

Royal New Zealand Pipe Bands' Association

EDUCATION GROUP

*College of Piping  
and Drumming*

**Bagpipes  
Curriculum and Guidelines**

December 1999



**Booklet 1  
Preliminary & Elementary**

## **RNZPBA COLLEGE OF PIPING & DRUMMING**

### **THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE GREAT HIGHLAND BAGPIPE**

The bagpipe shares with the drum and the harp the claim to be the oldest of musical instruments. Efforts to give a clear history of all these have not been entirely successful. One thing that can be said is that the bagpipe is not entirely Scottish in origin. Its introduction to Scotland is recent in comparison to the long history of the instrument.

It is unlikely that any one genius invented the bagpipe. It probably had its beginnings hundreds of years ago as a one-note whistle made from a piece of cane. From this it developed into a many-noted pipe which later had a bag added. The bag gave a reservoir of air so that the player could continue a melody while taking a breath.

Shepherds and others who looked after grazing animals have long been associated with bagpipes. The boredom of their work would have led them to develop and improve the instrument and their playing.

The earliest evidence of the bagpipe is believed to be in a Hittite carving of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. - although this carving is worn and vague. The Bible does not mention the bagpipe. There is no evidence that the Greeks or Egyptians had the bagpipe, and it is unlikely that they would have used the instrument without leaving some trace in their literature or art.

We could wonder if Jesus heard the bagpipe, for it is about this time that we can be sure that it was being played somewhere around the Mediterranean. In fact, the first real evidence appears to be in the First Century A.D. when it was used as a motif on a coin of the Roman Emperor, Nero. It is claimed that at the end of his life, Nero said that if he held his power as Emperor of Rome, he would give a performance on the water organ and bagpipe at the games in celebration of his victory.

Precopius called the bagpipe "the instrument of war of the Roman infantry". It seems quite possible that the warlike Romans adopted the bagpipe and spread it through the many countries they invaded. Certainly, there is evidence of the Romans taking the instrument to England.

There is ample evidence to show that bagpipe playing was widespread in the Middle Ages. The instrument is mentioned in 13<sup>th</sup> Century manuscripts. It is referred to by Chaucer, who says of his miller, "A baggepype wel coude he blowe and sowne". In the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Shakespeare and others make reference to it.

The bagpipe was not confined to any one level of society. As well as being popular at country fairs and weddings, the bagpipe was found in the palaces of kings. Ladies of the French Court carried and played small versions, the "cornemuse". King Henry VIII left five sets of pipes in his collection of musical instruments.

The end of the Middle Ages brought a great decline in the playing of the bagpipe. Many people's objections to its sound were because they did not hear it in the right environment. The bagpipe is very much an instrument of the open air, with its special features of loudness and persistence.

Today there are a few pipers who play their own native form of the instrument in Scotland,

England, Ireland, France, Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, Russia, India, Poland, Greece, and Czechoslovakia. Only in the last one hundred years or so have the Scandinavian countries as well as Holland, Belgium and Germany given up playing their own form of bagpipe. There the instrument survives only in museums.

In every country therefore, the more widespread playing of the bagpipe has faded away. The exception is Scotland, and especially the Highlands of Scotland. The Lowlands of Scotland had a pipe too, but it faded like so many others. It is interesting that in many countries that largely gave up their own form of the instrument, there has been an enthusiastic adoption of the Scottish bagpipe.

The Great Highland Bagpipe developed in its present form about 1650 A.D. - three drones (two tenors and a bass) spread out fan-wise with the bass tuned a full octave below the tenors. From that time to this, it has remained unchanged in general characteristics and appearance. The pitch has changed, and the tone has improved so that the bagpipe today is an advanced and harmonious instrument - when tuned and played well.

The history of the earliest players is not available to us, although we do know something about the MacCrimmon family of Skye. They laid the foundation for modern playing by starting the improvement of musicianship that performers and bands enjoy today. The MacCrimmons were the hereditary pipers to the MacLeods (1500 - 1795 A.D.). They had a "college of piping". Taught in caves, pupils were under tuition for seven years, progressing from one small step to the next. Defeat at Culloden in 1746 A.D. was the beginning of the end of this way of life. The Disarming Act disallowed the wearing of tartan or Highland dress, the speaking of Gaelic and the carrying of arms. Bagpipes were classified as arms! Although the Act did not stop the playing of the bagpipe, the colleges of piping were disbanded or ceased to exist and the number of pipers diminished. Pipe music at this time was for solo playing only and consisted mainly of *piobaireachd* and *jigs* with some reels later on.

Piping received a new start by the forming of the Highland Regiments and by the encouragement given to pipers to join other regiments. It was in this way that the Great Highland Bagpipe and eventually Pipe Bands made the first real impact on the rest of the world.

The Great Highland Bagpipe is more than a musical instrument. It represents a legendary epic.

These notes have been supplied by the RNZPBA College of Piping and Drumming. The main reference is Seumas MacNeill's *Piobaireachd - Classical Music of the Highland Bagpipe*, BBC, Edinburgh, 1968.

# PRELIMINARY CERTIFICATE BAGPIPES

## SYLLABUS

### **SECTION ONE -THEORY AND KNOWLEDGE**

- a. Ability to name and place all notes on the bagpipe scale.
- b. Recognise and name the following:
  - G, D, E grace notes |
  - doublings on low G, low A, B, C, D, E, F.
  - Throw on D
- c. Present two tunes of any time signature and of at least two parts each, correctly written out by the candidate.
- d. Name all parts of the Bagpipe.
- e. Explain how reeds and the Bagpipe work.

### **SECTION TWO -PRACTICAL**

#### ***Practice Chanter***

- a. Correctly play all exercises from one of the Preliminary Certificate exercise sheets chosen by the examiner.
- b. Correctly play all grace notes and doublings identified in Section One.
- c. Play the two tunes submitted (c -section one) from memory.

### **SECTION THREE -MAINTENANCE**

- a. Show knowledge and ability to handle and take care of the practice chanter, including ~leaning, drying, hemping, waxing, and storage of the instrument.
- b. Know the make up of a practice chanter reed.
- c. Identify relative advantages of cane and plastic chanter reeds.
- d. Demonstrate the ability to weaken and strengthen a practice chanter reed.

# GUIDELINES FOR THE AWARD OF A PRELIMINARY CERTIFICATE PIPING

## Section One - Theory and Knowledge

- a. Ability to name and place all notes on the bagpipe scale.

*The candidate must be able to reproduce the bagpipe scale starting with the additional low 'G' with all notes in order as detailed below. The candidate must also be able to name the notes in the bagpipe scale where the notes are not represented in order. Candidates must also recognise and name the different note values used in piping. This includes an understanding of what a dot does to a note and what a tail does to a note.*

A musical staff in treble clef showing the bagpipe scale. The notes are: Low G (below the staff), Low A (below the staff), B (first line), C (first space), D (second line), E (second space), F (third line), High G (third space), High A (fourth line), High G (third space), F (third line), E (second space), D (second line), C (first space), B (first line), Low A (below the staff), and Low G (below the staff).

Low G Low A B C D E F High G High A High G F E D C B Low A Low G

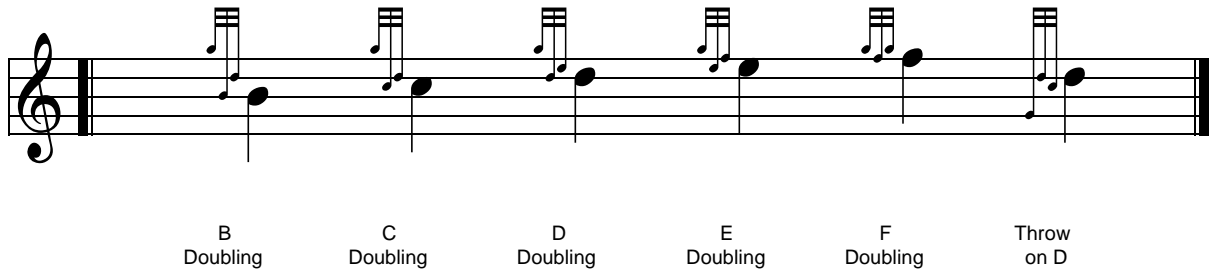
A musical staff in treble clef showing six different note values: a Semi Breve (whole note), a Minim (half note), a Crotchet (quarter note), a Quaver (eighth note), a Semi-Quaver (sixteenth note), and a Demi-Semi-Quaver (thirty-second note).

Semi Breve    Minim    Crotchet    Quaver    Semi-Quaver    Demi-Semi-Quaver  
Whole Note    1/2 Note    1/4 Note    1/8 Note    1/16 Note    1/32 Note

- b. Recognise and name the following gracenotes and doublings:

A musical staff in treble clef showing five examples of gracenotes and doublings. Each example consists of a main note with a grace note above it. The notes are: High G (gracenote), D (gracenote), E (gracenote), Low G (doubling), and Low A (doubling).

High G    D    E    Low G    Low A  
Gracenote    Gracenote    Gracenote    Doubling    Doubling

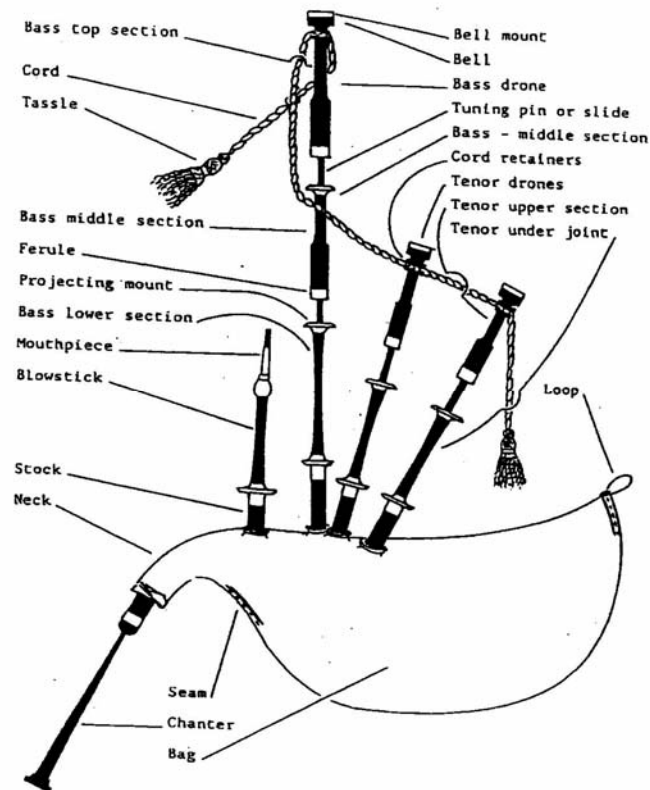


*Candidates must be able to recognise and correctly name all grace notes and doublings.*

- c. Present two tunes of any time signature and of at least two parts each, correctly written.

*Tunes must be on manuscript paper  
 Tunes must be neatly and legibly written out  
 Tunes must be correctly written out with bar lines in the right places  
 and all notation correct.*

- d. Name all parts of the bagpipe.



- e. Explain how reeds and the bagpipe work.

*Drone Reeds: Drone reeds are sounded by air flowing through the single bladed reed, forcing the tongue to vibrate against the body of the reed producing the reed's sound.*

*Chanter Reeds: Chanter reeds are sounded by air being forced under pressure through the double bladed reed forcing the blades to vibrate together producing a "crowing" sound.*

*The bagpipe works by inflating the bag through the blowpipe, striking the bag with the (normally) right hand, starting all drones. The bag is then pushed by the (normally) right hand to its normal position under the left arm and increased air pressure strikes in the chanter. The sound is continually produced by maintaining the air pressure in the bag at a sufficient level to continue sounding all reeds at an agreeable level.*

## **Section Two - Practical**

### **Practice Chanter**

- a. Correctly play all exercises from the Preliminary Certificate exercise sheet.

*There are two Preliminary Certificate exercise sheets at the end of this guide. Candidates must prepare themselves for the examination by practising all exercises. Candidates must play the exercises fluently, at a moderate to slow speed, correctly fingering all movements. Exercises are to be played in accordance with the note values and time signature specified. The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect playing a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination.*

- b. Play the two tunes submitted (c - section one) from memory.

*Candidates must play the tunes without any notational errors. Candidates must correctly play all embellishments. Candidates must play the tunes with a steady beat, and in accordance with the time signature and note values specified. The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect playing a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination.*

### Section Three - Maintenance

- a. Show knowledge and ability to handle and take care of the practice chanter, including cleaning, drying, hemping, waxing and storage of the instrument.

*The practice chanter must be handled with care. Care must be taken when separating the top and bottom sections to attend to the chanter reed to ensure it is not damaged.*

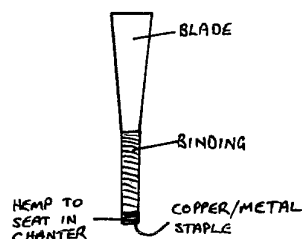
*The practice chanter must be presented for examination and be correctly hemped with waxed hemp (a final layer or two of plumbers/thread tape is permitted) achieving an airtight and watertight joint.*

*The candidate must understand the importance of cleaning and drying the practice chanter - to ensure it lasts a long time and to ensure the chanter is producing its best sound.*

*The candidate must understand that the chanter is best stored in a cool, dry area that is out of direct sunlight and is not subject to wide temperature variations.*

- b. Know the make up of a practice chanter reed.

*Refer to the practice chanter reed diagram below.*



- c. Identify the relative advantages of cane and plastic practice chanter reeds.

#### Cane:

- will usually produce a better sound than a plastic reed

#### Plastic:

- will last longer than a cane reed due to more durable nature of the material
- will not vary in pitch with increased moisture
- requires less maintenance than a cane reed
- are usually less expensive and easier to source than cane reeds

- d. Demonstrate the ability to weaken and strengthen a practice chanter reed.

#### Weaken:

- apply a small rubber band or bridle around the reed and adjust up or down to the desired strength.
- squeeze the staple in with a pair of pliers (an extreme measure not recommended as an initial option).

#### Strengthen:

- open the staple with a pair of pliers or an internal spike.
- if a rubber band or bridle has been applied, move it down the reed towards the binding to allow more of the blades to vibrate.

# Preliminary Certificate

## Exercise Sheet 1

The image displays a musical score for 'Exercise Sheet 1' from a 'Preliminary Certificate'. The score is organized into ten staves, divided into three sections by time signature changes. The first section, comprising the first four staves, is in 4/4 time and features quarter notes. The second section, comprising the next four staves, is also in 4/4 time but uses eighth notes. The third section, comprising the final two staves, is in 8/8 time and uses sixteenth notes. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The notation includes various rhythmic patterns and rests, with a vertical red line at the end of the page indicating the end of the exercise.

# Preliminary Certificate

## Exercise Sheet 2

The image displays seven staves of musical notation, each containing a sequence of notes and rests. The notation is written in a single system across seven staves. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The notes are primarily eighth and sixteenth notes, often grouped in pairs or fours. The sequence of notes across the staves appears to be a continuous melodic line, with some variations in rhythm and pitch. The notation is clear and legible, suitable for a preliminary certificate exercise.

# ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE BAGPIPES

## SYLLABUS

### ***SECTION ONE -THEORY AND KNOWLEDGE***

- a. A complete knowledge of the bagpipe scale, its note terminology and values.
- b. Write and explain the composition of grace notes, doublings, grips, taorluaths, and birls.
- c. Explain the meaning of time signatures.
- d. Explain the significance of bars, bar lines, dotted notes and beats. e. A basic understanding of the difference between time and tempo. f. Explain false fingering and cross notes.
- e. A general knowledge of the historical development of the Great Highland Bagpipe.

### ***SECTION TWO -PRACTICAL Practice Chanter***

- a. Correctly play all exercises from one of the Elementary Certificate exercise sheets chosen by the examiner.
- b. Demonstrate ability to blow a constant tone.
- c. Play from memory six times of two or more parts covering at least three different time signatures.
- d. These tunes should be played to the candidate's steady foot beat. Candidates should show confidence in playing to a metronome.

### **Bagpipe**

- a. Play from memory three of the six tunes submitted, as selected by the examiner, on a well-maintained instrument with all drones sounding.
- b. Candidates will be expected to blow a true High A and make a reasonable attempt at tuning their own drones.
- c. Once finally tuned, the candidate will be expected to maintain steadiness of sound throughout the playing. (The examiner may attend to final tuning.)
- d. While playing, the candidate should show the ability to march with good deportment.

### ***SECTION THREE -MAINTENANCE***

- a. Show knowledge and ability to handle and take care of the practice chanter and bagpipe, including cleaning, drying, hemping, waxing, and storage of the instrument.
- b. Know about the make-up, care and handling of reeds.
- c. Recognise the importance of a correctly fitting bag cover.

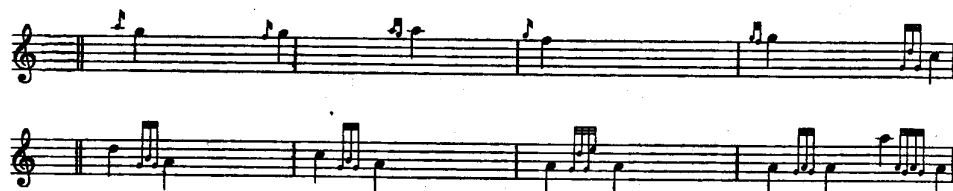
**GUIDELINES FOR THE AWARD OF AN  
ELEMENTARY CERTIFICATE  
PIPING**

Section One -Theory and Knowledge

- a. A complete knowledge of the bagpipe scale, its note terminology and values.

*The candidate must be able to reproduce the Bagpipe scale using the notes and note values specified in the examination paper.*

- b. Write and explain the composition of grace notes, doublings, grips taorluaths and birls.



Candidates must be able to identify and write each of the embellishments above and to explain that they are normally made up of grace notes, which have the note value of a demi-semi-quaver. Further, candidates must understand that embellishments do not form part of the total length of a bar, but are part of the note they are embellishing. Candidates must demonstrate where the beat falls on beat notes that are embellished with grace notes and doublings.

The examination paper will contain a section of manuscript like the example below for the candidate to insert beats as shown (arrows). The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect explanations/demonstrations a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination.



- c. Explain the meaning of time signatures.

*Time signatures dictate how many of what kind of note there is per bar. Eg 2/4 time means there are two quarter notes (crotchets) per bar, 6/8 time means there are 6 eighth notes (quavers) per bar.*

- d. . Explain the significance of bars, bar lines, dotted notes and beats.

*Bars - divide a piece of music up in accordance with the time signature eg a piece of 2/4 music is divided up so that there are two quarter notes (crotchets) per bar.*

**Bar lines** are the physical representation of where bars begin and end.

**Dotted notes.** A dot on a note will lengthen it by half its value, eg, a dotted quaver (quarter note) is a crotchet (quarter note) plus half its value, a quaver (eighth note).

**Beats** - are the regular pulse of a tune.

- e. A basic understanding of the difference between time and tempo. *Tempo is the speed at which a tune is played*

*Time is the correct length of each note as they are divided up in the bar in accordance with the time signature. Time could be described as the basic rhythmical pattern.*

- f. Explain false fingering and crossing noises.

*False fingering is the incorrect placement of fingers on the chanter to produce a note eg, a C without the little finger of the right hand covering the hole, a high G with the E finger covering the hole*

*Crossing noises are the extra sound produced when changing from one note to another, common from the top hand to the bottom hand and visa versa, eg, C to E with a low G crossing noise produced where the E finger does not lift off the chanter in time, E to high A with a low A crossing noise produced where the E finger closes to the chanter before the remaining fingers of the top hand have lifted off.*

- g. A general knowledge of the historical development of the Great Highland Bagpipe. *Candidates will be expected to correctly answer a series of ten questions on the historical development of the Great Highland Bagpipe. Questions will be taken from the historical essay contained in these guidelines. Examiners will be expected to have a thorough knowledge of this historical essay*

## **Section Two -Practical Practice Chanter**

- a. Correctly play all exercises from the Elementary Certificate exercise sheet chosen by the examiner.

There is one Elementary Certificate exercise sheet at the end of this guide. Candidates must prepare themselves for the examination by practising all exercises. Candidates must play the exercises fluently, at a moderate to slow speed, correctly Fingering all movements.

Exercises are to be played in accordance with the note values and time signature specified. The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect playing a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination.

- b. Demonstrate the ability to blow a constant tone.

Candidates must produce a steady sound and good tone from the practice chanter, and take breaths at the appropriate places, ie at the end of phrases or measures. The circular breathing method is acceptable.

- c. Play from memory six tunes of two or more parts covering at least three different time signatures.

Candidates must play the tunes without any notational errors. Candidates must correctly play all embellishments.

Candidates must play the tunes with a steady beat, and in accordance with the time signature and

note values specified.

The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect playing a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination. Tunes are to be played to the candidate's steady footbeat.

### Bagpipe.

- a. Play from memory three of the six tunes submitted, as selected by the examiner, on a well maintained instrument with all drones sounding.

Candidates will be expected to blow a true high A (normal blowing pressure) whilst tuning their drones.

Candidates must use a positive method to tune their drones, and may tune with one, two, or three drones sounding at the same time. The end result must be three drones tuned well together and close to low A. The examiner may attend to Final tuning before the candidate plays the required tunes.

While playing, the candidate must march (as appropriate) with good deportment, and with feet in time with the beat. It is not a requirement to march to slow airs / slow marches.

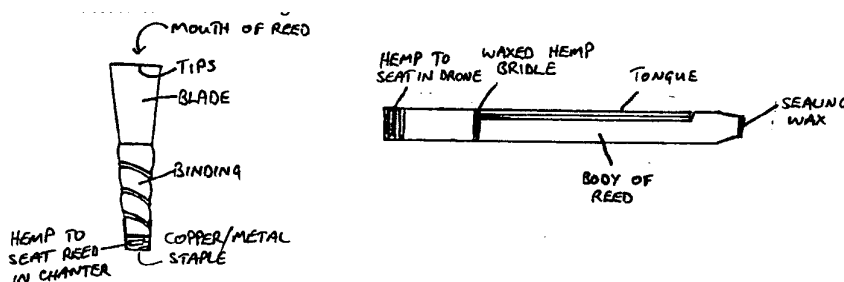
Candidates must achieve a steady sound during the performance and complete the tunes without notational or technical error. The examiner may ask the candidate to repeat any incorrect playing a maximum of two times. Errors that are not corrected during this time will result in the candidate failing this section of the examination.

### Section Three -Maintenance

- a. Show knowledge and ability to handle and take care of the practice chanter, including cleaning, drying, hemping, waxing and storage of the instrument.

As for the Preliminary Certificate

- b. Know about the make-up, care and handling of reeds. Refer to the reed diagrams below.



The candidate must be able to correctly identify all parts of the different reeds.

The candidate must understand the importance of drying reeds after playing and it is recommended the pipe chanter and reed are stored in a dry stock.

Candidates must demonstrate the ability to remove the pipe chanter from its stock and fit it to a dry stock with due care and minimal risk to damaging the reed, ie breaking a corner off.

Drone and chanter stocks and all internal bores should be dried with a 'pull through' after playing. Care should be taken that bag seasoning does not get stuck on the bottom inside of the stocks. This will make the drones almost impossible to keep steady.

Recognise the importance of a correctly fitting bag cover.

A bag cover that is too small will prevent the bag from being fully inflated, causing the drones to produce an unsteady sound and making the instrument unduly hard to blow. A bag cover that is too large may cause the bag to slip unduly from its normal resting place under the arm during playing.

