, and not of the performers – unless the composer is playing, in which case this needs to be clearly stated in the score or description. Performance traditions such as figured bass, improvised sections, lack of performance indications etc. of the baroque and jazz styles are not valid for this component. Evidence of the composers' ideas, rather than those of the performers, need to be shown clearly in the score.

## Common misconceptions

Candidates are often submitting written commentaries and scores for both Section 1 and Section 2 compositions. Whilst this practice can be very beneficial in the learning process or as an overall educative tool, it is not necessary as part of the submission. The requirement is for a score, description or lead-sheet. If a description is submitted, it should be descriptive of the different musical elements and performance indications, and not necessarily a commentary of the composition process.

The brief requirement for Section 2 should, as a general rule, follow the format of the OCR set briefs. Briefs need to be succinct and concise, but should include detail of elements such as style, form, instrumentation, occasion, venue, performers and length/timing. An appropriate title is to be encouraged as this furthers an impression of the composers' intentions, although marks are not given for this detail in particular.

## Avoiding potential malpractice

Work composed for AS Level in the previous year, may not be submitted for either Section 1 or Section 2 submissions for A Level the following year.

It is encouraged that candidates use the format of the OCR set briefs if so wished, but content must not replicate exactly any of those previously published by OCR.

## Helpful resources

<https://www.noteperformer.com>



## Supporting you

For further details of this qualification please visit the subject webpage.

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