



Music Education Council (MEC) Response to the Curriculum and Assessment Review Final Report and Government Response

To: Department for Education

From: Music Education Council (MEC)

Date: 14th November 2025

Subject: MEC response to Curriculum and Assessment Review: Building a World-Class Curriculum for All and the Government's Response

1. Introduction

The Music Education Council (MEC) welcomes the publication of Building a World-Class Curriculum for All and the Government's considered response. MEC supports the Review's ambition for a coherent, inclusive, and future-facing curriculum.

We particularly welcome the Government's recognition that a broad and balanced education must include the arts, and its commitment to revitalising arts education through the new National Centre for Arts and Music Education. We also commend the removal of the EBacc performance measure, which has for many years been a structural constraint on access to creative subjects.

However, we wish to highlight several areas in which the curriculum proposals for music require deeper consideration to ensure they are equitable, inclusive, and fit for purpose in practice. MEC stands ready to collaborate with the Department and sector partners in the ongoing development of the music curriculum.

2. Music Curriculum and Assessment

a. Musical notation and access

We understand the logic behind the Review's conclusion that inequity of access to musical learning—particularly at Key Stage 4—should be addressed by ensuring that all pupils learn to read and use musical notation. While notation can indeed be a powerful gateway to

musical understanding, this conclusion captures only one part of a complex picture. Disengagement arises from structural, cultural, and pedagogical barriers. A singular focus on notation risks refining inequality, appearing inclusive while maintaining narrow definitions of musical understanding. MEC therefore urges the review to adopt a broader conception of musical literacy that encompasses aurality, improvisation, digital musicianship, composition, and performance.

Disengagement and exclusion from classroom music arise from multiple factors, including:

- limited curriculum time allocated to music in many schools;
- shortage of specialist teachers and limited Initial Teacher Training and CPD support for generalist primary school teachers;
- musical instruments and repertoire that are physically inaccessible to some learners
- assessment models that privilege written rather than aural or creative skills; and
- cultural representations that fail to reflect pupils' lived experiences and musical identities.

b. GCSE Music

We welcome the forthcoming review of GCSE Music. The decision to retire the EBacc accountability measure provides a crucial opportunity to re-imagine Key Stage 4 pathways. However, MEC believes this review must be a substantive overhaul rather than a technical adjustment. The sustained decline in GCSE Music uptake reflects not only policy constraints but also structural and content issues within the current syllabus, assessment design that undervalues diverse musical traditions and creative processes, and limited alignment between Key Stages 3–4 and post-16 study routes.

This review must also consider whether current assessment structures reinforce cultural hierarchies by privileging specific genres, literacies, and ways of knowing. Reform should explicitly address cultural inclusion and representation alongside progression.

A meaningful review should therefore examine curriculum purpose, assessment models, and progression routes into further and higher education. MEC would welcome a partnership with DfE, Ofqual, and awarding bodies to help shape this reform, drawing on current research and practitioner expertise across genres and communities.

c. Continuity and progression (Key Stages 1–3)

We emphasise that the review of GCSE Music must be undertaken in the context of a coherent music learning continuum from Key Stage 1 through to Key Stage 4. Music education is cumulative and developmental; fragmentation between phases leads to disengagement and lost potential. MEC recommends that:

- the forthcoming review includes an explicit Key Stage 1–3 strand;
- expectations at GCSE be clearly aligned with prior learning outcomes; and
- consultation includes further and higher education representatives to ensure authentic progression pathways into advanced study, creative industries, and lifelong participation.

Progression should not only be vertical but also horizontal, connecting diverse musical practices, technologies, and community contexts.

d. Diversity and representation

We are pleased that the Government's response confirms that 'curriculum reforms should be guided by the principle that they reflect the diversity of our society'. We note examples of this commitment within history, citizenship, and English. However, the music recommendations currently lack explicit reference to diversity, equity, or representation.

A genuinely world-class curriculum must recognise the pluralism of Britain's musical landscape and its global interconnections. MEC stands ready to work with the Department and the new National Centre for Arts and Music Education to:

- ensure that revised programmes of study and exemplar materials draw from diverse musical cultures and practices;
- promote inclusive pedagogies that affirm every learner's identity and creativity;
- welcome reasonable adjustments within instrumentation and repertoire, and
- support professional learning for teachers to deliver this confidently.

3. Broader Reflections

Drawing on our national seminar series on Curriculum and Assessment, MEC reaffirms three wider principles that should underpin all curriculum reform; these are also present in the broader aspects of the curriculum review:

1. Equity and inclusion must be designed in from the outset, not retrofitted through enrichment.
2. Breadth and depth in the arts should be understood as essential to cognitive, emotional, and social development, not as optional enrichment.
3. Teacher expertise and trust are critical: teachers need both time and professional autonomy to bring the curriculum to life.
4. Curriculum reform must move beyond refining access to re-examining purpose, recognising music not only as a legitimate academic subject in its own right, but also as a vital social and cultural practice.

4. Conclusion

MEC welcomes the ambition to create a world-leading curriculum that delivers high standards for all. True reform requires more than access; it demands re-imagining purpose, treating music as both a legitimate field of academic study and a vibrant social and cultural practice.

To realise that ambition in music education, reforms must:

- address the structural barriers that limit access;
- align curriculum, assessment and progression across all key stages; and
- embody diversity and inclusion in both content and pedagogy.

We would be pleased to contribute constructively to the forthcoming curriculum and GCSE

review processes and to collaborate with the Department and the National Centre for Arts and Music Education to ensure that these reforms deliver for every child and young person.

Signed,

Michelle James – Co-Chair, Music Education Council

Barry Farrimond-Chuong MBE FRWCMD – Co-Chair, Music Education Council

Sharon Jagdev Powell – Co-Chair Elect, Music Education Council