

Submission to Cultural Commission September 2004

Scottish Traditional Music Grade Exams

The Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow

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Summary

A key initiative at the RSAMD is to create a gold standard system of traditional music graded examinations in Scottish music: "Our goal is to provide the right framework to support the explosion of new talent in our country's traditions. Scotland's youth, after many decades of deprivation in this field, has finally taken the business of playing and singing its national music and song to its heart. We, as educationalists, now have to provide the correct framework – from the earliest age – through which young people can reach the goals they set themselves as players and performers. By doing this, they will play a major part in the continuing revitalisation of this great tradition." (Brian McNeill, Head of Scottish Music)

Consultation Exercise

The RSAMD held a major consultation exercise from 19 April to 18 June 2004 during which an online questionnaire and forum could be accessed on the web. In addition, the following public meetings were held around Scotland, and these were preceded by focus groups made up of invited guests with a particular interest in traditional music.

Tuesday 18 May 2004, Selkirk High School

Wednesday 19 May 2004, Culloden Academy

Thursday 20 May 2004, Dyce Academy (Aberdeen City Music School)

Wednesday 26 May 2004, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, Glasgow

Over 100 people attended our meetings. Media coverage of the consultation exercise included an article in *The Glasgow Herald* and radio and television interviews with Brian McNeill on BBC Scotland.

Through the questionnaire, forum, public meetings and focus groups, we obtained some excellent feedback that has been vitally important in formulating the way ahead.

Results

Below are some of the results from the questionnaire.

The following percentages either agreed or strongly agreed that traditional music grade exams should:

recognise individual interpretation and creativity	93%
allow for a range of playing techniques e.g. bow holds	90%
include an element that tests knowledge of the context e.g. history of tunes	79%

include ear tests e.g. clapping rhythms	79%
include a practical skills test e.g. picking up tunes and playing them back	77%
give the option to include assessment of individuals within a group	77%
include contemporary arrangements	76%
include scales, arpeggios and chords as appropriate	65%
only include Scottish tunes (21% neither agreed nor disagreed)	52%

In addition:

- 36% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the exams should be conducted without written music notation (33% either agreed or strongly agreed, and 31% neither agreed nor disagreed)
- 45% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the exams should not use an accompanist; 42% neither agreed or disagreed

Pilot Examinations

Based on the findings from the consultation exercise and on recommendations from a specialist advisory group, we hope to pilot examinations in accordion, fiddle and Scottish harp at the end of this year. Our team comprises Brian McNeill (Head of Scottish Music), Dr Katherine Campbell (Project Manager), Madeleine Stafford (Research Administrator), and our expert consultants, Iain Fraser (fiddle), Ian Muir (piano accordion) and Wendy Stewart (Scottish harp). Thereafter we hope to expand the syllabus to include other instruments. Our Scottish music examinations will be aimed at:

- School-age young people (UK and overseas, particularly the Scottish diaspora: North America, Australasia, South Africa; also significant interest in the far East and Japan)
- The further/tertiary education sector (UK and overseas)
- Adult lifelong learners (particularly important in traditional music with its whole-community focus)

We believe that this initiative is of major importance to Scottish culture both in a national and international context.

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