



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Music
Level	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

Candidate entries for 2011, while slightly lower than last year, were still the second highest over the last four years. The majority of candidates opted for the Music: Performing route.

The preparation and improvement in performance in the external components of the Higher Music examination identified over the last few years have been maintained. There appears to be a more consistent application by centres of the advice offered since the start of the reviewed Courses in Music. Attainment in the Performing examination, the Performing with Technology folio, and the Question Paper, has been maintained with a high level of consistency.

Almost all of the candidates presented for the Higher Music Performing exam were presented at the correct NQ level, although there were still a number of referrals to the Principal Assessor regarding the standard of pieces presented, particularly the number of styles for drum-kit and the number of chords in a chordal guitar programme.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The continued support available from teaching staff and instrumental tutors has again resulted in generally consistently high attainment in the Performing component of the exam, with some excellent performances exhibited in a range of instrumental categories.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Generally, candidates' responses in the Higher Question Paper continue to be encouraging. There appears to be a better understanding and application of concept knowledge from Access 3 to Intermediate 2 levels, although some candidates are still offering answers to the open questions with concepts below Higher level. Centres are reminded that questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will examine concepts introduced at Higher level.

Some aspects of the musical literacy question still require more focus in preparing candidates for the demands of the paper. While more candidates appeared to identify bass clef notes and the melodic interval with greater confidence, other parts of this question drew more variable responses. The correction of rhythm, completion of missing notes, and identification of chord changes continue to be challenging for a number of candidates. Candidates should be aware that each part of the question needs to be completely correct to gain the mark. Candidates do not get credit for partly correct responses.

Candidates do, however, appear to be approaching the comparison question with greater confidence, with fewer candidates placing multiple ticks across the columns.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are commended for the effectiveness of their responses to the issues raised in external assessment reports over the last few years. Most 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 is offered to support centres in preparing candidates. 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 an assessment session (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 a requirement that Visiting Assessors be given a running order, with approximate timings, at the start of a session.

In a few cases, prepared performing programmes were short of the minimum time required. Centres are also reminded to check the exact number of drum-kit styles required and the number of chords required in chordal guitar programmes.

In preparing candidates for the Question Paper, centres are encouraged to remind candidates of the following:

- ◆ Short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will examine concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ In the Musical Literacy question, each part of the question needs to be completely correct to gain a mark. No half marks are awarded for partly correct answers.
- ◆ In the comparison question, particular attention should be paid to the number of ticks required in GRID 1 and 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 2010	4597
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	4585
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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	44.2%	44.2%	2026	70
B	30.4%	74.6%	1396	60
C	17.1%	91.8%	786	50
D	3.8%	95.5%	172	45
No award	4.5%	100.0%	205	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.