



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Music
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the Examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The candidate entries for 2013 remain stable, with the total number of entries for Higher Music in 2013 remaining at over 5,000. The vast majority of candidates continue to opt for the Performing option, and there were 600 entries for the Performing with Technology option.

The standard of candidate performance in the Performing component of the Music with Performing Course has increased slightly, with particularly strong performance shown on Instrument 1. Candidate performance in both sections of the Performing with Technology folio has been maintained with great consistency this year.

There were still a number of referrals to the Principal Assessor regarding the standard of pieces presented, particularly with reference to drum-kit styles and fills, and the number of chords for chordal guitar programmes.

The quality of Technology Folios has also shown a great deal of consistency, indicating that many centres intending to present candidates for the new Music Technology Courses have appropriate resources, and will be well placed to provide a good level of support.

The attainment in the question paper has again shown a steady increase for candidates following both the Performing and the Performing with Technology routes. This suggests that centres and candidates are familiar with both the demands and structure of the question paper, and have benefitted from the increasing number of past papers now available.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Some excellent performances were observed over a range of instrumental categories. The continued support available from Music teaching staff and instrumental staff has again resulted in performances which demonstrate a particularly high level of attainment. The process of sampling of performing programmes now seems to be well embedded in centres in the preparation and administration of this part of the examination.

Candidates' responses in the question paper have generally demonstrated a steady improvement again this year. More candidates responded to all the questions, with fewer candidates leaving questions unattempted.

Candidates generally performed well in the Multiple Choice questions, the Cloze question (Question 7) and the Comparison question (question 8). In the Musical Literacy question (Question 4), candidates performed particularly well in identifying the melodic and rhythmic features, including the melodic interval, transposition into the bass clef and correcting the rhythm.

There also appears to be a clearer understanding of concept knowledge from all levels, as well as more candidates being adept at offering Higher level concepts in their responses to the single word answer type of questions.

Candidates do appear to be approaching the Comparison question with much greater confidence, with fewer candidates placing multiple ticks across the columns. This suggests that centres are preparing candidates well for this question.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Although candidates' responses to the question paper has improved again this year, there are aspects of the question paper that some candidates still find challenging.

In the Multiple Choice questions, and the Comparison question, some candidates still find difficulty in contextualising answers; ticking concepts that are either unrelated, or are unlikely to be found in the same piece of music.

Although responses to both the Musical Map and the Cloze questions were generally good, many candidates still have difficulty in recognising instruments.

Musical styles tended to be identified well, although a number of candidates incorrectly identified Jazz-funk as one of the answers in Question 3.

Identification of harmonic concepts proved to be a particular challenge across the Question Paper. In the Music Literacy question (Question 4), candidates tended to have the greatest difficulty with identifying the chords. Other harmonic concepts that appeared to be particularly challenging were the identification the Dominant 7th chord in Question 5c, as well as the identification of cadences.

Although candidates are approaching the Comparison question (Question 8) with much greater proficiency, some candidates are still placing multiple ticks across the columns.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are again commended for responding so effectively to issues raised in previous External Assessment Reports. Many of the issues raised in recent reports have now been addressed and the improved performance by candidates bears testimony to the work undertaken by centres and candidates. The following advice, therefore, is offered to support centres in further preparing candidates.

Some commercially available drum-kit publications, although produced for particular Graded examinations, may not always contain the requisite number of fills required for SQA examinations. Centres are reminded, therefore, to check the exact number of styles and fills required for drum-kit candidates. Reference should be made to SQA drum-kit repertoire publication for clarification and exemplification of both the number and standard of fills.

Centres are also reminded to check the number of chords required in chordal guitar programmes, bearing in mind that guitar candidates presented at NQ levels still need to demonstrate the full number of chords for the level, even if a mixed programme of chordal guitar and melody guitar is offered. Candidates performing chordal guitar are reminded that they should have a melody to play along with, and should also have at least the melody line available in standard musical notation with the chord symbols clearly indicated. During the performance, the melody can be provided by the teacher, another student, or an audio recording.

In continuing to help the visiting examination to run as smoothly as possible, centres should note that:

- ◆ Candidate Mark Sheets must be completed and be available to the Visiting Assessor at the start of each assessment session (ie morning or afternoon).
- ◆ Details of the instruments or instrument and voice being professed, the pieces to be performed, and all timings of pieces, must be clearly indicated.
- ◆ Candidate Mark Sheets should be completed in pen (not pencil) by centre staff. This Mark Sheet is the formal record of the assessment event and it is very important that it is completed accurately.
- ◆ It is helpful for Visiting Assessors to be given a running order, with approximate timings, at the start of each session

In continuing to help the assessment of the Performing element of the Performing with Technology Folio the run as smoothly as possible, centres are also advised to:

- ◆ Clearly indicate the candidate name(s) and the order of pieces or songs on the CD.
- ◆ Clearly indicate which part is being performed by the candidate, particularly if the candidate is being accompanied by someone playing the same instrument (eg a guitar duet).
- ◆ Ensure that the part being performed by the candidate being assessed is clearly audible.
- ◆ Record each piece or song as an individual track, and avoid recording an entire candidates' programme as one single track.
- ◆ Try to record the pieces or songs on the CD in the same order as they are listed on the Candidate Mark Sheet.
- ◆ Try to have the copies of the sheet music in the corresponding order to both the audio recordings and the Candidate Mark Sheet.

In preparing candidates for the question paper, centres are encouraged to remind candidates of the following:

- ◆ In the Multiple Choice questions, candidates should note carefully exactly how many features should be ticked, and give more consideration to the musical context of the concepts.
- ◆ Make use of a wider variety of resources, including online resources, to practise identification of instruments and recognition of harmonic related concepts (eg chords and cadences).
- ◆ Short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level.

- ◆ In the comparison question, particular attention should be paid to the number of marks available for each column in GRID 2. The number of marks available for each column in GRID 2 (Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2 and Common to both excerpts) clearly indicates how many ticks should be placed in each column.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	5090
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	5091
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	52.5%	52.5%	2673	86
B	26.9%	79.4%	1368	71
C	13.3%	92.7%	678	61
D	3.0%	95.7%	151	51
No award	4.3%	100.0%	221	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.