

**A LEVEL**

**Examiners' report**

**MUSIC**

**H543**

For first teaching in 2016

**H543/01/02 Summer 2023 series**

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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## General overview

After the disruption of the past few years, it was gratifying to be able to return to pre-Covid conditions for the performing unit, and candidates and centres are to be congratulated on covering the full requirements this year. As is usually the case with this area of the qualification, there were many superb performances, reflecting years of practice and dedication by candidates, and support and facilitation by centres, accompanists and parents/guardians, for which OCR is very grateful.

In terms of administration, while the majority of centres uploaded the CCSs (coursework cover sheets), scores and video recordings successfully to the OCR Repository, there were some anomalies. For scores, centres are asked to upload them in the order of performance if possible, and as one discreet pdf rather than as separate sheets. In the worst case, examiners were faced with dozens of separate pages to download, making the process far more cumbersome. Centres are also urged to check that pages are uploaded in the right order, without intervening blank sheets and the correct way up.

Some centres did not compress mp4/movie files, with the consequence that they took up to 10 minutes to download. Compressing them first would make it much easier both for centres to upload recordings and examiners to download them. There were fewer that did not open this year, and where candidates performed as part of ensembles, they were appropriately identified. It is always helpful if there is some indication of the order of programme too. There were a few cases of the wrong video being uploaded, or some very late being uploaded, but with some encouragement, all was successfully resolved.

In some cases, CCSs were not included, or uploaded to the Administration section or the Composing section of the Repository instead. A few CCSs were incorrectly completed so that it was not apparent which pieces were intended for Section A (free choice) or Section B (focused study). As the criteria for marking are different for both sections, it is impossible for examiners to assess the work without this information.

### Use Kiteworks or Repository for submission

There were still a few submissions via memory sticks. Examiners are advised not to open these, so they will need re-submitting by centres via Kiteworks or the Repository. OCR will help with this.

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>performed music within their capabilities</li> <li>knew their repertoire. It is an obvious point, but nevertheless, candidates who showed a strong knowledge of notes and rhythm, performing fluently, gained high marks in this area of the marking criteria</li> <li>showed a strong critical understanding. At A Level, examiners are looking for evidence that candidates understand the music they are performing. This is evidenced by appropriate shaping of the notes to capture the intended character and style of the chosen repertoire, rather than simply 'playing the notes'</li> <li>showed technical control. Whatever the instrument or level at which the candidate is</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>showed inappropriate balance between the candidate as soloist and their accompaniment. This is usually where a backing track used is either too loud or too quiet. This affects the mark awarded in area 3 (Realisation/Aural Awareness) of the marking criteria. As it says 'aural awareness also pertains to choices made... in terms of amplification'. It can also be that the piano accompaniment is too loud or soft</li> <li>used inaudible backing tracks. In a few instances this year, there were recitals on electric guitar or drum kit where the candidate could clearly hear the backing track through headphones, but it was not audible to the examiner. This has an effect on the</li> </ul>

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
<p>performing, secure technical control is needed for the candidate to do well. This pertains to such things as evenness of tone, coordination of tongue/bow and fingers, intonation, breath control, pedalling, diction, tempi</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>used technology well. Even though few in number, recitals presented using music technology (e.g., sequencing) do well by demonstrating secure use of appropriate software functions, production techniques and balance. Please note that it is a requirement that the candidate appears on the video for this option of performing, just as it is for candidates playing an instrument</li> <li>were strong in interpretation and realisation. This is the area that brings the music to life, and candidates that did well generally displayed a wide palette of sound and colour, incorporating idiomatic features as appropriate to the particular style and genre of music being performed. Details of articulation and phrasing are needed</li> <li>showed a strong sense of balance and ensemble. This is particularly relevant when performing as part of group, whether it be a duet or a larger ensemble, the ability to blend, bring out a part, accompany as appropriate are all skills that candidates need to display to do well in this area</li> <li>were strong in improvisation. Where recitals include an element of choice, particularly improvised solos, they do well when the added material shows a clear and strong connection with the rest of the music, retaining the style, and exploring an appropriately wide range of the instrument with a variety of techniques</li> <li>maintained sustained level of demand. For candidates to do well, it is necessary for them to maintain a level of demand through the whole recital. This means that if they are performing as part of an ensemble, there should not be sections for which they do not play. This in effect, reduces the level of demand</li> <li>gave convincing performing in both sections of the marking criteria for Section B, focused study. The marking criteria here are different from those for Section A, free choice. Overall, the first area (Interpretative understanding) considers the 'candidate and the instrument' – how well they know the music, their technical control and realisation. The second area (Stylistic and aural awareness) considers the</li> </ul>	<p>assessment, as it is impossible to accurately assess balance and ensemble</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>had audible click track throughout the performance. There were more instances of this happening this year, and again, it affected the mark awarded in category 3</li> <li>performed on a 'second instrument' on which they were not as accomplished. Candidates are advised to perform on their strongest instrument throughout unless they are of equal proficiency on both</li> <li>gave overlong recitals. Recitals often last longer than the 6 or 10 minutes (depending on the performing option chosen) required, and there is no penalty for this. However, in some instances, overlong recitals end up self-penalising as candidates tire and perform less securely as it goes on</li> <li>gave short recitals. Conversely, some recitals were undertime with the consequent reduction of marks depending on how much under time they were</li> <li>gave imbalanced recitals. There were instances this year where recitals were uneven: one of the two pieces in Section A was secure, but the second, contrasting one clearly less well known, affecting the whole recital</li> <li>performed inappropriate scores. Sometimes the scores included did not match what was actually performed. If the candidate is not performing what is on the accompanying score, there should be some indication of how it is changed. It is not enough to simply submit a version from the internet without annotating it to correspond with what is actually being performed. This also includes adding details of rhythm, structure and realisation to TAB scores. It is appreciated that there will be some artistic license, within reason, in some vocal performances, particularly</li> <li>did not undertake tuning. Some candidates did not tune at all, or did not re-tune between items. Where intonation was insecure, it adversely affected their mark for technical control</li> <li>showed a lack of stagecraft. Performing presence and communication are vital parts of a performance, assessed in both sections, and form a large portion of the marks awarded for the Section B focused study</li> </ul>

Candidates who did well generally:	Candidates who did less well generally:
'candidate and the audience' – how well they can communicate and project their performance. Candidates who did well showed clear security, confidence and commitment in both areas.	submission. A lack of projection into the performing space had a detrimental effect on some performances.

### Assessment for learning

Something for teachers to bear in mind, is the positioning of candidates for the video performance. The candidate needs to be seen clearly, not hidden behind a music stand or far away at the end of a large hall. It is beneficial for both the examiners to see as well as hear the candidates clearly.

### Most common causes of centres not passing

It is infrequent that candidates don't pass in the performing component of the course. In the few instances where they don't it is because candidates do not meet the technical and interpretative requirements as outlined in the marking criteria at a high enough level. Sometimes this is compounded by some performances being incomplete, portions only of pieces being played.

### Common misconceptions

To access the full range of the marking criteria for this component, candidates need to play music that is comparable to grade 6 level. It is possible to achieve full marks by playing grade 6 repertoire. There is no advantage in terms of marks in playing music of a higher grade. There is still a misconception that playing more difficult music will earn some extra marks. This is not the case with the OCR specification, and candidates are strongly advised not to play repertoire that is beyond their technical capabilities, as it is detrimental to the final mark rather than enhancing it.

Another area of misconception is that there is extra credit for performing on a second instrument. This is not the case.

The submission of YouTube links or mp3 recordings is not an acceptable alternative to submitting scores. The only time this is a viable route is when there is no other way at all of providing a written score, and then needs to be checked with OCR first before submitting.

## Avoiding potential malpractice

As the specification states, the recording of the performance needs to be done in one complete take. While there are sometimes technical reasons why video/movie recordings are split, there is the potential for a malpractice query to be raised if it is clear that parts of the performance have been recorded at different times. Centres are strongly advised to make sure recordings are clearly the result of one unedited take. If the recording is split for some reason, then they should contact OCR at their earliest convenience, explaining why.

### Tip: Practise in front of others

One of the most helpful ways to build confidence before recording for the exam, is to practise performing to teachers and peers.

## Additional comments

It is worth bearing in mind that for H543/02, there are more marks available for Section A (75) than Section B (30). It is therefore within candidates' interest to perform their strongest pieces or on their stronger instrument (if playing more than one, and one is stronger than the other) for Section A.

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