



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Music
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 current Higher Music with Performing in 2015 was just over 700, and the entries for Music: Performing with Technology around 100. Although these figures are lower than in previous years, this was entirely to be expected as the vast majority of centres have chosen to offer the new Higher Music and the new Higher Music Technology courses this year.

The vast majority of candidates were still opting for the Performing route.

The standard of candidates' performance in the Performing component of the Music with Performing route continues to be strong, and has remained incredibly stable on both Instrument 1 and Instrument 2. Candidates' performance in both components of the Performing with Technology Folio has also continued to be very stable this year. This suggests that centres have become very adept at preparing candidates for the both the Performing examination and Performing with Technology folio.

The consistent quality of Sound Engineering and Production folios suggests that many centres intending to present candidates for the new Music Technology Course 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 the length of programmes, chordal guitar programmes, use of guitar tablature, and drumkit styles.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Some outstanding performances were noted over a range of instrumental categories. The support available from teaching staff and instrumental tutors has continued to result in many performances, on both instruments for the Music with Performing candidates, demonstrating a high level of attainment. Most candidates were well prepared for the Performing Exam, and a wide range of instrumental combinations was in evidence. There were also many performances in which there was evidence of personalisation and choice in the music performed.

Most centres were also well organised, with paperwork completed and having copies of the music available. Sampling of Performing programmes has also been well embedded within centres in the preparation of candidates for of this part of the exam. It should be noted, however, that there is no sampling requirement for the new Higher.

Most candidates approach the question paper appropriately, with very few examples of 'no responses' or ticking too many answers.

In Question 5 (music literacy question) most candidates correctly identified the rest, the interval and the transposition into bass clef.

Most candidates responded well to Question 8, and answering it appropriately, even if not gaining high marks. Very few candidates ticked too many concepts.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Although it has already been noted that the attainment in Performing has remained very stable, there were still a number of referrals to the Principal Assessor. Most of the referrals involved the following:

- ◆ the length of programmes being short of the required time
- ◆ some programmes exceeding the required time
- ◆ chordal guitar programmes not having the appropriate number of chords
- ◆ chordal guitar programmes with no context for the performance (ie having no melody to accompany or backing track to play along with)
- ◆ guitar programmes that had no copy of music in standard notation, or only in guitar tablature
- ◆ drumkit programmes that did not contain the required number of styles
- ◆ drumkit programmes that did not exhibit 4-way independence in every piece
- ◆ task levels (ie the standard of pieces performed) not being of the appropriate level
- ◆ keyboard programmes with the candidate playing the melody only

Although most candidates approached the question paper appropriately, there were still some questions that proved to be quite challenging:

- ◆ In Question 1, a number of candidates incorrectly identified Mordent as one of the possible answers.
- ◆ Question 2, the 'musical map', posed some challenges with many candidates having difficulty identifying the ornament and string playing concepts.
- ◆ In Question 3(b) a number of candidates did not correctly identify Tritone.
- ◆ Question 5, the music literacy question, drew variable responses. 5(a) appeared to cause some difficulty, with many candidates not correctly identifying the 6/8 time signature. 5(e), inserting the missing notes, and 5(f), identifying the pedal, also appeared to be challenging for a number of candidates.

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 previous 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 was offered for the last time in 2015, much of it applies equally well to the new Higher Music.

Preparing candidates

- ◆ Ensure that the overall programme is of the appropriate length. Judicious cuts may be appropriate to keep within the time limit, as long as this does not lower the task level (ie the technical demands required for Higher).
- ◆ Make sure the task level of each piece is appropriate (ie that each piece is of the appropriate standard for Higher).
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes must include the appropriate number of chords (18 chords for Higher).
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes require music to be provided in standard notation. This could simply be a copy of the melodic line which the chordal guitar is accompanying, with the chord named printed above. Tablature alone is not sufficient for examination purposes; neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no music notation.
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes require a context for the performance (ie 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.
- ◆ Drumkit programmes must include the appropriate number of styles and fills (five different styles with four different fills within each style for Higher). Reference should be made to the SQA Style Bank for drumkit for a list of acceptable styles. Centres should be aware that some commercially-available drumkit publications, although produced for particular graded examinations, may not always contain the number of fills required for SQA examinations. Reference should be made 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.
- ◆ Drumkit programmes must exhibit 4-way independence in every piece.
- ◆ Keyboard programmes must include both right and left hand in performance.

Visiting assessment

- ◆ 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.

Question paper

- ◆ 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. With the advent of e-marking,

markers are now marking from scanned images of candidates' responses. It is particularly important, therefore, that candidates make all written responses as clear as possible.

- ◆ 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 continue to specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ Centres presenting the new Higher for the first time next year should note that the format of some questions will be different. Centres are advised to refer to the Specimen Question Paper and Exemplar Question Paper for examples of the new question styles.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	5154
Number of resulted entries in 2015	849

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	59.7%	59.7%	507	70
B	22.3%	82.0%	189	60
C	14.6%	96.6%	124	50
D	2.2%	98.8%	19	45
No award	1.2%	-	10	-

The intention was to set a similar grade boundary to last year. The Course Assessment functioned as intended therefore grade boundaries were set at the notional values of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A.

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.