

Music Education

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CONTEXT

Music has been a consistent presence within the Scottish educational system and current configurations are grounded in historical context. The mid to late twentieth century was dominated by a curriculum that drew on the established division of music in the universities and conservatoires into performance, theory/rudiments and history. Pupils' ability to read and write musical notation was a given; performance repertoire was sourced from the Western classical tradition. Studies in music history and theory privileged pitch and rhythm perception, a knowledge of important composers and events, and the ability to deconstruct well-known items of the Western classical canon. Creative music-making and ensemble performances were almost entirely absent, though much excellent work took place in extra-curricular contexts. This was ideal preparation for entry to advanced study in the tertiary sector but, consequential to the emphasis on technical performance and notation skills, large numbers of young people were excluded who had a keen interest in music but lacked the traditional skills and expertise necessary to access the curriculum at certificated level.

The unpopularity of Music as a subject choice provided the context for its comprehensive overhaul within the secondary curriculum, stimulated by the publication of *Music in Scottish Schools* (SED, 1978). The impact of the philosophical and practical shift it represented was felt immediately in the development of the Standard Grade Music assessment documentation, followed in time by the content of the revised Higher Grade syllabus. The principles embodied in these developments were to shape the subsequent character of Music education in Scotland.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SECONDARY MUSIC EDUCATION

Three underlying philosophical imperatives have shaped Scottish Music education, informing curriculum development and having continued influence. These are broadly reflective of wider trends in music education, though Scotland can reasonably claim to have been at the forefront of innovation.

Accessible to all

First, formal Music education should be accessible to all. The threat to Music's continued place within the formal curriculum experienced in the 1980s inspired a concerted effort to remove any perceived barriers to study that were embedded in the existing curriculum. While accessibility may be a given at the early stages of secondary education, where Music was compulsory, it was applied also at the upper stages where studying Music was a choice. In the recent past, this ambition towards accessibility is most obvious in the progressive decrease of minimum requirements for performance in terms of technical difficulty and duration of recital. This makes it possible for pupils who do not possess relatively advanced levels of performing skill to take the subject.

Integrative

One of the aspects of Music education in Scotland that distinguishes praxis from other national contexts is the extent to which students engage in the full variety of musical activities rather than the class band ensemble-type activity that is the core of music education in some countries, but only a part of the experience in Scotland. The embrace of the three elements of performing, listening and creating music, and the deliberate attempt to transfer learning across these contexts, reflects an acceptance of a school of music education philosophy, notably Thomas Regelski's 'Comprehensive Musicianship' model (Regelski, 1981). The central tenet is that musical learning is achieved through application and experimentation in performance, composition and analysis, rather than simply 'playing music'.

Active Learning

Music education in Scotland is thus characterised by a focus on active learning, a belief that music education is about doing things – playing and creating music – rather than learning *about* music (Hewitt, 1995). Rooted in the Vygotskian concept of socially situated learning (Hewitt, 2008), emphasis is firmly on the practical aspects of music making and in particular a focus on developing pupils' conceptual learning rather than the abstractions of factual knowledge about music theory or history. The introduction of the concept list, which forms the basis of assessment in listening at Standard Grade and National Qualifications level and infuses learning across all three areas of music making, exemplifies this approach.

CURRICULUM

The curriculum is built around three basic activities: performing, listening and composing (termed 'inventing' at Standard Grade). No area dominates, though recent trends in assessment at the upper stages appear to downplay the importance of composition and privilege performance. In common with other creative arts subjects, Music is compulsory for pupils in S1 and S2 and subsequently offered as an option at S3–S6.

Performing

In S1 and S2 pupils encounter a variety of instruments including keyboard, guitar, drum kit and possibly voice, recorder and bass guitar. Developing a basic competence on at least one

or two of these is expected, with a particular emphasis on performance in mixed-instrument groups. A range of resources is used to support this aspect of learning, including classroom-oriented ensemble arrangements and self-study material for individual practice.

At S3 and S4, pupils taking Standard Grade Music selected two instruments to study, one being identified as the 'solo' instrument (assessed by a short recital of 3–6 minutes at the end of the course) and the other as 'group' (assessed by a taped small-group performance). Instruments could be taught in class or by a specialist instrumental tutor and pupils aiming for a Credit-level award were expected to play repertoire of at least Associated Board Grade 3 standard.

Post Standard Grade, performance continues to be an important element of the curriculum. Unless they had selected the Music with Technology option (see below), candidates had to complete the Music: Performing unit that involves developing performance skills in either two instruments, one instrument and voice, or one instrument or voice and accompanying. Examination has been by recital in front of an external assessor, with requirements for recital duration and technical difficulty increasing with award level.

Composing

Composing activities at S1 and S2 vary widely between schools. It would be fair to say that this aspect of the curriculum generates the greatest diversity of practice and emphasis, and some schools are more imaginative and creative than others. Music technology provides an accessible and attractive platform for musical creativity, allowing pupils to explore different musical ideas and combinations that would otherwise be unavailable. More traditional approaches to composing, such as melody-writing and basic harmonisation, can be encountered alongside more contemporary activities like improvisation, songwriting and sound design.

In the middle and upper stages, composing is a mandatory part of the curriculum, though a reliance on internal assessment, where the class teacher rather than an external assessor assesses work, suggests that its place in the hierarchy sits below performance and listening. At Higher level, composition is assessed via the production of an audio folio lasting at least two minutes and containing two examples of creative work, supplemented with a programme note (detailing the compositional process and devices used) and a score/performance plan. Indeed, composition does not itself receive a grade at Higher level, only needing to be 'passed'.

Listening

Conceptual learning is a cornerstone of Music education and involves pupils developing an understanding of what a concept means and its practical application. So, for example, pupils at S1/2 would be expected both to *understand* the difference between 'ascending' and 'descending' tone sequences and to *identify* these when they occur in a piece of music. As noted above, this integration between theoretical understanding and practical application is an important underpinning feature of the Music curriculum. Listening work across all stages is often organised into a series of topical units that may derive from a musical style ('classical' or 'jazz') or another thematic aspect ('opera' or 'Scottish Music'). Teachers attempt to achieve the integrative aspect highlighted previously by linking performance, composition and listening activities within a unit, for example by having pupils perform

a blues group performance, compose a blues improvisation and learn the historical and conceptual basis of blues music.

At the upper stages, the Music: Listening unit further extends candidates' conceptual understanding of music and supports learning within the composing and performance/technology units. At Higher level, this involves the detailed study of a number of prescribed works that encourage candidates to work at a broader/longer scale. Notably, there is a requirement to demonstrate understanding of musical notation within the formal assessment, which takes the form of a one-hour examination at the end of the unit.

NEW NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN MUSIC

At the time of writing a set of National Qualifications (NQ) in Music has been prepared for introduction in 2012–13 to replace the existing NQ framework. The final examination diet for Standard Grade was 2013 and the existing National Qualifications will be phased out over a two-year period. While retaining much of the existing design and content and with some detail still to be published, it is useful to note some important modifications.

In common with other subject areas, the middle stages of secondary Music education will be divided into a Preparatory year (S3) and a Course year (S4), proceeding from the 'broad general education' in Expressive Arts in S1 and S2. The design and structure of the Preparatory year will be at the discretion of schools and colleges, facilitating the development of Music programmes that reflect localised strengths and expertise. In the Course year, students will study at one of three levels: National 3 (broadly equivalent to Foundation/Access under the existing structure), National 4 (General/Int 1) or National 5 (Credit/Int 2). Regardless of level, students will complete three units: Performing Skills, Composing Skills and Understanding Music. All will be internally assessed with external verification from the Scottish Qualifications Authority. On satisfactory completion of these modules students will proceed to assessment for the course award comprising a recital on one or more instruments in ensemble and/or solo context. Performance will be assessed by school music staff at National 3 and National 4 level, and by a visiting assessor at National 5. Notably, the performance examination will have a broader scope than has been the case and will include elements of reflection on repertoire and personal development. National 6, replacing the existing Higher level, retains the features of its predecessor. Additional minor developments include a revised concept list (forming the basis of the Understanding Music unit) and an emphasis of content over duration in the Composing Skills unit.

TRENDS IN UPTAKE AND ATTAINMENT

Uptake

One of the principal objectives of curriculum reform in Music in the 1980s was to arrest the significant decline in numbers taking the subject at S3–S6. Using candidate numbers as a criterion, the picture today is positive, suggesting that the aim has been achieved. Presentations at Standard Grade Music are strong: assuming the number of presentations in English is representative of the total Standard Grade population, in 2011 around 18 per cent ($n = 9,181$) were presented in Music. Numbers have been stable at Intermediate 1 level, rising from 798 in 2007 to 825 in 2011. Presentations peaked in 2008 at 887. Presentations at Intermediate 2 increased steadily from 3,095 in 2007 to 3,663 in 2011. Presentations

at Higher level have also increased from 4,278 in 2007 to 4,585 in 2011. In 2011, 30,068 candidates were presented for Higher English, suggesting that around 15 per cent of pupils at this stage opted to study Music. Advanced Higher presentations have been stable, with 1,235 in 2007 and 1,299 in 2011.

Attainment

A review of grading distribution for the exam diets between 2007 and 2011 provides an interesting overview of attainment in Music. At Standard Grade, results improved during 2007–10 with the number of candidates being awarded the maximum grade increasing from 33.8 per cent in 2007 to 41.2 per cent in 2011. In general, this shift was achieved through a decreasing number of candidates being awarded grades in the middle bands.

At Intermediate 1, a B grade was the most common result in 2011 (31.4 per cent) compared to A (17.8 per cent) and C (27 per cent). A significant number (16.6 per cent, $n = 137$) of candidates received a 'no award' result. These patterns broadly reflect the trend in earlier presentations. At Intermediate 2, A grades were most common in 2011 (53.5 per cent) with 27.2 per cent receiving a B grade. 'No award' grades were less frequent at this level (4.4 per cent). This suggests a trend towards improved examination performance; in 2007 30.4 per cent received an A, 29.6 per cent a B and 21.8 per cent a C. In 2007, 12.3 per cent received a 'no award'.

In the 2011 Higher examination, 44.2 per cent achieved A, 30.4 per cent a B, 17.1 per cent a C and 3.8 per cent a D. 'No awards' were 4.5 per cent. As with the Intermediate 2, there appears to have been a trend towards the upper grade from 2007, when distribution was more even (28.4 per cent of pupils received A, 32 per cent received B and 23.4 received C). Only 1 per cent of pupils in 2007 received a 'no award'. At Advanced Higher, 60.5 per cent of candidates received an A grade in 2011, with 27.3 per cent receiving a B. This pattern of excellent performance at the most advanced stage has been consistent across the past six years.

CURRENT DEBATES AND CHALLENGES

Scotland boasts a rich and varied musical heritage with a proud record of producing world-class artists and composers across classical, jazz, rock, pop and traditional music. The accommodation of this diversity within a formal curriculum has been challenging, especially with a teaching profession whose background and expertise tended to be in the Western classical tradition. The desire to incorporate the rich diversity of musical experience within the classroom has stimulated some tension between delivering the building blocks of the classical tradition, such as notation, tonal harmony and technical skill in performance, and the desire (often from teachers themselves) to incorporate more contemporary approaches, or those drawn from a wider stylistic pool. Examples would include blues improvisation and the emphasis on the development of aural skills.

Similar challenges pertain to traditional Scottish music. The indigenous musical traditions of Scotland are now embedded into the formal Music curriculum, most noticeably in the requirement for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of concepts based in those traditions (particularly the vocal and instrumental types of repertoire) and in the ability of pupils to sit performance exams on traditional instruments such as the clarsach and bagpipes, and/or performing authentic repertoire. However, traditional music relies

on a different form of pedagogy, one that is based on learning by ear, sharing repertoire and greater focus on the social aspects of music making. In this there is more commonality with rock, pop, jazz and world music than the Western classical tradition. The translation of these approaches in the formal Music curriculum is challenging if authenticity of practice is valued.

Technology and Training

The use of music technology, whether desktop-based or mobile, has transformed the creation and consumption of music. Young people have access to an unprecedented range of music and a multiplicity of platforms upon which to create their own music. In Scotland, Music educators have readily adopted technological innovation within their classrooms and there is general recognition of the advantages that it can bring, especially to creative work. There is a route at Higher level to allow pupils to focus on Music with Technology. However, this demands resource in terms of equipment and, more critically, in terms of training. There remains a key requirement for teachers to receive up-to-date, effective and classroom-focused training on contemporary technology. Otherwise, the danger is that classroom music and out-of-school musical experience will remain dichotomous for many young people in Scotland.

Instrumental Teaching

Finally, special mention should be made of the pivotal role of local authority-based instrumental teaching in Scotland. While the design of the curriculum was based on opening access to all pupils who wish to study Music, there can be no doubt that the support of peripatetic instrumental staff, who are usually responsible for delivering small-group instruction within a cognate instrumental family (such as woodwind), is vital. Such provision caters for pupils who wish to pursue the development of advanced skills that would simply be impossible within the classroom setting, and who lack the financial resources to access private instrumental tuition. Current threats to the funding of such services pose very real challenges to the continued high-quality provision of Music.

CONCLUSION

Music education in Scottish secondary schools has experienced a steady period of growth in numbers at S3–S6 and a positive trend in attainment. An explosion of innovation in curriculum and pedagogy in the early 1990s has produced a stable platform with a curriculum centred on a core philosophy of accessibility, integration and active learning. A range of issues continue to generate debate within the Music teaching community, and financial challenges pose a significant threat to the provision of instrumental teaching and extra-curricular activities upon which much that is positive about Music education depends.

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