



## Course Report 2017

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**

## **Summary of the course assessment**

### **Component 1: Performance**

The performance component is assessed in a live performing situation 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 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, structured in the same way as the specimen question paper, exemplar question paper and live question papers since 2015.

The question paper includes an appropriate 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. The question paper contained a good range of questions, with a wide variety of music genres. 40 marks are available for the question paper.

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

The question paper performed broadly in line with expectations and feedback from both the marking team and practitioners suggested that it was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand. 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.

Personalisation and choice were evident in 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.

Many vocal candidates performed to a high standard with excellent diction and communication, and there were many performances on tuned percussion which demonstrated good technique.

Most candidates performing on drum kit had used the drum kit style bank, and many guitarists performed chordal/ melodic pieces, demonstrating excellent technical skills

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

#### **Component 2: Question paper**

Most candidates appeared to approach the question paper appropriately, with very few candidates making the error of providing additional answers/ticks. This suggests that they have benefitted from the specimen question paper, exemplar question paper and past papers made available, and were well prepared by centres.

- ◆ Question 1(a) was generally well answered, with the majority of candidates achieving 3 or 4 marks.
- ◆ Questions 3(a), 3(b) and 3(c) were well done by the majority of candidates, with 3(c) being particularly well done.
- ◆ Questions 4(a), 4(b) and 4(c) were extremely well done, with 4(f) being answered correctly by the majority of candidates.
- ◆ Question 6 was answered very well, with many candidates achieving 4 or 5 marks.
- ◆ Question 7 produced a wide range of responses, with the vast majority of candidates achieving 4 or more marks, and a reasonable number achieving 5 and 6 marks. The vast majority of candidates were approaching the question in an appropriate manner, with very few writing long lists of unrelated concepts.

### **Areas which candidates found demanding**

#### **Component 1: Performance**

Performances in voice were in some instances quite varied. While there were some excellent vocal performances, it was noted that in some vocal performances the choice of music was not always suited to the candidates' technical and musical ability or vocal

range. While more centres are annotating scores to match performances, there are still a number of performances where melodic/rhythmic licence is taken too liberally.

Where judicious cuts had been made to accommodate timings, some candidates were playing sections of music below the minimum requirements (ie Grade 4 or above) and in addition, some candidates did not fulfil the minimum time requirements.

Some drum kit candidates did not select their five styles from the drum kit style bank, and a few chordal guitar candidates did not demonstrate the 18 chords required.

## **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.

- ◆ Question 1(b) was generally not well answered, with the majority of candidates not correctly identifying *recitative*.
- ◆ Question 2 had mixed responses, with part 1 (instrument identification) and part 5 (*chromatic scale*) proving to be particularly challenging.
- ◆ Question 3(d) proved to be challenging to the majority of candidates not identifying *added 6th*.
- ◆ Question 4 (music literacy) had some mixed responses. While parts (a), (b) and (c) were generally well done, part (d) (completing the missing notes) appeared to be particularly challenging, and part (e) (chord identification) was not well answered by the majority of candidates.
- ◆ Question 5(a) was challenging for candidates, with few candidates achieving full marks.
- ◆ Question 5(b) also proved to be quite challenging to the majority of candidates, with a relatively small number of candidates correctly identifying *passacaglia*.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: Performance**

Centres are again commended for considering 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.

It has also been noted that, when centres have their materials well organised, with timings of candidates' performances well considered, the visiting assessment days run very smoothly.

The following advice is offered to support centres in preparing candidates for this component:

- ◆ Ensure that the overall programme is of the appropriate length. Candidates are required to perform on two instruments for a total of 12 minutes, with a maximum time of eight minutes and a minimum of four minutes on each instrument. Judicious cuts may be

appropriate to keep within the time limit, so long as the piece still meets the technical demands required at Higher level (Grade 4 or above).

- ◆ 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 which the chordal guitar is accompanying, with the chord name printed above or below the staff. Tablature alone is not sufficient for examination purposes. Neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no musical 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.
- ◆ Drum kit programmes must include the appropriate number of styles and fills (5 different styles with 4 different fills within each style for Higher). Reference should be made to the drum kit style bank for a list of acceptable styles. Centres 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. Reference should be made to the SQA drum kit repertoire publication 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.
- ◆ 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, centres are advised to encourage candidates to choose songs suited to their technical and vocal ability, as well as vocal range. Songs may be transposed into any suitable key.
- ◆ Although it is quite acceptable for centres to annotate copies of the music to match a candidate's performance, care should be taken by candidates to avoid too much melodic or rhythmic licence.
- ◆ In cases where a live accompaniment is not possible, centres are reminded that the use of pre-recorded backing tracks is perfectly acceptable.
- ◆ 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 available to the visiting assessor at the start of each assessment session (ie morning or afternoon).

- ◆ It is helpful for visiting assessors to be given 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 being professed, the pieces to be performed, and all timings of pieces, must be clearly indicated.
- ◆ For guitar candidates, mark sheets should clearly identify whether the candidate is performing a 'chordal', 'melodic' or 'mixed' programme.
- ◆ Music for candidates playing chordal guitar programmes, where 18 chords must be demonstrated within their programme, should have a melody line to allow the performance to be put into context.
- ◆ For drum kit candidates, it is also helpful to the visiting assessor if the rhythmic style of each piece is also identified. This is particularly helpful when the style is neither in the title of the piece nor identified on the copy of the music.
- ◆ The five styles chosen from the drum kit style bank should include four-way independence and four fills within each style. Candidates choosing to contain two styles within one piece should note that double the requisite number of fills are not necessary. Only one piece within the programme may contain two styles. Some drum kit programmes this year did not meet the minimum requirements in terms of having notated music for both the basic groove and the required number of fills.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ It is also helpful if copies of the music for each candidate can be arranged in the order in which the candidate is performing the pieces.

There may be some cases in which a candidate is unable to sit the performance exam due to health reasons or other exceptional circumstances. In such a situation the SQA will try to arrange an alternative date for the candidate to sit the exam. If this is not possible, the centre would be required to submit evidence of the candidate's attainment in performance. In submitting evidence of performance for absentee candidates, it is helpful to have an audio recording as much of the candidate's programme as possible, along with copies of music and the marks awarded for all the pieces performed.

Many centres are routinely making audio recordings of prelim exams for this eventuality. If an audio recording is not available, centres should submit alternative evidence that a candidate has demonstrated attainment at Higher level. Other evidence might include a 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, the exemplar question paper, and recent past papers for examples of the question styles. Centres are also encouraged to remind candidates of the following:

- ◆ In the multiple choice questions, candidates should give consideration to the musical context of the concepts, to avoid identifying concepts that are clearly unrelated.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) specifically examine 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. The question paper is marked from scanned images, so it is particularly important 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.

Centres are reminded that papers used for prelims should replicate the course assessment, both in terms of question types and overall allocation of marks. In preparing prelim exams centres are reminded that:

- ◆ If using questions from past papers, they should be drawn from different sources. This could be a combination of past papers, the specimen question paper, the exemplar question paper, or centre-devised questions.
- ◆ A past paper, specimen question paper, or exemplar question paper should not be used in its entirety.
- ◆ Examples of questions from the specimen question paper, the exemplar question paper and 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.
- ◆ Questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) must specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level.
- ◆ The types of questions and the overall distribution of marks should reflect the course assessment (ie they should be similar to the final exam).
- ◆ The marking instructions 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.

- ◆ When using prelim and listening assessments as part of evidence for exceptional circumstances, a full copy of the marking instructions should also be submitted, even if questions are drawn from SQA past papers. Centres are reminded that any candidate's work should already have been assessed by the centre.
  
- ◆ 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 2016	5181
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	5162
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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	57.4%	57.4%	2963	72
B	26.3%	83.7%	1360	62
C	11.9%	95.7%	615	52
D	2.4%	98.0%	122	47
No award	2.0%	-	102	-

## 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.