



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit**  
State Examinations Commission

**JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2012**

**MUSIC**

**ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT**

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 General

The Junior Certificate examination in Music consists of two Levels - Ordinary and Higher - and two components, namely, performing, lasting about 15 minutes, held in April, and listening, composing and general study, lasting two hours, held in June. In 2012 the set works and set songs from group A, the first of three groups, were on the course. In 2013 it will be group B and in 2014 it will be group C, and so on until there is a change of syllabus.

It is recommended that this report be read in conjunction with the syllabus (available on the DES web site at <http://www.education.ie>) and the question papers and the marking schemes (available on the SEC website at <http://www.examinations.ie>).

## 1.2 The candidature

The total number of candidates taking the Junior Certificate Music examination in 2012 was 10,578. This was an increase of 626 (6.3 per cent) on the 2011 figure of 9,952 and follows an increasing pattern in recent years in numbers and in the proportion of the total cohort for Junior Certificate. The following table illustrates the consistency of numbers and the increasing trends since 2007.

**Table 1.1:** Participation rates in Junior Certificate Music examinations, 2007—2012 (Higher and Ordinary Levels)

Year	Total Higher Level	Percentage Higher Level	Total Ordinary Level	Percentage Ordinary Level	Total both Levels	JC total cohort	Percentage taking JC Music
2012	8714	82.4	1864	17.6	10 578	58 836	18.0
2011	8104	81.4	1848	18.6	9952	56 930	17.5
2010	7897	81.3	1818	18.7	9715	56 179	17.3
2009	7443	78.3	2068	21.7	9511	55 657	17.1
2008	7497	80.4	1825	19.6	9322	56 023	16.6
2007	7427	79.1	1957	20.9	9348	57 395	16.3

In the breakdown for 2007–2012 there is a clear difference in standard and also a wide gap between the numbers doing Higher Level and those doing Ordinary Level. Since 2010 the ratio has been greater than four to one. In 2012, for example, the proportions were 82.4 and 17.6 per cent, respectively. This ratio continues to be one of the highest for all subjects.

**Table 1.2:** Participation rates, female and male, Ordinary Level, 2007–2012 (school-based candidates only)

Year	Total Ordinary Level	Female	Male
2012	1864	1246	618
2011	1849	1246	603
2010	1818	1231	587
2009	2068	1391	677
2008	1825	1214	611
2007	1957	1393	564

**Table 1.3:** Participation rates, female and male, Higher Level, 2007—2012 (school-based candidates only)

Year	Total Higher Level	Female	Male
2012	8714	6288	2426
2011	8103	5812	2291
2010	7897	5449	2248
2009	7443	5293	2150
2008	7497	5552	1945
2007	7427	5601	1826

There is also a wide gap between the number of females and the number of males taking the subject. Furthermore, the proportion in the past has been roughly four to one in favour of females; in 2012, however, a total of 7534 females and 3044 males, that is, 72.2 per cent and 28.8 per cent, respectively, sat the examinations at both Levels. This shows that more males are now taking the subject (see tables 1.2 and 1.3 above).

## 2 ORDINARY LEVEL

### 2.1 Candidate performance

For purposes of comparison, the overall results of the Ordinary Level candidates for the period 2007–2012 are given in table 2.1.

**Table 2.1:** Results, Ordinary Level cohort, expressed as a percentage, 2007–2012

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	1.6	24.3	45.2	23.0	2.8	3.0	0.2
2011	1.1	21.4	43.9	26.5	3.4	3.5	0.2
2010	1.2	22.7	44.4	24.2	2.9	4.2	0.4
2009	1.3	25.2	39.7	24.8	4.4	3.9	0.6
2008	1.5	23.6	42.8	23.6	3.9	4.3	0.3
2007	1.5	25.1	43.3	22.7	3.7	3.4	0.2

As is evident from the table overall results have been relatively stable over this period.

Tables 2.2 and 2.3 present the grade breakdown by gender at Ordinary Level over the same period.

**Table 2.2:** Results, female, Ordinary Level candidates, expressed as a percentage

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	1.5	25.6	45.7	21.3	2.5	3.1	0.3
2011	1.4	23.0	44.3	24.9	2.7	3.6	0.2
2010	1.3	24.2	45.4	22.7	2.4	3.7	0.2
2009	1.6	28.3	39.4	23.1	3.5	3.7	0.4
2008	1.6	25.9	41.8	23.1	3.4	4.2	0.1
2007	1.7	25.6	43.6	21.8	3.4	3.6	0.1

**Table 2.3:** Results, male, Ordinary Level candidates, expressed as a percentage

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	1.6	21.7	44.2	26.5	3.4	2.6	0.0
2011	0.7	18.1	43.3	29.9	4.6	3.2	0.3
2010	0.9	19.6	42.4	27.3	3.7	5.3	0.9
2009	0.7	18.9	40.5	28.2	6.4	4.4	0.9
2008	1.5	19.0	44.8	24.5	4.9	4.6	0.7
2007	1.1	23.9	42.6	25.0	4.3	2.8	0.4

As is evident from the tables females, in general, outperform males marginally in respect of grades returned at Junior Certificate Music at Ordinary Level.

## **2.2 Component-by-component analysis**

### **2.2.1 Performing**

The performing component of the Junior Certificate Music examination accounts for 25 per cent of the total. At the Ordinary Level, candidates perform two pieces in one activity and take an unprepared test. Candidates may select one of the following tests: sight-reading, aural memory (rhythm), aural memory (melody), or improvisation.

The marking scheme for both levels has three headings:

A: Control of the medium–20 marks

B: Chosen music and standard of performance–60 marks

C: Unprepared test–20 marks

Candidates may choose their activities from within the seven categories outlined in the syllabus.

Category 1: Solo song singing

Category 2: Recognised choir or orchestra

Category 3: Ensemble–vocal, instrumental, accompanying

Category 4: Solo instrument

Category 5: Solo Irish instrument

Category 6: Improvisation

Category 7: All others

In practice, however, most candidates opt for category 7. Technology is not an option in the Junior Certificate Music performing examination.

**Table 2.4:** Grade distribution ( $n = 1726$ ), number and percentage, for the Ordinary Level performing test in 2012

Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
Number	440	613	414	213	36	8	2
Percentage	25.5	35.5	24.0	12.3	2.1	0.5	0.1

A majority of candidates (61.0%) achieved an A or B grade; a minority (36.3%) got a C or D grade while a small number (2.7%) made up the combined remaining grades E, F and NG. Almost all candidates (96.8%) chose the aural memory rhythm unprepared test. Thirty-seven candidates chose sight-reading. Twenty-five opted for sight-reading on the acoustic guitar, nine candidates chose piano, two opted for descant recorder and one candidate chose the violin. Seventeen candidates opted for aural memory melody, and one candidate chose improvisation.

### **Prepared performance**

The overall standard of performance was good. A majority of candidates gave a solo performance. The standard of solo vocal performances ranged from poor to excellent. Good diction, intonation and breath control enhanced performances as well as appropriate accompaniments. The use of backing tracks proved problematic for some candidates, as they had difficulty maintaining the beat or missed entries. Poor vocal technique, forgetting the words of the song and accompaniments, which were too loud, undermined some performances.

Candidates performing on solo instruments gave average to excellent performances. Most candidates chose pieces they were able to play. A lack of instrumental technique—intonation, note placing, tone quality as well as a lack of dynamic and expressive contrast—was a principal factor in lowering marks. Some candidates performing on the recorder displayed only basic skills and a limited range of a few notes. Again the use of backing tracks proved problematic for some candidates, as

they missed entries or lost the beat. The absence of an accompaniment in a number of performances exposed the candidate unfavourably.

The standard of class-based activities was commendable, with marks ranging from good to excellent. Group performance favoured the candidate. Recorder ensembles in two parts were impressive as was group singing. Failure to contribute successfully in a group was the reason for lower marks among a small number of candidates.

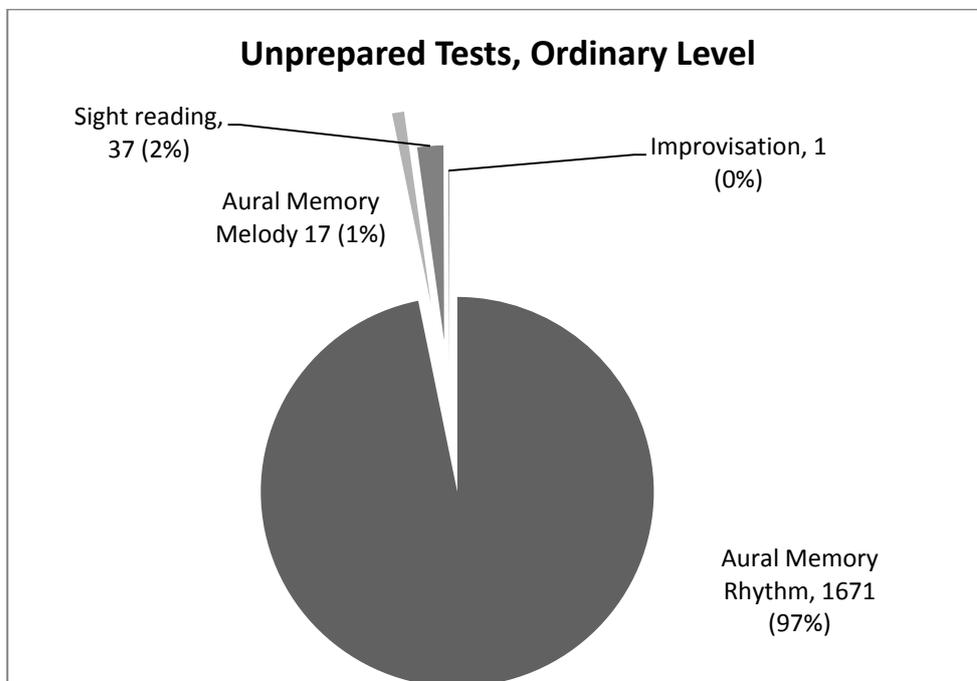
The most frequent option was solo and group singing followed by solo and group recorder. The recorder, tin whistle and guitar were the most popular instruments in group and solo performances. A small number of candidates performed on piano or orchestral instruments. Bass guitar, banjo, drums, African drums, bodhrán, accordion and fiddle were among other chosen instruments. A small number of candidates chose rapping as their performing medium. Some Ordinary Level candidates performed in a group along with Higher Level candidates.

A variety of styles was evident. Recorder pieces, both in solo and group performances, were largely from classed-based repertoire, coming from folk and popular genres. Some recorder pieces had a narrow range of five or six notes or limited rhythm and were of short duration. Other instrumental pieces were mostly from popular, folk, jazz, classical and traditional Irish genres.

Solo and group singing were mostly from the popular repertoire, namely chart music from recent years. Singers also performed ballads, rock songs, songs from musicals, and traditional songs. Programmes were generally well balanced and contrasting. Some candidates chose material that was too challenging for them. The use of backing tracks as accompaniment posed problems for some. Among the factors that produced less convincing performances were insecure entries, loud accompaniment, and unsuitable keys for the voice. One candidate impressively performed her own compositions on the piano. Some pieces requiring accompaniment were performed without accompaniment, thus diminishing their effectiveness.

## Unprepared tests

Almost all candidates opted for the aural memory rhythm unprepared test. The standard ranged from average to excellent. Failures to maintain a steady pulse and to clap back a complete response were the main difficulties encountered. Some candidates had problems with long notes and with tests in  $\frac{3}{4}$  time. Failing to give a four-bar response and adding a note or notes to the final bar were frequent errors in the aural memory rhythm tests. Of the thirty-seven candidates who opted for sight-reading, twenty five chose to sight-read on acoustic guitar. The standard was high. Seventeen candidates opted for aural memory melody, with mixed measures of success. One candidate selected improvisation as an unprepared test.



**Figure 2.1:** Number (and percentage) of activities at Ordinary Level ( $n = 1762$ ), 2012

### **2.2.2 Conclusions on performing tests**

- A majority of candidates achieved an A or B grade.
- The standard of class-based group activities was commendable.
- In general, candidates performed well-balanced and contrasting programmes.
- Appropriate accompaniment enhanced the overall performance.
- Candidates who chose pieces of a suitable standard and within their capabilities gave confident performances and gained high marks.
- Examiners gave lower marks to performances that had note inaccuracies, problems with intonation, poor diction, breathing and a lack of dynamic expression.
- Backing tracks did not always work to the advantage of candidates.
- Generally candidates who sang without accompaniment had difficulty with pitch and sometimes lacked confidence.
- Candidates who performed in groups with accompaniment generally did well.
- The aural memory rhythm was the choice of unprepared test for almost all the candidates.
- Guitar sight-reading was generally well executed.

### **2.2.3 Recommendations for teachers and students**

#### **Recommendations for teachers**

- Teachers should encourage instrumental players to consider selecting the sight-reading test for the unprepared test
- In group activities the discernible contribution of each member is essential
- Teachers should stress the musical aspects of phrasing, dynamic variation and tone production during rehearsal with Ordinary Level candidates as it will enhance their overall performances
- Teachers should encourage students to rehearse with backing tracks to feel confident and perform under examination conditions
- The choice of key for singers should be stressed as important, because intonation problems can compromise a performance
- Where a candidate is performing solo, every effort should be made to provide an accompaniment, where appropriate
- Less confident/weaker students should consider performing as part of a group as they may find this less daunting
- Teachers should encourage students to sing in languages other than English if they have that competence and if they feel more comfortable doing so
- Teachers should consider the inclusion of harmony as it can enhance a group performance
- Start preparing students for the unprepared tests from first year onwards
- Teachers should provide opportunities for students to practise their practical skills and encourage performance in class.

### **Recommendations for students**

- Choose pieces or songs that you enjoy performing
- Choose your programme well in advance so that you can give a confident and convincing performance
- Follow the advice of your teacher
- If you are nervous performing on your own, consider performing in a group
- Perform in front of people as often as you can
- Pay attention to tone, intonation, phrasing dynamics, expression and diction
- Practise for your unprepared test regularly
- Make sure the examiner can hear your contribution in a group. Never hide behind another member
- Take care when using backing tracks. Practise your performance on the actual machine used for your examination. Check the volume and find out the best place in the room to stand in relation to the CD player or computer
- Remember that the unprepared test is worth 20 per cent of the performing examination and always makes the difference in the overall result
- When playing a solo instrument, rehearse with your accompanist regularly, and make sure your instrument is in tune
- If you are singing to a backing track, make sure the key suits your voice and that you are able to maintain the speed (tempo)
- You can give a much more convincing performance if you learn the words by heart
- Smile, and try to relax. Think of it as a performance and not as an examination.

## 2.3 Listening, Composing and General Study

### 2.3.1 Structure of the test

- General
  - Ordinary Level: eight questions, 300 marks
  - Accounts for 75 per cent of the examination
- Listening
  - Ordinary Level: five questions, 180 marks (30, 30, 40, 40, 40)
- Composing
  - Ordinary Level: two questions, 100 marks (40, 60)
- General study
  - Ordinary Level: one question, 20 marks

### 2.3.2 Question-by-question analysis

The following data is based on an analysis of a random sample of scripts from each examiner. Each question is accompanied by the following information: average mark awarded, mark expressed as percentage and the number of attempts (*n*) which made up the sample.

#### Question 1: Set songs

Average mark: 20.9; percentage: 69.7 (*n* = random 120)

This question assessed candidates' ability to recall basic information and to identify various musical features in three of their set songs. All candidates attempted all parts of this question. The majority achieved at least 20 marks out of 30.

**A:** Just a few failed to identify “Kalinka” as a wedding song, or failed to identify its country of origin.

**B:** This excerpt proved more challenging, as most candidates failed to recognise Handel as the composer of “Spring”, or to classify it as belonging to the opera category.

**C:** Almost all recognised the number 59 in the song's title, but failed to recognise the movement by step and leap. Consequently, only a small number achieved full marks in this question.

## **Question 2: Set works**

Average mark: 19.5; percentage: 65 ( $n = \text{random } 120$ )

As in question 1, the majority obtained 20 marks or more. Candidates attempted all multiple choice questions, but few achieved full marks.

**A:** Only a minority correctly identified the excerpt as being part of *The William Tell Overture*, with *The Water Music Suite* being the most frequently chosen option. A majority correctly stated that Rossini was Italian.

**B:** Most candidates selected a revolution, and to a lesser extent Sunrise in the Alps instead of a storm. Most recognised that the excerpt was played loudly and softly.

**C:** An open question which required candidates to identify an instrument and its family. A minority answered correctly. Incorrect responses included naming the flute instead of the clarinet, and the cello instead of the violin. A small number identified brass and percussion instruments, and a minority did not attempt this question.

**D:** A majority had problems recognising that the melody was graceful and delicate. When choosing the instrumental family that played three notes, most opted for woodwind and brass, instead of woodwind only.

**E:** Most recognised that this excerpt sounded more powerful. Being asked to give a reason for their choice, most referred to louder dynamics or the presence of more instruments. Almost all achieved full marks for this section.

**F:** Few failed to hear a trumpet fanfare, and most correctly identified galloping horses. Almost all achieved full marks.

### **Question 3: Irish music**

Average mark, 25.0; percentage: 62.5 ( $n = \text{random } 120$ )

**A:** A majority of candidates had problems identifying the type of dance as a reel, but those who did so generally chose the correct number of beats. A small minority answered both sections correctly.

**B:** Candidates frequently confused a lullaby and a lament, but the majority successfully selected two features of the singer's performance.

**C:** Almost all correctly chose two instruments heard in this excerpt but were less successful in distinguishing between broken chords and block chords in the accompaniment.

**D:** Candidates had problems correctly linking true or false facts associated with the Belfast Harp Festival, and just a few obtained full marks.

### **Question 4: Dictation**

Average mark: 29.0; percentage: 72.5 ( $n = \text{random } 119$ )

Most candidates answered this question well, identifying 4/4 as the correct time signature and scoring between 24 and 32 marks for completing the rhythm. Common errors included adding a dot to the semibreve, beaming the last two notes in bar 3, and omitting the time signature.

### **Question 5: Chosen songs and works**

Average mark: 24.2; percentage: 53 ( $n = \text{random } 120$ )

**A:** The majority of candidates did not attempt these two sections, being unable to name a piece of illustrative or film music. A small minority named one of their set songs or set works here. Of those who correctly named their choice work, most could not name the correct composer. Popular choices were *Batman* theme music, songs from *Grease* or *Annie*, "The Hogwarth's March," *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, "Gabriel's Oboe," the *Jurassic Park* theme, and "The Sorcerer's Apprentice".

**B:** Candidates gave a variety of musical features.

**C, D, E:** Candidates showed a high standard of answering in these parts of this question, which involved multiple choice.

**F:** Few, however, correctly identified the celesta in F (ii), with a majority mistaking it for chime bars.

### **Question 6: Triads**

Average mark: 24.0; percentage: 60.0 ( $n = \text{random } 118$ )

This question showed a varied standard of answering, with marks ranging from 0 to 40. Preparation of a chord bank as rough work, though not required, was rarely evident.

**A:** Only a few candidates included the sharp when naming F as a note on the staff.

**B:** A majority recognised the triad as D.

**C:** Similarly, a majority correctly chose major as their answer.

**D:** A majority chose bar 6 or bar 15 instead of bar 13, even when they had correctly named the notes of the D major triad.

### **Question 7: Melodies**

Candidates could choose from three options to produce a 4-bar phrase. This caused difficulties for most candidates. Part C was the most popular option, and a minority chose A or B. A minority also attempted two or even three options. In these cases the marks awarded for each option were generally low. A few candidates made little or no attempt, while a small minority displayed competence and style. Most failed to gain the 12 marks available for ending on *doh* and for adding a phrase mark. However, a majority produced melodies with some degree of interest and with fairly accurate rhythms.

**A** (*a phrase set to a given rhythm*):

Average mark: 25.8; percentage: 38.0 ( $n = \text{random } 44$ )

A common error was either to ignore or to rearrange the given rhythm pattern. Failure to identify the key prevented the majority from achieving an acceptable melody.

**B** (*a phrase set to a given opening*):

Average mark: 28.0; percentage: 46.7 ( $n = \text{random } 42$ )

Those who chose this option were more successful

**C** (*an answering phrase*):

Average mark: 27.0; percentage: 45 ( $n = \text{random } 37$ )

Candidates lost marks when they ended their phrase on the same note as the given melody. Many copied two or more bars of the given rhythm or pitch, instead of composing a completely different phrase. A minority used a different time signature to the one given.

### **Question 8: General study**

Average mark: 10.7; percentage: 53.5 ( $n = \text{random } 110$ )

A small number did not attempt this question. Jazz, popular music, rock music, television theme tunes, African music, minimalist music, reggae and music in advertising were the most-popular options.

**A:** A majority stated their chosen study here but had more difficulty identifying the correct category, sometimes selecting two options.

**B:** Candidates answered this section well, most choosing valid titles of pieces and valid performers. A minority incorrectly listed set works or set songs.

**C:** Almost all made attempts to select two musical features, but the brief notes on these features lacked sufficient detail, or did not relate sufficiently to their chosen topic or to the pieces named in B.

Candidates who chose jazz as their general study tended to score well, as they usually referred to relevant features, such as syncopation, improvisation or scat singing, and showed a good knowledge of these features.

### **2.3.3 Conclusions on the Listening, Composing and General Study**

The majority of candidates performed best in the listening section of the paper, especially in the multiple-choice sections of questions 1, 2 and 3 and in the dictation question. They lost most marks in open questions, such as questions 2C (i) and (ii), 2E (ii) and 3C (i). In question 5, parts D, E and F (i) were well answered by most candidates, but very few correctly identified the celesta in F (ii). In this question few attempted parts A and B, while a significant minority named a set work or set song, in spite of a direction to the contrary.

In the composing section, candidates frequently lost marks through simple errors, such as failure to include an accidental in question 6 and failure to end on *doh* or to insert a phrase mark in question 7.

Although a minority did not attempt the general study question, candidates who had prepared well were able to score high marks in this section.

### **2.3.4 Recommendations for teachers and students**

#### **Recommendations for teachers**

- Listening to the set songs and set works as often as possible enhances the candidate's recognition of musical features, instruments, etc. Encourage the use of modern technology that the students can use at home, e.g. MP3 formats, comparing YouTube versions of performances, and viewing web sites featuring performances from composers on the course.
- To encourage the students' knowledge of Irish dance types, consider organising a céilí for the class or year-group so that students can actively participate in traditional sessions.
- When composing a melody, advise candidates to focus on one option only in question 7. This will avoid confusion for Ordinary Level candidates, who must not only copy the given rhythm exactly in A, but also compose a completely different rhythm in C. Encourage these candidates to write a scale in the preparation section of this question so that they become familiar with the moveable doh.
- For the general study, select topics that really interest the candidates and that they enjoy listening to. Ordinary Level students may have difficulty formulating their answers clearly and succinctly, so advise them on drawing up information on musical features and present this as brief notes.

#### **Recommendations for students**

- Listen to your set songs and set works as often as possible. Use whatever method helps you most, e.g. playing CDs, MP3 files on your phone, viewing YouTube performances. Sing or perform when you can.
- The recordings used in the examination are often different from the ones you are used to listening to in class. Listen carefully, as you may hear different features from the ones you are familiar with.

- Be careful not to confuse set songs and works (questions 1 and 2) with chosen songs and works (question 5).
- Be familiar with the characteristics that define different types of Irish traditional **performance**. Be able to recognise the different Irish dances, their time signatures and a typical bar of rhythm.
- Practice dictation. If you find the melody difficult, focus on the rhythm first. Half the marks in question 4 are for rhythm and bar lines. Listen out for the dotted crotchet and quaver. Remember there are always 4 bars and 10 notes. The melody will end on *doh*, so listen to hear if it's high *doh* or low *doh*.
- Learn basic theory really well, so that in the composition section you'll be comfortable working out key signatures and time signatures, recognising notes on the staff with sharps or flats, writing a scale and writing melodies using crochets, quavers, minims, etc.
- You have different options in questions 7 and 8. Read these carefully to choose the option most suitable to you.
- The general study question provides an opportunity to impress, so give enough detail.
- Make sure your writing is clear, so that the examiner can read it and give you all the marks that you deserve. You may use a pencil when notating music.

### 3 HIGHER LEVEL

#### 3.1 Candidate performance

For purposes of comparison, the overall results of the Higher Level candidates for the period 2007–2012 are given in table 3.1. Results over the period have been relatively stable.

**Table 3.1:** Results, Higher Level candidates, expressed as a percentage

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	10.7	41.1	33.7	12.9	1.2	0.4	0.0
2011	12.0	39.9	33.4	13.3	0.9	0.5	0.0
2010	10.7	42.4	33.1	12.4	0.9	0.6	0.0
2009	12.0	42.0	31.7	12.8	1.2	0.3	0.0
2008	8.5	41.2	36.1	12.9	0.8	0.5	0.0
2007	10.8	43.6	33.3	11.3	0.7	0.3	0.0

Tables 3.2 and 3.3 give the grade breakdown by gender at Higher Level over the same period.

**Table 3.2:** Results, female, Higher Level candidates, expressed as a percentage

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	11.5	41.9	32.9	12.2	1.1	0.4	0.0
2011	12.6	42.0	32.1	12.1	0.7	0.5	0.0
2010	11.6	44.0	32.1	11.3	0.6	0.5	0.0
2009	12.3	43.9	31.0	11.4	1.0	0.4	0.0
2008	8.8	42.6	35.4	11.9	0.7	0.5	0.0
2007	10.9	44.8	32.6	10.7	0.7	0.4	0.0

**Table 3.3:** Results, male, Higher Level candidates, expressed as a percentage

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2012	8.7	39.0	35.7	14.9	1.4	0.2	0.0
2011	10.1	34.8	36.8	16.4	1.4	0.6	0.0
2010	8.2	38.3	35.8	15.2	1.7	0.8	0.0
2009	11.3	37.2	33.3	16.2	1.7	0.2	0.0
2008	7.5	37.2	38.0	15.7	1.0	0.6	0.0
2007	10.5	40.0	35.3	13.0	0.9	0.2	0.0

At Higher Level there is a more marked differential in performance between females and males with females, in general, outperforming males more significantly than at Ordinary Level.

## **3.2 Component-by-component analysis**

### **3.2.1 Performing**

The performing component of the Junior Certificate Music examination accounts for 25 per cent of the total. At the Higher Level, candidates perform four pieces in one Higher Level activity or two pieces in each of two Ordinary Level activities and, in addition, take an unprepared test. Candidates may select one of the following tests: sight-reading, aural memory (rhythm), aural memory (melody), or improvisation.

The marking scheme for both levels has three headings:

A: Control of the medium–20 marks

B: Chosen music and standard of performance–60 marks

C: Unprepared test–20 marks

Candidates may choose their activities from within the seven categories outlined in the syllabus.

Category 1: Solo song singing

Category 2: Recognised choir or orchestra

Category 3: Ensemble–vocal, instrumental, accompanying

Category 4: Solo instrument

Category 5: Solo Irish instrument

Category 6: Improvisation

Category 7: All others

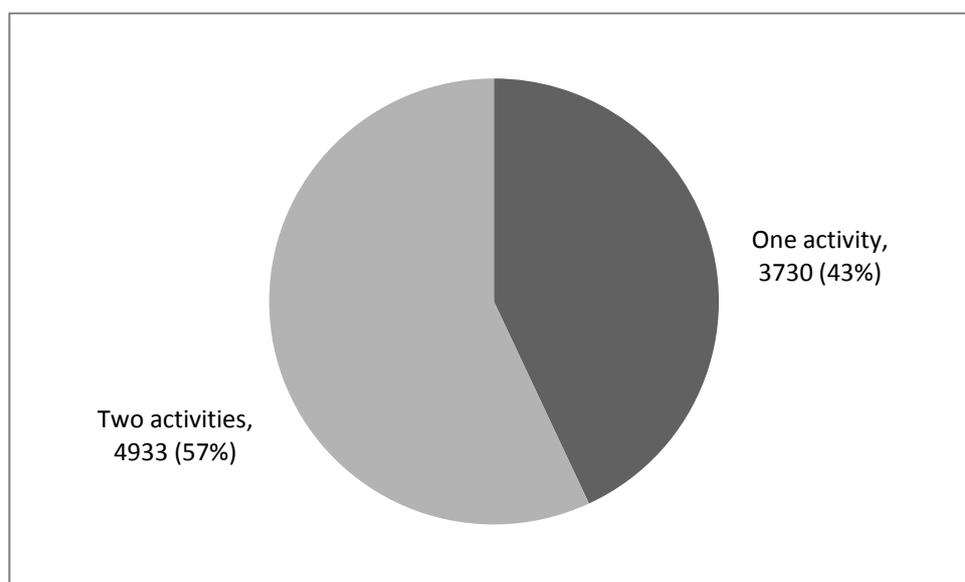
In practice, however, most candidates opt for category 7. Technology is not an option in the Junior Certificate Music performing examination.

The overall standard was high. Most candidates achieved an A or B grade. A minority achieved a C grade, while a small number achieved a D grade. Very few candidates achieved below D grade.

**Table 3.4:** Grade distribution ( $n = 8663$ ) number and percentage, at Higher Level

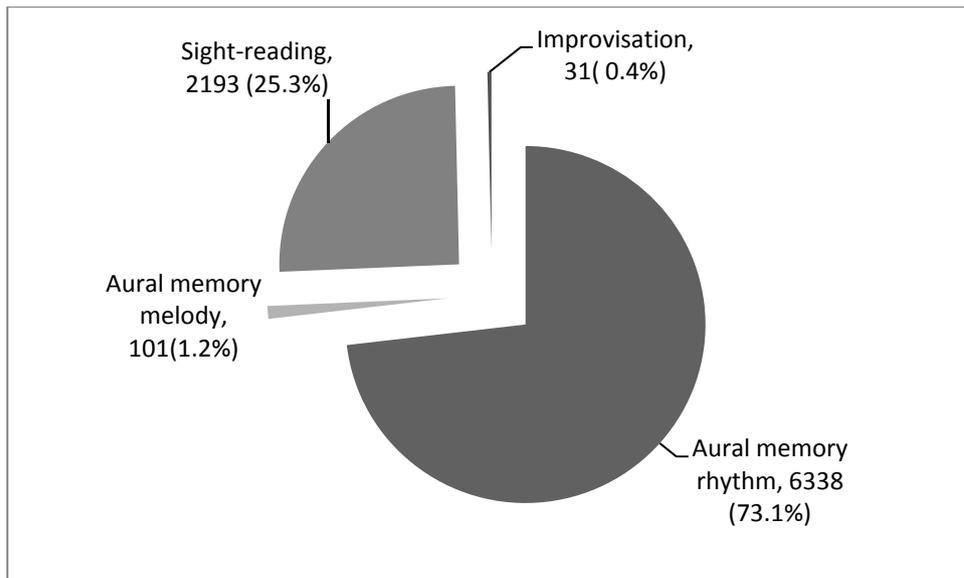
Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
Number	3439	3689	1231	280	22	2	0
Percentage	39.7	42.6	14.2	3.2	0.3	0.02	0

A majority of candidates opted for two activities, with a significant minority opting for one activity. Candidates who selected an incorrect combination of instruments or voices, for example three pieces in one activity and one piece in another, lost marks.



**Figure 3.1:** Number (and percentage) of activities at Higher Level ( $n = 8663$ ), 2012

A large majority of candidates chose the aural memory rhythm unprepared test; a minority chose sight-reading. The most popular instruments were acoustic guitar, piano, violin, flute and descant recorder. A small number of candidates opted for the aural memory melody test and the lowest number of all chose improvisation as their unprepared test.



**Figure 3.2:** Number (and percentage) of unprepared tests at Higher Level ( $n = 8663$ ), 2012

### Prepared performance

Candidates performing on solo instruments gave good to excellent performances. There were some outstanding solo performances. Successful candidates gave confident and convincing performances of pieces they enjoyed, that were well suited to their capabilities and within the required standard. There were some less convincing performances where instruments were not properly in tune.

The standard of solo vocal performances ranged from poor to excellent. High-achieving candidates communicated the music expressively and with confidence in the appropriate style. Problems with intonation, poor diction, insufficient breath control, weak voice projection, inappropriate choices of key and a lack of expression and attention to dynamic detail produced less convincing performances and consequently lower marks. Appropriate accompaniment generally enhanced performances. Backing tracks were popular, but some proved problematic. Tracks of inappropriate duration, insufficient or excessive volume and in unsuitable keys all contributed to less convincing performances.

The standard of class-based group activities was commendable. Both group singing and recorder ensembles in two or three parts were impressive, as were rock bands, traditional groups and percussion ensembles. Some problems with poor intonation, rhythmic difficulties, poor breathing, inappropriate phrasing, minimal group

interaction and evidence of a general lack of preparation contributed to less convincing performances. A small number of candidates failed to make a discernible contribution within their group.

The standard of Irish traditional solo and group performance was excellent. An impressive variety of instruments and regional styles featured.

The general standard of the unprepared tests was good. Marks ranged from poor to excellent. In some cases the standard of the unprepared test did not match the standard of performance.

Most candidates opted for category 7 though category 1 and category 3 were also popular. A majority of candidates chose to perform two pieces in each of two activities. A popular combination was one solo activity and one group activity. Also popular were two different instruments and a combination of instrument and voice. Accompanying was an increasingly popular option. Two activities involving two group performances was a less frequent option.

Candidates scored well when both activities were of an equally high standard. A significant minority chose to perform one activity.

While a broad range of instruments was in evidence, voice, descant recorder, piano, acoustic guitar, violin and flute were the most popular solo activities. Tin whistle was also popular in both traditional and non-traditional performances. Unusual instruments included tuba, euphonium, cornet, tenor horn, ukulele and fife. Voice and descant recorder were the most popular group activities. Unusual groups included djembe and bongo drumming and a samba band.

Traditional players generally opted for one activity under category 7. Some traditional players opted for two activities. A popular combination was one solo activity and one group activity on the same instrument or on two different instruments. Some unusual instruments included the uilleann pipes, banjo, and a bodhrán group.

In general, candidates chose well-balanced, contrasting programmes. A variety of styles was evident. Baroque, classical, contemporary, jazz and blues, rock, traditional, pop, folk, religious music and pieces from musicals all featured. Successful

programmes included a variety of style, tempo and mood. Some candidates displayed an impressive mixture of classical, traditional or jazz styles within the one activity. Less convincing performances featured a lack of variety with some candidates, particularly solo singers, choosing to perform music in one style only. Many solo instrumentalists chose external examination pieces. Some piano instrumentalists chose pieces beyond their range of capability. Traditional programmes usually included a selection of different dance types, marches, planxties and a slow air. Sean-nós songs also featured. A small number of candidates performed their own compositions.

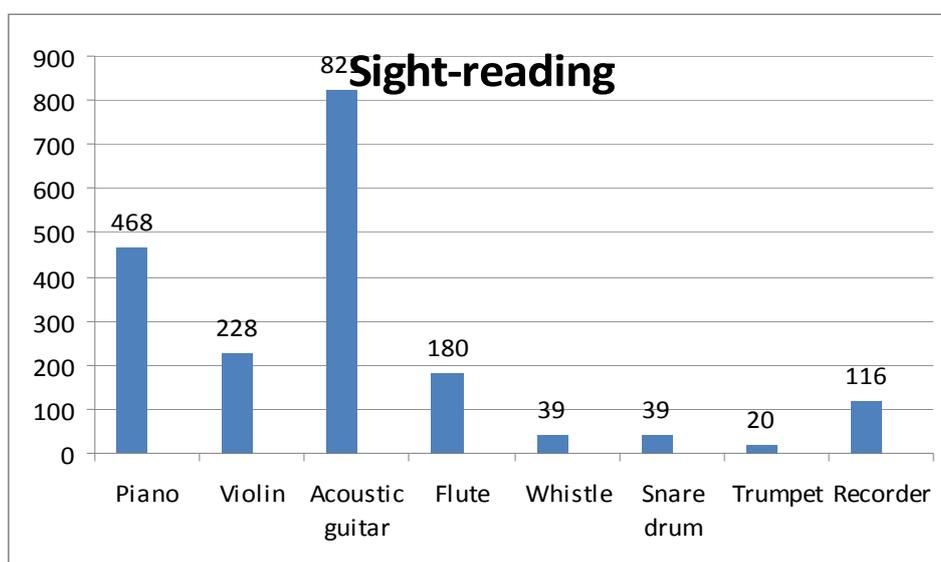
Class-based solo and group activities were drawn mainly from the popular, folk and jazz idioms. In group activities pieces ranged from unison to three-part arrangements of well-known songs and pieces and were enhanced by appropriate accompaniment. Almost all vocalists selected songs from musicals and from the folk and popular traditions. A small number performed classical pieces. Some candidates chose unsuitable popular songs which were beyond their vocal range. Some pieces requiring accompaniment were performed without accompaniment and consequently were not as effective. Backing tracks were used by some singers and recorder players. There were a few problems with backing tracks that were too long or in unsuitable keys. A small number of candidates presented recorder pieces that were too short and consequently gave less convincing performances.

### Unprepared tests

Most candidates opted for the aural memory rhythm test. The standard of responses varied from poor to excellent.

Candidates responded better to tests in 4/4 time. 3/4 tests proved problematic for some. Missing or misplacing the dotted crotchet and quaver rhythm was a common error. Some candidates had difficulty maintaining the correct pulse and some gave incomplete responses or added extra beats to the last bar.

A minority of candidates chose the sight-reading test. Solo instrumentalists favoured this option. The standard was high. Acoustic guitar sight reading was the most popular choice, followed by piano, violin, flute, and descant recorder. Some candidates found the piano sight reading difficult. In general, the rhythmic component of the sight-reading test proved more challenging for some candidates than the melodic. A few candidates opted for the aural memory melody test and for improvisation.



**Figure 3.4:** Number taking sight-reading at Higher Level ( $n = 2193$ ), 2012

### **3.2.2 Conclusions on the performing tests**

- The general standard of performance was high, with most candidates achieving an A or B grade at Higher Level.
- A majority of candidates opted for two activities at Higher Level. Candidates achieved high marks when both activities were of an equally high standard.
- The standard of class-based group activities was commendable. Well-prepared group singing and group playing performances achieved high marks.
- The standard of solo performance was high. There were some outstanding performances.
- The standard of traditional Irish music performance was high.
- Categories 7, 1 and 3 were the most popular, in that order. Category 6 was the least popular.
- In general, candidates performed well-balanced and contrasting programmes. Those who chose pieces of a suitable standard within their range of capabilities scored well.
- Appropriate accompaniment enhanced the performance of candidates. Some backing tracks proved problematic.
- The aural memory rhythm test was the most popular choice of unprepared test. Some candidates found this the most challenging component of the exam. The general standard was good.
- The sight-reading test was favoured by solo instrumentalists. Acoustic guitar sight reading was the most popular. The standard of response was good to excellent.

### **3.2.3 Recommendations for teachers and students**

#### **Recommendations for teachers**

- Candidates should be advised that they must adhere to the requirements of the syllabus. At Higher Level, no combination other than four pieces in one activity or two pieces in each of two Ordinary Level activities is permissible.
- Candidates should be advised that it is better for Higher Level candidates to perform four pieces in one activity than to present a second activity which is of a much lower standard.
- Candidates should be advised that in group activities, the discernible contribution of each member is essential. The inclusion of harmony parts usually enhances a group performance, and allows for the individual contribution of each member to be more discernible. It is advisable for candidates to perform both group pieces within the same group in the examination to avoid confusion.
- Candidates should be advised that candidates do well when performing well-balanced contrasting programmes of style and tempo within their range of ability. Piano players in particular should choose pieces to suit their standard of playing.
- Variety in the programmes of solo vocalists should be encouraged.
- Candidates should be advised that it is important that pieces are not too short for examination purposes.
- Candidates should be advised that in group and solo singing, good tone production, articulation, dynamics, phrasing, diction and expression are all important in delivering a convincing and musical performance. Focusing on the words and the meaning of the song produces a more musically convincing performance.
- Candidates should be advised that in group and solo recorder playing, careful note placement, good breath control and good tone production help to ensure a successful performance with a sense of musical enjoyment.
- Candidates should be advised that it is important for instrumentalists that their instrument is in tune.

- Teachers should encourage vocalists to choose a key that suits their range. Backing tracks can be problematic in this regard. Ensure that the key of the chosen backing track suits the vocal ability of the candidate and that the track is not too long or too loud. Also ensure that the backing track is compatible with the CD player in the examination venue. Midi files can be used as backing tracks.
- Tests are based on three years' class-based teaching. Preparation is essential.
- Teachers should encourage students to explore all the options in the unprepared tests before choosing the option that suits them best.
- Appropriate accompaniment enhances the performance of most candidates. Candidates should be encouraged to practise with the appropriate accompaniment in advance of the examination.
- Encouraging performance in class develops confidence and makes for a less daunting experience in the examination.
- Encouraging students to communicate more with the listener enhances a performance.
- A suitable venue free from disturbances including the school intercom is the best examination venue.

### **Recommendations for students**

- Choose activities that show off your talent and skill.
- Choose pieces that you enjoy playing and play well. Avoid pieces that are too difficult for you, or pieces that are too short.
- Choose and prepare your programme well in advance so that you can give a confident and convincing performance.
- If you are playing a solo instrument rehearse with your accompanist regularly and make sure that your instrument is in tune.
- If you are singing to a backing track, make sure the key suits your voice and that you are able to keep the tempo. Singing with backing tracks requires a lot of practice. Make sure the track is not too long and that the volume suits your

voice. Verify in advance that the backing track works with the CD player you will be using for the examination.

- You can interpret songs your own way; you do not have to copy popular artists. Think about the meaning of the words and try to convey this to the listener.
- If you are singing make sure the examiner can hear every word to fully appreciate your performance. You can give a much more convincing performance if you learn the words by heart. This way you can communicate the music more effectively to the examiner.
- If you are performing in a group, it is essential that the examiner hears your contribution. Do not depend on others. Play your own part with confidence.
- Be familiar with all the options in the unprepared tests. Practise the clapping back with other students. If you play an instrument practise doing sight-reading exercises and consider it as an option. Choose the unprepared test that suits you best.
- Practise performing your pieces in class.
- Aim for a confident performance. This will allow you to communicate the music to the examiner with a real sense of style.
- Listen to your teacher's advice.
- Smile, and try to relax. Think of it as a performance and not as an examination.

### 3.3 Listening, Composing and General Study

#### 3.3.1 Structure of the test

- General
  - Higher Level: nine (or seven) questions, 300 marks
  - Accounts for 75 per cent of the examination
- Listening
  - Higher Level: five questions, 180 marks (30, 30, 40, 40, 40)
- Composing
  - Higher Level: three questions, 100 marks (20, 35, 45), or
  - Higher Level: one question, 100 marks
- General study
  - Higher Level: one question, 20 marks

#### 3.3.2 Question-by-question analysis

Each question is accompanied by the following information: average mark awarded, mark expressed as percentage and the number of attempts ( $n$ ) which made up the sample.

##### Question 1: Set songs

Average mark: 19.6; percentage: 65.3 ( $n$  = random 420)

**A:** Almost all candidates identified Russia as the country of origin and recognised the changes in dynamics and speed that occurred in the first excerpt, “Kalinka.”

**B:** A majority identified *Ottone* as the opera from which the song was taken. A majority failed to give a valid explanation of the term *da capo*.

**C:** A majority of candidates could hear that the voices came in on the second beat. A significant minority had only partial or no understanding at all of the term harmonic *ostinato*, giving answers that lacked clarity or were simply incorrect.

**D:** A majority correctly identified the excerpt from song 2, “Spring.”

## Question 2: Set works

Average mark: 16.9; percentage: 56.3 ( $n = \text{random } 420$ )

**A:** Most candidates correctly identified the *William Tell* overture as the title of the work from which the excerpt was taken, and named Rossini as the composer.

**B:** While most candidates could identify the type of composition as an overture, only a minority could explain their choice, often giving an explanation of programme music instead.

**C:** Almost all candidates correctly named strings and woodwind as the two families of instruments that played in the excerpt.

**D:** Here, most candidates incorrectly referred to the programmatic uses of the terms *sequence* and *tremolo*, rather than explaining the techniques themselves.

**E:** A significant minority correctly identified the direction of the melody as descending and the bass as being ascending. However, there was some confusion over scales and arpeggios. Most were able to correctly identify one feature.

**F:** A majority gave a correct feature of the opening melody in F. Answers included a fanfare, the use of trumpet or brass instruments, and repeated notes. A small number incorrectly gave a feature of the *galop* that followed. A minority identified the second excerpt as the correct one.

## Question 3: Irish music

Average mark: 21.7; percentage: 54.2 ( $n = \text{random } 420$ )

**A:** A majority of candidates correctly identified the dance in the first excerpt as a reel. A minority failed to circle the correct rhythm or to give the correct time signature.

**B:** Most identified the lullaby, with a small number choosing lament as the type of song. A significant minority identified all three features of the performance. The most popular answers were ornamentation, sung in Irish, and guitar accompaniment. A small minority incorrectly gave answers such as nasal tone, flattened seventh, and syncopation. Most candidates correctly identified at least one feature.

**C:** A majority of candidates named two correct melody instruments in excerpt 3. A significant minority chose flute, tin whistle, or accordion. Most noticed the broken chords in the accompaniment.

**D:** Most candidates named Edward Bunting as a collector who attended the Belfast Harp Festival and gave at least one valid point about his contribution to the harping tradition. A majority achieved full marks by giving two points. Only a small number were able to name a harpist (such as Denis Hempson or Arthur O’Neill) who attended the event. A majority of candidates incorrectly named Turlough O’Carolan as having attended the event and lost marks accordingly.

#### **Question 4: Dictation**

Average mark: 23.0; percentage: 57.5 ( $n = \text{random } 420$ )

Staff notation was the choice of most candidates, with a small number opting for a combination of stick notation and tonic sol-fa. Only a few attempted the tonic sol-fa alone. A small number using tonic sol-fa lost marks for notating low *doh* instead of high *doh*.

Most candidates had the required ten notes. Most also had the correct number of bar lines, but some candidates lost marks by failing to put the bar lines in the correct positions. The positioning of the dotted crotchet or quaver directly after the given notes caused some problems. Candidates, in general, achieved higher marks for rhythm than for pitch. Almost all candidates who failed to identify the correct pitch gained some marks for contour.

#### **Question 5: Chosen songs and works**

Average mark: 19.6; percentage: 49.0 ( $n = \text{random } 420$ )

**A:** A majority of candidates correctly named a chosen work and composer to match the given category of illustrative or film music.

**B:** A majority displayed a good knowledge of the named work. A small number did not attempt A or B in this question.

**C:** A significant minority of candidates recognised the homophonic texture of this excerpt, with a minority going on to accurately explain their choice.

**D:** A small number of candidates achieved full marks here. Answers lacked the required detail, including reference to the entry of the clarinet or to a countermelody. A minority obtained some marks for mentioning the polyphonic texture. A lack of understanding of the term *texture* was apparent in the scripts of a minority of candidates, who instead described changes in tempo, articulation, or dynamics.

**E:** Nearly all candidates lost marks here. Most gave a description of the mood or activities they imagined the birds to be engaged in rather than referring to concrete musical features, such as strong accents, repeated notes, trills, increased speed, glissando, or high register. Many gave answers such as “the violins sound like hens.”

**F:** Similarly here, candidates merely described the mood of the music rather than the musical features that created it. Most identified the xylophone or piano instead of the celesta. A small number achieved full marks.

### **Question 6: Triads**

Average mark: 17.5; percentage, 87.5 ( $n = \text{random } 420$ )

A majority of candidates correctly named the three notes at X in the correct order. A small number omitted the sharp on the note F. A majority also correctly identified the triad as D major, while a significant minority identified the triad written on the bass staff. Most candidates selected bar 13 as the bar where the triad fitted the melody. In general, this question was well answered, and most candidates obtained a high mark.

### **Question 7: Melodies**

A few candidates unwisely, perhaps, attempted more than one option in this question.

**A** (*a phrase set to a given text*)

Average mark: 16.1; percentage: 46.0 ( $n = \text{random } 21$ )

A small number of candidates chose this option. Most attempts showed a poor grasp of word-setting or a failure to write the words or syllables under the notes at all. A few failed to end on the tonic.

**B** (*a phrase set to a given opening*)

Average mark: 23.8; percentage: 68.0 ( $n = \text{random } 202$ )

This was the second most popular choice. The majority of candidates wrote careful melodies. They frequently used a sequence in bar 2. A small number of candidates based their melody on a chord sequence. A few strayed out of the given  $3/4$  time signature. Most ended on the tonic and included phrasing.

**C** (*an answering phrase*)

Average mark: 23.3; percentage, 66.6 ( $n = \text{random } 193$ )

This was the most frequently chosen option. Most attempts were melodically careful and rhythmically accurate, but a minority failed to make the answering phrase different from the given phrase. A minority displayed the excellent melodic style and convincing rhythm required to achieve high marks. A few lost marks by failing to end on the tonic or omitting phrasing.

### **Question 8: Chord progressions**

Only a few candidates attempted more than one option, generally A and C.

**A** (*melody and bass notes at cadences for keyboard*)

Average mark: 35.4; percentage: 78.7 ( $n = \text{random } 23$ )

A minority of candidates chose this option. Most achieved high marks. A minority had difficulty with note accuracy, awkward leaps, such as the augmented fourth, spacing, parallel fifths and octaves, and resolution of the leading note, or used second inversions inappropriately.

**B** (*chords at cadences for SATB choir*)

Average mark: 19.0; percentage: 42.2 ( $n = \text{random } 2$ )

A few candidates chose to write for SATB choir. Most knew little about four-part writing and wrote in two parts only, achieving few, if any, marks. Many of these candidates answered all parts of this question.

**C** (*backing chords*)

Average mark: 32.7; percentage: 72.7 ( $n = \text{random } 398$ )

Most candidates opted for this part of the question. A minority achieved full marks. A few candidates omitted either minor symbols or the flat symbol in the appropriate chords. Many candidates lost marks for incorrectly using the chord of Cm in bar 7 and F in bar 9. A minority failed to end with a perfect cadence.

**Question 9: Free composition**

Average mark: 5.5; percentage: 5.5 ( $n = \text{random } 4$ ).

Only one candidate answered this question without answering questions 6, 7, and 8; a small number attempted this question in addition to questions 6, 7, and 8. They displayed no understanding of the requirements of this question and were awarded low marks, which were then disallowed.

### **3.3.3 Conclusions on the Listening, Composing and General Study**

Candidates scored well on knowledge-based questions and prepared questions, for example when asked to give factual information about a collector, or details of their general study. Candidates also did well in multiple-choice questions but fared less well in open questions, such as defining musical terms related to musical excerpts.

In the listening section, a small number achieved full marks in questions 1 and 2, with the former being the better of the two. A minority also achieved high marks in question 3. In question 4, candidates had good rhythmic skills but had difficulty with the melodic aspect of this question. Candidates fared worst in question 5.

Candidates performed best in the composing section, particularly in questions 6 and 8. A minority achieved high marks in question 7.

In the general study, a majority provided well-prepared answers, but a significant minority failed to fully develop their description of the musical features of their chosen topic.

### 3.3.4 Recommendations for teachers and students

#### Recommendations for teachers

- In addition to encouraging active listening to set songs and works, candidates should be encouraged to develop an awareness of terms and signs as they appear in the scores of their set works.
- Teachers should emphasise to candidates the importance of carefully reading questions. Specific features of a **performance** may be required, not a list of general traditional features. Candidates also need to be clear on the difference between **melody** and **accompanying** instruments.
- Candidates should be encouraged to listen to more examples of Irish music. The ability to recognise different types of dance tunes, their time signatures, and a typical bar of rhythm should be developed.
- Practice should be encouraged. It is the key to improving aural skills. This applies to question 4, where candidates struggle with the melodic element of dictation. Weaker candidates should concentrate first on rhythm, the number of notes played, and bar lines. Proceed slowly to introduce movement by step, then by leap.
- Ensure that candidates know the categories of the chosen songs and works in question 5. Make them aware of the difference between concrete musical features and general descriptions of music and its mood or atmosphere. Active listening in the classroom is essential.
- In the composing section, emphasise the importance of verifying the key signature for sharps or flats, labelling minor chords, and including accidentals.
- Work on melody writing. Stress to candidates the importance of having a balance between leaps and movement by step. Candidates should show some creativity, and an underlying harmonic structure is an important factor. Remind candidates not to forget a phrase mark and to end on *doh*, because this is a common reason for loss of marks.
- When preparing for the chord progressions (question 8A and 8B), emphasise the importance of note accuracy, the spacing of parts, the correct use of the leading note, and avoiding awkward leaps and second inversions. When completing

backing chords in 8C, teach candidates to clearly identify the difference between harmony notes and passing notes in order to best find the correct symbol. Remind them not to forget the minor symbol in ii and vi and to always end with a perfect cadence, where appropriate.

- In the general study, ensure that candidates know the category of their chosen topic and that they can describe their features in full detail. A good topic will have sufficient inherent musical features from which to glean interesting and different points of information.

### **Recommendations for students**

- Listen to your set songs and set works as often as possible. Use whatever method helps you most, whether playing CDs, playing MP3 files on your phone, or viewing YouTube performances. Sing or perform when you can.
- The recordings used in the examination are often different from the ones you are used to listening to in class. Listen carefully, as you may hear different features from the ones you are familiar with.
- Be careful not to confuse set songs and works (questions 1 and 2) with chosen songs and works (question 5).
- Be familiar with the characteristics that define different types of Irish traditional **performance**. Be able to recognise the different Irish dances, their time signatures, and a typical bar of rhythm.
- Practise dictation. If you find the melody difficult, concentrate on the rhythm first. Remember that half the marks in question 4 are for rhythm and bar lines. Listen out for the dotted crotchet or quaver. Remember, there are always four bars and ten notes. The melody will end on *doh*, so listen to hear if it's high *doh* or low *doh*.
- Learn basic theory really well, so that in the composition section you'll be comfortable working out key signatures and time signatures, recognising notes on the stave with sharps or flats, writing a scale, and writing melodies using crochets, quavers, minims, etc.
- You have different options in questions 7 and 8. Read these carefully to choose the option most suitable to you.

- The general study is a prepared question. It's your opportunity to impress, so give enough detail.
- Make sure your writing is clear, so that the examiner can read it and give you all the marks you deserve. You may use a pencil when notating music.