



Higher Music

Course code:	C850 76
Course assessment code:	X850 76
SCQF:	level 6 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from:	session 2025–26

This document provides detailed information about the course and course assessment to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It describes the structure of the course and the course assessment in terms of the skills, knowledge and understanding that are assessed.

This document is for teachers and lecturers and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver the course.

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Course overview

The course consists of 24 SCQF credit points which includes time for preparation for course assessment. The notional length of time for candidates to complete the course is 160 hours.

The course assessment has four components.

Component	Marks	Scaled mark	Duration
Question paper	40	35	1 hour
Assignment	30	15	see 'Course assessment' section
Performance — instrument 1	30	25	see 'Course assessment' section
Performance — instrument 2	30	25	see 'Course assessment' section

Recommended entry	Progression
<p>Entry to this course is at the discretion of the centre.</p> <p>Candidates should have achieved the National 5 Music course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ other qualifications in music, for example Advanced Higher Music and HN Sound Production♦ further study, employment and/or training

Conditions of award

The grade awarded is based on the total marks achieved across all course assessment components.

Course rationale

National Courses reflect Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles. They offer flexibility, provide time for learning, focus on skills and applying learning, and provide scope for personalisation and choice.

Every course provides opportunities for candidates to develop breadth, challenge and application. The focus and balance of assessment is tailored to each subject area.

Throughout this course, candidates develop a breadth of knowledge and understanding of music concepts and musical literacy. They learn to recognise and distinguish level-specific music concepts, signs and symbols as they perform, create and listen to music.

The course allows candidates to develop and consolidate practical skills in music and knowledge and understanding of music styles and concepts. It encourages them to self-reflect and explore their creative ideas. Understanding music through listening enables candidates to build on and extend their knowledge and understanding of music and influences on music.

The course provides opportunities for candidates to perform a range of music in solo and/or group settings.

Purpose and aims

The course provides candidates with a broad practical experience of performing, creating and understanding music. It enables them to work independently or in collaboration with others, and can help them to plan and organise, to make decisions, and to take responsibility for their own learning.

The course aims to enable candidates to:

- ◆ broaden their knowledge and understanding of music and musical literacy by listening to music and identifying level-specific music concepts, signs and symbols
- ◆ create original music using compositional methods
- ◆ perform music

Who is this course for?

The course is suitable for candidates with an interest in developing their understanding and skills in music. It allows them to consolidate and reinforce prior skills, knowledge and understanding of music developed through other qualifications or experience. It also provides a pathway for those who want to progress to higher levels of study.

The course takes account of the needs of different candidates and can be contextualised to suit a diverse range of needs, interests and aspirations. There is considerable scope for personalisation and choice through the activities of performing, creating and listening to music, and through opportunities for using music technology to create music.

Course content

The course has an integrated approach to learning and combines practical learning and understanding of music. Candidates draw upon their understanding of music styles and concepts when performing and creating music.

Candidates experiment with and use music concepts in creative ways, within a range of compositional methods, as they compose original music and self-reflect on their creative choices. Through listening, they develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of music styles, level-specific concepts, signs and symbols used in music notation.

Candidates develop their performing skills on two selected instruments, or on one selected instrument and voice, through regular practice and self-reflection.

Skills, knowledge and understanding

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course

The following provides a broad overview of the subject skills, knowledge and understanding developed in the course:

- ◆ skills in listening to music to promote aural perception and discrimination
- ◆ knowledge and understanding of level-specific music styles, concepts, notation signs and symbols
- ◆ skills in creating original music, incorporating harmony and using compositional methods
- ◆ reviewing the creative process and evaluating own composing
- ◆ skills in performing music on two contrasting instruments in contrasting styles
- ◆ self-reflection and review of rehearsal and practice skills

Skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment

The following provides details of skills, knowledge and understanding sampled in the course assessment.

The concepts in the course build on previous knowledge and understanding of concepts in Music courses at lower SCQF levels. Candidates are expected to have a secure understanding of the concepts at National 3, National 4 and National 5 levels, in addition to knowledge and understanding of those specific to Higher.

These concepts are detailed in the following tables.

Music concepts lists

Contexts for learning

Level	Styles	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Timbre
Higher	Plainchant	Mode or modal	3 against 2	Basso continuo	Tremolando
	Oratorio	Relative major	Time changes	Concerto grosso	Harmonics
	Mass	Relative minor	Irregular time signatures	Ritornello	String quartet
	Recitative	Interval	Triplets	Passacaglia	Ripieno
	Sonata	Obbligato	Augmentation	Da capo aria	Concertino
	Chamber music	Acciaccatura	Diminution	Sonata form	Coloratura
	String quartet	Mordent		Exposition	
	Lied	Plagal cadence		Subject	
	Impressionist	Interrupted cadence		Through-composed	
	Musique concrète	Tierce de Picardie			
	Jazz funk	Dominant 7th			
	Soul music	Diminished triad			
		Diminished 7th			
		Added 6th			
		Harmonic minor scale			
		Melodic minor scale			

Level	Styles	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Timbre
National 5	Symphony	Atonal, cluster	Rubato	Strophic	Piccolo, oboe, bassoon
	Gospel	Chord progressions — chords I, IV, V and VI in a major key	Ritardando	Binary/AB	(French) horn, tuba
	Classical		Moderato	Rondo/ABACA — episode	Viola
	Pibroch	Imperfect/perfect cadences	Cross rhythms	Alberti bass	Castanets, hi-hat cymbals, bongo drums
	Celtic rock	Inverted pedal	Compound time — 6 9 12 8 8 8	Walking bass	Clarsach, bodhran
	Bothy ballad	Chromatic		Ground bass	Sitar, tabla
	Waulking song	Whole-tone scale		Homophonic	Arco, pizzicato
	Gaelic psalm	Grace note		Polyphonic	Con sordino
	Aria	Glissando		Contrapuntal	Flutter-tonguing
	Chorus	Modulation		Coda	Rolls
	Minimalist	Contrary motion			Reverb
	Indian	Trill			Mezzo-soprano, baritone
		Syllabic, melismatic			A cappella
		Counter melody			
		Descant (voice)			
		Pitch bend			
		Tone/semitone			

Level	Styles	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Timbre
National 4	Baroque	Major/minor (tonality)	Syncopation	Canon	Brass band, wind band
	Ragtime	Drone	Scotch snap	Ternary/ABA	Violin, cello, double bass, harp
	Romantic	Broken chord/arpeggio	Strathspey	Verse and chorus	Flute, clarinet, saxophone, pan pipes, recorder
	Swing	Chord progressions — chords I, IV and V (major keys)	Jig	Middle 8	Trumpet, trombone
	Concerto	Change of key	Simple time — 2 3 4 4 4 4	Theme and variation	Timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, guiro, xylophone, glockenspiel
	Opera	Pedal	Compound time	Cadenza	Harpsichord
	Scots ballad	Scale	Anacrusis	Imitation	Bass guitar
	Mouth music	Pentatonic scale	Andante		Distortion
	Reggae	Octave	Accelerando		Muted
	African music	Vamp	Rallentando		Soprano, alto, tenor, bass
	Rapping	Scat singing	A tempo		Backing vocals
		Ornament	Dotted rhythms		

Level	Styles	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Timbre
National 3	Blues	Ascending	Accent/accented	Unison/octave	Striking (hitting), blowing, bowing, strumming, plucking
	Jazz	Descending	Beat/pulse	Harmony/chord	
	Rock	Step (stepwise)	2, 3 or 4 beats in the bar	Solo	Orchestra, strings, brass, woodwind and percussion (tuned and untuned)
	Pop	Leap (leaping)	On the beat/off the beat	Accompanied/ unaccompanied	
	Rock 'n' roll	Repetition	Repetition	Repetition	Accordion, fiddle, bagpipes
	Musical	Sequence	Slower/faster	Ostinato/riff	
	Scottish	Question and answer	Pause	Round	Acoustic guitar, electric guitar
	Latin American	Improvisation	March		
		Chord	Reel		Piano, organ
		Discord	Waltz		Drum kit
		Chord change	Drum fill		Steel band
			Adagio		Scottish dance band
			Allegro		Folk group
					Voice
					Choir
					Staccato, legato

Music literacy

Level	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Dynamics/timbre
Higher	<p>Bass clef — E–C — range of notes from E below the stave to middle C</p> <p>Transposing from treble clef down one octave into bass clef</p> <p>Identifying chords I, IV, V and VI in major and minor keys in treble and bass clefs</p> <p>Identifying tonic, subdominant and dominant notes in the keys of C, G and F major and A minor</p> <p>Naming diatonic intervals: 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, octave</p> <p>Writing diatonic intervals above a given note in treble clef</p>	<p>Quavers, crotchets, dotted crotchets and dotted minims within</p> <p>6 9 12</p> <p>8 8 8 time</p> <p>Triplet quavers, triplet crotchets</p> <p>Rests — quaver, crotchet, dotted crotchet, minim, semibreve, whole bar</p> <p>Da capo (D.C.)</p>	<p>Phrase mark</p>	<p>Accents (>)</p> <p>Slurs</p> <p>Staccato (.)</p>

Level	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Texture/structure/form	Dynamics/timbre
National 5	<p>Tones, semitones, accidentals — flats, sharps and naturals</p> <p>Scales and key signatures — C major, G major, F major, A minor</p> <p>Chords — C major, G major, F major and A minor</p> <p>Leaps</p>	<p>Dotted rhythms</p> <p>Dotted crotchet</p> <p>Dotted quaver</p> <p>Scotch snap</p> <p>1st and 2nd time bars</p>	Not applicable	<p><i>ff</i> — fortissimo</p> <p><i>pp</i> — pianissimo</p> <p><i>sfz</i> — sforzando</p>
National 4	<p>Treble clef stave</p> <p>C–A' — range of notes from middle C to first ledger line A</p> <p>Sequences</p>	<p>Quaver</p> <p>Semiquaver</p> <p>Grouped semiquavers</p> <p>Paired quavers</p> <p>Repeat signs</p>	Not applicable	<p><i>mf</i> — mezzo forte</p> <p><i>mp</i> — mezzo piano</p>
National 3	<p>Lines and spaces of the treble clef</p> <p>Steps</p> <p>Repetition</p>	<p>Crotchet</p> <p>Minim</p> <p>Dotted minim</p> <p>Semibreve</p> <p>Barlines</p> <p>Double barlines</p>	Not applicable	<p><i>f</i> — forte</p> <p><i>p</i> — piano</p> <p>< <i>cresc.</i> — crescendo</p> <p>> <i>dim.</i> — diminuendo</p>

Question paper

Candidates draw on skills in aural discrimination and perception, knowledge and understanding of level-specific music concepts, music literacy and analysis of music. These skills are developed throughout the course.

Assignment

The assignment draws on candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding of music composition. The composition must show use of **harmony**, along with at least three of the following elements of music:

- ◆ melody
- ◆ rhythm
- ◆ timbre
- ◆ structure

Candidates show their understanding of these elements of music through the creative and effective development of a range of musical ideas and compositional methods. They also self-reflect on their own original music and identify areas for improvement.

Performance

Candidates demonstrate their performing skills by presenting a prepared programme of music. The following aspects of performance are assessed:

- ◆ melodic accuracy and/or intonation
- ◆ rhythmic accuracy
- ◆ maintaining tempo and flow of the music
- ◆ conveying mood and character
- ◆ instrumental or vocal tone
- ◆ dynamics

The programme of music must be designed to allow the candidate to demonstrate a sufficient level of technical and musical skills at the appropriate grade level (Grade 4 or above).

Skills, knowledge and understanding included in the course are appropriate to the SCQF level of the course. The SCQF level descriptors give further information on characteristics and expected performance at each SCQF level, and can be found on the SCQF website.

Skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

This course helps candidates to develop broad, generic skills. These skills are based on [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#) and draw from the following main skills areas:

3 Health and wellbeing

3.1 Personal learning

5 Thinking skills

5.3 Applying

5.4 Analysing and evaluating

5.5 Creating

Teachers or lecturers must build these skills at an appropriate level, where there are suitable opportunities.

Course assessment

Course assessment is based on the information provided in this document.

The course assessment meets the key purposes and aims of the course by addressing:

- ◆ breadth — drawing on knowledge and skills from across the course
- ◆ challenge — requiring greater depth or extension of knowledge and/or skills
- ◆ application — requiring application of knowledge and/or skills in practical or theoretical contexts as appropriate

This enables candidates to:

- ◆ demonstrate a depth of knowledge and understanding of music, level-specific music concepts, and music literacy
- ◆ create original music and review the composing process
- ◆ prepare and perform a programme of music on two selected instruments or one instrument and voice

Course assessment structure: question paper

Question paper

40 marks

The question paper assesses candidates' knowledge and understanding of music concepts and music literacy.

Candidates demonstrate their conceptual knowledge and understanding of music by responding to questions that relate to excerpts of music in different styles. A range of question types is used in the question paper. Candidates must answer all the questions.

The question paper gives candidates an opportunity to demonstrate the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- ◆ aural perception and discrimination
- ◆ knowledge and understanding of music literacy and a range of music styles and concepts

The question paper has 40 marks out of a total of 130 marks. This is scaled by SQA to represent 35% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

Marks are awarded for:

- ◆ identifying and using concepts in a range of excerpts of music and styles
- ◆ applying musical literacy

Short-answer questions specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher level. In sequential listening questions or questions where candidates identify the prominent features of the music, concepts from all levels, up to and including Higher, are examined.

Setting, conducting and marking the question paper

The question paper is set and marked by SQA, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for external examinations by SQA.

Candidates have 1 hour to complete the question paper.

Specimen question papers for Higher courses are published on SQA's website. These illustrate the standard, structure and requirements of the question papers candidates sit. The specimen papers also include marking instructions.

Course assessment structure: assignment

Assignment

30 marks

The assignment allows candidates to explore and develop musical ideas to create music. It has two parts:

- ◆ composing one piece of music
- ◆ reviewing the composing process

The composed piece may be in any style or genre and must last a minimum of 1 minute and a maximum of 3 minutes and 30 seconds. Carefully-timed cuts or fade-outs should be used to keep within the time limit and should be at the discretion of teachers or lecturers.

The assignment has 30 marks out of a total of 130 marks. This is scaled by SQA to represent 15% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

Marks are awarded for:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------|
| ◆ composing music | 20 marks |
| ◆ composing review | 10 marks |

For composing music, candidates must:

- ◆ plan the assignment
- ◆ explore and develop musical ideas using at least four elements from melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and timbre, one of which must be **harmony**
- ◆ create one complete piece of music

For the composing review, candidates must:

- ◆ with reference to compositional methods used, provide a detailed account of the main decisions when exploring and developing their musical ideas
- ◆ identify strengths and/or areas which may be improved

Setting, conducting and marking the assignment

The assignment is set by centres within the following SQA guidelines.

Teachers or lecturers must agree the scope and focus of the assignment with the candidate, and must allow personalisation and choice.

The assignment must:

- ◆ allow candidates to apply the knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional methods
- ◆ be a meaningful and appropriately challenging task which enables candidates to clearly demonstrate application of musical skills in a creative way
- ◆ allow candidates to demonstrate competence in creating and developing musical ideas and an understanding of harmony

A candidate whose composition does not show use of harmony will be awarded 0 marks.

Candidates must not submit an arrangement of someone else's piece of music. A piece that is an arrangement will be awarded 0 marks.

Candidates who choose to include tablature (TAB) in their score or performance plan must ensure that all parts are notated in standard music notation. It is not sufficient to show any part in TAB only. A candidate whose score or performance plan has any part in TAB only will be awarded 0 marks.

The composed piece may contain sections of improvisation, but this must be in the context of a wider composition which demonstrates composing skills. A piece which is solely an improvisation will be awarded 0 marks.

Candidates who choose to work with pre-recorded loops must ensure that they do this in the context of a wider composition and show the compositional process. The candidate's actual creative input must be clearly identifiable.

Candidates who choose to write a serial composition must annotate their score showing the note rows. They must indicate which version of their note row they have used throughout their composition. It is not sufficient to indicate only some of their note rows. A candidate who does not annotate all their note rows in their score will be awarded 0 marks.

Candidates should clearly identify their input in their composition. For example, they should:

- ◆ make it clear if any part, such as a piano or guitar accompaniment or a drum kit part, has been fully realised by someone else, or what directions the candidate gave for that part
- ◆ state if they used any software to generate chord progressions or melodic or rhythmic ideas
- ◆ state if they used an electronic program to devise an accompaniment

The assignment is conducted under some supervision and control.

The assignment is submitted to SQA for external marking. All marking is quality assured by SQA.

Assessment conditions

Time

The assignment is carried out over an extended period of time in open-book conditions, allowing candidates to develop and refine their work before it is presented for assessment. Candidates start their assignment at an appropriate point in the course, as determined by their teacher or lecturer, allowing for personalisation.

Supervision, control and authentication

The assignment is carried out under some supervision and control. This means:

- ◆ candidates do not need to be directly supervised at all times
- ◆ the use of resources, including the internet, is not tightly prescribed
- ◆ the work an individual candidate submits for assessment is their own
- ◆ teachers or lecturers can provide reasonable assistance

Candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching setting. Teachers or lecturers may give support and guidance if required and should put in place processes for monitoring progress, for example regular checkpoints to ensure that the work is the candidate's own.

Resources

There are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access while producing their assignment.

Reasonable assistance

Candidates must undertake the assessment independently. However, reasonable assistance may be provided prior to the formal assessment process taking place. The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If any candidates require more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment or it may be that they have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

Teachers or lecturers may provide guidelines for the assignment to lead candidates through the assignment in stages. The coursework assessment task document provides guidance on reasonable assistance. It is available from the Higher Music subject page.

Candidates can seek clarification regarding the assignment assessment tasks if they find them unclear. In this case, clarification should normally be given to the whole class.

If a candidate is working on their assignment and is faced with more than one possible solution to a problem, then the teacher or lecturer may explore options with them. The teacher or lecturer and the candidate can discuss the pros and cons of each option. The candidate can then decide on a solution based on the discussion.

Evidence to be gathered

The following candidate evidence must be submitted:

- ◆ an audio recording
- ◆ a score or performance plan
- ◆ a composing review

Candidates must use the SQA composing review template, which is restricted to one page. They must submit only one composing review document. The template is available from the Higher Music subject page.

Volume

The composing review can be presented in prose or bullet points and, as a guide, should be in the region of 200 to 350 words.

Word count is given to indicate the volume of evidence required. No penalty will be applied.

Assignment marking instructions

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following marking instructions for the Higher Music assignment are addressed to the marker. They will also be helpful for those preparing candidates for course assessment.

Candidates' evidence is submitted to SQA for external marking.

General marking principles

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' responses.

- a Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- b For each of the parts, select the band descriptor which most closely describes the evidence presented. Once the best fit has been selected:

- where the evidence almost matches the level above, award the highest available mark from the range
- where the evidence just meets the standard described, award the lowest mark from the range

otherwise award a mark from the middle of the range if available

c If a candidate:

- does not submit an audio recording of their composition, award 0 marks
- does not submit a score or performance plan of their composition, award 0 marks
- submits a performance plan consisting of screenshots of a digital audio workstation, which may include only names of instruments, and no further information, award 0 marks
- submits a score or performance plan with any part as tablature (TAB) only, award 0 marks
- submits a piece that is an arrangement, award 0 marks
- submits a piece that is solely an improvisation, award 0 marks
- submits a piece that does not show use of harmony, award 0 marks
- does not annotate all their note rows in their serial composition, award 0 marks

Detailed marking instructions

Composing music

Candidates must use at least four of the musical elements listed below, one of which must be **harmony**:

- ♦ melody
- ♦ harmony
- ♦ rhythm
- ♦ structure
- ♦ timbre

Summary statements	Mark range
An excellent composition demonstrating a range of musical ideas which have been developed imaginatively and convincingly — appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements is highly creative and effective.	18–20
A very good composition demonstrating a range of musical ideas which have been developed with some imagination — appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements shows creativity.	15–17
A good composition demonstrating a range of musical ideas which have been developed competently — appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements shows some creativity.	12–14
A composition demonstrating musical ideas which have been developed satisfactorily — appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements may be simplistic and straightforward.	10–11
A composition demonstrating musical ideas which have been developed inconsistently to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements is not always appropriate.	7–9
A composition demonstrating limited musical ideas with little development appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements is poor.	4–6
A composition which shows a very limited understanding of musical ideas with no development appropriate to the candidate's chosen style. The selection and use of elements is very poor.	1–3
No evidence produced.	0

Composing review

The composing review must, with reference to compositional methods used, include:

- ◆ main decisions made
- ◆ the exploration and development of musical ideas
- ◆ strengths and/or areas for improvement

Summary statements	Mark range
The composing review contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ a detailed account of the main decisions made◆ a detailed explanation of the exploration and development of musical ideas◆ clear details of strengths and/or areas for improvement	9–10
The composing review contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ a fairly detailed account of the main decisions made◆ a relevant explanation of the exploration and development of musical ideas◆ identification of strengths and/or areas for improvement	7–8
The composing review contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ a satisfactory account of the main decisions made◆ sufficient explanation of the exploration and development of musical ideas◆ satisfactory identification of strengths and/or areas for improvement	5–6
The composing review contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ a limited account of the main decisions made◆ a limited explanation of the exploration and development of musical ideas◆ limited identification of strengths and/or areas for improvement	3–4
The composing review contains: <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ a poor account of the main decisions made◆ a very limited explanation of the piece of music◆ little or no identification of strengths and/or areas for improvement	1–2
No evidence produced.	0

Course assessment structure: performance

Performance — instrument 1

30 marks

Performance — instrument 2

30 marks

The performance allows candidates to demonstrate skills on either two selected instruments, or on a selected instrument and voice.

The performance can be solo and/or in a group setting. The overall performance programme must be a minimum of 12 minutes and must not exceed 13 minutes. The performance time on either of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice, must be a minimum of 4 minutes within the overall 12-minute programme.

Candidates must perform a minimum of two contrasting pieces of music on each of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice. These should be of an appropriate level of difficulty.

The performance has 60 marks out of a total of 130 marks. This is scaled by SQA to represent 50% of the overall marks for the course assessment. Each instrument or voice is marked out of 30, and individual pieces of music are given a mark out of 10.

The number of pieces of music in the performance programme is variable, therefore scaling is used to determine the final mark for each instrument or voice. Marks are awarded, as appropriate, for:

- ◆ melodic accuracy and/or intonation
- ◆ rhythmic accuracy
- ◆ tempo and flow
- ◆ mood and character
- ◆ tone
- ◆ dynamics

Performance overview

The performance allows candidates to demonstrate their musical and technical skills in an appropriately challenging context.

Music can, for example, be selected from current or past syllabuses (including graded anthologies) at the appropriate grade level (Grade 4 or above) from any of the following, or any other equivalent music organisation:

- ◆ Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)
- ◆ Trinity College
- ◆ RockschooL
- ◆ London College of Music
- ◆ Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) Scottish Traditional Music Graded Exams

Music in the 12-minute performance programme must allow candidates to demonstrate sufficient levels of technical and musical skills. It must include complete pieces of music and be of an appropriate level of complexity and demand. However, carefully-timed cuts to music may be required to keep within time requirements, and teachers or lecturers should ensure that the sections of music performed are appropriately challenging for Higher level.

The list of approved instruments and combinations of instruments is provided on the following page. Candidates who choose to perform on two instruments must refer to this list.

Approved instruments and unacceptable combinations of instruments

Candidates should demonstrate skills on either one or two contrasting instruments, either of which can be voice. Teachers or lecturers should send requests about presenting instruments not contained in the table below to SQA.

Instrument 1	Unacceptable in combination with Instrument 1
Accordion (free bass)	Accordion (Stradella)
Accordion (Stradella)	Accordion (free bass)
Bagpipes (Scottish)	Not applicable
Baritone/Euphonium	Horn in F Horn (tenor)/Cornet (Eb) Trumpet/Cornet/Flugel (Bb) Tuba
Bassoon	Oboe
Bass guitar**	Double bass**
Cello	Not applicable
Clarinet	Any saxophone
Clarsach	Harp
Double bass**	Bass guitar**
Drum kit*	Pipe band drumming* Snare drum* Timpani*
Flute	Not applicable
Guitar (acoustic)	Guitar (classical) Guitar (electric) Ukulele
Guitar (classical)	Guitar (acoustic) Guitar (electric) Ukulele
Guitar (electric)	Guitar (acoustic) Guitar (classical) Ukulele
Harp	Clarsach

Instrument 1	Unacceptable in combination with Instrument 1
Horn in F	Baritone/Euphonium Horn (tenor)/Cornet (Eb) Trumpet/Cornet/Flugel (Bb) Tuba
Horn (tenor)/Cornet (Eb)	Baritone/Euphonium Horn in F Trumpet/Cornet/Flugel (Bb) Tuba
Keyboard (electronic)	Organ (electronic) Organ (pipe) Piano
Mandolin	Scots fiddle Viola Violin
Oboe	Bassoon
Organ (electronic)	Keyboard (electronic) Organ (pipe) Piano
Organ (pipe)	Keyboard (electronic) Organ (electronic)
Piano	Keyboard (electronic) Organ (electronic)
Pipe band drumming*	Drum kit* Snare drum* Timpani*
Recorder (any one recorder or combination of descant, treble, tenor recorders)	Any other recorder Tin whistle
Saxophone (any one saxophone or combination of soprano, alto, tenor, baritone saxophones)	Any other saxophone Clarinet
Scots fiddle	Mandolin Viola Violin
Snare drum*	Drum kit* Pipe band drumming* Timpani*
Timpani*	Drum kit* Pipe band drumming* Snare drum*

Instrument 1	Unacceptable in combination with Instrument 1
Tin whistle	Any recorder
Trombone (tenor)	Not applicable
Trumpet/Cornet/Flugel (Bb)	Baritone/Euphonium Horn in F Horn (tenor)/Cornet (Eb) Tuba
Tuba	Baritone/Euphonium Horn in F Horn (tenor)/Cornet (Eb) Trumpet/Cornet/Flugel (Bb)
Tuned percussion (any one instrument or combination of glockenspiel, marimba, vibraphone, xylophone)	Any other tuned percussion instrument
Ukulele	Guitar (acoustic) Guitar (classical) Guitar (electric)
Viola	Mandolin Scots fiddle Violin
Violin	Mandolin Scots fiddle Viola
Voice	Not applicable

Combining similar instruments into one programme

Candidates can construct a performance programme that combines instruments from the 'Unacceptable in combination with Instrument 1' column with the corresponding instrument 1. They must also perform a second programme on another acceptable instrument. However, candidates **must not** combine drum kit, pipe band drumming, snare drum and timpani.

For example:

Performance programme one	Performance programme two
Piano and keyboard (electronic)	Any instrument other than : keyboard (electronic) piano organ (electronic) organ (pipe)
Guitar (acoustic) and guitar (classical) and guitar (electric)	Any instrument other than : guitar (acoustic) guitar (classical) guitar (electric) ukulele

*Instruments that cannot be combined into one programme

Candidates **must not** combine any of the following instruments into one performance programme:

- ◆ drum kit
- ◆ pipe band drumming
- ◆ snare drum
- ◆ timpani

Further instrument-specific information

**Bass guitar and double bass

Candidates can present bass guitar and double bass as two separate instruments, providing they use the bow for a substantial part of the double bass programme and use different music for each instrument. The double bass programme should largely consist of arco playing with pizzicato only where the piece particularly requires it. Candidates **must not** play a whole pizzicato programme on double bass and then play a bass guitar programme.

Bagpipes (Scottish)

Highland bagpipe must be presented at Higher. Practice chanter cannot be presented at this level.

Candidates must perform a varied programme containing a minimum of two pieces. All pieces must be played from memory.

Drum kit

A drum kit programme at Higher must have the following content:

Number of contrasting styles required in a programme	Number of different fills required within each style	Four-way independence required in
5	4	all styles

Carefully-timed cuts may be made in the printed music. Cuts and fade-outs may be made in the backing tracks to keep within the time limit, and should be at the discretion of the teacher or lecturer. Teachers or lecturers must ensure that the required number of fills is included before the cut or fade-out. Within any one programme, one piece only could include two styles and, in this case, candidates do not have to double the required number of fills. Candidates must demonstrate four-way independence in all styles.

Candidates presenting drum kit must be accompanied, and this may be live or recorded. However, one unaccompanied piece may be included within any one programme. This counts as one of the styles in the programme.

The pieces of music must allow the candidate to demonstrate a sufficient level of technical and music skills.

Drum kit styles

For Higher, candidates must perform a programme of five contrasting styles. Candidates must choose their five styles from banks 1 to 9 below. Each of their five styles must come from a different bank.

Bank 1	Bank 2	Bank 3	Bank 4	Bank 5	Bank 6	Bank 7	Bank 8	Bank 9
Rock	Disco	Blues (three quavers to one crotchet)	Shuffle	Jazz (2 or 4 feel)	Waltz	Reggae	Cha-cha	Irregular time signatures
Heavy rock	16th note rhythm		Funk shuffle	Swing	3 beats (simple or compound time)	Ska	Bossa nova	Free choice of any other style not listed in banks 1 to 8
Rock ballad	16 beat	12/8		Big band swing	9/8		Latin	
Metal rock							Samba	
Pop							Rumba	
Hip hop							Calypso	
Soul								
Hard rock								
Punk								
Funk								
R 'n' B								
Rock 'n' roll								

Guitar and ukulele (electric and acoustic)

There are three different and separate approaches to presenting a guitar or ukulele programme:

- ◆ a programme of pieces of chordal/rhythm guitar/ukulele throughout
- ◆ a programme of pieces which is a mixture of lead/melodic guitar/ukulele and chordal/rhythm guitar/ukulele — in which case the full chordal requirements for each level must be in the programme
- ◆ a programme of pieces of lead/melodic guitar/ukulele throughout

In the third approach, there is no requirement to include chords/chordal/rhythm guitar/ukulele within the programme and the requirement for a set number of chords does not apply.

Chordal requirements are shown below:

Minimum number of chords	Style
18	<p>Chords should be played in a continuous accompanying style, which could include finger-picking, arpeggiated chords, barre chords or more complex playing techniques appropriate to the styles of the music.</p> <p>Techniques might include alternating bass, runs, slurring, bending and harmonics.</p>

Keyboard

Single-fingered chords are accepted at this level. If a candidate plays with right hand only, they will be awarded 0 marks for the piece.

Voice

Singers do not need to perform from memory, however this allows for a more convincing interpretation and presentation.

Songs may be accompanied or unaccompanied (where appropriate), and transposed to any suitable key.

Setting, conducting and marking the performance

The performance is set by centres within the following SQA guidelines:

- ◆ The teacher or lecturer must agree the programme for the performance with the candidate.
- ◆ The teacher or lecturer must ensure that the music is of an appropriate standard for Higher level.

The performance is conducted under a high degree of supervision and control.

The performance is marked by an SQA visiting assessor. All marking is quality assured by SQA.

Assessment conditions

Time

Teachers or lecturers should ensure that there is sufficient time before the performance for candidates to prepare and warm up their instruments. Teachers or lecturers are also responsible for stating the title and duration of individual pieces of music on each candidate mark sheet before the assessment event.

This is a single assessment event. The full programme of music is performed in front of an SQA visiting assessor.

Supervision, control and authentication

The performance is marked by an SQA visiting assessor, and conducted in centres under conditions specified for visiting assessment by SQA.

Resources

There are no restrictions on the resources to which candidates may have access while preparing for their performance.

Reasonable assistance

Candidates must undertake the assessment independently. However, reasonable assistance may be provided prior to the formal assessment process taking place. The term 'reasonable assistance' is used to try to balance the need for support with the need to avoid giving too much assistance. If any candidates require more than what is thought to be 'reasonable assistance', they may not be ready for assessment or it may be that they have been entered for the wrong level of qualification.

Reasonable assistance may be given on a generic basis to a class or group of candidates, for example, by offering advice on how to select suitable pieces of contrasting music for the performance programme. It may also be given to candidates on an individual basis.

Group work approaches are acceptable as part of the preparation and also for the formal assessment. However, there must be clear evidence to show that the balance within group performances allows the SQA visiting assessor to clearly hear each candidate's performance programme.

Teachers or lecturers can provide candidates with some formative assistance prior to the formal assessment event.

Evidence to be gathered

An SQA visiting assessor assesses each candidate's performance by listening to their full programme of music. Assessment decisions are recorded by the SQA visiting assessor on an assessment record (candidate mark sheet) provided by SQA.

Volume

The following evidence is required for this assessment:

- ◆ Evidence of the candidate's ability to perform a 12-minute prepared programme of music on either two selected instruments, or one instrument and voice. The programme of music must include a minimum of two contrasting complete pieces of music on each of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice. However, carefully-timed cuts to music may be necessary to keep within time requirements, and teachers or lecturers should ensure that the sections of music performed are appropriately challenging for Higher level.

Performance marking instructions

In line with SQA's normal practice, the following marking instructions for the Higher Music performance are addressed to the visiting assessor. They will also be helpful for those preparing candidates for course assessment.

Candidates' evidence is marked in centres by an SQA visiting assessor.

General marking principles

Always apply these general principles. Use them in conjunction with the detailed marking instructions, which identify the key features required in candidates' performances.

- a Always use positive marking. This means candidates accumulate marks for the demonstration of relevant skills, knowledge and understanding; marks are not deducted for errors or omissions.
- b Award marks for the following, as appropriate:
 - melodic accuracy and/or intonation
 - rhythmic accuracy
 - tempo and flow
 - mood and character
 - tone
 - dynamics
- c Add the final marks for each piece of music together, and apply scaling to determine a final overall mark for each instrument, or instrument and voice.
- d Record assessment decisions on a candidate mark sheet. (Exemplar candidate mark sheets are available on the Higher Music subject page.)

Detailed marking instructions

Music performance — summary statements

Mark range 9–10: A convincing and stylish performance which demonstrates excellent technique

Melodic accuracy and/or intonation	Excellent level
Rhythmic accuracy	Excellent level
Tempo and flow	Appropriate and musically convincing
Mood and character	Conveyed with sensitivity
Tone	Confident, convincing and well-developed instrumental or vocal sound
Dynamics	Convincing

Mark range 7–8: A secure performance musically and technically

Melodic accuracy and/or intonation	Secure
Rhythmic accuracy	Secure
Tempo and flow	Appropriate and consistent
Mood and character	Conveyed securely
Tone	Secure and effective control of instrumental or vocal sound
Dynamics	Effective

Mark range 5–6: A mainly accurate performance displaying effective technical and musical control

Melodic accuracy and/or intonation	Mainly accurate
Rhythmic accuracy	Mainly accurate
Tempo and flow	Appropriate and mainly consistent
Mood and character	Conveyed with some success
Tone	Some evidence of development and control
Dynamics	Some contrast

Mark range 3–4: An inconsistent performance, lacking sufficient technical and/or musical skill to communicate the sense of the music

Melodic accuracy and/or intonation	Inconsistencies in melodic accuracy and/or passages of poor intonation
Rhythmic accuracy	Inconsistencies in rhythm
Tempo and flow	Inappropriate speed and/or some breaks in continuity
Mood and character	Not conveyed satisfactorily
Tone	Little evidence of development and control
Dynamics	Not observed satisfactorily

Mark range 0–2: A poor performance with little or no evidence of required technical and/or musical ability

Melodic accuracy and/or intonation	Inaccurate melody and/or consistently poor intonation
Rhythmic accuracy	Frequent inaccuracies
Tempo and flow	Totally inappropriate speed and/or frequent stumbling
Mood and character	Not conveyed
Tone	Poor
Dynamics	Ignored

Grading

Candidates' overall grades are determined by their performance across the course assessment. The course assessment is graded A–D on the basis of the total mark for all course assessment components.

Grade description for C

For the award of grade C, candidates will typically have demonstrated successful performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Grade description for A

For the award of grade A, candidates will typically have demonstrated a consistently high level of performance in relation to the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course.

Equality and inclusion

This course is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

For guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs, please follow the link to the assessment arrangements web page: www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

Further information

The following reference documents provide useful information and background.

- ◆ [Higher Music subject page](#)
- ◆ [Assessment arrangements](#)
- ◆ [Building the Curriculum 3–5](#)
- ◆ [Guidance on conditions of assessment for coursework](#)
- ◆ [Guide to Assessment](#)
- ◆ [Recent SQA research](#)
- ◆ [Remote assessment](#)
- ◆ [SCQF Handbook](#)
- ◆ [Know Your SCQF Level - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework](#)
- ◆ [SQA's Skills Framework: Skills for Learning, Skills for Life and Skills for Work](#)

Appendix 1: course support notes

Introduction

These support notes are not mandatory. They provide advice and guidance to teachers and lecturers on approaches to delivering the course. You should read these in conjunction with this course specification and the specimen question paper and coursework.

Developing skills, knowledge and understanding

This section provides further advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and understanding that you could include in the course. You have considerable flexibility to select contexts that will stimulate and challenge candidates, offering both breadth and depth.

Knowledge and understanding of music, music concepts and music literacy

Developing candidates' skills of aural perception and discrimination involves active listening. You should provide candidates with opportunities to experience a wide range of musical styles and genres and, through a variety of structured listening tasks and activities, develop their knowledge and understanding of music styles, concepts, notation signs and symbols. By listening, performing and creating music, candidates can develop these skills as they consolidate their understanding of music styles and concepts.

Skills in creating original music

Skills in creating original music using compositional methods are developed throughout the course and assessed in the assignment. The assignment assesses candidates' ability to explore and develop musical ideas to create music. Candidates explore and develop musical ideas using at least four elements from melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and timbre, one of which must be **harmony**.

Candidates apply knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional methods. They review the creative process by evaluating their main decisions when exploring and developing their musical ideas, and by identifying strengths and/or areas for improvement. You should encourage candidates to review their creative process on an ongoing basis and make regular opportunities to monitor progress.

Preparing and performing a programme of music on two selected instruments, or on one instrument and voice

Candidates develop their skills in performing music throughout the course by preparing and practising music in contrasting styles, on two contrasting instruments, or one instrument and voice. The programme of music must allow candidates to demonstrate a sufficient level of technical and musical skills. The programme of music must be at Grade 4 level or above. You should regularly review candidates' progress with them and identify next steps together.

Approaches to learning and teaching

This course is particularly suited to a number of teaching methodologies. You should use an appropriate balance of these to deliver the course. You should balance whole-class, direct teaching opportunities with activity-based learning on practical tasks. The course is designed to provide opportunities for learning and teaching activities that promote integration. Learning and teaching activities should provide opportunities for personalisation and choice, and address individual learning needs and interests.

Learning should be planned so that skills, knowledge and understanding are developed together. You should plan learning and teaching experiences carefully to take account of candidates' previous skills. You should also encourage candidates to critically self-reflect on their learning across the course. This process can help them to make links between the individual elements of the course.

Candidates' knowledge and understanding of music concepts and music literacy can be developed and consolidated through a variety of music activities.

- ◆ When candidates are preparing for their performance, you should encourage them to identify music concepts and music literacy within their own programmes of music. This makes their learning relevant and adds breadth and depth to their understanding of the music they have chosen to perform.
- ◆ ICT-based online resources allow candidates to access live performances, providing a visual and auditory experience, accommodating different learning styles.
- ◆ Learning can be supported by developing structured listening tasks using a variety of musical styles to illustrate the same concepts. This helps to consolidate learning.
- ◆ Catering to individual interests adds relevance to learning. You should encourage candidates to make informed connections between new and familiar styles and genres of music. Candidates are more open to new styles and genres of music if they understand the styles and genres they are already familiar with.
- ◆ Group activity work with discussion, rather than a series of tests, can support the thinking process as candidates learn to identify and verbalise why something is correct or incorrect.
- ◆ Gradually introducing candidates to the range of questions used in the question paper builds confidence and familiarises them with the exam.
- ◆ Incorporating coursework into learning and teaching activities is an effective way for candidates to gain and improve their musical literacy skills.

Preparing for course assessment

Question paper

General guidance for the question paper

The question paper assesses candidates' conceptual knowledge and understanding of music, music concepts and music literacy.

The concepts in the Higher course build on previous knowledge and understanding of music concepts in Music courses at lower SCQF levels. Candidates are expected to have a secure understanding of the concepts at National 3, National 4 and National 5 levels, in addition to knowledge and understanding of the level-specific Higher concepts.

Developing candidates' ability to aurally discriminate between different styles and music concepts involves active listening. You should encourage this through structured listening tasks and activities. Where possible, you should contextualise learning about music and music styles to make it relevant to candidates.

An understanding of the social and cultural influences on music can help candidates to identify concepts associated with a particular period or style. Two examples are given below.

The term 'impressionist' was first applied to a school of French painting that flourished from about 1880 until the early 20th century.

The impressionist style can be seen as a reaction against romanticism.

Period	Parallel cultural and social events	Musical features
Impressionist 1880 to late 19th and early 20th century	<p>French artists were looking for a new style.</p> <p>They explored new ways to use colour and light. Impressionist painters such as Monet (1840–1926) explored the visual impression of the moment, seeking to capture a feeling or experience rather than achieving an accurate depiction.</p> <p>This influenced writers like Mallarmé (1842–1898) and musicians like Debussy (1862–1918) to experiment in this style.</p>	<p>Impressionistic elements include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ rich and varied harmonies◆ whole-tone scales◆ instrumental timbres that create a shimmering interplay of 'colours' of sound◆ fragmented melodies◆ instrumental effects that obscure or substitute for melody◆ an avoidance of traditional musical form

During the Baroque period, the church remained an important patron of music, but the best jobs for musicians were at the royal courts. A large court typically employed an orchestra, opera company, chapel choir, and music director. Rulers demonstrated their status with lavish courts and entertainment. Music was often the highlight of court social activities and ceremonies.

The following table contains examples of the social and cultural influences on music during the Baroque period, and effects they had on the music. This approach could work for other periods and styles.

Period	Parallel cultural and social events	Musical features
Baroque 1600–c1750	Much of the music composed was for the church (sacred)	Choral music — sometimes a cappella, solo aria, chorus
	Instrumental music started to develop: concerto grosso, solo concerto	Orchestra: strings, oboes, high trumpets, horns, recorders, flutes, organ, harpsichord
	Composers were employed by the aristocracy	Music for special occasions; dance music
	Opera started to develop	Aria, chorus
	Baroque architecture — highly decorative	Baroque music — highly ornamented (grace notes, trills), polyphonic texture, binary form

Candidates could study a diverse range of music through a rolling programme of structured activities. This process would help them to understand and distinguish between the music concepts in each piece of music. Candidates could, for example, complete individualised listening programmes linked to their composing activities and their performance programme. Candidates could also use annotated music during listening tasks.

Composing and performance tasks also allow candidates to develop their music literacy. Performers use many skills simultaneously, and it is easy for them to be so focused on one aspect of their own performance that they overlook possible errors in other areas. Candidates can develop music literacy skills by listening to their peers performing and identifying pitch and/or rhythmic errors. When composing, it could be useful for candidates to ask you to play what they have written, exactly as they have notated it, to hear if the music accurately represents their ideas.

Candidates should regularly practise their listening skills to become focused, engaged, and critical listeners. You could set aside a short amount of time on a regular basis and give candidates questions to help them focus on particular aspects of the music they are listening to.

Questions to support candidates' listening could include:

Timbre

- ◆ Which instruments and/or voices do you hear?
- ◆ What type of group is playing: orchestra, string quartet, jazz funk group, brass band, wind band, steel band, folk group, Scottish dance band, rock group, choir?
- ◆ Which families of instruments do you hear: strings, brass, woodwind, percussion?
- ◆ Can you name the instruments? Can you hear a prominent instrument?
- ◆ Can you name any playing techniques — tremolando, arco, pizzicato, con sordino, harmonics?
- ◆ Is the music legato and/or staccato?
- ◆ Are there guitars and/or bass guitars? Are they strumming or plucking?
- ◆ Are there any guitar effects: distortion, reverb, harmonics?
- ◆ Are the voices male or female? Are they bass, baritone, tenor, alto, mezzo-soprano, soprano, coloratura?
- ◆ Is the singing accompanied or a cappella?
- ◆ Is the music forte or piano? Is there a crescendo or diminuendo, or are there any sudden changes of dynamic level?
- ◆ Is there a ripieno section?
- ◆ Is there a concertino section?

Melody/harmony

- ◆ Is the tonality major, minor, atonal or modal?
- ◆ Is there a change of key?
- ◆ Is there a change of key to the relative major or to the relative minor?
- ◆ Are there any ornaments and, if so, can you name them?
- ◆ Do you recognise any scales: major, minor, pentatonic, chromatic, whole-tone, harmonic minor, melodic minor?
- ◆ Are there any sequences?
- ◆ Are there any broken chords and/or arpeggios?
- ◆ Are there any discords?
- ◆ Are there any improvisations?
- ◆ Do you recognise any cadences: perfect, imperfect, interrupted, plagal?
- ◆ Is there a Tierce de Picardie?
- ◆ Is there a pedal and/or inverted pedal?

Rhythm/tempo

- ◆ Is the music in simple or compound time?
- ◆ How many beats are there in the bar?
- ◆ Are there 3 against 2 rhythmic patterns?
- ◆ Are there triplets?
- ◆ Are there irregular time signatures?
- ◆ Is augmentation or diminution used?
- ◆ Are there tempo changes: accelerando, rallentando, rubato?
- ◆ Is there an anacrusis?

Texture/structure/form

- ◆ Is there an ostinato?
- ◆ Can you identify the structure: binary form (AB), ternary form (ABA), theme and variations, verse and chorus?
- ◆ Is the song through-composed or strophic?
- ◆ Is the music in the form of a passacaglia?
- ◆ Is there an Alberti bass, ground bass, walking bass, or bass riff present?
- ◆ Is the excerpt from a Da capo aria?
- ◆ Is there a basso continuo?
- ◆ Is ritornello present?

Styles

What style is the music: plainchant, oratorio, mass, recitative, sonata, chamber music, string quartet, lied, impressionist, musique concrète, jazz funk, soul music?

Assignment

General guidance for the assignment

- ◆ The assignment is a creative process. Candidates should have freedom to explore and develop musical ideas, compose for instruments they know in a style or genre that interests them and allows them to apply knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional methods.
- ◆ You should build in time for planning, experimenting, developing and reviewing.
- ◆ You should encourage candidates to write their review as they make their decisions and explore and develop their musical ideas.
- ◆ There is no restriction on the resources candidates may use to compose or realise their compositions, in terms of hardware and software. Technology can be used to enhance initial ideas as long as the candidate's creative input can be identified. Candidates can use hardware such as guitar pedals, multi-track recorders, and programs such as Sibelius, Noteflight and MuseScore.
- ◆ You should encourage each candidate to be creative in their thinking and to avoid adopting a formulaic approach. Some candidates need more support than others, but all candidates must be allowed personalisation and choice.

- ◆ To accommodate the diverse musical interests of candidates, the length of the composition may be between 1 minute and 3 minutes and 30 seconds. For example, a composition by a singer-songwriter is generally longer than a composition in other styles or genres. The duration of a composition is not indicative of the standard and candidates can access the full range of marks by composing a piece that lasts 1 minute.
- ◆ You should encourage candidates to explore and experiment. This creative process informs their decision making as they develop their musical ideas into a composition.

Musical stimuli and development

The tables below contain a number of ideas that may be helpful for candidates to think about when starting to compose:

Possible stimuli for composing
Poems
Stories
Films
Video games
Pictures
Events

Composing using harmony

Candidates **must** show the use of harmony in their composition, but harmony does not have to be present all the way through. Harmony can be used in a variety of ways.

Here are some ideas:

Examples of using harmony
Ostinato
Vamp style of chordal accompaniment
Drone or pedal
Intervals of a third or sixth
A series of parallel intervals (4th, 5th, 3rd, 6th)
Experiment with dissonant intervals (minor 2nd, major 7th, aug 4th, minor 9th)
Chords I, IV, V and VI, experiment with chords II, III and VII
Dominant 7th (chord V7), diminished 7th
Added 6th chords; try different added notes (2nd, 7th)

Developing musical ideas

Type of development	Possible development techniques
Melodic development	◆ Sequences, repetition, ornaments, adding passing notes to the melody, modulation, ostinato, riff, relative major, relative minor, transposing to higher or lower octaves.
Harmonic development	◆ Countermelody, modulation, relative major, relative minor, chords with added 6th, dominant 7th, diminished 7th, broken chords, vamp, Alberti bass.
Rhythmic development	◆ 3 against 2, time changes, irregular time signatures, augmentation, diminution, syncopation, change of time signature, simple to compound or vice versa, cross rhythms, tempo changes, accents, dotted rhythms, drum fills, ostinato.
Timbral development	◆ Different playing techniques such as tremolando, harmonics, arco, pizzicato, con sordino, legato, staccato, flams, rim shots, rolls, paradiddles, use of different beaters or mallets. ◆ Dynamic contrasts <i>pp</i> , <i>p</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>mf</i> , <i>f</i> , <i>ff</i> , <i>sfz</i> ◆ Accents, slurs and staccato

Appendix 2 contains examples for candidates of instrument-specific approaches to composing.

Performance

General guidance for the performance

- ◆ Candidates should have a wide variety of music to choose from. This may be in the form of published music or centre-produced material. Materials should be refreshed regularly. Candidates should be discouraged from playing the same pieces on each instrument as this does not enhance their musical experience.
- ◆ Although within a teaching group some candidates might choose to perform the same piece of music, you should endeavour to provide the best musical experience for each candidate.
- ◆ You should regularly monitor candidates' progress and provide feedback to support their learning.
- ◆ You should build opportunities for candidates to perform into the course. Performing to others develops candidates' confidence.
- ◆ Peer reviews can greatly facilitate learning. The performer benefits from the opportunity to perform and receive feedback, and the reviewer learns to use musical language to describe the performance aspects. This can be done informally without detracting from teaching time.

- ◆ You should encourage candidates to record and listen to their performances and to make musical judgements on the standard of their playing. Sharing the performing assessment criteria with candidates can help them make these judgements and help them to identify the next steps.
- ◆ Candidates should have regular opportunities to perform with a suitable accompaniment. You may record the accompaniment for candidates' practice times, but you should also make opportunities for candidates to experience playing along with live accompaniment where appropriate.
- ◆ You may provide candidates with backing tracks to practise along with.
- ◆ You should liaise with instrumental tutors to ensure candidates are making progress and meeting standards.
- ◆ If candidates use headphones, or other appropriate technology, a range of performing activities can take place simultaneously.
- ◆ If candidates perform in a group situation, the assessor must be able to clearly identify and hear the candidate being assessed.

Candidates could improve their performance by:

- ◆ Practising sections where there are incorrect notes and/or rhythms slowly.
- ◆ Building up tempo gradually — if appropriate, by using a metronome.
- ◆ Working on technique to produce a better tone, for example articulation, bowing, breathing, tonguing, phrasing.
- ◆ Practising making dynamic contrasts.

The following questions may help candidates to reflect on their performance:

- ◆ Am I playing the correct notes?
- ◆ Am I playing the correct rhythms?
- ◆ Am I playing the music at an appropriate tempo throughout?
- ◆ Am I creating the right mood and character of the music?
- ◆ Am I producing a good tone?
- ◆ Am I observing the dynamic markings?

Appendix 3 contains further guidance to help candidates improve their performance.

Developing skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work

You should identify opportunities throughout the course for candidates to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

Candidates should be aware of the skills they are developing and you can provide advice on opportunities to practise and improve them.

SQA does not formally assess skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work.

There may also be opportunities to develop additional skills depending on approaches being used to deliver the course in each centre. This is for individual teachers and lecturers to manage.

Some examples of potential opportunities to practise or improve these skills are provided in the following table.

Skill	Opportunity to practise or improve skill
3 Health and wellbeing 3.1 Personal learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ identifying personal strengths, areas for improvement and next steps for learning♦ self-reflecting on creative choices and decisions
5 Thinking skills 5.3 Applying 5.4 Analysing and evaluating 5.5 Creating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">♦ applying musical and technical performing skills and understanding of music concepts and level-specific music literacy to realise the composer's intentions for the piece♦ applying understanding of music concepts and composition in creative ways♦ applying understanding of music concepts and basic music literacy through structured listening activities and exercises♦ analysing how others develop their ideas and work when creating original music♦ evaluating own and others' performances and compositions♦ developing original ideas for music♦ performing music in solo and/or group settings

Appendix 2: examples of instrument-specific approaches to composing

Singer-songwriter

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure: verse and chorus or strophic.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Start to experiment with words, melody, chords or riffs — whichever you find most straightforward.
- ◆ If you start with chords, make sure you choose a key which suits your voice and explore and experiment with chords I, IV, V and VI from your chosen key. For example, if you choose the key of G, you would experiment with chords G, C, D and E minor. You may choose to add 2nds, 6ths, 7ths to some of your chords. You are not limited to these suggestions and should feel free to use any chords that you already know, or find by experimenting.
- ◆ If you start with words, try saying the words rhythmically to help you with the word setting.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo that suits it.
- ◆ If you start with melody, think of words that fit the rhythm of the melody. You may decide that one of your ideas would make a catchy chorus to hook the listener and another idea would make a contrasting verse.
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and timbral development.
- ◆ If you started with melody and words, develop by adding chords to go along with your melody.
- ◆ If you started with chords, develop by adding a melody and words.
- ◆ Decide if you want a bridge section to link verses and choruses.
- ◆ Explore the effect of a key change or modulation.
- ◆ Think about adding harmonies — you could use another instrument or another voice.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Explore accompaniment styles, for example guitar: strumming and/or finger-picking, vamp; piano: broken chords and/or block chords, vamp.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Keyboard

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA), introduction–main section–coda, theme and variation(s).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Start to experiment with melody or chords — whichever you find most straightforward.
- ◆ If you start with chords, choose a key and explore and experiment with chords I, IV, V and VI from your chosen key. For example, if you choose the key of C you would experiment with chords C, F, G and A minor. You may choose to add 2nds, 6ths or 7ths to some of your chords. You are not limited to these suggestions and should feel free to use any chords that you know, or find by experimenting. Try to build up your music in four-bar phrases that end with an imperfect, interrupted, plagal or perfect cadence.
- ◆ Choose a time signature. If you are composing on an electronic keyboard, explore the styles and choose one you like.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo that suits it.
- ◆ If you start with melody, think of ways to shape it with rise and fall, question and answer, and/or phrases.
- ◆ Experiment with ornaments (trills, grace notes) but don't overdo it.
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and timbral development.
- ◆ If you started with chords, develop your ideas by composing a tune to go along with it. Base your tune around notes of the chords first and then add passing notes. Think of shape, question and answer, and phrases. If you have good ideas use them again (repetition), or use them higher or lower (sequence).
- ◆ If you started with melody, develop by adding chords. Choose from chords I, IV, V and VI in the key you have chosen. You may choose to add other chords. Think of an accompaniment style. If you are composing on an electronic keyboard, experiment with different styles to create your chosen mood. If you are composing on a piano, experiment with broken chords, vamp, Alberti bass and block chords.
- ◆ You might repeat a rhythm using different notes.
- ◆ Explore the effect of a key change or modulation.
- ◆ Think about adding a countermelody. Start simply — when the main melody has long notes, make the countermelody move and vice versa. If the main melody is moving up, try making the countermelody move down.
- ◆ Consider adding dynamics and staccato and/or legato playing styles.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Guitar

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA), introduction–main section–coda, theme and variation(s).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Start to experiment with chords or riffs — whichever you find most straightforward.
- ◆ If you start with chords, experiment with chords I, IV, V and VI from your chosen key to make a chord pattern. For example, if you choose the key of G you would experiment with chords G, C, D and E minor. You may choose to add 2nds, 6ths or 7ths to some of your chords. You are not limited to these suggestions and should feel free to use any chords that you know, or find by experimenting.
- ◆ If you start with riffs, explore a few that could go together.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo that suits it.
- ◆ Explore strum patterns and rhythms.
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and timbral development.
- ◆ If you started with chords, develop by creating a solo to go along with your chords.
- ◆ If you started with riffs, develop by adding chords. Consider layering the riffs, building up the music gradually.
- ◆ Decide if you want a bridge section that leads into a contrasting section. The contrasting section could be a change of key or modulation, or could include a solo.
- ◆ Think about adding parts for bass guitar and/or drum kit.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Drum kit or snare drum with other instruments

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA), introduction–main section–coda.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Experiment with instrumental combinations that allow you to use harmony in your composition, for example bass guitar and guitar, piano accompaniment, tuned percussion instruments.
- ◆ When you have a good combination, experiment with melodic, harmonic and rhythmic ideas.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo that suits it.
- ◆ Explore a range of dynamics and playing techniques to create contrasts.
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, harmonic and rhythmic development.
- ◆ Consider layering your melodic and rhythmic patterns, building up the music gradually.
- ◆ Decide if you want a bridge section that leads into a contrasting section. The contrasting section could be a change of style, or could include an improvised solo on one instrument while the others provide the harmony.
- ◆ Develop ideas using a range of dynamics and playing techniques.
- ◆ Consider the effect of rests and/or silence.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

A group of instruments

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA), introduction–main section–coda, theme and variation(s).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Choose instruments you are familiar with.
- ◆ Choose a key that suits your combination of instruments.
- ◆ Choose how many parts you are composing for, two or more.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo that suits it. Try changing from major to relative minor, or minor to relative major.
- ◆ Experiment by using different registers of the instruments — tunes played in different octaves (high or low) can sound very different.
- ◆ Changing the articulation from legato to staccato (or vice versa) can be very effective. Try pizzicato instead of arco. Would con sordino be effective? What about harmonics?
- ◆ Ornaments (trills, grace notes) can really change the character of a tune.
- ◆ Short ideas can work well in a question-and-answer format.
- ◆ Think of the shape of your idea — rising, then falling; starting high and descending; starting low and rising.
- ◆ Have you tried notes moving by step? Or by leap? Or does a mix work better?
- ◆ Try repeating.
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and timbral development.
- ◆ Repetition — but not too much — is essential in music. Try using a sequence, and move your idea higher or lower.
- ◆ Try adding some chromatic notes (accidentals) for variety.
- ◆ Explore the effects of a key change or modulation.
- ◆ You can often re-use a rhythm, but with different pitches.
- ◆ Ornaments (grace notes, trills) might be interesting additions.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Tuned percussion ensemble

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — binary (AB), ternary (ABA), rondo (ABACA), introduction–main section–coda, theme and variation(s).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Choose an instrumental combination that will help you to use harmony.
- ◆ Try out a few ideas on the instruments (xylophone, marimba, glockenspiel, vibraphone). You may choose to use other instruments.
- ◆ Experiment with chords and keys.
- ◆ Experiment by using different registers of the instrument — melodies played in different octaves (high or low) can sound very different.
- ◆ Experiment with playing techniques such as tremolando and glissando.
- ◆ Short ideas can work well in a question-and-answer format.
- ◆ Think of the shape of your idea — rising, then falling; starting high and descending; starting low and rising.
- ◆ Experiment with sequences, layering, repetition and ostinato.
- ◆ Have you tried notes moving by step? Or by leap? Or does a mix work better?
- ◆ Reflect on what works well.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Develop

- ◆ Consider melodic, rhythmic, harmonic and timbral development.
- ◆ Repetition — but not too much — is essential in music. Try using a sequence, and move your idea higher or lower.
- ◆ Try adding some chromatic notes (accidentals) for variety.
- ◆ Explore the effect of a key change or modulation.
- ◆ You can often re-use a rhythm, but with different pitches.
- ◆ Rolls, particularly on a xylophone and marimba are interesting, and are especially good for longer notes.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Create

- ◆ Use the best musical ideas you have developed to create your composition.
- ◆ Make a recording and a performance plan and/or score of your completed composition.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Review

- ◆ Using the notes you have made about your decisions throughout the creative process, complete the SQA composing review template and identify strengths and/or areas for improvement.

Appendix 3: good practice for improving performance

Good technique

Check you are applying good technique — holding the instrument or sticks/beaters correctly, using your fingers correctly, maintaining a good hand position.

Listen

Listen carefully to make sure you are making a good sound and are in tune.

Slowly

Begin to learn new music by playing slowly.

Small sections

Practise in small sections — take four bars at a time and don't move on until you can get these four bars right.

Joining up the sections

Practise joining up the sections you have practised.

Identify tricky bars

Isolate tricky bars and go over and over them.

Details

Check you are applying the details — for example dynamics, staccato, accents.

Gradually build up speed

When you can play the music well slowly, gradually build up your speed.

Reflect

Ask yourself: 'How can I improve my performance?'

Ask for help

Ask your teacher or your friends to listen to you performing and offer advice.

Administrative information

Published: September 2025 (version 3.2)

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Course support notes, examples of instrument-specific approaches to composing, and good practice for improving performance added as appendices.	July 2018
3.0	Component numbers removed. The list of approved instruments and unacceptable combinations of instruments was updated for accessibility — no content amendments.	May 2023
3.1	<p>Guidance on annotation of note rows in serial compositions and marking added on page 14, and to General Marking Principle (c) on pages 16 and 17. General Marking Principle (c) also updated to reflect when 0 marks are awarded.</p> <p>Amendments made to ‘Reasonable assistance’ on page 15 to direct to further guidance.</p> <p>Amendments made to page 16 to add instructions on the composing review.</p> <p>Tables on pages 4 to 9, 18, 19, 22 to 24, 27, and 32 reformatted for accessibility.</p> <p>‘Further information’ links updated.</p>	September 2024

Version	Description of change	Date
3.2	<p>Guidance on parts shown only in tablature (TAB) in a score or performance plan, and impact to marking, added on page 14, and to general marking principle (c) on page 17.</p> <p>Guidance on annotation of all note rows in a serial composition, and impact to marking added on page 14, and to general marking principle (c) on page 17.</p> <p>Guidance on performance plans consisting of screenshots of a digital audio workstation, and impact on marking, added to the general marking principle (c) on page 17.</p> <p>Guidance on clearly identifying candidates' input in their composition added on page 15.</p> <p>Typographical errors corrected on pages 14, 47 and 48.</p> <p>What you need to do differently Make sure candidates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ are aware of the penalties related to performance plans consisting of screenshots ◆ are aware of the penalties related to TAB ◆ are aware of the penalties related to serial compositions ◆ clearly identify their input in the composition or arrangement <p>You must update your teaching notes and teaching practice.</p> <p>You must refer to the updated course specification, coursework assessment task for assignment, and use the template for the composing review.</p>	September 2025

Note: you are advised to check SQA's website to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this document.