



Department
for Education

Music

GCSE subject content

January 2015

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The content for music GCSEs

Introduction

1. GCSE subject content sets out the knowledge, understanding and skills common to all GCSE specifications in a given subject.
2. Together with the assessment objectives it provides the framework within which the awarding organisations create the detail of their specifications, so ensuring progression from Key Stage 3 national curriculum requirements and the possibilities for development into A level.
3. GCSE music specifications must support students in forming personal and meaningful relationships with music through the development of musical knowledge, understanding and skills including performing, composing and appraising. 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. GCSE music specifications must also support the development of musical fluency and provide access to further study of music at AS and A level.

Subject aims and learning outcomes

5. GCSE specifications in music must offer a broad and coherent course of study which encourages students to:

- engage actively in the process of music study
- develop performing skills individually and in groups to communicate musically with fluency and control of the resources used
- develop composing skills to organise musical ideas and make use of appropriate resources
- recognise links between the integrated activities of performing, composing and appraising and how this informs the development of music
- broaden musical experience and interests, develop imagination and foster creativity
- develop knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians
- develop awareness of a variety of instruments, styles and approaches to performing and composing
- develop awareness of music technologies and their use in the creation and presentation of music
- recognise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop some awareness of musical chronology
- develop as effective and independent learners with enquiring minds
- reflect upon and evaluate their own and others' music
- engage with and appreciate the diverse heritage of music, in order to promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development

Subject content

6. GCSE specifications in music must require students to develop and demonstrate their musicianship skills through performing, composing and appraising.

7. GCSE specifications in music must require students to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language listed below, and allow students, where appropriate, to apply these to their own work when performing and composing.

Musical elements

- organisation of pitch (melodically and harmonically) including simple chord progressions e.g. perfect and imperfect cadences, and basic melodic devices e.g. sequence
- tonality including major, minor and basic modulation e.g. tonic - dominant
- structure; organisation of musical material including simple structure e.g. verse and chorus, call and response, binary and theme and variations
- sonority including recognition of a range of instrumental and vocal timbres and articulation e.g. legato and staccato
- texture; how musical lines (parts) fit together including simple textural combinations e.g. unison, chordal and solo
- tempo, metre and rhythm including pulse, simple time, compound time, and basic rhythmic devices e.g. dotted rhythms
- dynamics; basic dynamic devices e.g. crescendo and diminuendo

Musical contexts

- the effect of purpose and intention (e.g. of the composer, performer, commissioner) on how music is created, developed and performed in different historical, social and cultural contexts
- the effect of audience, time and place (e.g. venue, occasion) on how music is created, developed and performed in different historical, social and cultural contexts

Musical language

- reading and writing of staff notation including treble-clef and bass-clef note names, rhythmic notation in simple time, key signatures to four sharps and four flats
- major and minor chords and associated chord symbols including traditional and contemporary notation as appropriate e.g. IV or G7

- recognising and accurately using appropriate musical vocabulary and terminology related to the Areas of Study e.g. slide, repeats and stepwise

8. GCSE specifications in music must require students to demonstrate the ability to:

Perform

- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to interpret and communicate musical ideas with technical control and expression. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: playing or singing music, improvising, or realising music using music technology
- perform music with control, making expressive use of phrasing and dynamics appropriate to the style and mood of the music

Compose

- make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create and develop musical ideas with technical control and coherence; freely as the composer chooses, and responding to a brief or commission supplied by others
- compose music that develops musical ideas, uses conventions, and explores the potential of musical structures and resources

Appraise

- analyse and evaluate music in aural and/or written form, using knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical contexts and musical language to make critical judgements about repertoire within the Areas of Study
- use knowledge and understanding of musical elements, musical contexts and musical language to analyse unfamiliar music (i.e. individual pieces of music that have not been stipulated within the specification)
- make critical judgements about music, using appropriate musical vocabulary
- formulate critical judgements, which will be achieved by attentive listening (rather than just hearing) and aural perception

9. GCSE specifications in music must require students to apply practically the knowledge and understanding in paragraph 7, including musical vocabulary and notation as appropriate to the context, through the skills of:

- performing
- composing
- appraising

Areas of Study

10. Areas of Study must provide an appropriate focus for students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills across a broad range of musical genres, styles and traditions. 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 when performing and composing.
11. An area of study might be, for example, a genre, style, musical device, idiom, musical process, period of time, cultural tradition or contextual influence.
12. GCSE music specifications must require students to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and skills from paragraph 5 through a minimum of four Areas of Study.
 - at least one area of study must be drawn from music composed in the Western Classical Tradition¹ with all or the majority being composed between 1650 and 1910
 - at least one other area of study must not be drawn from the Western Classical Tradition
13. GCSE music specifications must offer a minimum choice of four Areas of Study and require students to place music studied within a wider context and chronology.

¹ For the purposes of this subject content document “Western Classical Tradition” is defined as art Music of (or growing out of) the European tradition, normally notated, and normally intended for public performance



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Reference: DFE-00703-2014



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