



## External Assessment Report 2014

|            |        |
|------------|--------|
| 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 number of candidates entered for Higher Music in 2014 has shown an increase from the previous year, with the total number of entries continuing to rise over 5,000. The vast majority of candidates opt for the Performing route, with more than 500 entries for the Performing with Technology option.

The standard of candidates' performance in the Performing component of the Music with Performing route has shown a slight increase on both Instrument 1 and Instrument 2. Candidates' performance in both components of the Performing with Technology Folio has shown a distinct improvement. This indicates that centres are becoming more and more adept at preparing candidates for the Performing with Technology folio.

The improved quality of Technology Folios has also shown that many centres intending to present candidates for the new Music Technology Courses have the appropriate resources and experience to provide a good level of support.

There were, however, a number of referrals to the Principal Assessor regarding Performing programmes. Most of these tended to focus on length of programmes, the standard of pieces presented, drumkit styles and fills, and chordal guitar programmes.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Some excellent performances were noted over a range of instrumental categories. The support available from teaching staff and instrumental staff has continued to result in many performances, on both instruments for the Music with Performing candidates, demonstrating a high level of attainment. Sampling of Performing programmes has been well embedded in the preparation and administration of this part of the exam.

Performing candidates still tend to perform slightly better overall in the question paper than Technology candidates.

Candidates generally performed well in the multiple choice questions and answered the Cloze question well. Questions involving identification of styles, such as Galliard, Jazz-funk, Scottish and Musique concrète, appeared to be well answered. Likewise, questions involving recognition of playing techniques such as pizzicato and tremolo were also well answered.

The music literacy questions were also generally well answered:

- ◆ Question 5: Many candidates correctly inserted the barlines.
- ◆ Question 6: Many candidates correctly identified the interval, chords and inserted the quaver rest in the correct place.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Although, as previously noted, the attainment in Performing has increased, there were a number of referrals to the Principal Assessor. Most of the referrals involved:

- ◆ The length of programmes being short of the required time.
- ◆ Task levels (ie pieces performed not being of the appropriate standard).
- ◆ Drumkit styles and fills being short of the requirements.
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes either not having the appropriate number of chords, or centres not providing an appropriate copy of the music in standard notation.

Certain aspects of the question paper seemed to be demanding for some candidates. In the multiple choice questions, and the comparison question, some candidates still find a challenge in contextualising answers, eg by choosing concepts that are either unrelated, or are unlikely to be found in the same piece, or style, of music.

Question 4: The musical map was generally not well attempted. Candidates had difficulty with instrument recognition, cadence identification and recognition of ornaments.

Question 6 (b): A number of candidates did not make the transposition down an octave clear enough. Common mistakes included not filling in the note head of the crotchet, not making the dot clear enough for the dotted minim, or transposing down two octaves instead of one.

Question 9: The comparison question elicited variable responses, with few candidates gaining maximum marks. A number of candidates either ticked too many answers in one column, or ticked the same concepts across the columns.

## Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are again commended for responding to issues raised in previous external assessment reports. Many of the issues raised in recent reports have 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. Although this advice is based on the current Higher, which will still be offered in 2015, much of it applies equally well to the new Higher Music which will be offered for the first time in 2015.

In preparing candidates' Performing programmes, the following bullet points are offered as a helpful checklist:

- ◆ Ensure that the programme for each instrument is of the appropriate length.
- ◆ Make sure the task level of each piece is appropriate (ie that each piece is of the appropriate standard for Higher).
- ◆ Drumkit programmes must include the appropriate number of styles and fills (five styles with four different fills within each style for Higher). Centres should be aware that some commercially available drumkit publications, although produced for particular graded

examinations, may not always contain the requisite number of fills required for SQA examinations. Please refer to the SQA drumkit repertoire publication, and update letters, for clarification and exemplification of both the number and standard of fills. Judicious cuts or fade-outs (in the case of backing-tracks) may be appropriate to keep within the time limit.

- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes must include the appropriate number of chords (18 chords for Higher). Centres are required to provide music notation for chord guitar pieces. This could simply be a copy of the melodic line which the chordal guitar is accompanying, with the chord name printed above. Tablature alone is not sufficient for examination purposes; neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no music notation.
- ◆ Candidates performing chordal guitar pieces should also have a melody to play along with (played, sung, or from a backing-track). This is essential to provide a context for the performance of the chords.

In continuing to help visiting assessment 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 current Performing with Technology Folio 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 candidate's programme as one single track.
- ◆ Record the pieces or songs on the CD in the same order as they are listed on the Candidate Mark Sheet.
- ◆ Arrange 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 identified, and give consideration to the musical context of the concepts.
- ◆ In music literacy questions, candidates should take great care to ensure that any responses involving music notation are clear and unambiguous (eg filling in of note heads, placing dots after notes and making sure that rests are clear). Using a pen, rather than a pencil, may help to make responses clearer.
- ◆ Make use of a wide variety of resources, including online resources, to practise identification of instruments and recognition of harmonic related concepts (eg chords and cadences) as well as ornaments.
- ◆ 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. Candidates do incur penalties if they tick too many features in one column. Centres presenting the new Higher in 2015 should note that the format of this question, as well as other questions, will be different. Please refer to the new Higher Music Specimen Question Paper (published March 2014).

### **Advice to centres for Exceptional Circumstances**

In submitting evidence for Performing, it is helpful to have an audio recording of the candidate's programme. Many centres are now routinely making audio recording of prelim exams for this eventuality. If an audio recording is not available, centres should submit alternative robust evidence that a candidate has demonstrated attainment at Higher level. This could include a detailed Candidate Mark Sheet showing that the candidate has achieved the Course assessment criteria, as well as meeting the Course requirements both in terms of the task level of each piece and the overall length of the programme. Other evidence could include eg, a detailed Mark Sheet from a graded examination at an appropriate level.

In submitting evidence for the question paper, centres may provide a range of evidence.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2013 | 5091 |
|------------------------------------|------|

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2014 | 5154 |
|------------------------------------|------|

## 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                             | 52.4% | 52.4%  | 2701                 | 69          |
| B                             | 28.6% | 81.0%  | 1474                 | 59          |
| C                             | 12.3% | 93.3%  | 633                  | 50          |
| D                             | 3.0%  | 96.3%  | 153                  | 45          |
| No award                      | 3.7%  | -      | 193                  | -           |

## 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.