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Department
for Education

Music

GCE A level and AS subject content

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The content for music AS and A levels

Introduction

1. AS and A level subject content set out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all AS and A level specifications in a given subject.
2. It provides the framework within which the awarding organisation creates the detail of the specification.
3. AS and A Level music specifications must support students in forming personal and meaningful relationships with music through the development of musical knowledge, understanding and skills. They must encourage students to engage critically and creatively with a wide range of music and musical contexts, develop an understanding of the place of music in different cultures and contexts and reflect on how music is used in the expression of personal and collective identities.
4. The specifications must also allow students to develop particular strengths and interests, encourage lifelong learning and provide access to higher education and university degree courses in music and music-related subjects as well as music-related and other careers.

Aims and Objectives

5. AS and A level specifications in music must offer a broad and coherent course of study which encourages students to:
 - engage actively in the study of music
 - develop skills that facilitate performances which demonstrate an understanding of tempo and style and a sense of continuity
 - develop skills that facilitate coherent compositions which demonstrate the manipulation of musical ideas and the use of musical devices and conventions
 - recognise the interdependence of musical knowledge, understanding and skills, and make links between the integrated activities of performing, composing and appraising underpinned by attentive listening
 - broaden experience and interests, develop imagination and foster creativity
 - develop and extend the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians
 - develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of instruments and styles, and of relevant approaches to both performing and composing

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- develop awareness of music technologies and their use in the creation and presentation of music
- appraise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop understanding of musical contexts and a coherent awareness of musical chronology
- develop as effective, independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers with enquiring minds
- reflect critically and make personal judgements on their own and others' music
- engage with, and extend appreciation of, the diverse heritage of music in order to promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development

Subject content

6. AS and A Level specifications in music must build on the knowledge, understanding and skills established at Key Stage 4 and in GCSE qualifications.

7. AS and A Level specifications in music must require students to develop an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language listed below, and allow students to apply these, where appropriate, to their own work in performance and composition.

- **musical elements** and their interdependence (as used in the students' own work and in the music of others)
 - organisation of pitch (melodically and harmonically) including sequence, plagal and interrupted cadences and augmentation at AS; additionally chromatic harmony, diminished 7th and additive melody at A level
 - tonality including modulation to the dominant, cycle of 5ths subdominant & relative minor key relationships at AS; additionally modulation to remote keys, atonality and polytonality at A level
 - structure including sonata form at AS; additionally, fugue and through-composed at A level
 - sonority including antiphony, identification of less common instruments e.g. piccolo, cor anglais, bass clarinet and instrumental techniques e.g. con sordino, una corda at AS; additionally smaller vs larger group pieces e.g. solo concerto/concerto grosso, vocalisation e.g. sprechgesang and acoustic resonance at A level
 - tempo, metre and rhythm including syncopation and cross-rhythms at AS; additionally rubato, hemiola and more complex rhythmic patterns, e.g. polyrhythm at A level

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- texture including homophony, imitation and monophony at AS; additionally polyphony, fugue and canon at A level
- dynamics including crescendo & diminuendo, terraced dynamics and application of dynamics to style & performance context at AS; additionally expressive application of dynamics in interpretative choices, nuance and additional special effects, e.g. fp, sf, dim al niente, con tutta forza at A level
- **musical contexts** (relating to the students' own work and the music of others)
 - composer, performer and audience including stylistic conventions, appropriate performance choices e.g. ornamentation/ improvisation and technical demands at AS; additionally stylistic "fingerprints", awareness of audience expectations and performance practice at A level
 - occasion, time and place including musical limitations/demands on composers, historical period and the effects of venue on the production and performance of music at AS; additionally awareness of social & historical context and live & recorded music at A level
- **musical language** (relating to the students' own work and the music of others)
 - reading and writing staff notation including rhythmic notation in compound time and key signatures to 5 sharps & 5 flats at AS; additionally chord notation and all key signatures at A level
 - chord symbols and harmonic progression including standard cadential progressions, chord inversions and dominant 7th chords at AS; additionally extended chords including secondary 7ths and 9ths at A level
 - technical musical vocabulary including recognition and use of appropriate terminology e.g. glissando, repetition and conjunct at AS; additionally recognition and use of sophisticated terminology e.g. portamento, ostinato and ascending minor scale at A level

8. AS and A level specifications in music must require students to demonstrate the ability to:

Perform

- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and an understanding of style and context. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: playing or singing solo or in ensemble, improvising, or realising music using music technology.
- perform with a sense of continuity using appropriate tempi, showing critical understanding of the music chosen

Compose

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- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create, develop and refine musical ideas with technical control and expressive understanding, either freely as the composer chooses, or by responding to a brief or commission supplied by others. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: experimenting, developing, critical refinement and being influenced by other composers' work.
- produce compositions that make some use of musical ideas and show some understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition

Appraise

- use knowledge and understanding of musical elements, techniques and resources to make critical judgements about:
 - repertoire and context of music within the Areas of Study
 - musical interpretations (this could be the process of deciding how to perform a piece of music, respond to a brief or to a starting point to produce a composition, or demonstrate stylistic understanding)
 - their own work
 - others' work including unfamiliar music (individual pieces of music that have not been stipulated within the specification)

Formulation of critical judgements will be achieved by attentive listening (rather than just hearing) and aural perception, and could also be achieved by informed discussion (in writing and/or through speech), analysis, evaluation, contextualisation and reflection.

- comment on music heard, showing understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied

9. In addition, A level specifications in music must require students to demonstrate the ability to:

Perform

- present generally fluent performances showing critical understanding of the overall shape, direction and style of the music chosen

Compose

- show a sophisticated use of musical elements in combination to produce musically convincing compositions
- produce compositions that make creative use of musical ideas and show understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition

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Appraise

- comment in some detail on music heard, showing critical understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied
- use acute aural perception and discrimination skills
- use technical musical vocabulary to communicate sophisticated judgements
- show understanding of the complex interdependencies between musical elements
- show understanding of the sophisticated connections between music and its context

10. AS and A level specifications in music must require students to apply practically, knowledge and understanding of:

- specialist musical vocabulary and notation appropriate to the context
- the relationship between compositional devices and techniques, musical elements including harmonic progressions, tonal relationships and musical structures appropriate to the context

Areas of study

11. Areas of study must provide an appropriate focus for students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills. They must encompass repertoire that allows the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language to be taught in context and allow opportunities for students to demonstrate contextual understanding through their performance and composition.

12. An area of study might be, for example, a genre, style, musical device, idiom, musical process, period of time, cultural tradition or contextual influence

13. Music specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills from paragraph 7 through an in-depth study of two Areas of Study at AS level and a total of three Areas of Study at A level.

- At least one area of study must be drawn from music composed in the western classical tradition between 1700 and 1900
- At least one other area of study must be drawn from a contrasting Area of Music (this could be from the western classical tradition outside of 1700 – 1900, or from a different tradition within the years of 1700 – 1900 or from a different tradition and time period)

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14. AS and A level music specifications must offer a minimum choice of 4 Areas of Study and require students to place music studied within a wider context and chronology.

Assessment

15. Work submitted for the AS qualification cannot be submitted towards the A level qualification.

16. Within the performing assessment:

- students total performance time must either be as a soloist or as part of an ensemble, or as a combination of both
- a student performing as part of an ensemble must perform a significant individual part, which is not doubled, as a member of an ensemble, accompanied or unaccompanied. The ensemble must consist of two or more players. The student's part may be realised acoustically or by the use of music technology appropriate to the context
- AS level music assessments must require a total performance duration across all pieces of no less than 6 minutes
- A level music assessments must require a total performance duration, depending on the allocated weighting of Assessment Objective 1. The total performance duration across all pieces must be no less than 6 minutes (25% weighting), 8 minutes (30% weighting), or 10 minutes (35% weighting)

17. Within the Composing assessment:

- students must compose at least two pieces; three pieces if AO2 is set at 35% for A level, one of which must respond to an Awarding Organisation commission or brief
- AS level music assessments must require a total composition duration across all pieces of no less than 4½ minutes
- A level music assessments must require a total composition duration, depending on the allocated weighting of Assessment Objective 2. The total composition duration across all pieces must be no less than 4 minutes (25% weighting), 6 minutes (30% weighting), or 8 minutes (35% weighting)



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