

DEVELOPMENT & CERTIFICATES

When I was a developing piper I can state without any doubt that the main tasks that improved my standard by a significant margin were:

- Competition
- Building a large repertoire
- Learning Piobaireachd
- Certificate courses

Competition gives small goals to aim for and feedback on your performance. I ensured that I listened to the upper echelon of players and watched very closely how they prepared and performed. It is usually a good boost to enthusiasm, nice to get a win and good to see young players get a bit of fire in their belly if they do not perform well and try to do better next time. It is always sad to see the players who fall aside and do not try very hard if success is not handed to them on a plate.

Building a large repertoire and maintaining it speaks for itself. The more tunes you learn to play well, the better you become as a player. The bigger your repertoire the more you practice. The more you practice the better you get. The more tunes you play the more interesting your practice becomes. It stands to reason. I am always bemused by pipers who tell me they are getting bored. I always ask the same first question; how many tunes do you practice outside of your band repertoire. The answer is always none, 100% of the time. When I then ask what they have set as their next goal, the answer is again nothing. Without fail this is 100% of the time. Listening to other players, obtaining good tunes that you like and aiming for something substantial is easy these days with so many sources at your disposal such as; You Tube, CD recordings, DVD recordings; sound files and music on the internet. There are also large volumes of new music books that appear regularly on the market.

Learning Piobaireachd was a turning point for me. We had to play it for exams at school and I also had to play it for my advanced certificate exams with the Pipe Band Association. I had started learning Piobaireachd when I was about 13 or 14 years of age. When I left school however I stopped dabbling and started to learn a serious quantity of tunes. This served a number of purposes. Firstly, the bigger your repertoire the better you play. Secondly, just playing Piobaireachd teaches you to listen more to your instrument and you aim for a better, more harmonic bagpipe sound. This improves the steadiness of you blowing and your own intonation. Again you have to be playing more. If it were not for the challenge of Piobaireachd I would probably have become bored with piping a long time ago.

Certificate courses give players goals to aim for and also control their development by ensuring that they have a solid grounding in all relevant areas. Too often developing players skip ahead to things that interest them and they miss out on portions of their required knowledge. Most syllabus include theory, practical and maintenance elements that ensures pipers develop an all round knowledge. I think a real turning point for me as a player was

when I worked toward and obtained my Advanced Certificate with the APBA and also my Senior Certificate with the Institute of Piping-Scotland. I was only about 19 years old at the time, but preparing for the exams meant that I had to look at my all round development, increase my repertoire and practice more. They were great goals to aim for and I felt a real sense of achievement when I obtained them.

Every Pipe Band Association has a certificate program, or access to one. In Australia you can complete the APBA exams and the syllabus can be found here: <http://www.pipebands.asn.au/CollegeDocs.asp> it is also possible to complete the Scottish system, conducted by the Piping and Drumming Qualifications Board, and their syllabus can be found here: <http://www.pdqb.org/certificates.html>. The current accredited examiners in Australia are Malcolm McRae (QLD) and Brett Tidswell (SA). Further details can be obtained at each of these sites. If you reside in a country not serviced by these organisations, I am sure your local Association can be of assistance in providing courses or examinations.

In most countries now it is essential that you hold a certain level of qualification before you can become an adjudicator. There is also a level of credibility that a piper has when they can show that they have had success as a performer and suitable qualifications to back them up.

The four PDQB-approved Examination Centres are:

The College of Piping

16-24 Otago Street
Glasgow
G12 8JH
SCOTLAND
Tel: 0141 334 3587
Email: college@college-of-piping.co.uk
Website: <http://www.college-of-piping.co.uk>

The National Piping Centre

30-34 McPhater Street
Glasgow, G4 0HW
SCOTLAND
Tel: 0141 353 0220
Email: reception@thepipingcentre.co.uk
Website: <http://www.thepipingcentre.co.uk>

The Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association

45 Washington Street
Glasgow
G3 8AZ
SCOTLAND
Tel: 0141 221 5414
Email: pdqb@rspba.org
Website: <http://www.rspba.org>

The Army School of Bagpipe Music and Highland Drumming

(PDQB Examination Centre for Armed Forces Personnel only)
Inchdrewer House
299 Colinton Road
Edinburgh
EH13 0LA
SCOTLAND
Tel: 0131 310 5561

NOTE: The Piobaireachd Society does not have the infrastructure to sustain its own Examination Centre and is content for its candidates to be examined through any of the official Examination Centres.

Applicants can apply to take PDQB examinations directly if they feel that they have the relevant knowledge, understanding and practical ability. Alternatively they can apply to undertake training programmes run by the partner organisations. Guidance will be provided by the Examination Centres.

All PDQB examinations incorporate both theory and practical application. With the exception of the Performer's Certificate, candidates must obtain a pass in both the written and practical sections before a Certificate can be awarded. Full details are available from the Examination Centres.

Examiners

PDQB-accredited Examiners are currently based in the following countries:

- United Kingdom
- Australia
- Canada
- Ireland
- New Zealand
- Northern Ireland
- Oman
- United States of America

It is possible to arrange PDQB examinations virtually anywhere in the world but the initial approach must be made to one of the four official PDQB Examination Centres listed above. The PDQB may in due course consider the appointment of accredited Examiners in other countries should the need arise.