



National 5 Music

Course code:	C850 75
Course assessment code:	X850 75
SCQF:	level 5 (24 SCQF credit points)
Valid from:	session 2025–26

The course specification 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 a candidate to complete the course is 160 hours.

The course assessment has four components.

Component	Marks	Scaled mark	Duration
Question paper	40	35	45 minutes
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 fourth curriculum level or the National 4 Music course or equivalent qualifications and/or experience prior to starting this course.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ other qualifications in music or related areas, for example Higher Music◆ further study, employment 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 more time for learning, more focus on skills and applying learning, and 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 the National 5 Music 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 purpose of the National 5 Music course is to provide candidates with a broad practical experience of performing, creating and understanding music. The course enables candidates 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?

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

The course takes account of the needs of different learners and can be contextualised to suit a diverse range of learner 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 National 5 Music course has an integrated approach to learning and combines practical learning and understanding of music. In the course, candidates draw upon their understanding of music styles and concepts as they experiment with these in creative ways 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, candidates 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 music styles, concepts, notation signs and symbols
- ◆ skills in creating original music 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 National 5 Music course build on previous knowledge and understanding of music concepts in Music courses at lower SQCF levels. Candidates are expected to have a secure understanding of the concepts at National 3 and National 4 level, in addition to knowledge and understanding of the level-specific National 5 music concepts.

These concepts are detailed in the following tables:

Music concept lists

Contexts for learning

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		Piano, organ
		Chord	Reel		Drum kit
		Discord	Waltz		Steel band
		Chord change	Drum fill		Scottish dance band
			Adagio		Folk group
			Allegro		Voice
				Choir	
				Staccato, legato	

Music literacy

Level	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Dynamics
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>	<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>	<p><i>mf</i> — mezzo forte</p> <p><i>mp</i> — mezzo piano</p>

Level	Melody/harmony	Rhythm/tempo	Dynamics
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>	<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

All 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. Candidates demonstrate their skills in the use of at least three of the following elements of music (melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and structure) when creating their piece of music.

They show their understanding of these elements of music through the creative and effective development of a range of musical ideas. 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/intonation
- ◆ rhythmic accuracy
- ◆ maintaining tempo and flow of the music
- ◆ conveying mood and character
- ◆ instrumental/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 3 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 (www.scqf.org.uk).

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

These skills must be built into the course where there are appropriate opportunities and the level should be appropriate to the level of the course.

Further information on building in skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work is given in the course support notes.

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:

- ◆ 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, 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 purpose of the question paper is to assess 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 are used in the question paper. All questions in the question paper are mandatory.

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

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

The question paper has 40 marks (35% of the overall course award).

Marks are awarded for:

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

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 complete this in 45 minutes.

Specimen question papers for National 5 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 purpose of the composing assignment is to explore and develop musical ideas to create music. The assignment has two parts:

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

The composed piece may be in any style/genre and must last between a minimum of 1 minute and a maximum of 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

The assignment has 30 marks (15% of the overall course award).

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 three of the elements of melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and structure
- ◆ create one complete piece of music

For the composing review, candidates must:

- ◆ 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:

- ◆ The scope and focus of the assignment must be agreed between the candidate and the teacher/lecturer and must allow the candidate personalisation and choice.
- ◆ An appropriate assignment allows the candidate to apply the knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional techniques.
- ◆ The assignment must be a meaningful and appropriately challenging task which should clearly demonstrate application of musical skills in a creative way.

- ◆ The assignment should allow the candidate to demonstrate competence in creating and developing musical ideas.
- ◆ The teacher/lecturer may provide guidelines for the assignment to lead candidates through the assignment in stages.
- ◆ An **arrangement** of own or other's piece of music is not acceptable. 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 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

This assignment will be 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 should start their assignment at an appropriate point in the course.

Supervision, control and authentication

Under some supervision and control 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/lecturers can provide reasonable assistance.

Candidates may complete part of the work outwith the learning and teaching setting. Teachers/lecturers may give support and guidance if required and should put in place processes for monitoring progress, eg 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 deemed 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 National 5 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 assessor may explore options with them. The assessor and 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 evidence must be included:

- ◆ 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 National 5 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 300 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 National 5 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 in candidates' responses.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ For each of the parts, select the band descriptor that 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.

- ◆ 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 improvisation, award 0 marks

Detailed marking instructions

Composing music

Candidates must use at least three of the musical elements listed below:

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

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

Composing review

The composing review must 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 account 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◆ 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◆ a 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◆ 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 purpose of the performance is to allow 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 programme must be a minimum of 8 minutes and must not exceed 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.

Candidates should 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 standard/level of difficulty.

The performance has 60 marks (50% of the overall course award). Each programme is marked out of 30 and individual pieces of music given a mark out of 10.

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

- ◆ melodic accuracy/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 could, for example, be selected from current or past syllabuses (including graded anthologies) at the appropriate grade level (Grade 3 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 8 minute programme should allow the candidate to demonstrate sufficient levels of technical and musical skills. It should include complete pieces of music and be of an

appropriate level in terms of complexity and demand. However, carefully-timed cuts to music may be required to keep within time requirements and centres should ensure that the sections of music performed are appropriately challenging for National 5 level.

The list of approved instruments and combinations of instruments is provided on the following page. Candidates performing on two instruments should 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)

Practice chanter cannot be presented at National 5. Highland bagpipe must 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

The required content of a drum kit programme at National 5 is as follows:

Number of contrasting styles required in a programme	Number of different fills required within each style	Four-way independence required in
4	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 centre. Centres should ensure that the requisite number of fills is included before the cut or fade-out. Within any one programme it is possible for one piece only to include two styles and, in this case, double the requisite fills is not a requirement. Four-way independence must be demonstrated in all styles.

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

Drum kit styles

For National 5, candidates must perform a programme of four contrasting styles and must select **only one** style from **each** of banks 1 to 9.

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			Latin	
Metal rock					9/8		Samba	
Pop							Rumba	
Hip hop							Calypso	
Soul								
Hard rock								
Punk								
Funk								
R 'n' B								
Rock 'n' roll								

Guitar (electric and acoustic)

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

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

In the third approach, there is no requirement to include chords/chordal/rhythm guitar 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
12	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.

The above requirements also apply to ukulele programmes as appropriate.

Keyboard

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

Voice

Performing from memory is not a mandatory requirement for singers, 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 programme for the performance should be agreed by the teacher/lecturer and candidate.
- ◆ The teacher/lecturer must ensure that the music is of an appropriate standard for National 5 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

Centres should ensure that there is sufficient time before the performance to prepare and warm-up the instruments. Centres 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 will be 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 deemed 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 during the planning/preparation stage. 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.

Assessors can provide candidates with some formative assistance prior to the formal assessment event.

Evidence to be gathered

An SQA visiting assessor assesses the performance. They assess 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 an 8 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.

Performance marking instructions

Marks in the performance are awarded by the SQA visiting assessor for the following, as appropriate:

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

General marking principles

As the number of pieces of music in individual candidates' programmes is variable, the final marks for each piece of music are added together by the SQA visiting assessor, and scaling is used to determine a final overall mark for each instrument/voice.

SQA visiting assessors record their assessment decisions on a candidate mark sheet. Exemplar candidate mark sheets are available from the National 5 Music subject page.

SQA visiting assessors exercise their professional judgement, guided by the summary statements for each mark range on the following 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

A candidate's overall grade is 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.

- ◆ [National 5 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. They should be read in conjunction with this course specification and the specimen question paper and/or coursework.

Developing skills knowledge and understanding

This section provides further advice and guidance about skills, knowledge and understanding that could be included in the course. Teachers and lecturers should refer to this course specification for the skills, knowledge and understanding for the course assessment. Course planners have considerable flexibility to select coherent contexts which will stimulate and challenge their 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. Teachers or lecturers should provide candidates with opportunities to experience a wide range of musical styles/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 on an ongoing basis throughout the course 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 through an assignment. The purpose of the assignment is to assess candidates' ability to explore and develop musical ideas to create music. Candidates explore musical ideas using at least three of the following musical elements: melody, harmony, rhythm, timbre and structure. Candidates apply knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional techniques. 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. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to review their creative journey 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

Skills in performing music are developed throughout the course by preparing and practising music on two contrasting instruments, or one instrument and voice, in contrasting styles. 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 3 level or above. Teachers or lecturers and candidates should regularly review progress and identify next steps together.

Approaches to learning and teaching

The National 5 Music course is particularly suited to a number of teaching methodologies. Teachers and lecturers should use an appropriate balance of these to deliver the course. Whole-class, direct teaching opportunities should be balanced by activity-based learning on practical tasks. The course is designed to provide opportunities for learning and teaching activities which 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 are developed simultaneously with knowledge and understanding. Teachers and lecturers should plan teaching and learning experiences carefully to take account of the prior skills of candidates. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to critically self-reflect on their learning across the course. This process can help candidates 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, teachers or lecturers 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 which illustrate the same concepts. This helps to consolidate learning.
- ◆ Catering to individual interests adds relevance to learning. Teachers and lecturers 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.
- ◆ Naturally occurring coursework is an effective way for candidates to gain and improve their musical literacy skills.

Preparing for course assessment

Assignment

General guidance for the assignment

- ◆ The assignment is a compositional process. Candidates should have freedom to explore and develop musical ideas, compose for instruments they know in a style or genre which interests them and allows them to apply knowledge and skills developed throughout the course to show understanding of compositional techniques.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should build in time for planning, experimenting, developing and reviewing.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers 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 programmes such as Sibelius and MuseScore.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should avoid adopting a formulaic approach and encourage each candidate to be creative in their thinking. Some candidates may 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 a minimum of 1 minute and a maximum of 2 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 it is possible to access the full range of marks by composing a piece which lasts 1 minute.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged 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

Developing musical ideas

Type of development	Possible development techniques
Melodic development	◆ Sequences, repetition, ornaments, adding extra notes to the melody, modulation, ostinato, riff.
Rhythmic development	◆ Syncopation, change of time signature, simple to compound or vice versa, cross rhythms, tempo changes, accents, dotted rhythms, drum fills, ostinato.
Harmonic development	◆ Countermelody, change of key, minor to major or vice versa, broken chords, vamp, Alberti bass.
Timbral development	◆ Different playing techniques such as arco, pizzicato, con sordino, legato, staccato, flams, rim shots, rolls, paradiddles, use of different beaters/mallets. ◆ Dynamic contrasts.

Appendix 2 contains examples 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, teachers or lecturers should endeavour to provide the best musical experience for each candidate.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers should regularly monitor candidates' progress and provide feedback to support their learning.
- ◆ Opportunities for candidates to perform should be built into the course. This builds confidence in performing to others.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Teachers and lecturers 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. Teachers or lecturers may record the accompaniment for the candidate's practice times but should also make opportunities for candidates to experience playing along with live accompaniment where appropriate.
- ◆ Backing tracks may be provided for candidates to practise along with.
- ◆ Teachers or lecturers should liaise with instrumental tutors to ensure standards are being met and progress is being made.

- ◆ A range of performing activities can take place simultaneously if headphones or technology are used.
- ◆ If candidates perform in a group situation, the assessor must be able to clearly identify and hear the performer being assessed.

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?

Possible next steps for candidates could include:

- ◆ 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. Consider articulation, bowing, breathing, tonguing, phrasing, etc.
- ◆ Practising making dynamic contrasts.

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

Question paper

General guidance for the question paper

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

Developing candidates' ability to aurally discriminate between different styles and music concepts involves active listening. Teachers or lecturers should encourage this through structured listening tasks and activities. Where possible, learning about music and music styles should be contextualised and 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. For example, 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/styles.

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

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 their teacher or lecturer to play what they have written, exactly as they have notated it, to hear if the music accurately represents their ideas.

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

Candidates should regularly practise their listening skills in order to become focused, engaged, and critical listeners. Teachers or lecturers could set aside a short amount of time on a regular basis, and give candidates some 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/voices do you hear?
- ◆ What type of group is playing: orchestra, 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 — arco, pizzicato, con sordino?
- ◆ 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?
- ◆ Are the voices male or female? Are they bass, baritone, tenor, alto, mezzo-soprano, soprano?
- ◆ Is the singing accompanied or unaccompanied/a cappella?
- ◆ Is the music loud and/or soft? Does the music gradually get louder or softer?

Melody/harmony

- ◆ Is the tonality major/minor/atonal?
- ◆ Is there a change of key?
- ◆ Are there any ornaments?
- ◆ Do you recognise any scales: major, minor, chromatic, whole-tone?
- ◆ Are there any sequences?
- ◆ Are there any broken chords/arpeggios?
- ◆ Are there any discords?
- ◆ Are there any improvisations?
- ◆ Do you recognise any cadences: perfect, imperfect?

Rhythm/tempo

- ◆ Is the music in simple or compound time?
- ◆ How many beats are there in the bar?
- ◆ Are there any 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/chorus, strophic?
- ◆ Is there an Alberti bass, ground bass, walking bass, bass riff present?

Styles

- ◆ What style is the music: jazz, blues, rock, pop, musical, Scottish, Latin American, ragtime, swing, reggae, romantic, Celtic rock?

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

Course planners 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 teachers and lecturers 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 some these skills are provided in the following tables.

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	<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
5.4 Analysing and evaluating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ analysing how others develop their ideas and work when creating original music ◆ evaluating own and others' performances and compositions
5.5 Creating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ 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/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 1, 4, 5 and 6 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 other chords.
- ◆ 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 which suits it.
- ◆ If you start with melody, think of words which will 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/choruses.
- ◆ Explore possibilities of a key change.
- ◆ 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, eg guitar: strumming/finger-picking, vamp; piano: broken chords/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 — AB, ABA, beginning-middle-end.
- ◆ 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 1, 4, 5 and 6 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 other chords. Try to build up your music in four-bar phrases which end with an imperfect 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 which suits it.
- ◆ If you start with melody, think of ways to shape your melody with rise and fall/question and answer/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/questions and answer/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 1, 4, 5 and 6 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 possibilities of a key change in one of the sections.
- ◆ Think about adding a counter melody. Start simply — when the main melody has long notes, make the counter melody move and vice versa. If the main melody is moving up, try making the counter melody move down.
- ◆ Consider adding dynamics and staccato/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 — AB, ABA, beginning-middle-end.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Start to experiment with chords or riffs — whichever you find most straightforward.
- ◆ Experiment with chords 1, 4, 5 and 6 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 other chords.
- ◆ If you start with riffs, explore a few which could go together.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo which 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 which leads into a contrasting section. The contrasting section could be a change of key, 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

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — AB, ABA, beginning-middle-end.
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Start to experiment with rhythmic ideas.
- ◆ Experiment using these ideas on different parts of the drum kit.
- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo which 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 rhythmic and timbral development.
- ◆ Consider layering your rhythmic patterns, building up the music gradually.
- ◆ Decide if you want a bridge section which leads into a contrasting section. The contrasting section could be a change of style, or could include an improvised solo.
- ◆ Develop rhythmic ideas using a range of dynamics and playing techniques.
- ◆ Consider the effect of rests/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.

Instruments — single-line melody

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — ternary (ABA), theme and variation(s), rondo (ABACA).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Try out a few ideas on the instrument.
- ◆ Choose the most easily played notes in a key that is comfortable for you.

- ◆ Think of the mood you want to create and choose a tempo which suits it. Try changing from major to minor, or minor to major.
- ◆ Experiment with using different parts of the instrument — 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?
- ◆ Ornaments (trills, grace notes) can really change the character of a tune.
- ◆ Short ideas can work well in a question/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 (next-door notes)? Leap (notes not next to each other)? 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 possibilities of a key change, perhaps for a contrasting section.
- ◆ 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 — single-line melody

Plan

- ◆ Think about a structure — ternary (ABA), theme and variation(s), rondo (ABACA).
- ◆ Make a note of your decisions.

Explore

- ◆ Try out a few ideas on the instrument (xylophone/marimba/glockenspiel). Slower tunes sound better on the glockenspiel; xylophone sounds die away quickly.
- ◆ Experiment with using different parts of the instrument — melodies played in different octaves (high or low) can sound very different.
- ◆ Short ideas can work well in a question/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 (next-door notes)? Leap (notes not next to each other)? 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 possibilities of a key change, perhaps for a contrasting section.
- ◆ You can often re-use a rhythm, but with different pitches.
- ◆ Rolls, particularly on a xylophone/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 — lounds and softs, staccato, accents etc.

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 playing?'

Ask for help

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

Administrative information

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History of changes to course specification

Version	Description of change	Date
2.0	Course support notes added as an appendix.	July 2017
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	Clarification of grade level added on page 9. Guidance added to page 13 and general marking principles on page 15 to reflect when 0 marks are awarded. Amendments made to page 14 to direct to further guidance on reasonable assistance, and provide clarification on the composing review and the assignment marking instructions. Tables on pages 4 to 8, 16, 17, 20 to 22, 25, 29, and 40 reformatted for accessibility. 'Further information' links updated.	September 2024
3.2	Guidance on parts shown only in tablature (TAB) in a score or performance plan, and impact on marking, added on page 13 and to the third general marking principle on page 15. Guidance on clearly identifying candidates' input in their composition added on page 13. Guidance on performance plans consisting of screenshots of a digital audio workstation, and impact on marking, added to the third general marking principle on page 15. What you need to do differently Make sure candidates: <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◆ clearly identify their input in the composition or arrangement You must update your teaching notes and teaching practice. You must refer to the updated course specification and coursework assessment task for the assignment, and use the template for the composing review.	September 2025

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

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