

rockschool®

KEYS

SYLLABUS SPECIFICATION

2019 Edition





Keys

Syllabus Specification

2019 Edition

Revised: 31/03/2025 (see final page for revision notes)

Rockschool | Stageschool | Vocational Qualifications

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PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Rockscool 2019 syllabus for Contemporary Keyboards. This syllabus guide is designed to give teachers, learners and candidates practical information on the graded examinations run by Rockscool.

The Rockscool website www.rslawards.com has detailed information on all aspects of our examinations, including examination regulations, detailed marking schemes and assessment criteria as well as notated and audio examples to help you prepare for the examination.

This Syllabus Guide covers the following examinations:

- Graded Examinations Debut to Grade 8
- Graded Certificates Debut to Grade 8
- Performance Certificates Debut to Grade 8

The Value Of RSL Qualifications

RSL advocates an open access approach to qualifications, providing a range of syllabi, designed to accommodate a wide variety of candidates of different ages, experience and levels of achievement. RSL qualifications are listed on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) in England and Northern Ireland by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual). RSL is committed to maintaining and improving its reputation for excellence by providing high quality education and training through its syllabi, examinations, music and resources.

RSL & UCAS

For students applying for work or University, many potential employers see graded music exams in a very positive way. Recognised qualifications demonstrate an ability to dedicate commitment to extra-curricular activities, providing evidence of versatility which many students find beneficial within UCAS (Universities & Colleges Admissions Service) applications and for University entrance interviews.

Our qualifications at Level 3 (Grades 6–8) carry allocated points on the UCAS tariff.

For full details relating to the allocation of UCAS points please see: www.rslawards.com/about-us/ucas-points

Period Of Operation

This syllabus specification covers Keys Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates from September 2018.

Examinations

Rockscool offers three types of graded music examination: Graded Examination, Graded Certificate & Performance Certificate

GRADE EXAMINATIONS

Grade Examinations are available from Debut – Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

PREPARED WORK	UNPREPARED WORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 3 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8 ■ Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Sight Reading Or Improvisation & Interpretation: Debut to Grade 8 ■ Ear Tests: Debut to Grade 8 ■ General Musicianship Questions: Debut to Grade 8

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Performance Certificates are available from Debut – Grade 8 and consist of the following:

PREPARED WORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 5 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Graded Certificates are available from Debut – Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

PREPARED WORK

- 3 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8

OVERVIEW

Unit Overview – Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL QUALIFICATION TIME
RSL Entry Level Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance (Entry 3)	501/0370/2	1	8	4	40
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 1	501/0391/X	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 2	501/0646/6	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 3	501/0647/8	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 4	501/0389/1	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 5	501/0643/0	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 6	501/0390/8	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 7	501/0645/4	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Examination in Music Performance – Grade 8	501/0648/X	1	54	32	320

Unit Overview – Graded Certificates in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL QUALIFICATION TIME
RSL Entry Level Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance (Entry 3)	610/4760/0	1	8	4	40
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 1	610/4761/2	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 2	610/4762/4	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 3	610/4763/6	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 4	610/4764/8	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 5	610/4765/X	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 6	610/4766/1	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 7	610/4767/3	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Graded Certificate in Music Performance – Grade 8	610/4768/5	1	54	32	320

Unit Overview – Performance Certificates in Popular Music Performance

QUALIFICATION TITLE	QAN	TOTAL NO. OF UNITS	GUIDED LEARNING HOURS	CREDIT	TOTAL QUALIFICATION TIME
RSL Entry Level Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance (Entry 3)	610/4770/3	1	8	4	40
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 1	610/4771/5	1	12	6	60
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 2	610/4772/7	1	18	9	90
RSL Level 1 Award in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 3	610/4773/9	1	18	12	120
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 4	610/4774/0	1	24	15	150
RSL Level 2 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 5	610/4775/2	1	24	18	180
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 6	610/4776/4	1	36	22	220
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 7	610/4777/6	1	48	27	270
RSL Level 3 Certificate in Performance Certificate in Music Performance - Grade 8	610/4778/8	1	54	32	320

Assessment Overview

ASSESSMENT	
Form of Assessment	All assessments are carried out by external examiners. Candidates are required to carry out a combination of practical tasks and underpinning theoretical assessment.
Unit Format	Unit specifications contain the title, unit code, credit level, credit value, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, grade descriptor, and types of evidence required for the unit.
Bands of Assessment	There are four bands of assessment (distinction, merit, pass and unclassified) for the qualification as a whole.
Quality Assurance	Quality Assurance ensures that all assessments are carried out to the same standard by objective sampling and re-assessment of candidates' work. A team of external examiners is appointed, trained and standardised by RSL.

Learning Outcomes

Performance Certificate

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles

Graded Certificate

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles
- Demonstrate technical ability on an instrument/voice through responding to set technical demands

Graded Exam

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles
- Demonstrate technical ability on an instrument/voice through responding to an unseen selection of set technical demands
- Demonstrate musical understanding through a range of an unseen selection of set tests

QUALIFICATION SUMMARY

Aims & Broad Objectives

The aim of popular music performance qualifications is to provide a flexible, progressive mastery approach to the knowledge, skills and understanding required for popular music performance.

RSL's graded qualifications motivate and encourage candidates of all ages and levels through a system of progressive mastery, enabling candidates to develop and enhance skills, knowledge and understanding in a safe and consistent way. The qualifications are beneficial for candidates wishing to progress at their own pace through smaller steps of achievement.

These qualifications are suitable for candidates in the Under 16, 16+, 16–18, 19+ age groups.

Progression

Graded qualifications provide a flexible progression route for candidates. They are a positive means of determining progress and enable candidates to learn the necessary techniques to gain entry to FE and HE courses. Graded qualifications operate according to a well-established methodology of 'progressive mastery'. They allow candidates to be tested in discrete stages in the development of a wide range of skills. They tend to be more rigorous than other types of exams and for that reason industry is confident that achievement at the highest level gained by candidates of graded qualifications will have the skills necessary to work in other areas of the business.

Qualification Structure

A graded qualification consists of a range of both practical and knowledge-based elements which are based on detailed requirements outlined in the relevant syllabus. Therefore, requirements for each grade will be set out in detail in the Unit Specifications below (page 29 and onwards) and the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each unit will require knowledge, skills and understanding of these syllabus requirements to be demonstrated at the grade entered.

Entry Requirements

There are no entry requirements for these qualifications. However, candidates should be aware that the content at the higher grades will require a level of knowledge and understanding covered in previous qualifications.

For further details on exam dates and fees and to apply for your music performance grades please visit the RSL website at:
www.rslawards.com

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Assessment Methodology

The graded examinations in Popular Music Performance are assessed via an examination. The examination is divided into the following sections:

Technical tests covering knowledge of:

- Scales
- Arpeggios
- Chords
- Technical Studies (level 2 & 3)

Performance Pieces

- Three Performance pieces (two pieces can be 'Free Choice Pieces')

Unseen Tests

- Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation tests
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

Assessment Timings

Examination timings for the graded examinations in Popular Music Performance are as follows:

Grade Exams

- Debut: 15 minutes
- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 25 minutes
- Grade 5: 25 minutes
- Grade 6: 30 minutes
- Grade 7: 30 minutes
- Grade 8: 30 minutes

Performance Certificates

- Debut: 12 minutes
- Grade 1: 15 minutes
- Grade 2: 15 minutes
- Grade 3: 18 minutes
- Grade 4: 22 minutes
- Grade 5: 22 minutes
- Grade 6: 25 minutes
- Grade 7: 25 minutes
- Grade 8: 28 minutes

All Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams and thus do not have set exam timings.

All assessment of these qualifications is external and is undertaken by RSL Examiners.

Marking Schemes

GRADED EXAMS DEBUT TO GRADE 8			
Element	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Performance Piece 1	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 2	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 3	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Technical Exercises	9–10 out of 15	11–12 out of 15	13+ out of 15
Ear Tests	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
General Musicianship Questions	3 out of 5	4 out of 5	5 out of 5
Total Marks	60%	74%	90%

GRADED CERTIFICATES DEBUT TO GRADE 8			
Element	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Performance Piece 1	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 2	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 3	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Technical Exercises	9–10 out of 15	11–12 out of 15	13+ out of 15
Total Marks	60%	74%	90%

Marking Schemes

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES 5 DEBUT TO GRADE 8			
Element	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Performance Piece 1	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 2	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 3	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 4	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Performance Piece 5	12–14 out of 20	15–17 out of 20	18+ out of 20
Total Marks	60%	74%	90%

Examination Structure

The examination structure for the grade examinations is shown below:

1. Pieces or technical exercises
2. Technical exercises or pieces
3. Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation
4. Ear Tests
5. General Musicianship Questions

General Notes

At the beginning of a Grade Examination, the Examiner will ask the candidate if they wish to begin with Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises. In a Performance Certificate, candidates may present their Performance Pieces in any order of their choice.

Prior to the start of the Performance Pieces, the Examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place alongside the backing track. Once the level has been established, the Examiner will then commence with the first piece in full. Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first Performance Piece only.

Candidates may perform any or all of their pieces from memory. This is not compulsory at any level and no additional marks are given for this. With the exception of certain Technical Exercises where memory requirements apply, it is permitted to use grade books which contain notes made during the course of a candidate's study.

Note: It is not permitted to make any notes at any time during the exam.

For General Musicianship Questions, the Examiner may use his or her version of the selected piece as the basis to ask the questions if such notes contained on the candidate's version are deemed sufficiently extensive or might assist the candidate when answering the questions.

The Examiner will not facilitate page turning for candidates. Candidates are allowed to photocopy relevant sheet music as necessary to alleviate page turns but all copied materials must be handed into the Examiner at the end of the examination.

All tempo markings are to be observed unless otherwise stated. Each piece is designed carefully to achieve a number of outcomes appropriate for the grade.

Expectations of Knowledge, Skills and Understanding

The graded examination system is one based on the principle of 'progressive mastery': each step in the exam chain demonstrates learning, progression and skills in incremental steps. Successful learning is characterised by a mastery of the fundamentals of the skills demanded in each grade.

Learners will be able to complete a set of practical tasks and be tested on their underpinning knowledge (the complexity and variety of tasks are determined by which qualification is being attempted), which allows them to demonstrate popular music performance knowledge, skills and understanding relevant to the grade. These technical skills set a firm platform for further technical and creative development by the learner.

Quality Assurance

All RSL examinations and graded qualifications are standardised according to the processes and procedures laid down by RSL.

CANDIDATE ACCESS AND REGISTRATION

Access and Registration

The qualifications will:

- be available to everyone who is capable of reaching the required standards
- be free from any barriers that restrict access and progression
- offer equal opportunities for all wishing to access the qualifications

At the point of application, RSL will ensure that all candidates are fully informed about the requirements and demands of the qualification.

Candidates may enter online for any of the qualifications at various points in the calendar year in territories throughout the world. Dates will be published on the website at www.rslawards.com

Please Note: Candidates may not perform pieces in their exam that they have previously performed for an RSL Assessment. This includes re-sits of their exams.

Recommended Prior Learning

Learners are not required to have any prior learning for these qualifications. However, learners should ensure that they are aware of the requirements and expectations of each grade prior to entering for an assessment.

FURTHER INFORMATION & CONTACT

Guidance on Free Choice Pieces

For all examinations, candidates are able to play a number of free choice pieces:

- **Grade Examinations:** Two free choice pieces (a minimum of one piece must be from the Keys grade book)
- **Graded Certificates:** Two free choice pieces (a minimum of one piece must be from the Keys grade book)
- **Performance Certificates:** Three free choice pieces (a minimum of two pieces must be from the Keys grade book)

Free choice pieces must demonstrate a comparable level of technical and musical demand to the pieces given in the set selections in the grade books which can be referred to as an indication of appropriate level.

Free choice pieces must be in a modern popular genre such as Pop; Rock; Jazz; Country; Blues; Soul; Reggae, Film and Musical Theatre.

Own compositions are also acceptable. Pieces should be selected carefully to ensure that they provide suitable opportunity for candidates to demonstrate the relevant assessment criteria. Candidates are reminded that if a chosen Free Choice Piece does not meet these requirements this may impact on the level of achievement possible within the examination.

Free Choice Pieces can be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track), or as a solo piece (without backing track).

Complaints & Appeals

All procedural complaints and appeals, including malpractice and requests for reasonable adjustments/special considerations, can be found on the RSL website www.rslawards.com

Equal Opportunities

RSL's Equal Opportunities policy can be found on the RSL website www.rslawards.com

Contacts for Help & Support

All correspondence should be directed to:

RSL

Harlequin House
Ground Floor
7 High Street
Teddington
Middlesex
TW11 8EE

Or info@rslawards.com

ROCKSCHOOL CONTEMPORARY KEYBOARDS EXAMINATIONS

EXAMINATIONS OVERVIEW

Rockschool offers **three** types of graded music examination; Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates.

GRADE EXAMINATIONS

Keys Grade Examinations are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Three Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation: Debut to Grade 8
- Ear Tests: Debut to Grade 8
- General Musicianship Questions: Debut to Grade 8

These elements fall into two categories:

- **Prepared work:** This consists of three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises
- **Unprepared work:** This consists of Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation (Debut to Grade 8)

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Keys Performance Certificates are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Five Performance Pieces

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Keys Graded Certificates are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements:

- Three Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8

Please Note: Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams only.

EXAMINATION STRUCTURE

The examination structure for the Grade Examination is shown below:

Debut to Grade 8

- Performance Pieces* (at least one of which must be a 'Keys Arrangement' piece
- Technical Exercises *
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

EXAMINATION TIMINGS

Grade Exams

- Debut: 15 minutes
- Grade 1: 20 minutes
- Grade 2: 20 minutes
- Grade 3: 25 minutes
- Grade 4: 25 minutes
- Grade 5: 25 minutes
- Grade 6: 30 minutes
- Grade 7: 30 minutes
- Grade 8: 30 minutes

Performance Certificates

- Debut: 12 minutes
- Grade 1: 15 minutes
- Grade 2: 15 minutes
- Grade 3: 18 minutes
- Grade 4: 22 minutes
- Grade 5: 22 minutes
- Grade 6: 25 minutes
- Grade 7: 25 minutes
- Grade 8: 28 minutes

All Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams and thus do not have set exam timings.

General Notes

The following general notes apply to both Grade and Performance Certificate Examinations:

FREE CHOICE PIECES

For all Keys grades, candidates are able to play a number of free choice pieces in the examination:

- Grade Examinations: **Two** Free Choice Pieces (at least one piece must be a 'keys arrangement' from the grade book)
- Graded Certificates: **Two** Free Choice Pieces (at least one piece must be a 'keys arrangement' from the grade book)
- Performance Certificates: **Three** Free Choice Pieces (at least two pieces must be from the grade book, and at least one of these must be a 'keys arrangement')

Visit www.rslawards.com for grade specific Free Choice Criteria and wider requirements which need to be observed in full to be eligible for use in the exam. Prior approval is not required but any deviation/simplification/omissions from any aspect of the criteria or requirements may be reflected in the marks awarded.

Free Choice Pieces can be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track), or as a solo piece (without backing track).

If there is any doubt or questions about the appropriateness of the chosen piece, it would be acceptable to email it to info@rslawards.com and a member of the RockschooL team will advise.

NOTATION

All notated work is to be played as written. Where a candidate wishes to perform alternative content (for example, playing their own solo), an equivalent level of technical outcomes must be demonstrated. Otherwise, there should be no changes or arrangement (unless previously agreed with RockschooL). Each piece is specifically written/presented carefully to achieve a number of outcomes appropriate for the grade.

Exclusions for *all* arrangements

- At Debut and Grade 1, if any three or four voiced chords notated in the pieces are unachievable, candidates may either reduce the amount of notes in the voicing or play as a spread chord if stylistically appropriate.
- At all grades, if any two handed/open voiced chords notated in the pieces are not achievable, candidates may either reduce the amount of notes in the voicing or play as a spread chord if stylistically appropriate.
- At all grades, candidates are free to execute voiced chords notated in the pieces with either hand or combination of hands.

Exclusions and guidance for *Keys* arrangements

- Voices suggested in patch settings are given as guides only. Due to the vast differences in keyboard instruments it is expected that candidates may need to use similar or equivalent sounds to those suggested. However, it should be noted that, as part of the technical criteria, candidates will be assessed on their ability to manipulate the sound of their instrument in performance (i.e. set or switch patches at indicated points, assign layers, use modulation effects etc.) as indicated in the score.
- Notated pitches in keys arrangements are indicative of the audible pitch of the assessed part, unless otherwise indicated or in instances where the timbre of a patch denotes alternative possibilities, for example in a synth timbre comprising multiple octaves.
- Assignment of patches between left hand and right hand is given as a guide and can be interpreted freely, provided the manipulation of sound is followed as indicated on the score (see exclusion 1)

ADAPTATION AND PERSONALISATION OF PIECES

Candidates should perform pieces as notated, except where they choose to embellish or rework any sections (NB. this does not apply to technical exercises or unseen tests which must be performed exactly as written). In these instances, as well as where there are performance indications to *ad lib*, *improvise*, *develop*, etc., candidates will be marked on their ability to present the personalised material in a stylistically appropriate way, commensurate with the grade level. All performances will be expected to have a clear basis in the notated material.

KEYBOARD SPECIFICATION

Candidates must bring their own keyboard and appropriate stand for use in the exam, plus any additional required equipment (i.e. power supply, sustain pedal).

The keyboards must fit the following criteria:

- **Debut:** Minimum of four octaves/49 keys, touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal.
- **Grades 1–5:** Minimum of five octaves/61 keys (unless chosen repertoire/technical facility of keyboard demands a wider range), touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal. Please note that octave transposition facilities may be required from grade 4 upwards.
- **Grades 6–8:** 88 keys, touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal.

Any keyboard instrument with multiple voice/timbre options and the facility to store and manipulate settings according to the level will be appropriate for the Rockschoo! Keys exams. Alternatively, MIDI keyboard and laptop set ups may also be used. Please note, a realistic piano sound will need to be used for any piano arrangement pieces.

In addition, it is recommended that keyboard instruments or laptop/MIDI keyboard setups have the following functions:

Debut (entry Level 3) & Grades 1–3 (Level 1)

- single patch settings and registrations
- Basic layering (e.g. piano/pad)
- pitch bend/modulation (grade 2 upwards)

Note: *octave transposition facilities for smaller keyboards may be required, depending on repertoire selection*

Level 2 (Grades 4–5)

- Multiple patch settings and registrations
- Layers
- Splits
- Octave transposition facilities
- Pitch bend/modulation

Level 3 (Grades 6–8)

- Multiple patch settings and registrations
- Multiple layering
- Multiple splits
- Octave transposition facilities
- Pitch bend/modulation

Please note, digital pianos may not have the full range of functions available to take a keyboard exam.

For further information, please email info@rslawards.com

Rockschoo! recommends that candidates contact their exam centre to make any practical arrangements beforehand and also bring their own assistance to carry the equipment in/out of the exam room.

Own equipment needs to be practicable and reasonably portable so as not to impact on exam timings.

Note also that if any outcomes required at a particular grade either cannot be demonstrated or are demonstrated less securely as a result of the equipment, this may be reflected in the marks awarded.

Candidates cannot use either pre-programmed backing tracks or internally generated, pre-programmed rhythms.

MAKING NOTES IN THE EXAM

It is not permitted to make any notes at any time during the exam.

With the exception of Technical Exercises where memory requirements apply, it is permitted to use grade books which contain notes made during the course of a candidate's study.

For General Musicianship Questions, the examiner may use his or her version of the selected piece as the basis to ask the questions if such notes contained on the candidate's version are deemed sufficiently extensive or might assist the candidate when answering the questions

GRADING CRITERIA & DEFINITIONS

Graded Examinations

PERFORMANCE PIECES					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

TECHNICAL EXERCISES					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	13–15	11–12	9–10	4–8	0–3
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION / QUICK STUDY PIECE					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	9–10	7–8	6	3–5	0–2
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

EAR TESTS					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	9–10	7–8	6	3–5	0–2
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout. Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall. Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated. Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS (GMQS)					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	5 correct responses	4 correct responses	3 correct responses	2 correct responses	0–1 correct responses

Performance Certificates

PERFORMANCE PIECES					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Graded Certificates

PERFORMANCE PIECES					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	18–20	15–17	12–14	6–11	0–5
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	
Style & Expression	Consistently convincing projection of the music.	Mostly convincing projection of the music.	Some convincing projection of the music.	Music not projected convincingly	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

TECHNICAL EXERCISES					
BANDS OF ATTAINMENT / MARK RANGE					
Attainment Band	Distinction	Merit	Pass	Below Pass 1	Below Pass 2
Mark Range	13–15	11–12	9–10	4–8	0–3
Command of Instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout.	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall.	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated.	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated.	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
	Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time.	Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time.	Understanding of musical structure not evidenced.	

Definitions

DEFINITIONS	
Command of Instrument	The quality of the sound produced from the instrument, including the consistency of sound/tone, control of sound/tone commensurate with grade.
Sync or Pulse	Alignment of the performance to backing track, metronome or applied to a solo performance, observing notation markings. For unaccompanied pieces candidates should maintain a secure internal pulse and adjust the pulse where instructed within the music.
Accuracy & Understanding	Representing the written notation accurately, except by instruction through performance notes, or interpreting the written part with equivalent skills demonstrated. Secure understanding of musical structure evidenced through transitions of phrases, bars and sections.
Style & Expression	An expressive and commanding performance of the notated material dictated by the demands of the performance piece.

UNIT SPECIFICATIONS

Debut

The Debut Keys exam is for candidates who have been learning a short time and have developed elementary skills, techniques, co-ordination and musical understanding.

There are two types of exam available at Debut, either a **Grade Exam** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Debut

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and **two** Ear Tests that begin to develop melodic recall and chord recognition.

The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore simple harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Debut exam lasts **15 minutes** and is taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can concentrate on the requirements of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control and sync at a beginner level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Debut there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios/Broken Chords and Chord Voicings.

All scales and arpeggios need to be played hands separately, in straight feel, ascending and descending. Pentatonic scales are right hand only.

The examiner will ask for a selection from each group and Groups A and B need to be played to a compulsory metronome click. Group C does not require a metronome and can be played at a tempo of the candidate's choice.

The book can be used in the exam for Groups A and B. Group C needs to be played from memory. For Group C, candidates will be required to close their grade books.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book when performing Group C will result in a deduction of marks for this element. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 52bpm

Range: One octave

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note

- C major (right hand)
- C major (left hand)
- A natural minor (right hand)
- A natural minor (left hand)
- C major pentatonic (right hand)
- A minor pentatonic (right hand)

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 92bpm

Time signatures: 3/4

Rhythms: Quarter notes, finishing on a dotted half note

- C major broken chord (right hand)
- C major broken chord (left hand)
- A minor broken chord (right hand)
- A minor broken chord (left hand)

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

- C major
- C minor

Candidates need to play either the C major voicings or the C minor voicings from memory. The examiner will state the exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Debut, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: C major

Tempo: 60bpm

Time signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, half, quarter notes, associated rests

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 4–6 bar melody.

Candidates are required to play hands separately and only single notes will be required to be played with both left and right hands.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: C major

Tempo: 60bpm

Time signature: 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 4–6 bar chord progression, with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise single note melodies with either left or right hand. It is permissible to play chord voicings, or use both hands, but marks will only be awarded for melodic content.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Debut there are **two** ear tests: Melodic Recall and Chord Recognition. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Half notes

The examiner will play two half notes one after the other. Candidates are to state whether the second note is higher or lower in pitch than the first note. The test will be played twice, each time preceded by four clicks. There will also be a C root note at the beginning of the test for reference. For this exercise, candidates are to use the words 'higher' or 'lower'.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

CHORD RECOGNITION

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Whole notes

The examiner will play two chords, each with a C root note. Candidates are to state which chord played was major and which chord played was minor. The test will be played twice, each time preceded by four clicks.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At debut candidates will be asked five questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Identification of major / minor triad chord symbols.

Group 2: Melody

A pitch in the treble clef within the stave.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole / half / quarter notes.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used in a crotchet length phrase. (Either hand)

Group 5: Genre

Genre of the piece.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **12 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full. Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 1

The Grade 1 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for six months to one year. They have mastered the key basic debut level skills and have since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding.

There is also an opportunity to build on basic improvisation.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 1, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate**, or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 1

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and **two** Ear Tests that begin to develop melodic recall and chord recognition.

The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore simple harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 1 exam lasts **20 minutes** and is taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can concentrate on the requirements of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control and sync at a beginner level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 1 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Chord Voicings.

All scales and arpeggios need to be played hands separately, in straight feel, ascending and descending. Pentatonic scales are right hand only.

The examiner will ask for a selection from each group and Groups A and B need to be played to a compulsory metronome click. Group C does not require a metronome and can be played at a tempo of the candidate's choice.

The book can be used in the exam for Groups A and B. Group C needs to be played from memory. For Group C, candidates will be required to close their grade books.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book when performing Group C will result in a deduction of marks for this element. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 60bpm

Range: Two octaves

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ F major (right hand) | ■ E natural minor (right hand) |
| ■ F major (left hand) | ■ E natural minor (left hand) |
| ■ G major (right hand) | ■ F major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ G major (left hand) | ■ G major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ D natural minor (right hand) | ■ D minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ D natural minor (left hand) | ■ E minor pentatonic (right hand) |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 100bpm

Time signature: 3/4

Rhythms: Quarter notes, finishing on a dotted half note

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ■ F major broken chord (right hand) | ■ E minor broken chord (right hand) |
| ■ F major broken chord (left hand) | ■ E minor broken chord (left hand) |
| ■ G major broken chord (right hand) | ■ C augmented arpeggio (right hand) |
| ■ G major broken chord (left hand) | ■ C augmented arpeggio (left hand) |
| ■ D minor broken chord (right hand) | ■ C diminished arpeggio (right hand) |
| ■ D minor broken chord (left hand) | ■ C diminished arpeggio (left hand) |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

- C diminished
- C augmented

Candidates will be asked to play either the C diminished or the C augmented triads from memory.

The examiner will state the exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 1, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: F major or G major

Tempo: 70bpm

Time signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, half, quarter notes, associated rests

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 4–6 bar melody.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: F major or G major

Tempo: 70bpm

Time signature: 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 4–6 bar chord progression, with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise single note melodies with either left or right hand. It is permissible to play chord voicings, or use both hands, but marks will only be awarded for melodic content.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 1 there are two ear tests: Melodic Recall and Chord Recognition. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Whole, half notes

The examiner will play three notes one after the other. Candidates are to state whether the second note is higher or lower in pitch than the first and whether the third note is higher or lower in pitch than the second. The test will be played twice, each time preceded by a one-bar metronome click. There will also be a C root note at the beginning of the test for reference. For this exercise, candidates are to use the words 'higher' or 'lower'.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

CHORD RECOGNITION

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Whole notes

The examiner will play a sequence of chords each with a C root note, then ask the candidate to state the chord quality of each chord from a choice of major, minor, diminished or augmented. The test will be played twice, each time preceded by a one-bar metronome click.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 1 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Interval construction of major / minor / augmented / diminished triad chords

Group 2: Melody

Pitches in the bass clef within the stave.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth notes, associated rests. Eighth note triplets.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used in a minim length phrase. (Either hand).

Group 5: Genre

Different artists from the same genre as the piece chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays five pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **15 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 2

The Grade 2 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for one year to eighteen months. They have mastered the key basic skills up to Grade 1 and since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. There is also the continuing opportunity to develop improvisation skills.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 2, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 2

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and two Ear Tests that continue to develop melodic recall and chord recognition. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore growing harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 2 exam lasts **20 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can increase their understanding and execution of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, expression and sync at a beginner level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Chord Voicings.

Major scales, minor scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in straight feel, ascending and descending. Candidates can choose to play either natural minor or harmonic minor scales in the exam. Pentatonic scales are right hand only, and the C blues scale needs to be performed hands separately.

The examiner will ask for a selection from each group and Groups A and B need to be played to a compulsory metronome click. Group C does not require a metronome and can be played at a tempo of the candidate's choice.

The book can be used in the exam for Groups A and B. Group C needs to be played from memory. For Group C, candidates will be required to close their grade books or ensure the information on the KR player is out of view.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book when performing Group C will result in a deduction of marks for this element. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 66bpm

Range: Two octaves (chromatic one octave)

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| ■ D major | ■ B \flat major pentatonic scale (right hand) |
| ■ B \flat major | ■ D major pentatonic scale (right hand) |
| ■ B natural minor | ■ G minor pentatonic scale (right hand) |
| ■ G natural minor | ■ B minor pentatonic scale (right hand) |
| ■ B harmonic minor | ■ C blues scale (right hand) |
| ■ G harmonic minor | ■ C blues scale (left hand) |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 63bpm

Time signature: 3/4, 4/4

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| ■ D major arpeggio | ■ G minor arpeggio |
| ■ B \flat major arpeggio | ■ C major 7th arpeggio |
| ■ B minor arpeggio | ■ C minor 7th arpeggio |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chord exercises:

- Major 7th
- Minor 7th
- Dominant 7th

Candidates will be asked to play one of the 7th chord exercises below, from memory. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 2 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: B \flat major or D major

Tempo: 60–95 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, quarter notes, associated rests.

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 4–6 bar melody.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: B \flat major or D major

Tempo: 60–95 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 4–6 bar chord progression, with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise single note melodies with either left or right hand. It is permissible to play chord voicings, or use both hands, but marks will only be awarded for melodic content.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 2 there are two ear tests: Melodic Recall and Chord Recognition. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half notes

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, with a range up to a fourth.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice, each preceded by four clicks. After this, there will be a one-bar count-in and then candidates need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be the root.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

CHORD RECOGNITION

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Whole notes

The examiner will play a sequence of chords each with a C root note, then ask the candidate to state the chord quality of each chord from a choice of major, minor, diminished, augmented or dominant 7. The test will be played twice, each time preceded by four clicks.

The same chord quality may appear more than once within the sequence.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 2 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Interval construction of major / minor triad, augmented / diminished triad, dom7 / sus4 chords.

Group 2: Melody

Pitches in the treble clef within the stave.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth notes, dotted quarters and eighth notes, associated rests. Eighth note triplets and associated rests

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used in a bar length phrase. (Either hand)

Group 5: Genre

Different song titles from the same genre as the piece chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **15 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 3

The Grade 3 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for eighteen months to two years and who are ready to consolidate their final stage as a beginner player. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 2 and since acquired greater use of technique, rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. Improvisation phrasing is now confident and articulate and candidates have started to develop the beginnings of stylistic awareness.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 3, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 3

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and **two** Ear Tests that continue to develop melodic recall and chord recognition. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 3 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 3 exam lasts **25 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can continue their understanding and execution of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, expression, articulation and sync at a high beginner level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Chord Voicings.

Major, natural and harmonic minor scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in straight or swung feel, ascending and descending. Pentatonic scales are right hand only. The melodic minor scale needs to be played hands separately, and the chromatic scale on A needs to be played hands together.

The examiner will ask for a selection from each group and A, B and C need to be played to a compulsory metronome click.

The book can be used in the exam for Groups A and B. Group C needs to be played from memory. For Group C, candidates will be required to close their grade books.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book when performing Group C will result in a deduction of marks for this element. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 80 bpm

Range: Two octaves

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| ■ A major | ■ E \flat major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ E \flat major | ■ A major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ F \sharp natural minor | ■ C minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ C natural minor | ■ F \sharp minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ C harmonic minor | ■ C melodic minor scale (right hand) |
| ■ F \sharp harmonic minor | ■ C melodic minor scale (left hand) |
| | ■ Chromatic scale on A (right hand) |
| | ■ Chromatic scale on A (left hand) |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 69 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ A major arpeggio | ■ C minor arpeggio |
| ■ E \flat major arpeggio | ■ C dominant seventh arpeggio |
| ■ F \sharp minor arpeggio | ■ C minor sixth arpeggio |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Tempo: 80 bpm

Rhythm: half notes

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chord exercises:

- C major harmonised scale in 7ths (root in bass)
- C major harmonised scale in 7ths (3rd in bass)

Candidates will be asked to play one of harmonised scale exercises from memory. The examiner will state the exercise. This exercise is performed to a metronome click.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 3 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: E^b major or A major

Tempo: 60–95 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth notes, eighth note ties, associated rests.

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 4–8 bar melody.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: E^b major or A major

Tempo: 60–95 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 4–8 bar chord progression, with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise single note melodies with either left or right hand. It is permissible to play chord voicings, or use both hands, but marks will only be awarded for melodic content.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 3 there are **two** ear tests: Melodic Recall and Chord Recognition. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half, quarter notes

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, with a range up to a fifth.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice, each preceded by four clicks. After this, there will be a one-bar count-in and then candidates need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be the root.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

CHORD RECOGNITION

Tempo: 95bpm

Rhythms: Whole notes

The examiner will play a sequence of chords each with a C root note, then ask the candidate to state the chord quality of two of the chords from a choice of major, minor, diminished, augmented, dominant 7 and major 7th. The examiner will select which two chords.

The test will be played twice, each time preceded by four clicks.

Credit will be given for speed of response.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 3 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Chord degrees of the scale.

Group 2: Melody

Identification of pitches in the bass clef within the staff.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth and associated dotted notes/rests, quarter/eighth note triplets and associated rests within one crotchet length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used in a bar length phrase. (Both hands)

Group 5: Genre

Different artists and song titles from the same genre as the piece chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **18 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios and chord voicings.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 4

The Grade 4 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for two to three years and who are ready for intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 3 and since acquired greater use of technique, more complex rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. Candidates will be developing a sense of expression and continuing to broaden their stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which will be growing in assurance and articulation.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 4, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 4

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and **two** Ear Tests, the first continuing to develop melodic recall and the second introducing harmonic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 4 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 4 exam lasts **25 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can acquire a solid understanding and execution of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, expression, style awareness and sync at an early intermediate level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 4 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies.

- Candidates can choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor scales
- Major and contrary motion scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in straight or swung feel, ascending and descending
- Pentatonic scales are right hand only
- Dorian and mixolydian modes need to be played hands separately
- Groups A, B and C (scales, arpeggios and chords) need to be played from memory, and candidates will be required to close their grade books. Candidates may use the book for Group D (technical studies)

The examiner will ask for a selection from groups A, B and C. Candidates can prepare the technical study of their choice from group D.

Groups A and B need to be performed to a metronome click. Group C can be performed at a tempo of the candidate's choice, but the examiner will be looking for the speed of response. The chosen technical study from Group D needs to be performed to a backing track.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book during the technical exercises will result in a deduction of overall marks for this section. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 104 bpm

Range: Two octaves

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ E major | ■ E major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ E major (contrary motion) | ■ F minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ A ^b major | ■ C [#] minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ A ^b major (contrary motion) | ■ C dorian (right hand) |
| ■ C [#] natural minor | ■ C dorian (left hand) |
| ■ F natural minor | ■ C mixolydian (right hand) |
| ■ C [#] harmonic minor | ■ C mixolydian (left hand) |
| ■ F harmonic minor | ■ Chromatic scale starting on any black key |
| ■ A ^b major pentatonic (right hand) | (named by examiner) |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 76 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ■ E major arpeggio | ■ C minor 7 ^b 5 (Cm7 ^b 5) or |
| ■ A ^b major arpeggio | C half diminished (C ^o) arpeggio |
| ■ C [#] minor arpeggio | ■ C diminished 7 (Cdim7 or C ^o 7) arpeggio |
| ■ F minor arpeggio | ■ C minor 9 (right hand) |
| | ■ C minor 9 (left hand) |
| | ■ C dominant 9 (right hand) |
| | ■ C dominant 9 (left hand) |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chord exercises:

- Major 9
- Dominant 9
- Minor 9

Candidates will be asked to play one of the chord exercises from memory. The examiner will state the chord type. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

GROUP D: TECHNICAL STUDIES

Candidates will be required to perform one technical study of their choice to the backing track.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 4 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: A^b major or E major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: simple (3/4, 4/4) or compound (6/8)

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth notes, associated rests.

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 8–12 bar melody.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: A^b major or E major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 8–12 bar chord progression with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise diatonic single note melodies with right hand and chords in left hand.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 4 there are two ear tests: Melodic Recall and Harmonic Recall. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half, quarter notes

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, with a range up to a sixth.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice, each preceded by four clicks. After this, there will be a one-bar count-in and then candidates need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be the root.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

HARMONIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole notes

The examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, IV, V in any order or combination in the key of C major. Candidates will hear the test twice, then play the chords back to a metronome click. Both playings of the initial test will be preceded by four clicks. The metronome backing for the exam version will be preceded by a one bar count-in.

Note: there is no requirement for the chords to be voicing specific but the diatonic progression needs to be correct.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 4 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Identification of note intervals relative to a chord symbol. (Root/3rd/5th/7th)

Group 2: Melody

Identification of pitches within the stave. (Treble or bass clef)

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth and associated dotted notes/rests and quarter/eighth note triplets and associated rests, up to one crotchet length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used to play the 3rd/5th/7th note of a chord.

Group 5: Genre

Melodic / harmonic / rhythmic devices indicative of the genre chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **22 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 5

The Grade 5 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for three years or more and who have fully consolidated their intermediate level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 4 and since acquired a greater use of appropriate technique, more complex rhythms, co-ordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have developed a good sense of expression, have a strong grasp of stylistic awareness, and there is also the opportunity to improvise which is now individual, assured, accurate and expressive.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 5, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 5

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test and there are also **two** Ear Tests which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 5 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 5 exam lasts **25 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can acquire a growing security and execution of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, expression, style awareness and sync at intermediate level.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 5 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies.

- Candidates can choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor scales
- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in straight or swung feel, ascending and descending, across three octaves (except contrary motion scales, pentatonics, lydian and phrygian modes, which must be played over two octaves and extended arpeggios which are one octave only)
- Pentatonic scales are right hand only
- Lydian and Phrygian modes need to be played hands separately
- Groups A, B and C (scales, arpeggios and chords) need to be played from memory and candidate will be required to close their grade books. Candidates may use the book for Group D (technical studies).

The examiner will ask for a selection from groups A, B and C. Candidates can prepare the technical study of their choice from group D.

Groups A and B need to be performed to a metronome click. Group C can be performed at a tempo of the candidate's choice, but the examiner will be looking for the speed of response. The chosen technical study from Group D needs to be performed to a backing track.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book during the technical exercises will result in a deduction of overall marks for this section. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 126 bpm

Octave range: 3 octaves (except contrary motion scales, pentatonics, lydian and phrygian modes – 2 octaves)

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ■ B major | ■ B major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ B major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ D ^b major pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ D ^b major | ■ G [#] minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ D ^b major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ B ^b minor pentatonic (right hand) |
| ■ G [#] natural minor | ■ C lydian (right hand) |
| ■ B ^b natural minor | ■ C lydian (left hand) |
| ■ G [#] harmonic minor | ■ C phrygian (right hand) |
| ■ B ^b harmonic minor | ■ C phrygian (left hand) |
| | ■ Chromatic scale starting on any white key chosen by the examiner |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 86 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Octave range: 3 octaves

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ B major arpeggio | ■ B ^b minor arpeggio |
| ■ D ^b major arpeggio | ■ C minor major 7 arpeggio |
| ■ G [#] minor arpeggio | ■ C7add4 arpeggio |
| | ■ C maj9#11 arpeggio (right hand) |
| | ■ C maj9#11 arpeggio (left hand) |
| | ■ C min11 arpeggio (right hand) |
| | ■ C min11 arpeggio (left hand) |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chord exercises:

- C min11
- C maj9#11

Candidates will be asked to play one of the chord exercises from memory. The examiner will state the chord type/exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

GROUP D: TECHNICAL STUDIES

Candidates will be required to perform one technical study of their choice to the backing track.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 5 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: D^b major or B major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth, associated rests. Eighth and quarter-note ties.

Dynamic Markings: *p*–*f*, < (crescendo) and > (decrescendo).

The Sight Reading test is in the form of a 8–16 bar melody, with possible geographical instruction.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: D^b major or B major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 8–16 bar chord progression with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise diatonic single note melodies with right hand and chords in left hand.

Candidates will have **90** seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 5 there are two ear tests: Melodic Recall and Harmonic Recall. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half, quarter, eighth notes. (Notes may be tied)

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, with a range up to an octave.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice, each preceded by four clicks. After this, there will be a one-bar count-in and then candidates need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be either the root or fifth.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising

HARMONIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half notes.

The examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, II, IV, V, VI in any order or combination in the key of C major. At this grade, seventh chords are introduced. Candidates will hear the test twice, then play the chords back to a metronome click. Both playings of the initial test will be preceded by four clicks. The metronome backing for the exam version will be preceded by a one bar count-in.

Note: there is no requirement for the chords to be voicing specific but the diatonic progression needs to be correct.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 5 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Identification of intervals relative to a chord symbol. (Root/3rd/5th/7th/9th/11th/13th).

Group 2: Melody

Identification of pitches in the within the stave. (Treble or bass clef)

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth and associated dotted notes/rests and quarter/eighth note triplets and associated rests, up to one crotchet length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used to play the 3rd/5th/7th/9th note of a chord

Group 5: Genre

Melodic / harmonic / rhythmic devices indicative of the genre chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **22 minutes**.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 6

The Grade 6 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning in the region of four or more years and who have reached the first stage of advanced level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 5 and have since developed appropriate technique, expressive devices, rhythmic complexity, co-ordination and musical understanding. Candidates will have an increased extent of individuality, enhanced stylistic awareness and will be able to improvise with convincing shape and articulation. There will be good understanding of form and structure with clear musical communication.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 6, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 6

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test, and there are also **two** Ear Tests which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 6 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 6 exam lasts **30 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can confidently understand and execute notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, style awareness and sync at an early advanced level. There will be assured presentation of musical structure with clear, convincing expressive communication.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 6 there are **four** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and technical studies.

- Candidates must prepare **both** natural minor **and** harmonic minor scales
- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together, in straight or swung feel, ascending and descending, across four octaves (except contrary motion scales, pentatonics, lydian dominant and locrian modes, which must be played over two octaves, and extended arpeggios which are one octave only)
- Groups A, B and C (scales, arpeggios and chords) need to be played from memory, and candidates will be required to close their books. Candidates may use the book for Group D (technical studies)

The examiner will ask for a selection from groups A, B and C. Candidates can prepare the technical study of their choice from group D.

Groups A and B need to be performed to a metronome click. Group C can be performed at a tempo of the candidate's choice, but the examiner will be looking for the speed of response. The chosen technical study from Group D needs to be performed to a backing track.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book during the technical exercises will result in a deduction of overall marks for this section. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 152 bpm

Octave range: 4 octaves (except contrary motion scales, pentatonics, lydian dominant and locrian modes – 2 octaves)

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter note.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ F# major | ■ F# major pentatonic |
| ■ F# major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ G ^b major pentatonic |
| ■ G ^b major | ■ D# minor pentatonic |
| ■ G ^b major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ E ^b minor pentatonic |
| ■ D# natural minor | ■ C lydian dominant |
| ■ E ^b natural minor | ■ C locrian |
| ■ D# harmonic minor | ■ Chromatic scale on any black key stated by examiner |
| ■ E ^b harmonic minor | |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 100 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Octave range: 4 octaves (except extended arpeggios – 2 octaves).

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a half note.

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| ■ F# major arpeggio | ■ G7 arpeggio |
| ■ G ^b major arpeggio | ■ F7 arpeggio |
| ■ D# minor arpeggio | ■ C# dim7 arpeggio |
| ■ E ^b minor arpeggio | ■ C13#11 arpeggio |
| | ■ C7#5#9 arpeggio |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chordal exercises, chosen by the examiner:

- C maj13
- C13
- Cm13

Candidates will be asked to play one of the chord exercises from memory. The examiner will state the chord type/exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

GROUP D: TECHNICAL STUDIES

Candidates will be required to perform one technical study of their choice to the backing track.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 6 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: G \flat major or F \sharp major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: simple or compound time

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes, associated rests.

Eighth, quarter, sixteenth note ties

The sight reading test is in the form of a 12–16 bar example in the key of either G \flat major or F \sharp major.

You will first be given 90 seconds to practise, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for you to practise and the second time is for you to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. The tempo is 60–130 bpm.

During the practice time, you will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous, so once the first playthrough has finished, the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: G \flat major or F \sharp major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 8–16 bar chord progression with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise melodies and chordal comping between left hand and right hand, in any way they wish, interpreting the chord progression and backing track given in the exam.

Candidates will have 90 seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in.

During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 6 there are two ear tests: Melodic Recall and Harmonic Recall. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half and eighth notes

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of C major, with a range up to an octave.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice, each time preceded by four clicks. After this, candidates will hear a one bar count-in then will need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be either the root or fifth.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

HARMONIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, half notes

The examiner will play a chord progression containing chords I, II, III, IV, V, VI in any order or combination in the key of C major, including seventh chords. The test will be played twice (each time preceded by four clicks), then candidates will hear a one bar count-in and play the chords back to a metronome click.

Note: there is no requirement for the chords to be voicing specific but the diatonic progression needs to be correct.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 6 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Appropriate modes which can be played over maj7 / min7 / dom7 / sus4 / 9sus4 / maj9# chords.

Group 2: Melody

Interval of any note relative to the chord symbol.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth, thirty-second notes, any dotted notes, triplets, any associated rests up to one crotchet length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used to play the 3rd/5th/7th/9th/11th note of a chord.

Group 5: Genre

Melodic / harmonic / rhythmic devices indicative of the genre chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **25** minutes.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 7

The Grade 7 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for four to five years and have extended their advanced level playing. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 6 and developed notable security of appropriate technique, use of expressive devices, rhythmic complexity, fluency and musical understanding. Candidates will be able to improvise with conviction and personality plus demonstrate strong musical form and structure. There will be mature and authentic stylistic awareness, with developing individuality and communication.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 7, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 7

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and Technical Studies.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test, and there are also **two** Ear Tests which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 7 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 7 exam lasts **30 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can convincingly understand and execute notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, style awareness and sync at an advanced level. There will be highly assured presentation of musical structure with fluent, individually shaped and highly expressive communication.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 7 there are **four** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies.

- Candidates must prepare **both** natural minor **and** harmonic minor scales
- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played:
 - hands together
 - ascending and descending
 - either straight or swung feel (as directed by the examiner)
 - either legato or staccato articulation (as directed by the examiner)
 - across four octaves (except contrary motion scales, scale in 3rds, altered scale and phrygian dominant mode, which must be played over two octaves, and extended arpeggios which are one octave only)
- Groups A, B and C (scales, arpeggios and chords) need to be played from memory, and candidates will be required to close the book. Candidates may use the book for Group D (technical studies)

The examiner will ask for a selection from groups A, B and C. Candidates can prepare the technical study of their choice from group D.

Groups A and B need to be performed to a metronome click. Group C can be performed at a tempo of the candidate's choice, but the examiner will be looking for the speed of response. The chosen technical study from Group D needs to be performed to a backing track.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book during the technical exercises will result in a deduction of overall marks for this section. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 160 bpm

Octave range: 4 octaves (except contrary motion scales, scale in 3rds, altered scale and phrygian dominant mode – 2 octaves)

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter/dotted half note.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ C# major | ■ C major in thirds (right hand) |
| ■ C# major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ C major in thirds (left hand) |
| ■ Cb major | |
| ■ Cb major (contrary motion) (2 octaves) | ■ C altered |
| ■ A# natural minor | ■ C phrygian dominant |
| ■ Ab natural minor | |
| ■ A# harmonic minor | ■ C chromatic (a minor 3rd apart, starting on any |
| ■ Ab harmonic minor | black key stated by examiner) |

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 112 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Octave range: 4 octaves (except extended arpeggio – 1 octave).

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole/half note.

- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------------|
| ■ C# major arpeggio | ■ D Dim7 arpeggio |
| ■ Cb major arpeggio | ■ D7 arpeggio |
| ■ A# minor arpeggio | ■ Bb7 arpeggio |
| ■ Ab minor arpeggio | ■ C9#5 arpeggio (1 octave) |

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one of the following chord exercises, chosen by the examiner.

- C dominant 7^b9
- C dominant 7[#]9[#]5
- C dominant 13[#]11

Candidates will be asked to play one of the chord exercises from memory. The examiner will state the chord type/exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

GROUP D: TECHNICAL STUDIES

Candidates will be required to perform one technical study of their choice to the backing track.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 7 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: C[♯] major or C[♭] major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: Any simple, compound or odd time signature

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes, associated rests.

Eighth, quarter, sixteenth note ties

The sight reading test is in the form of a 16–20 bar example in the key of either C[♭] major or C[♯] major.

You will first be given 90 seconds to practise, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for you to practise and the second time is for you to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in. The tempo is 60–130 bpm.

During the practice time, you will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous, so once the first playthrough has finished, the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: C[♯] major or C[♭] major

Tempo: 60–130 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4, swung 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 16–20 bar chord progression with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise melodies and chordal comping between left hand and right hand, in any way they wish, interpreting the chord progression and backing track given in the exam.

Candidates will have 90 seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For the first play through, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one bar count-in.

During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 7 there are **two** ear tests: Melodic Recall and Harmonic Recall. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major or C minor

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Quarter and eighth notes

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of either C major or C minor, with a range up to an octave.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice (each time preceded by four clicks). After this, candidates will hear a one bar count-in and will then need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be either the root or fifth.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

HARMONIC RECALL

Key: C major

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, half notes

The examiner will play a chord progression containing any combination of chords from the C major scale, including seventh chords. Candidates will hear the test twice (each time preceded by four clicks). After this, they will hear a one bar count-in and will then need to play the chords back to a metronome click.

Note: there is no requirement for the chords to be voicing specific but the diatonic progression needs to be correct.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 7 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Scales / modes which are being played.

Group 2: Melody

Intervallic construction of melodic phrases within the piece up to crotchet length.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth, thirty-second notes, any dotted notes, triplets or any associated rests up to one minim length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering used to play the 3rd/5th/7th/9th/11th/13th note of a chord.

Group 5: Genre

Melodic / harmonic / rhythmic devices indicative of the genre chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **25** minutes.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

Grade 8

The Grade 8 Keys exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for five years or more and have now consolidated their playing to a high level. They have mastered the key skills up to Grade 7 and developed heightened technique, use of expressive devices, rhythmic complexity, fluency, co-ordination and musical understanding. Candidates will be able to improvise to an advanced level with effortless assurance and personality plus demonstrate seamless musical form and structure. There will be an innate stylistic conviction and distinctive musicality with strong individuality. Communication will be commanding.

There are three types of exam available at Grade 8, a **Grade Exam**, **Graded Certificate** or **Performance Certificate**. (Refer to the Introduction for an explanation of the differences).

Grade 8

GRADE EXAMS

PREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to play either a Sight Reading or Improvisation/Interpretation test, and there are also **two** Ear Tests which continue to develop melodic and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** questions which are designed to explore harmony, melody, rhythmic, technical and stylistic knowledge at Grade 8 level.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 8 exam lasts **30 minutes** and will be taken in the following order:

- **Performance Pieces***
- **Technical Exercises ***
- **Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation:** Candidates are given an unseen test to prepare and perform.
- **Ear Tests:** Candidates respond to two aural tests. One is melodic and one is harmonic.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed.

**These elements can be taken first or second at the candidate's request*

Pieces

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. The expectation and length of pieces are designed so candidates can demonstrate complete ownership of notation accuracy, values, evenness of sound, tone quality/consistency, technical control, articulation, style awareness and sync at an advanced level. There will be instinctive presentation of musical structure with effortlessly fluent, maturely expressive communication.

Setting the level of the backing track

At the start of the exam the examiner will conduct a sound check to ensure that the level of the backing track is satisfactory for the candidate. Candidates will be asked to play along to the backing track for the first few bars of the first Performance Piece. The sound check is not marked and once the correct level has been agreed the examiner will start the exam with either the Performance Pieces or Technical Exercises at the candidate's choice. Note that the sound check is only conducted for the first piece.

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 8 there are **four** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies.

- Candidates must prepare **both** natural minor **and** harmonic minor scales
- Major scales, minor scales, chromatic scales and arpeggios need to be played:
 - hands together
 - ascending and descending
 - either straight or swung feel (as directed by the examiner)
 - either legato or staccato articulation (as directed by the examiner)
 - across four octaves (except half-whole and whole half diminished scales, which must be played over two octaves, and extended arpeggios which are one octave only)
- Groups A, B and C (scales, arpeggios and chords) need to be played from memory, and candidates will be required to close the grade book. Candidates may use the book for Group D (technical studies)

The examiner will ask for a selection from groups A, B and C. Candidates can prepare the technical study of their choice from group D.

Groups A and B need to be performed to a metronome click. Group C can be performed at a tempo of the candidate's choice, but the examiner will be looking for the speed of response. The chosen technical study from Group D needs to be performed to a backing track.

Note: the use of any notes or any reading from the grade book during the technical exercises will result in a deduction of overall marks for this section. (See Assessment Criteria).

Any fingerings shown in the grade book are for suggestions only.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: 176 bpm

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

Rhythms: Eighth notes, finishing on a quarter/dotted half note.

- C half-whole diminished (two octaves)
- C whole-half diminished (two octaves)

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: 132 bpm

Time Signature: 3/4, 4/4

Octave range: 4 octaves (except extended arpeggio shown below, 1 octave)

Rhythms: 3/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a dotted half note. 4/4: Eighth notes, finishing on a whole note.

- D# dim7 arpeggio
- A7 arpeggio
- E^b7 arpeggio
- C13^b9#11 arpeggio (one octave)

Additional Scale

Candidates will be asked to perform **one** additional scale from any of the Group A exercises in any of the previous grades, selected by the examiner. The scale will need to be played ascending and descending, in eighth notes and hands together. The examiner will confirm the scale, number of octaves, whether straight or swung, tempo and time signature.

Additional Arpeggio

Candidates will be asked to perform **one** additional arpeggio from any of the Group B exercises in any of the previous grades, selected by the examiner. The scale will need to be played ascending and descending, in eighth notes and hands together. The examiner will confirm the scale, number of octaves, whether straight or swung, tempo and time signature.

GROUP C: CHORD VOICINGS

Candidates will be asked to play one chordal exercise from below, chosen by the examiner:

- C13^b9#11
- C diminished major 7

Candidates will be asked to play one of the chord exercises from memory. The examiner will state the chord type/exercise. This test is performed in free time (without backing track or click), but the examiner will be looking for the speed of your response.

GROUP D: TECHNICAL STUDIES

Candidates will be required to perform one technical study of their choice to the backing track.

SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 8 candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation and Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book.

SIGHT READING

Key: Any

Tempo: 60–200 bpm

Time signature: Any

Rhythms: Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth, sixteenth notes, associated rests.

Eighth, quarter, sixteenth note ties

Dynamics: Any

The sight reading test is in the form of a 16–24 bar example in any key.

You will first be given 90 seconds to practise, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for you to practise and the second time is for you to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in. The tempo is 60–200 bpm.

During the practice time, you will be given the choice of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning.

The backing track is continuous, so once the first playthrough has finished, the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Key: Any

Tempo: 60–200 bpm

Time Signature: 4/4, swung 4/4

The Improvisation test is in the form of a 16–24 bar chord progression with all chord symbols indicated.

Candidates are required to improvise melodies and chordal comping between left hand and right hand, in any way they wish, interpreting the chord progression and backing track given in the exam.

Candidates will have 90 seconds to practise after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is to perform the final version for the exam. For each playthrough, the backing track will begin with a one bar count-in.

During the practice time, candidates will be given the option of a metronome click throughout or a one bar count-in at the beginning. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

EAR TESTS

At Grade 8 there are **two** ear tests: Melodic Recall and Harmonic Recall. Both are previously unseen and an example of each is shown in the grade book.

MELODIC RECALL

Key: C major, C natural minor or C harmonic minor

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Half, quarter, eighth notes.

The examiner will play a 2 bar diatonic melody in the key of either C major, C natural minor or C harmonic minor, with a range up to an octave.

There will be a C root note at the beginning of the test, then the melody will be played twice (each time preceded by four clicks). After this, candidates will hear a one bar count-in and will then need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

The first note of the melody will be either the root, third or fifth.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

HARMONIC RECALL

Key: C major or C minor

Tempo: 95bpm

Time Signature: 4/4

Rhythms: Whole, half notes

The examiner will play a chord progression containing any combination of chords from either the C major or C minor scale, including seventh chords. The melody will be played twice (each time preceded by four clicks). After this, candidates will hear a one bar count-in and will then need to play the melody back to a metronome click.

Note: there is no requirement for the chords to be voicing specific but the diatonic progression needs to be correct.

It is acceptable for candidates to play over the track as the test is being played and there will be 10 seconds to practise after the second playing. The keyboard can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

Note: the 10 seconds is pre-recorded on the audio track so the count-in for the exam version may begin while candidates are still practising.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 8 candidates will be asked **five** questions, one from each of the following groups:

- One question relating to harmony
- One question relating to melody
- One question relating to rhythms
- One question relating to technical requirements
- One question relating to genre

Candidates can choose the piece on which basis the questions will be asked. It must be one of the pieces performed in the exam. The exact bars or phrases will be chosen by the examiner.

The questions will cover the following topics:

Group 1: Harmony

Scales / modes which are being played.

Group 2: Melody

Intervallic construction of melodic phrases within the piece up to crotchet length.

Group 3: Rhythm

Whole, half, quarter, eighth, sixteenth, thirty-second notes, any dotted notes, triplets or any associated rests up to one minim length.

Group 4: Technical

Fingering required to execute voice leading between two consecutive chord voicings.

Group 5: Genre

Melodic / harmonic / rhythmic devices indicative of the genre chosen.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

The candidate plays **five** pieces in their preferred chosen order. The exam will last **28** minutes.

At the beginning of the exam, the examiner will conduct a sound check by asking the candidate to play the first few bars of the first chosen piece. This will set the levels for the exam and will take place along to the backing track. Once the level has been established, the examiner will then commence with the first piece in full.

Note: the sound check is undertaken for the first piece only.

GRADED CERTIFICATE

PREPARED WORK

Please Note: All Graded Certificates are only taken as Recorded Digital Exams

Candidates are required to play **three** Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chord voicings and technical studies.

Candidates need to perform all of the technical exercises from the grade book as detailed in the guidance that you can download at rslawards.com

REVISION HISTORY

21 January 2020

- **Grades 2 > Ear Tests > Melodic Recall > Rhythms** Revised (p.40)
- **Grades 3 > Ear Tests > Melodic Recall > Rhythms** Revised (p.48)
- **Grades 4 > Ear Tests > Melodic Recall > Rhythms** Revised (p.56)
- **Grades 6 > Ear Tests > Melodic Recall > Rhythms** Revised (p.74)
- **Grades 7 > Ear Tests > Melodic Recall > Rhythms** Revised (p.83)
- **Grades 5 > Sight Reading > Rhythms** Revised (p.64)
- **Marking Schemes** (p.10)

The following entries in the main marking scheme table have been revised:

Merit > Ear Tests and Sight Reading amended to **7–8 out of 10**

Merit > Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation amended to **7–8 out of 10**

- **Free Choice Pieces** (p.11 & p.15)

Backing track guidance has been clarified as follows:

“Free Choice Pieces can be performed to a backing track (without the examined part on the track), or as a solo piece (without backing track)”

- The following tables have been revised where indicated at Grade 6 (p.76), Grade 7 (p.85) and Grade 8 (p.94).

Performance Pieces > Merit > Grade Descriptor

Performance Pieces > Distinction > Grade Descriptor

27 April 2020

- (p.10) **Marking Schemes > Grade Exams Debut to Grade 8**

The entry for **General Musicianship Questions > Merit** has been corrected to “4 out of 5”

- The grading criteria tables for each unit have been removed, and replaced with one unified table within the preface section. The replacement tables include streamlined criteria each of which comprises clarified wording in a unified format, along with definitions of terms used. This is to facilitate digital mark sheet assessment whilst maintaining the recognition of knowledge skills and understanding attained at each grade level.

5 May 2020

- Grading criteria tables updated to include clarification of descriptors at ‘Below Pass 1’ band of attainment.

16 September 2020

- (p.6) Added new section: **RSL & UCAS**

- (p.45) **Grade 3 > Technical Work > Group A: Scales**

References to the A major and E^b major contrary motion scales have been removed from the blue bullet-pointed section. These scales are not required at Grade 3 and need not be prepared.

13 November 2020

- Qualification titles updated

31 Mar 2022

- Page 16: Guidance around adaptation and personalisation of repertoire pieces has been updated.

31 March 2025

- Added information about Graded Certificate exam type, including exam information and Qualification codes.
- Learning Outcomes added to Syllabus
- Page 15: Added guidance on selection of performance pieces stipulating that candidates may not be assessed on the same performance pieces more than once