

January 2026 newsletter – Music

Happy New Year to all Music teachers and your students. I hope your Christmas/Winter festivities all went well, and that you return to school fully rested.

This newsletter is a quick round up and some key reminders for this term. Please note the two AS and A Level specification updates.

Key dates:

Deadline for entries – 21st February.
GCE Performing visits begin – 2nd March.
GCSE Performing and Composing sample submission deadline – 5th May.
GCE Composing submission deadline – 15th May.
AS exam – 13th May.
A Level exam – 8th June.
GCSE exam – 5th June.
GCE results day – 13th August.
GCSE results day – 20th August.

Contact us:

If you have any questions or you need any help or advice, please contact the Music team:

Subject Officer, Music – Rachel Edwards

Subject Support Officer, Music – Natalie Harvey

Subject Support Officer, GCE Music Routes – Romi Lawrence

Subject Adviser, Music and Drama – Elise Arnold

We all monitor the Music inbox and phone line. Music@eduqas.co.uk
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General news

We are in the process of collating a number of general FAQs together, to allow teachers to find the information they need more quickly. The first of these is for [Eduqas GCSE](#) and is available on the website.

We are still growing, and Eduqas is now the biggest provider of GCSE Music. If you are a new centre, welcome! If you need support or have questions, please get in touch with us – we are here to help.

Another addition to the website recently has been a [Post Results FAQ document](#). This explains the processes for querying a mark in an examined component, or the outcome of moderation.

Exemplar materials

There are new exemplars for all aspects of GCE and GCSE Music – performing, composing and appraising – available to download from WJEC Portal. These cover a range of marks and types of response. It is also worth remembering that the exemplar from previous years is still available.

CPD

Please see the website for details of our [CPD programme](#). Materials from previous events can be downloaded from WJEC Portal.

GCSE

We have updated the [teacher guide](#) on the website for 2026. This contains procedural information for performing, composing and appraising. Please share this with your exams officer too.

In readiness for the 2026 series it may be useful to remind yourself of the comments made in the 2025 [Principal Examiners' report](#) which is available on the website.

The use of IAMIS (via the Portal) for uploading your NEA samples for Components 1 and 2 was successful last year and this will continue into 2026 and beyond.

Performing

We get a number of requests for levels of difficulty of performance repertoire, and suitability of ensemble pieces. If you are unsure, please check the descriptors for the levels of difficulty in Appendix A of the specification first. If the piece you are considering is named on any graded syllabus, we will be happy to accept it at that standard – as long as it is performed in full, exactly as it would be in the graded exam (so, using the same edition.) This does not include “free choice” items, or unaccompanied folk songs. If you need to send us an enquiry, please make sure that you email a **score** as an attachment, not a link, and state whether it is for GCSE or A Level. The score must show clearly what the candidate intends to perform.

All requests for GCSE LoD checks are dealt with by our Principal Moderator for performing, and we will forward her replies to you when we have them. Please note that leaving your request until the start of May is likely to result in a delayed response as the team are already preparing for the summer series, which must be prioritised.

We do not provide a list of suitable pieces, because many of the queries we get are from teachers who have made their own arrangements, and simply providing a list of titles would be meaningless.

You will no doubt have GCSE performances underway and may have recorded your candidates already. With apologies for repeating this information, the requirements for each candidate are as follows:

- 1 ensemble piece lasting at least a minute.
- At least one other performance to take the total length of the submission to at least 4 minutes. These can be solo or ensemble. (Solos are not compulsory.)
- A score or leadsheet for **every** piece performed. “Guide recordings” are not accepted.
- A completed and **signed** mark sheet.

A few procedural things to remember too:

- All performances must be recorded in the year of assessment (usually Year 11.)
- You (the assessing teacher) **MUST** be **present** when all recordings are made.
- You **must not edit recordings** or add any effects.
- For an ensemble performance the performers must play **at the same time**, not individually to create a multitrack recording.
- When timing a performance, start when the candidate sings/plays their first note, and end when they finish their last note. Do **not** include any long periods when the candidate is silent.

- In an ensemble performance, if the candidate plays some solo sections in addition to the 1 minute of ensemble, these can be included as part of the overall 4 minute requirement, and the whole performance should be assessed. You can add a note on the marksheet to give the timing details. Note that a second performance will still be required.
- No announcements are required, but if you need them to help you identify recordings, please keep them as **short** as possible. These must not be included in the timing.
- The live part in a sequenced performance should be played “**out loud**” and an audio recording made, not played into the sequencer.
- Tab is perfectly acceptable as long as it contains rhythms as well as pitches, and performance directions.
- For music from cultures where notation is created in a different style, please include a “key” to symbols to enable the moderator to understand and credit accurately.
- Please annotate scores **before the performance** to show if the candidate **plans** to deviate from what is printed. Remember to include all performance directions. If none are printed, you may add them. You may also mark cuts, or add extra repeats, as long as these are clear on the score and they make musical sense. Be aware that cutting the more challenging parts of a piece is likely to reduce the level of difficulty.
- You will also need to complete the [timing sheet](#) giving details of the length of the performances of every candidate.

We have produced some additional information regarding GCSE performing. You can find the following on the website:

[Selecting repertoire for GCSE Music](#) – guidance regarding levels of difficulty and different repertoire.

[GCSE Music Performing Criteria Amplification](#) – guidance to assist teachers when using the criteria for assessment.

A [flowchart](#) for checking the suitability of ensemble pieces.

Please review these documents before emailing the music team for guidance.

Composing

The advice for composing is the same as in previous years. You may find it helpful to re-read the Principal's report, as there was a lot of useful information regarding the approach to the briefs, and the application of the assessment criteria.

Please note that candidates may choose to compose music for a film, but only the audio may be submitted for assessment, so it is vital that the composition is successful as a standalone piece of music. Refer to the criteria, and ensure that there is sufficient evidence of development, as well as appropriate repetition and contrast of material. An episodic piece which follows a film clip is less likely to be successful under the criteria.

If any brief specifies that candidates should compose a **song**, this means that there is an expectation that there will be a vocal line, with lyrics. The lyrics do not have to be original – they can be from another song, a poem, or created by AI. There are no marks for the words themselves, but of course the way the music reflects the meaning will be important. Please give details in the log, including the prompt given to the AI if used.

The composing briefs were released as normal on 1st September and can be downloaded from WJEC Portal. Please read these carefully with your candidates, and make sure they understand the requirements. They are very open and there will undoubtedly be a huge variety of responses, but it is important that the instructions are followed. Unless the brief mentions a specific style or genre, candidates can compose in any style of music, regardless of the area of study. For the free compositions it is essential that candidates write their own brief. Please do not just call it “free composition.” Part of the assessment concerns the response to the brief, so without a stated brief there is no evidence on which to award marks for this. Here is just a quick reminder of the requirements for each candidate:

- 2 compositions, one to a brief and one free
- 2 audio files (wav or mp3) – one for each composition
- 2 scores or equivalent – one for each composition
- 1 log and marksheet – signed by the teacher and the candidate.

Remember that for authentication purposes you are required to monitor the compositions on at least 3 occasions, but this should be more if necessary for you to be confident to sign the authenticity declaration. This declaration has been updated to include the use of AI. Candidates are not permitted to use Artificial Intelligence to create or enhance their compositions, although this does not include any lyrics, as already explained above.

If a candidate will be asking another person to perform any aspect of their composition, it is vital that it is made clear on the log how the performer knew exactly what to play. The easiest way to show this is via a score, but if the candidate records a guide track this can also be submitted as evidence of the authenticity. Please do not accept logs which just say, “I told them what to play/sing.”

We have produced some additional information regarding GCSE composing, which is available on the website:

[GCSE Music Composing Criteria Amplification](#) – guidance to assist teachers when using the criteria for assessment.

There is also a pre-recorded webinar which goes through the application of the [NEA criteria](#).

Appraising

There is no change planned for the set works on the current specification. Past papers, mark schemes and audio files are available to download from WJEC Portal.

GCE AS and A Level

The [teacher guide](#) on the website has been updated for 2026. It contains procedural information for performing, composing and appraising. Please share this with your exams officer too.

In readiness for the 2026 series it may be useful to remind yourself of the comments made in the [Principal Examiners' report](#) which is available on the website.

Performing

You should have submitted your “impossible dates” form in the Autumn. If you have not, please look in the September Circulars folder on WJEC Portal to find the information and link, and send us the information as soon as possible. You should hear from your performing examiner by around February half term to arrange your visit. They have been given your term dates and the impossible dates you specified, and they use this to construct their route. Please bear in mind that they are trying to construct a **viable** route and may plan to visit more than one centre in the area on the same day, so it will only be possible to rearrange if there is a genuine reason why you cannot accept the date offered.

Please refer to the specification to confirm what is required in terms of timings and numbers of pieces. For each candidate, please prepare the following in advance of the visit:

- A mark sheet with the school and candidate details completed, and the titles and composers of pieces, and the level of difficulty if known.
- A photocopy of the score of every piece to be performed, labelled with the centre and candidate details. The examiner will take these with them.

It is also very helpful to provide a running order for the day, and to deal with practical considerations such as parking, a suitable performing venue, and including time for the examiner to have a “comfort break” or lunch if it will be a full day’s visit etc. The examiners thoroughly enjoy their visits, and we appreciate the efforts of centres to make sure things run smoothly.

If there is a last-minute emergency, please contact your examiner directly by email and cc the music team so that we can make further arrangements if necessary. We do have contingency plans, so please make contact as soon as you are aware of any serious issues.

Specification update: We have had confirmation from regulators that we can remove the requirement to link a performance to an area of study. This will be officially confirmed via circular.

Composing

As with GCSE It would be very worthwhile to revisit the Principal Examiner’s report which contains a lot of useful information. The 2026 Composing briefs were released on 1st September and can be downloaded from WJEC Portal.

Please remember that the composition to a set brief **MUST** demonstrate an understanding of the Western Classical Tradition, which for this purpose is defined as Baroque, Classical and Romantic music. If a candidate composes an excellent piece but does not demonstrate aspects of the WCT they will not be able to access the higher mark bands, so this is absolutely vital. Every year we have a number of candidates who fail to observe this requirement and are subsequently disappointed with the marks awarded.

As with GCSE, some candidates enjoy composing for film, but the submission will only be of the audio, so the piece must meet the criteria for assessment (including development of ideas) if it is to be successful.

A brief to write a “song” means that there is an expectation there will be a vocal line, with lyrics. As with GCSE these can be original, come from another song or poem, or be AI generated, as there are no marks for the words, only for the way the music portrays the meaning. Please give details in the log, including the prompt given to the AI if used.

The requirements for each candidate are as follows:

AS, and A Level Option A:

- 2 compositions, one to a brief and one free
- 2 audio files (wav or mp3) – one for each composition
- 2 scores or equivalent - one for each composition
- 1 log which is signed by the teacher and candidate

A Level Option B:

- 3 compositions: one to a brief and two free, one of which must link to a different Area of Study.
- 3 audio files (wav or mp3) – one for each composition
- 3 scores or equivalent - one for each composition
- 1 log which is signed by the teacher and candidate

Just as with GCSE, for authentication purposes you are required to monitor the compositions on at least 3 occasions, but this should be more if necessary for you to be confident to sign the authenticity declaration. This has been updated to include the use of AI. Candidates are not permitted to use Artificial Intelligence to create or enhance their compositions, although this does not include any lyrics, as outlined above.

If a candidate will be asking another person to perform any aspect of their composition, it is vital that it is made clear on the log how the performer knew exactly what to play. The easiest way to show this is via a score, but if the candidate records a guide track this can also be submitted as evidence of the authenticity. Please do not accept logs which just say, “I told them what to play/sing.”

We have produced some additional information regarding GCE composing, which is available on the website:

Composing: Amplification of the Criteria of Assessment – this gives further details on how the examiner will use the criteria for assessment, so that you can advise your candidates and give them effective feedback.

Specification update: From 2026 we have been instructed by the regulators that we may not award full marks to a composition submission which does not meet the minimum time requirement (shown below.) The specification has been updated to confirm this. If a candidate is awarded full marks according to the criteria, the timing will be checked, and if this falls short of the minimum requirement, one mark will be deducted from the total. This information will be officially confirmed via circular.

AS and A Level Option A: 4-6 minutes

A Level Option B: 8-10 minutes

Appraising

You will be aware that there is a change to the set works for AS and A Level Music, but the first examination for these new pieces (at both levels) will not be until **Summer 2028**. There will be a suite of resources published to support the teaching of these new pieces. Details of the new works can be found on the [September newsletter](#).

Past papers, marking schemes and audio files can be downloaded from WJEC Portal.

[ISBN numbers for New Eduqas A level Music Set Works](#)

For first teaching in September 2026 and first examination in 2028

Area of Study	Set work	ISBN Number
A - WCT	Haydn, Symphony 100 "Military" (AS - movements 1 and 2, A Level - all movements.)	Eulenburg score of the symphony by Haydn (ISBN 3-7957-6511-0)
A - WCT	Schubert, Symphony 5 (AS - movements 1 and 2, A Level - all movements.)	Eulenburg score of the Symphony No. 5 by Schubert (ISBN 978-3-7957-6560-6)
E - Into the Twentieth Century	Trio for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano, Movement I: Poulenc (alternative movement from existing set work)	978-87598-0392-9
E - Into the Twentieth Century	Three Nocturnes, Number 2, Fetes: Debussy (alternative movement from existing set work)	978-3-7957-7181-2 This edition is now in the public domain: Nocturnes (Debussy, Claude) - _____ _____ IMSLP
F - Into the Twenty-First Century	Concerto Grosso, Movement 2 - Errollyn Wallen	979-0-060-12910-0
F - Into the Twenty-First Century	Frieze, Movement 4 - Mark-Anthony Turnage	978-1-78454-037-1

Questions?

Please get in touch if you need to ask any questions. We are here to help. Music@eduqas.co.uk