



Course report 2019

Subject	Music
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Performance

Candidates were well prepared for the performance component and, as in previous years, most candidates demonstrated very good levels of skills in this area.

Portfolio

Candidates composed in a wide variety of styles and genres. Personalisation and choice continues to be very evident in this component.

Candidates performed slightly better this year than in previous years.

Question paper

The question paper performed in line with expectations. Markers reported that it was a fair and balanced paper, challenging in some areas but with an appropriate level of demand. The paper provided opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their subject knowledge and music theory/notation skills. Most candidates attempted every question.

In general, candidates were well prepared for the question paper. Responses to some literacy-based questions (in particular, inserting the missing notes) were better than previous years.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Performance

The overall standard of performances was very high, and there were many outstanding performances. Many candidates played pieces well above the minimum requirements. Personalisation and choice was evident in many candidates' programmes.

Most centres used the drum kit style bank and offered an appropriate spread and number of drum kit styles.

Most guitar chordal programmes were also presented correctly, contained 18 chords and incorporated a melody along with chordal accompaniment in one piece.

Vocal programmes were mainly performed from memory, with candidates choosing songs appropriate for their musical and technical skills.

Portfolio

Some candidates displayed considerable skill and imagination in their pieces, writing coherently, stylistically and imaginatively for their chosen instrument(s). A wide range of marks was achieved with some very impressive submissions. Some candidates submitted portfolios which included compositions for a variety of instruments and in different genres. Some candidates provided good evidence to support the compositional process, with informative and illuminating programme note(s), session log(s) and performance plan(s) or score(s). Some also made good use of technology and media files.

Question paper

Many candidates approached the paper appropriately and were well prepared for the requirements and format of the question paper.

Questions 1(a) and 5(a), multiple-choice questions, were answered well.

Question 1(d), which asked candidates to identify the correct version of a vocal part, was answered very well.

Questions 2(a)(ii), where candidates had to name the chord outlined, was answered well by the majority of candidates, and question 4(b)(ii), which asked candidates to write the enharmonic equivalent of a given note, was answered quite well by many candidates.

Question 3(a) part 2, which asked candidates to identify the texture, and question 3(a) part 4, which asked for the type of group playing, were both answered very well, as was question 3(b), which asked candidates to identify the form (fugue).

This year, more candidates were able to correctly identify a Tierce de Picardie in question 3(c) than last year.

There was a noticeable improvement in the standard of responses in the literacy-based question 4(a)(i), which asked candidates to insert the missing notes, compared with the equivalent question last year. Most, but not all, candidates wrote and placed rhythms, notes and accidentals accurately.

Question 4(c) asked candidates to explain the effect of the *8vb* sign below two tied notes. Many candidates answered this question well, although some, who had not read the stem of the question with sufficient care, incorrectly offered a description of the tied notes.

Question 5(b) was well done this year, with many candidates recognising the use of irregular time signatures or time changes.

Overall, candidates appeared to have quite a good understanding of the requirements of question 6. This was particularly evident in question 6(a)(i), where many candidates were able to provide a good number of concepts relevant to the music under the given headings. Markers also commented that some candidates answered question 6 confidently, with hardly any writing down concepts indiscriminately. Markers also noted that some candidates were able to make good comparisons between the excerpts.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Performance

Some candidates' performance programmes did not meet the required time allocation of 18 minutes. The minimum requirement is 18 minutes between the two instruments (the maximum is 20 minutes). The minimum time on one instrument is 6 minutes and the maximum time is 12 minutes. Other combinations are acceptable, for example 9 and 9, 7 and 11, 8 and 10.

Chordal guitarists did not always meet the requirements as some did not incorporate a melody along with chordal accompaniment in at least one piece.

Some drum kit candidates' programmes did not demonstrate four-way independence in all styles.

Some keyboard players did not demonstrate full fingered chords. At Advanced Higher level, candidates must play fully fingered chords throughout their entire keyboard programme.

Portfolio

Marks are awarded for developing and refining musical ideas in music that is original to the candidate, as well as for the creative and assured use of compositional methods and music concepts including melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and timbre.

Some candidates' work demonstrated a lack of harmonic awareness which hindered the development of their ideas.

Some candidates should give more attention to writing stylistically and within the range of the chosen instruments. Some of the most successful compositions showed considerable development and refinement of musical ideas but were not scored for a large number of instruments. Equally, candidates who wrote for instruments they were familiar with wrote more fluently and stylistically. Some candidates who wrote outwith the instrument range, displayed a lack of knowledge of the instrument they were writing for.

Programme notes should concentrate on the musical elements of the composition, including explaining how candidates used and developed these elements. While many programme notes were relevant and coherent, a few lacked focus, or did not give detail about the musical content (especially the harmony) and how it had been developed.

Question paper

While many candidates appeared to be well prepared for the question paper, there were still some questions that proved to be quite challenging. While the Advanced Higher question paper focuses on concepts from the upper levels of national qualifications (NQs), candidates may encounter concepts from all NQ levels, and from all styles. There was some evidence this year that not all candidates were prepared for concepts such as recitative, oratorio or soul, which are Higher level concepts.

Less than half of candidates were able to identify recitative, obbligato and oratorio in questions 1(b), 1(c) and 1(f). Centres should remind candidates that these types of short- or one-word-answer questions always test either Higher or Advanced Higher concepts.

Question 2(a)(i), which asked candidates to insert the missing rests, proved challenging for many candidates, who found it difficult to insert the correct rests in the time signature of 12/8.

Question 2(b), which asked candidates to describe the overall tonality (polytonal or bitonal), also proved challenging; many candidates incorrectly gave atonal as their answer. Questions such as this, which rely on harmonic awareness, were generally less well done and centres could focus on this when preparing candidates for future examinations.

Question 3(a) part 1 proved to be challenging for many candidates who were unable to identify the pedal. The stem of the question asked candidates to focus on the harmonic feature. Some candidates had not read the stem with sufficient care; these candidates incorrectly offered inappropriate concepts relating to rhythm or string technique. Some also had difficulty naming the imperfect cadence in question 3(a) part 3.

Question 4(a)(ii), which asked candidates to identify the interval (tritone or augmented 4th), proved challenging; many candidates just described the interval as a 4th.

In question 4(b)(i), some candidates found inserting the missing accidental demanding; not all of them took care to write and place the sharp sign accurately.

Although question 4(c), which asked candidates to explain the effect of the *8vb* sign below two tied notes, was answered well by many candidates, some — who had not read the stem of the question with sufficient care — incorrectly offered a description of the tied notes.

In question 5(c) some candidates did not correctly identify the style of the music as soul.

In question 6(a)(ii), some candidates found it challenging to identify concepts relating to melody/harmony. Centres should remind candidates that — as well as major and minor — concepts relating to melody and harmony include sequence, pedal and syllabic. In this case, sequence, pedal and syllabic would have been correct answers.

Although many candidates were able to provide a relevant and detailed response in their extended answer for question 6(b)(i), some did not provide details of the type of work (Mass) for both excerpts. Instead, they gave this information in question 6(b)(ii) where it was not credited. In this part of the question, candidates should be paying close attention to the detail of the music they have heard. For example, excerpt 1 contained both homophony and polyphony, whereas excerpt 2 contained only homophony. Similarly, excerpt 1 featured modulation — with the music moving gradually to a new key — while excerpt 2 featured abrupt changes of key. Candidates who simply wrote that both excerpts featured modulation did not give the full picture and were therefore not credited.

In question 6(b)(ii) some candidates had difficulty identifying the style and/or period, or providing an appropriate justification which pinned down which period the music came from. Some candidates did not appear to be drawing together their findings from the earlier parts of the question to come to an insightful conclusion.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Performance

Centres should have completed candidate mark sheets and have copies of the music ready for the visiting assessor (VA) at the start of each morning and afternoon session. When timetabling performance exams, it is helpful if centres consider the time allocated for each candidate performance in order to make the best use of the VA's time in each centre.

Some candidates' performance programmes were under or over the required time allocation. The minimum requirement is 18 minutes between the two instruments (the maximum is 20 minutes). The minimum time on one instrument is 6 minutes, and the maximum time is 12 minutes.

Centres are encouraged to annotate scores to match performances, and are reminded that they may use backing tracks, especially where no suitable accompaniment is available.

Chordal guitarists should incorporate a melody along with chordal accompaniment in at least one piece. In programmes that combine melodic and chordal guitar, candidates should demonstrate the full number of chords (18).

Most centres identified guitar programmes as chordal, melodic or mixed on the candidate mark sheet. Centres should ensure candidate mark sheets clearly identify guitar programmes as chordal or melodic.

Some centres offered the VA tablature for guitar programmes. This alone is insufficient for external assessment. Centres must provide standard notation for the VA, whether the candidate is playing from tablature or not.

With chordal guitar programmes, centres must provide a copy of the melodic line that the chordal guitar is accompanying. This provides a context for the chords.

Drum kit programmes must include six different styles, with four different fills within each style. Each piece must exhibit four-way independence. Candidates choosing to contain two styles within one piece should note that double the requisite number of fills are not necessary. Only one piece within the programme may contain two styles.

For drum kit performances, it is helpful if the candidate mark sheet clearly indicates which style each piece contains, not simply the title of the piece. Centres should refer to SQA's style bank for drum kit for a list of acceptable styles.

Centres are reminded that the minimum requirement for notated music for drum kit is four bars of groove and four fills with a performance plan/map.

For keyboard, full finger chords are mandatory at Advanced Higher.

For recorder, Advanced Higher candidates must present a programme that includes performances on both C and F recorders, for example descant and treble recorders or tenor and treble recorders.

If a candidate is unable to sit the performance exam due to health reasons or other exceptional circumstances, SQA will try to arrange an alternative date for the candidate to sit the exam. If this is not possible, centres must submit evidence of the candidate's attainment in performance. Centre staff should submit an audio or video recording of as much of the candidate's programme as possible, along with copies of the music and the marks awarded for all the pieces performed. Many centres routinely make audio recordings of prelim exams for this eventuality. If centres do not have an audio recording of the candidate's performance programme, they should submit alternative evidence that the candidate has demonstrated attainment at Advanced Higher level. Other supplementary evidence may include a certificate from a graded examination at an appropriate level.

Portfolio

The structure of the course will change from session 2019-20. Centres should ensure they are familiar with the requirements of the new course (Advanced Higher Music — portfolio option course code: C878 77). The Advanced Higher course specification and the Advanced Higher Music coursework assessment task contain details of the new course.

An Understanding Standards pack is available on SQA's secure site. It contains evidence of Advanced Higher compositions, arrangements and analyses, together with commentaries on how they have been marked. Further material exemplifying the standard will be published during the session 2019-2020.

Centres should consider how best they can support candidates with their harmonic understanding, particularly if candidates are going to write tonal music. An increased awareness of the harmonic language used would benefit candidates, both in this part of the course and in the question paper.

Candidates should not spend time writing about the programmatic content of their piece. Instead, they should concentrate on the main decisions they made regarding their use of all the musical elements in their compositions, and explaining how they explored and developed these musical elements.

When constructing a review of their composition(s)/arrangements(s), candidates should use the analytical skills developed in other parts of the course and apply these skills of critical reflection when considering the strengths and/or areas for improvement in their composition/arrangement.

Question paper

To help prepare candidates for the question paper, teachers and lecturers should consider the following advice and possible strategies for effecting improvement.

Short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will continue to specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher or Advanced Higher level. For example, questions 5(b) and 5(c) in this year's question paper tested two Higher concepts — irregular time signatures and soul music. This does not apply to the 'map' question (question 3(a) in the 2019 Advanced Higher question paper).

Centres should encourage candidates to read the stem of the question carefully. Some candidates lost marks because they did not do this.

There was an improvement this year in the standard of responses to the literacy-based question involving the insertion of missing notes. Overall, however, all types of questions testing melodic and harmonic awareness — for example intervals, cadences, pedal and polytonal/bitonal — were not well answered. Centres should provide frequent opportunities for candidates to listen to performances, using scores where possible, in order to promote literacy skills and develop aural perception and discrimination. Regularly giving candidates the opportunity to relate what they hear to what they see will directly benefit candidates' attainment in these types of questions.

In question 6(a)(i) and (a)(ii) there were again fewer instances of candidates giving long lists of unrelated or contradictory concepts. However, centres should continue to remind candidates that their responses should contain the prominent concepts under each category relating to the music heard.

In question 6(a) and (b)(i), centres should encourage candidates to focus on identifying concepts or similarities/differences under the given headings. They should also advise candidates that in question 6(b)(i), the number of similarities and differences will vary depending on the musical excerpts; for example, there may be more differences than similarities, or vice versa.

In question 6(b)(i), centres should advise candidates to avoid writing contradictory concepts unless both concepts are, in fact, present. For example, excerpt 2 was syllabic throughout but some candidates offered both syllabic and melismatic for this excerpt.

In question 6(b)(ii), some candidates found it difficult to justify their answers and, in some instances, provided a response which did not specifically identify the features unique to the style/period they were referring to. Centres should work with candidates to ensure they use the evidence they gave in earlier parts of the question to point the way to a period of music, and provide relevant justifications. Candidates should focus more on providing the period of music for each excerpt (for example Renaissance, Baroque, Classical) and then provide a justification which identifies the features in each excerpt that are unique to the style/period to which they have referred.

Centres should also remind candidates that identifying the type of work will not be credited in question 6(b)(ii), but should form part of their answer for question 6(b)(i).

Centres should encourage candidates to listen to as wide a range of music as possible, and consider more closely what characterises a particular period of music. For example, with reference to excerpt 1 in question 6(b)(ii), the use of plainchant does not necessarily mean that a piece of music is from the Renaissance period or earlier. Candidates need to listen to the excerpt as a whole before deciding on the period, which was Baroque. Similarly, some candidates were perhaps expecting to hear a harpsichord before writing Baroque, but not all Baroque music uses a harpsichord. Candidates may find it helpful to look at the detailed additional guidance for questions 6 (b)(i) and (ii) at the back of the Advanced Higher question paper marking instructions (available on SQA's Advanced Higher Music web page). Centres are encouraged to access the marking instructions for past question papers and the specimen question paper. These provide considerable detail regarding acceptable answers for all questions.

If centres are submitting exceptional circumstance evidence for the question paper, the assessment papers used for prelim-type events should replicate the course assessment in terms of question type and mark allocation. Centres should also submit a full copy of the marking instructions, even if questions are drawn from SQA specimen or past question papers.

When preparing prelim and listening assessments, centres must consider the following:

- ◆ A past paper or specimen question paper in its entirety must not be the only evidence submitted for exceptional circumstances consideration. These papers are accessible on SQA's website and therefore candidates may be familiar with the content prior to assessment.
- ◆ Class tests or other forms of evidence must demonstrate that candidates have knowledge and understanding of concepts appropriate to the course assessment.
- ◆ Some questions from older past papers may not provide the appropriate scope, coverage or balance, and may need to be amended.
- ◆ The marking instructions used for centre-devised assessments should reflect the marking instructions used in the final exam. Half marks are not used. Examples of marking instructions for past papers are available on SQA's website.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1712
Number of resulted entries in 2019	1698

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	54.1%	54.1%	919	70
B	24.0%	78.2%	408	60
C	13.9%	92.0%	236	50
D	3.7%	95.7%	62	45
No award	4.3%	-	73	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.