

Course report 2026

Advanced Higher Music, SCQF level 7

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 1,647

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 1,730

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	655	37.9	37.9	70
B	541	31.3	69.1	60
C	332	19.2	88.3	50
D	132	7.6	96.0	40
No award	70	4.0	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

General commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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's very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do

this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

Markers reported that the question paper was fair and balanced. It was challenging in some areas, but it was an appropriate level of demand. It provided opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their subject knowledge and musical literacy.

Assignment

The assignment provided a significant level of challenge for candidates. It enabled personalisation and choice in composition, arrangement and analysis.

Performance

Most candidates performed a variety of music on instruments from the approved instrument list. Most candidates met the required performance time of 18 minutes — performing on two instruments or one instrument and voice.

Portfolio

Candidates composed or arranged in a wide variety of styles and genres. Personalisation and choice were evident.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Many candidates approached the paper appropriately and were well prepared for the requirements and format.

Many candidates answered multiple choice questions 1(a) and 5(a) well.

Most candidates correctly identified piano trio as the group playing in question 3(a) and most candidates correctly identified contemporary jazz as the style of music in question 3(c). Most candidates identified tremolando or arco as the playing technique in question 3(d) part 3.

Many candidates correctly identified the key of D major in question 2(a)(i). Many candidates also correctly identified syllabic in question 3(d) part 2 and octave in 3(d) part 4.

Overall, candidates showed a good understanding of the requirements of question 6(a). This was particularly evident in question 6(a)(ii), where many candidates provided the required number of relevant concepts under the given headings.

In question 6(b)(ii) most candidates identified the period of excerpt 1 — Baroque — and gave a correct justification. The inclusion of a harpsichord was a popular answer.

Assignment

Most candidates wrote a composition, but there were more arrangements than in previous years. Candidates who scored well used their creativity freely. There were some exceptional candidates who wrote inspiring and creative music.

Candidates who produced good compositions demonstrated development of musical ideas and an understanding of harmony.

In the analysis, candidates who gained 4 or 5 marks demonstrated a perceptive understanding of their chosen piece, with detailed reference to key features. They

included detail on not just what composers had done, but why. Their analysis included detailed identification of key features of the music, backed up with detailed reference to the audio.

Performance

Most candidates were well prepared, and many performances were of a high standard. Personalisation and choice were evident in most candidates' programmes, and they presented a wide variety of instruments in a range of musical styles. A few candidates performed pieces above the minimum requirements and performed very well.

Portfolio

Some candidates demonstrated a very good level of skill, creating imaginative and stylistic pieces.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

Some candidates did not perform well in the musical literacy questions. Few candidates answered question 2(a)(ii) correctly. Candidates did not always accurately place the repeat sign. Some candidates answered question 2(a)(iii) correctly, but pitches were often inaccurate and were sometimes written an octave lower. In question 2(a)(iv) some candidates notated incorrect rhythms instead of using a tie.

Few candidates answered question 4(b) correctly and the accidental was often placed incorrectly. In question 4(c) some candidates identified the interval as 4, rather than augmented 4th or tritone. In question 4(d) some candidates notated the quavers accurately but added a B flat accidental.

The chord analysis question, 2(c), was very challenging. Some candidates used the correct roman numerals but added incorrect chord names; they often put B instead of Bm. The identification of the diminished 7th in question 2(b) was also challenging. Few candidates correctly identified the augmented triad in question 3(d) part 1.

Answers included diminished 7th or dominant 7th. Few candidates correctly identified dominant 7th in question 3(b).

Few candidates identified suspension in question 1(a), and some answered augmentation in question 5(a). In question 1(b) some candidates provided a variety of answers including mass, chorale and anthem.

Question 6(b)(i) required candidates to give detailed differences and similarities. The marking instructions highlighted paired differences in relation to key, word setting, playing techniques and instrumentation. The concepts in the excerpt 1 and 2 only boxes gave a good balance for the level of challenge in this part of the question. In question 6(b)(ii) many candidates did not identify both periods correctly. Some candidates did not appear to draw together their findings from the earlier parts of the question to come to an insightful conclusion. Some of the candidates identifying twentieth century for excerpt 2 did not give enough detail in their justifications.

In question 6(b)(ii) a few candidates correctly identified the periods of both excerpts. Many candidates identified the period of excerpt 2 as twentieth century or modern but did not give a detailed justification.

Assignment

Many compositions were simplistic and straightforward, and some did not demonstrate the development of ideas expected at Advanced Higher. Some candidates demonstrated a lack of understanding of how to successfully develop a composition or arrangement. Their approach, especially to harmony, was not sophisticated. Some candidates did not demonstrate skills beyond Higher level.

Some scores and performance plans did not match the audio or give a sufficient level of detail. Performance plans that contained a screenshot of a digital audio workstation with only names of instruments and no further information resulted in the composition or arrangement receiving 0 marks.

Some analyses were not submitted in the Qualifications Scotland template and did not include a web link to the audio for the piece. In some analyses, candidates did not include time codes. The course specification, available on [our website](#), details the maximum marks available if key features are not included.

Performance

Most candidates' mark sheets showed a programme of music that met the minimum time requirement of 18 minutes. However, during the performance assessment, a few candidates either did not attempt to perform one or more pieces, or only performed part of a piece, meaning their performances were under 18 minutes.

A few programmes did not meet the minimum time requirement of 6 minutes on at least one of the two selected instruments, or instrument and voice, although the overall performance time was appropriate.

Where cuts had been made to accommodate timings, a few candidates played sections of music below the minimum requirement (Grade 5 or above).

A few candidates who performed chordal guitar or chordal ukulele did not incorporate the minimum 18 chords required. In addition, a few candidates did not meet the requirements as they did not incorporate a melody along with chordal accompaniment in at least one piece.

A few drum kit candidates' programmes did not demonstrate four-way independence in every style.

A few keyboard players did not demonstrate fully fingered chords. At Advanced Higher, candidates must play fully fingered chords throughout their keyboard programme. If a candidate plays with right hand only or uses single-fingered chords, they will receive 0 marks for the piece.

Portfolio

Some candidates' work demonstrated a lack of harmonic awareness that hindered the development of their ideas.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should:

- Remind candidates that questions requiring short answers (one or two words, or a phrase) specifically examine concepts introduced at Higher or Advanced Higher. For example, questions 1(b), 3(a) and 4(c) in this year's question paper tested the Advanced Higher concepts motet, piano trio and tritone. Question 1(c) and 3(b) tested the Higher concepts coloratura and dominant 7th.
- Give candidates regular opportunities to listen to performances, using scores where possible, to develop their musical literacy skills, and aural perception and discrimination.
- Remind candidates that their responses to question 6 should contain the prominent concepts under each category relating to the music heard. Candidates should carefully note the categories in the stem of the question. This year melody, harmony and rhythm were grouped together.
- Make candidates aware that for question 6(b)(i) the number of similarities and differences varies depending on the musical excerpts. For example, there may be more differences than similarities.
- Ensure candidates use the responses they gave in earlier parts of the question to guide them to a period of music and provide relevant justifications for question 6(b)(ii). Encourage candidates to listen to as wide a range of music as possible and consider what characterises each period of music. [Past papers](#), the specimen question paper and marking instructions provide detail about acceptable answers for all questions.

When preparing prelim and listening assessments, you must consider:

- A past paper or specimen question paper in its entirety must not be the only evidence submitted for examination exceptional circumstances consideration. Past papers are accessible on our website, so candidates may be familiar with the content before the assessment.

- Class tests or other forms of evidence must allow candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of concepts appropriate to the course assessment.
- You must submit a copy of the marking instructions even if questions are drawn from past papers.

Assignment

You may find the following resources helpful:

- a new [Academy course](#) providing support for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher assignments
- materials on the [Understanding Standards](#) website, including an audio presentation highlighting changes to the course specification and coursework assessment tasks in session 2025–26, and the [assignment resource](#)
- the Music Assignment Catalogue, available on [our secure site](#)

Avoid structured template approaches to composition. For example, you must not set any of the following features in a template:

- number of instruments
- instrumentation
- prescribed harmonies in certain bars
- changes of time signature in certain bars
- prescribed rhythmic, melodic or structural features in certain bars

This would go beyond the acceptable amount of reasonable assistance.

You should:

- Encourage candidates to write their review of the creative process as they make decisions and explore and develop their musical ideas.
- Not give candidates review templates with, for example, pre-populated phrases with spaces for candidates to insert one or two words.
- Ensure that candidates submit their analysis and review of the creative process in the mandatory templates available on [our website](#).

Candidates must:

- If using pre-recorded loops, ensure they use them in the context of a wider composition. They must clearly identify their creative input in their review of the creative process.
- In an arrangement, creatively rework their chosen music by exploring and developing musical ideas using melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and timbre. An arrangement cannot be a basic transcription from an available score.
- Include a copy of the source material used for their arrangement, and clarify details of their input in their review.
- Include a minimum of two strengths and/or areas for improvement. These should refer to musical aspects rather than the candidate's feelings. They should use the analytical skills they developed in other parts of the course and apply these skills of critical reflection when considering the strengths and/or areas for improvement in their composition and/or arrangement.
- Provide an audio recording of their chosen piece for analysis and include audio time codes in their analysis.

We provide additional guidance about assignment in the [common questions](#).

Performance

You should familiarise yourself with the performance sections in the course specification, which you can find on [our website](#).

You should also refer to the information for teachers and lecturers document for visiting assessment. This is published on [our secure site](#) and issued alongside the candidate mark sheets in January.

We provide additional guidance about performance in the common questions.

Portfolio

You can support candidates by helping them to extend their harmonic knowledge and understanding. Developing their listening and analysis skills will enable candidates to apply knowledge to their compositions and arrangements. They should focus on developing musical ideas, either melodically, rhythmically or harmonically.