

# Why choose GCSE music?



Whatever your hopes for your child's final years of study at school, GCSE music is a wise choice.

If they have a passion for a subject, they're much more likely to enjoy their study and be motivated to revise and practise.

Yet there are so many other reasons why they'll benefit from studying music.

Read on to find out more, and learn about what's involved in GCSE music.

# What are the benefits of GCSE music?

Students are more likely to succeed and achieve a higher grade if they study something they are good at, and enjoy.<sup>1</sup>

## Music will provide transferable skills

GCSE music involves written, analytical, practical and social/personal skills such as:

- independent learning: having to be disciplined about practising on their instrument or voice
- team working: particularly if they're involved in weekly groups or ensembles, concerts and performances
- performance and presentation skills which are useful for any job/career
- listening: this is highly developed in musicians and it is an important part of the course
- analytical and essay-writing skills
- confidence and self-esteem: which has a knock-on effect in all areas of life and learning
- creativity and self-expression: helping young people to think differently and harness the power of their imagination

Find out more about the benefits of music:

[www.wiltshiremusicconnect.org.uk/whymusic](http://www.wiltshiremusicconnect.org.uk/whymusic)

## Making music can help a young person maintain good mental health during a time of high pressure.

Research has shown that music can improve mood and prompt creative flow, which helps with anxiety and self-doubt. It can also help young people to regulate their emotions<sup>2</sup>.

## Both employers and universities see creative subjects as assets.

Increasingly, employers and universities are looking for young people who have skills that are learned through creative subjects: creative thinking, emotional intelligence, adaptability, communication and tenacity to name just a few<sup>3</sup>. And universities are keen to attract students who have a well-rounded education and achieve good results, no matter what the subject.

## There is usually only one exam – the rest is course work.

This takes the pressure off revision during those critical weeks where they will have many other exams.



<sup>1</sup> Choosing A-levels for law [bit.ly/picksubjectsbestat](http://bit.ly/picksubjectsbestat)

<sup>2</sup> Search 'mental health' on Music Education Works [bit.ly/musicedworks](http://bit.ly/musicedworks)

<sup>3</sup> Creative subjects and 'work ready' skills [ind.pn/2Fxdp0q](http://ind.pn/2Fxdp0q); Creative Industries Federation report on the importance of creative and cultural learning [bit.ly/creativeeducationskills](http://bit.ly/creativeeducationskills)

# What are the benefits of GCSE music?

continued

## Music is an academic subject in its own right, but it actually benefits other subjects too.

A recent study in the UK found that playing a musical instrument appears to enhance general performance in other subjects at GCSE<sup>4</sup>. Other studies have shown that music benefits learning by activating all areas of the brain<sup>5</sup>; auditory (sound processing); motor (rhythm processing); and limbic (emotions).

So by choosing music, your child could actually be improving their chances of doing well in their other subjects – including those within the Ebacc.

“Studying music at GCSE goes beyond the enjoyment of creating and appreciating music – it fosters creativity, critical thinking, and discipline. It’s not just about notes and rhythms; music enhances overall academic skills and positively contributes to emotional well-being. Choosing GCSE music can unleash your creative potential and broaden your horizons in both academic success and personal fulfilment!”

Tim Baker,  
Head of Music, The Ilfracombe Academy.



Studying music opens doors to many opportunities.

Don't let them close before your child has a chance to explore.

<sup>4</sup> The impact of instrumental music learning on attainment at 16 [bit.ly/musicandGCSEresults](https://bit.ly/musicandGCSEresults)

<sup>5</sup> How playing an instrument benefits your brain [bit.ly/musicbrainvideo](https://bit.ly/musicbrainvideo)

# FAQs about GCSE music

Each school has different criteria and approaches. Do talk to the Head of Music/Performing Arts to find out the specifics for your child's school.

## What standard do students need to have reached?

Ideally, they'll need to be Grade 3 or 4 standard on an instrument (or voice) by the end of the course or have equivalent skills in music technology / digital music making.

## Can a student take music if they're not currently having instrumental lessons?

Ideally they'll have lessons, but exceptions can be made if they're at a high standard and practise regularly, particularly for vocalists. If money is an issue, ask your school about the financial assistance available.

Learning to play a musical instrument can be expensive, but there is support available for children and young from low-income backgrounds:

See [www.musiceducationhub.org/site/parents-carers/funding-and-remissions/](http://www.musiceducationhub.org/site/parents-carers/funding-and-remissions/)

## What if my child doesn't read music, having learnt by ear?

Schools will teach the skills required to succeed as part of the course. For the Performing and Composing units there are alternatives to using score notation – it is not a necessity.

## What if students don't play an instrument or sing, but use music technology, or rap/beatbox?

It's still possible to take GCSE music, as these are all options on every GCSE music specification – but this will vary from school to school.

## Would students be able to do A-level music if they don't take GCSE?

Possibly. They are more likely to be able to if they continue learning music outside of school. However, the decision will ultimately rest with the Head of Music/Performing Arts, so talk to them to find out.

## What does the course cover?

There are usually three main areas of study: Performance, Composition, Listening and Appraising. Students will learn about a range of types of music, including vocal, instrumental, music for film, pop, jazz, fusion, and new music.

### Performance

30% of final score.

Students give a performance for a minimum four minutes, including at least one minute of a group piece (ensemble playing).

### Composition

30% of final score.

Students create two compositions. In the first year of the course, they compose a piece of their choice. In the second, the piece is set by the exam board, usually from a choice of options.

### Listening and appraising/understanding

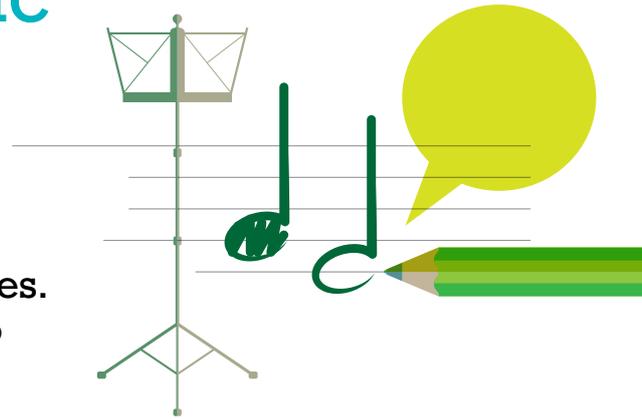
40% of the final score.

This is the only exam and is usually one and a half hours. Students are asked to listen to, and answer questions about, set works they've studied during the course. They then do the same for previously unheard pieces.

## When will we need to apply?

Most schools have GCSE information evenings in the spring term of the academic year before students start their GCSEs. You'll probably need to apply for the course in the Feb/March before the course starts.

Often, schools won't know if they will have enough students to be able to run the course, until they have received everyone's applications.



# FAQs about GCSE music

continued

## Where could GCSE music lead?

If students continue with their studies, they could choose from a range of different subjects

They may choose to continue with music, by studying A-level or BTEC music or performing arts. But equally, they might want to study other subjects. Either way, choosing music at GCSE will have benefited them because it provides transferable skills (see page 2).

If students don't want to study music beyond GCSE, it is still a smart choice.

**It can open doors to a range of education and employment pathways in:**

### Music

Being a musician isn't the only career in music – other options include being a sound technician, community musician, music therapist, teacher, or private tutor, or a range of careers in the music industry, in a concert hall or music venue.

### The arts/creative industries

This might include work in film, TV, theatre, radio, arts administration, or creative education.

### Professions such as medicine, law, accountancy

Music is highly regarded as an academic subject and so could complement your other studies in leading to a professional career.

### Any other pathway a young person might choose

GCSE Music provides a range of transferable skills that will provide a good foundation, whatever pathway your child chooses.

Students in Wiltshire have gone on to many and varied pathways following GCSE music, ranging from primary school teacher to mountain leader!



**MYTH BUSTED:** Music does not stop you getting into a profession such as law or medicine.

See our other Why Music? resources  
[www.musiceducationhub.org/site/why-music/](http://www.musiceducationhub.org/site/why-music/)

We'd love to have your feedback on this leaflet:  
[musiceducationhub@devon.gov.uk](mailto:musiceducationhub@devon.gov.uk)



Devon & Torbay Music Education Hubs work with schools, music educators and a range of local, regional and national partner organisations to provide an inclusive, diverse and relevant music education offer for all children and young people. As part of a network of Music Education Hubs across England, we are supported using public funding from the DfE and Arts Council England and tasked with delivering the objectives of the National Plan for Music Education.