



Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority

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# **Review of standards in A level and GCSE music**

*1985–2005*

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## General introduction

The period covered by the review spans a time when many changes took place in the cultural, social and educational attitudes to music within schools and colleges.

Essentially, the shift was from treating music as primarily an academic subject in which students learned about music, to an inclusive one in which the aim was to engage in musical as well as academic activities. This had profound effects on the curriculum and on the nature of the accompanying assessment.

In particular, the period saw the introduction of a national curriculum for music that identified the key features of the subject to be taught from ages 5-14. This curriculum clearly identified the inclusive philosophy and practical nature of the subject, with its focus on participation in the three areas of performing, composing and listening/appraising for all students. Its effects are clearly seen in both the GCSE and A level examinations covered in this review. It is worth noting in the context of this report that the inclusive aims of the changes were successful, with the numbers of candidates entered for both 16+ examinations (ie GCE O level and CSE in 1985 and GCSE in 2005) and A levels almost doubling over the period.

Between them the GCSE syllabuses in this study attracted all of the 58,500 candidates who took GCSE music in 2005. The A level syllabuses attracted all of the more than 7,000 candidates who took A level music in 2005.

The following awarding bodies offered syllabuses in the subject: the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA); the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA); Edexcel; Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR) and the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

## **GCSE music 1985–2005**

### **Introduction**

In 2006 QCA conducted the first review of standards over time in GCSE music. Changes in the assessment of music at 16+ over this period were influenced by a number of key events, including:

- the development in 1985 of national criteria for designing and assessing GCSE music syllabuses
- the introduction in 1988 of GCSE examinations to replace O levels and CSEs
- the introduction of new subject criteria for music in 2000 designed to ensure that syllabuses were built on the requirements of the national curriculum.

All of these changes reflect the major shift in the approach to teaching and learning in the subject outlined in the general introduction.

### **Materials available**

Reviewers considered the syllabus documents, examiners' reports and question papers with associated mark schemes from each of the awarding bodies in 1985, 1995, 2000 and 2005. CCEA provided question papers only for the years 1985 and 2000. Further details are provided in Appendix A.

In 1985 national criteria were published that specified how GCSE music syllabuses, which replaced O level and CSE examinations, should be designed and assessed. These criteria applied to all GCSE music syllabuses first examined in 1988. The 1995 GCSE syllabuses were based on these 1985 subject criteria. In 1995 the criteria were revised and the 2000 syllabuses conformed to these revised criteria. The 2005 syllabuses were designed in accordance with the revised 2000 subject criteria.

## Assessment objectives

In 1985 assessment objectives were not specifically identified by any awarding body, although they were in some cases implicit within the overall requirements of the syllabus, often as a set of abilities to be tested. In 1995 assessment objectives were linked to the three components of performing, composing and listening/appraising. In 2000 all awarding bodies identified six assessment objectives, as prescribed by the 1995 criteria. In 2005 every awarding body had adopted the three assessment objectives in line with the 2000 criteria – AO1 performing, AO2 composing, and AO3 appraising.

Awarding Body	1995	2000	2005
AQA	Listening - 40% Performing - 30% Composing - 30%	Six AOs - broadly equal weighting  2 each for Listening, Performing & Composing	AO1 Performing - 33.3%  AO2 Composing - 33.3%  AO3 Appraising - 33.3%
CCEA	Listening - 40% Performing - 35% Composing - 25%		AO1 Performing - 30%  AO2 Composing - 30%  AO3 Appraising - 40%
Edexcel	Listening Performing Composing No weightings given	Six AOs 15% each  2 for each component with one AO gaining an extra 10%	AO1 Performing 30%  AO2 Composing 30%  AO3 Appraising 40%
OCR	Listening 30–40% Performing 30–40% Composing 30–40%	Six AOs 15% each  2 for each component with one AO gaining	AO1 Performing 30–35%  AO2 Composing 30–

		an extra 10% depending on option chosen	35%  AO3 Appraising 35%
WJEC	Listening  Performing  Composing  No weightings given	Six AOs  No weighting given  2 for each component	AO1 Performing 30%  AO2 Composing 40%  AO3 Appraising 30%

The weighting attributed to the assessment objectives varied to some degree across awarding bodies. In 1995 only three awarding bodies identified weightings. Both AQA and CCEA allocated 40 per cent to listening, with AQA giving 30 per cent each to performing and composing and CCEA giving 35 per cent to performing and 25 per cent to composing. OCR provided a range of 30 to 40 per cent for each of the three objectives. In 2000 awarding bodies identified six assessment objectives in keeping with the relevant subject criteria. AQA gave the six objectives broadly equal weighting, while Edexcel and OCR allocated 15 per cent to each of the six objectives, with one objective gaining an extra 10 per cent according to the option chosen. WJEC did not provide information on weightings. In 2005 CCEA and Edexcel allocated 40 per cent to the third objective, appraising, while WJEC gave 40 per cent to composing. The rest was equally divided between the other two components. AQA weighted each of the three objectives equally, and OCR allocated 30 to 35 per cent for each of the first two objectives and 35 per cent for the third.

Some reviewers were concerned about the 40 per cent weighting given by WJEC to composing in 2005, feeling that this could disadvantage candidates who found composing difficult. In other respects they considered that the minor variations in weighting over time and across awarding bodies did not affect the level of demand.

## Syllabus content

In 1985 the candidature for O level music was small and specialised and the examination in all awarding bodies reflected this. There was a fundamentally academic emphasis on



the western classical music tradition and the study of set works. Most awarding bodies set one work for detailed study: Edexcel offered a choice of Mendelssohn's *Fourth Symphony* or Sibelius's *Violin Concerto*, OCR set Haydn's *Symphony 101 (The Clock)* and WJEC set the Overture to the *Magic Flute*. In addition, Edexcel set a choice of two from four works by Bach, Wagner, Shostakovich and Britten for general study, and a choice of one or two periods, each covering three composers – Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner and Sibelius, Prokofiev and Grieg. OCR had a choice of two works and composers from each of three periods: Vivaldi's *Autumn* or Part 2 of Handel's *Messiah*; Schubert's *String Quartet in C* or Smetana's *Overture to the Bartered Bride*; and Bartok's *Concerto for Orchestra* or Lennox Berkeley's *Six Preludes*. WJEC set five works for general study by Bach, Schubert, Dvorak, de Falla and Walton. AQA set six prescribed works ranging chronologically from Monteverdi's *Beatus Vir* to Tippett's *Suite for the Birthday of Prince Charles*.

There was a high level of demand in aural perception and in the musical techniques of melody, harmony and counterpoint. Competence in musical literacy was required. There was little opportunity for extended composing. AQA was the only awarding body with a compulsory performing element in 1985; for all other awarding bodies, performing was optional. Approaches to performing ranged from a Grade 5 standard in solo performing, sometimes via accreditation of an external grade examination, to aural dictation and sight reading/singing or, in the case of WJEC, to an optional practical examination with no allocated marks. It was unclear from the syllabus documents what procedures the awarding bodies adopted for marking, scaling and grading externally graded music examinations when these were used as the performing component in an O level. For example, the 1985 Edexcel syllabus stated that candidates could offer a pass in grades 5, 6 or 7 as an alternative to the analysis, set works and history examination, worth 40 per cent of the overall marks. Yet, there was no further information about how the different music grades contributed to candidates' final overall marks/grades for their O level.

In 1995 and 2000, syllabuses were revised to meet changes to the national criteria, made to bring them fully into line with the national curriculum at key stages 1–3. The changes focused on the three primary musical activities of performing, composing and listening/appraising. Compared with the 1985 syllabuses, greater breadth and balance was created in the range of musical genres and traditions to be studied by candidates, including those of jazz, popular and world music.

In 1995 AQA and WJEC required candidates to have a broad general musical background and to be able to identify musical styles, including music from cultures other than those of the Western European tradition. In addition, WJEC set Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture for detailed study and six other works, by Gabrieli, Vivaldi, Verdi, Penderecki, The Beatles and Dilys Elwyn Edwards, for general study. OCR's set works included four Beatles songs. Edexcel and CCEA set six to eight works for aural study, including not only works from the western classical tradition but also songs from the band ELO Part II and from Lloyd Webber's musical, *Cats*.

By 2000, with the exception of WJEC, which continued in a similar way as it had in 1995, awarding bodies had moved to identifying three or four areas of study. The emphasis was now on candidates understanding continuity and change in musical traditions. AQA set choral music from 1550 to present, orchestral music from 1700 to present, keyboard music from 1700 to present and dance music from 1800 to present. Edexcel identified music from western traditions, popular culture and non-western traditions, in particular Indian, gamelan, African, Latin American and Caribbean. OCR followed a similar path. Edexcel also offered the option of studying a set work by Haydn, Berlioz or Sting.

Performing and composing became much more significant elements in the syllabuses, making them accessible to a much wider range of candidates than they had been in previous years.

By 2005 the introduction of contrasted areas of study selected across time, cultures and musical traditions, together with the requirement for candidates to make comparisons between different cultures and connections between the three musical activities, made for more complex syllabuses. Awarding bodies varied in the number of areas set, for example CCEA offered three and Edexcel five, and found varying ways of addressing the multiple requirements of the 2000 criteria for selection of these areas. Some areas of study focused on a particular genre, for example music for film or dance. Others focused on technical aspects such as rhythms, scales and modes in music from around the world, or on musical structures, music for special events or, in the case of CCEA and WJEC, on national traditions. In all cases the emphasis was on candidates responding to music

from a variety of styles and traditions and exploring connections across all three components of the syllabus.

OCR made use of an integrated coursework assignment as a means of assessing all three assessment objectives. Reviewers were concerned that the assignment could make unduly heavy demands on relatively immature young people, although there was also a danger that the open-ended and non-prescriptive nature of the task could encourage superficial responses. Reviewers were also concerned that, for several awarding bodies, the requirement to link composing to the areas of study could stifle creativity. However, in the case of WJEC, this was seen as less of a problem since candidates were able to select two out of five very general areas of study in which to have their composing assessed. Edexcel's requirement that candidates perform or direct a performance of at least one of their compositions was also seen as a potentially limiting factor for those with weak performing or composing skills.

Reviewers welcomed many of the new developments in GCSE syllabuses over the period from 1985–2005. These included:

- an examination that builds on the school curriculum at key stages 1–3
- increased accessibility and relevance of the content of current qualifications
- wide-ranging areas of study that take in music from a variety of periods and cultures
- greater emphasis on creative development, with a higher profile for composing
- closer links between the three primary musical activities.

Reviewers identified a number of areas where they considered that the level of demand had fallen since 1985. These included:

- the move from set works to specified but more open areas of study
- the reduction of the level of musical skills required in aural perception, namely through the lack of formal dictation and the absence of a specific paper

- the emphasis on breadth rather than depth in the study of music history
- the removal of a requirement to study musical techniques such as melody, harmony and counterpoint
- the absence of sufficient emphasis on the demonstration of a degree of musical literacy
- a reduced requirement for extended writing
- a greater breadth of content that was not comprehensively tested in examinations
- the gradual reduction over time in the use of unprepared tests in sight reading and/or improvisation
- the introduction by awarding bodies of strategies to allow candidates playing much easier pieces to gain high marks for aspects such as technical control, interpretation, musical expression and communication.

Reviewers judged that there had been a decline in the level of demand over time, in particular between 1985 and 1995. Reviewers also identified variations in the overall demand across awarding bodies in 2005. While the demands of the AQA, CCEA and WJEC syllabuses were judged to be comparable and to have been largely consistent since 1995, reviewers found that the Edexcel syllabus had declined in demand since 1995 and was less demanding than the other awarding bodies.

Reviewers had differing views about the 2005 OCR syllabus, with its distinctive integrated assignment worth 75 per cent of the overall marks. Some considered that the emphasis on establishing links between performing and composing and the areas of study increased the level of demand beyond that of the 1995 and 2000 syllabuses. Others were concerned that, while the synthesis of skills required in the integrated assignment could potentially be challenging, the non-prescriptive nature of the tasks and the very low proportion of externally assessed terminal examination work made this difficult to ensure.

## **Scheme of assessment**

There have been four phases in the development of schemes of assessment in the course of the review period. The first, represented by the 1985 O level syllabuses, set out to assess traditional musical skills and understanding largely by means of terminal written

examinations. Four hours or more of written papers was the norm; practical examinations, or accreditation of external performing results, in some cases reduced this demand to around two hours, thirty minutes.

With the introduction of GCSE in 1988, new schemes of assessment became essential for future syllabuses. Most importantly, the emphasis on extended composing rather than on traditional musical techniques made including a coursework component the only viable way of encompassing this key element of the new national curriculum. This in turn raised issues of assessment. Awarding bodies, rather than seeking the submission of candidate compositions for external marking, decided to follow the route of internal assessment by teachers with external moderation. Once established, this opened the door to the use of internal assessment in other areas of the examination. In 1995 two awarding bodies and in 2000 a further one used this approach for the assessment of performing, rather than employing visiting examiners. This in turn reduced the time spent on terminal examination papers to an average of one and one-half to two hours.

A further change was the introduction by awarding bodies of strategies to take into account the difficulty of pieces attempted by candidates in the performing component. In 1995 it was not always clear how these were applied. However by 2000, Edexcel and OCR had specified the maximum number of marks that candidates attempting the easiest pieces could obtain in the performing component (50 per cent and 33 per cent, respectively). By 2005 these figures had been adjusted so that candidates doing the easiest pieces could access high marks (84 per cent of the maximum for Edexcel and 66 per cent for OCR). While reviewers appreciated the aim of these procedures (to comply with a criteria requirement to ensure that the highest grades are available to candidates who have not received additional specialist music lessons), they judged that the changes in requirements had contributed to the reduction in demand of the performing component over time.

The revised subject criteria of 2000 placed new demands on syllabuses and schemes of assessment. The compulsory introduction of areas of study and increased emphasis on the integration of the three primary musical activities of performing, composing and appraising posed new challenges for awarding bodies. These were addressed in different ways, as is evident from the 2005 schemes of assessment. Reviewers considered that

some schemes of assessment, particularly in composing, were too prescriptive, enabling candidates to achieve a higher grade without having fully explored the creative potential of the task.

Two awarding bodies, AQA and OCR, introduced a new element into the scheme of assessment – the integrated assignment. In the case of AQA this made a fourth component, which attracted 25 per cent of the total subject marks and was carried out as coursework but externally assessed. In the case of OCR it embraced all three assessment objectives and attracted 60 per cent of the total subject marks, with a related terminal task gaining a further 15 per cent. Both the coursework and terminal task were internally assessed and externally moderated. CCEA and WJEC retained visiting examiners for performing and listening and appraising papers of one to one and one-half hours, with only the composing component carried out as coursework and internally assessed. Edexcel retained a one and one-half hour written listening and appraising paper with coursework and internal assessment for performing and composing. Overall, coursework was used by awarding bodies in a number of different components of the examination, and procedures for its assessment varied across awarding bodies and over time and have undoubtedly been significant for the changing candidature.

In conclusion, the complexity of the syllabuses and the implications for the resulting assessment processes together with the radically different approaches to assessment adopted by awarding bodies, particularly in recent years, made it difficult for reviewers to arrive at consistent conclusions about the overall impact of these changes on the level of demand over time. Reviewers regretted the passing of the traditional knowledge, skills and understanding required by the O level examinations and the general decline in demand. However, they welcomed the increased accessibility and the breadth and creative opportunities of the new syllabuses.

**GCSE Schemes of assessment**

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
AQA	<p>Part 1 Written examination</p> <p>36% Syllabuses A &amp; B</p> <p>1½ hours</p> <p>Part 2 Written examination</p> <p>45% Syllabus A</p> <p>34% Syllabus B</p> <p>1¼ hours</p> <p>Practical Examination (Visiting examiner)</p>	<p>Written examination 40%</p> <p>Examination</p> <p>2 hours</p> <p>Performing 30%</p> <p>Internal assessment</p> <p>Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework</p> <p>Internal assessment</p>	<p>Listening &amp; Appraising 40%</p> <p>Written examination AO 5 &amp; 6</p> <p>2 hours</p> <p>Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework AO 3 &amp; 4</p> <p>(Internally assessed/externally moderated)</p> <p>Performing 30%</p> <p>Coursework AO 1 &amp; 2</p>	<p>Unit 1 Composing</p> <p>25% Coursework AO2</p> <p>Internal assessment</p> <p>External moderation</p> <p>Unit 2 performing 25%</p> <p>Coursework AO1</p> <p>Internal assessment</p> <p>External moderation</p> <p>Unit 3 Integrated assignment</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	19% Syllabus A  34% Syllabus B			25% Assignments issued in advance plus terminal paper ½ hour. External assessment AO 1,2,3  Unit 4 Listen & appraise 25%  Written examination - 1¼ hours AO3
CCEA		Listening 40%  Written examination 2 hours  Performing 35%		Composing & Appraising 40%  Coursework - Internally assessed  2 compositions with commentaries (3–5 minutes)



Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
		Visiting Examiner  Composition 25%  Coursework  (Internally assessed/externally moderated)		Performing & Appraisal 35%  Visiting Examiner  Solo & ensemble performances – up to 5 minutes  Listening & Appraisal 25%  Examined test of aural perception - 1 hour
Edexcel	Paper 1 Aural tests 20%  Examination conducted by teacher or examiner - <sup>3</sup> / <sub>4</sub> hour	Paper 1 Listening 38%  Written examination – 2 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> hours	Paper 1 Performing 30%  Solo performance AO1 (15%)  Ensemble AO2 (15%)  Internally assessed although	Paper 1 Performing 30%  AO1 Coursework internally assessed & externally moderated

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>Paper 2 Rudiments 40%</p> <p>Examination – melody &amp; harmony - 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 2R Pass in Grade V,VI, VII Practical 40%</p> <p>Performing (alternative)</p> <p>Paper 3 Analysis, Set works &amp; history 40%</p> <p>Written examination – 2hours</p>	<p>Paper 2 Performing 32%</p> <p>Visiting Examiner</p> <p>Paper 3 Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework (Internally assessed/externally moderated)</p>	<p>solo performance may be assessed by visiting examiner if desired.</p> <p>Paper 2 Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework. Internally assessed.</p> <p>AO3 (15%)</p> <p>AO4 (15%)</p> <p>Two pieces lasting at least 3 minutes in total</p> <p>Paper 3 Listening &amp; Appraising 30%</p>	<p>Paper 2 Composing 30%</p> <p>AO2 Coursework internally assessed &amp; externally moderated</p> <p>Paper 3 Appraising 40%</p> <p>AO3 Written examination 1½ hours</p> <p>Externally assessed</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
			<p>Written examination - 90 minutes</p> <p>Externally assessed</p> <p>Paper 4</p> <p>One of five options 10%</p> <p>Extensions of core activities</p> <p>Externally marked</p>	
OCR	<p>Part A Aural tests 25%</p> <p>Examination</p>	<p>Component 1 Listening 30%</p> <p>Examination - 1½ hours</p>	<p>Component 1 Listening 30%</p> <p>Examination - 2 hours</p> <p>AOs 5 &amp; 6</p>	<p>Integrated Assignment 60%</p> <p>Coursework AOs 1,2 &amp; 3</p> <p>Internally assessed &amp;</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
OCR cont	<p>Part B Written examination</p> <p>2½ hours                      41.6%</p> <p>Part C Either                      33.3%</p> <p>(i) Practical examination</p> <p>(Visiting examiner? Spec is not clear)</p> <p>(ii) harmony examination (2 ½ hours)</p> <p>(iii) General Musical knowledge</p>	<p>Component 2 Listening    40%</p> <p>Examination - 2 hours</p> <p>Component 3 Performing</p> <p>Coursework                      30%</p> <p>Component 4 Performing</p> <p>Coursework                      40%</p> <p>Component 5 Composing</p> <p>Coursework                      30%</p>	<p>Component 3 performing</p> <p>AOs 1 &amp; 2                      30%</p> <p>Component 5 Composing AOs 3 &amp; 4                      30%</p> <p>And one of components 2,4, or 6                      10%</p> <p>Component 2 Further Listening Paper ½ hour</p> <p>AOs 5 &amp; 6</p>	<p>externally moderated</p> <p>Terminal Task                      15%</p> <p>AO2 (optional addition of AO1) 25 minutes supervised time plus 5 minutes to either record their composition of complete their written version</p> <p>Internally assessed &amp; externally moderated</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	examination (2 ½ hours)	Component 6 Composing (Internally assessed/ externally moderated) 40% Option A = 1,3 & 6 Option B = 1,4,& 5 Option C = 2,3 & 5	Component 4 Unprepared Performing Terminal task (Internally assessed/ externally moderated) AOs 1 & 2 Component 6 Composing Using a given stimulus AOs 3 & 4 (Internally assessed/ externally moderated)	Written examination AO3 25% 1½ hours Externally assessed
WJEC	Paper A 33.3% Written Examination 2 hours	Listening 40% Examination 2 hours	Performing 30% External assessment by visiting examiner	Composing 40% Coursework AO2

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>Paper B 33.3%</p> <p>Written Examination 1½ hours</p> <p>Aural 25%</p> <p>Written Examination ¾ hour</p> <p>Sight Singing 8.3%</p> <p>Optional practical examination</p>	<p>Performing 30%</p> <p>External assessment by visiting examiner</p> <p>Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework (Internally assessed/externally moderated)</p>	<p>Composing 30%</p> <p>Coursework (Internally assessed/externally moderated)</p> <p>Appraising 40%</p> <p>Examination 2 hours</p>	<p>Internally assessed</p> <p>Externally moderated</p> <p>Performing 30%</p> <p>AO1 (Visiting examiner)</p> <p>Appraising 30%</p> <p>AO3 Examination 1½ hours</p>

## Options

Reviewers found that the use of options varied across awarding bodies and over time. When well designed, options were seen to provide an opportunity for candidates to play to their strengths within the context of a fair and reliable assessment structure. The scope of the subject is, by its very nature, so wide that reviewers judged that it was reasonable and just to allow some degree of choice for candidates and to provide the chance for them to develop areas of special personal interest. However, reviewers acknowledged that flexibility within syllabuses also brings with it the potential for variations to emerge between options and awarding bodies and that a balance must be struck when offering candidates flexibility in order to ensure, as far as possible, that options provide comparable challenges and that the overall demand of syllabuses is maintained through the different optional routes.

In 1985 there were a number of different ways in which the issue of options was addressed by awarding bodies and reviewers raised some queries about the legitimacy of some of the options offered. For example in Edexcel's syllabus, candidates opting for Paper 2 (Rudiments, Melody and Harmony) were not required to perform, while candidates opting for Paper 2R were able to avoid any direct assessment in music theory or compositional techniques. A similar situation applied with OCR. Reviewers considered that this type of escape route seriously reduced the breadth and balance of the syllabus and the overall demand for candidates. In other cases, for example the WJEC, there was an option to take a practical examination or to offer a Grade Certificate, but it was unclear how marks for this option were awarded.

In 1995 and 2000 GCSE syllabuses continued to offer some degree of choice to candidates. The extent to which this occurred varied across the awarding bodies. For example the CCEA syllabus in 1995 offered only minimal options and the listening paper was demanding in terms of scope and breadth. On the other hand, Edexcel and OCR candidates in 2000 could increase the weighting allocated to performing, composing or listening depending on the options chosen.

In all these syllabuses, the performing component offered candidates the opportunity to select their own pieces both for solo and ensemble performing. By contrast in the 1985

syllabus, although there were variations across and within the awarding bodies, the norm was for prescribed lists or preset pieces. In composing, there was also considerable freedom of choice in terms of medium and style. However, in more recent syllabuses candidates were required to work to a common brief, either provided by the awarding body or chosen by candidates or their teachers.

In 2005, with the increasing emphasis on the integration of the three core musical activities, integrated projects appeared in syllabuses. These offered candidates further options to specialise in areas of personal interest and expertise, as for example in the AQA and OCR syllabuses. Frequently in such work, candidates were required to draw on one or more of the prescribed areas of study for performing and composing activities, as for example in the WJEC; here, the breadth of the five areas of study made such linkage a realistic and attractive proposition for candidates.

For the most part, reviewers welcomed the shift over time to cater for an ever-widening candidature and to increase the scope for creative and integrated work. Reviewers judged that the integration of the three constituent elements had the potential to increase the level of demand for candidates. Yet, there were reservations about some of the less prescriptive assignments, which could leave candidates and their teachers free to submit a very wide range of work for assessment. There was some concern about the rigour and reliability of the assessment process in this context, although it was noted that this could also have been true in some elements of assessment in 1985.

## **Question papers**

The 1985 O level examination for all awarding bodies had as its core the traditional elements of an academic music course – aural perception, musical techniques and history and analysis. Performing was included as a compulsory part of the examination only in the case of AQA.

Question papers were set to test competence in the three key areas. In the case of aural perception, the question papers were concerned with aural dictation and in some cases sight singing; in musical techniques, traditional melody and harmony tests were set. In the case of music history, candidates were tested on their knowledge of set works and on



general music history, though without any direct reference to the sound of the music. Questions here were challenging, open-ended and required a good depth of knowledge and understanding, although mark schemes were often minimal and in many cases relied on impression marking. Whether this was a valid vehicle for the assessment of musical behaviours is open to question.

In 1995 the GCSE examinations had less emphasis on terminal written question papers and more on practical examinations and composition completed as coursework assignments. By 1995 listening papers required candidates to respond to the structural and expressive elements of music, to perceive the relationship between sound and symbol using staff notation and to show an awareness of musical styles, past and present. There was now reference to recorded music, but there was a dramatically lower level of demand in the questions on set works and historical topics. This was due to a significant shift in the type and style of questions, the way marks were allocated and the balance of questions requiring short answers versus extended prose responses. In addition, reviewers judged that the questions testing candidates' knowledge and understanding about music were less demanding than those of 1985, which dealt with the analysis of periods, composers and pieces.

By 1995 performing was compulsory across all awarding bodies. Examinations were mostly conducted by visiting examiners, and candidates were required to offer both prepared and unprepared performing. However, reviewers judged that there was a general lowering of expectations compared to the requirements of the 1985 performing options. They considered that this was also true in terms of the assessment of aural perception. In composing, candidates were required to compose or arrange music in a traditional or contemporary idiom. Marking criteria were variable in detail and rigour.

The 2000 examination followed similar lines to those of 1995, although reviewers judged that overall demand had declined further. The removal of any study of set works from some syllabuses, the withdrawal of unprepared performing and a reduction of the number of compositions required were the main factors in this judgement.

By 2005 for CCEA, Edexcel and WJEC, the only remaining question paper was for listening. AQA and OCR also had a terminal task linked to their integrated assignments. The lower level of detailed knowledge required and the use of many multiple choice questions as well as questions requiring short responses meant that reviewers found the listening papers to be relatively undemanding.

From 1985 to 2005, reviewers had no doubt that the overall level of demand of the listening question paper, which was part of all syllabuses, had declined, with a growing focus on breadth of coverage rather than depth of knowledge. There were increasingly fewer opportunities for candidates to argue a point of view or write extended answers in coherent prose. There was an increasing emphasis on short-answer, closed and structured questions, as well as multiple choice questions, all of which in many instances favoured less able candidates. In addition, questions that demanded more traditional skills of melodic/rhythmic notation tended to be shorter and easier. As a result, reviewers were concerned that GCSE papers from 1995 onwards did not provide an appropriate level of demand for able candidates. This was despite the fact that papers progressively showed much greater attention to clarity and simplicity in the formulation of questions and layout. The level of detail in mark schemes had also significantly improved.

## **Coursework**

The issue of coursework is particularly complex in music examinations. Essentially, the term coursework embraces any activity where the work is carried out by candidates over an extended period of time and subsequently submitted for assessment as part of a final qualification. The assessment process for coursework may be ongoing, for example where candidates' performances during the course are assessed by teachers as they take place, or it may be terminal, where for example compositions carried out during the course are completed and then submitted by a given date for assessment. In addition, coursework assessment may be carried out internally with external moderation, as for example in the case of reports or investigations carried out by candidates with marking undertaken by the teacher in the centre and subsequently submitted for external moderation. External examiners may also carry out the marking, as sometimes happens in the case of recorded performances.

Following on the introduction of coursework as part of the scheme of assessment for GCSE from 1988, there was a significant shift from external assessment by examination towards internal assessment of coursework.

In 1985 there was no internal assessment included in the specifications. In 1995 the percentage of marks allocated to internal assessment varied from 25–30 per cent with CCEA, WJEC and Edexcel, to 60–70 per cent with AQA and OCR options. In 2000 there was a similar pattern, with Edexcel moving to 60 per cent. In 2005, all awarding bodies had moved to an allocation of between 40 and 75 per cent.

Coursework was used by awarding bodies in different components of the examination, and procedures for its assessment varied across awarding bodies and over time. For example, there were cases where coursework submissions were externally marked, such as the AQA 2005 integrated assignment which, apart from a brief terminal paper, was carried out outside of examination conditions.

Reviewers agreed that composing cannot be effectively assessed by examination papers and that its submission as coursework was entirely appropriate. However, where internal assessment was used, there were concerns over reliability. For example, Edexcel's use of optional criteria in mark schemes highlighted the tension between the need for flexibility to cope with varying musical styles and the need for the schemes to lead to consistent outcomes. There was also some concern about the submission of composing coursework in recorded form, without any requirement to use musical notation. There was, however, general agreement that the introduction of briefs for composing from 2000 had gone some way towards raising the level of demand in this component. Reviewers also judged that the use of internal assessment for integrated assignments could in some cases be appropriate.

In the case of performance, reviewers acknowledged that a mix of both internal and external assessment was valid for reflecting the studio and live performance environments, although they noted that by 2005 only WJEC and CCEA were using visiting examiners for assessing live performing. For the other awarding bodies, performing was assessed internally and moderated externally. Overall, reviewers judged

that there had been a decline in the level of demand in performing. Still, some reviewers considered that, in some 2005 syllabuses, the linking of performing to the areas of study had, in fact, increased the level of demand.

The lack of unprepared performing and the gradual decline in the number of compositions that candidates were required to submit, together with the fact that notation of these was no longer required, concerned reviewers, as did the variations between awarding bodies in the relative weightings of examination and coursework.

## Conclusions

As discussed above, the 20-year period covered by the review saw a number of changes in the assessment of music at 16+: the introduction of GCSE in 1988 and the introduction of new subject criteria in 1995 and 2000. These were significant changes affecting the syllabus content and the overall assessment structure and had a positive impact in a number of ways:

- syllabuses became much more accessible to the full range of candidates
- syllabuses now feature jazz, popular and world music alongside the western classical tradition
- the compulsory requirement for performing and composing in syllabuses means that candidates now gain firsthand musical experience
- there is increased scope for creative and integrated work by candidates.

However, there has been a significant loss of demand in some areas:

there is much less emphasis on musical literacy;

several aspects of the performing component are affected: the minimum demand of pieces now needed to achieve the higher grades is very low; assessment via coursework has replaced the live concert environment for most candidates; and unprepared sight-reading and improvisation are no longer assessed;

the move to short answer, structured and multiple choice questions means there are no opportunities for candidates to develop substantial essay-based answers requiring detailed knowledge of set works.

## Standards of attainment at GCSE

### Introduction

Reviewers considered candidates' work from all of the awarding bodies in 2005. Details of the materials used are provided in Appendix B.

It should be noted that no performances were provided for CCEA candidates and this may have affected reviewers' judgements about candidates' work.

### Descriptions of attainment

Reviewers were asked to identify key features of candidate performance in 2005, based on candidates' overall work seen at each of the key grade boundaries. Reviewers drew up descriptions of attainment seen at each borderline, focusing on the assessment objectives as well as allowing for additional features of candidate attainment.

#### GCSE grade A boundary description of attainment

Performing
Candidates characteristically play and/or sing with some confidence. They exhibit an understanding of rhythm and metre and, where repertoire is appropriately chosen, show an emerging sense of style in both solo and ensemble performance. Their performances make some use of expressive detail but are often lacking in overall musicality.
Composing
Candidates characteristically create compositions which are structural, secure and consistent in style but are often functional and underdeveloped. Most show an ability to respond to a brief and to attempt to evaluate their own work critically.
Appraising
Candidates characteristically show musical knowledge and understanding across a range of styles, traditions and genres. They have the ability to identify some musical elements and are able to respond to their listening using appropriate musical language.

## Description of attainment at the GCSE grade A boundary

Overall, AQA candidates were judged to be slightly stronger than candidates from other awarding bodies, while WJEC candidates were found to be weaker. There were no performances available for CCEA candidates and reviewers commented that this may have affected their judgements, as performance was often the strongest component. Reviewers noted that the standard of candidates' work in the listening examination tended to be comparable across the awarding bodies, with the exception of WJEC (see below), and that more variation occurred in performance and composing elements.

Reviewers found that AQA candidates tended to be confident and competent in all areas and were often adventurous in their performances and compositions. They showed good control over a wide range of musical elements. They also tended to perform well on what reviewers judged to be quite a difficult listening paper.

Reviewers found that WJEC candidates tended to demonstrate a lower standard in their compositions and performances. While their compositions showed some sense of structure, they were often predictable and lacked flair and creativity, with little development of ideas or colour. Their performance on the listening component was often variable and reviewers commented that the WJEC listening examination had many closed questions and very few required extended responses. This made it difficult for candidates to explore and analyse effectively, particularly at the grade A boundary.

## GCSE grade C boundary description of attainment

Performing
Candidates characteristically play and/or sing with adequate control of the demands of the music both in individual and ensemble performance. They show a sense of balance in ensemble and are able to respond to other performers. They apply some interpretative detail to their performances.
Composing
Candidates characteristically create compositions which organise a range of musical ideas with some awareness of stylistic conventions. The outcomes are broadly appropriate to the brief.

Appraising

Candidates characteristically are able to identify simple features of their own and others' music in relation to the styles in which they are working. They make use of some appropriate musical language in describing what they hear.

### Description of attainment at the GCSE grade C boundary

The standard of candidate work was judged to be comparable across the awarding bodies at this grade boundary, with the exception of CCEA candidates, who were found to be weaker. However, it should be noted that there was no performance work available for CCEA candidates and reviewers commented that this may have affected their judgements. Furthermore, there was no recording of the composition component and so reviewers had to base their judgements solely on the score provided.

Reviewers found that CCEA candidates tended to perform reasonably well on the listening paper. They were often good at instrument recognition but weaker on questions requiring extended answers and on notation. However, their compositions tended to be weaker, using simple structures with little development of ideas and much repetition. The use of 'arrangements' by some candidates was not always successful, as it was unclear what the candidate had contributed in terms of original input.

### GCSE grade F boundary description of attainment

Performing

Candidates characteristically play and/or sing with a modest degree of continuity and are able to communicate their ideas at a basic level.

Composition

Candidates characteristically create compositions which organise simple musical ideas and make elementary use of appropriate resources in response to a brief.

Appraising

Candidates characteristically make basic responses to their own and others' music using a limited range of musical vocabulary to justify their opinions.



### **Description of attainment at the GCSE grade F boundary**

Based on the limited evidence available, reviewers found the standard of candidate work to be broadly comparable across the awarding bodies, with the exception of OCR candidates, who were judged to be weaker. Reviewers commented on the difficulty of making judgements when many candidates (across the awarding bodies) had missing components.

OCR candidates' performances were generally judged to be poor and they were found to be particularly weak on the listening paper. While they could make a few relevant musical responses, they were generally unable to identify tonality, key change, instruments within groups or cadence points. On questions requiring longer answers, their responses were repetitive, unstructured and lacking in specific detail. Their compositions tended to be their strongest component and, although these were basic and repetitive, they did show some limited development of style and structure.

### **Summary**

Standards of candidate work were generally judged to be comparable across the awarding bodies, although at each grade boundary candidates from one awarding body were judged to be weaker than the others. At grade A, this was WJEC candidates, at grade C this was CCEA candidates and at grade F this was OCR candidates. It should be noted that there was no performance evidence available for CCEA candidates, which may have affected reviewers' judgements. Further, at grade F many candidates across the awarding bodies had missing components, so that there was often limited evidence on which to base judgements.

## A level 1985–2005

### Introduction

There have been two major factors that affected all A level examinations between 1985 and 2005.

The first derives from the fact that the 20-year period covered by the review spans the time when the many changes in the cultural, social and educational attitudes to music within schools and colleges described in the General Introduction happened. In 1985 there was a clear perspective that the content of an A level music course would build from O level, providing a secure foundation for a small and specialised group of students, a significant proportion of whom would probably wish to pursue the subject in higher education. However, with the period seeing the introduction of a national curriculum in music which focused on participation for all in the three areas of performing, composing and listening/appraising, awarding bodies sought to make music A level examinations much more widely accessible and more closely linked to the main themes of the national curriculum.

The second factor was the change in design of the A level qualification in line with the Curriculum 2000 reforms. This involved a move to unitised assessment based on a six-unit structure. The overall assessment of the A level qualification was split into the first half, Advanced Subsidiary (AS), and the second half, A2. The AS and A2 sections of the course were each assessed by three units, making six units for the A level overall. The level of demand of the AS qualification was reduced from the former Advanced Supplementary qualification to allow a smoother transition for students moving from GCSE to A level and to allow the new AS to stand as a broadening qualification in its own right. The main requirement of the changes was to carry forward the full A level standard.

The most significant changes for A level music between 1985 and 2005 were:

- a gradual broadening of focus beyond the western classical tradition
- a shift in emphasis in what is assessed from knowledge about music and its history to practical experience in performing, composing and listening

- the use by all awarding bodies of a common aural perception paper for a period from 1987 and its subsequent withdrawal
- the change to a mandatory six-unit AS/A2 assessment structure as described above
- a move to less demanding AS and more demanding A2 units
- a revised synoptic requirement
- the compulsory introduction of areas of study as a basis for syllabuses (introduced with Curriculum 2000 reforms).

### **Materials available**

Reviewers considered the syllabus documents, question papers and associated mark schemes from each of the awarding bodies in 1985, 1995, 2000 and 2005. Information from CCEA was provided only for 1995 and 2005. Details of the syllabuses included in the review are given in Appendix A. However, information about assessment criteria and mark schemes was frequently incomplete in the documentation for pre-2005 syllabuses, which made it difficult to assess demand confidently. Where this documentation was provided, the information on assessment criteria was sometimes minimal, particularly in 1985.

### **Assessment objectives**

A table showing the assessment objectives across the awarding bodies in the years 1985, 1995, 2000 and 2005 follows.

**A level assessment objectives, 1985–2005**

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
AQA	<p>Listening &amp; Critical appreciation (3)<sup>1</sup></p> <p>Syllabuses A,B &amp; C</p> <p>Written musical expression (3)</p> <p>Syllabuses A &amp; B</p> <p>Performance (1)</p> <p>Syllabuses A &amp; B</p> <p>Practical work (5)</p> <p>Syllabuses A &amp; B</p> <p>Aural Perception &amp; analysis (4)</p>	<p>Listening &amp; Critical appreciation (3)</p> <p>Written and musical expression (6)</p> <p>Performance (1)</p> <p>Practical work (2)</p> <p>Aural perception &amp; analysis (4)</p>	<p>Knowledge, understanding &amp; use of practical &amp; interpretative skills &amp; written techniques</p> <p>Aural awareness &amp; critical response to music of different styles in a cultural &amp; historical context</p> <p>Quality of language</p> <p>No weightings given</p>	<p>AO1.1 Performing 30%</p> <p>AO1.2 Composing 25%</p> <p>AO2 Understanding 45%</p>

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers in brackets indicate the numbers of separate assessment objectives attached to specific components of the assessment.

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>Syllabus C</p> <p>No weightings given</p>	<p>No weightings given</p>		
CCEA		<p>Perform</p> <p>Compose</p> <p>Use a vocabulary of diatonic harmony</p> <p>Recognise the use of chromatic harmony</p> <p>Work with harmonic knowledge in a variety of textures</p> <p>Understand musical forms, textures &amp; styles &amp; the development of instrumentation</p>		<p>AO1 Performing &amp; Composing 60–64%</p> <p>AO2 Appraising 36–s40%</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
		<p>Analyse, comment perceptively &amp; write lucidly about basic aspects of structure &amp; style using the appropriate technical language</p> <p>No weightings given</p>		
Edexcel	None stated	<p>Skill in aural perception</p> <p>Understanding of musical techniques</p> <p>Analytical &amp; historical understanding of music from the period 1550 to the present day</p> <p>Skill, understanding &amp; communication in musical</p>	As for 1995	<p>AO1 (a) Performing</p> <p>22½ or 37½%</p> <p>AO1 (b) Composing</p> <p>22½ or 37½%</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
		performance		AO2 Appraising 40%
OCR	None stated	Listening Performing (4) Composing (2) Appraising (3)  No weightings given	Listening Performing (4) Composing (2) Appraising (3) Quality of language  No weightings given	AO1 (a) Performing 27.5%  AO1 (b) Composing 31.7%  AO2 Appraising 40.8% (including quality of written language)
WJEC	None stated	Aural awareness  Ability to distinguish principal styles from 1550–c1970  Aural analytical skills	As for 1995	AO1 (a) Performing 30%  AO1 (b) Composing 30%

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
		Compositional skills  Historical, stylish & cultural awareness  Performing skills  No weightings given		AO2    Appraising    40%



In 1985 the only awarding body to identify specific assessment objectives was AQA. Their 16 different objectives covered a vast range of content and simply reflected the syllabus components.

By 1995 all syllabuses contained often extensive lists of assessment objectives. As with AQA in 1985, rather than wide cross-component assessment objectives, these were really just descriptions of what individual components were trying to achieve. They related to the main activities of aural perception, listening and critical appreciation, written musical techniques and performing. In the case of CCEA the list is essentially one of learning outcomes and in the case of OCR the relationship between assessment objectives and syllabus structure was not made explicit. In the case of WJEC the assessment objectives were brief but well balanced across the different activities. However, reviewers were concerned that ‘the ability to distinguish principal styles from 1550–c1970’ was too wide in terms of possible historical study when not limited to some extent by further guidance on musical periods or pieces, while also being narrow in its focus on the western classical tradition.

In 2000 Edexcel, OCR and WJEC retained essentially the same assessment objectives, while AQA reduced their previous 16 assessment objectives to two, stating that ‘all components within both the core & the options will lead candidates to demonstrate skills & understanding that are assessable by both of the AOs’. Both AQA and OCR included a reference to the assessment of quality of written language.

Up to and including 2000 no weightings were given to assessment objectives by any of the awarding bodies. The 2005 assessment objectives were based on those given in the Curriculum 2000 subject criteria, where only two assessment objectives were defined. AO1 encompassed both performing and composing, although these two activities were essentially treated as two separate components: AO1(a) performing and AO1(b) composing. AO2 covered appraising/understanding. The subject criteria allowed a weighting of 55–65 per cent for AO1, with the requirement that each of AO1a and AO1b must have a minimum weighting of 20 per cent, and maximum weighting between 35–45% for AO2. Awarding bodies differed in the weightings they assigned within these parameters, with AQA weighting AO1 at 55 per cent and CCEA allowing it to count for up to 64 per cent. AQA weighted AO1 30/25 per cent towards performing and OCR

weighted it 31/27 per cent towards composing, while Edexcel allowed candidates the option of giving greater weight (37/22 per cent) to either AO1a or A01b, depending on the option chosen.

The degree of change to assessment objectives over the period made it impossible for reviewers to judge whether there had been any impact on demand over time. However, reviewers considered that the variations in 2005 provided acceptable levels of flexibility without affecting demand.

## **Syllabus content**

In 1985 all of the awarding bodies reviewed offered some choice to candidates. AQA offered three syllabuses with only one common paper in music history, which was in two parts. The three syllabuses catered, in turn, for the all-round musician, the performer and the critical listener. Edexcel had four compulsory papers – aural perception, musical techniques, music history and performing – with a choice of one of three further optional papers allowing for specialisation in one of these areas.

OCR had two compulsory papers – aural perception and harmony and history – with two options, one of which allowed for harmonic analysis and set works, plus an external practical grade, and the other which allowed for a higher-level practical grade to be accredited. The first option required candidates to perform at Grade 6 but accounted for no marks and instead acted as a hurdle for candidates in order to achieve a grade. The second option required performing at Grade 8 and was weighted so that marks contributed to candidates' final grades. In addition, candidates could submit one short original composition if they wished, but this would contribute to a candidate's grade only if it was deemed to be of 'sufficient merit'. WJEC had all compulsory components – harmony and counterpoint, history and set works, aural test and practical performance – although there were three performing options, consisting of either pure performing, performing and composing or performing and a dissertation.

Initially, performing played a relatively minor role in the qualification, typically attracting 16–18 per cent of the total marks for the subject. However there were options that, in the case of AQA, Edexcel and OCR, gave candidates the opportunity to specialise in

performing, thus increasing the subject marks available to between 29 and 37 per cent. There was one instance in which performing at a certain level acted as a hurdle for candidates to achieve an A level, with no specific weighting assigned.

Reviewers generally perceived the 1985 syllabuses to be very demanding. All of the awarding bodies set a paper in music history, and in every case topics for this paper had a limited focus and were based on an essentially traditional, western cultural heritage. All syllabuses required detailed study of one or more set works drawn from mainstream composers. OCR set a choice of either Beethoven's *Third Symphony* or Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* as well as two further works drawn from a list of six, ranging from a selection of English madrigals to Webern's *Symphony Op. 21*. Works set by WJEC included Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* or Handel's *Acis and Galatea*; Brahms's *Symphony No. 1* or Tchaikovsky's *Symphony No. 6* and Vaughan Williams's *Sea Symphony*; or Daniel Jones's *The Country Beyond the Stars* or Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*. AQA's set works were related to set periods and Edexcel set 30 musical extracts drawn from 1550 to the present.

In addition to this detailed analytical study, awarding bodies also required candidates to know about developments in extended periods of classical music history. AQA defined eight periods ranging from 1400–1594 up to 1930 to the present, of which four were set for study in any one year. OCR required knowledge of the outlines of music history for the period 1700–1920 and WJEC offered a choice of one topic from the following three options: opera and religious music, 1650–1720; the romantic symphony, 1830–1895, and choral/orchestral music, 1910–1960. Topics for the most part lent themselves to a highly factual approach, with much recall of knowledge about music required and probably less firsthand understanding of music than in later syllabuses.

There were mixed views about the level of demand in performing where practical grades were used, due largely to the great variety of approaches from the awarding bodies. The production of a certificate at Grade 6 accounted for 18 per cent of marks for Edexcel, but no marks at OCR, instead acting as a hurdle to be passed. A certificate at Grade 8 accounted for 36 per cent and 37 per cent for Edexcel and OCR, respectively, while AQA and WJEC did not accept the external grade certificates, instead using visiting examiners to carry out their own assessments.

In 1995, syllabuses continued to consist of compulsory papers combined with some level of choice, allowing candidates to weight their overall A level towards one of the core musical activities. Edexcel added dissertation and music technology to its list of options. For one syllabus, AQA offered a choice of musical techniques or commissioned compositions. OCR offered a choice of one option from further composing, more advanced performing and a project. WJEC asked for one piece of extension work. All five components were compulsory for CCEA.

The focus remained on music from the western classical tradition, with CCEA requiring candidates to select two out of four set works and two out of four set topics from a list that included Mozart's *Symphony No. 41 in C*, Bartok's *String Quartet No. 4*, the music of Monteverdi and the symphonic poems of Richard Strauss. WJEC and OCR moved to study of set periods and related set works, while AQA and Edexcel for the most part maintained their previous approach.

Performing became an integral part of the A level music examination and most syllabuses offered options for higher-level performers. Most syllabuses included both prepared and unprepared performing activities, although there were variations in what the additional tests included. For AQA and WJEC, sight singing was compulsory. Edexcel required both solo performance and a quick study assignment. This involved candidates studying a previously unseen piece for 20 minutes and then performing it; it was assessed against the same criteria as those for solo performance. Candidates were given more choice than in 1985 in selecting repertoire, although recommended levels of difficulty varied between awarding bodies and there was a gradual expansion in the range of instruments presented for examination. This raises particular issues with regard to consistency of assessment. Recommended timings for performances varied from 12 to 15 minutes for some boards and 15 to 20 minutes for others.

In 2000, Edexcel, OCR and WJEC retained essentially the same syllabuses as in 1995. AQA made a radical change introducing two compulsory papers – aural perception and history and analysis – plus three out of a possible list of six options including composing, harmony and counterpoint, practical musicianship, project and report and two practical examinations. Each of the five components carried equal weight.

For the most part, reviewers judged that the syllabuses for 1995 and 2000 offered an appropriate spread of opportunity for candidates of all abilities, although some of the compulsory papers were quite demanding. There were concerns about the prevailing focus on the western classical tradition, as described above, and about the relatively restricted range of prescribed 20th-century art music. WJEC included a significant number of 20th-century works, not only by composers such as Shostakovich, Messiaen and Walton but also by Welsh composers such as Grace Williams, Daniel Jones and Alan Hoddinott. Other awarding bodies included representative works from the first half of the century, including those by Bartok, Janacek, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Webern, and jazz traditions began to be set. However there was little evidence of any music written after 1950.

By 2005, the advent of Curriculum 2000 and the new subject criteria had led to a six-unit structure linked to the two assessment objectives and examinations at both AS and A2 levels. The syllabuses required candidates at AS to gain a depth of understanding of two contrasting areas of study across time and/or place, at least one of which should be taken from the western classical tradition. At A2, candidates were required to increase depth of study in one of the areas selected at AS and to increase breadth of study by including one further area of study.

Performing had to be included at both AS and A2, and a clear distinction had to be drawn between the two levels. Most awarding bodies adjusted the timings of performances, with typically eight to 10 minutes at AS and 10 to 15 minutes at A2. There was also a general expectation of a standard of performing of about Grade 5 at AS and Grade 6 at A2, although not all awarding bodies used these external points of reference. Most awarding bodies applied some proportion of marks in marking schemes to cater for candidates who performed at either a higher or a lower level of difficulty than that recommended.

Reviewers were concerned that, in some cases, performing demands were inadequate. For example, for two of the awarding bodies, candidates could achieve an AS grade having offered a minimum of five minutes of performance for assessment. There were also concerns about Edexcel, where some of the performing at AS and A2 could be recorded at any time during the course rather than in a terminal examination, as with

other awarding bodies. At A2 all awarding bodies required 10–15 minutes of performance, but the total time could be far higher with some awarding bodies, depending on the options chosen by candidates. Reviewers also noted that practical examinations in most cases no longer included unprepared work and considered that this contributed to a lowering of demand, although CCEA still featured an unprepared performance at A2. However there were some encouraging developments. Some syllabuses retained a *viva voce* and the OCR 'Performance Investigation' at A2 added a distinctive and demanding element, though the maximum number of words was considered to be excessive. The 2005 OCR also syllabus featured the three valuable AS options of performing on a second instrument, in an ensemble or an original composition. It was judged that the extent of guidance given by AQA as to the standard of performing expected at both AS and A2 was limited as compared with that provided by other awarding bodies.

CCEA offered an impressive range of options at both AS and A2, including the possibility of playing two instruments, individual or solo ensemble performing, rehearsing and directing and multi-track recording and sequencing.

The increased role for extended composition in syllabuses was welcomed, as for example in the Edexcel unit 4 option and in the AQA unit 5 investigation, 'Report and composition'. However in some syllabuses, for example CCEA, the absence of any requirement for harmony and counterpoint, and of any required aural dictation, was judged to reduce demand, as was WJEC's treatment of harmony and counterpoint as an option. There were also reservations about the level of demand of the Edexcel musical techniques requirement for A2 level, where candidates select only one task from eight possible options, including harmonisation of a Bach Chorale melody, completion of a contrapuntal excerpt and development of a composition in minimalist, serialist or popular song style.

Overall, the most significant variations between awarding bodies occurred in the areas of study prescribed in the syllabuses. In some cases awarding bodies specified different areas of study for AS and A2, while in others candidates were allowed to select their areas of study from a list of areas available at either AS or A2.

AQA set two areas for AS: *The Western Tonal Tradition 1700–1850* with three set works, Bach's second *Brandenburg Concerto*, Haydn's *String Quartet Op. 76 No. 2* and three Schubert Songs, as well as *Change and Development* in a musical genre, style or tradition with the topic selected by the teacher. For A2, the third area of study was *Musical Genres and the Musical Setting of Text in 20th & 21st Centuries*, with a study of six genres and a choice of one out of two set works. Candidates were required to carry forward their study of the western tonal tradition with an in-depth study of two works separated by at least 100 years but connected by genre, place or occasion. One of the works must be drawn from the period 1700–1850 and one from either before or after this period.

CCEA set for AS *The Concerto (1700–1897)* and a choice of either *Oratorio*, *The Evolution of Jazz (1890–1929)* or *Folk Traditions of Ireland & Scotland*. For A2, *The Concerto* area was carried forward with a choice of one set work and the third area was a choice of *16th Century Music* (Lassus, G. Gabrieli and Tallis) or *20th Century Music* (Copland, Vaughan Williams and Shostakovich).

Edexcel provided a list of nine areas of study available at either AS and A2 levels that, in addition to western classical topics, included music for film and television, popular music and jazz and world music. Special focus works for each area were highlighted.

OCR set only three areas of study, which provided an overarching framework within which learning in one module might be linked to another. The AS areas were *Tonality* and *Expressive Use of Instrumental Techniques*. Either of these could be continued to A2. The third area was *Words & Music*.

WJEC also set only three areas of study, all available at AS and A2. These were: An investigation of music elements, structures and resources through the study of instrumental Baroque music (1650–1750); An introduction to Musical Styles in Stage Music with a prescribed list of music from opera, ballet and theatre music; and Music in the 20th Century with a focus on the diversity of musical styles in western art music of the 20th century (Debussy/Stravinsky/Schoenberg).

Areas of study have also played a key part in the move to promote not only the study of the three primary activities of performing, composing and listening/appraising, but also to encourage a more integrated and holistic approach to the subject. This objective is realised in the requirement for synoptic assessment, which is defined as the demonstration of aural perception, making connections between different aspects of musical activities, and applying the musical skills, knowledge and understanding, described in both assessment objectives to unfamiliar music. In meeting this requirement, syllabuses made a number of links between areas of study and both the listening/appraising component (AO2) and performing and composing (AO1) requirements. AQA required that at least one composition at AS level was linked to an area of study. At A2 unit 5, compositions were to be inspired by the chosen area of study. Edexcel also provided opportunities for candidates to relate composing and/or compositional techniques to areas of study. OCR actively promoted integration and cross-referencing in composing and historical/analytical study. At A2, WJEC required links to areas of study in both composing and performing.

With this emphasis on synoptic assessment in 2005 syllabuses, further demands had been placed on candidates to make connections between their performing work and their other studies. However, there were concerns that these links could be restricted by the nature of the areas of study. This applied, for example, to OCR, where an overemphasis on tonality and a sidelining of contemporary art music was apparent. Reviewers found with WJEC that the narrow focus on Baroque music at AS could limit candidates in composing to Baroque pastiche or to large-scale opera and ballet. With CCEA, the compulsory area of study, 'The Concerto (approx. 1700–1897)', offered a somewhat narrow focus. However, the remainder of the CCEA syllabus was seen as significantly broader and potentially more appealing to candidates than previously, with opportunities for the use of information and communication technology within the performing units.

The picture of the content of syllabuses over the period of the review is multifaceted, and made more complex by the commitment of most awarding bodies to provide options for candidates to play to their strengths while endeavouring to ensure comparability and rigour. For the most part reviewers considered that the syllabuses offered a satisfactory balance between compulsory and optional topics, although they varied to some extent in their views of whether more choice for candidates increased or reduced the level of demand. Reviewers generally perceived the 1985 syllabuses as very demanding and for



the most part judged that subsequent syllabuses offered an appropriate spread of opportunity for candidates of all abilities.

Reviewers also welcomed the move over time to expand the repertoire of music to be studied to include not only the repertoire of the western classical tradition but also jazz, popular and world music. There were some queries about the relative weightings of these different styles and traditions, the balance of breadth and depth of study required by syllabuses and the level of demand. However, there was general agreement and endorsement of the direction which syllabuses have taken over time in this area.

Reviewers were concerned that, coinciding with some of these changes, there had been a lowering in the overall level of demand. It was judged that the level of aural perception skills had fallen. There was also a concern that musical techniques in harmony and counterpoint were being marginalised, and that the detailed analytical study of set works had been lost. In addition, requirements for extended writing had been reduced. Some reviewers saw the requirements for links between components as a dilution of the integrity of the performing element; others judged that it had increased the level of demand, particularly at A2. There was concern that some important skills were not being developed as fully as they had been for some candidates in the past.

Overall, however, in terms of subject content, there was much to welcome in the new syllabuses. Candidates were being encouraged to engage in firsthand musical experiences, learning to develop and communicate their musical ideas to a wider audience, working to their strengths and taking responsibility for their own learning. The move to include performing and extended composing as an integral part of the syllabus, to embrace a much wider range of musical traditions and genres and to provide more opportunities for expressive and creative work was welcomed. By 2005 there was a clear exposition of objectives in line with the subject criteria, and the given weightings were generally seen to be appropriate.

## **Scheme of assessment and options**

A table showing the scheme of assessment across the awarding bodies in the years 1985, 1995, 2000 and 2005 follows.

**A level schemes of assessment, 1985–2005**

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
AQA	Paper 1 32% Syllabus A,B & C Written examination 3hours Paper 2 24% Syllabus A & B Written examination 2 hours Project 24% Syllabus C Written coursework Internally assessed/ externally moderated	Paper 1 24% Written examination 2½ hours Paper 2 18% Syllabus A Written examination 2 hours Syllabus B Either Paper 2 (as above) or Commissioned compositions Coursework Externally assessed	All candidates must take the core (40%) & three options (60%) Core: Listening Part 1 10% Dictation & aural discrimination Examination ¾ hour Part 2 10% Aural & stylistic analysis Examination 1 hour	Unit 1 (AO2) 20% Understanding Music Written Examination 2½ hours Unit 2 (AO1.2) 15% Composing Coursework Externally assessed Unit 3 (AO1/1) 15% Performing Coursework 7–15 mins. Internally assessed/externally

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	Folio 12%		History & Analysis 20%	moderated
	Syllabus A	Aural perception 28%	Examination 2½ hours	
	Composition coursework	Written examination		Unit 4 (AO2) 15%
	Internally assessed/externally moderated	1¾ hours	Options each at 20%	Understanding Music
	Aural & dictation 15%	Performance, viva	Compositions (10–15 mins.)	Written Examination 2½ hours
	Syllabus A & B	Syllabus A 18%	Externally assessed Coursework	Unit 5 (AO1.2 & AO2) 20%
	Practical Test	Syllabus B 30%	Harmony & Counterpoint	Investigation, Report & Composition Coursework
	Visiting examiner	Practical examination	Examination 2½ hours	
	Viva, performance	Visiting examiner	Practical Musicianship	Internally assessed/externally moderated
	Syllabus A 17%		External Examiner	
	Syllabus B 29%	Folio of compositions 12%	Project & Report	

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	Practical Test Visiting examiner Aural perception & analysis Syllabus C 44% Written examination 3 hours	Syllabus A Coursework Internally assessed/externally moderated	Coursework Internally assessed & externally moderated Recital A (15–20 mins.) or Recital B (12–15 mins.) Visiting Examiners	Unit 6 (AO1.1) 15% Performing (15 mins.) Visiting Examiner
CCEA	No information	Composition 13% Externally assessed Paper 1 12%	No information	AS 1 (AO1) 16% Composition - Externally assessed AS 2 (AO1) 16%

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
		<p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 2 27%</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>Paper 3 28%</p> <p>Written examination 2¼ hours</p> <p>Practical Test 20%</p> <p>Visiting examiner</p>		<p>Performance - Externally assessed (5–18 mins.)</p> <p>AS 3 (AO2) 18%</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>A2 1 (AO1) 16%</p> <p>Composition - Externally assessed</p> <p>A2 2 (AO1) 16%</p> <p>Performance - Externally assessed (10–28 mins.)</p> <p>A2 3 (AO2) 18%</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
Edexcel	<p>All candidates take Papers 1, 2 &amp; 4 then</p> <p>either Paper 6 plus one of Papers 3, 3R or 5</p> <p>or Paper 7</p> <p>Paper 1 Aural 28%</p> <p>Written examination 1 hour</p> <p>Paper 2 Musical Techniques One 18%</p> <p>Written examination 1½ hours</p>	<p>All candidates take Paper 1, 4 and either 2 or 10 then</p> <p>Either Paper 6 plus one of 3,5,8,10,12A, 12B or 6 on a second instrument</p> <p>Or Paper 7</p> <p>Paper 1 Aural Perception - 20%</p> <p>Written examination 1½ hours</p> <p>Paper 4 Musical History &amp; Analysis 1 20%</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 2 Musical Techniques 1 20%</p>	As for 1995	<p>Unit 1 (AO1a) 15%</p> <p>Performing</p> <p>Solo performance recorded &amp; externally assessed (5–6 mins.)</p> <p>Performing during course internally assessed (4 occasions)</p> <p>Unit 2 (AO1b) 15%</p> <p>Developing musical ideas</p> <p>Coursework externally assessed</p> <p>Unit 3 (AO2) 20%</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
Edexcel cont	<p>Paper 3 Musical Techniques Two 18%</p> <p>Written examination 1½ hours</p> <p>Paper 3R Composition 18%</p> <p>Coursework</p> <p>Externally assessed</p> <p>Paper 4 Musical History &amp; Analysis 1 18%</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 5 Musical History &amp;</p>	<p>Written examination 1 ½ hours</p> <p>Paper 10 Composition &amp; Arrangement 20%</p> <p>Coursework - Externally assessed</p> <p>Paper 3 Musical Techniques 2 20%</p> <p>Written examination - 1 ½ hours</p> <p>Paper 5 Musical History &amp; Analysis 2 20%</p> <p>Written examination - 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 6 Performance Minor 20%</p> <p>Paper 7 Performance Major</p>		<p>Listening &amp; understanding</p> <p>Written examination 2¼ hours</p> <p>Unit 4 Option A (AO1b) 15%</p> <p>Composition portfolio</p> <p>Coursework externally assessed</p> <p>Unit 4 Option B (AO1a) 15%</p> <p>Recital (20 mins.)</p> <p>Recorded &amp; externally assessed</p> <p>Unit 5 (AO1a &amp; b) 15%</p>



Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>Analysis 2 18%</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>Paper 6 Performance Minor 18%</p> <p>Practical Test</p> <p>Pass at least Grade 6 of Associated Boards</p> <p>Paper 7 Performance Major 36%</p> <p>Practical Test</p>	<p>40%</p> <p>Practical test</p> <p>Sections A &amp; B assessed by visiting examiner; Sections C &amp; D internally assessed/externally moderated</p> <p>Paper 8 Dissertation 20%</p> <p>Coursework - External assessment</p> <p>Paper s 12 A &amp; 12B 20%</p> <p>12A – Sequencing; 12 B – Multi-track recording</p>		<p>Performing &amp; Composing</p> <p>Four performances - internally assessed</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>Unit 6 (AO2) 20%</p> <p>Analysing Music</p> <p>Written examination 2¾ hours</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	Pass at least Grade 8 of Associated Boards			
OCR	All candidates take:- Part A Aural Tests 26% Examination time not stated & Part B Harmony & History 37%	All candidates take:- Performing 1 27% Section A visiting examiner Section B coursework Internally assessed/externally moderated	All candidates take:- Performing 1 (AO1 & 2) 27% Visiting examiner & coursework internally assessed/externally moderated Composing Folio 1 27% (AO1,3 & 4)	Unit 1 Performing 16.7% AO1a 10–15 mins. Visiting Examiner Unit 2 Composing 16.7% AO1b & AO2
OCR cont	Written examination 3 hours		Coursework - Externally	Coursework Internally

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>In addition Option 1 take:-</p> <p>Part C Harmonic analysis &amp; prescribed works 37%</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>&amp;</p> <p>Part D ABRSM exam At least a pass at Grade 6 of Associated Boards</p> <p>Option 2 take</p> <p>Part E ABRSM exam 37%</p> <p>At least a pass at Grade 8 of</p>	<p>Composing folio 1 27%</p> <p>Coursework</p> <p>Externally assessed</p> <p>Historical Topics 27%</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>AND one of the following</p> <p>Performing 2 19%</p> <p>Visiting Examiner</p>	<p>assessed</p> <p>Historical topics 27% (AO1,4 &amp; 5)</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>AND one of the following:</p> <p>Performing 2 19%</p> <p>AO 1 &amp; 2</p> <p>Visiting Examiner</p> <p>Composing Folio 2 19%</p> <p>AO 1,3 &amp; 4</p> <p>Coursework Externally</p>	<p>assessed</p> <p>Unit 3 Introduction to Historical Study 16.7%</p> <p>AO2</p> <p>Written examination 2 hours</p> <p>Unit 4 Performing &amp; interpretation 16.7%</p> <p>AO1a &amp; AO2</p> <p>15 mins. Visiting Examiner</p>

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
OCR (cont'd)	Associated Boards &  Part F one short original composition (optional)  Coursework  Credit may be given at final subject grading if the work is of sufficient merit	Composing Folio 2 19%  Coursework  Externally assessed  Project 19%  Coursework  Externally assessed	assessed  Project 19%  AO1 , (3) & (5) AO1 plus either 3 or 5 depending on project  Coursework - Externally assessed	Unit 5 Composing 16.7%  AO1b  Coursework Externally assessed  Unit 6 Historical & Analytical Studies 16.7%  AO2  Written examination 2½ hours
WJEC	A1 Harmony Counterpoint  33.3%	1. Composing 20%  Examination 2½ hours + coursework folio	As for 1995	MU1 AO2 20%  Listening & Appraising  Written examination 1 hour +

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
WJEC Cont	Written examination 3 hours  A2 History & Set works 33.3%  Written examination 3 hours  Aural Tests 16.6%  Examination Externally assessed  Practical 16.6%  Examination Grade 6,5 or 3 of Associated Boards depending	Internally assessed/ externally moderated  2. Set Works 20%  Examination 2 hours +  Coursework folio  Internally assessed/externally moderated  3. Performing 20%  Visiting Examiner  10–20 mins.		coursework Internally assessed/externally moderated  MU2 AO1b 15%  Composing  Coursework externally assessed  MU3 AO1a 15%  Performing 8 minutes  Visiting Examiner  MU4 AO2 20%

Awarding Body	1985	1995	2000	2005
	<p>on option</p> <p>1 Performance 2 Composition &amp; Performance</p> <p>3 Dissertation &amp; Performance Visiting examiner</p>	<p>4. Aural Perception 28%</p> <p>Written examination 1¼ hours</p> <p>5. Additional piece of work one of composing / set works/ performing 12%</p> <p>Visiting Examiner or coursework</p> <p>Internally assessed /externally moderated</p>		<p>Listening &amp; Appraising</p> <p>Written examination 3 hours</p> <p>MU5 AO1b 15%</p> <p>Composing</p> <p>Option of either an examination or coursework Externally assessed</p> <p>MU6 AO1a 15%</p> <p>Performing Recital 12 mins.</p> <p>Visiting Examiner</p>

Throughout the period of the review, there was considerable variation across syllabuses. The introduction of a series of options by awarding bodies led to a more varied portfolio of assessment models. These included external practical examinations and schemes that contained a mix of styles of assessment, such as terminal papers, practical examinations and coursework, assessed both internally and externally. However, the major change over the period of the review was the move to a mandatory unit-based assessment in 2002 with a six-unit structure, as described above.

Reviewers judged that the level of demand in 1985 was high. Assessment depended almost exclusively on a suite of written question papers. The validity of this approach for assessing musical skills and knowledge could be open to question, as is the assessment of performing by external grade examination boards. Although there was a degree of consensus about the skills being assessed, there was considerable variation in how these assessments were used by the awarding bodies.

In 1995 AQA retained two different syllabuses. Syllabus A relied heavily on terminal examination papers plus a folio of compositions, which attracted only 12 per cent of the total marks and was internally assessed and externally moderated. Syllabus B offered an option to substitute the written harmony and counterpoint paper with commissioned compositions carried out as coursework and externally assessed. It also provided for a heavier performing weighting of 30 per cent. Edexcel required five components all weighted at 20 per cent. These included:

- two compulsory written papers in aural perception and music history
- a choice between a harmony and counterpoint question paper or an extended composition and arrangement coursework project externally marked
- a practical examination
- an extension of one component that, according to choice, could involve a question paper, a practical test that combined external and internal assessment or a piece of coursework externally assessed.

OCR offered three compulsory components, each weighted at 27 per cent. They were: performing assessed through a combination of internal and external assessment, a terminal written music history paper and a coursework composition externally assessed.

The fourth component, weighted at 19 per cent, consisted of an extension of one of the three core components and was externally assessed.

In 2000, with the exception of AQA, all awarding bodies offered broadly similar schemes of assessment to those of 1995. AQA changed its scheme to one where all candidates took core terminal papers in listening and music history and analysis and chose three out of six options; all five components were equally weighted. Assessment modes for the options varied according to the nature of the component.

In the 1995 and 2000 syllabuses, the establishment by awarding bodies of a central core with a range of options, encouraging candidates to play to their strengths, made comparability of demand across schemes of assessment difficult. In some cases, candidates were able to bypass aspects such as musical techniques and literacy, which some reviewers saw as contributing to a significant lowering of demand. There also were concerns that the demands of written papers and coursework options were not always comparable. The much more extensive range of instruments being offered for assessment in performing also presented a challenge to achieving comparability.

In 2005 there was a much greater degree of consistency, with two written papers normally related to AO2 totalling between four and five hours, which were split between AS and A2 levels. Performing (AO1a) was assessed in different ways: by a visiting examiner, by means of a recording externally marked or by teacher assessment with external moderation. Composing (AO1b) was normally submitted as coursework and was variously externally and internally assessed. However, at A2, Edexcel used a compositional techniques paper carried out under examination conditions, while WJEC offered candidates the choice of taking a composing examination or submitting two commissioned compositions completed under supervised conditions.

Also new in 2005 was the requirement for each syllabus to contain synoptic assessment at A2 level, weighted at 20 per cent of the whole subject and with at least 15 per cent contained in terminal papers. The overarching areas of study were seen as providing the primary means by which connections would be made between the three main musical activities of performing, composing and appraising, as discussed above.



The requirement for synoptic assessment has presented a number of challenges for awarding bodies, examiners, teachers and candidates, and reviewers appreciated the variety of ways in which these challenges had been addressed. All of the awarding bodies indicated that the A2 written examination papers and examined performances were synoptic, although question papers and mark schemes did not specify in detail the allocation of marks awarded for synoptic responses. There were some awarding bodies that adopted more overtly synoptic approaches, such as AQA's investigation and report activity (although this is carried out as a coursework exercise), Edexcel's compositional techniques exercise and OCR's performing investigation plus either a vocal composition or film storyboard written to a brief. However, reviewers considered that there were still some issues that remained unresolved. These included the choice of appropriate structures for assessment and the extent to which candidates could work creatively and expressively in performing and composing, while also meeting the requirements of links to areas of study.

With the greater degree of standardisation in 2005, there was a more secure basis for reviewing the level of demand across assessment schemes. In general, there was less choice available to candidates. In 2005, the schemes of assessment for performing (AO1a) were many and varied, including both solo and ensemble performance and ranging from external assessment carried out by visiting examiners to externally assessed recorded performances, and from one-off recitals given at centres and assessed by teachers to ongoing assessment throughout the course. The allocation of marks to take account of the levels of difficulty of the pieces performed was also seen to be a significant factor in final assessments, although the ways in which levels of difficulty were applied and marks awarded varied across the awarding bodies.

Extended composing is invariably carried out as a coursework activity. Assessment criteria vary, from very detailed criteria, as for example with Edexcel, to broad band descriptors operated in the context of general guidance, as with AQA.

The assessment of AO2 (appraising) was predominantly carried out through terminal written papers. However, the selection by awarding bodies of appropriate areas of study was seen as a critical factor in the scheme of assessment and the resulting level of

demand for candidates. Reviewers considered the open-ended AQA requirements, where teachers and candidates selected their own topics, could lead to significant variations in response. In the case of Edexcel, the balance of breadth and depth of study and the admirably wide coverage of musical genres and traditions were welcomed, although there were some concerns about the quantity of advice given to candidates about areas on which to focus. The narrower focus of CCEA (*The Concerto*) and of WJEC (*Instrumental music of the Baroque period – 1650–1750*) was perceived as a limiting factor both in terms of AO2 and of cross-component integration.

Schemes of assessment were, for the most part, clearly formulated and well designed to encourage a wide range of candidates to show what they know, understand and can do. Over time, they have been supported with increasingly detailed information and guidance for teachers. There was a general perception that demand in 1985 was unrealistically high, and certainly inappropriate for the wider candidature currently taking up the subject. For the most part, the 2005 schemes of assessment were judged to be appropriate in the demands made, although there were some reservations about the coursework assessment, which are discussed below.

## Options

For the most part, reviewers considered that syllabuses over the period of the review offered a satisfactory balance between compulsory and optional topics. Most syllabuses from 1985 to 2000 offered extensive options, as outlined in the paragraphs on schemes of assessment. The opportunity offered by these options for candidates to play to individual strengths has undoubtedly been a factor in the significant growth in candidature for A level music over the past 20 years. However, for all awarding bodies, the issue of comparability of options and alternative syllabuses was complex and critical. It was made doubly difficult by the variety, not only of subject matter, but also of styles of assessment, as described above.

For example, the limited choice in Edexcel's 1985 syllabus was generally seen to be more demanding for candidates, while there was a perception that the two options of the OCR 1985 syllabus were unbalanced in their levels of demand. There were mixed perceptions about the WJEC 2005 syllabus, which offered fewer elements of choice than in 1995 or 2000 but where candidates could opt to be assessed on certain areas of the curriculum. This was thought by some to limit the experience and learning and to reduce the level of demand. This was also an issue with Edexcel's 1995 and 2000 syllabuses,

where the broad range of options was in many ways perceived as a strength, although the opportunity for candidates who were weaker in musical techniques to avoid this area altogether lowered the level of demand.

With the greater regulation and conformity of the 2005 syllabuses, options lay more within the mandatory components than between them, making comparability more readily attainable. However, some freedom has remained. As described above, awarding bodies have been able to select their own areas of study, in line with the Curriculum 2000 subject criteria, and to determine the best ways of achieving the required synoptic assessment. Teachers and candidates have been able to choose avenues of personal development within the confines of the individual syllabuses. Overall, reviewers judged that, with the few exceptions mentioned, syllabuses made appropriate use of options and offered a broadly comparable level of demand to candidates.

## Assessment

### Question papers

As discussed above, in 1985, assessment relied for the most part on a suite of terminal written papers, with the only exceptions being the assessment of practical work and a small number of optional coursework assignments.

The papers reflected a traditionally academic approach to the teaching and assessment of music. A paper in aural perception had a heavy emphasis on aural dictation and another paper tested a large volume of knowledge about both harmony and counterpoint by means of technical exercises. In an essay-type paper, in addition to analysis of set works, very general questions were set on historical periods, often extending from 1550 to the present.

Tasks were demanding in terms of content, knowledge and the ability to recall facts under the pressure of time. In the case of history and analysis, there were issues of comparability in the papers between the treatment of different areas of study, for example set works and general history, and also in the style and number of questions set. In the case of harmony and counterpoint, the questions in some cases, such as the Edexcel paper, appeared to be less challenging than questions from later years. Yet, since the tasks were undertaken without the use of a keyboard, they were seen to be demanding. There was some vagueness in the formulation of questions, for example OCR's melody test suggested that some modulation might be included but did not indicate whether candidates would gain credit or be penalised if it were missing. Mark schemes were often minimal, particularly for essay questions. Overall, reviewers found most of the papers demanding and in many cases likely to prove daunting for less able candidates, although they were seen to be appropriate for A grade candidates.

In 1995 and 2000, there was a greater divergence of approach across awarding bodies. Some maintained a substantial number of written papers, while others began to develop alternative modes of assessment in line with the increased range of options offered in syllabuses. For the most part, aural perception papers were considered to be quite demanding, but some of the history and analysis papers were judged to be variable in their level of demand. These ranged from AQA, which had substantial questions that

were often based on critical quotations and required extensive musical references, to CCEA, where there were very straightforward essays and easy set works questions, to OCR, where history questions were often very broad. There was also a concern that, although questions for WJEC were more focused than questions in papers for other awarding bodies, only seven of 10 areas of the syllabus were examined. The position with regard to harmony and counterpoint varied across awarding bodies, with both OCR and Edexcel allowing candidates to avoid this subject and also to exhibit less competence in musical literacy. Reviewers judged that these trends contributed to a gradual decline in the overall level of demand.

By 2005, all awarding bodies conducted at least 22 per cent of assessment through coursework (potentially up to 50 per cent). However, with examinations at both AS and A2, the actual time allocated to terminal papers did not reduce significantly, with a two and one-half hour written paper being set for both AS and A2 levels. The only exception was WJEC, where at AS level a combination of coursework and a one-hour written paper was used. These papers incorporated the assessment of aural perception and that of musical history and analysis through the medium of the areas of study. In some cases question papers were also used as part of the coursework assessment process, for example in Edexcel's unit 5 and the option in WJEC's unit 5.

Variations existed in awarding bodies between the setting of question papers for AS and for A2 levels. Some AS papers had more optional questions, as in the case of Edexcel. In other cases, such as AQA, questions were rather generalised in order to accommodate elements of choice offered in the syllabus. There was also a tendency for many questions to require single-word answers rather than extended prose.

There were mixed perceptions about papers at A2 level. Many were seen to be better structured, shorter and more varied than papers from previous years, with layouts also more user-friendly than in previous years. There were concerns that contextual questions were sometimes absent, as for example in AQA, and that in the case of CCEA there appeared to be a lack of significant development from AS to A2. In the case of Edexcel, the types of questions were appropriate, although some were very straightforward and the overall time allocated to the papers was not justified by the relatively modest number of answers required for the written papers in units 3, 5 and 6.

Reviewers welcomed the increasing emphasis on clarity and focus in question papers over the period of the review, and also the attention that had been given to the identification of the precise remit of questions and to their formulation. They noted that papers had become more accessible over time to candidates of lower ability, although there were some concerns about the effectiveness of the more generalised questions in the assessment of able candidates.

They considered that, over the review period, the demand of history and analysis papers had reduced. In some cases they noted that AS papers had more in common with earlier O level and GCSE papers, particularly with regard to style of questioning and the greater emphasis on breadth rather than on depth and extended writing. In the case of aural perception and musical techniques, there was general agreement that traditional skills were no longer being tested at such high levels as in the past or, in the case of harmony and counterpoint, at all. However, the move to greater integration of the three musical components was recognised as valuable.

## **Coursework**

The issue of coursework is particularly complex within music examinations. The complexities are described in the GCSE coursework section on page 26.

By 1995 all of the awarding bodies were using coursework to assess some skills. The amount of the overall A level work completed as coursework depended on the options chosen by candidates, but in 1985 coursework could account for up to 24 per cent of total marks, rising to 56 per cent in 1995. In 1995, however, it was still possible for candidates to complete no coursework at all, as for example with some AQA and Edexcel option routes.

Reviewers considered a number of issues connected to the use of coursework as an assessment tool. Overall, they were concerned that it was sometimes being employed in areas where assessment would more appropriately be carried out under examination conditions. This was particularly true where it was used for closed-task exercises, giving rise to concerns that this could ultimately lead to a lowering of demand.

However, reviewers were agreed that, in the case of composing, coursework was the most valid vehicle for assessment. Awarding bodies approached the setting of composing assignments in different ways. With the new syllabuses following on Curriculum 2000, there came an additional requirement to find ways of linking compositions to areas of study, and in some cases to performances. There was a perception that this provided an additional pressure for candidates, which could contribute to a raising of the level of demand but a diminishing of creative invention, as was evident in some of the work considered at the script review.

The assessment of composing is, at any level, highly complex and awarding bodies have addressed the issues involved in many different ways. Over the period, a combination of internal and external assessment was employed by most awarding bodies for composing. The priority for all parties has been to establish a reliable and rigorous assessment model, which does not inhibit the initiative and creativity of individual candidates. Reviewers had concerns about the extent to which this had been achieved over the period of the review, but by 2005 most were satisfied that demand was generally appropriate.

Over the years coursework has been used in other contexts, such as that of AQA's projects and reports in 2000 and 2005, Edexcel's dissertation in 1995 and 2000, OCR's projects in 1995 and 2000 and WJEC's set works folio in the same years. For the most part, syllabuses in 2005 have avoided such coursework projects, with the exception of AQA's investigation, report and composition, which was seen to be an imaginative and relevant approach to synoptic assessment, and CCEA's optional research study.

## **Practical**

Performing has played an increasingly important part in syllabuses over the period of the review and a range of assessment models has been employed. These have included the accreditation of marks awarded in grade examinations by external bodies, examinations conducted at centres by visiting examiners, internally marked practical examinations and ongoing assessment during the course. There have also been variations in the level of demand set by awarding bodies in the performing component.

In 1985 both CCEA and WJEC asked for a Grade 6, whereas other awarding bodies were asking for Grade 8 or were offering two different options, with increased weighting for higher grades. AQA set a demanding practical examination, which in Syllabus A required performing and *viva voce* of a piece of Grade 8 standard, together with sight singing, practical musicianship and a *viva* on general musical activities (17 per cent). The same requirements appeared in Syllabus B, plus a further performance and sight reading (29 per cent). WJEC required the performing of a Grade 6 level piece (16.6 per cent), and it was possible to reduce the weighting of the performing element further by carrying out additional work in composing or dissertation. Where awarding bodies set practical examinations, work was assessed in a practical test by visiting examiners.

From 1995 performing was seen as an integral part of the A level music examination and most syllabuses offered options for higher-level performers. Demand, however, remained variable, with CCEA and WJEC still requiring performing at Grade 6 level, OCR declining to recommend a standard but providing criteria for examiners linked to seven marking bands and AQA and Edexcel providing two performing options at approximately Grade 6 and Grade 8 levels, attracting respectively either 18 to 20 per cent or 30 to 36 per cent of subject marks. Assessment was normally made by visiting examiners, although Edexcel's performing during the course (50 per cent of the component) was internally assessed and externally moderated.

From 2005 the position is less clear in regard to AS and A2. There is a greater degree of consensus about levels required: in general, Grade 5 for AS and Grade 6 for A2. However, timings for programmes can vary a great deal between some awarding bodies, depending on the options chosen by candidates. With the exception of Edexcel, which uses a combination of internal assessment of performing during the course and external assessment of recordings, visiting examiners are used by all awarding bodies at A2 and by CCEA, OCR and WJEC at AS. AQA AS performing is internally assessed and externally moderated by means of recordings.

Reviewers acknowledged that in some respects there was a higher level of consistency in assessment than previously across the awarding bodies, despite the increased flexibility available to candidates in choice of repertoire. However, there was a general



perception that the examination no longer presented the same level of challenge for able performers due to the absence of unprepared tests and sight-reading as well as a drop in the general level of performing expected. This could act as a disincentive for candidates to perform at the highest level. Nevertheless, there was recognition that developing relationships between performing, composing and appraising activities was valuable for all candidates. However, these links could put restrictions on candidates. Requirements by some awarding bodies for candidates to perform one of their compositions could be a disadvantage for those with weak composing skills or – in cases where marks are assigned for the realisation of a composition – for those with poor performing skills.

Reviewers felt that, in assessing live performance, it was important that conditions should reflect normal practice and enable a full assessment of all the elements involved, including the ability to communicate with an audience, however small, and to deliver and sustain a performance on a single occasion. In these circumstances the use of an external examiner was thought to be more appropriate than that of internal assessment by the teacher, as subsequent moderation could only be carried out via a recording.

Where studio-type performances were being undertaken, reviewers considered that the assessment of a final recording could be more appropriate, although it was likely that different assessment criteria would then be required.

## **Conclusions**

The 20-year period covered by this review of music A level syllabuses has seen changes in the cultural, social and educational attitudes to music within schools and colleges, as well as change in the design of the A level qualification in line with Curriculum 2000 reforms. These changes were seen as positive in a number of ways:

- there is a more consistent approach across the awarding body syllabuses in 2005, while there are still variations in the optional routes available to candidates
- jazz, popular and world music are included alongside the western classical tradition
- areas of study have promoted a more integrated and holistic approach in syllabuses

- having performance and composition as integral parts of music syllabuses requires candidates to engage in firsthand musical experiences, including expressive and creative work, rather than being tested almost exclusively via a suite of written papers (as in 1985)
- there is now increased accessibility reflecting the full ability range.

However, there are several areas that have seen a decline in demand meaning that some important skills and understanding are not being as fully developed as they were for candidates in the past:

there has been a reduction in levels of aural perception skills required

there is less emphasis on the discrete assessment of musical techniques such as harmony & counterpoint, although relevant skills now assessed through compositional work

the standardisation of requirements for performance to grade 6 equivalence means there is no longer the same impetus for the most able performers to challenge themselves; in addition, most awarding bodies no longer have an unprepared element to performing and the playing times required in 2005 syllabuses are variable

there is a reduced requirement for candidates to present ideas and arguments in extended written work, resulting in less need for the detailed study of set works.

## Standards of attainment at A level

### Introduction

Reviewers considered candidates' work from all of the awarding bodies in 2005. There was no composition work for CCEA candidates or work at Grade E for A2. Further details of the materials used are provided in Appendix B.

### Descriptions of attainment

The reviewers considered the regulatory authorities' published AS and A2 performance descriptions for GCE music in the light of candidate work reviewed. Reviewers were invited to comment where, for whatever reason, candidates' work did not match the performance descriptions. This included cases where candidates' work showed evidence of additional features not mentioned in the performance descriptions. On some occasions, candidates' work did not match the performance description because candidates failed to demonstrate a particular feature that was tested. On other occasions, performance did not match the description because the question papers did not require candidates to demonstrate a particular feature. Where the reviewers identified aspects of candidates' work that did not match the performance descriptions in some way, these features are boldfaced and discussed in the comment that follows.

### AS grade A boundary description of attainment

AO1a	AO1b	AO2
Candidates should be able to:  Interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and a sense of style and awareness of occasion and/or ensemble.	Candidates should be able to:  develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control, making creative use of musical devices and conventions.	Candidates should be able to:  demonstrate understanding of, and comment perceptively on, the structural, expressive and contextual aspects of music

<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>present musically convincing and generally fluent performances that show musical understanding.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>produce <b>musically convincing</b> compositions that <b>show musical imagination</b>, and make use of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>make critical judgements about music heard and show a breadth of understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied.</p>
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The reviewers judged that, in general, candidates met or exceeded the requirements of AO1a and met the requirements of AO2. However, for AO1b, candidates produced compositions that were largely not musically convincing, nor was there sufficient musical imagination shown. It was noted by reviewers that for those awarding bodies setting musical techniques questions to test AO1b, it would not be possible for candidates to show imagination.

### **Description of attainment at AS grade A boundary**

AQA, Edexcel and OCR candidates were generally judged to show comparable standards of performance. Reviewers judged CCEA and WJEC candidates to be weaker overall. The CCEA candidate work did not include the composition coursework, which was part of unit 2. Reviewers commented on the difficulty of comparing grading standards without the full range of supporting evidence.

Reviewers found that CCEA and WJEC candidates tended to demonstrate a lower standard of work, particularly in the written and listening papers. Reviewers also noted that the WJEC and CCEA listening papers contained many closed questions or questions requiring basic descriptions, which did not allow candidates to demonstrate understanding of what they had heard and how the music worked. However, the absence of composition work from CCEA candidates may have had an effect on reviewers' judgements.

## AS grade E boundary description of attainment performance description

AO1a	AO1b	AO2
<p>Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>Interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and a sense of style and awareness of occasion and/or ensemble.</p>	<p>Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control making creative use of musical devices and conventions.</p>	<p>Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of, and comment perceptively on, the structural, expressive and contextual aspects of music</p>
<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>perform with a sense of continuity using appropriate tempo and showing some understanding of the music chosen.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>produce compositions that make some <b>creative</b> use of musical ideas, show some understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>comment on music heard showing some understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied.</p>

The reviewers judged that, in general, candidates met the requirements of AO1a, although on some occasions lacked technical/expressive control and a sense of style. The requirements of AO1b were mostly met except there was a failure to display a creative use of musical ideas. In general, candidates met the requirements of AO2.

### Description of attainment at AS grade E boundary

Edexcel candidates were judged to be the strongest at this grade boundary, while WJEC candidates were found to be weaker. Reviewers noted that candidate work at this grade boundary for all awarding bodies tended to be rather uneven across the different

disciplines, with candidates compensating for weakness in one area with stronger performance in another.

The Edexcel candidates displayed better techniques in their compositions and were also stronger in their performance component. However, it should be noted that some of the Edexcel work was some way above the E/U boundary and this may have had an impact on the findings.

Reviewers commented that WJEC candidates demonstrated lower attainment in all areas, often with little progression evident from GCSE. They also noted that the WJEC listening question paper tended to require basic descriptive detail or instrument identification and did not allow candidates to show understanding of what they had heard.

## A2 grade A boundary description of attainment

<p>AO1a - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>Interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and a sense of style and awareness of occasion and/or ensemble.</p>	<p>AO1b - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control making creative use of musical devices and conventions.</p>	<p>AO2 - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of, and comment perceptively on, the structural, expressive and contextual aspects of music</p>
<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>present musically convincing and fluent performances that show musical understanding and personal interpretation.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>produce musically convincing compositions that show musical imagination, and make effective use of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>make and justify personal judgements on music heard and show some depth of understanding within the genres, styles and traditions studied making connections between the structural, expressive and contextual</p>

		aspects of music.
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The reviewers judged that, in general, candidates met or exceeded the requirements of AO1a. The requirements of AO1b were met, but there were concerns about the divergent approaches between awarding bodies with regards to the assessment of this AO and the opportunities to display musical imagination. AO2 was also seen to have met the grade A requirements, but there were concerns that some papers didn't provide the opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their depth of understanding.

### **Description of attainment at A2 grade A boundary**

AQA candidates were consistently judged to be stronger than those from the other awarding bodies and CCEA candidates found to be weaker. However, it should be noted that CCEA candidate work did not include candidates' compositions and that this may have affected reviewers' judgements.

Reviewers commented that awarding bodies offered a range of optional routes at A2, which resulted in significant variations in the proportion of performance and composition in the work submitted. Both Edexcel and CCEA allowed candidates to weight their assessment in favour of either composing or performing, while both OCR and WJEC allowed candidates a choice of differing composing options. This made comparisons difficult on occasions.

Reviewers found that AQA candidates demonstrated high standards in all areas. Their essays showed good analytical skills, with lucid and intelligent writing, and they were able to use musical knowledge and vocabulary effectively and appropriately in their listening papers. Their composition work showed flair, understanding and sensitivity. In particular, reviewers noted that several AQA candidates were very strong performers.

Reviewers found that CCEA candidates gave weaker performances both technically and musically. Their listening skills were variable, often with poor dictation, and their essays sometimes lacked focus on the question so that, while they made many points, there was also a degree of irrelevance. Some reviewers commented that the CCEA question

papers and marking criteria made fewer demands on candidates, and that candidates therefore tended to perform at a lower standard across all components.

## A2 grade E boundary description of attainment

<p>AO1a - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and a sense of style and awareness of occasion and/or ensemble.</p>	<p>AO1b - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>develop musical ideas with technical and expressive control making creative use of musical devices and conventions.</p>	<p>AO2 - Candidates should be able to:</p> <p>demonstrate understanding of, and comment perceptively on, the structural, expressive and contextual aspects of music</p>
<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>present generally fluent performance showing some understanding of the overall shape, direction and style of the music chosen.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>produce compositions that make creative use of musical ideas with a <b>sense of shape and direction</b>, and show understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition.</p>	<p>Candidates characteristically:</p> <p>comment <b>perceptively</b> on music heard, showing some understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied and the ability to <b>make some connections</b> between musical activities.</p>

The reviewers judged that, in general, candidates met or exceeded the grade E performance descriptions for AO1a, although a few candidates were not generally fluent in their performance. The description for AO1b was mostly not met, especially in showing a sense of shape and direction, and AO2 was mostly not met, especially in the need to comment perceptively and make connections between musical activities.

### Description of attainment at A2 grade E boundary

AQA candidates were judged to be the strongest at this grade boundary, while WJEC candidates were found to be weaker than those from other awarding bodies. Reviewers



commented that candidates from all awarding bodies at this grade boundary tended to demonstrate variable and often insecure levels of knowledge in the history papers and were often weak in the listening papers. Performance tended to be the strongest area.

AQA candidates often gave the strongest performances and their compositions, while often basic and lacking in imagination, did show some internal understanding of the music and its structure. Reviewers noted that the AQA investigation and report allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, and that this followed through into their compositions.

Reviewers found that WJEC candidates were often significantly weaker at performing than candidates from other awarding bodies. Their compositions and, in particular, their listening skills were often weak, with little understanding shown. As at AS, reviewers noted that the WJEC history and listening papers were less demanding than those from the other awarding bodies and that this may have had an impact on the standard of work seen.

## **Summary**

AQA candidates were judged to be the strongest at A level grades A and E.

WJEC candidates were judged to be weaker than those from other awarding bodies at grade E at AS and A2, and also at AS grade A.

CCEA candidates were judged to be weaker at A level grade A and, along with WJEC, at AS grade A.

However, it should be noted that the lack of evidence in the composition component for CCEA candidates may have affected reviewers' judgements.

## **Relationship between GCSE and A level within music in 2005**

### **Aims**

At both GCSE and A level, the aims for syllabuses are defined in the music subject criteria, where issues of progression have been addressed for all syllabuses. These aims are replicated by all awarding bodies, albeit with occasional slight variations in layout. Only OCR extends the given paragraph on additional opportunities at A2 level.

### **Assessment objectives**

At both GCSE and A level, assessment is concerned with three main areas of activity – performing, composing and appraising. At GCSE three discrete assessment objectives are defined, whereas at A level performing and composing are subsumed into AO1, and appraising is AO2. Weightings at both levels are within the recommended limits, but with minor variations across awarding bodies. With most awarding bodies, the balance at both GCSE and A level is in the region of 60 per cent for performing and composing and 40 per cent for appraising. However, AQA has all three AOs equally weighted at GCSE, giving 66 per cent to performing and composing, whereas at A level performing and composing attracts only 55 per cent of the total marks available and appraising attracts 45 per cent of the marks.

For the most part, GCSE assessment objectives, unlike A levels, do not require subject-specific technical knowledge, skills and understanding, making progression between levels in terms of AOs difficult to determine. However, reviewers noted that there was only a minimal change in the performing assessment objectives between GCSE and AS. In the case of AS and A2, assessment objectives are the same, with only minor differences in weighting so that progression is not evident in this context.

### **Content**

Reviewers perceived a very real issue over progression from GCSE to AS in the content of some syllabuses. This in many cases was a product of low expectations at GCSE rather than of inappropriately high expectations at AS. Reviewers commented, in particular, on the significant gap in expectations in all aspects of the Edexcel syllabus and in the change from the non-specific approach to appraising at GCSE and the highly

detailed analysis of set works at AS. In the case of WJEC, the longer performance time and use of contrasting styles in AS gave a suitable element of progression, although the lower level of content in the appraising element reduced the level of demand. The wider range of performing activities in OCR's AS specification contributed to a sense of progression. The move from AS to A2 was in general seen to be smoother and relatively free of problems..

## **Question papers**

At GCSE and AS level, question papers mostly related to the appraising element of the examination. Reviewers again had concerns that the demands of some GCSE papers were excessively low and that, as a result, there was a disproportionate gap between the levels of demand for GCSE and for AS (where expectations were considered to be more appropriate). The only exception was with WJEC, where the AS paper was very straightforward. This in turn affected the progression from AS to A2 in WJEC, where there was, in consequence, a significant gap in terms of expectations. Establishing a reliable sense of progression across all sections of the question papers from GCSE to AS to A2 is challenging for awarding bodies, but it was seen by reviewers to be critical in maintaining standards across the whole examination system.

## **Coursework**

Coursework requirements varied significantly at all levels, making progression sometimes difficult to assess. In all syllabuses, composing was submitted as coursework, with the majority of it being assessed internally with external moderation. At GCSE, some reviewers were concerned that the level of demand was depressed by the absence of any requirement for notation, making the progression to AS a significant leap. In the case of OCR, it could be argued that, although there was a good range of composing activities at GCSE, candidates were not prepared for the emphasis on tonal harmony at AS level. The progression from AS to A2 across all syllabuses was generally seen to be appropriate in composing.

## **Performing**

Performing was assessed in different ways. At GCSE, it was treated as coursework by AQA, Edexcel and OCR, with internal assessment and external moderation, while CCEA and WJEC used visiting examiners. At AS visiting examiners were used by CCEA, OCR

and WJEC, and at A2 by all awarding bodies with the exception of Edexcel. Progression at both stages lay primarily in the definition of standards required at each level, and in the recommended length of performances. Few syllabuses required any unprepared work, but there were some additional elements, such as the wide range of options offered by CCEA at both AS and A2 and the written interpretation element offered by OCR at A2, which contributed to progression. Links to areas of study, particularly at A2, were in some cases seen to increase demand.

Reviewers were concerned about the low threshold standard of performing (sub-grade 1) at GCSE, which made progression to AS for these candidates a major issue. At AS and A2, most awarding bodies adjusted the timings of performances, and there was a general expectation of a standard of performing of about Grade 5 at AS level and Grade 6 at A2 level, making progression more specific. There was a general concern that the progression for able performers was inadequate, despite the awarding of additional credit for pieces of greater difficulty.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, reviewers considered that the step from GCSE to AS was too large, whereas that from AS to A2 was seen as relatively smooth, and presenting few problems. The difficulties of progression from GCSE to AS, were seen to lie, not in the nature of the content of syllabuses, but in the low level of assessment challenges set for candidates at GCSE, leaving them unprepared for the more appropriate demands at AS and A2.

## Appendix A: Syllabuses reviewed

### GCSE

Year	Awarding body and syllabus				
	AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC
1985	NEAB (A & B)		University of London (500)	UCLES (6020)	WJEC (0140)
1995	NEAB (1391)	CCEA (G70)	London Examinations (1425)	MEG (1677)	WJEC
2000	NEAB (1392)		Edexcel (1425)	OCR (1678)	WJEC (190)
2005	AQA (3271)	CCEA (G70)	Edexcel (1426)	OCR (1919)	WJEC (7010)

**A level**

Year	Awarding body and syllabus				
	AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC
1985	NEAB (A, B, C)		University of London (505, 506, 507)	UCLES (9315)	WJEC (0031)
1995	NEAB (A, B)	CCEA (A)	London Examinations (9502, 9506)	UCLES (9312)	WJEC (GCE Advanced)
2000	NEAB (4392)		Edexcel (9502, 9506)	OCR (9312)	WJEC (GCE Advanced)
2005	AQA (5271/6271)	CCEA (AS/A)	Edexcel (8501/9501)	OCR (3872/7872)	WJEC (GCE AS/A)

## Appendix B: Candidates reviewed

### GCSE

Grade	AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC
A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
C	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
F	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### A level

Grade	AQA	CCEA	Edexcel	OCR	WJEC
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AS A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
AS E	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

A2 A	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A2 E	✓	x	✓	✓	✓

## Appendix C: List of reviewers

Coordinator	Marjorie Ayling
Syllabus reviewers	<p>John Arkell</p> <p>Alison Daubney</p> <p>Malcolm Goldring</p> <p>David Hout</p> <p>Susanne Lloyd Jones</p> <p>David Peacock</p> <p>Julia Winterson</p>
Script reviewers	<p>David Adams</p> <p>Mary Carlin (CCEA)</p> <p>Viv Finer</p> <p>Phil Hier (WJEC)</p> <p>Peter Kay (NAME)</p> <p>Jonathan Martin (Edexcel)</p> <p>Paul McQueen (CCEA)</p> <p>Robert Meredith</p> <p>Chris Polybank</p>



	Graeme Rudland (OCR) Bernard Soper Philip Taylor (AQA) Peter Underwood (OCR)
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Note: where a participant was nominated by a particular organisation, the nominating body is shown in parentheses after their name.