



Course Report 2018

Subject	Music
Level	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

Candidates perform a programme of music totalling 12 minutes between two instruments, or one instrument and voice for this component. The performance time on either of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice, must be a minimum of four minutes within the overall assessment programme. Each instrument/voice has a maximum mark of 30 giving 60 marks available for this component which is 60% of the total marks for the course.

Candidates' performance in this component has remained consistent over the last few years. This was also the case in the current session. The varied programmes selected by candidates provided clear evidence of personalisation and choice in most centres.

Component 2: question paper

The question paper is based on recorded excerpts of music, structured in the same way as the specimen question paper and past question papers since 2015. 40 marks are available for this component which represents 40% of the total marks available for the course.

The question paper performed in line with expectations. Feedback from both the marking team and practitioners suggested that it was comprehensive in terms of concept coverage, and appropriately demanding. Some questions were accessible to all candidates while others were more challenging.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: performance

Candidates were well-prepared, and many performances were of a high standard. Many candidates performed pieces at a level above that required for Higher, but those who did this performed them well.

Guitar programmes were mostly named 'chordal' or 'melodic' and this helped to inform the visiting assessor. Drum kit styles were well understood, with the majority of centres using the drum kit style bank. More centres used published graded materials, so they made fewer referrals to SQA about the levels of pieces.

Personalisation and choice were evident in candidates' programmes, and a wide variety of instruments were presented.

Component 2: question paper

Candidates were generally well-prepared for the requirements and layout of the question paper. Most candidates approached the question paper appropriately, with few candidates making the error of providing additional answers. This suggests that candidates have benefitted from the specimen question paper and past question papers available.

The question paper as a whole, and the individual questions, generally performed as anticipated.

- ◆ Question 1(a) was generally answered well, with many candidates achieving 3 marks and some achieving 4 marks.
- ◆ Question 1(b) was also answered well, with the majority of candidates correctly identifying 'string quartet'.
- ◆ Question 2(a) had some mixed responses. However, questions 2(a) 1 and 5 were generally answered well.
- ◆ Question 3 had mixed responses. Questions 3(a) and (d) were answered well, with the majority of candidates correctly inserting the missing barlines and identifying the interval.
- ◆ Question 4 was attempted well by the majority of candidates, with some very good answers. A wide range of marks was achieved, with a small number of candidates achieving full marks.
- ◆ Question 5(a) was generally answered well, with most candidates achieving 2 marks and some achieving 3 marks.
- ◆ Question 7 was attempted well by the majority of candidates. There was a wide spread of marks, with the majority of candidates achieving 4 marks, but some achieving 5 marks.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: performance

Although attainment in performance component has remained stable, there were still some referrals to the principal assessor about the length of programmes, timings of performances, chordal guitar programmes and drum kit styles.

Some programmes did not meet the minimum time requirement on one instrument, although the overall performance time was appropriate.

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 drum kit programmes did not meet the minimum required number of fills.

Performances on voice were varied. While there were some excellent vocal performances, the choice of music was not always suited to the candidates' technical and musical ability or vocal range. While some centres are annotating scores to match performances, there are still a number of performances where melodic and rhythmic licence is taken too liberally.

More personalisation and choice was evident in candidates' programmes. However, a few centres used the same pieces for the majority of their candidates and, in some centres, candidates played the same programme on both instruments.

Component 2: question paper

While most candidates seemed well-prepared for the question paper, there were some questions that proved to be quite challenging.

- ◆ Question 2(a) had some mixed responses. In questions 2(a) 2 and 3, instrument identification continues to be a challenge for many candidates. In question 2 (a) 4 many candidates did not identify 'arpeggio'.
- ◆ Question 2(b) was challenging, with less than half of candidates correctly identifying 'harmonic minor scale'.
- ◆ Question 3 had mixed responses. Questions 3(b), (c) and (f) were not answered correctly by many candidates: the transposition, insertion of missing notes and naming of chords presented a challenge. Many candidates did not place the sharp sign correctly in question 3(b).
- ◆ Question 3(e) proved to be particularly challenging, with only a small number of candidates notating the crotchet triplets correctly.
- ◆ Question 5(b) proved quite challenging for the majority of candidates, with less than half identifying 'obbligato'.
- ◆ Question 6(a) was generally not completed well, with a relatively small number of candidates identifying 'modal'. Questions 6(b) and (c) were also generally not completed well, with a number of candidates providing concepts that were not at Higher level.

- ◆ Question 8 proved to be quite challenging for most, with very few candidates identifying 'imperfect cadence'.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: performance

The following advice may help to prepare future candidates for the performance component.

- ◆ Ensure that the overall programme is of the appropriate length. A Higher programme should last a total of 12 minutes, with a minimum of 4 minutes for each instrument or voice. Centres must ensure that candidates adhere to the minimum and maximum time limits.
- ◆ Make sure the task level of each piece is of the appropriate level for Higher.
- ◆ Carefully timed cuts may be appropriate to keep within the time limit, as long as this does not lower the technical demands required for Higher.
- ◆ Any cuts made could be shown clearly on the copy of the music provided to the visiting assessor.
- ◆ For guitar programmes, centres should specify if the candidate is performing a 'chordal' or 'melodic' guitar programme. Chords may be included in a melodic guitar programme, but will not be counted if it is not a chordal guitar programme.
- ◆ Chordal guitar programmes must include 18 chords, which is the required number for Higher.
- ◆ For chordal guitar programmes, music must be provided 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. Tablature alone is not sufficient for assessment purposes. Neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no music notation.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Drum kit programmes must include five different styles, with four different fills within each style for Higher. Teachers and lecturers should refer to SQA's style bank for drum kit for a list of acceptable styles.
- ◆ Each drum kit style should be clearly named on the candidate mark sheet, irrespective of the title of the piece.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should be aware that some commercially available drum kit publications — although produced for particular graded examinations — may not always contain the number of fills required for SQA examinations. Teachers and lecturers should refer to SQA's drum kit repertoire publication, and update letters, for clarification and exemplification of both the number and standard of fills. Carefully timed cuts or fade-outs (in the case of backing tracks) may be appropriate to keep within the time limit.
- ◆ Drum kit programmes must exhibit four-way independence in every piece.
- ◆ The minimum requirement for notated music for drum kit is four bars of the groove and four fills with a performance plan/map.
- ◆ For vocal performances, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to choose songs suited to their technical and vocal ability, and vocal range. Songs may be transposed into any suitable key.

- ◆ Although it is acceptable to annotate copies of the music to match a candidate's performance more correctly, care should be taken by candidates to avoid too much melodic or rhythmic licence.
- ◆ In cases where a live accompaniment proves to be challenging, pre-recorded backing tracks are perfectly acceptable.
- ◆ Keyboard programmes must include both the right and left hand in performance. Candidates playing a right-hand melody only on keyboard will not be awarded any marks.

To help visiting assessment run smoothly:

- ◆ Candidate mark sheets issued by SQA must be completed and be available to the visiting assessor at the start of each assessment session (morning or afternoon).
- ◆ It is helpful if the visiting assessor is given a running order, with approximate timings, at the start of each session.
- ◆ Details of the instruments or instrument and voice used, the pieces to be performed, and all timings of pieces should be clearly indicated. The total length of time for each instrument or voice should also be indicated.
- ◆ In the case of guitar performances, whether the candidate is performing a 'chordal' or 'melodic' programme should be clearly noted on the mark sheet.
- ◆ In the case of drum kit performances, the rhythmic style of each piece should be identified on the candidate mark sheet. (This is particularly helpful when the style name is neither in the title of the piece nor identified on the copy of the music.)
- ◆ Candidate mark sheets should be completed in pen (not pencil) by centre staff. The mark sheet is the formal record of the assessment event and it is very important that it is completed accurately.
- ◆ Copies of the music for each candidate could be arranged in the order in which the candidate is performing the pieces.

Component 2: question paper

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the specimen question paper and recent past papers for examples of the question styles. The following advice may help to prepare future candidates for the question paper:

- ◆ In multiple-choice questions, candidates should consider the musical context of the concepts to avoid choosing concepts that are clearly unrelated.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ In music literacy questions, candidates need to ensure that any responses involving music notation are clear and unambiguous. The pitch and rhythm of each note must be correct, each note must have the majority of note head in the correct place, note heads must be appropriately filled in, and any accidentals must come before the note and be correctly placed. Candidates should be aware that rhythmic concepts such as dotted notes, triplets and rests may be included.

- ◆ In the question that requires candidates to identify the prominent concepts, they should be aware that the headings provided may change from year to year and that the headings used could be any combination of headings from the tables of music concepts.
- ◆ In the question that requires candidates to insert concepts where they occur, next to the lyrics of a song, they should be aware that more than one concept could occur in the same place. In such a situation, they should insert the concepts on the same line.
- ◆ Candidates should use of a wide variety of resources, including online resources, to practise identifying instruments and recognising melodic and harmonic related concepts, such as types of chords, scales and cadences.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	5162
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	5061
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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	54.5%	54.5%	2756	70
B	26.4%	80.9%	1336	60
C	13.8%	94.6%	697	50
D	2.7%	97.3%	136	45
No award	2.7%	-	136	-

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.