Course Report 2017

Subject	Music
Level	Advanced 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: Performance or portfolio

Performance

The performance component is assessed by an SQA visiting assessor. Candidates perform live a programme of music totalling 18 minutes between two instruments, or one instrument and voice. Each piece is marked out of 10, against clear performance criteria. 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 training event at which performance standards over a range of instrumental categories and levels (including National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) are exemplified. All visiting assessors also take part in a standardisation exercise to ensure consistency in the application of the assessment criteria.

The assessment of the performance component continues to remain remarkably consistent over the last few years.

Portfolio

The portfolio component is externally marked and quality assured by SQA. Candidates submit an audio folio of 12 minutes of music, which includes a minimum of two contrasting pieces, together with supporting evidence of the compositional process. Each composition is marked out of 20 in line with the general marking principles and the detailed marking instructions for this assessment. Marks are then scaled to award each candidate a mark out of 60 for this component.

In the second year of the new Advanced Higher Music there was a relatively low uptake for the new portfolio (Composing) option. Advanced Higher Understanding Standards events took place in November 2016 and exemplified standards and promoted approaches to this component of course assessment. Candidate materials and commentaries from these events can be found on the SQA secure website: https://secure.sqa.org.uk/secure/Understanding-Standards-Materials/NQCourseAssessments/Music. Centres can arrange access to these materials through their SQA Co-ordinator.

Component 2: Question paper

The question paper, worth 40 marks, was a one and a quarter hour examination based on recorded excerpts of music. The paper was structured in the same way as the specimen question paper, the exemplar question paper, and the 2016 question paper, and incorporated a mixture of multiple choice, short response, literacy and extended/analytical questions.

The question paper performed in line with expectations. Feedback from the marking team reported that it was a fair and balanced paper, appropriate for this level, which provided opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their subject knowledge and music theory/notation skills. In general, centres seem to be preparing candidates well for the question paper, with responses to literacy-based questions improving. Centres may also have benefited from accessing the marking instructions for the 2016 question paper, which give considerable detail on acceptable answers, particularly to Question 6.

As the question paper was marked online, markers were also required to work through a number of practice scripts and qualifications scripts before proceeding to live e-marking. Markers were well supported and monitored throughout the marking process by the team leaders and the principal assessor. This meant that the quality assurance was robust.

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 excellent performances. Many candidates played pieces that were well above the minimum requirements, and personalisation and choice was evident in many candidates' programmes.

Most candidates performing on drum kit played their six styles well, with reference to the drum kit style bank.

Vocal programmes, in the main, were performed from memory. Most candidates performing on chordal guitar demonstrated their chosen 18 chords well through a variety of strumming styles. Keyboard players used full finger chords as left hand accompaniment.

Bagpipe players included level specific sections of a piobaireachd as part of their programme.

Portfolio
There was a relatively low uptake for the portfolio (composing) option. Even so, candidates composed in a wide variety of genres and styles, including pieces created using music technology.

Some candidates displayed skill and creativity in their pieces, writing coherently and stylistically for their chosen instruments. Some also provided good evidence to support the compositional process with informative and illuminating programme notes, session logs and performance plans/scores. Some candidates made good use of technology and media files.

Component 2: Question paper

Many candidates approached the question paper appropriately and appear to have been well prepared for the requirements and format of this question paper. This suggests that centres made good use of the specimen question paper, the exemplar question paper, the 2016 question paper and associated marking instructions, and the exemplification published following the Understanding Standards event in November 2016.

♦ Question 1(a), a multiple choice question, was answered well, while Question 2(a), also multiple choice, was answered quite well.

♦ Questions 1(b) and 1(d), requiring short or one-word answers, were answered well. Centres should remind candidates that these types of questions will always test either Higher or Advanced Higher concepts.

♦ Question 2(d), requiring candidates to identify what they heard from four options, was well done.

♦ Question 3(a) parts 1, 3 and 4, which asked candidates to complete a guide to the music, were all well done.

There was a general improvement in the standard of responses in theory-/literacy-based questions, with Questions 4(a), 4(d), 4(e) and 5(a) being answered well by the majority of candidates. Candidates, on the whole, took care to write and place rhythms and notes accurately.

Overall, in comparison with the 2016 question paper, many candidates appeared to have an improved understanding of the requirements of Question 6. There is evidence that, with the information provided by last year's question paper and marking instructions, the course report, and the Understanding Standards events, teachers prepared candidates well for Question 6. The majority of candidates answered well in 6(a)(i), and there was evidence of good analytical skills and high-order aural awareness in responses in 6(b)(i) from some candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Performance or portfolio

Performance

Some candidates did not make judicious cuts, which meant their programmes were over 20 minutes long. However, some candidates who did make judicious cuts played sections of music that were below the minimum requirements (ie Grade 5 or above).

While there were some excellent vocal performances, some vocal candidates chose songs that did not suit their technical ability or range. There were a number of instances where melodic/rhythmic licence was overdone, especially in vocal programmes.

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

Some drum kit candidates' programmes contained two styles in more than one piece.

Portfolio

In the 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.

Several candidates had insufficient harmonic knowledge to assuredly develop their ideas. In some cases, more focus should have been given 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 while not necessarily using a large number of instruments.

Programme notes should concentrate on the musical elements of the composition and the explanation of how they have been used and developed. While many programme notes were relevant and coherent, a few lacked focus or appear to be hastily put together.

Component 2: Question paper

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

Question 3(a) part 2, which asked candidates to identify the harmonic feature at the end of the phrase, and 3(b) which asked them to identify the type of work proved to be challenging for many. Quite a number of candidates found it difficult to identify the tritone in the multiple choice (1 from 4) Question 3(c).

In Question 4(b) some candidates had difficulty in correctly identifying the printed chord.

Question 5(b), which required candidates to write the enharmonic equivalent of a note on the stave, was generally not answered well. Question 5(c) was answered well by the majority, but a significant number of candidates did not read the question with sufficient care and wrote the three notes an octave lower instead of at the same pitch. Question 5(d), which asked candidates to draw a sign above two bars where the bass guitar played an octave leap, proved to be challenging for many. In Question 5(e), where the candidate was asked to complete the bass line from the chord information provided, there was no need to write the entire chord. A single line bass line, that reflected the chord information given, would have sufficed.

In Question 6(a) and b(i) some candidates identified concepts or provided similarities/ differences that were not relevant to the stated categories — some chose to write about rhythm, which was not one of the categories. This may have meant that they were able to devote less time to focusing on the given categories. Centres should emphasise to candidates that concepts outwith these categories will not be credited. They should also remind candidates that these categories may vary from year to year, depending on the musical excerpt.

Some candidates found Question 6(b)(ii) quite demanding. Some had difficulty in identifying the style/period or providing an appropriate justification.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Performance or portfolio

Performance

The overall standard of performances was very high, and there were many outstanding performances on a variety of instruments. Many candidates played pieces above the minimum requirements (Grade 5 or above). Centres were, overall, well organised, with completed mark sheets and copies of the music ready for the visiting assessor. The timetabling of the visiting assessor's day was mostly effective, but some centres allowed too much or too little time for each performance. Please refer to the Information for centres document regarding advice for timings. This is issued to all centres before the visiting assessment period.

Some candidates' performance programmes were under or over the required time allocation. The minimum requirement is 18 minutes between the two instruments (the maximum being 20). The minimum time on one instrument is six minutes, and the maximum time on one instrument is 12 minutes. Other combinations are acceptable, for example nine and nine, seven and 11, eight and 10.

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.

In programmes that combine melodic and chordal guitar, centres are reminded that the full number of chords (18) should be demonstrated. Most centres identified guitar programmes as chordal, melodic or mixed on the candidate mark sheet.

Some centres offered the visiting assessor tablature for guitar programmes. This alone is not sufficient for external assessment. There must be standard notation provided for the visiting assessor, whether or not the candidate is playing from tablature. Centres must provide a copy of the melodic line which the chordal guitar is accompanying. This provides a context for the chords.

Drum kit styles were better understood this year, with the majority of centres using the drum kit style bank. 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.

It is recommended that singers perform from memory to allow a convincing interpretation and presentation, but performing from memory is not a mandatory requirement.

Centres are also reminded that for keyboard, at Advanced Higher, full finger chords are mandatory.

Portfolio

Centres and candidates should be 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 learner
- completion of a programme note/session log

An audio recording and score/performance plan is also required for each piece in the portfolio.

Candidates should, throughout the process of composition, reflect on whether, how and to what extent they have developed and refined their material. Some of the most successful and creative compositions showed considerable development and refinement of a limited number of musical ideas. Similarly, there were some very effective compositions which did not necessarily use a large number of instruments.

Successful compositions demonstrated a sophisticated and assured use of harmony and timbre, but there were some where more focus should have been given to creating successful harmonic progressions and/or writing stylistically for the chosen instruments. Candidates who played one or more of the instruments for which they wrote tended to write more stylistically for those instruments.

Programme notes should provide a relevant explanation of the pieces of music, and not just be a list of concepts used. Equally, they should concentrate on the musical elements of the composition and the explanation of how they have been used and developed. Candidates should seek to utilise their analytical skills developed in other parts of the course and apply these skills of critical reflection to their own compositions when constructing a programme note.

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

Centres who are preparing candidates for this component should ensure that they are familiar with the material contained in the Music component: portfolio general assessment information, including the general and detailed marking instructions and the summary statements. This can be found on the coursework information section of the SQA Advanced Higher Music web page: http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/48450.html.

Advanced Higher Understanding Standards events took place in November 2016. The events exemplified standards and promoted approaches to this component of course assessment. Candidate materials and commentaries from these events can be found on SQA secure: https://secure.sqa.org.uk/secure/Understanding-Standards-Materials/NQCourseAssessments/Music. The candidate materials exemplify a range of approaches to composition, together with detailed commentaries and candidate assessment records detailing the mark awarded. Centres who are considering entering candidates for the portfolio component are strongly encouraged to make use of this resource.

Component 2: Question paper

To help centres to prepare candidates for this course component, teachers/lecturers are encouraged to consider the following examples of good practice and strategies:

♦ In music literacy questions, candidates should take care to ensure that any responses involving music notation are clear and unambiguous (eg filling in and placing of note heads, accurate placing of accidentals, placing dots in the correct place after notes, and making sure that rests are clear). Using a pen, rather than a pencil, may help to make responses clearer. Markers are marking from scanned images of candidates' responses: it is particularly important, therefore, that candidates make all written responses as clear as possible.

♦ 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 2017 Advanced Higher question paper).

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to read the stem of the question with great care. Some candidates lost marks because they did not do this — for example in Question 5(c) a significant number of candidates wrote the three notes an octave lower instead of at the same pitch. Similarly, candidates who spent time writing about rhythmic concepts in Question 6(a) and (b)(i) were perhaps able to devote less time to focusing on the given categories — rhythm was not one of the stated categories. Centres should make candidates aware that these categories may vary from year to year depending on the excerpts of music.

♦ In questions involving the identification of chords, candidates should write either the chord name **or** number and, where appropriate, 1st or 2nd inversion. There is no need to write the chord name and number.

♦ Although there is some evidence that there was an improvement this year in the standard of responses to literacy-based questions, some responses were weak. Centres are encouraged to provide regular opportunities to listen to performances using scores, where possible, to promote literacy skills and develop aural perception and discrimination. Centres may also wish to use materials available online to improve candidate skills in this area.

♦ In Question 6 parts (a) and (b)(i), candidates should be encouraged to focus specifically on identifying concepts or similarities/differences under the given headings. Candidates should also be advised that in 6(b)(i) the number of similarities and differences will vary depending on the musical excerpts; there may, for example, be more differences than similarities, or vice versa.

♦ It was clear that some candidates found Question 6 — and in particular part (b)(ii) — quite challenging. A number of candidates had trouble identifying the style of Excerpt 1 as Baroque and incorrectly identified it as 'Renaissance'. Some candidates also found it difficult to justify their answers and in some instances provided a response that did not specifically identify the features unique to the style/period to which they were referring. When preparing candidates for this question centres might wish to consider a variety of strategies to address this including:

1. Highlighting to candidates that the activities undertaken in the Understanding and Analysing Music unit lead directly to the skills required to undertake Question 6. The ability to recognise and distinguish between a range of music concepts and styles, and to analyse the information available before drawing conclusions, is an

ability which is required for both the Understanding and Analysing Music unit and for Question 6.

2. An individual or group exercise asking candidates, using their own or teacher's choice of music and the format of Question 6, to make up and then answer/discuss their questions and marking instructions.

3. Encouraging students to 'fingerprint' styles/periods of music. For example, asking the questions: What are the fingerprints of Baroque music? What are the unique features of that style/period? Are there features in a style/period of music which are shared with another style?

In 2017 in Question 6(a) (i) and (ii) there were fewer instances of long lists of unrelated or contradictory concepts being provided by candidates. However, centres should continue to remind candidates that their responses should contain the prominent concepts under each category relating to the music heard. Lists of concepts unrelated to the music and/or extensive lists of contradictory concepts will result in penalties being applied.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	1675

Number of resulted entries in 2017	1661

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	67.2%	67.2%	1116	70
B	19.2%	86.4%	319	60
C	9.3%	95.7%	155	50
D	2.0%	97.8%	34	45
No award	2.2%	-	37	-

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.