



# Subject Benchmark Statement

Music

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## About this Statement

This QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Music defines what can be expected of a graduate in terms of what they might know, do and understand at the end of their studies. Subject Benchmark Statements are an established part of the quality assurance arrangements in UK higher education, but not a regulatory requirement. They are sector-owned reference points, developed and written by academics. Subject Benchmark Statements also describe the nature and characteristics of awards in a particular discipline or area. Subject Benchmark Statements are published in QAA's capacity as an expert quality body on behalf of the higher education sector. A summary of the Statement is also available on the QAA website.

Key changes from the previous Subject Benchmark Statement include:

- a revised structure for the Statement, which includes the introduction of cross-cutting themes of:
  - equity, diversity, and inclusion
  - accessibility and the needs of students with disabilities
  - education for sustainable development
  - employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise education
  - generative artificial intelligence
- a comprehensive review updating the context and purposes section, including guidance on programme design and content, in order to inform and underpin the revised benchmark standards.

## How can I use this document?

Subject Benchmark Statements are not intended to prescribe any particular approaches to teaching, learning or assessment. Rather, they provide a framework, agreed by the subject community, that forms the basis on which those responsible for curriculum design, approval and updating can reflect upon a programme, and its component modules. This allows for flexibility and innovation in programme design while providing a broadly accepted external reference point for that discipline.

They may also be used as a reference point by external examiners when considering whether the design of a programme and the threshold standards of achievement are comparable with those of other higher education providers. Furthermore, Statements can support professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with their definitions and interpretations of academic standards.

You may want to read this document if you are:

- involved in the design, delivery and review of courses in Music
- a prospective student thinking about undertaking a course in Music
- an employer, to find out about the knowledge and skills generally expected of Music graduates.

## Relationship to legislation

The responsibility for academic standards lies with the higher education provider which awards the degree. Higher education providers are responsible for meeting the requirements of legislation and any other regulatory requirements placed upon them by their relevant

funding and regulatory bodies. This Statement does not interpret legislation, nor does it incorporate statutory or regulatory requirements.

The status of the Statement will differ depending on the educational jurisdictions of the UK. In England, Subject Benchmark Statements are not [sector-recognised standards](#) as set out under the Office for Students' [regulatory framework](#). However, Subject Benchmark Statements are part of the current quality arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Because the Statement describes outcomes and attributes expected at the threshold standard of achievement in a UK-wide context, many higher education providers will use them as an enhancement tool for course design and approval, and for subsequent monitoring and review, in addition to helping demonstrate the security of academic standards.

## **Additional sector reference points**

Higher education providers are likely to consider other reference points in addition to this Statement when designing, delivering and reviewing courses. These may include requirements set out by PSRBs and industry or employer expectations. In 2024, QAA published an update to the [Quality Code](#), which will be helpful when using this Statement.

Explanations of unfamiliar terms used in this Subject Benchmark Statement can be found in [QAA's Glossary](#). Sources of information about other requirements and examples of guidance and good practice are signposted within the Statement where appropriate.

# 1 Context and purposes of a Music degree

1.1 The study of Music in higher education is an extremely rich field of endeavour, providing students with opportunities to engage in a broad spectrum of intellectual and creative activity, enabling them to develop a wide range of specialised and generic skills, and preparing them for a diverse array of careers, both within Music and beyond it. Music graduates have skills and knowledge of great value to society. They are agents of social cohesion, cultural understanding, artistic expression, and individual and collective well-being.

## Purposes and characteristics of a Music degree

1.2 Music degrees take many different forms, and vary considerably in content, methodology and approach. Key elements of a Music degree are set out in paragraph 2.2 below.

1.3 The study of Music in higher education is constantly changing in response to the needs and interests of students, employers and the world at large.

1.4 The diversity of the discipline reflects the cultural diversity of society. Music degrees may focus on one tradition or may be more plural in content, recognising the cultural significance of each tradition to different groups of people.

1.5 The various branches of Music can be studied independently or in combination; Music may furthermore be studied productively alongside other disciplines. Music degrees may be arts or science-based; they may intersect and converge with other subjects, including the humanities, business and management, engineering, physics, psychology, medical studies, education, and other creative and performing arts.

1.6 Within the wider landscape of higher education, the study of Music has distinctive elements. These include practice, creative invention, the development of sensory skills, collaborative working, and subject-specific literacies such as musical notation and specialist programming. These require specialised resourcing, including space, instruments, technology, collections and staff practitioners.

1.7 Music degrees are offered by a range of providers, including specialist providers such as conservatoires and other institutions, each of which offers a distinctive educational experience, with its own mission and focus contributing to the diversity of the sector.

1.8 Music degrees draw together learners with a range of profiles, including those with backgrounds in formal academic study, those with vocational experience, and autodidactic learners.

1.9 Music graduates work in many fields. Many are employed in roles specific to Music and/or the wider cultural sector. Some bring their knowledge and skills to bear in other professional environments such as broadcasting and healthcare. Many work in education, either independently, in institutions, or in other organisations (such as regional music services). The skills acquired from the study of Music are transferable to other sectors, with creative skills being particularly sought after by employers. Music graduates are frequently self-employed, and often have portfolio careers across a range of musical activity.

1.10 This Subject Benchmark Statement is relevant to all kinds of undergraduate and taught postgraduate degrees in Music, including broad-ranging Music degrees, cognate degrees such as Sound Studies and Music Production, degrees that intersect closely with other fields, such as Music Therapy and Musical Theatre, and specialised degrees within Music such as Ethnomusicology and Music Performance.

1.11 This Statement frequently includes examples for explanatory purposes. Given the breadth of Music as a field of study, these are not exhaustive.

## **Equity, diversity and inclusion**

1.12 The UK higher education sector offers a wide range of Music courses which focus on different aspects of the discipline (creative, re-creative, technical and contextual), and which utilise a variety of pedagogical approaches. Initiatives to make curricula and learning experiences more inclusive in Music studies have a significant presence. In acknowledging that all human social groups include music-making as part of their cultures, methods of learning and teaching in higher education Music communities increasingly seek to critique privilege and associated discourses.

1.13 Many programmes recognise and acknowledge problems in inherited scholarship and modes of teaching, and the limitations of standard course materials. Consequently, studying Music in inclusive ways shapes provision in the interests of equality of opportunities. This may include global, decolonial, disability-centred and gender-focused perspectives. As a site for exploring individual and community identities, music practice provides a safe space for otherwise marginalised or persecuted communities.

1.14 Admission to Music programmes and the wider industry can be shaped by gate-keeping practices. These are being questioned and critiqued in the context of structural inequalities relating to protected (and unprotected) characteristics, including those of race/ethnicity, sexuality, gender identity and socioeconomic background. For applicants to Music programmes, inequalities are manifested especially in different levels of access to key resources (appropriate instruments, digital technologies, recordings, printed music, and so on) and education (including specialised instrumental or vocal tuition). Best practice in this area encompasses transparent and explicit admissions criteria and the ongoing reflective critique of these.

1.15 Programmes in Music offer students optionality and creative freedom in self-directed compositional, performance-based, technological and verbal and non-verbal project work. Self and peer evaluation of choices and outcomes from creative engagements are often built into the assessment of such student-directed learning. In response to this context, students may explore, celebrate, amplify and grow their identities in and through Music, often supported through peer-to-peer learning and the sharing of different lived experiences. The participatory nature of Music studies invites inclusion via making (including composition/songwriting and performance) as well as receiving (including reflective listening and writing).

1.16 Musicology engages with all musical cultures through a range of methods, including those of ethnomusicology. Opportunities to engage with Music produced globally are increasingly foregrounded as the wider world of the music industry becomes more inclusive and listening contexts more international. Group performance work is collaborative in its very nature, but musical leadership is also a key skill for musical directors and producers. Some programmes encourage students to uncover material to work with what has been overlooked, disregarded or not yet addressed, and this trend is reinforced by recent changes in musicological scholarship.

1.17 Historical and historiographical approaches to Music studies offer tools to reinterpret repertoires in performance, and to reconsider their use as compositional models. This aspect of the Music curriculum in higher education is being diversified through decolonisation projects and through enquiry into marginalised voices and participations. Music scholarship embedded in learning experiences increasingly engages directly with issues of cultural politics. Many programmes of study are committed to challenging and redressing the

inequalities of opportunity and representation along lines of gender and sexuality, as well as race, class, age and capacity, that can remain present in music institutions, scenes and contexts for the production and consumption of music worldwide.

## Accessibility and the needs of disabled students

1.18 All Music courses have a responsibility to consider the needs of students with disabilities under the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and take proactive steps to ensure disabled students do not experience direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation. Disabilities particularly pertinent to the study of Music might include physical impairments (including repetitive strain injuries), sensory conditions (particularly visual and hearing impairments and D/deafness), mental health conditions (including debilitating performance anxiety), neurodiversity (including dyslexia and autism), long-term medical conditions (including myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS) and epilepsy), and specific learning difficulties. Access to degrees for all students is proactively and flexibly considered, including processes of recruitment and selection. Music course teams also ensure that all students are able to access performance spaces and facilities, teaching rooms, studios and audiovisual equipment.

1.19 Providers arrange for specialist support and provision for disabled students, including assistance with accessing additional financial support. Inclusive and individual reasonable adjustments are considered in the process of curriculum design and may include, for instance:

- examination adjustments, such as papers in suitable formats, and the use of assistive technology or extra time
- access to campus-based computers with assistive technology, including magnification and screen-reading software, and other assistive equipment, such as handheld magnifiers
- the use of audio recording devices to enable students to record lectures
- the provision of teaching materials in appropriate formats or enabling them to be accessed with assistive technologies, and the provision of reading lists in advance to allow students preparation time
- assistance liaising with library services to access alternative format books and journals (alternative formats could include electronic, audio, large print and braille)
- additional study skills support where necessary.

1.20 Music course teams ensure that curricula, pedagogy, assessment design and practical elements of courses are designed to be accessible and flexible. Course teams use inclusive design where possible to build flexibility into teaching and assessment, offering appropriate and diverse options for all students. In addition, individual reasonable adjustments are put in place to ensure all students with disabilities can engage fully in their learning and be given a fair chance to succeed. Course teams liaise with specialist institutional services to organise access to appropriate support.

1.21 Music course teams also consider elements of the student experience that may be closely connected with subject study, and ensure that all disabled students are able to access activities that are an expected part of their studies. In addition to those given immediately above, examples specific to Music include: practical instrumental and vocal lessons; participation in masterclasses and performance seminars; participation in ensembles and group work (especially where the activity is credit-bearing and includes non-Music students); industry or work experience placements; and study abroad. Course teams

have alternatives in place, particularly for performance and other group activities, that might be affected by either mental or physical health requirements.

1.22 When designing learning activities, course teams consider students whose personal circumstances or learning needs dictate that they cannot always participate fully in synchronous teaching events. Inclusive alternatives may include online or remote provision. Music course teams ensure that both synchronous and asynchronous teaching materials, learning platforms and other virtual spaces, such as virtual learning environments (VLEs), are made accessible to all students, and that music examples are accessible in visual and audio format, with captioning.

## Education for sustainable development

1.23 Matters of sustainability and sustainable development are integral to understanding the impacts and wider value of Music as a human activity, social resource and object of consumption. [Education for Sustainable Development \(ESD\)](#) adopts a holistic approach to interrelated questions of climate change, social justice and global inequality across the curriculum. Education in Music necessarily triangulates and invites critical analysis of the global economics of the music industries, the physical environments and materials that are utilised to create and perform, and the role of Music as a social asset for the positive development of communities.

1.24 ESD plays a key role in highlighting and reflecting on the relevance of the study of Music in and to contemporary society. Studying Music provides a breadth of opportunity for reflection on culture, race, gender, education, well-being, technology, industry, climate and environment as well as the interconnected nature of these things. Music - including Music Technology, Acoustics and Sound Studies - can provide a unique lens for new understandings through inter and trans-disciplinary learning. This enables students to develop new approaches to sustainability through competencies in critical and anticipatory thinking, collaboration, problem solving and self-awareness. The [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) can help to frame the Music curriculum in a way that reflects the rich and diverse context of ESD.

1.25 Pedagogy for sustainable development in Music enhances the content of teaching and learning, as well as its various modes of delivery. Its inclusion in both formal curricular and more informal extracurricular learning situations has great potential to nurture musicians as stewards of sustainability and, in so doing, enrich their artistic citizenship. Where appropriate, opportunities can be taken to inflect subject material (that is, what is being taught), as well as the modes of delivery (that is, how it is being taught). The following examples draw on specific United Nations SDGs which share a clear symbiosis with Music study:

- interrogating musical, cultural and social impacts of Music and music-making through diversity, equity and inclusion, social justice, and inclusive practices (SEND)
- Music therapy and performance health and well-being
- exploring the power of Music as an agent of social commentary and change
- composing, performing, exploring and interrogating Music which engages with representations of nature and of society
- exploring the use of natural resources in the creation and maintenance of musical tools and instruments.

1.26 A degree in Music equips students to reflect critically on the impacts of musical activity on the physical environment, including in the design and manufacture of instruments and



other technologies, the environmental implications of performance practices, whether technology-based or paper-based, and the carbon footprint of translocal performance or research. Students in Music also develop the skillsets to address these impacts practically, balancing them alongside the economic and social impacts of musical participation and engagement. Developing a critical awareness of each of these aspects involves the surfacing of social injustice: ESD within Music degrees necessarily furnishes graduates with a profound understanding of how knowledge of their subject, and of the future of music-making worldwide, is generated, managed, contested and evolving.

## **Employability, enterprise and entrepreneurship education**

1.27 [Enterprise and entrepreneurship education](#) (EEE) supports behaviours, attributes and competencies that are likely to have a significant impact on the individual student in terms of their choice of employment destination and future career success. It prepares students for changing environments and provides enhanced impact through placements and activities that build links between academic institutions and external organisations.

1.28 Beyond employment, entrepreneurship education provides competencies to help graduates lead a rewarding, self-determined professional life, well placed to add social, cultural and economic value to society through their careers.

1.29 Music encompasses the arts and sciences, and the creative industries require roles across the entire ecosystem, including artists, technicians, engineers, sound designers, programmers, teachers, academics, administrators, entrepreneurs and more. People engaged in Music often cover several of these roles simultaneously, creating unique and diverse portfolio careers. Students learn to apply their skills and mindset in numerous contexts and at various professional levels.

1.30 Resilience and adaptability are key attributes for a sustainable career. They are learnt through studies and extracurricular activities. For those working in Music, professional careers may have started prior to higher education and continue throughout it. Being a professional in Music often transcends traditional employment structures, and Music graduates are rewarded by cultural and mental enrichment as well as by monetary recognition.

1.31 Music programmes support students on their professional journeys, while preparing them for challenges and opportunities. Transferable skills are relevant here, as well as education for professional life. At the point of graduating, students will have started building their professional networks, begun developing their own personal brand, solved complex problems in challenging situations, and built up resilience.

1.32 EEE attributes and skills are embedded within the curriculum of a Music degree, resulting in students seeing the professional relevance of their work. Students are encouraged to be enterprising, and assessed and co-curricular work will often involve organising events, finding commissions and competitions, working with local communities, responding to creative briefs, or creating their own microbusinesses.

1.33 EEE may be taught and assessed directly through modules which require students to, for example, develop business plans, learn about online promotion, profile areas of employment in the arts and culture sector, or gain work experience. Assessment tasks, from group presentations to live performances, may also support and encourage EEE attributes, behaviours and competencies.

1.34 EEE can be enhanced by the involvement of expert staff and external industry professionals in curriculum design, delivery and monitoring. Involvement can take many forms, including guest workshops and masterclasses, assessments taking place in real or

simulated professional settings, visits and internship programmes, and opportunities to pitch initiatives to established entrepreneurs. Learning and assessment activities that simulate professional working environments enable students to transition into professional work.

1.35 As well as working with external stakeholders, students can benefit from working with teaching staff who are practitioners. This brings students directly into contact with industry experts who draw on professional experience and knowledge.

1.36 Music students graduate with both unique and transferable qualities, skills and experience that meet the needs of employers across sectors, as well as futureproofing them for employment and business models which do not yet exist. Self-employment is common in the music industry, and Music programmes support students to understand how to effectively operate a freelance portfolio career or run their own business.

## **Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI)**

1.37 GenAI for Music is a rapidly evolving and innovative area building on historic practices that have the potential to impact the musical landscape and broader society in various ways. AI offers tools to support musicological enquiry, tools to generate, enhance and perform musical works, and assistive tools for compositional processes such as orchestration, or for the analysis and editing of recorded music.

1.38 It is helpful for teaching staff to develop an understanding of what AI is for, and to equip Music graduates with the knowledge, skills and values that will enable them to engage with generative AI critically, creatively and ethically. Where possible, students work to build a critical understanding of how AI tools are trained and function within the wider context of AI used, and the potential ethical implications of GenAI as a creative tool.

1.39 GenAI presents opportunities to enhance teaching practices and student learning experiences. Where appropriate, teaching of Music curricula may be adapted to incorporate the use of GenAI in order to:

- enhance the creativity, innovation, collaboration, diversity and accessibility of musical expression and learning by exposing students to various GenAI approaches, tools and techniques
- support the development of students' music analysis, synthesis, instrument design, evaluation, interpretation and communication skills by enabling them to use GenAI as a source of inspiration, feedback and reflection
- foster students' critical thinking, problem-solving and research skills by challenging them to explore the underlying principles, methods and limitations of GenAI within Music
- cultivate students' ethical, legal, social and cultural awareness by encouraging them to consider the implications and responsibilities of using GenAI in various contexts and scenarios.

1.40 Music programmes are designed to ensure that students are equipped with and develop skills relevant to their future practice. Where appropriate to relevant learning outcomes, assessment within a variety of Music practices may be adapted to support students in their acquisition of skills utilising GenAI. Relevant assessment methods may include:

- project-based learning, where students work individually or in groups to design, implement and evaluate GenAI for practical or scholarly Music projects; these could

include composing, performing, remixing or analysing musical content using GenAI tools and techniques, including hybrid processes, with AI acting as a collaborator

- peer feedback, where students share their GenAI-assisted Music projects with their peers, and provide constructive comments and suggestions for improvement
- self-reflection, where students document their learning process and identify the strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement in GenAI-assisted outcomes
- presentations, where students share their GenAI Music projects via portfolios or public presentations demonstrating their approaches, learning achievements and skills
- contextualisation, where students situate their use of GenAI processes and approaches within wider histories of music technology and algorithmic composition processes.

1.41 The use of GenAI within a range of Music practices raises important ethical, legal, social, environmental and cultural considerations. It is important that students understand the limitations and ethical issues associated with the use of these tools and, equally, that these issues may change as the tools develop and proliferate. Students are provided with guidance about the appropriate use of GenAI, including:

- recognising and respecting the privacy, intellectual property rights and creative contributions of human and machine agents involved in GenAI for Music, and how intellectual property can be used in datasets to train AI, possibly without permission or acknowledgement.
- avoiding and detecting intentional or unintentional plagiarism or copyright infringement by GenAI
- recognising potential changes to working practices, employment opportunities and systems of rewarding labour (including intellectual and creative labour)
- recognising environmental impacts of using GenAI technologies
- recognising that societal biases from the human generated data sets used by GenAI systems for Music can be influenced by genre, style, culture, gender or race. This can include generated music but also extend to AI performers and wider content, including musicological enquiry. Students are taught to be aware of potential biases (including the potential for cultural appropriation), and to analyse them critically.

## 2 Distinctive features of a Music degree

### Design

2.1 Degree programmes in Music are characterised by a variety of designs. Programmes encompass the practical and theoretical aspects of music-making and may include social, aesthetic, historical, contemporary, analytical, technological and pedagogical approaches. Some programmes provide a broad curriculum while others focus on particular practices or specialisms.

2.2 All degree programmes in Music include a range of connected activities which motivate and inform the content of curricula. These can include:

- investigating the nature of musical texts, whether written or aural
- creative and re-creative practice through performance, composition, improvisation and/or production
- engaging with musical processes, materials and technologies through analysis, criticism and/or creative practice
- exploring musical repertoires and their cultural contexts
- understanding the relevance of Music and music-making to societies past and present
- exploring applications of Music contributing to broader cultural practices and experiences
- responding to aspects of social science and medical sciences and psychology to make connections with well-being, therapy and education
- exploring how to share musical knowledge and skills, including through education
- interrogating issues of aesthetics, reception and dissemination of Music
- tracing relationships between theory and practice
- understanding the nature of musical experiences
- engaging in interdisciplinary applications of Music
- developing vocational skills and knowledge, including an understanding of established business practices and creative entrepreneurship.

2.3 Music is intrinsically interdisciplinary, global and multicultural. Curricula may respond to an inclusive range of practices and explore the interconnections between contexts, cultures and identities.

2.4 At undergraduate level, Music may be studied as a single honours award or as part of another degree programme. Where Music is part of another degree, it may constitute creative overlap to other provision (such as in film and sound production, or in design or performing arts), or may contribute to a broadening or specialisation of another primary field of study (such as a Music Business module within a management degree).

2.5 At taught postgraduate level, there is great variety of provision and it is common for students to be working in specialised fields such as Music Therapy, Musicology or Ethnomusicology, or working in a primarily practical area such as Performance, Music Production or Composition. Some programmes will allow students to mix a variety of fields and approaches, for example by undertaking modules in performance, composition and musicology within the same programme, perhaps with a specialised focus across these

approaches (for example, Popular Music studies). Other programmes are focused on a single named area (such as composition or performance) and prepare students for professional work in these fields.

## Progression

2.6 Over the course of a standard undergraduate degree with honours (FHEQ Level 6; FQHEIS Level 10) or, if available, an integrated master's degree (FHEQ Level 7; FQHEIS Level 11), a Music student will progress from one level of study to the next, in line with the regulations and processes for each institution. However, it is expected that each level sees the attainment of knowledge, expertise and experience that builds towards the final achievement of meeting at least the threshold-level of subject-specific and generic skills listed in this Statement. The knowledge, expertise and experience acquired throughout a Music degree are often cumulative. Examples include performance/compositional output of increasing duration and technical complexity, or critical/historical/contextual engagement at a deeper level.

2.7 Upon graduation from an undergraduate degree in Music, it is expected that a student who has achieved a second-class degree or higher would be capable of, and equipped for, undertaking postgraduate study in Music or a related discipline. Entry requirements to postgraduate programmes are, however, determined by individual providers and may require the acquisition of specified skills and/or specified levels of achievement at undergraduate level.

2.8 Undergraduates studying Music as part of a combined or joint degree with other subjects (including courses that specify major and minor options) will achieve core elements of the specific and generic skills outlined in this Statement and will add others according to the areas covered in the other subject(s) of their degree. Additionally, overlaps between different disciplines may enable students to explore opportunities for interdisciplinary study.

2.9 A student enrolled on an undergraduate honours degree programme in Music may exit before completing the course and be eligible for a Certificate of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 4; FQHEIS Level 8), a Diploma of Higher Education (FHEQ Level 5; FQHEIS Level 9), or other awards depending upon the levels of study completed to a satisfactory standard.

## Flexibility

2.10 At providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the usual duration of a full-time course leading to a standard undergraduate degree is three years for a bachelor's degree or four years for an integrated master's degree. Scottish undergraduate degrees with honours (which may be designated as bachelor's or master's degrees) are typically designed to include four years of study and integrated master's five. Conservatoires typically offer undergraduate degrees of four years' duration. Students following part-time or accelerated routes accumulate academic credit in proportion to the intensity of their study, and their total study time and credit value is equivalent to those achieved on full-time routes.

2.11 Higher education providers structure the courses they offer to support students' learning and attainment. Depending on the educational mission of the provider, this may include opportunities to engage in learning on campus, online, and/or through hybrid learning, arranged in terms, by semester, year-long, block, or other formats. These may be offered in full and/or part-time modes of study and credit may be accumulated through the completion of micro-credentials, short-accredited learning, recognition of prior learning or accreditation of prior experiential learning.

## Partnership

2.12 Degree-awarding bodies may deliver courses in partnership with other providers through validation and franchising arrangements. Some may work with partners who deliver specific elements of the course through placement learning or as part of a degree apprenticeship. Other approaches can include progression agreements in which a student completes part of their studies in a different institution (for example, through international partnerships) and then progresses to the awarding institute. Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, play an important role in helping partners design provision that contributes to threshold standards being met in a specific subject area.

2.13 Partnerships provide external opportunities for students to enhance employability skills and build professional relationships in wider contexts. Types of partnership include involving industry partners in curriculum design and review, involving students in live project briefs with partners, and offering internship/placement opportunities for students. These opportunities could be from within Music or other arts organisations, or creative industries related fields such as marketing or game design.

2.14 PSRB (professional, statutory or professional body) accreditation for Music courses offers opportunities for curriculum areas such as Music Production, Musical Theatre and Music Therapy. The process usually involves a review of curriculum, facilities, staffing, student assessment and professional partnerships throughout the provision. Such additional accreditation, for example from JAMES (Joint Audio Media Education Services), CDMT (Council for Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre) or HCPC (Health and Care Professions Council), supports industry preparation for students training for specific contexts on graduation.

2.15 Other levels of education benefit from working in partnership with higher education Music departments, often in three-way partnerships with other organisations. Collaborations between higher education institutions, schools and colleges exist across the UK, and form key strands of the National Plans for Music Education in Wales and England (both 2022). These partnerships can help to prepare prospective students for Music degrees and can offer opportunities for degree-level students to acquire valuable vocational experience.

## Monitoring and review

2.16 Degree-awarding bodies, and their collaborative partnerships, routinely collect and analyse information and undertake periodic course review according to their own needs. Considering the student voice will form part of this. They draw on a range of external reference points, including this Statement, to ensure that their provision aligns with sector norms. Monitoring and evaluation facilitate periodic assessment of a course, conducted internally or by external independent evaluators. Evaluation uses information from both current and historic monitoring to develop an understanding of student achievement or inform future course planning.

2.17 Externality is an essential component of the quality assurance system in the UK. Providers will use external reviewers from other higher education institutions, professional bodies or employers as part of periodic review to gain an independent perspective on any proposed changes and ensure threshold standards are achieved and content is appropriate for the subject.

2.18 The external examining system currently in use across the UK higher education sector promotes consistency in the way academic standards are secured by degree-awarding bodies. Typically, external examiners will be asked to comment on the types, principles and purposes of assessments being offered to students. They will consider the types of modules

on offer to students, the outcomes of a cohort and how these compare to similar provision offered within other UK higher education providers.

2.19 External examiners may be invited to attend a selection of student performance recitals and/or other event-based assessments. Where in-person attendance is not feasible, programme teams may seek to ensure that audiovisual recordings of events (and other digital artefacts) are available for external examiners to review. External examiners are required to produce a report each year and make recommendations for changes to modules and assessments (where appropriate). Subject Benchmark Statements, such as this one, can play an important role in supporting external examiners in advising on whether threshold standards are being met in a specific subject area.

2.20 Courses with professional and vocational outcomes may also require evaluation and accreditation from professional and regulatory bodies. These are usually done through a combination of site visits and online desk-based reviews.



### 3 Content, structure and delivery

3.1 This section explores how the content of the curriculum for Music shapes teaching and learning strategies and the modes of assessment that allow students to demonstrate they have met the benchmark standards and discriminate between different levels of attainment.

#### Content

3.2 Key content shared by Music degrees is listed in paragraph 2.2 above.

3.3 Music degrees vary in design and structure and are characterised by a diversity of methodologies and approaches. No single programme can cover every variety of musical study and practice. Some focus on one area of musical practice or knowledge acquisition, which might be closely related to specific skills, musical genres, styles or repertoires, or preparation for future career paths. Some may be more generalist in their focus, offering a broader exploration of Music practices, cultures and histories. Music may be studied as an arts and/or as a sciences qualification, and as a vocational or liberal subject. Many courses bring together elements of these different approaches, offering a range of choices and pathways to students.

3.4 Music offers unique opportunities for interdisciplinary study and practice, and may be studied in combination with other subjects in joint or combined qualifications. The skills and content developed in Music courses may also overlap with courses in, for example, film and media production, theatre, events management, and instrument and sound design. Music-adjacent qualifications include subjects such as Music Business and Music Therapy, which may reference other Subject Benchmark Statements or regulatory frameworks.

3.5 Music students develop a wide range of skills across the practical, intellectual, interpersonal and employment-related spectrum. Skills and attributes common among graduates in Music include:

- knowledge of the social and cultural contexts of Music
- critical engagement with Music and ideas about Music
- the understanding and application of principles of musical language and organisation
- specialised skills in performance, composition (including songwriting) and production
- the ability to collaborate effectively with others
- skills in communication
- self-motivation and self-awareness
- understanding of business practices, the cultivation of an entrepreneurial mindset and the professionalisation of creative practices.

These are described further in section 4 of this Statement.

#### Teaching and learning

3.6 Teaching and learning in Music degree courses encompasses a wide range of styles and methods, reflective of the broad scope and diverse content of the courses themselves and the diversity of students' needs and prior experience. Teaching takes an inclusive and collaborative approach, offering a range of learning opportunities to meet the required outcomes. Because the cultivation of intellectual and creative independence is fundamental to successful Music practice, educational design encompasses practical learning where



appropriate. Teaching in Music may take place in person, online, or utilising hybrid delivery and engagement methods. These are carefully considered and balanced to ensure that accessibility needs are met and suitable support is in place, and that the method of delivery is appropriate for the subject matter.

3.7 Lectures and seminars offer opportunities for the development of knowledge and understanding of history, analysis, criticism and other topics. These are likely to involve activities both within sessions and as part of preparation, including engaging with written and musical texts, group discussion, presentation and other forms of communication, listening and problem-solving. These learning experiences may be linked closely to practical activities and outcomes.

3.8 Teaching and learning in Music are supported by high-quality environments, performing spaces and studios, and the provision of appropriate technical equipment, as well as qualified staff to ensure maximum engagement with facilities. Music courses are also supported by access to a wide range of printed sources, including books and scores, online resources, and collections of audio and video recordings. Appropriate musical instruments may be provided.

3.9 Many Music degree courses include provision for the individual development of skill in performance and/or composition. This may be achieved through one-to-one tuition from tutors within or outside the provider, and is guided by the aspirations and achievements of the individual student while maintaining a standard expected of graduates.

3.10 Group performance tuition, in the form of small or large ensembles, develops practical performance skills, knowledge of key repertoire, and listening and analytical skills, as well as offering opportunities for the development of leadership and teamwork. Group performance tuition may be organised on a regular basis or in the form of workshops and masterclasses, and may be run by internal staff or visiting specialists, or may be student-led.

3.11 Certain kinds of pedagogical activity may, by necessity, be delivered to students across multiple levels, with differentiated assessment criteria. This is especially true in, for example, ensemble performance coaching, where the instrumental or vocal constitution of an ensemble may require the involvement of students from several cohorts.

3.12 Practical performing activities which enhance the student experience may be organised as formal activities, aligned closely with teaching and learning, or provided as extracurricular activities. Music course teams are often at the heart of the musical activities of a provider, including the experience of students and staff from all subjects, and musical activities that form part of the teaching and learning of a course team may therefore have a considerable impact on access to Music across a wide student population and local community. Music performance may also be student-led, developing skills in collaboration, leadership, self-promotion, financial management, and event organisation. Practical activities may also include teaching and learning of technologies or production practices in relation to creative practice, either as standalone Music projects or in collaboration with, for example, theatre, film or dance teaching teams.

3.13 Music programmes may include teaching and learning directly related to the industry and to employability. This can include scenario-based learning which simulates professional contexts. Teaching and learning in these areas may also include opportunities for work placements, shadowing, masterclasses and mentorship, either organised by students or via course team contacts. These provide vital opportunities for employability enhancement.

3.14 Integration with support services is also important for the purposes of effective teaching and learning. This may include support such as specialist library staff, specialist tuition in English for academic purposes, and disability support.

## Assessment and feedback

3.15 Feedback and assessment are essential learning tools which underpin student development. Assessments are designed to enable students to demonstrate the required skills, knowledge and understanding for their degree and, where appropriate, to act as an employability tool, supporting students to build a portfolio of work for their future career or academic aims.

3.16 The wealth of approaches to the study of Music in UK higher education necessitates an approach to assessment and feedback which acknowledges the diversity of skills required, across both practice and theory and, in so doing, empowers students' development. Assessment is closely aligned with, and reflective of, the breadth of ways in which Music is taught. Many aspects of Music can be understood as both a 'process' and a 'product', making both formative and summative modes of assessment crucial.

3.17 Diverse assessment methods allow students to demonstrate a range of authentic skills that will be used in their professional careers.

3.18 To ensure that the needs of diverse learning communities are met, a variety of assessment practices and/or submission methods may be offered, providing choice (for example, verbal or non-verbal submissions). These adjustments are made pre-emptively within the course and allow for academic rigour in assessment while acknowledging diverse learning needs.

## Assessment methods

3.19 The list below is broadly indicative of the wide range of assessment types commonly found in Music degree programmes, but is neither exhaustive nor prescriptive. The breadth and profile of assessment combinations will range widely to reflect, for example, the specialist profile of the provider or the emphasis on particular learning activities and outcomes within a given programme. These diverse assessment methods support students to demonstrate critical, analytical, reflective and creative skills. Many assessment methods in Music require personal engagement and individual expression.

### Critical, analytical and reflective work

- essays and other coursework which test students' ability to investigate a topic in depth, organise their material and communicate ideas
- formal examinations which require students to work and think in time-sensitive conditions, assessing their knowledge base, understanding, analytical and critical listening skills
- take-away examination papers which allow the assessment of self-directed work, for example, extended pieces of analytical work
- reports on the experiences gained and learning achieved through external placements, including periods of study abroad
- reports on empirical work, which may take the form of fieldwork or laboratory experiments. Such reports are designed to demonstrate the students' ability to analyse and present evidence from a research project carried out in a manner appropriate to its disciplinary and/or cultural context
- commentary on practice, which may include critical evaluation and reflection, practice-as-research methodologies, project reports, and contextualisation of practice within artistic, technological, theoretical and/or cultural fields

- technical and professional documentation such as technical riders for live performance, sample library documentation, and instrument or software user guides.

### **Presentation, performance and collaborative work**

- practical examinations which allow students to present technical and interpretative skills in performance. These may include set works and prescribed studies/technical exercises, as well as own choice items and improvisations. Practical examinations can assess both individuals and ensembles, including an individual's direction of an ensemble. They often replicate professional conditions in the choice of venue and conditions of performance
- aural examinations which assess the students' ability to recognise and reproduce sounds, in a wide range of contexts
- viva voce examinations, providing the opportunity for critical and analytical reflection and discussion
- verbal or non-verbal presentations which test communication skills in an individual or group situation
- installations which utilise physical location as a component of the creative or scholarly work
- events where the focus of assessment is on students' own management and organisation
- project coordination and facilitation.

### **Artefacts**

- audio recordings, which may document a live performance, embody a creative output such as an electroacoustic composition or sound design, or be the focus of assessment in their own right, such as linear production or audio engineering documentation
- texts, such as notated or graphic compositions, or song lyrics / lead sheets
- media, such as music videos, or music or sound synched to screen-based media forms (film clips, animation, games)
- software programs or patches, such as software instruments or effects, interactive or generative music or audiovisual systems, or digital signal processing (DSP) code
- instruments, for example, newly developed acoustic, electronic or hybrid instruments, adapted or 'hacked' instruments or sound-making objects, software controller systems or performance systems
- installations, or documentation of installations
- project or event documentation, which may include audiovisual media, planning and production paperwork, budgets, health and safety documentation, technical riders or other professional documentation.

3.20 Projects and portfolios combine different elements of creative materials, professional work, written documentation and critical reflection. These could include various combinations of compositions, recordings, production work, sound design, multimedia, sonic arts, software projects or other examples depending on the discipline.

Examples of projects and portfolios include:

- individual projects (for example, dissertations) and practical portfolios (for example, recordings, compositions) which are intended to demonstrate advanced understanding, knowledge, critical engagement, research skills and/or creative achievement
- collaborative projects which may be assessed through a mixture of continuous assessment, final presentation and supporting documentation
- take-away examination papers which allow the assessment of longer exercises in orchestration/arranging, or extended pieces of analytical/critical work
- multimedia presentations, which may relate to plans, work in progress or completed projects
- portfolios of practice, which demonstrate and reflect on the experiences gained, and learning achieved, through placements or other formative processes
- peer assessment in which students present work (usually performances or compositions) for group discussion and critique, developing students' abilities to formulate criteria for judgement and provide effective feedback
- self-assessment demonstrating students' abilities to evaluate their work objectively and to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, and to negotiate their assessment with others
- reports on empirical work, which may take the form of fieldwork or laboratory experiments, demonstrating students' ability to analyse and present evidence from a research project carried out in a manner appropriate to its disciplinary and/or cultural context.

## Feedback

3.21 As assessments are central to a student's learning experience and professional skills, it is essential within assessment and feedback practices that students are provided with clarity on the assessment process, and how their mark will be calculated. Clearly articulated assessment criteria aligned to learning outcomes and curriculum enable students to contextualise their mark and understand how they can improve their future submissions and professional work.

3.22 Feedback may be provided in a range of formats, including written comments, annotated work, audio recordings, videos and synchronous tutorials. Appropriate methods are chosen according to the needs of the students and the assessment.

3.23 Tutors regularly provide feedback on formative and summative work, both in support of students' ongoing development, and in direct response to student work formally within assessment contexts. Provision of continuous feedback - defined as information communicated to students with the intention of improving learning and attainment - is a significant and distinctive strength of many Music degree programmes. It is particularly prevalent within the iterative dialogue which takes place between tutors and students in practical learning contexts. Feedback is frequently framed in terms of the wider relevance or transferability of the learning demonstrated through the assessment, such that it helps students to build on their achievements for future projects ('feed forward').

3.24 Creative and performance assessments in Music can include personal expression, dependent on artistic practices. Therefore, typically, students will have opportunities to

discuss and seek clarification on feedback received and be given the tools to interpret and use it, equipping them with the skills required to work in the creative industries.

3.25 Within Music communities, peer support and feedback can often be a useful professional tool; this is modelled within education contexts where students are supported to build their professional peer communities through providing in-class peer feedback, allowing students to build independent feedback networks.

## 4 Benchmark standards

### Introduction

4.1 This Subject Benchmark Statement sets out the minimum threshold and typical standards that a student will have demonstrated when they are awarded an honours degree in Music. Demonstrating these standards over time will show that a student has achieved the range of knowledge, understanding and skills expected of graduates in Music.

4.2 The vast majority of students will perform significantly better than the minimum threshold standards. Each higher education provider has its own method of determining what appropriate evidence of this achievement will be and should refer to [Annex D of the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies](#). This Annex sets out common descriptions of the four main degree outcome classifications for bachelor's degrees with honours: 1st, 2.1, 2.2 and 3rd.

4.3 Please note that the minimum threshold and typical standards are not intended to specify universal competence standards for a discipline. If a provider chooses to develop competence standards (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) as part of a programme specification, these can be informed by the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement along with any PSRB requirements. In these circumstances, providers should follow the most recent guidance from the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#).

4.4 Beyond the typical standards described below, excellence may be demonstrated in various ways, including (but not limited to) the achievement of high levels of professionalism in presentation, or by innovation of scholarly or creative approaches or applications.

4.5 This Subject Benchmark Statement does not define or imply a common curriculum for Music. Indeed, the diversity of provision in Music at both undergraduate and postgraduate level may lead course designers to apply standards in different ways, according to the particular practice(s) being assessed.

4.6 The standards set out below are typically demonstrated in interconnected ways.

### Knowledge and understanding

4.7 On graduating with an undergraduate degree with honours in Music, students are able to:

Threshold level	Typical level
demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a body of music and of musical materials, artefacts, texts, discourses, resources and concepts associated with it appropriate to their discipline	in addition, show the ability to explore, evaluate, apply or challenge associated scholarship and research relating to musical materials in depth
demonstrate knowledge and understanding of musical contexts, including the relationship of Music to historical, philosophical, cultural, educational and social practices and phenomena	in addition, demonstrate awareness of the critical debates arising from the placing of Music in wider contexts

Threshold level	Typical level
demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how Music interconnects with other disciplines in the arts, humanities, and social and physical sciences, as appropriate	in addition, show an awareness of the implications of an interdisciplinary approach to Music for creation, innovation and research
analyse and interrogate musical materials and artefacts appropriate to their discipline and communicate the findings in a coherent form	in addition, show critical awareness of issues of debate or uncertainty raised from analysing musical materials and artefacts
demonstrate an understanding of relationships between artistic practice and theoretical aspects of Music, as applicable to the particular area studied	in addition, critique the nature, relevance, purpose and consequences of theoretical constructs in Music
demonstrate an understanding of the relationships between Music and technology.	in addition, show in-depth awareness of current discourse in and on Music technologies through critical work or practice-as-research.

## Technical skills

4.8 On graduating with an undergraduate degree with honours in Music, students are able to:

Threshold level	Typical level
convey personal expression and imagination in practical music-making through employing appropriate technical and interpretative means	demonstrate an individual musical personality or 'voice', through advanced technical skills and deeper levels of interpretative insight
recognise and use essential components of musical language appropriate to the discipline and practice	in addition, interrogate the use of musical language within different cultural or genre-specific settings
recognise and respond to aspects of musical organisation as appropriate to the discipline	in addition, internalise and reconstruct musical materials as appropriate to the discipline
collaborate in music-making, whether through ensemble performance, co-creation, improvisatory work, or analogous activities	in addition, demonstrate qualities of leadership within a creative team

Threshold level	Typical level
employ music technologies as appropriate to the discipline; this could include recording, producing, composition, sound design, instrument creation, live events, or use of generative technologies.	in addition, demonstrate nuance, creative flair and professionalism with the technology in a stylistically appropriate way.



## Professional skills

4.9 On graduating with an undergraduate degree with honours in Music, students are able to:

Threshold level	Typical level
demonstrate independent research skills and the potential for continuing artistic and creative development	in addition, demonstrate the potential for artistic and creative leadership and innovation
work independently, and show self-motivation and critical self-awareness	in addition, produce independent work of high quality (rigorous, defensible, robust, imaginative)
work with others in diverse teams addressing joint projects or activities	in addition, demonstrate advanced skills of teamwork, negotiation, organisation and decision-making
organise and manage a schedule of work effectively in the execution of a project	in addition, demonstrate confidence and adaptability in project planning and management
demonstrate awareness and respect of different professional and cultural contexts	in addition, adapt and respond creatively to different professional and cultural environments, and articulate the value of musical, intellectual and creative skills and associated practices within such contexts
present work in accessible form, intelligible to both expert and non-expert audiences (readers, listeners, consumers) through sonic, verbal and/or written forms of presentation	in addition, demonstrate and articulate imaginative and persuasive powers of presentation
demonstrate awareness of appropriate technological and technical skills	demonstrate advanced knowledge of the application of technical and technological skills relative to the area studied
demonstrate an awareness of the legal and ethical frameworks relating to Music practices and procedures	identify ethical and political challenges within Music and take steps to ensure ethical practices are undertaken
communicate musical and creative ideas effectively with others within a creative team	in addition, adapt language and terminology when communicating with a variety of stakeholders
demonstrate an awareness of how Music relates to wider societal concerns	in addition, identify ways in which Music can contribute to solving global and societal challenges
demonstrate the ability to adapt and continue to learn.	in addition, demonstrate an ability to contribute to shaping the future of Music.

## Master's level

4.10 Regardless of the field or mode of work, study for a master's degree in Music requires critical and conceptual understanding in addition to the benchmark standards above. Through completing a master's degree, students are able to:

- demonstrate both a systematic and comprehensive understanding and a critical awareness of current and emerging trends in Music research and/or practice
- evaluate current research and advanced scholarship to apply knowledge in original ways in an area of Music studies or practice
- evaluate appropriate methodologies and demonstrate self-direction and originality in dealing with complex problems in practice and/or research
- create new insight in their field of study, and communicate conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- complete a major piece of practice, or a substantial research project, informed by thorough understandings of the discipline.

4.11 A master's degree in Music may equip students with skills and experience that would allow them to continue work in their field at doctoral level.

## 5 List of references and further resources

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## 6 Membership of the Advisory Group

### Membership of the Advisory Group for the Subject Benchmark Statement for Music 2025

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