



# ABRSM exam discount scheme

Operating guidelines for music services

## Introduction

ABRSM is piloting an exam discount scheme, to be offered through music services in all four nations of the UK, the Isle of Man and Channel Islands. The scheme has been designed to alleviate some of the financial barriers that many families face in accessing exams, as part of a broader plan to make ABRSM a more open, accessible and inclusive organisation.

The scheme will be administered by Music Mark and will operate as a pilot in the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years. Discounts will be made available to music services through the use of discount codes; each local authority area will receive an allocation calculated according to a formula based on published school roll numbers and an adjustment for deprivation appropriate to each territory, as well as a minimum allocation.

## Formula for calculation

ABRSM and Music Mark have established a formula for allocating discounts to each local authority area based on school rolls and an appropriate measure of deprivation (free school meals where available and Scottish Multiple Indices of Deprivation), as well as a minimum allocation to ensure a meaningful level of discounts is available to smaller music services

## Pilot duration

The pilot scheme will run in two phases from September 2022 until July 2024. The first phase will be between September 2022 and January 2023 inclusive and the second phase will run from February 2023 onwards.

## Terms and Conditions

### 1. Eligible exams

Discounts can be used against the following exams:

- Instrumental & Singing
  - Prep Test, Practical Grades (Initial to Grade 8), ARSM diploma
  - Performance Grades (Initial to Grade 8) and Performance Assessment
- Music Theory:
  - Online Music Theory (Grades 1 to 5)
  - Music Theory (Grades 6 to 8)

All exams must be booked via ABRSM's exam booking portal.

## 2. Administration of the scheme

The scheme is offered to the local music service (or its nearest equivalent known to Music Mark) in each local authority area of the four nations of the UK, as well as the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

Heads of Service or their agreed delegates (e.g. music centre leads) will have discretion over who is offered discounts and what level, although Music Mark recommends that families should usually pay something. In the first iteration of the pilot, discounts of up to 95% will be available. ABRSM and Music Mark anticipate that discounts will be allowed for:

- Students who meet music services' established remissions policies
- Students who are eligible for Free School Meals (rather than those who receive them as a universal entitlement, e.g. children in certain Scottish areas and KS1 pupils in England)
- Looked After Children
- Pupil Premium children
- Students in schools or areas where there is a low culture of musical learning and exam taking on account of cost in particular
- Students who have not chosen to present for exam previously because of cost
- Other reasons, such as the financial impact of sudden loss of employment or family break-up

If reasons for allowing discounts fall outside those anticipated, Music Mark may need to liaise with ABRSM, whose decision will be final. Music services are encouraged to consider which students might benefit from a discount early in the process and, where circumstances do not fit clearly within the reasons above, to discuss the reasons confidentially with Music Mark to be sure of eligibility.

The level of discount allowed may vary according to local remissions practices, socio-economic circumstances and to provide equity of access. Discounts should only be allowed where families are covering the cost of exams, not where exams are funded by schools or the music service itself. Music services are strongly encouraged to waive any admin fee for discounted exams.

Participating music services have discretion as to how they operate the scheme in their area(s), the reasons they will offer discount and the level of discount (which may vary locally according to circumstances). Neither Music Mark nor ABRSM will engage in discussions or disputes with parents and carers or students about decisions to offer a discount (or not) nor the level of discount offered.

Participating music services undertake to:

- allow discounts fairly and in a way that supports the spirit of the scheme, i.e. to enable access for students who would not otherwise be able to take ABRSM exams on account of cost
- use codes as intended and only as part of an exam entry made directly by the music service
- reasonably and lawfully share with Music Mark and ABRSM information for case studies, or anonymised data, in order to evaluate the impact of the scheme
- participate constructively in the evaluation of the scheme and development of the processes

## Local operation of the scheme

During the pilot, exam entries should be made centrally by the music service via ABRSM's exam booking portal. If the music service does not already have an account and ABRSM Contact ID, it will need to [register for one here](#). All bookings should be made using the music service's Contact ID number. All candidates will also need their own ABRSM Contact ID to be eligible for a discount, so music services should ensure in advance that each candidate has a Contact ID or creates one.

## Requesting discounts and inputting codes

The value of discounts is at the absolute discretion of ABRSM.

Discount codes may only be generated by ABRSM.

Discounts can only be applied through this scheme via discount codes and not by cash.

At the start of each term, and no later than three weeks before the relevant exam booking deadline, music services should contact Music Mark ([info@musicmark.org.uk](mailto:info@musicmark.org.uk)) to request confirmation of their exam discount allocation for the relevant period. Music Mark will reply within three working days to confirm the balance available.

Music Services should read these instructions in full and then [download this Excel spreadsheet](#), completing the relevant tab at least two weeks before the relevant exam booking deadline. Please note that requests for codes cannot be made retrospectively, and any requests submitted within the two-week lead up to a booking deadline may not be fulfilled.

In nearly all cases (see exception below), Music Services should complete the 'Application Form' sheet, filling out the information for each candidate in need of a discount code on separate lines. Music Services should then save a copy of the spreadsheet for their records, and then save a new copy with the candidate names omitted. This copy should be sent via email to Music Mark, who will request single-use discount codes for each candidate from ABRSM and send through to the music service.

Music Services will then need to make separate bookings for each candidate in receipt of a discount code. For Private Visits, it is recommended that all candidates paying full fees are entered first using the bulk upload template, and candidates with discount codes are then entered (and submitted) individually to ensure the correct discount is applied to each candidate. Music Services will still be able to move candidates around within their timetable as usual.

### Exception – group bookings at ABRSM Public Venues

In order to ensure all candidates can be grouped together under a single booking at an ABRSM Public Venue, one single-use discount code will be generated for the music service to input against a single exam booking covering both candidates in receipt of discounts and candidates paying full exam fees.

Music services booking candidates into one of ABRSM's Public Venues should therefore complete the 'Public Venue (group bookings)' tab, which will calculate the discount as a percentage of their total exam booking. Music Services should save a copy of the spreadsheet for their records, and then save a new copy with the candidate names omitted. This copy should be sent via email to Music Mark, who will request a single-use discount code from ABRSM and send through to the music service. Music services should then apply the discount code to their exam booking via the ABRSM portal.

## Audit and record keeping

The scheme is subject to audit and internal reporting. This may include matching Contact IDs to records of discounts and exam outcomes by ABRSM. Music services must not claim discounts exceeding their allocation. Music Mark will keep records of music services' remaining allocations. ABRSM reserves the right to invoice music services for any amounts which are overclaimed and Music Mark will assist ABRSM in recovering the money.

For music services booking via ABRSM public venues, please note the invoice will display a single discount applied to the full booking, so music services must ensure they retain the spreadsheet for their own auditing purposes.

## Data

Music Mark will collate information from claims spreadsheets and will use this to monitor use of the scheme and encourage take up in areas where it is not being used. It will analyse data at regional and national levels and report to ABRSM regularly, and at least once every quarter.

All information submitted to Music Mark on claims spreadsheets will be shared with ABRSM, who will handle it in line with their data privacy policy. Candidates' Contact IDs but **not** names must be included on spreadsheets sent to Music Mark. Music Mark does not have access to Contact ID lists and cannot identify candidates.

ABRSM will monitor impact at a programme level in terms of any increase in numbers of candidates and exams taken. Contact IDs may be matched to exam records to understand the impact of the scheme in terms of take-up and outcomes. ABRSM may publish results but will not reveal data for any single local authority area or any single service where it covers more than one local authority area.

## Evaluation and case studies

Evaluation will cover administration, participation by music services, overall take-up of discounts and impact measured by the increase in the number of eligible exams taken in the UK. Evaluation will be both on-going and summative. Music Mark may also ask to gather case studies to illustrate the impact of the scheme. Appropriate permissions will be sought for these at the time and case studies will be anonymised ahead of publication.

## Amendment, curtailment or suspension of the scheme

ABRSM reserves the right to review, amend or discontinue the scheme at any time if it deems that the scheme is not meeting its objectives. ABRSM may withdraw the scheme in a specific area or specific areas if there is just cause to believe it is being inappropriately applied. Such action will only be taken after discussions with the music service.

# Administrative Flow

