

QUESTORS YOUNG MUSICIANS CLUB

Taking a Music Examination

Does my child have to take music exams?

No. There is no compulsion for your child to take exams even if other children in the same class do decide to enter for them. Most children do however like to take exams. They are a great incentive for pupils to prepare pieces to performance standard and provide a goal to work for and a great sense of achievement when passed (and an attractive certificate!). It can also be useful to have an independent assessment of a pupil's playing – all boards provide a marksheet with comments in addition to the certificate. Music grade examinations are nationally recognised - they are often helpful in getting children into secondary school and may be taken into account when universities and colleges are making their offers.

Music exams in general

Exams in playing, singing and theoretical music are offered by a variety of exam boards. QYMC can prepare pupils for examinations held by the Associated Board, Trinity College, and Guildhall and Victoria College. The syllabuses are all broadly similar but teachers have their own preferences and different boards have their own strengths. Most boards have eight graded exams from grade 1 (preliminary) to grade 8 (advanced). In addition most boards offer some form of assessment below grade 1, and various post grade 8 options. In general they require around 66% to pass, with merit and distinction classifications for higher marks. Theory exams have a pass mark of 66%, with marks of 90% or more awarded distinction. Unusually, there is no merit for theory.

Exam Boards commonly used by QYMC teachers

Associated Board	Trinity College	Guildhall	Victoria College
Violin and Cello	Recorder	Flute	Keyboard
Saxophone	Keyboard	Percussion	Trinity
Piano			
Recorder			
Flute and Clarinet			
Brass			

Exam Entries

Exams entry dates are usually at the beginning of term, often before the QYMC term has begun. It is important for both parents and teachers to know what is involved as these exams are not cheap and there are other financial factors to consider. Exam fees must be paid when the entry forms are sent in, and as the boards require one cheque to cover all the pupils entered by one teacher, it is usual for parents to pay the teacher direct, not the exam board. Refunds are only available for medical reasons on production of a medical certificate and an administrative charge is usually deducted.

Dates of Exams

Practical exams are usually on a weekday near the end of term and theory exams are on a set date during the week after half term. The dates of the exam sessions are published in the general regulations pamphlets issued by each board, some of which now have quite helpful websites. For practical exams teachers can specify a preferred week, but there is no guarantee of being allocated the chosen week. If you are going on holiday near the end of term please discuss the dates with your child's teacher before the entry is sent off as it is nigh on impossible to get them changed! The boards are getting more flexible, but they do handle a huge number of applications each term. You will usually get two or three weeks notice of the exam date. Trinity College has 5 exam sessions during the year, so their exams are not necessarily at the end of term!

Where do Exams take place?

Associated Board exams take place at various venues in Ealing. Most other boards have exam centres in central London.

Exam Results

Results of practical exams are usually sent to the teacher around two weeks after the exam. Trinity College results are often much quicker. Theory results are published around five weeks after the exam.

Accompanists

For all exams except piano, keyboard, percussion and some guitar exams your child will need an accompanist. The examiner will **not** play for your child, and candidates can be penalised or even disqualified if they do not provide an accompanist. Some teachers play for their pupils' exams, at least in the earlier grades, but others prefer not to play for exams. If your child's teacher is not going to accompany his/her pupils you will need to find someone to play for your child. Several of our teachers act as accompanists for QYMC children's exams and teachers will usually arrange an accompanist for you. If you wish to engage someone else or indeed play for your own child this is usually fine. No matter who will be playing, it is best all round if you discuss at the outset how many rehearsals will be needed, and negotiate a fee. Rehearsals can sometimes be fitted in at QYMC

on Saturdays however there is limited time when a piano is available so you may need to go the accompanist's house or they may visit you.

Accompanists' Fees

It is ideal if your child can have one or two rehearsals with their accompanist before the exam, however for early grades this may not be necessary as a run through in the warm up room may be sufficient. For higher grades a prior rehearsal is essential. Below is a table of suggested fees, however circumstances differ and you should discuss the number of rehearsals required with the teacher and fix a fee with the accompanist. Accompanists may charge higher fees if there are only a few QYMC pupils being examined in one day.

Grade	On the day only	Prior Rehearsals
1 – 3	£5	£25-30 per hour pro rata
4 – 5	£10	£25-30 per hour pro rata
6 – 8	£15	£25-30 per hour pro rata

The Syllabus

Copies of the most common syllabi are usually kept on or near the noticeboard. Acquaint yourself with the requirements for the relevant grade but please do not take them away! If the one you need is not there, the teacher may have a copy for you to consult, or have a word with Barbara or Fiona and we will obtain a copy for QYMC. Some exam boards now publish syllabuses online: visit the QYMC website (www.qymc.org) for more details. Most exams require three pieces (or two pieces and a study), scales and arpeggios, sight-reading and aural tests/general musicianship. Trinity College exams may also involve *viva voce* (answering questions about the pieces played) and / or improvisation. The pieces, scales and arpeggios are the major part of the exam and are covered in your child's class at QYMC. Sight reading is covered in part in the lesson, but it is helpful for your child to be exposed to as much other playing as possible such as an ensemble and/or orchestra to help develop these skills. Teachers are encouraged to give pupils a copy of the syllabus or a list of the requirements. Some teachers will get hold of exam music for you, others will expect you to buy it. If you have any difficulties getting hold of music please ask for advice at the desk. Don't leave it to the last minute.

Aural Tests

To prepare for the aural tests children should sign up for aural classes for at least the term in which the exam is to be taken. We recommend that pupils start aural for grade 1 a term in advance of the exam as many children need time to assimilate the musical vocabulary and skills required. For higher grades it is also recommended that aural is started a term in advance.

Theory

In order to enter for Associated Board grade 6, 7 or 8 your child must already have passed grade 5 theory. You would not expect a child to take grade 5 on an instrument after only a few terms' lessons, and the same is true of theory - once your child reaches grade 3-4 on their instrument he or she should start taking theory classes. Theory need not be boring or difficult and it can be frustrating for pupils who are ready for grade 6 to be trying to catch up on the theory. In fact, understanding the theory of notation enhances pupils' practical music making.

Extra preparation

Occasionally pupils or teachers may feel that an additional lesson or two may be needed to ensure a secure performance on the day, particularly for higher grades or if a pupil has missed several lessons. These should be arranged directly with the teacher and he or she should be offered payment for this at around £20 per hour. It is unlikely that these can take place at QYMC as most teachers have a full timetable so teachers may ask you to go to their house or offer to come to yours.

Hints to help your child to do well

Make sure you and your child know exactly what they need to have prepared

Start learning the scales from memory as early as possible. Write each possible permutation (left hand, right hand, slurred, separate bows etc.) onto small cards or pieces of paper, put them into a hat and pick a few at random every day or draw up a practice chart rotating the scales to work on each day.

If your child finds the aural tests difficult there are now several CDs available with extra practice tests on them.

Sight-reading which is the hardest part to prepare for in group lessons. Encourage your child to join an ensemble and to have a go at sight reading anything in the various music books they already have.

Make sure you know exactly where the exam venue is and leave plenty of time to get there.