

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.

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 – 26th 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.

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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 will be available soon on the website.

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 unit, 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

Remember that centres in Wales should now have started teaching the new Made for Wales GCSE specification to Year 10 learners. The current Year 11 will be the final cohort to sit the legacy specification.

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. A new teacher guide for the Made for Wales specification will be available soon.

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 Units 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 legacy specification, or the Unit 1 Assessment Handbook for the Made for Wales 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 sitting the Legacy qualification 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 programme note for one of the pieces performed, linked to an Area of Study.
- A score or leadsheet for **every** piece performed. “Guide recordings” are not accepted.
- A completed and **signed** mark sheet.

The requirements for the new Made for Wales GCSE are slightly different. These can be found in the [Unit 1 Assessment Handbook](#), which also contains the assessment criteria.

A few procedural things to remember too:

- All performances for the legacy GCSE specification must be recorded in the year of assessment (Usually Year 11.) Under the Made for Wales specifications recordings can be made at any point during the course.
- 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.
- For the legacy specification: 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.
- For the legacy qualification, the live part in a sequenced performance should be played “**out loud**” and an audio recording made, not played into the sequencer. For technology performances for the Made for Wales specification please see the Assessment Handbook.
- 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 accuracy.
- 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 for the legacy specification. 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 entering the legacy specification:

- 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 evaluation of the composition to a set brief
- 1 log and marksheet – signed by the teacher and the candidate.

You can find details of the requirements for the Made for Wales specification in the [Unit 2 Assessment Handbook](#). The briefs for this specification are released at the start of Year 10, so these are already available on the Portal, for submission in 2027.

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 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 for the legacy GCSE, 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 legacy specification. Past papers, mark schemes and audio files are available to download from WJEC Portal. The legacy Unit 3 will be examined for the final time in Summer 2026.

For the Made for Wales specification there is a [Sample Unit 3](#) examination available on the website.

Please note that from Summer 2027 the Unit 3 assessment will be an on-screen examination. Centres will need to ensure that they have the required equipment to facilitate this (laptops and headphones for each candidate.) WJEC will not be supplying equipment.

For Braille readers, the examination will be available as a hard copy Braille document to be used with the practical assistant, and applications for this should be made as normal by the examinations officer. The on-screen assessment will allow visually impaired candidates to zoom in on the text to enlarge it to an appropriate size. The text will automatically “re-flow” to avoid the need for scrolling left and right.

There is a suite of [resources](#) available to support the teaching of the new set works. Please note that centres will need to obtain scores for study of their choice of piece from List A:

Palladio – score available to purchase from Boosey and Hawkes, approx. £10

Elizabeth Remembered – score free to download from Debbie Wiseman’s website

Concerto for Two Trumpets – score free to download from IMSLP.

For the pieces on List B there are leadsheets available as part of the “blended learning” resources.

In addition, there are class performance packs for all of the set works available to download from Portal. Please note that these are NOT the same as study scores as they have been adapted for use for performances with your candidates.

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.

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.

Appraising

You will be aware that there is a change to the set works for AS and A Level Music. Please see the table below for a reminder. Please note that any candidates re-sitting Unit 3 in Summer 2026 will have to study the new set works.

Area of Study	New set work	Date of first examination
AS Music AoS A: The Symphony	Haydn: Symphony 103 (Drum Roll) Movements 3 and 4	Summer 2026
A Level Music AoS A: The Symphony	Brahms: Symphony 1 Movement 1	Summer 2027
AS Music AoS A: Religious Choral Music	Mozart: Requiem – Recordare, Confutatis, Lacrimosa, Domine Jesu.	Summer 2026
A Level Music AoS A: Religious Choral Music	Verdi: Requiem – Ingemisco, Confutatis, Lacrymosa, Domine Jesu Christe, Sanctus	Summer 2027
AoS F Strand 1: Impressionism	Lili Boulanger: Pour Les Funerailles d'un Soldat	Summer 2027
AoS F Strand 2: Chamber Music in Wales	Ben Henegan: Summer to Autumn	Summer 2027

There are new [resources](#) available to support the teaching of these new pieces. Past papers, marking schemes and audio files can be downloaded from WJEC Portal.

Questions?

Please get in touch if you need to ask any questions. We are here to help.

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