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rockschool®

ACOUSTIC GUITAR

SYLLABUS SPECIFICATION 2026

DEBUT – GRADE 8

RSL Awarding the Contemporary Arts

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 2

PREFACE 4

- INTRODUCTION 5
- OVERVIEW 7
- QUALIFICATION SUMMARY 10
- ASSESSMENT INFORMATION 11
- CANDIDATE ACCESS & REGISTRATION 14
- FURTHER INFORMATION & CONTACT 15

ROCKSCHOOL ACOUSTIC EXAMINATIONS 16

GRADING CRITERIA & DEFINITIONS 20

UNIT SPECIFICATIONS 26

- Debut 27
- Grade 1 33
- Grade 2 40
- Grade 3 48
- Grade 4 55
- Grade 5 63
- Grade 6 71
- Grade 7 77
- Grade 8 87

REVISION HISTORY **95**

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Rockschool 2026 syllabus for Acoustic guitar. This syllabus guide is designed to give teachers, learners and candidates practical information on the graded examinations run by Rockschool.

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

This Syllabus Guide covers the following examinations:

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

The Value of RSL Qualifications

RSL advocates an open access approach to qualifications, providing a range of syllabuses, 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**

Period of Operation

This syllabus specification covers Acoustic Grade Examinations, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates from September 2019 and includes the material covered in the 2026 publica.

Examinations

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

GRADE EXAMINATIONS

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

PREPARED WORK	UNPREPARED WORK
▪ 3 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8 ▪ Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8	▪ Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation: Debut to Grade 5 ▪ Quick Study Pieces: Grade 6 to Grade 8 ▪ Ear Tests: Debut to Grade 8 ▪ General Musicianship Questions: Debut to Grade 8

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

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

PREPARED WORK
▪ 5 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8

GRADED CERTIFICATES

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

PREPARED WORK
▪ 3 Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8 ▪ Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8

OVERVIEW

Unit Overview – Graded Examinations in Popular Music Performance

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

Unit Overview – Graded Certificates in Popular Music Performance

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

Unit Overview – Performance Certificates in Popular Music Performance

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

Assessment Overview

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

Learning Outcomes

Performance Certificate

Learners will be able to:

- Perform music in a range of musical styles

Graded Certificate

Learners will be able to:

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

Graded Exam

Learners will be able to:

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

QUALIFICATION SUMMARY

Aims & Broad Objectives

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

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

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

Progression

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

Qualification Structure

A graded qualification consists of a range of both practical and knowledge-based elements which are based on detailed requirements outlined in the relevant syllabus. Therefore, requirements for each grade will be set out in detail in the Unit Specifications below (page 26 and onwards) and the learning outcomes and assessment criteria for each unit will require knowledge, skills and understanding of these syllabus requirements to be demonstrated at the grade entered.

Entry Requirements

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

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

www.rslawards.com

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION

Assessment Methodology

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

Technical tests covering knowledge of:

- Scales
- Modes (Grade 6–8)
- Arpeggios (Grade 3–8)
- Chords
- Acoustic Riff (Debut–Grade 5)
- Stylistic Studies (Grade 6–8)

Performance Pieces

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

Unseen Tests

- Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation tests (Debut–Grade 5)
- Quick Study Pieces (Grade 6–8)
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

Assessment Timings

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

GRADE LEVEL	GRADE EXAM	PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE
Debut	15 minutes	14 minutes
Grade 1	20 minutes	17 minutes
Grade 2	20 minutes	17 minutes
Grade 3	27 minutes	20 minutes
Grade 4	27 minutes	24 minutes
Grade 5	27 minutes	24 minutes
Grade 6	32 minutes	27 minutes
Grade 7	32 minutes	27 minutes
Grade 8	32 minutes	30 minutes

All Graded Certificates are taken as Recorded Digital Exams and thus do not have specific exam 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 Tests	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10
Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation (Debut to Grade 5)	6 out of 10	7–8 out of 10	9+ out of 10

Quick Study Pieces (Grade 6 to Grade 8)	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**%**

Examination Structure

The examination structure for the grade examinations is shown below:

- Pieces or technical exercises
- Technical exercises or pieces
- Sight Reading or Improvisation & Interpretation (Debut to Grade 5); Quick Study Pieces (Grade 6-8)
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

General Notes

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

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

Candidates may perform any or all of their pieces from memory. This is not compulsory at any level and no additional marks are given for this. Except where stipulated, 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 & REGISTRATION

Access and Registration

The qualifications will:

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

At the point of application, RSL will ensure that all candidates are fully informed about the requirements and demands of the qualification. Candidates may enter online for any of the qualifications at various points in the calendar year in territories throughout the world.

Dates will be published on the website at **www.rslawards.com**

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

Recommended Prior Learning

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

FURTHER INFORMATION & CONTACT

Guidance on Free Choice Pieces

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

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

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

Free choice pieces must be in a modern popular genre such as pop; rock; jazz; country; blues; soul; reggae, film and musical theatre.

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

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

Complaints & Appeals

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

Equal Opportunities

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

Contacts for Help & Support

All correspondence should be directed to:

RSL
Harlequin House
7 High Street
Teddington
Middlesex
TW11 8EE
info@rslawards.com

ROCKSCHOOL ACOUSTIC EXAMINATIONS

EXAMINATIONS OVERVIEW

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

Grade Examinations

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

- Three Performance Pieces: Debut to Grade 8
- Technical Exercises: Debut to Grade 8
- Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation: Debut to Grade 5
- Quick Study Pieces: Grade 6 to Grade 8
- Ear Tests: Debut to Grade 8
- General Musicianship Questions: Debut to Grade 8

These elements fall into **two** categories:

1. Prepared work: This consists of three Performance Pieces and Technical Exercises
2. Unprepared work: This consists of Sight Reading OR Improvisation & Interpretation (Debut to Grade 5), and Quick Study Pieces (Grade 6 to Grade 8)

Performance Certificate

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

- Five Performance Pieces

Graded Certificates

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

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

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 (Debut to Grade 5); Quick Study Pieces (Grade 6 to Grade 8)
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

For the performance certificate, candidates perform their five pieces in a sequence of their choice.

EXAMINATION TIMINGS

GRADE LEVEL	GRADE EXAM	PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE
Debut	15 minutes	14 minutes
Grade 1	20 minutes	17 minutes
Grade 2	20 minutes	17 minutes
Grade 3	27 minutes	20 minutes
Grade 4	27 minutes	24 minutes
Grade 5	27 minutes	24 minutes
Grade 6	32 minutes	27 minutes
Grade 7	32 minutes	27 minutes
Grade 8	32 minutes	30 minutes

General Notes

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

Free Choice Pieces

- **For all acoustic grades, candidates are able to play a number of free choice pieces in the examination:**
- **Grade Examinations & 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** 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.

Pieces can be performed with or without a backing track.

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

Notation

All notated work is to be played as written. There should be no changes or arrangement (unless previously agreed with Rockschool). Each piece is specifically written/presented carefully to achieve a number of outcomes appropriate for the grade. However, articulation/expression (from grade 1) and idiomatic development (from grade 3) further to the written notation is encouraged and awarded as part of the assessment criteria.

Musical Interpretation

For all acoustic grades, Rockschool encourages individual musicality, articulation, expression and use of dynamics when performing if not otherwise stipulated in the notation. This also applies anywhere in the exam, whether within a performance piece or any other prepared/unprepared element.

Note: where there is notated articulation, expression, dynamic or equivalent markings, these have been specifically written and must be observed.

Instrument Specification

Candidates may use nylon or steel strung guitars, but it is recommended to use an instrument that best facilitates performance of the selected repertoire, particularly with regards to advanced techniques or set up at higher grades. Electronic pickup facilities are not required for Acoustic examinations.

Candidates must supply their own capos if these are required in their repertoire selection. Candidates are also reminded to use instruments which are appropriately set up to accommodate tuning changes if these are required. Candidates are permitted to bring a second instrument to accommodate pieces with altered tunings if this is preferred.

Making Notes In The Exam

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

It is permitted to use grade books which contain notes made during the course of a candidate's study, except during sections of the exam where memorisation is stipulated or in unseen sections.

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

GRADING CRITERIA | Debut – Grade 8

Graded Examinations

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

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

Sight Reading / Improvisation & Interpretation / Quick Study Piece					
Attainment Band	**Distinction**	**Merit**	**Pass**	**Below Pass 1**	**Below Pass 2**
Mark Range	**9–10**	**7–8**	**6**	**3–5**	**0–2**
Command of instrument	Consistently clear production of sound and even tone quality throughout	Mostly clear production of sound and even tone quality overall	Some clear production of sound and generally even tone quality	Sound produced is unclear with uneven quality of tone produced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Sync or Pulse	Performance consistently synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance mostly synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance sometimes synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse maintained	Performance not synchronised to the music, or an internal pulse not maintained	No attempt and/or incomplete performance
Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated Understanding of musical structure not evidenced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

Ear Tests					
Attainment Band	**Distinction**	**Merit**	**Pass**	**Below Pass 1**	**Below Pass 2**
Mark Range	**9–10**	**7–8**	**6**	**3–5**	**0–2**

Accuracy & Understanding	All of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated throughout Understanding of musical structure shown all of the time	Most of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills demonstrated overall Understanding of musical structure shown most of the time	Some of the written music accurately performed or equivalent skills generally demonstrated Understanding of musical structure shown some of the time	Written music not accurately performed or equivalent skills not demonstrated Understanding of musical structure not evidenced	No attempt and/or incomplete performance

General Musicianship Questions (GMQs)					
Attainment Band	**Distinction**	**Merit**	**Pass**	**Below Pass 1**	**Below Pass 2**
Mark Range	**5**	**4**	**3**	**2**	**0–1**
Responses	5 correct responses	4 correct responses	3 correct responses	2 correct responses	0–1 correct responses

Performance Certificates

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

Graded Certificates

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

Debut

The Debut Acoustic 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).

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and two Ear Tests which begin to develop Melodic and Rhythmic recall

EXAM STRUCTURE

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

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Debut there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A needs to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group B is played as a continuous sequence, with each chord announced by the examiner

Group C is played to a backing track.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**65**
Rhythms: Quarter Notes
Range: One octave

- C major
- E minor pentatonic
- A minor pentatonic

GROUP B: CHORDS

Open position chords. Individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.

- Major: A, D, C G
- Minor: Am, Em

GROUP C: ACOUSTIC RIFF

The riff shown in bar 1 should be played in the same shape in bars 2–4. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent three bars

SIGHT READING OR 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

SIGHT READING

Duration: 4 bars
Rhythms: Whole (semibreves), half (minims) and quarter (crotchets)
Key: C major
Pitches and Instrumental Compass: C&D on the second string
Tempo: Crotchet =**65**

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Duration: 4 bars
Key: C major
Tempo: Crotchet =**65**
Improvisation Requirement: Diatonic single-note melodies only

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear two half notes one after the other and will be asked whether the second note is higher or lower in pitch than the first note.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =85.

Test 2: Rhythmic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string.

The test will be played twice. Candidates will be asked to play the rhythm back, before identifying the rhythm from two printed examples shown to them by the examiner.

Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar count-in. There will be a short gap for candidates to practise. Next candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then need to play the rhythm to the drum backing.

The tempo is Crotchet =85.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about the candidate's instrument.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask the candidate four music knowledge questions based on a piece of performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Debut candidates will be asked to identify:

- The music stave and the TAB
- The treble clef
- Half and quarter note values

Instrument Knowledge

The examiner will also ask candidates one question regarding their instrument.

In Debut candidates will be asked to identify:

- One of the following parts of the guitar: neck, body, tuning-pegs or bridge

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Debut Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Debut there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 1

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play three performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and two Ear Tests that continue to develop melodic and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument 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
- Ear Tests
- General Musicianship Questions

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A needs to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group B power chords need to be played as a continuous sequence to a click. Major and minor chords are played as individual chords, each chord being announced by the examiner.

Group C is played to a backing track.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**70**
Rhythms: Quarter Notes
Range: One octave

- C major
- A natural minor
- E minor pentatonic
- A minor pentatonic
- G major pentatonic

GROUP B: CHORDS

1. Power chords. Two-note chords to be played in a continuous sequence

   Tempo: Crotchet =70
   Rhythms: Quarter Notes

   - Power Chords: B5, A5, D5

2. Open position chords. Individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.
   - Major: A, D, E, C & G
   - Minor: Am, Dm, Em

GROUP C: ACOUSTIC RIFF

The riff shown in bar 1 should be played in the same shape in bars 2–4. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the music in each of the subsequent three bars

SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

SIGHT READING

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

Tempo: Crotchet =**70**
Duration: 4 bars
Rhythms: Half notes (minims) and quarter notes (crotchets)
Key: A minor
Pitches: A – E: 1st, 2nd and 3rd strings
Instrumental compass: Open position to 3rd fret

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Tempo: Crotchet =**70-80**
Duration: 4-6 bars
Key: C major or A minor
Improvisation Requirement: Rhythmic chords or melodic lead line (candidate choice)

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear three notes in sequence. The examiner will ask whether the notes are higher or lower (up or down) in sequence.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =85.

Test 2: Rhythmic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string.

The test will be played twice. Candidates will be asked to play the rhythm back, before identifying the rhythm from two printed examples shown to them by the examiner.

Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar count-in. There will be a short gap for candidates to practise. Next candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then need to play the rhythm to the drum backing.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about the candidate's instrument.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask candidates four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 1 candidates will be asked to identify:

- The treble clef
- The time signature
- Whole, half, quarter and eighth note values
- The difference between a major and minor chord

Instrument Knowledge

The examiner will also ask the candidate one question regarding their instrument.

In Grade 1 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Two of the following parts of the guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, nut, bridge or sound hole
- Names of the open strings

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 1 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 1 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 2

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and two Ear Tests that develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 2 exam lasts 20 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A needs to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group B power chords need to be played as a continuous sequence to a click. Major & minor and major 7/minor 7 chords are played as individual chords, each announced by the examiner.

Group C is played to a backing track.

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Quarter Notes
Range: One octave

- C major
- G major
- E natural minor
- A natural minor
- G minor pentatonic
- G major pentatonic
- C minor pentatonic
- C major pentatonic

GROUP B: CHORDS

Power chords. Three-note chords to be played in a continuous sequence

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Quarter Notes

- Power Chords: E5, G5, A5, C5

Open position chords. Individual chords will be strummed once as directed by the examiner.

- Major & minor: F, Bm
- Major 7: A maj7, C maj7, D maj7
- Minor 7: A min7, D min7, E min7

GROUP C: ACOUSTIC RIFF

The riff shown in bar 1-2 should be played in the same shape but transposed as shown in bars 3-8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the subsequent bars.

SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

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

SIGHT READING

Tempo: Crotchet =**70**
Duration: 4 bars
Rhythms: Quarter notes (crotchets) eighth notes (quavers) and rests
Key: G major or E natural minor
Pitches: D, E, F# - 4th (D) string
G, A – 3rd (G) string
B, C, D – 2nd (B) string
Instrumental compass: Open/first/second position

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Tempo: Crotchet =**80-90**
Duration: 4-6 bars
Key: G major or E minor
Improvisation Requirement: Rhythmic chords or melodic lead (candidate choice)

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the C minor pentatonic scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be ascending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

Test 2: Rhythmic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string.

The test will be played twice. Candidates will be asked to play the rhythm back, before identifying the rhythm from two printed examples shown to them by the examiner.

Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar count-in. There will be a short gap for candidates to practise. Next candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then need to play the rhythm to the drum backing. The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about the candidate's instrument.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask candidates four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music that they have played in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 2 candidates will be asked to identify:

- The pitch name of notes
- The meaning of the time signature marking
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth and 16th note values
- Rest values
- The construction of a major or minor chord

Instrument Knowledge

The examiner will also ask one question regarding the instrument.

In Grade 2 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Three of the following parts of the guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, nut, bridge or soundhole
- Names of all open strings

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 2 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 2 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 3

The Grade 3 Acoustic exam is for candidates who have been typically learning for eighteen months to two years and who are ready to consolidate their final stage as a beginner player. The 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 EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and two Ear Tests that develop melodic recall and rhythmic sense and the final part of the exam is a set of five simple questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and instrument knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 3 exam lasts 27 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 3 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks. Group C is played as directed by the examiner.

Group D is played to the backing track

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =90
Rhythms: Quarter Notes
Range: Two octaves

To be prepared in the following keys: G, A & B:

- Major
- Natural minor
- Minor pentatonic
- Major pentatonic
- Blues

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =90
Rhythms: Quarter Notes
To be prepared in the following keys: G, A & B:

- Major
- Minor

GROUP C: CHORDS

1. Partial barre chords

Two partial barre voicings for each chord type - played as directed by the examiner.

- Major & minor: G, Am, Bm, C

2. Dominant 7 Chords

Individual chords will be strummed once and then picked (arpeggiated) – as directed by the examiner

GROUP D: ACOUSTIC RIFF

The riff shown in bar 1-2 should be transposed and played as indicated in bars 3-8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the subsequent bars.

SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

SIGHT READING

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

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Duration: 4 bars
Rhythms: Half notes (minims), quarter notes (crotchets), eighth notes (quavers) and equivalent rests
Key: G major or A natural minor – diatonic notes only
Compass: Open/first position/second position

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

Tempo: Crotchet =**80-90**
Duration: 4-6 bars
Key: G major or A minor
Improvisation Requirement: Rhythmic chords or melodic lead (candidate choice)

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the G minor pentatonic scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be ascending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =85.

Test 2: Rhythmic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar rhythm played to a drum backing on the lowest-sounding E string.

The test will be played twice. Candidates will be asked to play the rhythm back, before identifying the rhythm from two printed examples shown to them by the examiner.

Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar count-in. There will be a short gap for candidates to practise. Next candidates will hear a vocal count-in and will then need to play the rhythm to the drum backing. The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music played by the candidate in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 3 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Names of pitches
- The meaning of the time signature marking
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth, triplet eight-notes and 16th note values
- Rest values
- The construction of a dominant 7 chord

Instrument/Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask one question regarding the instrument/technical knowledge.

In Grade 3 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Three of the following parts of the guitar: neck, fretboard, body, tuning-pegs, nut, bridge or sound hole
- Two kinds of legato fretting hand technique
- Names of all open strings

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 3 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 3 there are three groups of technical work: Scales, Chords, Arpeggios and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 4

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and **two** Ear Tests which begin to develop descending melodic recall and rhythmic sense, and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and technical knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 4 exam lasts 27 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 4 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C 7th chords need to be played as a continuous sequence to a click. Major & minor full barre shapes are played as individual chords, each announced by the examiner.

Group D is played to the backing track

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Eighth Notes
Range: Two octaves

Two fingerings, to be prepared in the following keys: A, Bb, B and C
Both fingerings must be prepared for each scale type and key

- Major
- Natural minor
- Minor pentatonic
- Major pentatonic
- Blues

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Eighth Notes

To be prepared in the following keys: A, Bb, B & C

- Major 7
- Minor 7
- Dominant 7

GROUP C: CHORDS

1. Full barre chords

Individual chords will be strummed once and then picked (arpeggiated) – as directed by the examiner

- 6th String root: A major, A minor
- 5th string root: D major, D minor

2. 7th Chords

7th chords played as a continuous sequence to a click

Tempo: Crotchet =80

- A maj7, A dom7, D maj7, D dom7, Dm7, G dom7, Am7

GROUP D: ACOUSTIC RIFF

The riff shown in bar 1-2 should be transposed and played as indicated in bars 3-8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the subsequent bars.

SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 4 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

At this level there is an element of improvisation in the sight reading test*

Tempo: Crotchet =**80-90**
Duration: 8 bars
Rhythms: Half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, ties and rests
Key: D major, G major, D minor or A minor

*Improvisation element: two bars, melody only

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At this level there is an element of sight reading in the Improvisation & Interpretation test*

Tempo: Crotchet =**90-100**
Duration: 4-6 bars
Key: G major or A minor
Improvisation requirement: Rhythmic chords and melodic lines (as shown on score)

***Sight reading element: two bars, rhythmic strumming only**

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the C major pentatonic or B minor pentatonic scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be descending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90

Test 2: Harmonic Recall

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a two-bar sequence in the key of C major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, IV and V chords and may occur in any combination. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the Grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

The tempo is Crotchet =90

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 4 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Names of pitches
- The meaning of the time signature marking and the key signature marking
- Repeat marks, first and second time bars, D.C., D.S., al Coda and al Fine markings
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth, triplet eight-notes and 16th note values
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth, triplet eight-notes and 16th note rests and rest combinations
- The construction of major 7, minor 7 or dominant 7 chords

Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask one question regarding a technical consideration of the piece, in relation to:

- Picking hand: Strumming or picking technique for a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable
- Fretting hand: Fretting position and fingering used to play a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable

The examiner will choose the section of music and will ask for a brief explanation as to why the technique was appropriate for the chosen section.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 4 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 4 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Chords, Arpeggios and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 5

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, arpeggios, chords and an acoustic riff.

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete either a Sight Reading or an Improvisation & Interpretation test, and two Ear Tests that continue to develop descending melodic recall and rhythmic sense, and the final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These are designed to explore theory and technical knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 5 exam lasts 27 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 5 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and Acoustic Riff

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use their book during the exam for all groups.

Group A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C needs to be played as a continuous sequence to a click

Group D is played to the backing track

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Eighth Notes
Range: Two octaves

- Major
- Natural minor
- Harmonic minor
- Minor pentatonic
- Major pentatonic
- Blues

To be prepared as follows:

Root 6th (E) string: key of F, G & A

Root 5th (A) string: key of B, C & D

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Rhythms: Eighth notes
Range: Two octaves

- Major
- Minor

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: key of F, G & A
- Root 5th (A) string: key of B, C & D

GROUP C: CHORDS

Tempo: Crotchet =**80**
Major and minor triads

Three inversions on the top three strings in the key of C, as written in the grade book. To be played in a continuous sequence to click.

GROUP D: ACOUSTIC RIFF

Tempo: Crotchet =**85**

The riff shown in bar 1-2 should be transposed and played as indicated in bars 3-8. The root note of the pattern to be played is shown in the subsequent bars. Candidates must perform the riff to the backing track as supplied in the audio downloads

SIGHT READING OR IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At Grade 5 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

At this level there is an element of improvisation in the sight reading test*

Tempo: Crotchet =**90**
Duration: 8 bars
Rhythms: Half notes, quarter notes, eighth notes, ties and rests
Key: F major or G major, E minor or G minor
***Improvisation element: two bar ending, melody only**

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

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

IMPROVISATION & INTERPRETATION

At this level there is an element of sight reading in the Improvisation & Interpretation test*

Tempo: Crotchet =**90-100**
Duration: 4-6 bars
Key: A major, G major, E minor or G minor
Improvisation requirement: Rhythmic chords and melodic lines (as shown on score)
***Sight reading element: Two bars, rhythmic strumming only**

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

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

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the D major pentatonic or A minor pentatonic scale. The first note of the melody will be the root note and the first interval will be descending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

Test 2: Harmonic Recall

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a two-bar sequence in the key of G major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, IV, V and vi chords and may occur in any combination. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

The tempo is Crotchet =80.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 5 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Names of pitches
- The meaning of the time signature marking and the key signature marking
- Repeat marks, first and second time bars, D.C., D.S., al Coda and al Fine markings
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth, triplet eighth-notes and 16th note values
- Whole, half, quarter, eighth, triplet eighth-notes and 16th note rests and rest combinations
- The construction of major 7, minor 7 or dominant 7 chords
- To explain the meaning of a sus2 or sus4 chord

Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask one question regarding a technical consideration of the piece, in relation to:

- Picking hand: Strumming or picking technique for a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable
- Fretting hand: Fretting position and fingering used to play a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable

The examiner will choose the section of music and will ask candidates to give a brief explanation as to why the technique was appropriate for the chosen section.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios, Chords and the Acoustic Riff). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 5 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 5 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Chords, Arpeggios and the Acoustic Riff. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 6

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, modes, arpeggios, chords and a Stylistic Study,

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and **two** Ear Tests which develop melodic recall and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and technical knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 6 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 6 there are five groups of technical work: Scales, Modes, Arpeggios, Chords and Stylistic Study.

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use the book during the exam for all groups.

Group A, B & C need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group D needs to be played as directed by the examiner

Group E is played to the backing track

GROUP A: SCALES

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth Notes

- Major pentatonic exercise
- Minor pentatonic exercise

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: key of F#
- Root 5th (A) string: key of B

GROUP B: MODES

Tempo: *7th chords* played as a continuous sequence to a click

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth notes
Range: Two octaves

- Dorian mode
- Mixolydian mode

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: keys of G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: keys of C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP C: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth notes
Range: Two octaves

- Major 7
- Minor 7
- Dominant 7

To be prepared as follows:

Root 6th (E) string: keys of G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
Root 5th (A) string: keys of C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP D: CHORDS

To be strummed then arpeggiated.

- Minor 7b5
- Diminished 7

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: keys of G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: keys of C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP E: STYLISTIC STUDIES

Candidates must prepare their choice of stylistic study from the grade book and perform it to the backing track. Please note: the chosen style for the stylistic study will inform the Quick Study piece.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

QUICK STUDY PIECE

At this grade candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece (QSP). The QSP chosen will be a previously unseen example, but similar to those provided as exemplar material in the grade book.

Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the notated parts played. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected by the candidate in the technical exercise section. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and candidates must create their own interpretation of the music in the parts where instructed to do so.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the D major pentatonic, D minor pentatonic or G natural minor scale. The first note of the melody will be *either* the root note *or* fifth and the first interval will be *either* ascending *or* descending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

Test 2: Harmonic Recall

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a four-bar sequence in the key of D major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, ii, iii, IV, V and vi chords and will incorporate a dominant7 (V7) chord. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 6 candidates will be asked to identify:

- The names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, *staccato*, *legato*, *vibrato*
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the piece you have played and its relation to the underlying harmony of the piece (if relevant) ***or:***
- How you developed a section of the piece (if relevant) ***or:***
- A stylistic feature of the piece characteristic of its genre

Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask the candidate one question regarding a technical consideration of their piece, in relation to:

- Picking hand: Strumming or picking technique for a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable
- Fretting hand: Fretting position and fingering used to play a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable

The examiner will choose the section of music and will ask for a brief explanation as to why the technique was appropriate for the chosen section.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Modes, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 6 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 6 there are five groups of technical work: Scales, Modes, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 7

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, modes, arpeggios, chords and a Stylistic Study,

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and **two** Ear Tests which develop melodic recall and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and technical knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 7 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 7 there are four groups of technical work: Scales & Modes, Arpeggios, Chords and Stylistic Study.

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use the book during the exam for all groups.

Group A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C is played as directed by the examiner

Group D is played to backing track

GROUP A: SCALES & MODES

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth notes
Range: Two octaves

- Lydian mode
- Phrygian mode
- Jazz melodic minor

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth notes

- Major 9
- Minor 9
- Dominant 9

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP C: CHORDS

Strummed and then picked (arpeggiated):

- Major 9
- Minor 9
- Dominant 9

GROUP D: STYLISTIC STUDIES

Candidates must prepare their choice of stylistic study from the grade book and perform it to the backing track. Please note: the chosen style for the stylistic study will inform the Quick Study piece.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

QUICK STUDY PIECE

At this grade candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece (QSP). The QSP chosen will be a previously unseen example, but similar to those provided as exemplar material in the grade book.

Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the *notated parts played*. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected by the candidate in the technical exercise section. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and candidates must create their own interpretation of the music in the parts where instructed to do so.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the A major pentatonic, C minor pentatonic or A natural minor scale. The first note of the melody will be *either* the root note *or* fifth and the first interval will be *either* ascending *or* descending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

Test 2: Harmonic Recall

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a four-bar sequence in the key of A major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, ii, iii, IV, V and vi chords. The ii, iii, and vi chords can be either minor or minor 7th chords. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner, including any chord extensions. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 7 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, staccato, legato, vibrato, natural and artificial harmonics
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the piece you have played and its relation to the underlying harmony of the piece (if relevant) or:
- How you developed a section of the piece (if relevant) or:
- A stylistic feature of the piece characteristic of its genre

Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask the candidate one question regarding a technical consideration of their piece, in relation to:

- Picking hand: Strumming or picking technique for a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable
- Fretting hand: Fretting position and fingering used to play a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable

The examiner will choose the section of music and will ask for a brief explanation as to why the technique was appropriate for the chosen section.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales & Modes, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 7 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 7 there are four groups of technical work: Scales & Modes, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

Grade 8

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

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

GRADE EXAMS

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *three* performance pieces and Technical Exercises which cover scales, modes, arpeggios, chords and a Stylistic Study

Unprepared Work

Candidates are required to complete a Quick Study Piece, and **two** Ear Tests which develop melodic recall and harmonic recall. The final part of the exam is a set of five questions based on the candidate's choice of piece. These explore and demonstrate theory and technical knowledge.

EXAM STRUCTURE

The Grade 8 exam lasts 32 minutes and is taken in the following order:

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

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

TECHNICAL WORK

At Grade 8 there are four groups of technical work: Scales & Modes, Arpeggios, Chords and Stylistic Study.

All exercises need to be played in straight feel, in the keys, octaves and tempos shown. Candidates may use the book during the exam for all groups.

Group A & B need to be played to a click. The examiner will play the click at the given tempo and candidates should begin to play after four clicks.

Group C is played as directed by the examiner

Group D is played to backing track

GROUP A: SCALES & MODES

Tempo: Crotchet =**100**
Rhythms: Eighth Notes
Range: Two octaves

- Whole Tone
- Diminished
- Altered

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP B: ARPEGGIOS

Tempo: Crotchet =100

Rhythms: Eighth notes

Range: One octave

- Dominant 7#5
- Dominant 7b5
- Minor 7b5
- Dominant 7#9
- Dominant 7b9
- Diminished

To be prepared as follows:

- Root 6th (E) string: G, G#/Ab, A, A#/Bb, B
- Root 5th (A) string: C, C#/Db, D, D#/Eb, E

GROUP C: CHORDS

Strummed and then picked (arpeggiated)

- Dominant 7#5
- Dominant 7b5
- Dominant 7#9
- Dominant 7b9

GROUP D: STYLISTIC STUDIES

Candidates must prepare their choice of stylistic study from the grade book and perform it to the backing track. Please note: the chosen style for the stylistic study will inform the Quick Study piece.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

QUICK STUDY PIECE

At this grade candidates will be asked to prepare and play a short Quick Study Piece (QSP). The QSP chosen will be a previously unseen example, but similar to those provided as exemplar material in the grade book.

Candidates will be shown the test and played the track with the *notated parts played*. Any bars that require improvisation will not be demonstrated. Candidates will then have three minutes to study the test with the option of a click track. The backing track will be played twice more. Candidates will be allowed to practise during the first playing of the backing track, with the notated parts now absent, before playing it to the examiner on the second playing of the backing track.

The style of the QSP is determined by the stylistic study selected by the candidate in the technical exercise section. The QSP is in the form of a lead sheet and candidates must create their own interpretation of the music in the parts where instructed to do so.

Styles:

- Rock & Pop
- Blues & Country
- Acoustic Specialist

EAR TESTS

There are two Ear Tests in this grade. The examiner will play each test twice.

Test 1: Melodic Recall

Candidates will hear a two-bar melody with a drum backing using the E major pentatonic, F minor pentatonic or B natural minor scale. The first note of the melody will be *either* the root note, third *or* fifth and the first interval will be *either* ascending *or* descending. Candidates will need to then play back the melody on their instrument.

The test will be played twice. Each time the test is played it is preceded by a one bar vocal count-in.

The tempo is Crotchet =90.

Test 2: Harmonic Recall

Candidates will hear a tonic chord followed by a four-bar sequence in the key of E major played to a bass and drum backing. The sequence will be drawn from the I, ii, iii, IV, V and vi chords. The ii, iii, and vi chords can be either major or major 7th chords. Candidates will be asked to play the chord sequence to the drum backing in the rhythm shown in the example from the grade book. This rhythm will be used in all examples of this test given in the exam. Candidates will then be asked to identify the sequence they have played to the examiner, including any chord extensions. The test will be played twice.

Each time the test is played the sequence is: count-in, tonic, count-in, chords. There will be a short gap to practise after second playing. Candidates will then hear the count-in and tonic for the third time followed by a vocal count-in then must play the chords to the drum backing. Candidates should then identify the chords. The tempo is Crotchet =90.

GENERAL MUSICIANSHIP QUESTIONS

Candidates will be asked five questions. Four of these questions will be about general music knowledge and the fifth question asked will be about instrumental & technical knowledge.

Music Knowledge

The examiner will ask four music knowledge questions based on a piece of music performed in the exam. Candidates will nominate the piece of music about which the questions will be asked.

In Grade 8 candidates will be asked to identify:

- Names of pitches
- Any expressive musical marking found in the piece such as palm muting, accents, staccato, legato, vibrato, natural and artificial harmonics
- Any dynamic marking found in the piece
- One type of scale that can be used appropriately in the solo section of the piece you have played and its relation to the
- underlying harmony of the piece (if relevant) or:
- How you developed a section of the piece (if relevant) or:
- A stylistic feature of the piece characteristic of its genre

Technical Knowledge

The examiner will also ask the candidate one question regarding a technical consideration of their piece, in relation to:

- Picking hand: Strumming or picking technique for a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable
- Fretting hand: Fretting position and fingering used to play a short phrase (up to one bar) – demonstration is acceptable

The examiner will choose the section of music and will ask for a brief explanation as to why the technique was appropriate for the chosen section.

PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATES

Prepared Work

Candidates are required to play *five* performance pieces. There is no unprepared work in the Performance Certificate.

GRADED CERTIFICATES

Candidates are required to play three Performance Pieces, and Technical Exercises (covering Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies). There is no unprepared work in the Graded Certificate.

Exam Structure

The Grade 8 Graded Certificate is taken by Recorded Digital Exam and is comprised of the following:

- Performance Pieces*
- Technical Exercises*

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

Technical Work

At Grade 8 there are four groups of technical work: Scales, Arpeggios, Chord Voicings and Technical Studies. Detailed guidance on performing technical exercises for Recorded Digital Exams can be found at rslawards.com

REVISION HISTORY

REVISION HISTORY

February 2020

- Page 5: Clarification to Period of Operation
- Pages 10 & 13: Clarification Free Choice Piece requirements

May 1st 2020

- The grading criteria tables for each unit have been removed and replaced with one unified table within the preface section. The replacement tables include streamlined criteria each of which comprises clarified wording in a unified format, along with definitions of terms used. This is to facilitate digital mark sheet assessment whilst maintaining the recognition of knowledge skills and understanding attained at each grade level
- Grade 1 > Technical Exercises > Group B > Section 2 (page 31): The chord requirements in Grade 1 technical exercises group B have been clarified to include the 'E' chord as shown in the grade book
- Grade 8 > Technical Exercises > Groups A & B (page 78): The required octave ranges for both scales and arpeggios have been clarified to reflect the grade book

May 5th 2020

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

November 13th 2020

- Qualification titles updated.

April 24th 2023

- P.45 > Grade 3 > Sight Reading: Rhythmic requirements updated.
- P.66 > Grade 6
  P.73 > Grade 7
  P.80 > Grade 8
  Quick Study Piece: Process updated to include the option to practise to click track.

March 31st 2025

- Qualification titles and QANs updated to reflect the distinction between Grade Exams, Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates
- Information on Graded Certificates added to entire syllabus
- Information on Graded Certificates and Performance Certificates added to each unit
- P.14 > Added guidance on selection of performance pieces stipulating that candidates may not be assessed on the same performance pieces more than once

May 8th 2025

- Syllabus cover updated