

Singing Awards Changes from 2027

Overall

1. New entry-level qualification - the 'Singing Certificate' – Available for assessment from September 2026

- Key features:
 - No pass/fail — purely formative assessment
 - Focus on confidence-building and first exam experience
 - Flexible repertoire (including own choice without approval)
 - Includes warm-ups, simple repertoire, and basic listening skills

2. Mark scheme changes

There is no intent to change the required standards at any level

However, there are two significant changes to the marking criteria/mark grids.

- In all sections of the exam, the marking criteria descriptors are rephrased to use positive vocabulary when describing outcomes above the pass mark. N.B. Examiner comments will continue to identify reservations about performances above the pass mark.
- No mark exists, now, in more than one row of a marking grid. This will ensure consistency of application of specific marks.

3. Exam time reduction

The result of the changes to the syllabus is that the duration of RSCM singing exams can be reduced, by 5 minutes at each of Bronze and Silver levels, and by 10 at Gold level.

What remains the same

- Bronze / Silver / Gold levels remain the three medal-bearing award levels.
- Structure of exams are unchanged
 - Hymn
 - Psalm
 - Unaccompanied item
 - Anthem(s)
 - Practical skills (Sight-reading, technical questions and aural tests)
 - Choir in Context
- Mark totals and general framework remain unchanged at each level.

Repertoire/Prepared items

- The list of repertoire in the syllabus is maintained.
- The syllabus also now allows '**own-choice**' anthems at all levels (with pre-approval via email to examsdesk@rscm.com required for Bronze/Silver/Gold)
 - Once 'own choice' repertoire has been approved, an ongoing 'approved repertoire list' will be maintained online. Any item listed there will be permitted at the indicated level for use in the exams by any candidate at any church/choir.
- The requirements for hymn choice are simplified (line/syllable counts removed, reasonable repetition permitted)

Sight Reading

Sight reading is redesigned to follow an identical format at all levels.

- Examiner plays through the entire test first at Silver/Bronze, and the first half of the test at Gold, including the candidate's vocal line. Candidate may sing/hum along but will not be marked at this point.
- Candidate then has 30 seconds (1 minute for those eligible for extra time) to look through and try out on their own. Singing out loud is not only permitted, but encouraged.
- Candidate then sings through with the accompaniment and is marked on this attempt. The examiner will indicate key chord, starting note, and speed with a count-in.
- The accompaniment will provide greater 'scaffolding' for the candidate's line (particularly at Bronze and, to a lesser extent, at Silver and Gold levels) and this scaffolding will help the candidate 'back on track' if they make a mistake.

The intent of this change is to be similar to a 'choir rehearsal' situation (where a chorister is led by the piano/organ or with the support of other singers in the learning of new music). 2nd attempts will, though, no longer be permitted (to ensure consistent assessment across all exams).

Technical Questions

- There will be slightly fewer questions within the exam at all levels, but these will still be sampled from across the entire syllabus.
- There are some reductions and changes in the knowledge content at Bronze and Gold level, and some movement of knowledge from Bronze to Silver, and Silver to Gold. Please refer to the syllabus and to the new study notes for full details.
- Questions will, as with Gold, be drawn out of the sight singing exercise at Bronze and Silver levels.
- All candidates will be asked the same number of questions within each level, which will be marked right/wrong with the total mark awarded reflecting the number of correct answers.
- No written comments will appear on the mark form for Technical Questions – just a mark which will reflect the number of correct responses.

The aim is to reduce the time spent in the exam on this aspect, whilst still requiring an appropriate degree of learning for each level. Marking will be simpler, and have greater consistency.

Aural Tests (Bronze/Silver)

No changes to the tests themselves, but some changes to the examiner rubric ('script') to remove compound sentences and/or multiple instructions given prior to a candidate response, where possible.

Gold Level 'Combined skills' test

- The marking of sight singing will be separated from the marking of technical questions (the technical questions will be drawn from the sight-reading music as before). Technical questions will be marked as right/wrong (inc. at Silver/Bronze levels) with the mark awarded based on the number of correct responses and no comment on the mark form. The total number of marks available across both elements remains the same.
- Technical Questions will include some 'aural' elements (for example, when asked to identify a cadence, this will be played to candidates as well as being seen on the score).

This change makes it clearer when marking the different skills of sight reading and technical understanding. It allows for better statistical monitoring of exams/examining.

Choir in Context

Removal of 'Christmas' as an option at Bronze level Liturgy section (it will be going into a new 'pre-bronze' level award which is being developed)

Removal of St's Andrew and Matthew as options at Gold Level.

Change of Section: at Gold Level, the Saints now feature under the 'Bible' section (previously Liturgy), and the Psalm under 'Liturgy' (previously Bible).

Other changes

- Significantly reduced quantity of content to be learned at all levels (each element of Bible/Ministry/Liturgy now contains only one task/area of learning and examination, rather than two).
- Greater focus on candidates demonstrating **understanding** rather than recall
 - Shorter, more focused answers will be required in response to specific questions at all levels, although more open questions will be asked in some areas at Silver/Gold.
- Memorisation (e.g. of collects or prayers) is removed
- Reading aloud no longer assessed
- Unfamiliar bible texts (at Silver and Gold) will be taken from a newer translation of the Bible.

It is hoped that the changes will improve accessibility.

Choir trainers and candidates are advised to consult the syllabus and new study notes in order to ensure that they prepare correctly for this section of the revised syllabus. Note that there is no 'new' content, but some content from the 2021 syllabus is no longer required for exams in the revised syllabus and the style of questions will differ significantly in the exam.

Changes to Regulations

- Regulations introduced to cover 'own choice' repertoire approval process.
- Changes to regulations about accompanists.
 - **Accompaniment is not marked** and candidates are not penalised for poor accompanists
 - Concerns handled separately
- Access arrangements
 - Direct contact with RSCM encouraged in advance of the exam to ensure candidate access needs are met
 - Explicit rule: **no adjustments can be requested on the day**
- Transposition rules changed
 - **Hymns, psalms, and anthems may be transposed freely** to suit voice and without seeking approval or notifying the examiner. This is particularly intended to help those with changing voices.
- Regulations added to cover online exams explicitly

What has NOT changed

- Entry system and deadlines
- Deferral and cancellation rules
- Membership requirements
- One exam per session rule
- Safeguarding and recording

Chris Sparkhall, Chief Examiner