

In a nutshell

A certificate of competence in piano teaching, designed, examined and administered by EPTA UK, to demonstrate key skills in the development of beginners up to grade 3 ABRSM, TCL or LCM. The diploma would be a good fit for the less experienced teacher primarily concerned with working effectively at the early stages. An amount of hands-on teaching experience is expected (in line with Associate member status), hence there will be an emphasis on demonstrating at the instrument, explaining basic theoretical, technical and musical aspects, establishing best practice and motivating pupils to progress with pleasure and purpose.

Assessment and Prerequisites: No formal level of piano performance or music theory is required, and there are no written requirements. Assessment will take the form of a verbal examination, which will last up to 45 minutes in the company of one designated EPTA Examiner. Typed feedback will be emailed in a standardised format to the candidate within one month of the exam, indicating whether you have been approved or not approved. If approved, you will be eligible to use the letters CertEPTA and a printed certificate will be issued to this effect in due course; if not approved, feedback will state clearly the area(s) where shortcomings appeared and, where possible, strategies for addressing these issues in the event the candidate wishes to resit. Resits will in all cases require a full re-examination, though under these circumstances the cost will be reduced by 25%.

The examination itself will place emphasis on establishing a bedrock of sound teaching, to include these core aspects:

- First encounters: setting out on the piano journey, introducing the instrument and showing what it can do.
- Preparing and delivering first lessons; making these formative experiences memorable and inspirational.
- Keyboard geography: locating keys, numbering the fingers and making the first joyful explorations in sound.
- Establishing good posture and hand position; addressing the keys with freedom and confidence.
- Showing a sound knowledge of varied repertoire at this early level, including tutor books, exercises, duets, examination materials and a sprinkling of lighter styles.
- How to demonstrate effectively: a particular focus on the styles most likely to arise from beginner to grade 3.
- The motivation conundrum: how to sustain lively, active progress and prevent pupils from wanting to give up.
- Establishing effective, safe, tension-free practising habits.
- Building a thriving private teaching practice; working in schools; peripatetic keyboards; group teaching.
- The importance of reflective practice and keeping a teaching diary.
- Ways of ensuring the systematic coverage of aural, sight-reading, musical knowledge and technical work.
- Use of apps and handheld devices to foster and consolidate independent learning.
- Improvisation as a tool to unlock creativity, as well as to add breadth and diversity in lessons.
- The role of examinations; positives, pitfalls and alternative methods of incentivising pupils.
- Placing regular, memorable landmarks in early learning, such as pupil concerts, festivals and piano parties.
- Encouraging pupils to self-reflect at each stage along their piano journey.
- Sensitive handling of the pupil/teacher/parent triangle.
- Guiding pupils and parents in purchasing/hiring an appropriate instrument/weighted keyboard.
- Professional values and practice: safeguarding, EPTA code of conduct.
- How to protect yourself and your livelihood.
- Other aspects of effective early piano teaching initiated by the candidate.

This list is by no means exhaustive or exclusive; nor should it be assumed that all of these topic areas will find their way into your exam. This will in part be due to time considerations, but will also reflect the free flow of the conversation, which will to a varying extent, centre on your own interests, current teaching experience and ambitions. The exam is likely to unfold according to the following broad design (see below). Since you are encouraged to take a flexible approach in your teaching, this may result in a different order and/or emphasis on the day, though the main pillars of discussion will at some point receive appropriate focus.

➤ Outline structure of a typical CertEPTA examination: 45 minutes ~ Approved/Not Approved

1: At your Ease

- A very brief survey of your teaching experience, training and/or qualifications to date.
- Perceived strengths, personal ambitions and goals over the short to medium term.

2: At the Table

- First lessons: main objectives and structuring ideas; the importance of signposting topics clearly and singly.
- Always leading from the known to the unknown.
- The importance of setting achievable goals, clear take-home messages and enjoyable practice activities.
- Sound before sign: learning by rote, and the point at which notation/basic theory might best be introduced.
- The merits of tutor books versus the case for a more bespoke, pupil-led approach.

3: At the Piano

- Keyboard geography; establishing good posture and seating, hand position and related matters.
- Discovering the beauty of sound through touch: how it happens; high/low, loud/quiet, long/short notes; basic mechanics of the instrument and (where appropriate) the effect of using the sustain/una corda pedals.
- Ways to listen: stimulating an attentive ear for nuance, atmosphere, light and shade, evenness of touch.
- Establishing a basic sense of pulse and pitch; clapping, singing and playing as an integrated, joyful experience.
- Passing the thumb; breaking free from the 5 finger position and moving more easily around the keyboard.
- Basic touches: legato and staccato playing; sustaining a warm, appealing tone; introducing light and shade.
- Hand assembly: basic coordination and rhythmic playing; tackling initial problems of asynchrony.
- Three pieces to be selected from current grade 3 repertoire: ABRSM, TCL or LCM syllabuses.
- Extracts from the chosen pieces to be selected by the examiner for demonstration and discussion.
- One full piece (selected by the candidate from the 3 above) to be played complete: this needs to reach a fluent, musically persuasive level, as if demonstrating in a lesson, but does not need to be flawless or memorised.
- One previously unseen prep test/initial grade piece to be taught to the examiner.

4: At your discretion

- In this final part of the exam you will be given an opportunity to take the discussion down one particular avenue of your own choosing. [See Appendix 1]. For example, you might wish to tackle additional repertoire, homemade flash cards for pitch/rhythm/notation/character etc., use of Kodaly or Dalcrose.
- Repertoire selected at random from your own materials will be spotlighted, compared and contrasted.
- Your views on building a successful teaching practice, safeguarding, child support and other related issues.
- **In this final quarter of the exam, the emphasis will be on discovering your individual approaches, strategies and philosophies. This will be your chance to connect together any loose strands of the discussion that may have arisen so far, or to offer any further insights and ideas you might use in your teaching.**

Your overall performance in the exam will be assessed as a whole at the end of the exam, rather than topic-by-topic. Areas in which you are able to demonstrate particular strengths will, to some degree, offset areas less well presented. The single exception to this lies in the area of demonstrating at the piano, which must be sufficiently confident and competent to support your declared approach. At its heart, the CertEPTA qualification presents an opportunity for you to show a range of skills, knowledge and interests likely to be of value to you as your teaching continues to blossom. Furthermore, you will have ample opportunity to demonstrate your ability to communicate clearly and to enthuse in a thoughtful, flexible and enthusiastic way. A willingness to react to the different pace at which pupils of different ages and abilities learn will be a recurring theme in the exam.