Course Report 2018

Subject	Music
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: performance or portfolio

Performance

Teachers and lecturers continue to prepare candidates well for the performance and, as in previous years, most candidates demonstrated very good levels of skills in this area.

Portfolio

Some candidates performed very well in the portfolio. There was a small increase in the numbers presented for the portfolio (composing) option this session.

Component 2: question paper

The question paper performed in line with expectations. The marking team reported that it was a fair and balanced paper, challenging in some areas but appropriate for this level. It provided opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their subject knowledge and music theory and notation skills.

Almost all candidates attempted every question. In general, teachers and lecturers seem to be preparing candidates well for the question paper. Responses to some literacy-based questions have improved.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: performance or portfolio

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.

Teachers and lecturers were more confident with the task level of pieces and candidates' programmes were appropriate for Advanced Higher. The increase in publications of graded pieces from recognised music bodies such as the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music and Trinity Guildhall has helped with this.

Portfolio

Candidates composed in a wide variety of styles and genres, including pieces created using music technology.

Some candidates displayed considerable skill and imagination in their pieces, writing coherently and stylistically for their chosen instrument(s). Some also 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 candidates made good use of technology and media files.

Some candidates provided detailed scores and had clearly thought carefully about articulation, dynamics, and tempo markings.

Component 2: question paper

Many candidates performed well in the question paper and appear to have been well prepared.

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

Candidates answered questions 1(b) and 1(c), requiring short or one-word answers, well. Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that these types of questions will always test Higher or Advanced Higher concepts.

Candidates answered question 2(c)(i), inserting the correct time signature, and question 2(c)(ii), which required them to re-write a note an octave lower in bass clef, well.

Candidates answered question 2(d), identifying an augmented triad in a passage of music, well.

Candidates answered question 3(a) part 1 quite well. This question asked them to identify the ornament used.

Question 3(b) asked candidates to identify the prominent chords featured. They answered this well, along with question 3(c) where they were asked to identify the type of group playing.

Question 4(c) asked candidates to write the enharmonic equivalent of a given note. Many candidates answered this question quite well.

Question 5(b) asked candidates to identify the correct version of a printed melody. The majority of candidates answered this question well. Candidates also answered question 5(d), where they had to identify the order in which four different woodwind instruments were played, well.

The standard of responses in some of the theory and literacy-based questions improved this year, with candidates answering question 2(c)(ii) and question 4(c) noticeably better than the equivalent questions last year. Most candidates took care to write and place rhythms, notes and accidentals accurately.

Many candidates had a good understanding of the requirements of question 6, particularly 6(a)(i) and 6(a)(ii), where many were able to provide a good number of concepts relevant to the music under the given headings.

Many candidate responses to question 6(b)(i) provided evidence of good analytical skills and higher-order aural awareness.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: performance or portfolio

Performance
Some candidates' performance programmes did not meet the required time allocation of 18 minutes.

While some candidates gave excellent vocal performances, other vocal candidates chose songs that were inappropriate for their musical and technical skills.

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

In some cases, candidates should have focused on writing stylistically and within the range for their chosen instruments. Some of the most successful compositions showed considerable development and refinement of musical ideas, while not necessarily using a large number of instruments.

Many candidates' programme notes were relevant and coherent, but a few lacked focus. Programme notes should concentrate on the musical elements of the composition and explain how they have been used and developed.

Component 2: question paper

Some candidates found the following questions challenging.

Question 2(a)(i), which asked candidates to insert the missing notes and rests, proved challenging for many candidates. Some managed to insert the correct pitch or rhythm or rest, but very few managed to note down all three elements correctly; consequently, few achieved the mark for this question.

Question 2(a)(ii) was also challenging for many candidates. Many candidates did not draw the bracket to accurately indicate where the bass part is played. Generally candidates did not answer question 2(b), where they were asked to complete the bass line from the chord information provided, well. Many candidates did not write the correct bass note for the G7 chord.

Some candidates found question 3(a) part 2 challenging — they were unable to identify the inverted pedal. Question 3(a) part 3 asked candidates to identify the prominent solo instrument. Some candidates correctly identified the instrument as a bassoon. In question 3(a) part 2, some candidates did not manage to identify the type of work as a concerto.

In question 4(a) some candidates did not correctly identify the key as E minor, even though the printed music started and ended on E and had a D sharp in the first complete bar. Many candidates incorrectly concluded that the key was G major.

Candidates also found question 4(b), where they were asked to identify the cadence, challenging. In question 4(d) many candidates failed to identify the harmonic device in the final bar as Tierce de Picardie.

In question 5(c), many candidates were unable to recognise the irregular time signatures or time changes. For questions like this, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to listen carefully to the musical context.

Some candidates had difficulty in question 5(e), identifying the plagal cadence. Teachers and lecturers could focus on harmonic awareness when preparing candidates for future examinations.

In parts (a)(i) and (a)(ii) and (b)(i) of question 6, some candidates identified concepts or provided similarities or differences that were not relevant to the stated categories, for example some candidates wrote about rhythm, which was not one of the categories. Teachers and lecturers should emphasise to candidates that answering on concepts outwith the stated categories will not gain them marks. They should also remind candidates that these categories may vary from year to year, depending on the musical excerpt. Teachers and lecturers should also advise candidates to avoid writing contradictory concepts, unless both concepts are present. For example, excerpt one was major throughout but some candidates wrote both major and minor.

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 for both excerpts, but instead gave this information in 6(b)(ii) where it was not worth marks.

Some candidates found question 6(b)(ii) demanding. They did not identify the style or period of the music, or provide an appropriate justification.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: performance or portfolio

Performance

Teachers and lecturers should have completed candidate mark sheets and copies of the music ready for the SQA visiting assessor (VA) at the start of each morning and afternoon session. They should consider the time allocated for each candidate performance to make the best use of the VA's time in each centre.

While there were some excellent vocal performances, some vocal candidates chose songs that did not suit their technical ability or range. When choosing a programme, candidates and their teachers or lecturers should consider the technical and musical requirements of songs. They should remember that songs can be transposed to any suitable key.

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).

Teachers or lecturers should make sure candidate mark sheets clearly identify guitar programmes as chordal or melodic.

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

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.

Portfolio

Teachers and lecturers should make candidates aware that marks are awarded for:

♦ the development and refinement of musical ideas
♦ creative and assured use of compositional methods
♦ selecting and applying music concepts in a sophisticated way: melody, harmony, rhythm, structure, timbre
♦ creating music that is original to the candidate
♦ completing a programme note or session log

Candidates should also produce an audio recording and score or performance plan for each piece in their portfolio.

Candidates who submit an arrangement as part of their portfolio, must include a copy of the source materials used and clarify the details of their own input in the accompanying programme note. They must include clear evidence of the specific content they have created, rather than a basic transcription from an available score.

Teachers and lecturers should consider how best they can support candidates with their harmonic understanding, particularly if they are going to write tonal music. An increased

awareness of harmonic language would benefit candidates not just in this part of the course, but in the question paper.

Candidates should avoid spending too much time writing about the programmatic content of their piece. They should concentrate on the musical elements of their compositions and explain how they have used and developed these. Candidates should apply the analytical skills they developed in other parts of the course to critically reflect to their compositions when writing their programme note.

Component 2: question paper

Teachers and lecturers should consider the following advice and possible improvement strategies when preparing candidates for the question paper:

♦ Short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will continue to specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher or Advanced Higher level. This does not apply to the 'map' question (question 3(a) in the 2018 Advanced Higher question paper).

♦ Candidates should read the stem of the question carefully. Some candidates lost marks because they did not do this. For example, some candidates spent time writing about rhythmic concepts in question 6(a)(i), 6(a)(ii) and 6(b)(i) when rhythm was not one of the stated categories. Teachers and lecturers should explain to candidates that these categories may vary from year to year, depending on the excerpts of music.

♦ The standard of responses to some literacy-based questions improved this year, specifically writing an enharmonic equivalent note and transposing from treble clef to bass clef. However, candidates still responded poorly to some literacy-based questions, particularly those requiring harmonic awareness and involving cadences, inverted pedal, Tierce de Picardie, or key signature. 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.

♦ In response to question 6(a)(i) and 6(a)(ii) this year, some candidates still provided long lists of unrelated or contradictory concepts. Teachers and lecturers should continue to remind candidates that their responses should contain the prominent concepts under each category relating to the music heard.

♦ In response to question 6(a) and 6(b)(i) this year, candidates did not always specifically identify concepts or similarities or differences under the given headings. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to focus on this. They should also advise candidates that in question 6(b)(i) the number of similarities and differences will vary depending on the musical excerpts. There could, for example, be more differences than similarities, or vice versa.

♦ In question 6(b)(ii), some candidates found it difficult to justify their answers. In some instances they provided a response that did not specifically identify the features unique to the style or period to which they were referring. Teachers and lecturers should work with candidates to ensure that the evidence they provide in earlier parts of questions is used to point the way to a period of music and to provide relevant justifications. Teachers

and lecturers should encourage candidates to focus more on providing the period of music (for example Renaissance, Baroque, Classical) for each excerpt and then providing a justification that specifically identifies the features in each excerpt which are unique to that style or period.

♦ Teachers and lecturers could highlight to candidates that the activities in the *Understanding and Analysing Music* unit lead directly to the skills required to correctly answer question 6 of the question paper. Both require candidates to recognise and distinguish between a range of music concepts and styles, and to analyse the information available before drawing conclusions. Similarly, the harmonic awareness candidates need to write a successful composition can also inform their understanding of the questions in the question paper involving harmony.

♦ Teachers and lecturers should remind candidates that they cannot gain marks for identifying the type of work in question 6(b)(ii). This should form part of their answer for question 6(b)(i).

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	1661

Number of resulted entries in 2018	1712

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	60.7%	60.7%	1039	70
B	21.9%	82.6%	375	60
C	11.3%	93.9%	193	50
D	2.5%	96.4%	43	45
No award	3.6%	-	62	-

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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.