Course report 2024

Advanced Higher Music Technology

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 59

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 84

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	27	Percentage	32.1	Cumulative percentage	32.1	Minimum mark required	94
B	Number of candidates	29	Percentage	34.5	Cumulative percentage	66.7	Minimum mark required	80
C	Number of candidates	13	Percentage	15.5	Cumulative percentage	82.1	Minimum mark required	67
D	Number of candidates	8	Percentage	9.5	Cumulative percentage	91.7	Minimum mark required	53
No award	Number of candidates	7	Percentage	8.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ‘most’ means greater than 70%
- ‘many’ means 50% to 69%
- ‘some’ means 25% to 49%
- ‘a few’ means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

This is the third year of SQA marking this course since it was implemented in session 2019–20. There were two uplifts, with the research project uplifted in March and the production project uplifted in May. Each project has a discrete brief and both projects total 135 marks.

The course assessment performed as intended. Candidates this year were generally well prepared for both projects. Many candidates demonstrated strong implementation skills.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Project–research

Candidate performance in the research element of the project was mixed but there was an improvement from last year.

In stage 1: identifying an appropriate research topic in a music technology context, and produce an outline specification:

- some candidates chose contexts that were too broad or did not provide sufficient scope for the research project

In stage 2a: investigating and analysing technology skills, techniques, and processes, and relevant musical analysis as appropriate:

- candidates often completed in-depth investigation of identified skills, techniques, and processes, but did not complete any analysis
- candidates sometimes did not include media files they have investigated and analysed
- candidates sometimes provided links to videos as citations for their investigation but did not annotate precise timings

In stage 2b: experimenting with music technology skills, techniques, and processes, candidates generally performed well, providing the required evidence.

In stage 2c: synthesising investigation, analysis, experimentation, and drawing conclusions, candidates often drew conclusions and completed synthesis based on their experimentation only and did not fully detail the impact on their own practice.

Stage 3: organising and presenting, including using information from a range of sources was completed well by many candidates. Some candidates, however, included synthesis as part of stage 2b.

Project–production

In stage 1: defining a project brief:

- candidates often completed project briefs that were appropriate, including details of their intended use of new skills, techniques and processes
- some candidates did not provide an executive summary of their research

In stage 2: planning the production, candidates performed to a good standard.

Candidates performed strongest in stage 3: implementing the production, although some candidates provided evidence of using plug-in presets. In the course assessment task document, it is clearly stated that ‘candidates must not use presets’ for stages 3b, c and d.

In stage 4a: mastering the production — analysis and critical listening skills:

- some candidates provided only one reference recording
- some candidates did not complete a sufficiently robust analysis and critical listening commentary, including detailed comparisons with reference recordings and proposed mastering decisions

Candidates completed stage 4b: mastering the production — finalising and mastering techniques reasonably well. However, some candidates provided evidence of using plug-in presets. In the course assessment task document, it is clearly stated that ‘candidates must not use presets in their mastering chain.’

For stage 5: evaluating and reflecting, candidates’ evaluation reports often lacked evaluative comments.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Project–research

Stage 1

Candidates must include an outline specification for the research project that is sufficiently detailed and provides sufficient scope for the project.

Stage 2

Candidates should be discouraged from selecting contexts that lack scope, such as Foley mic'ing techniques that limit the candidate's ability to investigate and analyse, experiment, and synthesise in the research element of the project.

Similarly, candidates should be discouraged from contexts that do not allow them to research technology skills, techniques and processes. An example of this could be manipulation of Foley props.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are both investigating and analysing in stage 2a, and that candidates have clearly identified the investigated and analysed skills, techniques and processes. They should also ensure candidates provide media files they have investigated and analysed.

In stage 2b, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates focus on the clearly identified skills, techniques and processes they investigated and analysed in stage 2a. In this stage, candidates often embedded the required media files in their log. Candidates who choose not to do this should clearly and correctly label their media files before submitting them to SQA.

For stage 2c, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are synthesising their investigation and analysis, and experimentation, and that the conclusions they draw are based on evidence generated in stage 2a and stage 2b, and that they are detailing the impact on their own practice.

Stage 3

For stage 3, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to not only structure and present their work to the best of their ability, but cite their sources throughout, and use an appropriate referencing system. Many candidates use video references, and if they do, they must provide precise timings in candidate referencing.

In terms of structure, candidates should be encouraged to work sequentially, presenting evidence for stage 2a, followed by 2b, then 2c.

Project–production

Many candidates demonstrated strong implementation skills. Given the size of the project, candidates should provide a log format that evidences all of the mandatory requirements in a logical way. Candidates who use a diary approach often omit aspects of the mandatory requirements and end up with large and unwieldy logs.

Stage 2

Candidates should ensure they have provided all the evidence required for this stage. In particular, when it comes to evidencing their mixing plan (for the production element) and the production plan (for Foley/sound design contexts). Where required, candidates must provide reasons for their choices.

Stage 3

Candidates are more familiar with the stages here, and the practical application of audio capture and microphone technique showed improvement from last year.

For stage 3a, candidates should ensure they are experimenting with microphone and capture techniques (for example, using multi-mic'ing and ambient or room mic'ing) and documenting these under the audio capture section of their logs.

For stages 3b, c and d, candidates must not use presets.

Stage 4

As mastering is a new skill for most candidates taking Advanced Higher Music Technology, teaching and learning should give them opportunities to prepare for this stage of the project.

Teachers and lecturers should develop candidate analysis and critical listening ability in preparation for stage 4a, and guide candidates in providing all the evidence required.

Examples of model mastering chains may be useful to candidates for stage 4b, and once again, candidates must not use presets.

Stage 5

For stage 5, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use technical language, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the music technology skills, techniques and processes they employ in their project.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in March 2024 and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report.