

GCSE, AS and A Level Music: Decisions on Conditions and Guidance



In February 2015 we published a consultation about the rules and guidance we proposed to put in place for reformed GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications in music.

This consultation set out draft Subject Level Conditions and guidance that would apply to all reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in music.

We have reviewed the responses to the consultation and are now announcing our decisions. We are also publishing a more detailed analysis of the responses.¹

Weighting of non-exam assessment

Although this was not covered in this consultation, a number of respondents raised concerns that reformed qualifications in music focused too much on written examinations, and not enough on practical performance. Others felt that the balance between exam and non-exam assessment was appropriate.

These are issues that we have already considered, when making decisions following an earlier consultation. Respondents did not raise any new issues that cause us to revisit these earlier decisions. Our view remains that the balance between exam and non-exam assessment is appropriate given the expectations set out in the Department for Education's subject content.

GCSE music

Conditions

We proposed to require all reformed GCSEs in music to comply with:

- the subject content requirements published by the Department for Education,² and with our assessment objectives; and
- our requirements around assessments.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-as-and-a-level-reform-regulations-for-music

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-music

Respondents did not comment on these proposals.

We have reviewed our proposed Conditions following consultation and are satisfied that they are fit for purpose and consistent with our overall approach to reformed GCSEs. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposals.

Assessment requirements

We proposed to introduce the following requirements for non-exam assessment in reformed music GCSEs:

- Non-exam assessment will separately test performance and composition skills (weighted at 30 per cent of total marks each).
- Students must perform at least two pieces totalling at least 4 minutes – including one performance (of at least 1 minute) as part of an ensemble.
- Students must compose at least two pieces totalling 3 minutes – including one in response to a brief set by the exam board, and one piece to their own brief.
- For performance and composition assessments, schools must provide a recording of the piece for marking or moderation, as well as a score, lead sheet or written account (as appropriate).
- Non-exam assessment tasks may be marked by teachers (and moderated by the exam board), or marked by the exam board.

Respondents commented that our requirements around composition were unclear and could be read as conflicting with the subject content requirement for students to carry out free composition. We agree with this concern, and have amended our requirements to make clear that free composition is required.

Several respondents also commented that specifying minimum lengths of performance and composition pieces was unhelpful, as what matters is the difficulty of the piece. While we agree that length is only one aspect of the difficulty of a performance or composition, we do not think it is appropriate to permit performances or compositions of any length. We think our proposed minimum times are the best way to set clear and consistent expectations of students across specifications, and have chosen to confirm our consultation proposals.

Respondents also felt that it was important for us to provide clear guidance on the number of briefs that exam boards should set for the composition assessment. Our view is that this is a matter for exam boards to determine – balancing risks to predictability and comparability with the need to ensure that all students have a fair opportunity to complete the task. We think that this can be done in different ways –

using a greater number of narrower briefs, or a smaller number of broader briefs – and we do not want to rule out legitimate approaches.

Finally, respondents sought further clarity about the nature of recordings that would be required. Our view here is that video recording could be helpful in determining authenticity of work, but it is not the only possible approach and alternatives may be necessary if video recording is problematic for schools or students. We have therefore decided to retain our high-level requirement that exam boards ensure that schools provide ‘recordings’, but we have left it open to exam boards to determine the best approach for their qualifications.

We have also made changes to our requirements to clarify how different performance routes (including the use of music technology) should be assessed.

Guidance

We proposed to introduce guidance clarifying the interpretation of our assessment objectives.

Respondents made a number of comments on the wording of our guidance, and we have made some minor changes in response to clarify our expectations.

AS and A level music

Conditions

We proposed to require all reformed AS and A levels in music to comply with:

- the subject content requirements published by the Department for Education,³ and with our assessment objectives; and
- our requirements around assessments.

Respondents did not comment directly on these proposals.

We have reviewed our proposed Conditions following consultation and are satisfied that they are fit for purpose and consistent with our overall approach to reformed AS and A levels. We have therefore decided to confirm our proposed Conditions.

Assessment requirements

We proposed to introduce the following requirements for non-exam assessment in reformed music AS and A levels:

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-music

- Non-exam assessment will separately test performance and composition skills (weighted at 30 per cent of total marks each at AS, and between 25 and 35 per cent each at A level).
- For A level, students must perform for at least 6, 8 or 10 minutes (depending on the weighting of performance skills within the specification), and compose at least two (or three) pieces totalling at least 4, 6 or 8 minutes (number and duration depending on the weighting of composition skills within the specification).
- For AS, students must perform for at least 6 minutes, and compose at least two pieces totalling at least 4 minutes and 30 seconds.
- At both AS and A level, students must compose at least one piece in response to a brief set by the exam board, and at least one piece in response to their own brief.
- For performance and composition assessments, schools must provide a recording of the piece for marking or moderation, as well as a score, lead sheet or written account (as appropriate).
- Exam boards will mark all non-exam assessment tasks.

Respondents raised similar issues to those at GCSE:

- Our requirements around composition were unclear and could be read as conflicting with the subject content requirement for students to carry out free composition.
- Specifying minimum lengths of performance and composition pieces was unhelpful, as what matters is the difficulty of the piece.
- It was important for us to provide clear guidance on the number of briefs that exam boards should set for the composition assessment.
- It was not clear whether audio or video recordings would be needed.

We accept the comments around the wording for composition tasks. We have revised our requirements to make clear that in line with the subject content, students should be free to compose in response to a brief, carry out free composition, or both.

As at GCSE, we think that it is important (for consistency and comparability purposes) to have minimum performance and composition times. We also think that it is for exam boards (not us) to determine the appropriate number of compositions, and the appropriate approach to recording performances.

We have also made changes to our requirements to clarify how different performance routes (including the use of music technology) should be assessed.

Guidance

We proposed to introduce guidance clarifying the interpretation of our assessment objectives.

Respondents made a number of comments on the wording of our guidance, and we have made some minor changes in response to clarify our expectations.

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published the following documents which set out our final rules and guidance for reformed GCSEs, AS and A levels in music:

- *GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Music*⁴
- *GCSE Subject Level Guidance for Music*⁵
- *GCE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Music*⁶
- *GCE Subject Level Guidance for Music*.⁷

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-music

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-music

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-music

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-guidance-for-music