



Course report 2019

Subject	Music
Level	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

Question paper

The question paper performed in line with expectations. Marker feedback and statistical analysis indicate that it was a fair paper with a good spread of coverage of concepts at an appropriate level of demand. The majority of candidates attempted all questions. Some questions were accessible to all candidates, while others were more challenging.

Assignment

Most of the music composed by candidates for their assignment was of a satisfactory standard. A few compositions were highly creative and effective.

Most of the composing reviews gave a satisfactory account of the main decisions made, and strengths and/or areas for improvement. Some candidates found the explanation of their exploration and development of musical ideas challenging.

Performance

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

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Most candidates demonstrated familiarity and knowledge of question types and displayed appropriate exam technique.

Candidates answered questions 1(a) and question 6(a), multiple choice questions, well.

Question 1(b) asked candidates to identify recitative. Many candidates answered this quite well.

Candidates answered question 2.2, part of a sequential listening question, well. They were asked to identify glissando.

Candidates answered question 3(b) very well. They were asked to identify an interval of a 5th.

Candidates answered question 7, identifying the prominent features, quite well. This type of question was answered much better than in previous years, with only a tiny number of candidates providing extensive lists of contradictory concepts.

Assignment

Some candidates composed pieces of a good to excellent standard. These candidates imaginatively developed a range of musical ideas, and selected and used elements creatively.

Some candidates who chose instrumental or vocal forces, and a style that they were familiar with, achieved higher marks. Many candidates who wrote for one or a small number of instruments were successful.

In the composing reviews, most candidates wrote a satisfactory account of their main decisions. Some candidates accurately identified their strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Performance

Most candidates were well prepared and many performances were of a high standard.

Personalisation and choice were evident in most candidates' programmes, and a wide variety of instruments were presented with a range of musical styles. Many candidates opted to perform pieces above the minimum requirements and performed very well.

Most candidates performing on drum kit used the drum kit style bank.

Many performances on orchestral instruments were of a very high standard.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Some candidates found the following questions challenging:

- ◆ Question 2 part 3 asked candidates to identify the lowest instrument in a sequential listening question. This was challenging for many candidates; they were unable to identify a double bass.
- ◆ Question 2 part 5 asked candidates to identify passacaglia in a sequential listening question. This was very challenging for most candidates.
- ◆ Question 3(a) asked candidates to insert a 6/8 time signature. Most candidates did not listen and look carefully enough to the whole excerpt to identify the correct time signature.
- ◆ Question 3(c) asked candidates to insert chords. Many candidates found this challenging.
- ◆ Question 3(f) asked candidates to transpose a bar down an octave from treble to bass clef. Many candidates did not take enough care to copy the tie.
- ◆ Question 4(b) asked candidates to identify the style. Many candidates found this challenging; they were unable to identify either sonata or chamber music.
- ◆ In question 6, a multiple choice question, although most candidates correctly identified harpsichord, many wrongly assumed that Baroque was a correct answer. Candidates should listen carefully to the style of the music.
- ◆ Question 8 asked candidates to insert identified concepts in to a song. This was challenging for some candidates.

Assignment

Many candidates' compositions did not demonstrate successful development of their musical ideas appropriate to their chosen style.

Many candidates who wrote for instruments that they were unfamiliar with, did not demonstrate effective instrumental writing.

Many candidates who wrote for a large number of instruments were less successful.

In the composing review, many candidates had difficulty describing their exploration and development of musical ideas. Many candidates showed limited identification of strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Performance

Some programmes did not meet the minimum time requirements of one instrument, although the overall performance time was appropriate. Some programmes did not meet the minimum time requirement of 12 minutes overall. Where judicious cuts had been made to accommodate timings, some candidates were playing sections of music below the minimum requirements (Grade 4 or above).

Some candidates who played chordal guitar programmes played the pieces without providing a melody line to allow the performance to be heard in context. Some chordal guitar candidates did not demonstrate the 18 chords required.

Some drum kit programmes did not meet the minimum required number of fills. Some drum kit candidates did not select their five styles from the drum kit style bank and did not demonstrate four-way independence in every style.

Some candidates performed keyboard programmes without left-hand chords.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the specimen question paper and recent past papers for examples of the question styles and marking instructions.

The following advice may help to prepare candidates for the question paper:

- ◆ In multiple choice questions, candidates should listen carefully to the excerpt and consider the musical context to avoid choosing concepts that are clearly unrelated.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) specifically examine concepts at Higher level. This does not apply to the sequential listening question (question 2 in the 2019 Higher question paper).
- ◆ In music literacy questions, a time signature written as a fraction is not accepted.
- ◆ In transposition questions from treble to bass clef, candidates should ensure that all of the relevant notation, such as ties or accidentals, is copied in to the bass clef at the appropriate place.
- ◆ In the question that requires candidates to identify the prominent concepts, they should be aware that the headings may change from year to year depending on the musical excerpt. Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that:
 - their responses should contain the prominent concepts under each heading relating to the music heard
 - extensive lists of concepts unrelated to the music and/or extensive lists of contradictory concepts will result in penalties being applied
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should give candidates regular opportunities to listen to performances using scores, where possible, to promote literacy skills and develop aural perception and discrimination.

If centres are submitting exceptional circumstance evidence for the question paper, the assessment papers used for prelim-type events should replicate the question type and mark allocation from the course assessment. 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 information:

- ◆ A past paper or specimen question paper in its entirety cannot be the only evidence submitted for exceptional circumstances. These papers are accessible on the SQA 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 can be found on the SQA website.

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the Understanding Standards materials on SQA's secure website for a range of approaches and development ideas for the Higher Music assignment. The following advice may help to prepare candidates for the composition:

- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to develop ideas creatively as the music progresses, within the context of their chosen style.
- ◆ In order for candidates to demonstrate creativity, teachers and lecturers should avoid a structured template approach to composition. Candidates who were allowed to choose the style and instrumentation of their composition often achieved higher marks.
- ◆ Candidates must use at least four musical elements from melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and timbre, one of which must be harmony. Markers award 0 marks to a piece that has no harmony.
- ◆ Candidates who choose to work with pre-recorded loops or electronic music must ensure that they do this in the context of a wider composition, and show the compositional process. Candidates must clearly identify their actual creative input in their composing review. For example, if they select a chord progression but use an electronic programme to devise an accompaniment, they must indicate this in their review.
- ◆ A composition may contain sections of improvisation, but this must be in the context of a wider composition that demonstrates composing skills. Markers award 0 marks to a piece that is solely an improvisation.
- ◆ Candidates should submit either a score or performance plan. Performance plans should be clear and informative, with a well-defined harmonic framework to inform the marking process.
- ◆ A composition that is submitted solely using tablature (TAB) is not sufficient. Candidates should submit a score or performance plan showing the harmonic framework. A performance plan that includes, for example, a guitar riff in TAB within a harmonic framework is acceptable.
- ◆ The composed music should be within the stated times (1 minute to 3 minutes 30 seconds).
- ◆ Audio files should be clearly labelled with candidate names.
- ◆ Candidates must not submit an arrangement of someone else's piece of music.

The following advice may help to prepare candidates for the composing review:

- ◆ Candidates must clearly identify their input, for example, has an accompaniment part been realised by someone else.
- ◆ Candidates must include the main decisions they made, how they explored and developed their musical ideas, and their strengths and/or areas for improvement. Candidates must give a minimum of two strengths and/or areas for improvement. These should ideally refer to musical aspects rather than the candidate's feelings, for example, 'the modulation to the relative minor contrasts well with the preceding section'.
- ◆ It must be individual to each candidate and be their own work.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should check that reviews are submitted in the mandatory template and are limited to one page. The template is published on SQA's website.

- ◆ Scores or performances plans, and reviews can be submitted either as a printed document or an electronic file. Centres do not have to submit separate CDs or memory sticks for each candidate.

Performance

The following advice may help to prepare candidates for the performance components:

- ◆ Centres should ensure that the overall programme is of the appropriate length. A Higher programme should last a total of 12 minutes. The performance time on either of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice, must be a minimum of 4 minutes within the overall 12-minute programme. Centres must ensure that candidates adhere to the minimum and maximum time limits. Centres should also ensure that the music to be played is at the appropriate level (Grade 4 or above).
- ◆ Carefully timed cuts may be appropriate to keep within the time limit, as long as this does not lower the technical demands.
- ◆ For guitar programmes, centres should specify if the candidate is performing a 'chordal', 'melodic' or 'mixed' guitar programme. Chords can be included in a melodic guitar programme, but are not counted if it is not a chordal guitar programme.
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes:
 - must include 18 chords
 - must be in standard notation. This could simply be a copy of the melodic line that the guitar is accompanying, with the chord names printed above or below the staff. TAB alone is not sufficient for assessment purposes; neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no music notation.
 - should also have a melody for candidates to play along with (played, sung or from a backing track). This is essential to provide a context for the performance of the chords.
- ◆ Drum kit programmes:
 - must include five different styles, with four different fills within each style. Teachers and lecturers should refer to SQA's style bank for a list of acceptable styles.
 - must exhibit four-way independence in every piece.
 - for notated music, the minimum requirement is four bars of the groove and four fills with a performance plan or map.
- ◆ Keyboard programmes:
 - must include both the right and left hand in performance
 - candidates playing a right-hand melody only are awarded 0 marks

To help visiting assessment run smoothly:

- ◆ Candidate mark sheets issued by SQA must be completed in pen (not pencil) by centre staff and be available to the visiting assessor (VA) at the start of each assessment section (morning or afternoon). The candidate mark sheet is the formal record of the assessment event and it is very important that it is completed accurately.
- ◆ Centre staff should give the VAs a running order, with approximate timings, at the start of each session.
- ◆ Timetabling should take account of the candidates' chosen performance time on each instrument.

- ◆ Details of the instruments, or instrument and voice used, the pieces to be performed, and all timings of pieces should be clearly indicated on the candidate mark sheet. The total length of time for each instrument or voice should also be indicated.
- ◆ Each drum kit style should be clearly named on the candidate mark sheet, irrespective of the title of the piece, for example 'Download' — rock.

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 have to 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 Higher level. Other supplementary evidence may include a certificate from a graded examination at an appropriate level.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	5061
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	5067
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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	45.4%	45.4%	2301	70
B	30.0%	75.4%	1521	60
C	16.6%	92.0%	841	50
D	5.9%	98.0%	301	40
No award	2.0%	-	103	-

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.