



Course Report 2016

Subject	Music
Level	Higher

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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Performance

The Performance component is assessed in a live performance by a visiting assessor. Candidates perform a programme of music totalling 12 minutes between two instruments, or one instrument and voice. Each piece is marked out of 10, with reference to clear performance criteria and summary statements. Marks are then scaled 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 full day training event at which performance standards over a range of instrumental and vocal categories and levels (including National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) are exemplified. All visiting assessors also take part in a standardisation exercise, for which detailed feedback is provided, 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, and was structured in the same way as the Specimen Question Paper (SQP) and Exemplar Question Paper (EQP), incorporating a mixture of multiple choice questions, short responses, musical literacy and sequential listening questions. Candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of a range of music concepts, and musical literacy, in a variety of musical contexts. 40 marks are available for the question paper.

The question paper performed in line with expectations, and feedback from the marking team and from practitioners suggested that it was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand. It contained a good range of questions, with a wide variety of music genres. Some questions were very accessible to all candidates while others were more challenging. Across the board, a wide range of marks was accessed.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Performance

Candidates were well prepared, and there were many performances of a high standard. Many candidates opted to play pieces above the minimum standard and played well.

In general, centres were well organised with Candidate Mark Sheets completed with the details of each programme. In most centres, there was clear evidence of personalisation and choice in varied programmes selected by their candidates.

The standard of candidates' performance continues to be strong, and has remained extremely consistent on both instrument 1 and instrument 2.

Some outstanding performances were noted over a range of instrumental categories. The support available from teaching staff and instrumental staff 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

Candidates also appear to have been generally well-prepared for the requirements and format of the question paper. Most candidates appeared to approach the question paper appropriately. Very few candidates made the error of providing additional answers/ticks. This suggests that they have benefited from the specimen question paper and exemplar question paper that have already been made available to centres.

Question 1 was generally well answered.

Question 3 was generally done very well overall, with most candidates providing Higher concepts as answers.

Question 4 was well done overall. Candidates appear to be better prepared this year for the music literacy aspect of the paper.

Questions 5(b) and 5(c) were well answered.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Performance

Although it has already been noted that the attainment in Performance has remained very stable, there were still some referrals to the Principal Assessor regarding the task level of some pieces, length of programmes, chordal guitar programmes, use of guitar tablature and drum kit styles.

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 for some candidates.

Question 2 had mixed responses, with Question 2(1) (instrument identification) and Question 2(5) (melodic minor scale) proving to be particularly challenging.

Question 5(a) posed some difficulty, with few candidates achieving full marks. Recognition of Diminished 7th and Interrupted cadence appear to have been particularly challenging.

Question 6 produced a wide range of responses. A number of centres appear to have been advising candidates to adopt a 'scattergun' approach; writing large numbers of concepts.

Question 7 was answered appropriately by most candidates, although it also appears to have been a challenging question.

Question 8 also seemed to be quite challenging for a number of candidates, with few candidates achieving maximum marks.

In general, questions that required candidates to listen for a number of concepts (eg Questions 2, 6, 7 and 8) appeared to be the most demanding.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Performance

Centres are again commended for responding to issues raised in previous Course Reports. Many of the issues raised in previous reports have been addressed, and the consistent performance of candidates bears testimony to the work undertaken by centres and candidates.

In preparing candidates' performance programmes, the following 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.
- ◆ Ensure 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 that the chordal guitar is accompanying, with the chord names printed above or below. 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 drumkit 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 drumkit 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 4-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.
- ◆ Visiting assessors should be given a running order, with approximate timings, at the start of each session.
- ◆ It is helpful if copies of the music for each candidate can be arranged in the order in which the candidate is performing the pieces.

If submitting evidence of performing, for Exceptional Circumstances, if possible it is helpful to have an audio recording of the candidate's full programme. Many centres are now routinely making audio recording of prelim type events for this eventuality. If an audio recording is not available, centres should submit alternative robust evidence that a candidate has demonstrated attainment at Higher level. This should include a detailed Candidate Mark Sheet showing that the candidate has achieved the course assessment criteria, as well as meeting the course requirements both in terms of the task level of each piece and the overall length of the programme. Assessment of performing for this purpose should have taken place on a single assessment occasion, and not spread over a period of time.

Other evidence might include a detailed mark sheet, or certificate, from a graded examination at an appropriate level.

Component 2: Question paper

In preparing candidates for the question paper, centres are advised to refer to the specimen question paper and exemplar question paper for examples of the question styles. Centres are also 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.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) will continue to specifically test concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ In musical 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 and placing dots after notes). 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.
- ◆ Make use of a wide variety of resources, including online resources, to practise identification of instruments and recognition of melodic and harmonic related concepts such as types of chords, scales and cadences.
- ◆ In the question requiring candidates to identify the 'most prominent concepts', candidates should be encouraged to focus specifically on identifying prominent concepts under the given headings. In Question 6, there was an increase in the number of instances where long lists of unrelated concepts are being provided in questions where candidates are asked to identify the prominent features in the music; this is neither the purpose of, nor in the spirit of, this type of question.

Candidates' responses should give the prominent concepts under each heading relating to the music heard. From 2017 onwards, lists of concepts unrelated to the music and/or extensive lists of contradictory concepts will result in a loss of marks. This is illustrated in the following examples.

Example 1: The excerpt is in 4/4 time throughout, the candidate correctly identifies this and is awarded 1 mark. If the candidate then goes on to list, eg 3/4, 6/8, 12/8 and 5/4 and these are not present in the music, the candidate loses the original mark awarded for this part of the question.

Example 2: The candidate correctly identifies the style of the excerpt as Impressionist and is awarded 1 mark. If the candidate goes on to list, eg Baroque and Classical and Minimalist and these are not applicable to the music heard, the candidate loses the original mark for this part of the question.

Centres are reminded that papers used for prelim type events should replicate the course assessment, both in terms of question type and allocation of marks. A full copy of the marking instructions should also be submitted, even if questions are drawn from SQA past paper. In preparing prelim exams centres are reminded that:

- ◆ A past paper, specimen question paper, or exemplar question paper should not be used in its entirety.
- ◆ Questions from the specimen question paper, the exemplar question paper, and the most recent past papers are more likely to be relevant to the question styles of the question paper. 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 prelims should reflect the marking instructions used in the final exam. It should be noted that half marks are not used. Examples of marking instructions for past papers can be found on the SQA website. Reference should also be made to the detailed marking instructions for the specimen question paper and exemplar question paper.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) must specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ The type of questions and the distribution of marks should reflect the course assessment (ie they should be similar to the final exam).
- ◆ End of unit tests, or other forms of evidence, must demonstrate that candidates have the appropriate knowledge and understanding of concepts appropriate to the course assessment.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	4340
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	5181
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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 -				
A	58.6%	58.6%	3037	70
B	25.4%	84.1%	1318	60
C	11.1%	95.2%	577	50
D	2.0%	97.2%	103	45
No award	2.8%	-	146	0

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.