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by Anna Gower

The two documents referred to throughout this section are:

- Music programmes of study: key stage 3 national curriculum in England (DfE)
- GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Music March 2015 (Ofqual)

INTRODUCTION

The KS3 programme of study is an age-related phase of learning that most commonly happens at the start of secondary or high school education in England. The GCSE is a stand-alone qualification governed by a framework laid out by Ofqual that has been used by examination boards to develop their own specifications and assessments against defined learning objectives.

Although free schools and academies have been released from their obligation to adhere to the KS3 programme of study, it does nevertheless provide a useful starting point in suggesting what students might be expected to do and to learn in music at KS3, where teachers are given the freedom to build their own content, approach and assessment to create their KS3 curriculum.

Within each unit or scheme of work comes the opportunity to design learning objectives that broadly map to the statements from the programme of study. However, with the relaxing of the direction and prescription about how and what is taught at KS3, and no centrally driven banks of exemplar work or professional development for teachers looking to develop this stage, the gap between the freedom allowed at KS3 and the prescription required for a nationally accredited qualification at KS4 continues to widen.

One of the challenges facing teachers when they look to develop their curriculum content and approach at KS3 is the fact that the programme of study is simply a loose two-page statement that reads more like a set of aims and values than prescriptive learning outcomes, or specific content with an assessment framework.

While this system allows a degree of freedom and flexibility for teachers at KS3 to design their own responses, the GCSE necessarily becomes far more prescriptive.

With the GCSE comes an extra layer by way of examination boards, who design the content and assessment around the Ofqual framework. This then becomes the basis for teachers to design their own curriculum and approach to deliver the content across the duration of their GCSE teaching.

With the introduction of new specifications have also come increased opportunities for teachers to make choices over how and which content is taught within the parameters of broad areas of study that specify designated musical 'areas of study'.

Within these areas, the study of identified musical styles, genres and set works can be organised, and the understanding of specific key musical elements, concepts and language can be measured through performing, composing and appraising. There is no such structure written into the KS3 programme of study.

Therefore, the leap between the two can sometimes cause teachers to question whether their curriculum and approach at KS3 effectively prepares students for the qualification they will take should they opt to study music further.

Challenges

As a result of the jump from the freedom and flexibility at KS3 to a far more prescribed and fixed approach at GCSE, there's a mixture of responses seen across music education forums and discussions that pose questions and also offer a rationale for taking another look at what it means to use KS3 to prepare students for GCSE and beyond. Throw in the challenges of a three-year KS4, music on a carousel with other arts subjects, cuts to curriculum time for music, inconsistency over what students may experience in music at

primary school, and huge accountability pressures on results from exam courses beyond KS4, and it's easy to understand why KS3 often sinks to the bottom of the list of priorities.

However these issues may also become an opportunity to challenge some of the entrenched approaches to music at KS3. For example:

- Does the model of the six-week scheme of work still hold relevance when taking a closer look at the more holistic requirements of students when they come to GCSE level?
- Are students given the opportunity in this model to build on what they have learnt or simply repeat the activity through a different genre of music?
- Has enough thought gone into how, what and why topics are selected from the thousands of years of music that we have the opportunity to introduce to students in the classroom?
- Can the basic building blocks of the GCSE music subject requirements actually provide a means of challenging the norm at KS3, and of opening new ways to join up that pathway from KS3 to GCSE more effectively, and in ways that are of benefit to all students whether they opt to take the GCSE or not?

Furthermore, there are potential pitfalls for music education in general if the gap between KS3 and GCSE widens further:

- A diversifying of pathways for students through KS3 and beyond. Taking into account other qualifications that are available at that level, are we reducing students to following one pathway or another, and if so, what is this based on? Are vocational and academic music pathways different, and can only certain students access one above another based on their prior musical experiences, which often happen outside the classroom? How can KS3 make the opportunity for more students to access the GCSE pathway more even than perhaps exists at present?
- KS3 becomes irrelevant as there is a lack of consistency in approach between KS3 and GCSE teaching due to the content, so teaching should effectively 'start again' at GCSE. An example of this might be that students work in small groups to compose or perform at KS3, whereas for GCSE this has to be done individually. Or that there are no desks in the classroom for KS3 lessons, but they are used for GCSE lessons to reflect the need to write and keep notes. Are there ways to maintain consistency in order to build on what has happened at KS3 rather than have to effectively start again from scratch?
- The need to pin some kind of minimum standard in order to opt to take music GCSE is an accessibility issue due to the fact that all but one exam board have chosen to use the graded music exams as their benchmarks for levels of difficulty for performing. However, students who haven't learnt to play their instrument formally may not be able to pin a standard to their playing. How might changing the approach to performing at KS3 help to address this? Is it really possible to take GCSE without having instrumental lessons outside the classroom, and how can what happens at KS3 look to address this potential issue of music becoming the preserve of those who can afford to pay for it?
- KS3 content becomes driven by the need to learn music theory as preparation for KS4, so that students are ready to cover the required GCSE content even if most won't opt to take it.

A common response to the introduction of prescribed content and the requirement for students to attain a certain level of musical skills, to amass some knowledge about music, to understand musical concepts and conventions and apply this to their own musical outcomes is to design a KS3 curriculum around the GCSE specification content of whichever exam board is used at the school.

This can mean a shift at KS3 to an emphasis on music theory, the reading and use of staff notation, studying some set works before the course, introducing exam-style questions, or chunking the KS3 curriculum into the defined GCSE outcomes of performing, composing, listening and evaluating as separate topics which are then assessed using GCSE criteria.

However, choosing to focus on specification content also runs the risk of disengaging students by becoming too prescriptive and narrow too quickly. With GCSE entries for music declining, the question is often asked about the purpose of KS3 music for those who won't continue to access music through a GCSE (although they may do so through other pathways).

This article aims to take a more holistic view of KS3 and KS4 music, with the aim of identifying and articulating commonalities in aims, values, content and musical learning that are embedded into both. There is no intention to make any judgement about how teachers choose to deliver their chosen content, but instead an emphasis on thinking about how preparation for GCSE could become a relevant, engaging enjoyable experience for all students through the design and choice of content of the KS3 curriculum.

In order to ensure that this process starts with the end goals in mind, this article will look at how KS3 might best prepare students to meet the four GCSE assessment objectives that judge how well they:

- perform with technical control, expression and interpretation.
- compose and develop musical ideas with technical control and coherence.
- demonstrate and apply musical knowledge.
- use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music.

At the end of each section is a checklist to allow teachers to look at whether students have the opportunity embedded into the KS3 experience to demonstrate and then develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of music in order to prepare them for the requirements of GCSE music as outlined in the Ofqual framework.

IDENTIFYING AIMS AND VALUES

The KS3 programme of study and the Ofqual GCSE Conditions and Requirements both outline some key aims, which are captured in the table below.

KS3	GCSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage and inspire pupils to develop a love of music and their talent as musicians. • Increase their self-confidence, creativity and sense of achievement. • Develop a critical engagement with music, allowing them to compose, and to listen with discrimination to the best in the musical canon. <p>Students will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • performing • listening • reviewing • evaluating • understanding • exploring • singing and using their voices • creating and composing music on their own and with others • having the opportunity to learn a musical instrument • using technology appropriately • having the opportunity to progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form personal and meaningful relationships with music through the development of musical knowledge, understanding and skills. • Perform, compose and appraise. • 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. • Reflect on how music is used in the expression of personal and collective identities. • Develop musical fluency. • Ensure access to further study of music at AS and A level.

Values and aims checklist

The common themes between the two documents (taking out any reference to content) could be summarised like this:

VALUES STATEMENT

- Music is meaningful, engaging, inspiring and personal.
- Engaging with music should increase self-confidence, creativity and a sense of achievement.

WHAT STUDENTS WILL DO

- Perform, compose, listen and appraise/evaluate/reflect.
- Play, sing, and use relevant technology and relevant notations.
- Encounter a wide range of musical styles and genres.

WHAT STUDENTS WILL LEARN

- Skills (fluency, expression, technical control).
- Knowledge about music (elements, structures, devices, contexts, cultures).
- Understanding of musical concepts.
- How to apply skills/knowledge/understanding.
- How to engage critically and creatively with music.

Progression

There is a clear pathway from KS3 to GCSE to A level (or equivalent).

1. Work through these lists and identify the statements that you feel are the most useful in your teaching context. You may want to add, remove or edit the elements to pull them in line with the values that underpin your department.
2. Pull the elements into a checklist, and then apply them to a current KS3 unit or scheme of work. Has the opportunity for students to engage with them been planned into that unit? If not, how might you introduce them the next time you teach that part of the curriculum?

The documents go on to provide more detail that can be used as a checklist when planning units of schemes of work for KS3 or GCSE:

KS3	GCSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Play/sing and perform confidently, musically, fluently and with accuracy and expression.■ Improvise and compose.■ Extend and develop musical ideas.■ Use a range of musical structures, styles, genres and traditions.■ Use staff and other relevant notations appropriately and accurately.■ Identify and use the interrelated dimensions of music expressively and with increasing sophistication.■ Include use of tonalities, different types of scales and other musical devices.■ Listen with increasing discrimination to a wide range of music from great composers and musicians.■ Develop a deepening understanding of the music that they perform and to which they listen, and its history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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.

GCSE ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 1: PERFORM WITH TECHNICAL CONTROL, EXPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION

Music is unique in that it has an almost gold-standard assessment backbone embedded in it: graded music exams. Most people who teach music have some experience of this system, and a basic understanding of the rough standards of each grade from 1 to 8.

So it makes sense that this widely understood system has been used in three out of four of the GCSE exam specifications to benchmark the instrumental performing standards required at the end of the GCSE course (with performances to be recorded in the year of assessment).

However, this is part of the reason that many students on GCSE courses are encouraged to complete their performances outside the classroom, working within an instrumental teaching system that has the graded music exams so firmly embedded into that culture of learning. This approach doesn't translate well from a one-to-one or small-group lesson to a whole-class activity, yet it's difficult to avoid the appeal of utilising additional time and capacity outside lessons to get 30% of the course done and dusted!

But what of the rest? What of those students without access to instrumental lessons, or who learn instruments in ways that may not conveniently fit into the constraints of the graded exams? And what are the implications for KS3 as preparation for performing at GCSE level for those students?

The Ofqual framework prescribes that performances may be playing, singing, improvising or music technology. The length and type of performances that can be submitted are specified, along with the necessity to provide a score or lead sheet and the percentage of marks that can be awarded for that unit. However, decisions regarding the levels of difficulty for performing are left to each board to decide. Whether a student plays, sings, improvises or uses music tech, the standards chosen by the boards must be consistent.

This has resulted in additional support being provided in how to benchmark outside the remit of the graded instrumental exam provision – for example DJing, beatboxing or sequencing, which are helpful with assessment at KS3 where these may be more widely used by students who don't have access to the more traditional instruments covered by graded music exams.

This table shows how the different exam boards have chosen to implement difficulty levels into their assessments schemes for performance:

Edexcel	AQA	Edquas	OCR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to grade 3: less difficult Grade 4: standard Grade 5 and above: more difficult 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grade 5 and above: 6 marks Grade 4: 5 marks Grade 3: 4 marks Grade 2: 3 marks Grade 1: 2 marks Below grade 1: 1 mark 	Grade 3 is given as a benchmark for standard level, and pieces are marked as above or below standard.	Not mapped to grades. Descriptors are provided for teachers to make judgements and award from six additional marks accordingly.
A scaling mark scheme that encompasses the difficulty levels is provided.	Up to six additional marks are added with these equated to instrumental grades.	A scaling mark scheme that encompasses the difficulty levels is provided.	

Place on pathway	Time to get to this point	Standard required
End of GCSE course	2 or 3 years	Approx instrumental grade 3-4.
End of KS3	2 or 3 years	A grade 1-2 standard would seem to be a good starting point, on which to spend 2 years working toward grade 3.
Start of KS3	Baseline	What are the basic <i>musical</i> (not instrumental) skills needed to start to develop as a performer?

Despite different language and wording between boards, the assessment of performing at GCSE provides a useful checklist for KS3.

KS3 performing checklist

- Do your students have the opportunity to demonstrate and have feedback on the following when they perform?
 - Technical control of an instrument
 - Expression
 - Communication
 - Understanding of the style and mood of the music
- How can you ensure that there is a pathway embedded into KS3 for performing for students who don't have their own instrument or an opportunity to practise or learn outside the classroom?
 - Where are your students starting from?
 - How do you know?
 - How can you effectively build instrumental skills to a level on which to build in the requirements for AO1?
 - Can technology and access to online music platforms help to support out-of-hours learning?
 - In the context of your school/departments, the time you have at KS3, the prior experiences of your students and the resources available, what might this end of KS3 level be, and how might you ensure that all students can work towards it?
- Is it possible to prepare students to be ready to embark on the GCSE performing component only through your classroom teaching at KS3?
 - What are the implications for accessibility for all students to GCSE?
 - Do you have an alternative pathway available for those for whom GCSE music may not be the best route?

GCSE ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE 2: COMPOSE AND DEVELOP MUSICAL IDEAS WITH TECHNICAL CONTROL AND COHERENCE

Although it's possible to consider performance a stand-alone musical activity, one that's wrapped in tried and tested practices and outcomes, and one with its own convenient assessment system as well (even though this may not be the most desirable outcome at KS3 or KS4), the remaining GCSE assessment objectives share some common themes.

AO2 assesses students on how they:

- create and develop musical ideas (respond to a brief).
- use musical elements, structures, resources and conventions to do this.
- do this with appropriate awareness of styles and contexts.
- record their intentions.

In order to do this successfully, students need the following:

- Musical skills/tools.
- Knowledge about music.
- Understanding of how music works.

Their compositions should demonstrate how they then *apply* musical skills, knowledge and understanding in the outcome they produce. How these are taught would most likely be through the areas of study, and in preparation for the listening exam.

At this point, the overlaps with the requirements of AO3 (demonstrate and apply musical knowledge) and AO4 (use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music) and the outline of the required subject knowledge as required by Ofqual provide a useful checklist for a KS3 unit of work.

At GCSE students need to be able to	At KS3 we can provide them with	Do KS3 units allow them to explore these things?
Create and develop musical ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills/tools • Understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The elements of music • Musical vocabulary • Musical language • Musical contexts • Purpose and intention • Social and historical contexts
Use musical elements, structures, resources, conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills/tools • Knowledge • Understanding 	
Show an awareness of style and context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge 	
Record their intentions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding 	

A note about musical language

Under the heading 'musical language', Ofqual specifies the requirement for:

- 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, eg IV or G7.

For some teachers, this has resulted in introducing a chunk of theory and notation at KS3 in order for students to be able to engage with these concepts at KS4. However, an analysis of sample papers from all exam boards reveals that the questions that relate directly (through rhythmic or melodic dictation) to content from graded theory exams are allocated very few marks.

Edexcel	AQA	Edquas	OCR
6 marks	6 marks	5 marks	7 marks

There is, however, a requirement to be able to follow a score, to recognise and identify musical things that are happening, and to mark these in the right place on the score.

The implication is that it is possible to teach these things in a musical context, for example by introducing relevant notations at KS3 rather than teaching the note names on a staff, or by using musical vocabulary when giving feedback to a group, or in a whole-class workshop at KS3 rather than providing lists of key words and definitions to be learned. There's a difference in design between music theory in context in a GCSE exam and a graded music theory exam, yet some students are being required to study graded theory at KS3 in preparation for GCSE.

AREAS OF STUDY

The specific content of the GCSE music specifications grew from some very simple guidance from Ofqual. There must be four or more 'areas of study', with at least one area of study drawn from music composed in the Western classical tradition, with all or the majority being composed between 1650 and 1910, and at least one other area of study must not be drawn from the Western classical tradition.

Some exam boards responded by producing a list of set works, with questions to be related specifically to pieces of music or from other music related to them.

With quite a chunk of content from the areas of study to be covered at GCSE level, KS3 could be a good opportunity to start to introduce some of those broader areas, so that when they are looked at in more depth at GCSE. they're not completely unfamiliar to students – keeping in mind a need to retain depth and breadth of study at KS3.

With such freedom over what's studied at KS3, and thousands of years of musical styles, genres and pieces to choose from, it can become a bit of a pick and mix of content at KS3. However, working through all of the GCSE areas of study across the exam boards, it's possible to identify some that are common to all or most that might help in identifying some areas of study that might be useful at KS3 as well.

These are:

- Music from Baroque, Classical and Romantic periods.
- Film music (including computer games).
- Popular music (including jazz and blues).
- Fusions.
- Folk and world music.
- Musical theatre.

KS3 CHECKLIST

The following is designed to be a series of discussion or thinking points as you consider KS3 as preparation for GCSE. With limited time at KS3 that for some students may be their only experience of music, what teaching strategies might help to make the most of that precious musical learning time?

Checklist	Red/Amber/Green	What opportunities are there to do this?
Do students have the opportunity to perform, compose and appraise in every unit?		
Do students have the opportunity to play, sing, improvise and/or use music tech at KS3?		
Do students have the opportunity to become familiar with and use musical vocabulary in context?		
Do students experience music aurally as well as through relevant notations?		
Do students have the time in each unit to learn about the social and historical context of music?		
Are students able to give a personal response to the music? How?		
Are students encouraged to give critical responses about music that they hear, play and create? How?		
Do students have an opportunity to communicate an understanding of the style and mood of the music? How?		
Do students understand the elements of music in context in all units?		
Is there an opportunity to communicate the purpose and intentions of music they are playing or hearing?		
Do students record their work?		
Do students have the opportunity to develop their musical ideas?		
Do they use know about and use basic musical conventions, structures and resources?		
Can students analyse and evaluate music?		
Do students take part in attentive listening?		
Does each activity build on the activity before, leading to a defined learning objective at the end?		

Suggested teaching strategies for KS3

- Always give tasks a context. For example, providing a backing track to play along to helps students to assimilate characteristics of a musical style and create a more meaningful musical experience than playing from a worksheet.
- Use out-of-hours learning time to encourage students to explore the social and historical contexts of music. Encourage them to listen to relevant music at home via YouTube or a Spotify playlist.
- Target your questions and feedback, and model by playing as you facilitate group work to draw out critical responses and model musical outcomes.
- Use as much musical vocabulary in context as possible.
- Identify core musical skills such as listening and copying, counting, keeping a pulse and following a score, and use whole-class warm-ups and ice-breakers to help embed these at the start of lessons.