

**Music theory performance comparison**

Comparison of A level subject content and assessment objectives (released January 2015 by the Department for Education and Ofqual respectively) and the existing ABRSM specification for graded examinations in music theory grades 6-8 (syllabus from 2015).

Comparison headings	A level subject content (DfE January 2015)	Grades 6-8 (ABRSM theory syllabus)
<p><b>Aims and objectives</b></p>	<p>AS and A level specifications in music must offer a broad and coherent course of which encourages students to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage actively in the study of music</li> <li>• develop skills that facilitate performances which demonstrate an understanding of tempo and style and a sense of continuity</li> <li>• develop skills that facilitate coherent compositions which demonstrate the manipulation of musical ideas and the use of musical devices and conventions</li> <li>• recognise the interdependence of musical knowledge, understanding and skills, and make links between the integrated activities of performing, composing and appraising underpinned by attentive listening</li> <li>• broaden experience and interests, develop imagination and foster creativity</li> <li>• develop and extend the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to communicate effectively as musicians</li> <li>• develop knowledge and understanding of a variety of instruments and styles, and of relevant approaches to both performing and composing</li> <li>• develop awareness of music technologies and their use in the creation and presentation of music</li> <li>• appraise contrasting genres, styles and traditions of music, and develop understanding of musical contexts and a coherent awareness of musical chronology</li> <li>• develop as effective, independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers with enquiring minds</li> <li>• reflect critically and make personal judgements on their own and others' music</li> </ul>	<p>ABRSM's Theory of Music exams give students opportunities to acquire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a knowledge of the notation of western music, including the signs and terminology commonly employed</li> <li>• an understanding of fundamental musical elements such as intervals, keys, scales and chords</li> <li>• skill in constructing balanced rhythmic patterns or completing given melodic or harmonic structures</li> <li>• an ability to apply theoretical knowledge and understanding to score analysis</li> </ul> <p>Candidates are assessed on their ability to identify, use and manipulate conventional musical symbols, to complete extracts and to answer questions relating to the elements of music according to the grade-by-grade parameters detailed on the following pages.</p>

**Appendix F - A comparison of Graded Examinations with relevant GCSEs and A levels**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• engage with, and extend appreciation of, the diverse heritage of music in order to</li> <li>• promote personal, social, intellectual and cultural development</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Content – practical</b></p>	<p>AS and A Level specifications in music must require students to develop an in- depth knowledge and understanding of the musical elements, musical contexts and musical language listed below, and allow students to apply these, where appropriate, to their own work in performance and composition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• musical elements and their interdependence (as used in the students’ own work and in the music of others)</li> <li>• organisation of pitch (melodically and harmonically) including sequence, plagal and interrupted cadences and augmentation at AS; additionally chromatic harmony, diminished 7th and additive melody at A level</li> <li>• tonality including modulation to the dominant, cycle of 5ths subdominant &amp; relative minor key relationships at AS; additionally modulation to remote keys, atonality and polytonality at A level</li> <li>• structure including sonata form at AS; additionally, fugue and through-composed at A level</li> <li>• sonority including antiphony, identification of less common instruments e.g. piccolo, cor anglais, bass clarinet and instrumental techniques e.g. con sordino, una corda at AS; additionally smaller vs larger group pieces e.g solo concerto/concerto grosso, vocalisation e.g. sprechgesang and acoustic resonance at A level</li> <li>• tempo, metre and rhythm including syncopation and cross-rhythms at AS; additionally rubato, hemiola and more complex rhythmic patterns, e.g. polyrhythm at A level</li> <li>• texture including homophony, imitation and monophony at AS; additionally polyphony, fugue and canon at A level</li> <li>• dynamics including crescendo &amp; diminuendo, terraced dynamics and application of dynamics to style &amp; performance context at AS; additionally expressive</li> </ul>	

	<p>application of dynamics in interpretative choices, nuance and additional special effects, e.g. fp, sf, dim al niente, con tutta forza at A level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• musical contexts (relating to the students' own work and the music of others)</li> <li>• composer, performer and audience including stylistic conventions, appropriate performance choices e.g. ornamentation/ improvisation and technical demands at AS; additionally stylistic "fingerprints", awareness of audience expectations and performance practice at A level</li> <li>• occasion, time and place including musical limitations/demands on composers, historical period and the effects of venue on the production and performance of music at AS; additionally awareness of social &amp; historical context and live &amp; recorded music at A level</li> <li>• musical language (relating to the students' own work and the music of others)</li> <li>• reading and writing staff notation including rhythmic notation in compound time and key signatures to 5 sharps &amp; 5 flats at AS; additionally chord notation and all key signatures at A level</li> <li>• chord symbols and harmonic progression including standard cadential progressions, chord inversions and dominant 7th chords at AS; additionally extended chords including secondary 7ths and 9ths at A level</li> <li>• technical musical vocabulary including recognition and use of appropriate terminology e.g. glissando, repetition and conjunct at AS; additionally recognition and use of sophisticated terminology e.g. portamento, ostinato and ascending minor scale at A level</li> </ul> <p>AS and A level specifications in music must require students to demonstrate the ability to:</p> <p><b>Perform</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to</li> </ul>	
--	--	--

	<p>interpret musical ideas with technical and expressive control and an understanding of style and context. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: playing or singing solo or in ensemble, improvising, or realising music using music technology.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• perform with a sense of continuity using appropriate tempi, showing critical understanding of the music chosen</li> </ul> <p><b>Compose</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• make use of musical elements, techniques and resources to create, develop and refine musical ideas with technical control and expressive understanding, either freely as the composer chooses, or by responding to a brief or commission supplied by others. This must be achieved by one or more of the following means: experimenting, developing, critical refinement and being influenced by other composers' work.</li> <li>• produce compositions that make some use of musical ideas and show some understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition</li> </ul> <p>In addition, A level specifications must allow students to demonstrate the ability to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perform - present generally fluent performances showing critical understanding of the overall shape, direction and style of the music chosen</li> <li>• Compose - show a sophisticated use of musical elements in combination to produce musically convincing compositions</li> <li>• produce compositions that make creative use of musical ideas and show understanding of musical devices and conventions in relation to the chosen genre, style and tradition</li> </ul>	
--	---	--

**Appendix F - A comparison of Graded Examinations with relevant GCSEs and A levels**

<p><b>Content – theoretical understanding and historical and contextual studies</b></p>	<p><b>Appraise</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• use knowledge and understanding of musical elements, techniques and resources to make critical judgements about:</li> <li>• repertoire and context of music within the Areas of Study</li> <li>• musical interpretations (this could be the process of deciding how to perform a piece of music, respond to a brief or to a starting point to produce a composition, or demonstrate stylistic understanding)</li> <li>• their own work</li> <li>• others’ work including unfamiliar music (individual pieces of music that have not</li> <li>• been stipulated within the specification)</li> <li>• Formulation of critical judgements will be achieved by attentive listening (rather than just hearing) and aural perception, and could also be achieved by informed discussion (in writing and/or through speech), analysis, evaluation, contextualisation and reflection.</li> <li>• comment on music heard, showing understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied</li> </ul> <p>In addition A level specifications must allow students opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appraise - comment in some detail on music heard, showing critical understanding across the genres, styles and traditions studied</li> <li>• use acute aural perception and discrimination skills</li> <li>• use technical musical vocabulary to communicate sophisticated judgements</li> <li>• show understanding of the complex interdependencies between musical elements</li> <li>• show understanding of the sophisticated connections between music and its context</li> <li>• apply practically specialist musical vocabulary and notation appropriate to the context</li> <li>• the relationship between compositional devices and</li> </ul>	<p>Grades 6-8 build upon the knowledge and understanding of preceding grades so students are expected to know and understand content from previous grades including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note values</li> <li>• Time signatures</li> <li>• The staff</li> <li>• Clefs</li> <li>• Sharp, flat and natural signs</li> <li>• Terms and signs</li> <li>• Scales and key signatures</li> </ul> <p><b>In addition, the following are required:</b></p> <p><b>Grade 6</b></p> <p>The harmonic vocabulary expected will include: the use of 53 63 and 64 chords on any degree of the major or minor (harmonic and melodic) scale; the recognition of the dominant seventh chord in root position, first, second and third inversions, and the supertonic seventh chord in root position and first inversion, in any major or minor key; and the figuring for all these chords.</p> <p>An understanding of the principles of modulation and a knowledge of cadences, ornamentation and melodic decoration (which might include passing notes, auxiliary notes, appoggiaturas, changing notes and notes of anticipation) will also be expected.</p> <p>Questions will cover:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Writing specified chords for voices in four parts or for keyboard (at the candidate’s choice) above a given bass part of about four bars.</li> <li>2 The indication of suitable chords for the accompaniment of a diatonic melody of about eight bars in any key, using any recognized method of notation, or, at the candidate’s choice, the provision of a bass to a given melody, adding figures to indicate the intended harmonies.</li> </ol>
---	--	---

**Appendix F - A comparison of Graded Examinations with relevant GCSEs and A levels**

	<p>techniques, musical elements including harmonic progressions, tonal relationships and musical structures appropriate to the context</p>	<p>3 Composition of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given), using a given opening. Modulation to the dominant, subdominant, relative major or relative minor may be required.</p> <p>4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate’s knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.</p> <p><b>Grade 7</b></p> <p>Recognition of all diatonic secondary seventh chords and their inversions, the Neapolitan sixth and the diminished seventh chords, and of all figures commonly used by composers during the period c.1620–1790 to indicate harmonies above a bass part. Questions will cover:</p> <p>1 The indication of chords and movement of the inner parts by figuring the bass in a passage in which both the melody and bass are given.</p> <p>2 Rewriting a given passage to include appropriate suspensions and notes of melodic decoration.</p> <p>3 Continuation of a given opening for solo instrument with keyboard accompaniment, which will be given in full throughout the passage, by completing the solo part, or, at the candidate’s choice, composition of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given) based on a given progression of chords or melodic figure.</p> <p>4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate’s knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of</p>
--	--	---

**Appendix F - A comparison of Graded Examinations with relevant GCSEs and A levels**

		<p>underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.</p> <p><b>Grade 8</b> The harmonic vocabulary expected will include all standard diatonic and chromatic chords. Questions will cover:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Continuation of a given opening of a passage from a Baroque trio sonata for two treble instruments and basso continuo. The basso continuo part will be given throughout and fully figured (but a realization for keyboard will not be required).</li> <li>2 Completion of an outline of a short passage for keyboard. Some knowledge of the styles practiced by composers from the time of Haydn onwards will be assumed.</li> <li>3 Continuation of a given opening of a melody for a specified instrument (a choice will be given).</li> <li>4 Questions on short extracts of music written for piano or in open score for voices or for any combination of instruments and/or voices, designed to test the candidate's knowledge of the elements and notation of music, including the realization of ornaments, the identification and notation of underlying harmonic structure, phrase structure, style, performance, and on the voices and instruments for which the works were written.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Assessment – practical</b></p>	<p><i>NB the assessment objectives are likely to contain a mixture of practical and theoretical elements which will be assessed using a variety of means.</i></p>	
<p><b>Assessment – knowledge and understanding</b></p>	<p>AO1 Perform with technical control, expression and interpretation 30%</p> <p>AO2 Compose and develop musical ideas with technical control and coherence 30%</p> <p>AO3 Demonstrate and apply musical knowledge 20%</p> <p>AO4 Use appraising skills to make evaluative and critical judgements about music 20%</p>	<p><b>Unit learning outcomes and assessment criteria for Grade 8 Music Theory (taken from Ofqual Register of Qualifications)</b></p> <p>LO1 Answer questions about the notation of music as stipulated for the grade</p> <p>1.1 Demonstrate a sophisticated knowledge and understanding of the notation of western music</p>

**Appendix F - A comparison of Graded Examinations with relevant GCSEs and A levels**

		<p>1.2 Recognise and analyse complex musical structures, techniques and concepts</p> <p>LO2 Identify, use and manipulate conventional music symbols</p> <p>2.1 Respond to music notation with appropriate awareness of its symbols and stylistic features</p> <p>2.2 Relate the standard terms and signs of western music notation to practical meaning, as appropriate to the grade</p> <p>LO3 Respond creatively to set compositional demands</p> <p>3.1 Manipulate conventional music symbols to create coherent musical structures</p> <p>3.2 Complete musical extracts in an appropriate style</p>
--	--	---