



Course report 2024

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: 1,075

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 1,070

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade.

A	Number of candidates	363	Percentage	33.9	Cumulative percentage	33.9	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	357	Percentage	33.4	Cumulative percentage	67.3	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	231	Percentage	21.6	Cumulative percentage	88.9	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	83	Percentage	7.8	Cumulative percentage	96.6	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	36	Percentage	3.4	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected this year. Candidates demonstrated their musical and technological knowledge through questioning styles that were similar to those used in previous years.

The paper included questions about intellectual property and technological developments for the first time since 2019–20.

All questions proved to be accessible, with some providing more challenge for candidates.

Assignment

The requirement to demonstrate multi-tracked electronically produced sounds and/or music was re-established for the first time since 2019–20.

Many candidates submitted high-quality and creative work, with most submissions being multi-track recordings within a radio broadcast or film project.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 1(a): Candidates identify a genre and associated concept. Most candidates did well in this question.

Question 1(b): Candidates describe two features of a genre. Many candidates achieved at least 1 mark in this question.

Question 2(a): Candidates identify a genre and give features. Many candidates answered correctly.

Question 2(b): Candidates identify a feature of the excerpt. Many candidates answered correctly.

Questions 3(a)(i) and (ii): Candidates identify a fault present in the recording. Many candidates identified the fault and most identified the solution.

Question 5(b): Candidates identify concepts common to two excerpts. The vast majority of candidates answered correctly.

Question 5(c): Candidates show their understanding of copyright. Most candidates answered correctly.

Question 6(a): Candidates identify two features of an excerpt. Most candidates achieved 2 marks.

Question 7(a): Candidates give two features of a chosen genre. Most candidates answered correctly, with many achieving 2 marks.

Question 8 (part 1): Candidates identify two effects applied. Some candidates identified both effects correctly.

Question 8 (part 3): Candidates identify the tonality. Many candidates answered correctly.

Question 8 (part 4): Candidates identify the change in tonality. Most candidates answered correctly.

Question 9: Candidates identify 5 production features from a list of 10. Most candidates performed well in this 5-mark question.

Assignment

Stage 1a: planning sound design. Once again, many centres used good, structured templates to support candidates to provide required information.

Stage 2a: implementing the production – audio capture. Many candidates demonstrated a range of microphone techniques within complex multi-tracks. Candidates also demonstrated using multiple inputs by mic'ing a drum kit with four mics on the kick drum, snare and two overheads. This also demonstrated stereo mic'ing.

Stage 2b: implementing the production — processing skills. Most candidates demonstrated the requirements of this stage and included all the requirements as detailed in the coursework assessment task document.

Stage 2c: implementing the production — applying effects. Most candidates demonstrated the requirements of this stage well, and many included evidence of MIDI instrument manipulation.

Stage 2e: implementing the production — creative and appropriate use of sound and/or music. Candidates demonstrated their creativity in a wide range of ways, with some excellent examples of creating jingles and other radio show content, and complex sound design for film with Foley.

Stage 3: evaluating the production. Many candidates were able to evaluate their work effectively as they made comments linked to each stage of their work

Areas that candidates found demanding

Questions 3(b)(i) and (ii): Candidates identify a processing fault where the threshold on a noise gate was set too high. Many candidates found this question demanding.

Question 4(a): Candidates identify settings on a phaser effect. Many candidates found this question demanding.

Question 4(b): Candidates identify controls on a tremolo effect. Most candidates found this question demanding.

Question 5(a): Candidates identify a technology. Many candidates did not identify that a sampler was used to capture the audio from another excerpt.

Question 5(b): Candidates describe a stereo mic'ing technique. Candidates found it challenging to identify all three of the details required to access the full range of marks (give a correct microphone type or array, a correct distance and give a justification). A few candidates did not identify that two microphones are required for a stereo technique. Justification continues to be a challenge for some candidates and reference can be made to past papers to show acceptable answers.

Question 6(c): Candidates identify a musical scale. Many candidates found this question fairly demanding.

Question 7(b): Candidates name a key innovator and describe one example of their influence. Most candidates found this question demanding.

Question 8 (part 2): Candidates identify that a sample of a cymbal was reversed. Many candidates found this question fairly demanding.

Question 8 (part 5): Candidates identify an effect on a vocal. This proved to be a challenging question for most candidates.

Question 8 (part 6): Candidates identify the manipulated control on a synthesiser. This proved to be a challenging question for most candidates.

Assignment

Stage 1a: planning sound design. Some candidates were not able to access the full range of marks as they did not plan their electronic multi-track requirements in full.

Stage 2b: implementing the production — processing skills. Some candidates did not access the full range of marks as they have not demonstrated a sufficient knowledge of editing a minimum of three takes into a single take. Using screenshots clearly showing these edits helps demonstrate understanding.

Stage 2d: implementing the production — mixing and sequencing skills. Some candidates did not access the full range of marks as they did not demonstrate send and insert effects, and grouping/bussing. Candidates should include screenshots of their final edit and mix windows, which can enhance their progress record.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

To prepare for the question paper, teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates are familiar with the full range of music concepts, different effects, controllers and processes applied to a section of music, and technology features applied to different genres.

For guidance on learning about technological developments, there is a list of specific equipment on page 9 of the course specification, which you can find on the [Higher Music Technology subject page](#). Candidates should be familiar with intellectual property (IP) cases and how IP is considered in the music industry.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should make candidates aware of the requirements of the assignment before they do it. They should remind candidates to check and implement the mandatory list of technical skills.

Some logbooks are submitted in a chronological diary format, including information that does not attract marks. Candidates should ensure that their logs are clear and concise, to the point where another person could recreate their production using the information they provide.

In addition, when preparing logbooks, candidates must ensure that they include details of the mandatory requirements. Candidates should use their time efficiently — if a log entry isn't going to be awarded marks, it is better to omit this detail from the final logbook submitted for marking.

For stage 1a: planning the sound design, candidates should refer to the bullet points in the marking instructions to ensure that every planning requirement has been detailed; for example, the type and placement of all microphones to be used or where they will demonstrate automation. Please refer to page 5 of the coursework assessment task document, which you can find on the [Higher Music Technology subject page](#).

For stage 1b: planning the recording, creating, editing and mixing, candidates should justify their choices at this stage.

For stage 2a: implementing the production — audio capture, candidates are expected to select and use virtual and/or MIDI instruments to create electronic sound. They cannot access the full range of marks if they only use one MIDI instrument.

For stage 2c: implementing the production — applying effects, candidates must include at least two effects from the list given (delay, echo, reverb, chorus, phase and flange).

Most centres opted to submit audio and logbooks electronically through the SQA portal as Word documents or PowerPoint presentations. When preparing files for submission, teachers and lecturers should check that files are accessible and that they have transferred

correctly. If SQA appointees cannot access files, marking is problematic. Centres should make sure flyleaves are completed to inform markers and ensure candidates have implemented the list of mandatory skills

There are a range of Understanding Standards materials that can support you with the assignment. The examples of candidate evidence are accompanied by a written commentary from an SQA senior examiner explaining why marks were awarded. They are available from the [SQA Secure website](#) (log-in needed).

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](#).