



Course report 2023

National 5 Music

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 7,676

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 7,555

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	4,579	Percentage	60.6	Cumulative percentage	60.6	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	1,642	Percentage	21.7	Cumulative percentage	82.3	Minimum mark required	59
C	Number of candidates	793	Percentage	10.5	Cumulative percentage	92.8	Minimum mark required	49
D	Number of candidates	377	Percentage	5	Cumulative percentage	97.8	Minimum mark required	38
No award	Number of candidates	164	Percentage	2.2	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Markers' reports for the question paper indicated that this was a fair paper with wide course coverage and a good mix of both accessible and challenging questions. Markers felt there was a good range of musical excerpts, and the paper was enjoyable to listen to.

Assignment

The requirement to complete the assignment was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance

Most candidates were well prepared for the performance and, as in previous years, most candidates demonstrated a good level of skills in this area.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas which candidates performed well in

Question paper

Responses showed that candidates were well prepared for the question paper. Candidates displayed appropriate exam technique, and most demonstrated familiarity with all question types.

Candidates completed the following questions well:

- ◆ multiple-choice questions — question 1(a), (b) and (d); question 4(a), (b), (d) and (f)
- ◆ sequential listening question — question 2
- ◆ inserting missing notes, and identifying the value of the dotted crotchet — question 3(c) and (d)
- ◆ identifying Celtic Rock — question 7(b)(i)
- ◆ giving a relevant reason — question 7(a)(ii) and 7(b)(ii)
- ◆ recognising prominent features appropriate to the excerpt — question 8

Performance

Most candidates were well prepared, and many performances were of a high standard.

Most candidates performing on drum kit used the drum kit style bank.

Many vocal candidates performed programmes from memory, although this is not mandatory, and they chose songs that were appropriate for their musical and technical skills.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question paper

Some candidates found the following questions demanding:

- ◆ question 1(c) — identifying the voice type as mezzo soprano, and 1(e) — identifying the chord sequence
- ◆ question 3(b) — identifying the Italian tempo marking as Andante and writing this at the appropriate place in the printed music, 3(e) — identifying the interval as semitone or 2nd, and 3(f) — inserting a repeat sign, with sufficient accuracy, at the end of bar 8
- ◆ question 4(g) — identifying bassoon as the solo instrument
- ◆ question 6 — recognising syllabic as the word setting, and strophic as the structure/form

Performance

During the performance assessment, some candidate mark sheets indicated a programme of music which met the minimum time requirement of 6 minutes, however during the assessment, candidates either did not attempt to perform one of the pieces or only

performed the opening bars of one of the pieces. As a result, these programmes did not meet the minimum time requirements of 6 minutes overall.

Where judicious cuts had been made to accommodate timings, a few candidates played sections of music below the minimum requirements (Grade 3 or above).

A few candidates who presented chordal guitar or ukulele programmes performed the pieces without providing a notated melody line, which is a requirement to allow the performance to be assessed in context.

A few chordal guitar and ukulele candidates did not demonstrate the minimum 12 chords required.

A few drum kit candidates did not select their three styles from the drum kit style bank and did not demonstrate four-way independence in every style.

A few candidates performed keyboard programmes without left-hand chords.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Concepts in a National 5 question paper are drawn from National 3, National 4 and National 5 concept lists, and candidates should be able to identify concepts from each of the three levels.

The following advice will be helpful to teachers and lecturers when preparing candidates for the question paper:

- ◆ When writing notation in question 3, candidates should clearly indicate whether a note is on a line or in a space, and it should be very clear if a note head has been filled in or left empty. This year, candidates were required to identify both pitch and rhythm of the missing notes, and most recognised that the notes were identical to those at the end of bar 1. If a candidate's pitch and rhythm are not written with sufficient accuracy, markers cannot award a mark.
- ◆ In short-answer questions, candidates should use the information provided, which is designed to guide them towards the answer. For example, in question 4(e) when symphony was the answer, candidates were guided in the stem of the question to write a response that described the type of large-scale orchestral work.
- ◆ In question 5 and question 8, the table headings may change, as indicated in previous SQA past papers. Candidates should carefully read the questions to ensure their answers are relevant. This year, candidates were asked to comment on prominent rhythm, melody/harmony, instruments and dynamic features in question 8; however some also wrote tempo concepts that were not asked for, and therefore they were not awarded marks.
- ◆ In question 8, candidates should give answers related to the excerpt and avoid long lists of unrelated concepts. Lists of concepts unrelated to the music and/or extensive lists of contradictory concepts will result in candidates not accessing the full range of marks.

If centres need to submit question paper evidence for exceptional circumstances, the question papers used for formal assessments should replicate the course assessment in terms of course coverage, question types and mark allocation. Centres should also submit a full copy of the marking instructions, even if questions are drawn from SQA specimen or past question papers, and in this case, centres should clearly indicate which SQA paper the questions have been taken from, or state if they are centre-devised. When preparing prelim and listening assessments, centres must consider the following information:

- ◆ A past paper or specimen question paper in its entirety cannot be the only evidence submitted for exceptional circumstances consideration.
- ◆ Some questions from previous qualifications may not provide the appropriate scope, coverage or balance, and may need to be amended.
- ◆ The marking instructions used for centre-devised assessments should reflect the marking instructions used in the final exam, for example half marks are not used. Examples of marking instructions for past papers can be found on SQA's website.

- ◆ Class tests, or other forms of evidence, must demonstrate that candidates have knowledge and understanding of concepts appropriate to the course assessment, including sufficiently broad coverage of a range of National 5 concepts.

Assignment

- ◆ Audio presentations are available on the Understanding Standards website to support candidates, teachers, and lecturers with the re-introduction of the (composing) assignment. These presentations signpost the range of Understanding Standards materials available, and give advice on the requirements and how to approach the assignment.
- ◆ The [assignment catalogue](#) is available on SQA's secure website. This catalogue details all available Understanding Standards candidate evidence and commentaries. It can be used to find, for example, compositions in a particular mark range, performance plans and those with specific instrumentation.
- ◆ The 2018 and 2019 course reports for National 5 Music available from the [Music subject pages](#) on SQA's website provided information for the assignment component which is still available and applicable.

Performance

The following advice may help to prepare candidates for the performance components:

- ◆ Centres should ensure that the overall programme is of the appropriate length. For session 2023–24, a National 5 programme should last a minimum of 8 minutes between the two instruments. The maximum time is 8 minutes and 30 seconds. The performance time on either of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice, must be a minimum of 2 minutes within the overall 8-minute programme. Centres must ensure that candidates adhere to the minimum and maximum time limits. Centres should also ensure that the music performed is at the appropriate level (Grade 3 or above).
- ◆ Carefully timed cuts may be appropriate to keep within the time limit, as long as they do not lower the technical demands. Centres should also consider the length of individual pieces after any cuts have been made. If significant cuts are made to a piece of music, it can become challenging for a candidate to access all the marks available.
- ◆ For guitar and ukulele programmes, centres should specify if the candidate is performing a 'chordal', 'melodic' or 'mixed' programme. Candidates can include chords in a melodic guitar or melodic ukulele programme, but they are not counted if it is not a chordal programme.
- ◆ Chordal guitar and ukulele programmes must:
 - include 12 chords minimum
 - be in standard notation — this could simply be a copy of the melodic line that the guitar or ukulele is accompanying, with the chord names printed above or below the staff; tablature (TAB) alone is not sufficient for assessment purposes, and neither is a lyric sheet with only chord names and no music notation
 - have a melody for candidates 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 should specify each style performed and style bank number. For session 2023–24, a programme must include four different styles, with four different fills within each style. Teachers and lecturers should refer to SQA’s style bank for a list of acceptable styles. Drum kit programmes must exhibit four-way independence in every piece. For notated music, the minimum requirement is four bars of the groove and four fills with a performance plan or map.
- ◆ Keyboard programmes must include both the right-hand melody and left-hand accompaniment in the performance. Candidates playing only a right-hand melody are awarded 0 marks for that piece.

To help visiting assessment run smoothly:

- ◆ Candidate mark sheets issued by SQA must be completed in pen (not pencil) by centre staff and be available to the visiting assessor at the start of each assessment session (morning or afternoon). The candidate mark sheet is the formal record of the assessment event and it is very important that it is completed accurately.
- ◆ Centre staff should give the visiting assessor a running order with approximate timings at the start of each session.
- ◆ To avoid unexpected candidate absence disrupting the planned running order, centre staff should have the next two candidates ready to perform. This ensures the maximum use of the visiting assessor’s time.
- ◆ Timetabling should take account of candidates’ chosen performance time on each instrument. It is helpful if centres consider the time allocated for each performance to make the best use of the visiting assessor’s time in each centre.
- ◆ Details of the instruments, or instrument and voice used, the pieces to be performed, and all timings of pieces should be clearly indicated on the candidate mark sheet. The total length of time for each instrument or voice should also be indicated.
- ◆ Each drum kit style should be clearly named on the candidate mark sheet, irrespective of the title of the piece; for example, ‘Download’ — rock, bank 1.

If a candidate is absent for the performance exam for health reasons or other unexpected circumstances, SQA will try to arrange an alternative date for the candidate to sit the exam. If this is not possible, centres must submit evidence of the candidate’s attainment in performance. Centre staff should submit an audio or video recording of as much of the candidate’s programme as possible, along with copies of the music and the marks awarded for all the pieces performed. Many centres routinely make audio or video recordings of formal assessments for this eventuality. If centres do not have an audio or video recording of the candidate’s performance programme, they should submit alternative evidence to show that the candidate has demonstrated attainment at National 5 level. Other supplementary evidence may include a certificate from a graded examination at an appropriate level.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).