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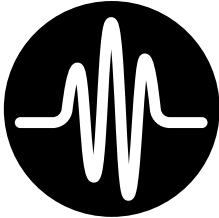
# PIANO

SYLLABUS SPECIFICATION 2025

PREMIERE – GRADE 8



Awarding the  
Contemporary Arts



rockschool®

# Piano

# Syllabus Specification

2025 Edition

Rockschool | RSL Classical | Stageschool | Vocational Qualifications | Creative Qualifications

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### SYLLABUS

Syllabus designed and written by Jono Harrison

Syllabus Director (2025 Update): Dr Fern-Chantele Carter

Syllabus consultants: Andrew Eales, Simon Troup & Jennie Troup [Digital Music Art]

Supporting Tests written by Helen Madden, Chris Stanbury and Jono Harrison

Syllabus advisors: Tim Bennett-Hart, David Duncan, Alistair Platt, Daniel Francis, Ritesh Khokar, Rockie Siew, Stuart Slater

### PUBLISHING

Music engraving: Simon Troup, David Duncan

Book layout: Simon Troup, Jono Harrison

Fact Files: Abbie Thomas

Preparation and Performance Notes: Jennie Troup

Music Editing: Jono Harrison, David Duncan

Cover design: Phil Millard [Rather Nice Design]

Cover update: Simon Troup

### AUDIO

Production: Jono Harrison

Supporting Tests: Chris Stanbury, Jono Harrison

### MUSICIANS

Piano: Ross Stanley, Jono Harrison

Additional Programming: Jono Harrison

### DISTRIBUTION

Exclusive Distributors: Hal Leonard

### CONTACTING ROCKSCHOOL

[www.rslawards.com](http://www.rslawards.com)

Telephone: +44 (0)345 460 4747

Email: [info@rslawards.com](mailto:info@rslawards.com)

### EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS

John Simpson, Norton York

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# PREFACE

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the RSL Awards 2025 syllabus for Piano. This syllabus guide is designed to give teachers, learners and candidates practical information on the graded examinations run by RSL Awards.

The RSL Awards website [www.rslawards.com](http://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 syllabuses, 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](http://www.rslawards.com/about-us/ucas-points)

## Period Of Operation

This syllabus specification covers RSL Piano Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates from September 2025.

## Examinations

RSL offers three types of graded music examination: Graded Examination, Graded Certificates & Performance Certificate.

## Qualifications At A Glance

### 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"> <li>■ 3 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8</li> <li>■ Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sight Reading <b>or</b> Improvisation &amp; Interpretation: Debut to Grade 8</li> <li>■ Ear Test: Debut to Grade 8</li> <li>■ General Musicianship Questions: Debut to Grade 8</li> </ul> |

### PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

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

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

## 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

### Qualification titles and sizes

#### GRADED EXAMINATIONS IN POPULAR MUSIC PERFORMANCE

| Qualification title                                                          | QAN         | Total number of units | Guided learning hours (GLH) | Credit | Total qualification time (TQT) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 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       | 5501/0391/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                            |

## GRADED CERTIFICATES IN POPULAR MUSIC PERFORMANCE

| Qualification title                                                          | QAN        | Total number of units | Guided learning hours (GLH) | Credit | Total qualification time (TQT) |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 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                            |

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES IN POPULAR MUSIC PERFORMANCE

| Qualification title                                                               | QAN        | Total number of units | Guided learning hours (GLH) | Credit | Total qualification time (TQT) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| 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.                                                       |
| Assessment bands   | 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 reassessment 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 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 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](http://www.rslawards.com)

## ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

### Assessment Methodology

The **Graded Examinations** in Music Performance are assessed via an examination. The examination is divided into the following sections:

#### Technical Exercises, covering knowledge of:

- Scales
- Arpeggios
- Technical Studies

#### 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

The **Performance Certificates** in Music Performance are assessed via an examination. The examination is divided into the following sections:

#### Performance Pieces

- Five Performance pieces (three pieces can be 'Free Choice Pieces')

### Assessment Timings

Examination timings for the Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance are as follows:

#### Graded 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

**Graded Certificates are taken remotely and have no specific assessment timings.**

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

## Marking Schemes

| GRADE 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 Test                                        | 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%           |

| PERFORMANCE 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 |
| 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%             | 75%             | 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                   | 12–14 out of 20 | 15–17 out of 20 | 18+ out of 20 |
| Total Marks                           | 60%+            | 75%+            | 90%+          |

## 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.

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](http://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 Piano grade book)
- **Graded Certificates:** Two free choice pieces (a minimum of one piece must be from the Piano grade book)
- **Performance Certificates:** Three free choice pieces (a minimum of two pieces must be from the Piano 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.

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.

### 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](http://www.rslawards.com)

### Equal Opportunities

RSL's Equal Opportunities policy can be found on the RSL website [www.rslawards.com](http://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](mailto:info@rslawards.com)

# RSL PIANO EXAMINATIONS

## EXAMINATIONS OVERVIEW

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

### GRADE EXAMINATIONS

Piano Grade Examinations are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements at each grade:

- **Three** Performance Pieces
- Technical Exercises
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation
- Ear Test
- General Musicianship Questions

These elements fall into two categories:

- Prepared work: Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises
- Unprepared work: Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation, Ear Test, and General Musicianship Questions.

### PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

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

- **Five** Performance Pieces

### GRADED CERTIFICATES

Piano Graded Certificates are available from Debut to Grade 8 and consist of the following elements at each grade:

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

## EXAMINATION STRUCTURE

The examination structure for the Grade Examination is shown below:

### Debut to Grade 8

- Performance Pieces \*
- 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

## General Notes

The following general notes apply to Graded Exams and Performance Certificate Examinations:

***Graded Certificates are taken remotely and have no specific assessment timings.***

## FREE CHOICE PIECES

For all piano 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 from the grade book)
- Graded Certificates: **Two** Free Choice Pieces (at least one piece must be from the grade book)
- Performance Certificates: **Three** Free Choice Pieces (at least two pieces must be from the grade book)

Visit [www.rslawards.com](http://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](mailto:info@rslawards.com) and a member of the RSL Awards team will advise.

## NOTATION

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

Please note that fingering indications are given as guidance only. Fingering technique is not in itself assessed, only the resulting musical outcome.

### Exclusions:

- At all grades, if any two handed/open voiced chords notated in the pieces are not achievable, candidates may adapt the chord 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.

## 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.

## PIANO SPECIFICATION

The following instruments are accepted for use in Piano exams at all grades.

- Acoustic Piano
- Digital Piano

A number of our exam venues in the UK have acoustic pianos. The remainder have digital pianos. Candidates are advised to contact RSL Awards to check their nearest centre if they specifically wish to perform the exam on an acoustic piano.

See also <https://www.rslawards.com/music/find-a-centre>

## USING OWN EQUIPMENT

Candidates may bring their own digital piano or keyboard for use in the exam, which must fit the following criteria:

- **Debut:** Minimum of four octaves/49 keys, touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal.
- **Grade 1:** Minimum of five octaves/61 keys, touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal.
- **Grades 2–8:** 88 keys, touch sensitive, sprung or weighted keys and a sustain pedal.
- **Candidates must use a 'realistic' piano sound for their exam.**

Candidates will need to note on the application form that they wish to use their own equipment when applying to take the exam. Owing to scheduling constraints and the potential impact on subsequent exam times, the absence of prior notification to RSL Awards will result in the examiner refusing candidates own equipment on the day.

RSL Awards also recommends that candidates who wish to bring in their own equipment 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 whilst it is acceptable for candidates to use their own equipment for use in the exam, 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. Rockschooll cannot advise whether or not candidates use their own equipment. A decision to do so is entirely at a candidate's discretion/risk on this basis.

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 | 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                               |                                          |

| 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 | 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                               |                                          |

| 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 | 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                             |                                          |

| 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 |

## 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                               |                                          |

## 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 |

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

There are three types of exam available at Debut: a **Grade Exam, Graded Certificate** 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 studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test that begins to develop melodic recall. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general instrumental 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 one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Debut there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Studies.

- All scales and arpeggios need to be played hands separately, *legato*, ascending and descending, in the keys and octaves shown in the grade book.
- There is no memory requirement, and candidates may use their book for all technical sections at this grade.
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).

### GROUP A: SCALES

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 52

- C major, one octave, right hand
- C major, one octave, left hand
- A natural minor, one octave, right hand
- A natural minor, one octave, left hand

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 92

- C major, to a 5th, left hand
- C major, to a 5th, left hand
- A minor, to a 5th, right hand
- A minor, to 5th, left hand

### GROUP C: STUDIES

Studies are specially composed short pieces designed to develop and demonstrate key areas of technique in performance.

At Debut, candidates perform their choice of **one** of the technical studies from the grade book.

## SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Debut, candidates will be offered the choice between Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation. Both are previously unseen and examples of each are given in the grade book. The examiner will ask the candidate which one they wish to choose before commencing the test. Once a decision has been made, the candidate cannot change their mind.

### SIGHT READING

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give the candidate a previously unseen 4–6 bar melody in the key of C major or A minor, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask the candidate to commence the test.

- Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 60
- Candidates are tested on their ability to perform previously unseen pitches and rhythms. No dynamics are shown, however, candidates should maintain an even tone quality throughout.
- While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the recommended minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout their practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key: C major**

**Tempo: 60bpm**

**Time signature: 4/4**

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

Candidates may improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track. Candidates will have 90 seconds to prepare 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.

For the first playthrough, there will be four clicks. For the test, there will be a one-bar count-in. The backing track is continuous so once the first playthrough has finished the count-in of the second playing will start immediately.

## EAR TEST

At Debut there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

Tempo: ♩ = 95

Rhythms: Minims (half notes)

The examiner will play two minims 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. For this exercise, candidates are to use the words 'higher' or 'lower'.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

The final part of the exam is the General Musicianship Questions section, where the examiner will ask a **total of five questions** drawn from the topics and lists below, relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination, and on general musical and instrumental knowledge. The examiner will ask which piece the candidate has chosen for this section of the exam and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with the questions.

### Questions relating to the candidate's chosen piece:

At Debut, candidates may be asked to identify:

- The treble or bass staves
- The treble or bass clefs
- Note pitch names (within treble stave only)
- Minim (half) or crotchet (quarter) note values

### Instrument Knowledge:

In Debut candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of piano: black and white keys, middle C (C4)

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Debut, there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 1

The Grade 1 Piano exam is for candidates who 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 studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or a Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills.

The final part of the exam comprises five General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental 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 one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

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

- Scales and arpeggios need to be played **legato**, ascending and descending, in the keys and octaves shown in the grade book.
- Candidates must choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor **or** melodic minor scales in the exam. In a Graded Exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- There is no memory requirement, and candidates may use their book for all technical sections at this grade.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click). Performances slower than the stated minimum tempo may be subject to qualitative judgement by the examiner, according to extent and commensurate with the grade.
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.

### GROUP A: SCALES

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 60

#### Major Scales:

- F major, two octaves (right hand)
- F major, two octaves (left hand)
- G major, two octaves (right hand)
- G major, two octaves (left hand)
- C major, one octave (hands together)

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates must choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor **or** melodic minor). In the exam. In a Graded Exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared and request a selection of scales to perform on this basis.

#### Natural minor scales:

- D natural minor, two octaves (right hand)
- D natural minor, two octaves (left hand)
- E natural minor, two octaves (right hand)
- E natural minor two octaves (left hand)

#### Harmonic minor scales:

- D harmonic minor, two octaves (right hand)
- D harmonic minor, two octaves (left hand)
- E harmonic minor, two octaves (right hand)
- E harmonic minor, two octaves (left hand)

#### Melodic minor scales:

- D melodic minor, two octaves (right hand)
- D melodic minor, two octaves (left hand)
- E melodic minor, two octaves (right hand)
- E melodic minor, two octaves (left hand)

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 50

- G major, one octave (right hand)
- G major, one octave (left hand)
- D minor, one octave (right hand)
- D minor, one octave (left hand)

### GROUP C: STUDIES

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the technical studies from the grade book.

## SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

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

### SIGHT READING

**Key: F major or G major**

**Recommended minimum tempo: 70bpm**

**Time signature: 4/4**

**Rhythms: Minims (half notes), crotchets (quarter notes), associated rests**

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar melody in the key of either G major or F major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practice. After the practice time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test.

- All sight reading tests at Grade 1 should be played at a recommended minimum tempo of  $\text{♩} = 70$ .
- At Grade 1, candidates are tested on their ability to perform previously unseen pitches and rhythms. No dynamics are shown, however, an even tone quality should be maintained throughout.
- While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the recommended minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout their practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key: F major or G major**

**Tempo: 70bpm**

**Time signature: 4/4**

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar chord progression in the key of either G major or F major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, 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. The tempo is  $\text{♩} = 70$ .

- At Grade 1, candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TESTS

At Grade 1 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**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. For this exercise, candidates are to use the words 'higher' or 'lower'.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 1 candidates will be asked **five** questions on topics relating to their choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 1 candidates may be asked to identify:

- The time signature
- The treble and bass clefs
- Note pitch names (within bass and treble staves only)
- Semibreve (whole), minim (half), crotchet (quarter), quaver (eighth) note values

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

At Grade 1 candidates may be asked to:

- State the intervals of a major triad in root position (using interval names, e.g., 'root', 'fifth', etc.)
- Identify one of the following parts of the piano: middle C (C4), sustain pedal, hammers or strings

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 2

The Grade 2 Piano exam is for candidates who 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 studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

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

- Scales and arpeggios need to be played hands together (unless otherwise specified), in the keys, motion, direction and octaves as shown in the grade book.
- Candidates must choose to play either natural minor or harmonic minor or melodic minor scales in the exam. In a Grade Exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- There is no memory requirement, and candidates may use their book for all technical sections at this grade.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.

### GROUP A: SCALES

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 80

#### Major Scales:

- D major, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- G major, two octaves
- C major, one octave, contrary motion

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask the candidate which set of minor scales they have chosen and will then request a selection of scales for them to perform on this basis.

#### Natural minor scales

- B natural minor, two octaves
- G natural minor, two octaves
- D natural minor, two octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- B melodic minor, two octaves
- G melodic minor, two octaves
- D melodic minor, two octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- B harmonic minor, two octaves
- G harmonic minor, two octaves
- D harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Chromatic scales:

- Chromatic scale starting on D, one octave, right hand only
- Chromatic scale starting on D, one octave, left hand only

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 63

#### Major Arpeggios:

- D major, two octaves, right hand only
- D major, two octaves, left hand only
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves, right hand only
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves, left hand only
- G major, one octave, hands together

#### Minor Arpeggios:

- B minor, two octaves, right hand only
- B minor, two octaves, left hand only
- G minor, two octaves, right hand only
- G minor, two octaves, left hand only

### GROUP C: STUDIES

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the technical studies from the grade book.

## SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

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

### SIGHT READING

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar piece in D major or B<sup>b</sup> major, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practice time, the examiner will ask the candidate to commence the test.

- All sight reading tests at Grade 2 should be played at a recommended minimum tempo of  $\text{♩} = 80$
- At Grade 2, candidates are tested on their ability to perform previously unseen pitches, rhythms and basic dynamics (mf, mp).
- While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the recommended minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout the practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar chord progression in the key of either D major or B<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for candidates 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. The tempo is:  $\text{♩} = 60–95$ .

- At this grade, candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 2 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:**  $\text{♩} = 95$

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Minims (half notes)

The examiner will play a two-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 practice after the second playing. The piano can be used to assist at any time prior to being counted in to perform the exam version.

## GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

At Grade 2 candidates will be asked five questions on topics relating to their choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 2 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the time signature marking
- Identify note pitch names (within bass and treble staves only)
- Identify semibreve (whole), minim (half), crotchet (quarter), quaver (eighth), semiquaver (16th) note and rest values
- Locate dynamic markings in the piece (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff)

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 2 candidates may be asked to:

- State the intervals of a major or minor triad in root position (using interval names, e.g., 'root', 'fifth', etc.)
- Identify two of the following parts of the piano: middle C (C4), sustain pedal, hammers, strings.

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform them.

# Grade 3

The Grade 3 Piano exam is for candidates 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 technical studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Technical Studies.

- Scales and arpeggios need to be played *legato* in the keys, motion and octaves as shown below.
- Candidates must choose to play *either* natural minor *or* harmonic minor *or* melodic minor scales in the exam. In a grade exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- There is no memory requirement, and candidates may use your book for all technical sections at this grade
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).

### GROUP A: SCALES

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 80

#### Major Scales:

- E<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- A major, two octaves
- D major, two octaves
- F major, two octaves
- A major, one octave, contrary motion
- E<sup>b</sup> major, one octave, contrary motion

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask which set of minor scales the candidate has chosen and will then request a selection of scales for the candidate to perform on this basis

#### Natural minor scales

- C natural minor, two octaves
- F<sup>#</sup> natural minor, two octaves
- E natural minor, two octaves
- D natural minor, two octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- C melodic minor, two octaves
- F<sup>#</sup> melodic minor, two octaves
- E melodic minor, two octaves
- D melodic minor, two octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- C harmonic minor, two octaves
- F<sup>#</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves
- E harmonic minor, two octaves
- D harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Chromatic scale

- Chromatic scale starting on A, one octave

### GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 69

#### Major Arpeggios

- A major, two octaves
- E<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves, right hand only
- E<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves, left hand only

#### Minor Arpeggios

- C minor, two octaves
- F<sup>#</sup> minor, two octaves, right hand only
- F<sup>#</sup> minor, two octaves, left hand only

### GROUP C: STUDIES

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the studies from the grade book.

## 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<sup>b</sup> major or A major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Semibreve (whole), dotted minim (dotted half), minim (half), dotted crotchet (dotted quarter), crotchet (quarter), quaver (eighth) notes, quaver ties, associated rests.

**Dynamic Markings:** *f*, *mp*

**Articulation:** staccato, legato

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar piece in A major or E<sup>b</sup> major, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test. While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the recommended minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout the practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** E<sup>b</sup> major or A major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 4–6 bar chord progression in the key of either A major or E<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, 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. The tempo is: ♩ = 60–95.

- At this grade, candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 3 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Minims (half notes), crotchets (quarter notes)

The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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

Grade 3 candidates will be asked five questions on topics relating to their choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Your Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 3 candidates may be asked to:

- Identify and explain the meaning of the key signature
- Identify note pitch names (bass and treble staves plus two ledger lines)
- Identify semibreve (whole), minim (half), crotchet (quarter), quaver (eighth), semiquaver (16th) note and rest values
- Identify and explain the meaning of dynamic markings found in the piece (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) and cresc. and dim. plus hairpins

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 3 candidates may be asked to:

- State the intervals of a major triad, minor triad or dominant 7th chord (using interval names, e.g., 'root', 'fifth', etc.)
- Explain how the sound is produced on an acoustic piano when a key is pressed

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 4

The Grade 4 Piano exam is for candidates 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, and studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 4 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Studies.

- Groups A and B (Scales & Arpeggios) must be played from memory. Candidates may use their book for Group C (Studies).
- Scales and arpeggios need to be played **legato**, in the keys, motion and octaves as shown in the grade book. All scales and arpeggios are played hands together at this grade.
- Candidates must choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor **or** melodic minor scales in the exam. In a graded exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.

### GROUP A: SCALES

Minimum Tempo: ♩ = 104

Range: Two octaves

#### Major Scales

- A<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- E major, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- A major, two octaves
- E<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask which set of minor scales the candidate has chosen and will then request a selection of scales for the candidate to perform on this basis.

#### Natural minor scales

- F natural minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> natural minor, two octaves
- B natural minor, two octaves
- G natural minor, two octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- F melodic minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> melodic minor, two octaves
- B melodic minor, two octaves
- G melodic minor, two octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- F harmonic minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves
- B harmonic minor, two octaves
- G harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Major and Minor Scales in Contrary Motion

- A<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves, contrary motion
- E major, two octaves, contrary motion
- D major, two octaves, contrary motion
- C harmonic minor, two octaves, contrary motion

#### Chromatic Scale

- Chromatic scale starting on G<sup>#</sup>, two octaves

**GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS**

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 76

**Major and Minor Arpeggios**

- A<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- E major, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- E<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- F minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> minor, two octaves
- B minor, two octaves
- G minor, two octaves

**GROUP C: TECHNICAL STUDIES**Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the studies from the grade book.**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<sup>b</sup> major or E major**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–130**Time Signature:** simple (3/4, 4/4) or compound (6/8)**Rhythms:** Whole, dotted half, half, dotted quarter, quarter, eighth notes, associated rests.**Dynamic Markings:** *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f***Articulation:** *staccato*, *legato*

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates an eight-bar piece in E major or A<sup>b</sup> major, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test. While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout the practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

**IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION****Key:** A<sup>b</sup> major or E major**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–130**Time Signature:** 3/4, 4/4

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 8–12 bar chord progression in the key of either E major or A<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 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. The tempo is ♩ = 60–130.

- At this grade, candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 4 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Minims (half notes), crotchets (quarter notes)**

The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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 on topics relating to their choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 4 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the key signature and identify the accidentals within it
- Identify note pitch names (bass and treble staves plus up to three ledger lines)
- Identify any note and rest values within the chosen piece
- Identify and explain the meaning of any repeat marks, first and second-time bars, D.C., D.S., al Coda and al Fine markings
- Identify and explain the meaning of any expressive musical markings found in the piece including dynamic markings (pp, p, mp, mf, f, ff) and cresc. and dim., hairpins, and any tempo markings, for example rit., rall., a tempo, subito, simile, molto and poco a poco.
- Give a brief explanation of the genre and historical context of the chosen piece, without referring to notes or to the book.

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 4 candidates may be asked to:

- State the intervals of a major triad, minor triad, or dominant 7th chord in either root position, first inversion or second inversion (using interval names, e.g., 'root', 'fifth', etc.)
- Identify the location and functions of the soft pedal or sustain pedal

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 4 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 5

The Grade 5 Piano exam is for candidates 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, and studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 5 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Studies.

- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. Candidates may use their book for Group C (Studies).
- Scales and arpeggios must be played *legato* unless otherwise stated, in the keys, motion and octaves as shown in the grade book. All scales and arpeggios are played hands together at this grade.
- Candidates must choose to play **either** natural minor **or** harmonic minor **or** melodic minor scales in the exam. In a graded exam, the examiner will ask the candidate to state which set of minor scales they have prepared
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).

### GROUP A: SCALES

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 126

#### Major Scales

- B major, two octaves
- D<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- E major, two octaves
- A<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask which set of minor scales the candidate has chosen and will then request a selection of scales for the candidate to perform on this basis

#### Natural minor scales

- G<sup>#</sup> natural minor, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> natural minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> natural minor, two octaves
- F natural minor, two octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- G<sup>#</sup> melodic minor, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> melodic minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> melodic minor, two octaves
- F melodic minor, two octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- G<sup>#</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves
- C<sup>#</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves
- F harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Contrary Motion Scales:

- B major, two octaves
- D<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves
- D harmonic minor, two octaves
- G harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Chromatic Scale:

- Chromatic scale starting on B, two octaves

#### Staccato Scales:

- G major, two octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves

#### Major Scale a 3rd apart:

- A major, one octave

## GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 86

### Major and Minor Arpeggios

- |                                     |                                     |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ■ B major, two octaves              | ■ G <sup>♯</sup> minor, two octaves |
| ■ D <sup>♭</sup> major, two octaves | ■ B <sup>♭</sup> minor, two octaves |
| ■ E major, two octaves              | ■ C <sup>♯</sup> minor, two octaves |
| ■ A <sup>♭</sup> major, two octaves | ■ F minor, two octaves              |

## GROUP C: STUDIES

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the technical studies from the grade book.

## SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

### SIGHT READING

**Key:** D<sup>b</sup> major or B major

**Time Signature:** 3/4, 4/4

**Rhythms:** Semibreve (whole), dotted minim (dotted half), minim (half), dotted crotchet (dotted quarter), crotchet (quarter), quaver (eighth) notes, associated rests. Quaver and crotchet ties.

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

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates an 8–16 bar example in the key of either B major or D<sup>b</sup> major, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test.

While the assessed part of the test is not played to a metronome click, candidates may ask to hear the recommended minimum tempo on a metronome at the start of, or throughout the practice time. Additionally, candidates may ask to hear a few seconds of the tempo on a metronome before the assessed part of the test begins.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** D<sup>b</sup> major or B major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–130

**Time Signature:** 3/4, 4/4

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates an 8–16 bar chord progression in the key of either B major or D<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 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. The tempo is ♩ = 60–130.

- At this grade, candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 5 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book..

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Minims (half notes), crotchets (quarter notes), quavers (eighth notes). Notes may be tied.

The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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 on topics relating to their choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 5 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain the meaning of the time signature
- Identify the key signature (and the accidentals within it)
- Identify any note pitch name (bass and treble staves plus four ledger lines)
- Identify any note and rest values within the chosen piece
- Identify and explain the meaning of any repeat marks, first and second time bars, D.C., D.S., al Coda and al Fine markings
- Identify and explain the meaning of any expressive musical markings found in the piece including dynamic markings (*pp*, *p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, *ff*, cresc. and dim., hairpins), and any tempo markings, for example: rit., rall., a tempo, subito, simile, molto and poco a poco
- Give a brief explanation of the genre and historical context of the chosen piece, without referring to notes or to the book

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 5 candidates may be asked to:

- State the intervals of a minor 7th or dominant 7th chord in root position, first inversion or second inversion (using interval names, e.g., 'root', 'fifth', etc.)
- Identify the location and functions of the soft pedal and sustain pedal

## 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

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 5 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 6

The Grade 6 Piano exam is for candidates 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, and studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete **either** a Sight Reading **or** an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 6 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Studies.

- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. Candidates may use their book for Group C (Technical Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- Enharmonic pairs are shown for illustrative purposes. *In the graded exam, the examiner may ask for either of the enharmonic equivalents.*

### GROUP A: SCALES

**Recommended minimum tempo:** ♩ = 152 (Except C major in 3rds: ♩ = 76)

#### Major Scales

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across **four** octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- F# major (enharmonic G<sup>b</sup> major), four octaves
- D major, four octaves
- B<sup>b</sup> major, two octaves

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask which set of minor scales the candidate has chosen and will then request a selection of scales for the candidate to perform on this basis

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across **four** octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

#### Natural minor scales

- D# natural minor (enharmonic E<sup>b</sup> natural minor), four octaves
- B natural minor, four octaves
- G natural minor, four octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- D# melodic minor (enharmonic E<sup>b</sup> melodic minor), four octaves
- B melodic minor, four octaves
- G melodic minor, four octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- D# harmonic minor (enharmonic E<sup>b</sup> harmonic minor), four octaves
- B harmonic minor, four octaves
- G harmonic minor, four octaves

#### Major and Harmonic Minor Scales in Contrary Motion:

To be played hands together, in contrary motion, across **two** octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- F# major (enharmonic G<sup>b</sup> major), two octaves
- F# harmonic minor, two octaves
- B harmonic minor, two octaves

#### Chromatic Scales in Similar and Contrary Motion:

To be played hands together, in similar or contrary motion as shown in the grade book, played **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- Chromatic scale starting on D#, similar motion, **four** octaves
- Chromatic scale starting on F#, contrary motion, **two** octaves

**Harmonised Scales:**

- C major in 3rds, right hand only, two octaves, legato (recommended minimum tempo: ♩=76)
- A<sup>b</sup> major a third apart, hands together, two octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation)

**GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS**

The recommended minimum tempo for Group B is ♩=100

**Major & Minor Arpeggios:**

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across **four** octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation)

- |                                                                                 |                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ F <sup>#</sup> major (enharmonic G <sup>b</sup> major) arpeggio, four octaves | ■ D <sup>#</sup> minor (enharmonic E <sup>b</sup> minor) arpeggio, four octaves |
| ■ D major arpeggio, four octaves                                                | ■ B minor arpeggio, four octaves                                                |
| ■ B <sup>b</sup> major arpeggio, four octaves                                   | ■ G minor arpeggio, four octaves                                                |

**Seventh Arpeggios:**

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across four octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation)

- C diminished 7th, two octaves
- C dominant 7th, two octaves

**GROUP C: STUDIES**

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the studies from the grade book.

## 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 Signature:** Up to six sharps or flats

**Time Signature:** simple or compound time

**Dynamics/articulation:** any

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a 12–16 bar piece, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will candidates to commence the test.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** G<sup>b</sup> major or F<sup>#</sup> major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–130

**Time Signature:** 3/4, 4/4

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 12–16 bar chord progression in the key of either F<sup>#</sup> major or G<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is for 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. The tempo is ♩ = 60–130.

- Candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 6 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Minims (half notes) and quavers (eighth notes)

The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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

The examiner will ask five questions on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination, and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 6 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain any tempo marking on the score, e.g., bpm, allegretto, poco moto, etc., and rit., rall., a tempo
- Identify the key signature (including accidentals within it and relative major/minor)
- Identify any note pitch names (bass and treble staves plus all ledger lines and accidentals)
- Identify any note and rest values within the chosen piece
- Identify and explain the meaning of any expressive musical markings found in the piece including all dynamic markings, and performance directions e.g., subito, simile, molto and poco a poco
- Give a brief explanation of stylistic and technical considerations in preparation and performance of the chosen piece (with demonstration – no use of notes or book)

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 6 candidates may be asked to:

- State the chords of a perfect or imperfect cadence in the key of C or F major (the examiner will choose which key and cadence)
- Identify the location, function and use of all pedals on the piano, e.g., soft pedal, sostenuto pedal and sustain pedal

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 6 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 7

The Grade 7 Piano exam is for candidates who 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, and studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. Candidates may use their book for Group C (Technical Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- At this grade, **enharmonic equivalents of scales from earlier grades are included**, e.g. C<sup>♯</sup> major (enharmonic D<sup>♭</sup> major). Examiners will refer to these scales using the names shown in the grade book

### GROUP A: SCALES

The recommended minimum tempo for this group is ♩ = 160 (except for G major in 3rds: ♩ = 80)

#### Major Scales

To be played hands together, in similar motion, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- C<sup>♯</sup> major, four octaves
- C<sup>♭</sup> major, four octaves
- E major, four octaves
- A<sup>♭</sup> major four octaves

#### Minor Scales:

Candidates should choose **one** set of minor scales to perform in their exam (**either** natural minor, **or** harmonic minor, **or** melodic minor). The examiner will ask which set of minor scales the candidate has chosen and will then request a selection of scales for the candidate to perform on this basis

Minor scales should be played hands together, in similar motion, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

#### Natural minor scales

- A<sup>♯</sup> natural minor, four octaves
- A<sup>♭</sup> natural minor, four octaves
- C<sup>♯</sup> natural minor, four octaves
- F natural minor, four octaves

#### Melodic minor scales

- A<sup>♯</sup> melodic minor, four octaves
- A<sup>♭</sup> melodic minor, four octaves
- C<sup>♯</sup> melodic minor, four octaves
- F melodic minor, four octaves

#### Harmonic minor scales

- A<sup>♯</sup> harmonic minor, four octaves
- A<sup>♭</sup> harmonic minor, four octaves
- C<sup>♯</sup> harmonic minor, four octaves
- F harmonic minor, four octaves

#### Major and Harmonic Minor Scales in Contrary Motion:

To be played hands together, in contrary motion, across two octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- |                                     |                                              |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| ■ C <sup>♯</sup> major, two octaves | ■ F harmonic minor, two octaves              |
| ■ C <sup>♭</sup> major, two octaves | ■ C <sup>♯</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves |
| ■ E major, two octaves              | ■ G <sup>♯</sup> harmonic minor, two octaves |
| ■ A <sup>♭</sup> major, two octaves |                                              |

#### Chromatic Scales in Similar and Contrary Motion:

To be played hands together, **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- Chromatic scale in similar motion starting on E, G<sup>♯</sup>, C<sup>♯</sup> or F, **four** octaves
- Chromatic scale in contrary motion starting on C<sup>♯</sup> or G, **two** octaves

**Harmonised Scales:**

- G major in 3rds, right hand only, two octaves, **legato** (recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 80)
- G major in 3rds, left hand only, two octaves, **legato** (recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 80)
- E major a 3rd apart, hands together, four octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (examiner choice)
- A<sup>b</sup> major a 6th apart, hands together, four octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (examiner choice)

**GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS**

Recommended minimum tempo: ♩ = 112

**Major & Minor Arpeggios**

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across **four** octaves (two octaves shown), **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- |                                 |                                 |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ■ C <sup>#</sup> major arpeggio | ■ A <sup>#</sup> minor arpeggio |
| ■ C <sup>b</sup> major arpeggio | ■ A <sup>b</sup> minor arpeggio |
| ■ E major arpeggio              | ■ C <sup>#</sup> minor arpeggio |
| ■ A <sup>b</sup> major arpeggio | ■ F minor arpeggio              |

**Seventh Arpeggios**

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across **four** octaves (two octaves shown), **legato** or **staccato** (In a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- E diminished 7th
- G<sup>#</sup> diminished 7th
- E dominant 7th
- A<sup>b</sup> dominant 7th

**GROUP C: STUDIES**

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the studies from the grade book.

## 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 Signature:** Up to seven sharps or flats

**Time Signature:** simple, compound or odd time

**Dynamics/articulation:** any

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a 16–20 bar piece, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

**Key:** C<sup>#</sup> major or C<sup>b</sup> major

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–130 bpm

**Time Signature:** 4/4 or swung 4/4

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 16–20 bar chord progression in the key of either C<sup>#</sup> major or C<sup>b</sup> major. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, after which the examiner will play the backing track twice. The first time is to practise and the second time is for candidates 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 ♩ = 60–130.

- Candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track.
- During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 7 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example is shown in the grade book.

### MELODIC RECALL

**Key:** C major or C minor

**Tempo:** ♩ = 95

**Time Signature:** 4/4

**Rhythms:** Crotchets (quarter notes and quavers (eighth notes))

- The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 7 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain any tempo marking on the score, e.g., bpm, allegretto, poco moto, etc., and rit., rall., a tempo
- Identify the key signature (including accidentals within it and relative major/minor)
- Identify any note pitch names (bass and treble staves plus all ledger lines and accidentals)
- Identify any note and rest values within the chosen piece
- Identify and explain the meaning of any expressive musical markings found in the piece including all dynamic markings, and performance directions e.g., subito, simile, molto and poco a poco
- Give a brief explanation of stylistic and technical considerations in preparation and performance of the chosen piece (with demonstration – no use of notes or book)

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 7 candidates may be asked to:

- State the chords that make up two of four cadence types in the key of D or G major. The examiner will choose a key, and then ask for the chords from the following cadences:
  - Perfect
  - Imperfect
  - Plagal
  - Deceptive
- Identify the location, function and use of any part of the piano

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 7 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

# Grade 8

The Grade 8 Piano exam is for candidates who 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 and studies.

#### UNPREPARED WORK

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and an Ear Test developing melodic recall skills. The final part of the exam comprises **five** General Musicianship Questions, on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### 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 Test:** Candidates respond to one melodic recall test.
- **General Musicianship Questions:** Candidates answer five questions based on one of the pieces performed, and on general instrumental knowledge.

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

### PERFORMANCE PIECES

The pieces in the grade book can be used for every type of exam. In a Grade Exam and Graded Certificate, candidates are required to perform three pieces. In a Performance Certificate, candidates are required to perform five pieces.

## TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 8 there are **three** groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios and Studies.

- Groups A and B (scales & arpeggios) must be played from memory. Candidates may use their book for Group C (Studies).
- All groups are played unaccompanied (without metronome or click).
- Any fingerings shown are suggestions only.
- Enharmonic equivalent scales feature at this grade. One of each pair is shown in the grade book for illustrative purposes. In a graded exam, the examiner may ask for either of the enharmonic equivalents.

### GROUP A: SCALES

**Recommended minimum tempo:** ♩ = 176 (except for harmonised scales: ♩ = 100)

#### Major Scales

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across four octaves, *legato* or *staccato* (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation)

- B<sup>b</sup> major
- A major
- E<sup>b</sup> major
- E major
- D<sup>b</sup> major/C<sup>#</sup> major
- F<sup>#</sup> major/G<sup>b</sup> major

#### Minor Scales

To be played hands together, in similar motion, across four octaves, *legato* or *staccato* (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation). Please note that at this grade, the forms of minor scale (natural, harmonic, melodic) must be prepared as stated in the list below.

- G harmonic minor
- C harmonic minor
- F<sup>#</sup> melodic minor
- C<sup>#</sup> natural minor
- B<sup>b</sup> harmonic minor/A<sup>#</sup> harmonic minor
- D<sup>#</sup> melodic minor/E<sup>b</sup> melodic minor

#### Major and Harmonic Minor Scales in Contrary Motion

To be played hands together, in contrary motion, across two octaves, *legato* or *staccato* (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- |                                |                                                               |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| ■ F major                      | ■ D harmonic minor                                            |
| ■ D major                      | ■ B harmonic minor                                            |
| ■ A <sup>b</sup> major         | ■ F harmonic minor                                            |
| ■ B major/C <sup>b</sup> major | ■ G <sup>#</sup> harmonic minor/A <sup>b</sup> harmonic minor |

#### Chromatic Scales in Similar and Contrary Motion

To be played hands together, *legato* or *staccato* (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

- Chromatic scale in similar motion, starting on B, F<sup>#</sup>, G<sup>#</sup> or C<sup>#</sup>, four octaves
- Chromatic scale in contrary motion from B and A<sup>b</sup>, two octaves

**Harmonised Scales****Recommended minimum tempo:** ♩ = 100

- E<sup>b</sup> major in thirds, right hand only, two octaves, **legato**
- E<sup>b</sup> major in thirds, left hand only, two octaves, **legato**
- C major in 6ths, right hand only, two octaves, **staccato**
- C major in 6ths, left hand only, two octaves, **staccato**
- F<sup>#</sup> major a 3rd apart, hands together, four octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (examiner choice)
- D<sup>b</sup> major a 6th apart, hands together, four octaves, **legato** or **staccato** (examiner choice)

**GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS****Recommended minimum tempo:** ♩ = 132

All arpeggios to be played hands together, in similar motion, across four octaves **legato** or **staccato** (in a graded exam, the examiner will choose which articulation).

**Major & Minor Arpeggios**

- |                                               |                                               |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| ■ B <sup>b</sup> major                        | ■ G minor                                     |
| ■ A major                                     | ■ C minor                                     |
| ■ E <sup>b</sup> major                        | ■ F <sup>#</sup> minor                        |
| ■ E major                                     | ■ C <sup>#</sup> minor                        |
| ■ D <sup>b</sup> major / C <sup>#</sup> major | ■ B <sup>b</sup> minor / A <sup>#</sup> minor |
| ■ F <sup>#</sup> major / G <sup>b</sup> major | ■ D <sup>#</sup> minor / E <sup>b</sup> minor |

**Seventh Arpeggios**

- F<sup>#</sup> diminished 7th
- C<sup>#</sup> diminished 7th
- F<sup>#</sup> dominant 7th
- D<sup>b</sup> dominant 7th

**GROUP C: STUDIES**

Candidates perform their choice of **one** of the technical studies from the grade book.

## SIGHT READING / IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

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

### SIGHT READING

**Key:** Any

**Time signature:** Any

**Dynamics/articulation:** any

In the sight reading test, the examiner will give candidates a piece of music of up to 24 bars in length, to be played unaccompanied. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to practise. After the practise time, the examiner will ask candidates to commence the test.

### IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

In the Improvisation & Interpretation test, the examiner will give candidates a 16–24 bar chord progression in any key. Candidates will first be given 90 seconds to prepare, 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. The tempo is ♩ = 60–200.

**Key:** Any

**Tempo:** ♩ = 60–200

**Time Signature:** 4/4, swung 4/4

Candidates have the choice to improvise either a melodic line or a chordal part to complement the backing track. During the preparation time, candidates 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.

## EAR TEST

At Grade 8 there is one ear test, assessing melodic recall skills. An example 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:** Minims (half notes), crotchets (quarter notes), quaver (eighth notes).

The examiner will play a two-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 piano 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

The examiner will ask five questions on topics relating to the candidate's choice of piece performed in the examination, and on general musical and instrumental knowledge.

### Knowledge of Chosen Piece

The examiner will ask the candidate which piece they have chosen for this section and will ask them to open the relevant page in their book before commencing with these questions.

At Grade 8 candidates may be asked to:

- Explain any tempo markings on the score, e.g., bpm, allegretto, poco moto, etc., and rit., rall., a tempo
- Identify the key signature (including accidentals within it and relative major/minor)
- Identify any note pitch names (bass and treble staves plus all ledger lines and accidentals)
- Identify any note and rest values within the chosen piece
- Identify and explain the meaning of any expressive musical markings found in the piece, including all dynamic markings and performance directions e.g., subito, simile, molto and poco a poco
- Give a brief explanation of stylistic and technical considerations in preparation and performance of the chosen piece (with demonstration – no use of notes or book)

### General Musical and Instrumental Knowledge

Candidates will not need to refer to their chosen piece for these questions.

At Grade 8 candidates may be asked to:

- State the chords that make up three of the following cadence types in the key of C, D, F or G major. The examiner will choose a key, and then ask for the chords from the following cadences:
  - Perfect
  - Imperfect
  - Plagal
  - Deceptive
- Identify the location, function and use of any part of the piano

## PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE

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

## GRADED CERTIFICATE

**Please note:** Graded Certificates can only be taken as Recorded Digital Exams.

### EXAM STRUCTURE

Candidates choose to play three pieces and all of the technical exercises. The detailed guidelines for Recorded Digital Exams are outlined in the Recorded Digital Exam guidance that you can download at [rslawards.com](https://www.rslawards.com)

At Grade 8 there are three groups of technical work as detailed in the information for the Graded Exams. Candidates must perform all of them.

## REVISION HISTORY

### August 2025

- New syllabus released, replacing the 2019 Piano syllabus.