



*Registered Charity 312828*

**Portsmouth Area  
Dean's & Bishop's Awards  
Guidance notes for choirtrainers**

We hope that the following notes will prove helpful to choirtrainers and candidates in preparing for Dean's and Bishop's Awards. These notes supplement the more formal guidance which is contained within the syllabus, but candidates and choirtrainers are advised to read the syllabus carefully and make sure that all sections of the examination are well prepared.

The 2009 syllabus can be obtained by contacting the Portsmouth Area Awards Administrator, or from the RSCM website: [www.rscm.com](http://www.rscm.com)

## **Introduction to the Dean's and Bishop's Awards**

These awards are not *purely* a reward for commitment or long service (although this is the subject of Section D, the testimonial). Candidates must be fundamentally able to do what is required. So please do not enter candidates whom you do not expect to pass, or simply because 'it's their turn'. It is always sad for all concerned when someone fails, and usually

very disheartening and counter-productive for the candidate.

If your candidate can genuinely do what is recommended for *Voice for Life* Dark Blue ribbon, then he/she should have no problem with Dean's Award; likewise with Red ribbon and Bishop's Award.

Although the syllabus *content* is very similar for Dean's and Bishop's awards, you will see from the formal guidance that Bishop's exams are marked against more criteria, as well as a higher general standard of performance being expected. The level of musicianship displayed, and the perceptiveness and comprehensiveness of the answers to questions, are important discriminators between Dean's and Bishop's in terms of the standard expected.

## **Maintaining standards**

The Portsmouth Area syllabus has been prepared according to national guidelines, and the awards are now moderated ('validated') against a national standard. This is to ensure that they represent fundamentally the same level of achievement wherever they are awarded in the UK (which was not entirely the case previously).

The examiners for RSCM Awards are RSCM validated, and attend regular training sessions to ensure that there is a consistent standard of marking throughout the country.

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## **Contents of this booklet**

You will find guidance on the five different sections of the examination, as follows:

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## Section A (Using the voice well)

Look carefully at the marking scheme and you will see that Section A (the prepared singing) carries the most weight, constituting 50% of the marks for the whole exam. Good preparation of this section is particularly important. Look in the guidance notes to see the sort of things which will be marked. Don't forget your accompanist accompanies all of this section.

Candidates should prepare the items for this section very well. If your candidate can sing the Section A items well, then that is an easy way for him/her to earn lots of marks. If your candidate is not well prepared in this section, then they could lose too many marks to be successful in the award overall.

Candidates may suffer from nerves which could affect their performance: this can be helped by providing opportunities for the candidate to perform their solo item(s) during the run-up to the examination e.g. during choir practice, or during a service.

Choirtrainers should be aware that the examiners can only mark what they hear on the day. Whilst examiners will try to put candidates at ease, and be sympathetic to those candidates suffering from nerves or illness, they must mark what they hear during the examination.

### EXAM TIPS

- Don't forget that you must provide an accompanist for Section A of the examination. Make sure the candidate and accompanist have rehearsed together in advance, and agreed what the accompanist will play as an introduction to each item.
- Choose the hymn carefully so as to flatter your candidate's better points and not expose the weaknesses. For example, if your candidate has a problem with breathing, then *Lord of all hopefulness* (with its tremendously long lines) wouldn't be a sensible choice. As the hymn will be done first in the exam, it should also be something within comfortable range which the candidate likes and can use to settle in to the exam environment. Candidates should be capable of being in tune at the end of their unaccompanied verse.
- All three verses should be sung straight off, without more than the normal break between them. So, the accompanist stops playing for the second verse, and resumes playing for the third.
- Let the psalm flow with the word rhythm – don't let it become in any way metrical!  
Don't forget to phrase off ends of verses/half verses.
- The prepared piece carries the highest mark of any single item, so make sure your candidate can sing it accurately, in tune and with plenty of expression. Again, choose it carefully, bearing in mind your candidate's likes, and strong and weak points. For items which would normally be unaccompanied, the accompanist should fill in the other voice parts. The candidate will gain more credit (particularly at Bishop's level) if his/her own part is not specifically doubled in the accompaniment.

## Section B (Musical skills and understanding)

The 'unseen' sections of music examinations such as the sightreading and aural tests often cause candidates to feel very nervous, but this need not be the case if the candidate has plenty of practice at the specific tests which will be included in the exam. For example, by looking carefully at the syllabus and practicing the aural tests regularly with your candidate before the examination, the sense of the 'unknown' will be significantly reduced as they will be familiar with exactly what will take place in the exam room.

Although candidates will constantly be sightreading within choir practices, it is important to allow time for some specific practice on this skill before the award examinations. There are a number of helpful resources available. The RSCM *Voice for Life Choir Trainer's Book* (Order No. F0100) contains tips about teaching sightsinging, and a number of sightreading tests. The ABRSM produce a book of sightreading tests for Grades 1-5 (Dean's candidates should be comfortable with Grade 3 tests, and Bishop's candidates Grade 5 tests.)

For a comprehensive sightreading method to use with your candidates, you might like to use *Improve your sightsinging* published by Faber, available at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels in different voice ranges. Another useful method is *Successful Sightsinging* by Nancy Telfer published by Musicsales.

All these items are available from RSCM Music Direct.

### EXAM TIPS

- The accompaniment for the (sung) sight reading will not specifically include the candidate's part. At Dean's Award, candidates sing the *tune*, at Bishop's Award they sing their *own part*.
- Singing back as an echo is equivalent to ABRSM Grade 3 test B at Dean's level, and Grade 5 test A at Bishop's. Books of example ABRSM tests are available in music shops.
- Considerable preparation for the questions can be done with the prepared piece. For example, the candidate should know the key of the piece (major modulations as well at Bishop's level), understand the time signature(s) and know the meaning of all the Italian/musical terms.

## Section C (Repertoire)

The *Voice for Life Choir Trainer's Book* (RSCM stock code F0100) contains a very good summary of what should be known at each level, with sample questions and example answers, and you are recommended to read this. Dean's Award candidates should be capable of questions to Dark Blue level, and Bishop's Award candidates to Red level.

The questions in this section could, if appropriate, be framed as a short dialogue; the later questions would therefore depend on the candidate's answers to the earlier ones.

The following example piece (Stanford *Beati quorum via*) is from the Bishop's syllabus, but is here used as an example for Dean's Award as well. The answers given are just a guide as to what *could* be said; they are not necessarily *all* that could be said, but equally, there is probably more here than you *need* to say for a good response. The example answers given (in the questions which are common to Dean's and Bishop's) represent what would get a very good mark at Bishop's Award, and are written in somewhat adult terms. A Dean's candidate would not be expected to say this much, and young candidates would be expected to answer according to their age and experience. Bear in mind also that whilst (of necessity) these notes on this section are quite lengthy, it counts for only 10 marks in the exam.

At **Dean's level**, here are some example questions (from the *Dark Blue singer's worksheet*):

- *Who wrote the music?*  
CV Stanford.
- *When did the composer live? (Give dates, musical period or century.)*  
Stanford lived from 1852 to 1924. (19th/early 20th centuries.)
- *What country did the composer live in?*

Stanford was born in Dublin (Ireland), but lived much of his life in England. He also spent considerable time studying in Leipzig and Berlin (Germany).

- *Name another piece by this composer, or another composer who lived around this time.*
- There are lots to choose from (one or two would do, or a few at Bishop's level). This motet is one of a set of three, the others being *Justorum animae* and *Coelos ascendit hodie*. Aside from these, Stanford also wrote numerous other anthems – for example, *Ye choirs of new Jerusalem* (for Easter), *O for a closer walk with God* and *The Lord is my shepherd*. The service settings in A (double choir), B flat, C, F and G (the latter with big treble and bass solos) are also well known. If you can name something that you have done yourself, so much the better.

Another composer of the same period was Charles Wood (1866 – 1926). You may have sung his anthem *O thou the central orb*, or (if you have a very large choir), *Hail, gladdening light* (it's for double choir).

- *Explain simply what the whole text means, or what it is saying.*

The copy gives the translation as “*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord*”. So it is about obedience to the law of the Lord.

- *What language is the text written in?*

Latin.

- *What key is the piece written in?*

A flat. (This question might instead be asked under Section B.)

- *What is its time signature?*

3-4 time (3 crotchet beats to a bar. This might also be asked under Section B).

- *How many parts is it written for?*

Six – two soprano, one alto, one tenor, two bass.

- *What is the mood of the music?*

This question is quite subjective. One answer could be that, generally, the piece is quite calm, but there are two big climaxes, perhaps in praise of those who follow the law of the Lord.

- *When would it be performed?*

It's very suitable as a communion motet, but could also be used as an introit or even the gradual.

The following *additional* questions might be asked at **Bishop's level** (examples from the *Red singer's worksheet*):

- *When would the piece normally be sung – at a particular time of year or for a particular event?*

*Beati quorum* was composed in 1905 for Alan Gray and the Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge (Stanford's old college). It's thought it was written as a grace to be sung at College feasts. This probably isn't something most parish choirs will be expected to do that often! However, the piece is very suitable at any time, but looking at the words, it would be particularly fitting on a Saint's Day.

- *Where do the words come from (eg Bible, prayer, poem, etc)?*

It's Psalm 119 verse 1 (so a passage from the Bible). It was probably originally written in Hebrew. Although at least some psalms are thought to have been written by King David, many were probably not – so we do not know who wrote it, nor exactly when.

- *Can you name other composers who wrote in the same period?*

There are plenty, but (in addition to Wood, mentioned above) prominent ones in church music include Elgar, Parry and (slightly later) Vaughan Williams, and abroad Fauré and Bruckner. Even better if you have sung and can name any music by these!

- *Can you find out any other interesting information about the composer (eg job, family, etc)?*

Stanford's father was a keen amateur musician in Dublin. Stanford was educated at Queens College, Cambridge, and was subsequently appointed Organist of Trinity College, Cambridge. He was appointed Professor of Music at Cambridge and then Professor of Composition at the Royal College of Music, and was knighted in 1901. His pupils included Wood, Howells, Vaughan Williams, Holst and Ireland. Stanford is now known principally for his church music, but he also wrote orchestral and chamber works, oratorios, operas and part songs, almost all being now largely unknown. From studying in Germany, his music was considerably influenced by Brahms.

The First World War brought personal conflicts for Stanford, since he had many friends in Germany. Stanford died in London.

## **Section D (Belonging to the choir)**

Section D is not examined as such; requirements for it are met by the testimonial on the candidate's application form. Candidates are expected to be committed and exemplary members of their choir, and we hope that choir trainers will rigorously observe the spirit of this.

## **Section E (Choir in context)**

This section is what distinguishes the test from a simple music exam. It carries 20% of the marks and should not be overlooked in preparation – indeed, if well prepared, it provides another straightforward opportunity to gain marks.

Some parts are a simple recall of learned facts, but others are designed to show that the candidate has a good understanding of the role that music has to play in the life of their church.

### **Part 1 – Bible**

#### ***Dean's (Psalm)***

A simple response can be learned but some background would be useful.

As mentioned above, not all psalms were written by King David, although many are attributed to him. Most were written around the time of the exile in Babylon when the Israelites were thrown out of their promised land (see for example Psalm 137). Some are directed at God, others to fellow believers. They often show strong feeling, which is what needs to be identified by the candidate.

Ever since they were written people have found psalms helpful, as they express such a range of emotions, which haven't changed that much!

#### ***Bishop's (Liturgical texts)***

The question probably demands a fairly fact-based answer: here is an outline, with the references for you to look up the detail.

*Our Father* (Lord's Prayer): - Jesus teaching his disciples about prayer (Luke 11:1-4).

*Holy, Holy, Holy* (Sanctus): - John's vision of the throne in Heaven. 'Four living creatures say it day and night' (Rev. 4:8).

*Glory to God* (Gloria): - Partly angels to the Shepherds (Luke 2:14). It was an early Christian hymn.

*Lamb of God*: (Agnus Dei): - John's idea, Jesus as the Lamb of God is mentioned in his gospel and in Revelation. The exact words are not from the Bible.

*Magnificat*: – Mary's response to the annunciation (Luke 1:46-55).

*Nunc Dimittis*: – Simeon the priest's response to seeing the baby Jesus (Luke 2:29-32).

## Part 2 – Liturgy

- (a) (*Major Service*)

The service described should be whatever is your main Sunday service. (If it is not from the Church of England service book *Common Worship* or *Book of Common Prayer*, please bring a typical Order of Service for the examiner).

**Dean's:** Aim for an intelligent description. English or Latin names of canticles will do.

**Bishop's:** Also mentions structure - Ministries of the Word and Sacrament. Other useful things like how many readings, placing of the confession etc. should be known.

- (b & c) (*Seasons & Festivals*)

The stated requirements are the same for Dean's and Bishop's. Candidates at Bishop's level would be well advised to pick a less obvious festival or season to show their knowledge. For the season chosen by the examiner, it might be sensible to know particularly about the seasons near the exam date, ie Lent / Passiontide/Easter/Ascension/Whitsun in the spring, and Harvest/Advent/Christmas in the autumn. Some questions can be asked either way round, eg, "When is Palm Sunday?" or "What is the last Sunday before Easter called?"

## Part 3 – Ministry

**Dean's:** Encourage a prepared but not automated response to the question.

**Bishop's:** The piece selected should not be that chosen as the Section A anthem (since plenty of questions will have been asked on this already). It need not be on the repertoire list (and could be the same as chosen for Section E 2(b)).

Candidates should explain, with reference to their chosen piece, how music helps people to worship. Consider different types of prayer. The most basic way is to block out all other extraneous noise and aid concentration.

- Words of a hymn or anthem can be made a personal prayer by the singer.
- Reflective music can aid meditative prayer.
- Joyful music can inspire praise.
- Can mean a deep response beyond words which can be considered prayer too.