

CC PIANO — IRISH MUSIC EXAM PATHWAYS GUIDE

Comprehensive Reference Guide for Parents, Students & Secondary School Music Candidates

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NATIONAL BOARD

RIAM Grade Exams

Ireland's national grade system (Primary to Grade 8) examined locally across Leinster.

- **Pieces:** 60 Marks / 60% (3 Set Pieces)
- **Technique:** 15% Scales & Arpeggios
- **Sight-Reading & Aural:** 25% (Reading + Viva Voce)
- **Centres:** Local Westmeath centres (Mullingar/Athlone)
- **Theory Rule:** No mandatory written theory exam required for practical grades.

GLOBAL BENCHMARK

ABRSM Qualifications

UK-based international exam board recognized in 90+ countries with classical, jazz & pop options.

- **Pieces:** 90 / 150 Marks (3 Set Pieces)
- **Technique & Reading:** 21 Marks Scales + 39 Marks Reading/Aural
- **UCAS Tariffs:** Grades 6–8 carry official UK UCAS points
- **Theory Rule:** Passing Grade 5 Theory is mandatory before sitting Practical Grades 6–8.

50% OF LC MARK

Leaving Cert Music

State Examinations Commission (SEC) practical exam for secondary school students.

- **Practical Mark:** Piano performance covers 50% of Higher Level mark
- **CAO Boost:** H1 grade delivers 100 CAO Points for any university degree
- **Options:** Option A (6 Pieces at Grade 5–6) or Option B (4 Pieces + Tech)
- **BMus Standard:** Third-level audition requires Grade 8 benchmark

RIAM VS ABRSM: WHAT IS THE ACTUAL DIFFERENCE?

1. Theory Prerequisite (The #1 Practical Difference)

ABRSM requires passing Grade 5 Written Theory before taking Practical Grades 6–8. RIAM does not require written theory to progress through practical grades.

3. Practical Difficulty Standard (Practically Identical)

Both boards demand an identical technical and artistic standard. Grade 8 on both RIAM and ABRSM represents third-level conservatoire audition readiness.

2. Global Recognition & UCAS Tariff Points

ABRSM is globally recognized across 90+ countries and earns UK UCAS tariff points. RIAM is the gold standard within Ireland, ideal for Leaving Cert practical alignment.

4. Viva Voce vs Pure Aural Testing

RIAM includes a viva voce (discussion with examiner about key signatures & style). ABRSM focuses strictly on standardized sight-reading and pitch/rhythm aural tests.

Direct Feature-by-Feature Comparison Matrix

FEATURE / METRIC	🍀 RIAM (IRELAND)	🇬🇧 ABRSM (GLOBAL)	🎓 LEAVING CERT MUSIC
Governing Board & Origin	Royal Irish Academy of Music (Dublin, Ireland)	Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music (London, UK)	State Examinations Commission (SEC, Ireland)
Geographic Scope	National (Ireland)	International (90+ Countries)	National (Irish Secondary Schools)
Performance Pieces Weighting	60 Marks / 60% (3 Set Pieces)	90 Marks / 60% (3 Set Pieces)	50% of Higher Level Grade (6 Pieces or 4 + Tech)
Sight-Reading & Aural Tests	10% Sight-reading + 15% Aural / Viva Voce	21 Marks Sight-reading + 18 Marks Aural	Integrated in 50% written listening paper
Written Theory Prerequisite	Optional standalone exams (No rule for Grades 6–8)	Mandatory Grade 5 Theory Pass required before Grades 6–8	Integrated into 50% written paper (Composing & Listening)
CAO & UCAS Value	Prepares Grade 5–6 standard for 50% LC Practical	Prepares Grade 5–6 standard + UK UCAS Points	H1 grade = 100 CAO Points for any university degree
Third-Level BMus Audition Level	Grade 8 standard benchmark for TU Dublin / TCD / MTU	Grade 8 standard benchmark globally / UK	Requires Grade 8 standard for BMus practical audition
Exam Location & Format	Local Westmeath / Dublin centres or Video Recital	Exam centres nationwide or Video Performance Grade	In-school practical with State Examiner in March/April