



Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 7,555

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 7,730

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	4,259	Percentage	55.1	Cumulative percentage	55.1	Minimum mark required	69
B	Number of candidates	1,760	Percentage	22.8	Cumulative percentage	77.9	Minimum mark required	59
C	Number of candidates	1,015	Percentage	13.1	Cumulative percentage	91.0	Minimum mark required	49
D	Number of candidates	493	Percentage	6.4	Cumulative percentage	97.4	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Number of candidates	203	Percentage	2.6	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected. Markers felt that there was good course coverage of National 3, National 4 and National 5 concepts; that excerpts spanned a wide range of genres; and that overall, there was appropriate level of challenge balanced with more accessible questions.

Assignment

The assignment was re-introduced this session.

Most candidates met the requirement to submit an assignment comprising a composition and review.

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 that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Many candidates demonstrated that they were well prepared for the assessment, showed familiarity with the question types and displayed appropriate exam technique. Most candidates attempted every question.

Most candidates answered the following questions well:

- ◆ Question 1(a) — identifying reggae music
- ◆ Question 1(d) — recognising pitch bend
- ◆ Question 3(b) — identifying and accurately writing the time signature
- ◆ Question 3(e) — naming the note
- ◆ Question 4(a) — identifying vamp and Scotch snap
- ◆ Question 4(c) — identifying minimalist
- ◆ Question 4(d) — identifying inverted pedal and French horn
- ◆ Question 4(f) — identifying imperfect cadence
- ◆ Question 7(a)(i) — identifying Scots ballad

Many candidates answered the following questions well:

- ◆ Question 1(b) — recognising trumpet as the instrument playing con sordino
- ◆ Question 1(c) — identifying the bass line as walking bass
- ◆ Question 1(f) — identifying distortion as the electronic effect
- ◆ Question 3(f) — identifying and accurately writing an appropriate dynamic marking after the diminuendo
- ◆ Question 4(b) — recognising jig as the Scottish dance

Assignment

Some candidates' compositions demonstrated creativity and showed a range of musical ideas that they developed well. Most candidates wrote a composing review containing satisfactory accounts of the main decisions they made. Some candidate submissions evidenced personalisation and choice, demonstrating original ideas that they developed effectively and creatively.

Performance

In most performances, there was clear evidence of personalisation and choice in the varied programmes selected.

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

Most candidates who performed 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 that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Many candidates found the following questions challenging:

- ◆ Question 1(e) — identifying the chord sequence
- ◆ Question 2 part 2 — identifying the word setting as syllabic
- ◆ Question 2 part 4 — identifying the scale as chromatic
- ◆ Question 3(a) — identifying the tempo as andante and writing this at the appropriate place in the printed music
- ◆ Question 3(c) — identifying the opening chord as A minor
- ◆ Question 3(d) — accurately identifying and completing the missing notes in bar 3
- ◆ Question 4(e) — identifying homophonic — the question asked for a concept to describe the texture of the vocals; however, many candidates gave responses that were unrelated to texture
- ◆ Question 6 — recognising recorder as the solo instrument

Assignment

Most compositions show candidates' initial ideas are appropriate, but some do not show they have successfully developed these ideas.

Some candidates lacked harmonic understanding, resulting in clashes in melodic and accompaniment parts.

Some compositions did not meet the time requirements — the music on the audio recording must last between a minimum of 1 minute and a maximum of 2 minutes and 30 seconds.

Some candidates who chose to work with pre-recorded loops lacked sufficient detail to show which sections were original to them, or how they had developed the loops to make them their own. Performance plans and reviews should include information about the candidate's creative input, clearly demonstrating what they have composed in addition to the loops or samples used.

In the composing review, many candidates lacked detail of how they had explored and developed their musical ideas, which is one of the three requirements of the review. Some candidates provided limited identification of strengths and areas for development; for example: 'I like my music', 'I could add another instrument', 'I would make my piece longer' or 'If I had more time, I would add a drum beat.'

Performance

Most candidate mark sheets indicated a programme of music that met the minimum time requirement of 8 minutes. However, during the performance assessment, a few 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 8 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 four 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:

- ◆ In short-answer questions, candidates should use the information provided, which is designed to guide them towards the answer. For example, in question 1(f) when distortion was the answer, candidates were guided in the stem of the question to listen to the guitar and name the electronic effect. Some candidates' responses were unrelated to an effect and instead responded with, for example, a style of music or an instrumental technique.
- ◆ In question 3, candidates should look elsewhere in the printed music to see if there are similar patterns in pitch or rhythm that may assist them in their answer. In question 3(d) this year, the rhythm was provided above the bar and the notes moved by step, similar to sequences elsewhere in the music; both pitch and rhythm must be written accurately to be awarded the mark. When writing notation, candidates should clearly indicate whether a note is on a line or in a space. If a candidate has not made their intention clear, then markers cannot award marks.
- ◆ In question 5 and question 8, the table headings may change from year to year. Candidates should carefully read the questions to ensure their answers are relevant. This year, candidates were asked to comment on prominent melody/harmony, rhythm/tempo, instruments and dynamics (Italian terms) in question 8.
- ◆ 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 or extensive lists of contradictory concepts will result in candidates not accessing the full range of marks.
- ◆ In multiple choice questions, candidates should read the question carefully so they are aware of how many responses should be ticked. Some candidates ticked two boxes when only one response was required, or only ticked one box when two responses were asked for.

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 question type and mark allocation. Ensuring assessments meet the criteria below will help teachers and lecturers establish candidate estimates. Centres should also submit a full copy of the marking instructions, even if questions are drawn from SQA specimen or past question papers. When preparing formal assessment and listening exams, 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. 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

Teachers and lecturers should refer to the Understanding Standards materials on SQA's secure website for a range of approaches and development ideas for the National 5 Music assignment. The Music assignment catalogue lists approximately 120 pieces of candidate evidence across National 5 to Advanced Higher levels, including marks and commentaries. In addition, in September 2023, SQA published audio presentations at these three levels showing marked candidate evidence with commentaries.

Personalisation and choice should be encouraged, allowing candidates to compose in a genre or style that interests them. Centres should avoid using across-the-board template approaches that direct candidates to compose specific styles of music, as this can limit candidates' creativity, personalisation and choice. For example, using a whole-class Scottish Waltz or a ternary form composition template is unlikely to encourage candidates to develop their individual compositional skills, often meaning their creativity, imagination and development opportunities are stifled. This could make it more difficult for them to access the upper mark ranges.

For candidates to demonstrate creativity, teachers and lecturers should avoid structured template approaches to composition. For example, they must not set some or all 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 restrictive template would go beyond the acceptable amount of reasonable assistance for the assignment.

Candidates are required to explore and develop musical ideas to create an original piece of music for their assignment. For teaching and learning purposes only, it is acceptable to provide candidates with, for example, accompaniment patterns, bass lines or rhythm banks. However, as the assignment is an assessment and not a learning and teaching exercise, candidates should then create their own individual composition. Candidates should not select, copy and paste musical ideas provided by their teacher or lecturer into their composition.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to develop ideas creatively as the music progresses, in the context of their chosen style. Appendix 2 of the National 5 Music Course Specification suggests a range of ways that candidates can develop music. The Understanding Standards examples on SQA's secure site illustrate how development is necessary for candidates to access the full range of marks.

Development is one of the key elements of the assessment criteria. Compositions that are limited in development — for example, repeated sections that are identical to previous ones, rhythmic patterns that remain the same throughout or chord sequences that follow the same order for the duration of the piece — are less likely to access the upper mark ranges.

Candidates who choose to work with pre-recorded loops must ensure that they use these in the context of a wider composition in which they demonstrate their additional original ideas and show the compositional process. The candidate's actual creative input must be clearly identifiable — this could be annotations or additional text on a performance plan, descriptions in the review of the music that has been composed in addition to the loops, or details of how the loops have been developed. For example, if they select a chord progression but use an electronic program to devise an accompaniment, they must indicate this in their review. This ensures markers can distinguish a candidate's own work from pre-recorded elements they have selected from a program.

The composed piece may contain sections of improvisation, but this must be in the context of a wider composition that demonstrates composing skills. The score or performance plan and composing review should indicate which areas within a composition are improvised. Markers award no marks to pieces that are solely improvisation.

A composition that is submitted solely using tablature (TAB) is not sufficient; candidates should submit a score or performance plan showing the harmonic framework. A performance plan that includes, for example, a guitar riff in TAB within a harmonic framework is acceptable.

Candidates should submit either a score or performance plan. Performance plans should be clear and informative, with a well-defined harmonic framework to inform the marking process. A screenshot from a digital audio workstation with no additional information is not sufficient.

An arrangement of another piece of music is not acceptable.

In their composing review, candidates must reference all three bullet points:

- ◆ the main decisions made
- ◆ how they explored and developed musical ideas
- ◆ strengths and/or areas for improvement

Candidates must clearly identify their input in their composition. For example, they must state if any part has been realised by someone else. Their main decisions could include comments on, for example, instruments and voices chosen, tempo, time signatures, chords and chord sequence, modulations, and structure. They should also include decisions they

made as their composition progressed. Some candidates only referenced their early decisions, which impacted the marks awarded.

To successfully capture the exploration and development of their musical ideas, candidates should be encouraged to give details of what they have tried and perhaps dismissed, for example, 'I used keyboard with a piano sound to work out chords, but I tried other sounds and thought harp was better with the flute melody.' Comments such as 'I changed the rhythms to develop my piece' offer a very limited explanation of how the candidate explored and developed the piece of music. To improve, the candidate could provide further explanation such as 'to develop the melody from bar 17, I tried a variety of rhythms such as quavers and semiquavers but decided to use dotted rhythms to add more interest to this section.'

Candidates should provide a minimum of two strengths and/or areas for improvement. These should ideally refer to musical aspects rather than the candidate's feelings about the piece. For example, 'A strength was using piano broken chords in the final section instead of block chords, as this helped to create a lighter accompaniment' shows the candidate's musical understanding. Whereas a statement such as 'I like the piano in the last section' provides little identification of the candidate's strengths.

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ ensure composing reviews are submitted in the one-page mandatory template available on the [National 5 subject page](#)
- ◆ ensure the composing reviews are individual to each candidate and their own work
- ◆ not give candidates composing review templates with, for example, pre-populated phrases that only require candidates to insert one or two words into the text at designated places
- ◆ encourage candidates to write the composing review as they write the piece and not leave it until the end of the process

To help the marking process run smoothly, teachers and lecturers should ensure that:

- ◆ all instrumental parts can be clearly heard in the audio file
- ◆ all audio files are in any of the following formats — MP3, MP4, WAV or WMA. Teachers and lecturers must not submit any other type of files, including music notation software files. These should be exported into an acceptable format before submission
- ◆ all digital files are clearly labelled with candidate names and which part of the assignment it contains; for example, score, review or audio file
- ◆ the flyleaf is completed accurately, and the ticks indicate the parts of the assignment submitted for the candidate

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. 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; 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. It 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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).