



## Course Report 2015

|         |              |
|---------|--------------|
| Subject | Music        |
| Level   | Higher (new) |

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

## **Section 1: Comments on the Assessment**

### **Component 1: Performance**

The Performance component is assessed by an SQA Visiting Assessor. Candidates perform live a programme of music totalling 12 minutes between two instruments, or one instrument and voice. Each piece is marked out of 10, using clear performance criteria. Marks are then aggregated to award each candidate a mark out of 30 for each instrument. Candidates, therefore, receive a mark out of 60 for this component.

All Visiting Assessors attend a training event at which performance standards over a range of instrumental categories and levels (including National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) are exemplified. All Visiting Assessors also take part in a Standardisation exercise to ensure consistency in the application of the assessment criteria.

The assessment of the Performance component has remained remarkably consistent over the last few years.

### **Component 2: Question paper**

The question paper is a one-hour examination based on recorded excerpts of music. Candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a range of music concepts, and music literacy, in a variety of musical contexts. 40 marks are available for the question paper.

Markers for the question paper attended a full day training meeting, at which standards were clearly exemplified through reference to candidates' responses. As the question paper was marked online, Markers were also required to work through a number of practice scripts and qualifications scripts before proceeding to live e-marking. Markers were also well supported, and monitored, throughout the marking process by Team Leaders and the Principal Assessor. This meant that the quality assurance was extremely robust.

Again, the marking of the question paper has remained extremely consistent over the last few years.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Component 1: Performance**

The standard of candidates' performance in the Performance component continues to be strong, and has remained incredibly consistent on both Instrument 1 and Instrument 2.

Visiting Assessors, and teachers in centres, welcomed the opportunity for candidates to perform their entire programmes and choose the order of their pieces, rather than having the programmes sampled.

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.

## **Component 2: Question paper**

Centres appear to be well aware of requirements for the new exam. Candidates also appear to have been generally well prepared for the requirements and layout of the question paper. This suggests that they have benefitted from the Specimen question paper and Exemplar question paper that have already been made available to centres.

## **Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Component 1: Performance**

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, demonstrating a high level of attainment. Most candidates were well prepared for the Performance exam and a variety of instrumental combinations were evident. There were also many performances in which there was evidence of personalisation and choice in the music performed.

### **Component 2: Question paper**

Most candidates appeared to approach the question paper appropriately. Very few candidates made the error of providing additional answers/ticks. The approach appears to have been better than in previous years, suggesting that centres have made good use of the Specimen Question Paper and Exemplar Question Paper in preparing candidates for the first year of the new question paper.

Question 4, the music literacy question, drew variable responses. In Question 4 (a) the octave transposition and 4(b) the interval identification were generally answered well.

Question 7 was answered very well by the majority of candidates.

Question 9 was also generally answered well.

## **Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: Performance**

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 programme with the candidate playing the melody only.

## **Component 2: Question paper**

While most candidates did appear to be well prepared for the question paper, there were still some questions that proved to be quite challenging.

Question 2 appeared to be challenging to candidates, with some finding difficulty with instrument recognition, texture, and recognition of the Diminished 7th chord.

In Question 3 (b) some candidates did not correctly identify Recitative, and in 3 (c) Added 6th proved to be difficult for some candidates.

Question 4, the music literacy question drew variable responses. Question 4 (c), inserting the flat sign, 4 (d), inserting the correct notes and 4 (f) chord recognition were generally not answered well.

Question 6 was generally well attempted; although a small number of candidates adopted a 'scattergun' approach, simply listing large numbers of concepts. Some candidates also identified concepts that were not in the categories provided or used terms such as 'drums' instead of 'drumkit'.

Question 8, the new style of comparison question, appeared to be fairly challenging overall, with few candidates achieving maximum marks. However, there did not appear to be any pattern to the choice of candidate responses.

Some candidates were also offering concepts such as *Consort*, *Sprechgesang* and *Hemiola*, which are no longer on the concepts list for Higher.

## **Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: Performance**

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.

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

- ◆ 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 drum-kit for a list of acceptable styles. Centres should be aware that some commercially available drum-kit 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 drum-kit 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 four-way independence in every piece.
- ◆ Keyboard programmes must include both right and left hand in performance.

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.

## Component 2: Question paper

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. 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.
- ◆ In the question requiring candidates to identify the 'most prominent concepts', candidates should be encouraged to focus specifically on identifying concepts under the given headings. Candidates should be discouraged from adopting a 'scattergun' approach by simply listing large numbers of concepts, and not really identifying the 'prominent' concepts.
- ◆ Make use of a wide variety of resources, including online resources, to practise identification of instruments and recognition of harmonic-related concepts (eg types of chords, ornaments and cadences) as well completing missing notes and rhythms.
- ◆ 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 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 | 0    |
| Number of resulted entries in 2015 | 4340 |

## 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                             | 50.7% | 50.7%  | 2202                 | 70          |
| B                             | 30.4% | 81.1%  | 1319                 | 60          |
| C                             | 13.2% | 94.4%  | 575                  | 50          |
| D                             | 2.8%  | 97.2%  | 121                  | 45          |
| No award                      | 2.8%  | -      | 123                  | 0           |

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional values of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

## 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.