

KEYBOARD OR PIANO ?

– that is the question



It is essential that pupils have access to an instrument for regular practice between lessons. But when it comes to pupils choosing which instrument to learn, these questions often arise.....

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A KEYBOARD AND A PIANO?

Keyboards are more portable than pianos as they are smaller, lighter and have fewer keys.

They have many different sounds and also have a range of auto accompaniment styles. This gives pupils scope to experiment with their music making and choose different sounds and styles for their pieces.

Keyboard music generally has one line of music with chord symbols. Usually the right hand plays the melody whilst the left hand accompanies with chords using auto accompaniments.

As keyboard pupils progress they should also learn some bass clef notes and how to play in a piano style, but this is only one small part of playing the keyboard. Whilst some keyboards have touch response (this is when the notes sound louder or softer depending on how hard you press the keys) they do not have weighted keys like pianos. This makes them unsuitable for practising piano pieces as pupils are unable to achieve an adequate range of volume and expression. Also many piano pieces simply cannot be played on a keyboard as it has too few notes.

Pianos come in two types, acoustic and digital. Both of these are suitable for piano practice.

Acoustic pianos are either upright or grand and need to be regularly maintained. This usually means getting them tuned every six months, but additional repairs may become necessary from time to time.

Digital pianos are electric and are available as grand, upright or stage pianos. These all take up less room than their acoustic equivalents and are lighter and easier to move around. Stage pianos are portable and can be used on a portable stand (similar to a keyboard stand) and packed away when not in use. Digital pianos require no maintenance or tuning and are cheaper to buy than acoustic pianos. They can also be used with headphones. However many pianists prefer the authentic feel and superior sound of an acoustic piano.

Pupils learning the piano will be taught to read both treble and bass clef notes and will read two staves at once from an early stage.

CAN YOU PLAY THE SAME TYPE OF MUSIC ON BOTH INSTRUMENTS?

Both instruments are very versatile and are suited to lots of different styles of music. Pupils learning piano or keyboard can play a wide range of pieces which might include classical, rock and pop, jazz, folk, or traditional music. The main difference is the use of auto accompaniments in keyboard music which gives it a more popular sound.

CAN ALL PUPILS TAKE GRADED EXAMS?

Yes they can.

Piano examinations can be taken through the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music or the Trinity Guildhall School of Music.

Keyboard examinations can be taken through the Trinity Guildhall School of Music.

EASS usually holds two Associated Board exam sessions and one Trinity Guildhall exam session each academic year.

WHICH INSTRUMENT SHOULD YOU CHOOSE?

The choice is yours! However

**If you have a keyboard at home, you should apply for keyboard lessons.
If you have a piano at home, you should apply for piano lessons.**

BOTH NEED PRACTICE !

WHICH KEYBOARD SHOULD YOU BUY?

There are lots of different makes and sizes of keyboard available to buy but we give the following general recommendations:

- Pupils should have an instrument with 61 full-size keys.
- For pupils wishing to take exams a keyboard with touch response will be required. Registration memory is also required from Grade 3. This is a facility that allows the changing of settings during the playing of a piece.

ASSISTED INSTRUMENT PURCHASE SCHEME

If a pupil is having lessons through EASS, it is possible to purchase a keyboard through the EASS Assisted Instrument Purchase Scheme (AIPS), saving the cost of VAT. The AIPS scheme does not apply to pianos.

This information sheet has been produced by
Enfield Arts Support Service

If you need any further advice or assistance
please contact Paula Warren, EASS Piano and Keyboard Co-ordinator
Telephone: 020 8807 8881
Email: info@enfieldartssupportservice.org.uk

Purchasing or hiring a keyboard

Keyboards come in different shapes and sizes, but for keyboard lessons and electronic keyboard exams a keyboard with at least 61 keys full size keys is required. It also needs to have a voice or tone section with a selection of sounds and an auto accompaniment facility. Touch response and registration memory are required for all grade exams (registration memory is a means of storing settings so that they can be changed during the playing of a piece).

Starter keyboards suitable for beginners can be purchased from around £90.00. Keyboards with both touch response and registration memory suitable for examinations start at around £200.00.

There are a number of keyboard shops in and around London who are part of the **Arts Council 's `Take it Away' scheme**. This is a scheme where a loan of up to £2000 can be taken out with 10 months interest free credit in order to purchase any instrument. Below is a list of dealers who are part of this scheme.

The Sound Garden Music Shop, 36-38 High Street, Barnet, Herts, EN5 5RU (020 8441 8603) www.thesoundgarden.co.uk

The Music Stop, 109 Cockfosters Rd, Cockfosters, Hertfordshire, EN4 0DA (020 8441 1050) www.themusicstop.co.uk

Playsomething, 31 Baldock St, Ware, Herts, SG12 9DH (01920 460646) www.playsomething.co.uk

GigGear , Unit 17 & 18 St James Centre, East Road, Harlow, Essex, CM20 2SX (01279 432900)

or 5 & 6 Post Office Walk, Fore Street, Hertford, Herts, SG14 1DL (01992 500976) www.giggear.co.uk

Chappell of Bond Street, 152-160 Wardour St, London, W1F 8YA (020 7432 4422) www.chappellofbondstreet.co.uk

Other keyboard shops that are not part of this scheme are listed below. These dealers also hire out keyboards;

Umbrella Music, 2 Greenleaf Road, Walthamstow, London, E17 6QQ (0845 500 2323) www.umbrellamusic.co.uk (Hire Yamaha or Casio keyboards from £15.00 per month)

UK Pianos, 85, Southbury Road, Enfield, Middlesex, EN1 1PJ (020 8367 2080) www.uk.pianos.co.uk (Hire keyboards)

Purchasing or hiring a piano

There are two kinds of piano, acoustic pianos and digital pianos.

Acoustic pianos are the traditional type of piano and are either upright or grand.

Digital pianos are electric and can be used with headphones. They can also be connected to computers and other equipment. They tend to be a bit smaller and lighter than acoustic pianos.

Both kinds of piano are perfectly adequate for piano practice and often the decision of which one to choose comes down to how much space you have and whether the sound will be a problem for neighbours.

There are a number of piano dealers in and around London who are part of the **Arts Council's 'Take it Away' scheme**. This is a scheme where a loan of up to £2000 can be taken out with 10 months interest free credit in order to purchase any instrument. Below is a list of dealers who are part of this scheme. Some of these shops also hire instruments.

The Music Stop, 109 Cockfosters Rd, Cockfosters, Hertfordshire, EN4 0DA
(020 8441 1050) www.themusicstop.co.uk (Digital pianos only)

Playsomething, 31 Baldock St, Ware, Herts, SG12 9DH
(01920 460646) www.playsomething.co.uk (Digital pianos only)

GigGear , Unit 17 & 18 St James Centre, East Road, Harlow, Essex, CM20 2SX (01279 432900)
or 5 & 6 Post Office Walk, Fore Street, Hertford, Herts, SG14 1DL (01992 500976)
www.giggear.co.uk
(Digital pianos only)

Piano Warehouse, 30 Highgate Rd, Kentish Town, London, NW5 1NS
(020 7267 7671) www.piano-warehouse.co.uk (Have a rent to buy scheme)

Markson Pianos, 5-8 Chester Ct, Albany St, London, NW1 4BU
(0800 0748 980) www.marksonpianos.com (Have hire scheme for acoustic pianos only)

Chappell of Bond Street, 152-160 Wardour St, London, W1F 8YA.
(020 7432 4422) www.chappellofbondstreet.co.uk

Other shops in the area that sell and hire pianos that are not part of the 'Take it Away' scheme are:

J.Reid Pianos, 184, St. Ann's Road, Tottenham, London, N15 5RP (Have hire scheme)
(020 8800 6907) www.jreidpianos.co.uk

RAC Pianos, Longfield Nursery, Epping Road, Roydon, Essex, CM19 5DW 01279 792129)
(Have a rent to buy scheme) www.racpianos.com

UK Pianos, 85 Southbury Rd, Enfield, EN1 1PJ (020 8367 2080) www.ukpianos.co.uk
(Have hire scheme and interest free purchase scheme)

Learning to Play Keyboard: Expected Progression

Every instrument has its own techniques that need to be mastered and therefore pupils will take differing amounts of time to reach the Grade 1 exam depending on which instrument they are learning. For keyboard pupils, this can take up to two years, depending on the amount of practice the child does. Some may reach this level quicker but others might take longer to get there. Some children may also wish to take the Initial Grade exam before Grade 1. It is important that pupils are comfortable with their instrument and can play with confidence and enjoyment – it would not be wise to push a child early into taking an exam which they are not ready for.

For beginner keyboard pupils, the main technical issues are:

- Learning how to operate the voice and style functions on the keyboard.
- Learning to move around the keyboard using different hand positions.
- Learning to play chords.
- Learning to play with both hands together at the same time.
- Learning to control the way in which the notes are played – smoothly, short and detached, loudly, softly, and changes between all of these.

During the first two terms, pupils will probably learn:

- How to find the white notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G in relation to the position of the black notes.
- How to find the middle C note.
- How to play notes that last for 1 count, 2 counts, 4 counts and 3 counts and what these notes look like when written down.
- To play tunes with 5 notes with their right hand – probably C, D, E, F, G and also what these notes look like when written down.
- They will also learn to play some chords with their left hand, usually C, G and F.
- How to play chords using auto accompaniments.
- How to adjust the tempo for each style.

After these things have been learned, pupils will need to begin to learn how to move their fingers and hands to different positions on the keyboard to extend the range of notes they can play. They will then need to learn how to play with both hands together at the same time, and also to play more than one note in each hand at once. They will also extend the range of chords they can play.

Grade exams require more than just the playing of pieces. Pupils will also need to learn how to play technical exercises such as scales, arpeggios and broken chords. They will also need to be able to do other supporting tests such as improvisation, reading music at sight without having seen it before and aural tests (these involve tests such as identifying time signatures, clapping back rhythms, singing back short tunes and identifying changes made in music. Pupils may also be required to answer some questions about the pieces they have played.

After an exam, most teachers will take time to consolidate children's learning before beginning to teach them the new skills they will need for the next grade.

Learning to Play Piano: Expected Progression

Every instrument has its own techniques that need to be mastered and therefore pupils will take differing amounts of time to reach the Grade 1 exam depending on which instrument they are learning. For piano pupils, this can take up to two years, depending on the amount of practice the child does. Some will get there faster and may only take a year and a half. Others will take longer. Some children may also wish to take the Initial / Preparatory Grade before Grade 1. It is important that pupils are comfortable with their instrument and can play with confidence and enjoyment – it would not be wise to push a child early into taking an exam which they are not ready for.

For beginner piano pupils, the main technical issues are:

- Learning to move hand positions around the keyboard.
- Learning to play with both hands together at the same time.
- Learning to play chords – more than one note at the same time.
- Learning to control the way in which the notes are played – smoothly, short and detached, loudly, softly, and changes between all of these.
- Learning how to use the pedals.

During the first two terms, pupils will probably learn:

- How to find the white notes A, B, C, D, E, F, G in relation to the position of the black notes.
- How to find the middle C note.
- How to play notes that last for 1 count, 2 counts, 4 counts and 3 counts and what these notes look like when written down.
- To play tunes with 5 notes with their right hand – probably C, D, E, F, G. They will probably learn what these notes look like when written down.
- They will also learn to play some notes with their left hand, building up until they can play 5 notes (which 5 will depend on the book that they are using).

After these things have been learned, pupils will need to begin to learn how to move their fingers and hands to different positions on the keyboard to extend the range of notes they can play. They will then need to learn how to play with both hands together at the same time, and also to play more than one note in each hand at once.

Grade exams require more than just the playing of pieces. Pupils will also need to learn about musical keys and time signatures, and how to play some technical exercises such as scales, arpeggios and broken chords. Some exams may ask pupils to be able to improvise. They will need to be able to read music at sight without having seen it before and also to be able to clap back rhythms, sing back short tunes and to identify changes made in music that is played to them. They may also be required to answer some questions about the pieces they have played.

After an exam, most teachers will take time to consolidate children's learning before beginning to teach them the new skills they will need for the next grade.