Assessment of Composing at Key Stages 3 and 4 in English Secondary Schools

Research Report for the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music

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1. The Aims of the Research

The aim of the research reported here was to survey secondary school music teachers' current practice with regard to the assessment of composing at key stages 3 and 4. The research took place on a nationwide basis in England, via the use of on-line survey tools, and face-to-face interviews. Its purposes are, firstly, to find out what teachers are actually doing, what school and external systems require them to do, and what their views are on this. Secondly, we offer some commentary on this, and discuss the implications of our findings from both an assessment perspective, and with a view to the broader issues concerned.

Two questions have governed our research:

- What are teachers currently doing with regard to assessment of composing?
- What else might they do?

2. Research Methodology

The research into assessment of composing at key stages 3 and 4 was undertaken in three phases:

> Phase 1: Online survey
> Phase 2: Follow-up on-line survey
> Phase 3: Individual interviews with teachers

Phase 1: Initial on-line survey
The initial on-line survey was made available to all music teachers in England, and was advertised widely in subject association information, and by direct contact with many schools via an e-mail to the head of music. The initial on-line questionnaire received 677 views, was started by 171 respondents, and completed by 92. Of these 92, 92% were classroom music teachers, 6.25% peripatetic music teachers, and 2% community musicians or workshop leaders, resulting in a completion rate of 53.8%. A good cross-section of respondents was achieved, from rural communities to inner cities. We were delighted with the high completion rate, which compares very favourably against other pieces of educational research.

Phase 2: Follow-up on-line survey
One question in the survey was whether the respondents would be willing to undertake a more detailed follow-up survey, and those who responded positively to this question were invited by e-mail to undertake the second survey. This more complex follow-up survey was viewed (interestingly) 202 times, started by 33 respondents, and completed by 18, giving a completion rate of 54.55%

Phase 3: Individual interviews with teachers
In the follow-up survey respondents were questioned as to whether they would be prepared to be interviewed, and from analysis of answers to the

surveys a list of possible respondents was identified, and 11 teachers were interviewed. These ranged geographically from the North-East of England, via the North-West and the Midlands, down to London and the South-East. 10 of these interviews took place on a face-to-face basis, and 1 was conducted by telephone. These were semi-structured interviews (Cohen et al., 2000), based on a predetermined interview schedule, which was departed from for supplementary questions.

In presenting material from the surveys and interviews, we have taken the decision not to rewrite respondents' written comments for grammar or syntax purposes, but we have regularised spellings. In the case of the interviews, all interviews were audio recorded, and then the services of a transcriber were employed. Again, we have not edited teachers' comments from these for grammatical purposes, but present the actuality of direct speech.

In ethical terms, we followed the guidelines laid down by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004). To this end all responses have been anonymised, and, where respondents are identified at all, this is only done by numerical codes. Gender identification of respondents has been avoided, sometimes by using the formulation 'their' to apply to an individual to avoid the gender specificity of 'his' or 'hers'. No schools are mentioned by name or location.

For the purposes of our research we did not seek to define classroom composing, neither did our respondents question our usage of the term.

A full range of personal experiences of composing was evidenced in the teachers who responded, from those who had little or no experience of personal composing (one simply responded 'zilch' to this question!) to those such as the respondent who replied that they were 'a published composer', via a range of responses in-between.

As far as we know, this is the first wide-scale survey of teacher attitudes to composing which has been undertaken in England.

3 Conceptions of composing and assessment

3.1 Composing

The notion of composing as a curricular activity suitable for all pupils in the secondary school has received increasing attention in academic circles in recent years. Burnard has investigated a number of aspects of the composing process, including its relationship to improvisation (Burnard, 2000a; 2000b), how pupils derive meaning from composing, and what they do whilst undertaking it (Burnard, 2002; Burnard & Younker, 2002; 2004a; 2004b).

Odam (2000) and Paynter (2000) noted, in their separate ways, that historically there had been issues with the teaching and learning of composing in schools. This is an area also investigated by Berkley (2001), who described problems teachers found with composing pedagogy.

We know that a lot of composing at KS3 happens in groups, and the group composing process has been deconstructed in terms of the stages pupils work through (Fautley, 1999; 2005). Social interaction plays a large part in group composing (Burland & Davidson, 2001), and this has also been investigated in terms of the ways in which pupils talk with each other (Miell & MacDonald, 2000; Major, 2007; 2008). More recently, what Activity Theory can tell us about group composing has been studied (Burnard & Younker, 2008).

3.2 Assessment

Assessment is a key area of interest in contemporary educational discourse. The role of formative assessment, and its place in raising standards has been well documented (*inter alia* Black, 1995; Black et al., 2003a; 2003b; 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998; 2006; Assessment Reform Group, 1999; 2002; James, 1998). Summative assessment too has been researched, and its role as a 'high-stakes' tool discussed (Harlen, 2005; 2007; Stobart, 2001; 2008).

Formative assessment, also known as assessment for learning (AfL), has figured in a number of governmental initiatives for schools. Interestingly, it was a music lesson which was chosen as an exemplar for teachers of all subjects for training in AfL (DfES, 2002).

Currently, there is working party being led by Kevin Rogers (Music Advisor for Hampshire) considering a new range of advice for teachers related to assessment in music teaching. This is following new guidance from the QCA as part of the recently established third iteration of the National Curriculum for Music[1].

3.3 Assessment of composing in the secondary school classroom
Formal assessment of composing happens at KS4, in GCSE and BTEC examination work, and here assessment criteria are provided by examination

[1] Further information on this can be found at: http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/.

boards. Assessment of composing also happens at KS3, where it forms part of the teacher assessment. The requirements of the National Curriculum (NC) are that an overall level is provided at the end of the key stage (QCA, 2008). Many schools use the NC far more often than that, however, despite the recommendation that "… level descriptions are not designed to be used to 'level' individual pieces of work" (QCA, 2001).

Assessment of composing, particularly in the English[2] situation has received less attention, however. We have some general overviews (Stephens, 2003; MacDonald et al., 2006) and specific research involving teachers (Byrne et al., 2003; Byrne & Sheridan, 2001). Burnard and Younker (2004b) mention assessment in their analysis of individual composing pathways. Mills (1991) investigated the musical nature of assessment, whilst from an American perspective, Brophy (2000) looked into developmental matters. From a pragmatic classroom perspective, Bray (2000; 2002) and Adams (2000) discuss ways in which teachers can operationalise assessment in the classroom.

Although there are anecdotally a number of worries over composing and its assessment (Fautley, 2008), we do not know a great deal about teachers' assessment practices, hence this current research.

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[2] We are specifying 'English' here as the National Curriculum is different for each member country of the UK.

4. Pedagogies for Classroom Composing

In order to understand the ways in which assessment of composing is taking place, we first wanted to uncover the ways in which the teaching and learning of composing was being operationalised in secondary schools.

4.1 Organisation of Composing

The two on-line surveys reveal a wealth of data concerning composing and its assessment. In this section responses from both surveys are considered alongside each other, as many of the questions in the second survey build on and amplify material covered in the first one.

The first question asked was about the organisation of composing in the classroom. Firstly we asked about KS3 composing

Figure 1: Organising Classroom Composing – KS3

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	In small groups (approx. 3-6) operating within the class	83	41.71%					
2.	In the class as a whole	14	7.04%					
3.	Individually	34	17.09%					
4.	In pairs	68	34.17%					
	Total	199	100%					

This clearly shows that the normal modality for composing at KS3 is conjointly, with small groups being the commonest form, followed by pairs of pupils. Taking these two responses together 75.58% of respondents said that some form of collaborative composing was the usual way for them to work. In the follow up survey we asked why this was the case.

Figure 2: Reasons for Organising Classroom Composing – KS3

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	Easier to organise	8	14.55%					
2.	Makes best use of time	7	12.73%					
3.	Only have limited instruments available	8	14.55%					
4.	Because pupils work better together	11	20.00%					
5.	Means I can get round groups of pupils in one lesson, whereas I might not get to all the individuals	10	18.18%					
6.	Does not apply to me	2	3.64%					
7.	Other (please specify)	9	16.36%					
	Total	55	100%					

The responses to this are split between aspects of quality of musical responses and distributing the composing process in groups, in that 20% of respondents said that pupils work better this way, but then allied to this are pragmatic responses, in that teacher time and organisation of classes work better this way, and, for 12.73% or respondents, this is the way to deploy the

limited resources available to them. This seems to show that teachers think composing in groups is the best way for it to be operationalised at KS3, but that this is mitigated and influenced by a range of pragmatic responses to the key stage 3 curriculum requirements.

In the follow-up survey teachers were offered the opportunity to explain their reasons for working in this fashion. Many of the reasons were to do with distributing the composing process amongst individuals:

> Allows for mixed ability and for pupils to help each other and share ideas working in groups often helps students with low confidence achieve more and it can also with G&T produce outstanding results.

> pupils bounce ideas off each other and they gain more confidence to try something out, more so than they perhaps would alone

In addition to this, there is also the issue of social learning, which group composing can facilitate:

> So students can learn to socialise with other students they wouldn't normally work with. It give students with varying tastes in music to combine their thoughts and ideas to create new, original, forward thinking music

The research does not prove conclusively, whether the group work that dominates KS3 teaching is done for pragmatic or authentic musical reasons. Anecdotal evidence from our visits to schools that have been recently rebuilt (e.g. as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme) is that music teachers are tending to favour classroom layout and design that facilitate a greater degree of autonomous working (perhaps through the use of musical keyboards and computer-based work). The authors of this research find this a worrying trend.

However, at KS4 the situation is entirely different, with the majority of composing here being done on an individual basis:

Figure 3: Organising Classroom Composing – KS4

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	In small groups (approx. 3-6) operating within the class	28	14.97%					
2.	In the class as a whole	15	8.02%					
3.	Individually	114	60.96%					
4.	In pairs	30	16.04%					
	Total	187	100%					
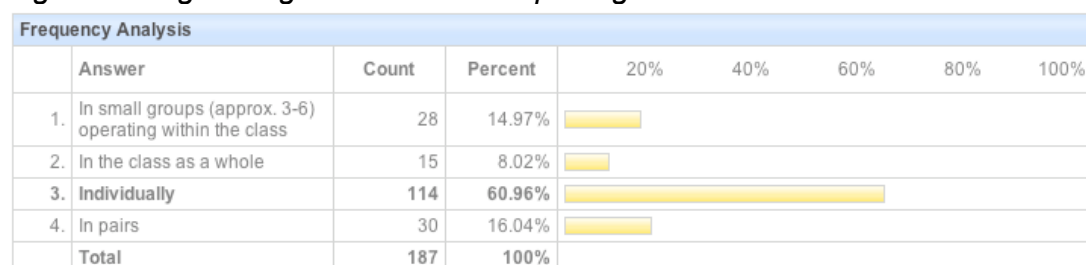
Here, a little over 60% of composing is done individually, with paired composing coming a long way behind at around 16%. This marks a major shift from pupils working in groups to working by themselves. To investigate this further we asked how this changeover is managed, from group composing to individual. Responses to this varied considerably, with some

respondents starting with group work, to others who launched directly into solo composing. These three responses show the range of these variations:

> I start by doing a group composition so they get to know each other and share ideas. I then break them into their first individual composition task by getting them compose a 8 bar chord sequence followed by writing a melody over it. I find that this short tasks builds their confidence in composing individually. (5092)

> Paired activity at the start of the course, sharing ideas within the group, then selecting and developing material on a more individual basis. The next project might start similarly but more quickly move on to a more individualised footing. From there we can move to individual generation of ideas. Pairs and small groups can still validate and discuss each others' compositions. (9238)

> I found that students who took GCSE often decided to work alone when the chance was presented at KS3. At KS4 to help students get started, the way composition is approached is often quite different - more teacher guidance etc. (8555)

In a consideration of assessment, it is useful to establish the pedagogies which have been involved, and so we asked whether teachers used published schemes of work in the teaching and learning of composing. The results are significant here, at KS3 83.55% use their own materials, and at KS4 82.55%. Published schemes are used by a little over 10% of teachers at KS3 and 4. At KS3 *Music Matters* (Metcalfe & Hiscock, 1992; 1999) is by far the most popular, whilst at KS4 there is a less clear picture, but "the Heinemann course" is mentioned by a number of respondents. In following up on this question we asked about this, and over 21% of respondents said they had not been able to find any suitable published materials for either KS3 or KS4. This seems to offer an opportunity for tailored composing pedagogy materials to be produced! Set against this, however, is a further 17% of teachers at KS3 and 19% of teachers at KS4 who would rather spend their budget on other things anyway. We know that music is a costly subject to equip in secondary schools, and so it may well be the case that this is where teachers would prefer to place their limited spending power. However, this does have some implications for commercial provision of suitable materials.

4.2 Composing Stimuli

We then turned our attention to what we call composing stimuli, or starting points for composing. We postulated 6 starting points, representing what we felt to be the full range of such stimuli which we had observed in classroom composing at Key Stages 3 and 4. These were:

> 1. You provide the pupils with a musical 'technical term (or terms)' or starting point (e.g. ostinato, accelerando) and ask them to compose evidencing the use of it/them.

2. You provide the pupils with a musical stimulus (e.g. a rhythm, melody or chord sequence) and ask them to compose evidencing the use of it/them.

3. You provide pupils with a musical framework (e.g. ternary form, rondo, theme and variations) and ask them to compose using it.

4. You provide a non-musical starting point or stimulus (e.g. a picture, story, poem or film) and ask them to compose with it.

5. You provide a personal stimulus, issue or challenge (e.g. their beliefs, thoughts, peers, fashions, tastes, lives, environments) and ask them to compose around or about it.

6. You ask the pupils to compose anything they wish.

We asked whether teachers had used these starting points, and offered a six-point Likert scale for responses:

1. I used to do this but don't any more
2. I've never done this
3. I've not done this but plan to
4. I do this occasionally
5. I do this quite often
6. I do this very often

We also asked a question concerning the perceived efficacy of these starting points.

Table 1 shows the data table upon which the following discussions, graphs and analyses are taken. For normalisation purposes, all figures are expressed as percentages.

Table 1: Data for Composing Stimuli

	musical technical term	musical stimulus	musical framework	non-musical starting point	personal stimulus	anything they wish
I used to do this but don't any more	7.08	0.88	2.65	4.42	2.65	14.16
I've never done this	7.08	1.77	3.54	1.77	44.25	42.48
I've not done this but plan to	0.88	1.77	0.88	4.42	7.08	1.77
I do this occasionally	42.48	39.82	31.86	50.44	34.51	37.17
I do this quite often	29.2	43.36	41.59	28.32	8.85	3.54
I do this very often	13.27	12.39	19.47	10.62	2.65	0.88
KS3	35.4	22.12	13.27	49.56	38.05	18.58
KS4	4.42	13.27	20.35	4.42	3.54	22.12
KS3 and KS4	60.48	64.6	66.37	46.02	58.41	59.29
I find this generally ineffective	13.27	5.31	6.19	12.39	42.48	60.18
This is quite effective	63.72	61.85	48.67	50.44	38.94	30.97
This is very effective	23.01	32.74	45.13	37.17	18.58	8.85

Of the stimulus types, musical ones tended to be the preferred *modus operandi* for composing, with those being directly musical, or using musical frameworks being the most popular.

Figure 4: Composing Stimulus types
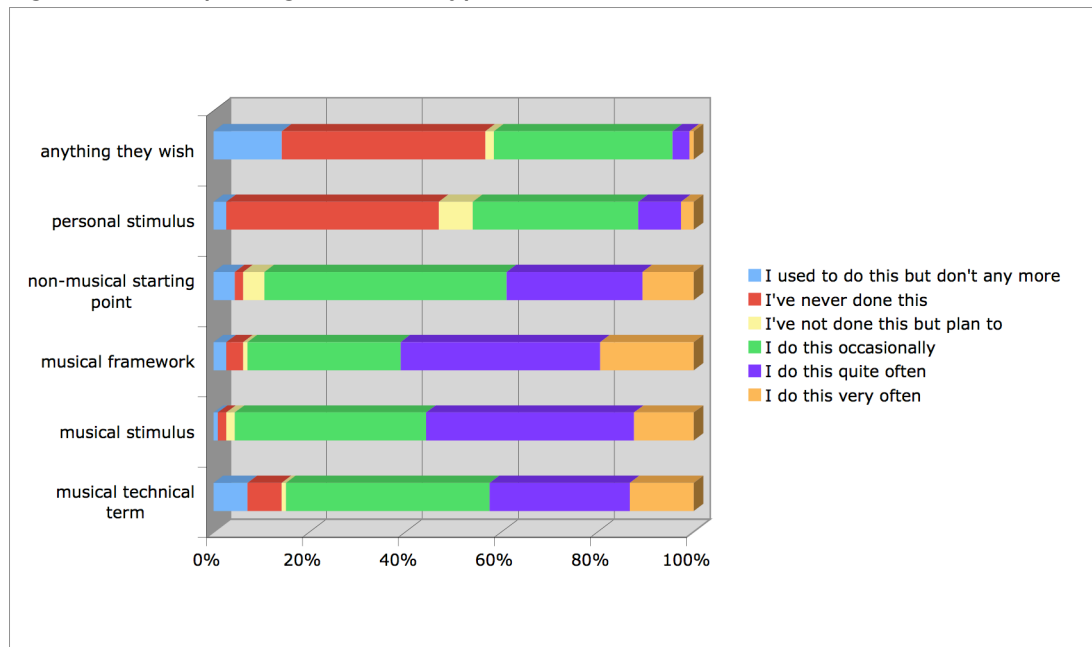
However, when we look at the phase specificity of responses we notice that there are some which are deemed more suitable for specific age phases

Figure 5: Composing Stimuli by phase
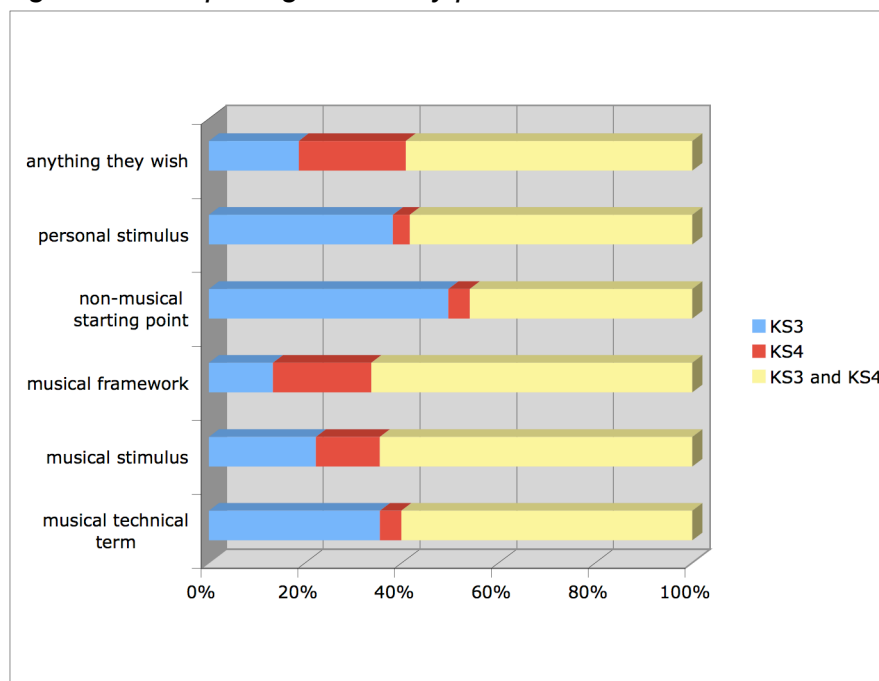
A case in point is the non-musical starting point, where only 4% of respondents use it exclusively at KS4, but it figures highly (50%) at KS3. The

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most popular starting point for Key Stages 3 and 4, as reflected in the earlier data, is the musical framework, which 66% of respondents use at KS3 and 4. However, frequency of use is not of itself sufficient to consider, and so we turn now to teachers' impressions of the efficacy of different composing starting points. One explanation for the figure being so high at KS3 (50%) could relate to the recent emphasis on musical learning being contextualised. This is a major plank of recent initiatives such as the National Strategy for KS3. This strategy argues that musical learning is most effective when it is placed within a context which pupils can relate to easily. Similarly, recent developments within the National Curriculum have placed an emphasis on cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning. Perhaps this is a more sophisticated argument that has not, as yet, been fully explored within KS3 teaching. But both these initiatives invited further exploration about what constitutes the nature of individual subjects within a wider curriculum, how these subjects relate to each other and, perhaps more pertinently for this research, how specific musical processes are situated within wider curriculum frameworks.

The most effective compositional starting point was considered to be the musical framework, with 45% saying is was very effective, and a further 49% believing it to be quite effective. Contrastingly, this did not score the lowest for ineffectiveness, (6%), that honour went to the musical stimulus, which did not score highest in the 'very effective' category. Linked to these must be the use of musical technical terms as starting points, which scored highest in the 'quite effective' category. This figure contrasts with the argument made in the previous paragraph. Here, teachers seem to find comfort in traditional approaches to composition. Perhaps these relate to how they were taught themselves, or what they perceive to be the 'correct' approach. From a more critical stance, however, this could be read as a reflection on the conservative nature of much music education which fails to take a wider viewpoint of pupils' learning (and how teacher's teach) and seeks to maintain a more isolated view of music as a subject within a wider curriculum framework.

The most ineffective compositional starting point was generally considered to be the 'anything they wish' category, with 64% of respondents identifying it as such, this was followed by the 'personal stimulus, and then there is quite a large gap to the remaining four. Altogether the 'anything they wish' category scored lowest for efficacy, there was still a significant minority of teachers (9%) who found this a very effective starting point.

This finding contrasts starkly with some of the very recent investigations into music education such as the Musical Futures programme. This initiative stresses the importance of allowing pupils free reign over curriculum content and the process by which this is engaged with and developed. Within this model, teachers act as facilitators of learning rather than initiators of learning; they are there to advise, support and nurture learning, rather than dictate; they should empathise with the needs of individual learners rather than seek to make them conform. Whilst much of this work has been done within the field of musical performance and its associated pedagogy, Musical Futures also makes claims to represent a way forward for the teaching of composing. This research seems to indicate that this approach is not supported within the

current pedagogy of those teachers surveyed. There are many potential issues associated with the Musical Futures approach which are beyond the scope of this report, but we will emphasise here that the findings of our research show that a diversity of approaches for stimulating composition work was evident in our findings.

The ongoing requirements for teachers to personalise the curriculum on offer to their pupils is also relevant here. These differences could be accounted for by teachers personalising their learning to meet the needs of their classes, and there being some teachers in some schools for whom this is an effective way of working. The fact that nearly 43% of teachers have never tried starting composing from this standpoint does, however, seem to indicate that this is a specialised area for some.

Figure 6: Perceived efficacy of composing stimuli
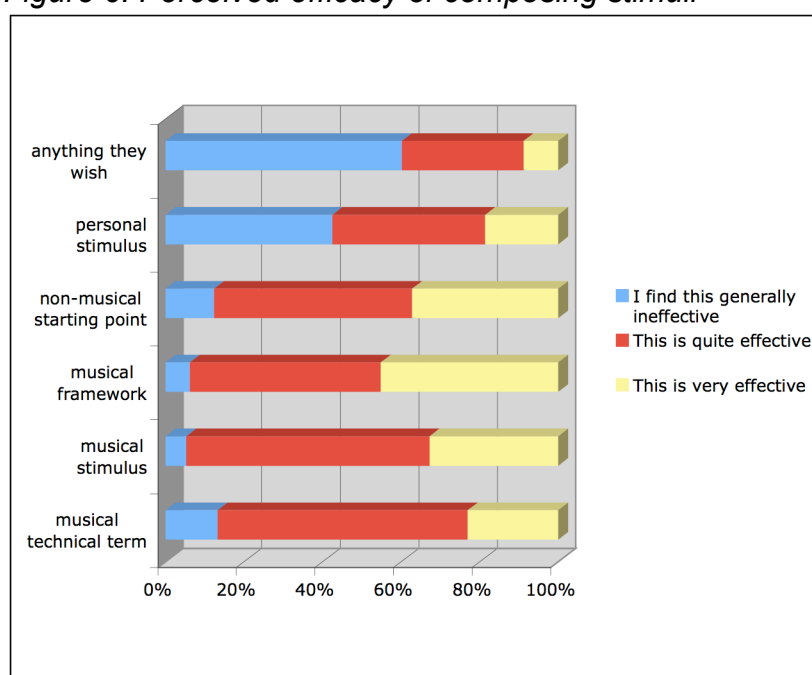
This is backed up by our experiences within initial teacher education. It is clear that composing is an area which many postgraduate students undertaking initial teacher education have sketchy experiences. Many will have received a traditional grounding in composition (of the type evidenced within this research) and will not have been given the freedom for more individualised responses to compositional briefs, or even the chance or encouragement to continue with compositional work for their own individual enjoyment. The majority of students that go on to become qualified teachers appear to define themselves primarily as instrumentalists. Composing is often an area of weakness. This is potentially unsurprising, as "most secondary school music teachers are the products of the Western classical tradition" (Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003 p.266). Hence, they feel the need to fall back onto stronger frameworks for compositional activity within the classroom.

4.3 Developing skills in composing

To investigate further the pedagogy of KS3 composing, we asked interviewees if they were able to say what skills they were endeavouring to develop in KS3 composing lessons. A number found this a challenging question, and said so! No clear picture emerged as to what composing skills were being developed. Indeed, a number of teachers found it difficult to pin down the notion of composing skills in the first place. This teacher talks about starting with structure, and then becoming more complex:

> I think it's a gradual development of skills, and I think it's more sort of, skill based in Year 7, and then we tend to sort off, focus a lot on styles. Composing in various styles in Year 8, Year 9, it becomes more complex, where they actually integrate more, and they work with other people and they look at different types of composing as well, and different approaches to it. (1312)

The answer from this next teacher is more complex, and in many ways gets to the heart of why composing is taught at all at KS3:

> That's very complicated isn't it, because all the time you're wanting to, because we teach in an integrated way, you're limited to an extent by what they can perform as well as what they can compose. So the composing skills that they want to get, I suppose what you're wanting them to do, is to be able to order sounds within the structures, and to produce some sort of expressive effect from that, but that doesn't sound much of a skill on its own does it? But you could then, that becomes a set of skills that you develop as they work through the Key Stage. So it might be that at initial stages in Year 7, all you're really wanting them to do is to distinguish between sounds, or to create sounds that produced a particular effect. And then you want them to give them some sort of structure, and as they become more skilled at doing that, you want the expressive effect to be more to the fore, or to be more finely tuned for them to be able to, to say what their intentions are, and to produce music which fulfils those intentions.
>
> But I think also as composers, well to me, the reason that you would teach children to compose isn't really as an expressive tool, so much as an understanding tool. That, by composing you understand how people compose, so whilst you might never produce pop songs which are going to earn you a lot of money, or Mahler symphonies or anything like that, the little that you can do in composing gives you a real insight into how other people do it.
>
> I don't think we're setting out to make composers, but we're setting out to help people understand what composition is and how it works. (106)

There seems to be a key point being made in the last sentence here, and that is that of the role of music education in the general education of a 'rounded individual'. It is important to remember that this follows the general curriculum guidelines at Key Stage 3 which conceive of an integrated model of musical understanding that is facilitated by a skilful combination of performance,

composing and listening-related activities. To that end, we were encouraged by responses such as these which seem to highlight the links between composing as a discrete and purposeful activity, and wider developments in a pupil's musical education and general education.

But returning to specifics, one of the key issues that this teacher raises is that of *intentionality*. What is wanted is for learners to understand what it is they want to do, and how they can go about achieving it. This notion of intentionality was also the goal for another teacher:

> That's a very hard question; I always think it's a very good question as well. I don't think I am actually. I don't think I'm able to say, what, I mean, what I would like to see is that I give my, by the end of Year 9 for example, I would like my students to feel that they could produce music in a way that they want to do. So for example if they want to, if they want to write a rock song they've got the skills required to write a good rock song , so they can write a catchy chorus, they can put chords together for a verse, they can use major and minor chords effectively, they can write a riffy bass line that fits between the chords. I think that's what I want, I would like my students to be able to compose in a style that they want to do, through the skills which I've taught them in the classroom. (1320)

But there is a tension here. As we have discussed above, recent moves in curriculum design and implementation (such as the National Strategy at Key Stage 3 and the new National Curriculum for Key Stage 3) have focused on the importance of a 'context' for musical learning. Whilst, at one level, this is difficult to argue against, it does beg the question as to where musical skills, and their development, fit into the curriculum. Skilful teachers are able to identify specific compositional skills and nurture them in a developmental manner. Unfortunately, we did not note this very often in this research. Rather, there is a general acknowledge that such skills may exist. But teachers' ability to recognise, nurture and develop these in their pupils is questionable. In the future, we may see teachers spending even more time thinking about the context for music learning and less time about specific skills and their development. This is an area which would benefit from further research.

4.4 Developing challenge in composing

Having looked at whether or not skills could be commented on specifically, we then asked teachers whether or not they felt that *challenge* in composing increased during KS3. In general, they felt that it did. This teacher talks of the challenge increasing by complexity of topic:

> I think the topics that I've chosen, I've chosen quite carefully, and the order of them, and in fact every year I look at it and think have I got the order right, is there a progression of skills within that. Because some composing styles are obviously more complex than others, so if you're doing something about song writing in Year 9, you're are expecting that

the level of compositional skill involved in there would be very much greater than, say if you are doing something quite formulaic and the new topic I've introduced in Year 7, is in native North American music, and we compose pastiche native North American flute melodies, so we used a minor pentatonic scale. I give them five notes, I tell them which ones they are, I give them a sort of rhythmic framework, there'll be a few fast notes then there'll be a slower note and this sort of thing. It'd be on the flute sound. So you've got a set of parameters in which composing takes place.

Now that's sort of composing by numbers really, but later on in the Key Stage, you don't give them the parameters so much, but you say well this is the expressive effect that I'm wanting you to produce. (106)

Whereas for this next teacher, although challenge increases with topic, then other external skills come in to play too:

I try to give pupils a different composition brief, but often it's to do with, it's often to do with the ability within the class rather than the ability across the Key Stage. But then other skills start to come in as well, you know, external skills like music technology skills and things like … at the moment… we teach according to genre, a lot of the time and there are big problems in that because I think they tend to get the skills that you're looking for, and composition tend to get pigeon holed within those genres, and then it just becomes a kind of, almost tick box mentality of what is stylistic of this genre and therefore, we're just doing this because the criteria says so. (1112)

What we can hypothecate from the responses of many of the teachers is that there is a sort of unsubstantiated topic/genre/style hierarchy which they use as a way of developing composing work, and providing increasing challenge. However, as we have noted above, this research quite clearly shows that the skills and understanding needed to engage with, and develop, pupils' compositional ability are not really recognised or understood by the majority of teachers. Teachers in this survey were unable to pinpoint with any degree of precision what these skills might be or how they could be nurtured in a developmental way across the key stage.

Perhaps even more worryingly, teachers' notions of creativity in composing often seem to be linked to ideas of freedom of expression, or just allowing pupils to follow their own interests, without 'placing boundaries' in the way. Whilst there is nothing wrong with these notions *per se*, we would argue that creativity does exist within certain boundaries and should be nurtured as such. The implication of this is that teachers will need help in developing the notion of *challenge* in composing work. In particular, they need a greater degree of understanding about how frameworks for the development of compositional skills can be developed and implemented in a way that does not mitigate against the opportunities for pupils to become more creative composers. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) writes of the importance of the 'field' in creativity, and this is an area which music teachers seem to need to think

about in terms of the specificities of developing composing in learners. Fautley and Savage (2007, p.59) also deal with aspects of this, in terms of the ways teachers need to consider moving from an perspective based upon the acquisition of skills alone, to one where more creative responses are planned for.

4.5 The place of notation

The issue of notation, and if/when/how it should be taught can be a contentious issue for some music teachers. We asked interviewees if they believed that notation was important for composing. Most believed that it was, especially for KS4:

> At Key Stage 3, no, at Key Stage 4, yes. ... I don't think notation is something they have to be able to do it, it is something that we teach alongside it to support what will go on in higher studies should they choose to do it. (1320)

Some teachers talked about introducing notation in KS3 as a precursor for those who would be doing music in KS4, as they felt it to be important there:

> Well, we start with notation at Key Stage 3, we start with that, as a starter, introduce it to students gently, in a friendly way, otherwise you frighten them to death, apart from those who can already read. So notation starts at Year 7 Key Stage 3, and improves, improves, goes to, you know, by the end of Year 7 they're able to write a two to four bar phrase.
>
> *Interviewer:* Do you think, just moving into Key Stage 4, do you think the GCSE values, the skills of using musical notation enough or not enough or…?
>
> *Teacher:* Yes, they should read music to be able to tick the GCSE box. Yes.
>
> *Interviewer:* And should it be used as part of the composition work?
>
> *Teacher:* It is for us, used as part of the composition work, when the kids do their integrated assignment, we encourage them to also forward a score, manuscript score to the board..
>
> *Interviewer:* Is that a requirement or is that..
>
> *Teacher:* It is a requirement actually, as part of the integrated assignment whereas composition, it's not a requirement but it's there as a supportive tool. And as musicians, I know there's an argument here, it's a fine line, we believe that traditionally, fundamentally, our students should be able to read music, to one level or another.
>
> *Interviewer:* And use it as a part of the composition process?

Teacher: And use it as a part of the composition process yes. And that overspills to their performance, and their listening, yeah, absolutely. I don't know how one would do it without, I'm sure one does. There are many students who take GCSE who do not read music, and we, you know, we've had kids who, you know a few guitarists particularly and drummers, that are close to the bone there. But, we do extra theory classes and get them on that, you know, treadmill as soon as we possibly can. It opens up a world for them there, otherwise they're very inhibited and very limited if they can't read music. (1018)

This teacher raises the issue of musicians such as drummers and guitarists, for whom notation is not a normal part of their work. One teacher, who works in an inner-city curtly observed:

My kids, they never work in notation, we do have it for performing, for reading and stuff like that, but for composing…….. no. Most of the music they compose isn't written. (904)

Lying in-between these extremes are a range of views, one of which is represented by this teacher:

No it's not. It's a helpful tool for some students. Some students have got a very good, a very good ear and a very good memory, and don't need to write ideas down. Others do need, you know they've got twenty-five lessons before the next music lesson, they do need a reminder and they do need, but how music is notated, I think is probably less important. We do teach staff notation in Year 8 and I have to admit, that's partly just because I think that after three years of learning music, they should at least be aware of how staff notation goes. (712)

This is where notation is seen as useful, but not essential to composing. Another teacher unpicked this a little further, and distinguished between notation as an *aide memoire*, and of staff notation being used appropriately:

It's important for recording your thoughts, isn't it? It's important for having something to come back to and its importance for mediating your composition to other people. Because if you're going to write something for more than one person, then either you're going to have to multi-track it yourself, or you're going to have to write it down, so that other people can play it. I suppose not, you could go and teach them it but that could be quite a laborious process and you might have changed your mind in the meantime. So yes, I think some sort of notation is necessary.

The big question is, whether it's necessary for everybody to have a really big understanding of staff notation and I think increasingly it isn't, because you can, you know if you use Logic Audio software for example you can play something in, that's pretty freeform and it would

produce a score for you. The score can be musical nonsense, but it represents what you've played. Now if you then give that to somebody you've got a bit of a problem. But, yes, I think some sort of notation is necessary, but only from the recording of your thoughts point of view, not from the actual development of thoughts. (106)

One of the points made by this teacher, that of the role of ICT in teaching composing, leads us into the next area we investigated.

4.6 ICT in composing

We then turned our attention to the use of ICT in composing. Here a very clear picture emerged, with ICT being used 'a lot' at KS4, according to 71% of respondents, compared with 33% of teachers using it 'a lot' at KS3,
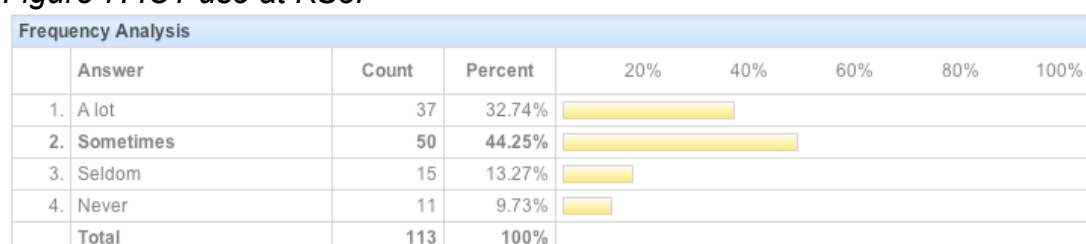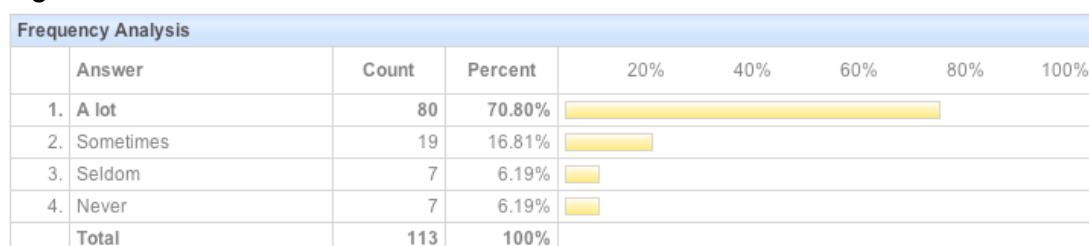
Figure 7: ICT use at KS3:

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	A lot	37	32.74%					
2.	Sometimes	50	44.25%					
3.	Seldom	15	13.27%					
4.	Never	11	9.73%					
	Total	113	100%					

Figure 8: ICT use at KS4:

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	A lot	80	70.80%					
2.	Sometimes	19	16.81%					
3.	Seldom	7	6.19%					
4.	Never	7	6.19%					
	Total	113	100%					

What is interesting here are the 'seldom' and 'never' responses, indicating that a small but significant number of pupils never get the opportunities afforded by ICT in their composing. This must have an effect upon them when compared with those who do reap the rewards that engagement with ICT can offer. This is huge topic and one that does, perhaps, fall outside the remit of this research. However, a few comments are worth making. Firstly, the range of technologies being used within teaching at these key stages has an obvious effect on the types of activities that pupils can undertake. Recent research conducted for Roland UK (and made available to the ABRSM from Roland's Education Director) showed that many teachers made use of music notation software such as Sibelius and Finale in UK schools. This confirms our analysis of the conservative nature of many teachers' view about composing as an activity. It also helps to explain why many teachers reported an increase in the use of ICT at key stage 4. What was meant here, is that more pupils use software of this type to 'compose' pieces for the demands of individual GCSE assessment.

Secondly, access and entitlement to ICT is a major issue. This relates to the above point. What pieces of ICT that teachers choose to use in their teaching is the single biggest determining factor in this. The Roland UK research clearly showed an over-reliance on expensive software packages (many of which were not designed for educational use) and the lack of appreciation of web-based (often open-source) tools for compositional work. Teachers seem reluctant or unable to make the conceptual leaps required to use these tools in constructive pedagogical ways. Whilst there have been some examples of innovative practice, these are few and far between, and the systems to alert teachers to these new ideas are too fragile.

Thirdly, in many respects the existing skills, knowledge and understanding that many teachers have in the area of musical composition are often ill-suited to the digital environment that young people are growing up with today. (Prensky, 2001a; 2001b) has categorised the differences between 'digital natives' and 'digital immigrants' and these are quite helpful metaphors here. Practically, many teachers do not seem to understand that the skills to use new pieces of technology within musical composition may well be different to those required to compose using notation or traditional instruments. They try to apply or appropriate existing knowledge and understanding to this, but often this is resisted by the pieces of technology themselves, or by the pupils.

This brings us to our final point in this important discussion. Young people are accessing compositional tools outside formal educational contexts. They are engaging with and developing the new sets of skills, knowledge and understanding required to operate in a digital world. Teachers will need significant support to understand these processes, but engaging with them is vital if music education within our schools is to remain relevant to the typical 21st century pupil.

5 Assessment of classroom composing

Having investigated the pedagogies of classroom composing, we then turned our attention to the ways in which teachers assess it, starting firstly with National Curriculum levels.
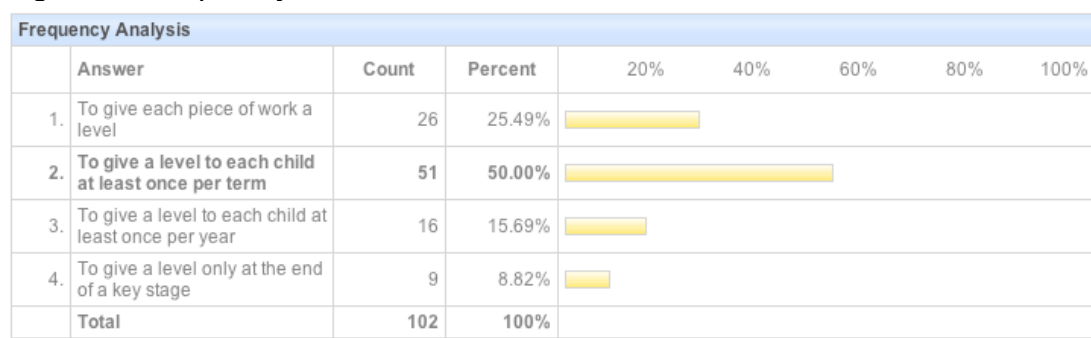
5.1 National Curriculum levels

These levels constitute the attainment target within the National Curriculum for Music. There are eight levels (and one 'exceptional performance' level) which describe the process of musical learning (including performing, composing, and listening). It is important to note that there are not separate levels for each of these activities. Rather, the levels build on the conception of integrated practice and this is something that we have welcomed. There is only one attainment target for music and this covers the broad areas of musical performance, composing, listening, reviewing and evaluating.

When the levels were first introduced in 2000 many teachers were unhappy about their construction, and there was an accompanying lack of appropriate classroom exemplification by Government agencies. Whilst the QCA has made some moves to facilitate a common understanding of what might constitute each particular level, our previous research and work in this area has shown significant differences in understanding amongst teachers. During the course of this research the current revision of the National Curriculum was introduced which has included the same levels of attainment, although the content of the curriculum has, in our view, significantly changed. This is an additional problem which teachers are currently facing but which this research has not focussed on.
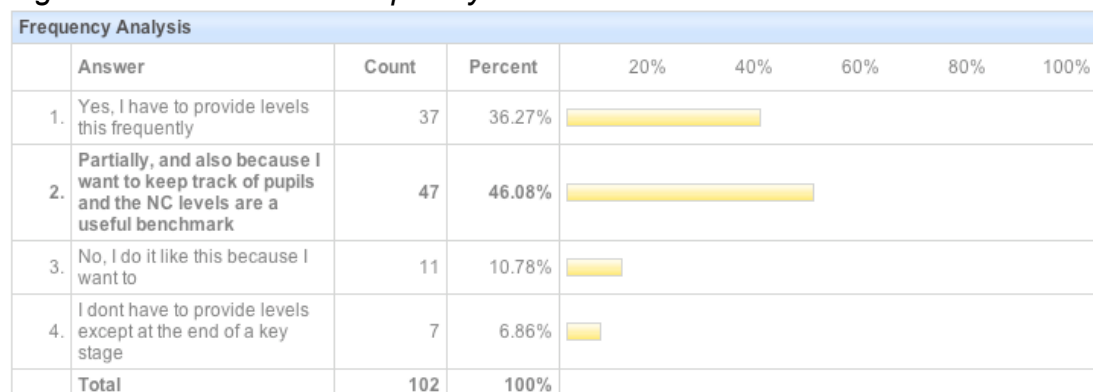
We asked to what extent do teachers use the NC levels to make judgements about their pupils. Despite the original intention of them being used to level work at the *end* of a key stage, and the very clear statement on the National Curriculum website that "… level descriptions are not designed to be used to 'level' individual pieces of work" (NC Action website) 25% of teachers responded that they use the levels to assess individual pieces of work. Only about 9% of teachers use the levels in the way which they were originally intended, to report at the end of the Key Stage, with 50% of teachers giving levels to all pupils at least once per term, whereas only about 16% are using them on a annual basis.

Figure 9: Frequency of NC level use

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	To give each piece of work a level	26	25.49%					
2.	To give a level to each child at least once per term	51	50.00%					
3.	To give a level to each child at least once per year	16	15.69%					
4.	To give a level only at the end of a key stage	9	8.82%					
	Total	102	100%					

Teachers are often asked to provide levels of attainment for each pupil every term. This is a key issue for many teachers. We asked whether they were assessing frequently because they had to, or because they wanted to.

Figure 10: Reasons for frequency of NC level use

|	Answer	Count	Percent	
1.	Yes, I have to provide levels this frequently	37	36.27%	
2.	Partially, and also because I want to keep track of pupils and the NC levels are a useful benchmark	47	46.08%	
3.	No, I do it like this because I want to	11	10.78%	
4.	I dont have to provide levels except at the end of a key stage	7	6.86%	
	Total	102	100%	

There is a slight mismatch here between those teachers who only provide levels at the end of a key stage, and those who say they are only required to do this, where the figure now is about 7%. Only about 11% answered that they do things the way they do because they want to, which seems to imply that about 90% of teachers are having to comply with systems they may not be entirely happy with. About 47% of teachers felt that NC levels provided a useful benchmark, and as pupil-tracking and target-setting becomes increasingly important in schools, it is clear that these have the potential to be helpful with this, and could fulfil the requirements of schools' data-gathering systems.

Another issue to be considered here is that frequency of contact in classroom music lessons is likely to be significantly less than in the core subjects, and the provision of regular assessment levels seems an imposition upon music teachers. Although they will not be alone in this, they will be at the lower end of the teaching/time ratio, and at the upper end of the head-count of the number of pupils taught per week.

5.2 "Do you find National Curriculum levels helpful?"

We then asked the simple and stark question "do you find the National Curriculum levels helpful"? Despite their having been in existence for many years now, and local authority and other training courses having been run concerning their use, approximately a third of teachers reportedly found them unhelpful. Conversely two-thirds of teachers do find them helpful, but it does seem that the use of NC levels raises a number of questions, not least concerning that of ways of meeting the concerns of this significant minority of teachers.

Figure 11: Helpfulness of NC levels
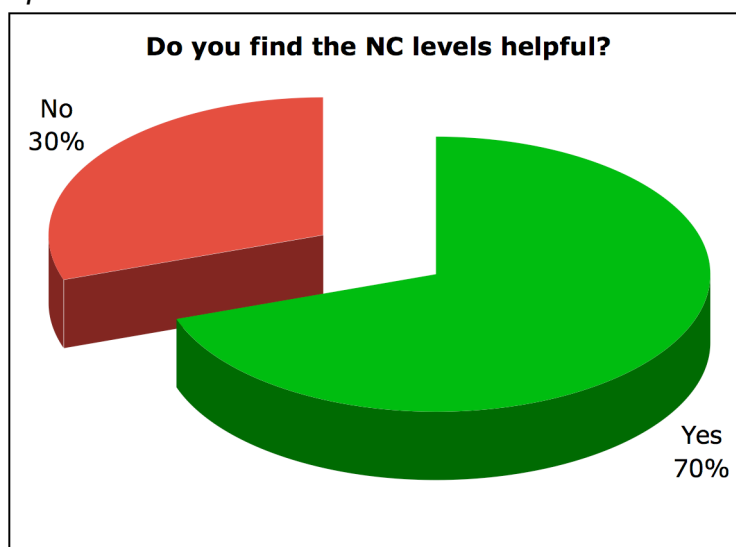
5.3 Translation of levels into 'pupil-speak'.

From answers to survey questions, and from anecdotal evidence amongst teachers, we wondered how prevalent the practice of re-writing the published NC levels into a more pupil-friendly vocabulary might be. To investigate, we asked interviewees whether they did this. Teachers replied with a range of responses, from the definite and unequivocal, to the equally unequivocal who had not and would not!

This teacher was very definite:

> We don't share National Curriculum levels with the students because we have different kid-speak levels that the students use. (1018)

Whereas this teacher was having second thoughts about using the ones he had rewritten:

> I put what I thought were National Curriculum levels into what I thought was pupil speak, and we've been using them since I, when I started, we've tried to augment them every now and again by different things, when people get different ideas. But it's not good, it's not good, and now I look at it again, and I think, well what I did then that day, that's not what they were really getting out of the National Curriculum, but however, our kids understand what they were talking about. And now because we just had training days on the new National Curriculum, and now I've had to revisit it all again that five years on from when I first did it, and now I'm thinking, I'm thinking I've been marking them all really harshly. (904)

This teacher had rewritten to a limited extent, but was concerned about the effect that doing this might have:

To an extent, yes. I'm rather allergic to doing this. I'd rather give them the statement and try to help them to understand it and that's what we do at several points in the year. So we look back at the various statements and say well, if somebody is at such and such a level I'd expect to see most of these things going on, and this is what these things mean. And so the language that is used in the National Curriculum statements, we do tend to make that part of our teaching language as well. So that those statements are quite accessible.

Having said that, there are certain bits of language, for example in level 3, you wouldn't necessarily expect a level 3 child, if there is such a thing, to understand all the terminology in level 3 statement. And so, if you're going to make somebody, help somebody understand that that's the level that they're working at, or working towards or whatever other terminology you want to use, you may have to interpret it.

We have some things stuck on the wall… which has broken down what's said in the various levels into very short sentences, which were designed to be intelligible, and at times I would take certain parts of the statement, ones that refer to a particular topic, and would reword those slightly. But I think the further you get away from the actual wording, whether you like the wording or not, but the further away that you get from it, the more difficult it becomes to use them. Because if you just want to write it in your own words, then, but that's fine, if you want to have a set of criteria, but then why pretend that that's the National Curriculum? (106)

For some teachers, the prevailing culture of levels means that teachers found themselves having to do this, in order to meet pupil expectations of what was required.

With the levels, I sort of try and put them into, like we were saying before put them into pupil speak. I tend to try, the kids actually like to know what sort of level they're working towards. At first I didn't really use the levels, I sort of gave them an indication of the, this is what I want it to be, this is like what it, if it's below sort of, where I want it to be, it's going to be here. So I'm not actually, indicating what the levels were. But then, I was observing and just sort of saying, try actually using the levels with them, as soon as you mention the levels, especially Year 7's they get really, a lot more enthusiastic about stuff if they know they're going to, if they add this they get to a higher level, sort of level. (303)

5.4 Ways of assessing composing

We then moved to consider the ways that teachers do go about assessing composing, and we asked the open-response question "How do you assess composing" at Key stages 3 and 4, separately.

5.5 KS3 assessment.

Using an analysis methodology taken from a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), we categorised teachers' responses into five areas. These were:

1. NC levels: Almost invariably mentioned directly;
2. Formative Assessment: This includes assessment for learning (AfL), and when teachers described using AfL strategies;
3. Summative Assessment: This includes assessment of learning (AofL), and when teachers described their use of AofL techniques;
4. Peer and/or self Assessment: Often mentioned together;
5. Criterion Referencing: Some teachers mentioned or discussed some form of criterion referencing in their answers. Sometimes these were of their own devising, but others were taken from NC levels rewritten into 'pupil-speak'. Sometimes we use this category when they do not necessarily seem to be referring to NC levels, but might be.

Results obtained from this analysis, graphically plotted, look like this:

Figure 12: Modality of assessments
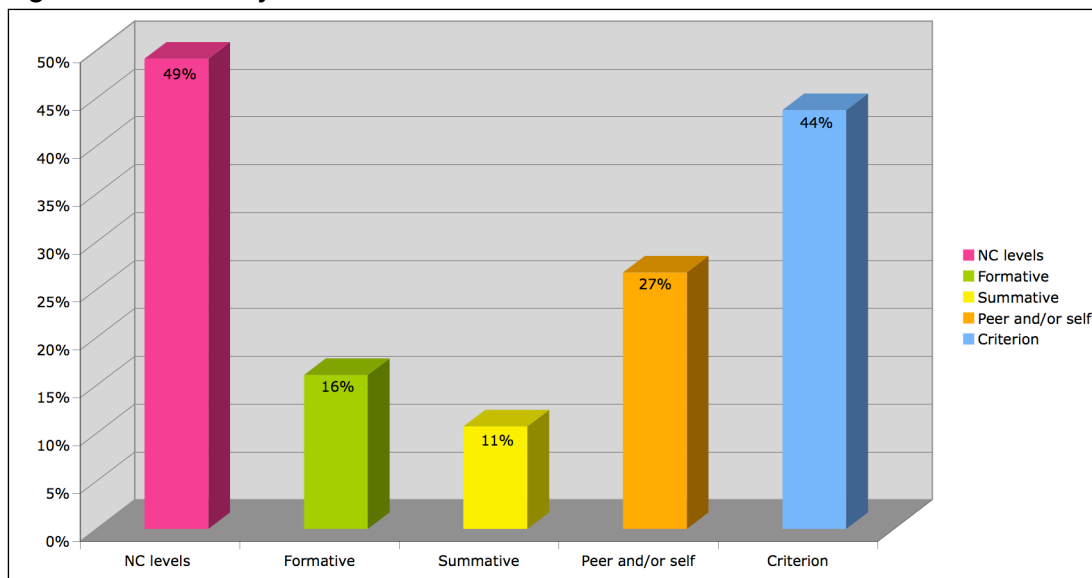
This clearly shows that NC levels were the main modality for teacher assessment at KS3, with 49% of respondents mentioning them directly. The text responses from which this analysis is derived reveals that for some teachers use of the NC levels was felt to be sufficient in and of itself alone, with short answers such as these being not untypical:

- "Use NC Level descriptors";
- "National Curriculum criteria";
- "KS3 levels";
- "NC orders".

This seems to show an unproblematic connection between NC levels and teacher thinking. An issue here is that the analysis of teacher responses only counts when teachers mentioned NC levels *directly* in their answers. Reading the text of others it is possible that what teachers were doing was explaining how they use NC levels, but not mentioning them. Referring back to the last section, we do not think that this can be taken to mean that 51% of teachers do not use NC levels.

For example, none of these three teachers mention NC levels directly:

> Break task down to several distinct aspects and mark on how well each has been tackled; then a more general mark on how effective the piece was; finally written comments on the complete composition project with comments on what was especially good and what can be done to improve composing in the future.

> Often orally to the group or to the class, mainly through peer assessment (what was good what was not, etc.). Traffic lights - set the criteria with the class at start then assess whether it was met. (What makes a good song? X, X, and X - did they have all three?) Self assessment done in writing - what they feel worked, what didn't, how will they improve next time?

> I look at the four areas of Composing Performing Listening and Appraising and this is the structure of my assessment.

44% of respondents mentioned criterion-referencing of some sort, and this seems to play an important part in the way teachers think about KS3 assessment. We could not distinguish between those who were referring to criteria which they had created themselves, and those which were, however obliquely, derived from the NC. This point was made by teacher 106 in the comment previously cited:

> … that's fine, if you want to have a set of criteria, but then why pretend that that's the National Curriculum?

Teacher derived, or teacher invented, criteria which are presumed to have their roots in the NC levels can be seen to be an issue here. In some schools, not part of this research, we have observed comments along the lines of "can play with one hand = level 4, can play with two hands = level 5". This sort of criterion referencing has no basis in, or legitimacy from, the NC levels.

27% of respondents also mention peer and/or self assessment – often both – and this is an interesting development. Further investigation concerning the nature of this is needed, however, as for some teachers it seems to be getting the pupils to give each other a level:

> …and I also give pupils a copy of levels. Instead of me just assessing work I get the whole class to assess work

Whilst for others it is a little more complex:

> pupils are given a criteria for each national curriculum level before they start alongside the brief. We have a whole lesson dedicated to summative assessment where the pupils perform their work to the class. The teacher marks it in line with the criteria. The class are also asked to suggest a level and explain why

In terms of assessment terminologies, formative assessment, or AfL, was mentioned more often than summative assessment directly, although the preponderance of NC level-related statements shows that summative assessment was well to the fore in teacher thinking.

5.6 Using levels to show progression

In interviews we asked if teachers felt that they could used the NC levels to show progression in composing. The NC levels, as was noted above, were not intended to show differentiated development of the key processes in music, so in some ways this is a bit of an artificial question! However, it was designed to try to uncover teacher thinking in this area.

Answers were broad and varied. For some teachers the levels were not used in this way:

> No. The statements are too broad and sometimes unrealistic as to what can be achieved. They expect too much from students who don't have much actual music teaching. (1214)

> I have separate criteria for composition; I don't use the National Curriculum levels. (1112)

One teacher observed that the NC levels were not meant to be criteria, and so this was not possible:

> Well there are elements that you can pick out of the levels which do relate to composition, there is a strand of composing which runs through them, to show development. Yes I think you can … but I don't think the stranding is particularly thorough, and I don't think it's supposed to be particularly, so you talk about intentions and expressive effects at various different stages, and you can see some sort of differentiated outcomes through those. But I don't think as a set of, well they're not meant to be criteria, and I don't think that as a set of statements they're specific enough really to track progression in all but the vaguest terms. (106)

Some teachers used the NC levels for internal recording purposes, but did not share them with the pupils:

> Yes, we do use them but we use them as teachers. We don't share National Curriculum levels with the students (1018)

A number of teachers had broken down the level statements from the NC, and used these to show progression:

> I think we are able to use, to show development, because the way, the way that I've broken, the way I like to teach it is, I've broken down the levels because in each of the attainment levels, as a block is both performing, appraising and composing. So if you extract from that, the different strands, I think you are able to show development through those things. So for example the level 5, ... is one that talks about using chords, the right sort of chords and then there's the one that's able, just puts, you are able to put sounds together, that's one. ... But then if you're able to use chords and whatever the other thing it says, effectively, then you are showing some form of development, however within that, I think there's a lot of scope for, maybe breaking it down to show more development, because it's quite, if you're able to do this, it's this, but if you're able to do that then it's this, but there is quite a lot that happens in between that, to go from that, to that. If you, sort of follow my, my logic pattern there. So I think you are able to show it, but I think it's quite tricky. (1320)

In terms of breaking down levels statements, many teachers talked about the school requiring them to break down the existing level statements into sub-levels, often three. This breaking down is not an officially sanctioned activity, and the net result of this on a nationwide basis is that lots of different systems are operating simultaneously, with only limited transferability. This teacher was having trouble with a school imposed linear improvement requirement:

> Oh this is a contentious one. Oh well, we're supposed to aren't we? It's just so hard in music. I mean the rule, the rule of the school is that every child should increase by two sub levels per year. And so if we're playing the game, every child increases by two sub levels per year in music.
>
> *Interviewer:* So how many sub levels are there at this school?
>
> *Teacher:* Three.
>
> *Interviewer:* Three, right, ok*.*
>
> *Teacher:* Yes, so a child can be level four, and it can be an A, B or C. So A is close to level 5, B is in the middle, C is just attaining level 4. So that's the school line and the line that obviously we sort of have to take but, in reality there are so many different facets to composing, performing, listening that's it actually very, very difficult to make accurate assessments and plus the aesthetic and the creative elements that come on top of that. You know, one person playing 'Twinkle Twinkle little Star' and another person can play exactly the same notes and it could be a much more musical and much more

creative performance and so, yes technically it shows development but in reality I think it's a grey area. (712)

This teacher was also facing similar issues:

> I find the levels, this is a very difficult one because, I think you can report levels and show progress, but my issue is, how often you are actually reporting the progress. So if you're, you know if your school tells you that you have to report two to three times a year, and says somebody is on a level 5 and they're still on a level 5 in the following term, it looks to that student, as if they haven't made any progress, and they actually have. They might have fulfilled some actual criteria within the block. ...what our school's actually making us do on our sub levels, and we're having to do the ABC and breaking these levels down, and I find that really tricky. I don't personally agree with it and I don't like it, and I don't think there's, you know, if you can say, a pupil can display these skills, and they had this knowledge and is understanding of blah blah blah blah blah, I don't see why we had to refer to that so often. I think that actually tells a pupil more, and the parents more about what they are actually attaining, and achieving, then a number slapped on the head so to speak. That's what it feels like to me, as though we are becoming this number of assessed, and you know, pupils might think, oh I'm a level five. But when you ask them what does that actually mean, because to me, It's more important about what that number means and how they do actually move on and improve. And yes we do, we do, we level twice a year, because we're not allowed to do it any less than that. If it was my choice, it would be much less than that. But we do report, obviously, at the end of each half term when they've finished, when they finished an actual module. We do actually report, you know, in terms of using our departmental assessment criteria, and they have got an idea of where they're going and how to set targets. But I have got a big issue with levels, I have to say. (1312)

An important point raised in these discussions relates to the systems of control and accountability that exist within schools. The majority of the teachers interviewed were working within schools that demanded half-termly or termly data about pupils for processes of target-setting or monitoring. In most cases, these data would also be reported to parents. Whilst the majority of teachers interviewed could see the sense in these systems and were happy to contribute to them, it was interesting to note that this was done in response to the system, rather than because it was considered an inherently useful, and musical, approach to assessment of musical ability or development.

If, as is the case, NC levels were not designed to show 'shades' of progression within a level, and if, as is also the case, schools are requiring music teachers to do this, then there seems to be a mismatch between intention, and the tools available for the purpose.

There seem to be four main issues with regard to assessment of composing at KS3 using NC levels that arise from these teachers' comments:

1. The NC levels alone are not sufficient to show progress;
2. The language of the NC levels is problematic for teachers to use in the classroom, and many have rewritten them into 'pupil-speak'. This creates inconsistency between schools;
3. Many schools have had to invent sub-levels. This again leads to inconsistency, and teachers are unsure as to what these mean in practice;
4. Teachers are using NC levels because they need to, rather than because they are considered useful.

5.7 Assessment of Composing at KS4

To start our investigation of KS4 composing and its associated assessment regimes we began by asking which examination boards were used; here Edexcel emerged the clear favourite:
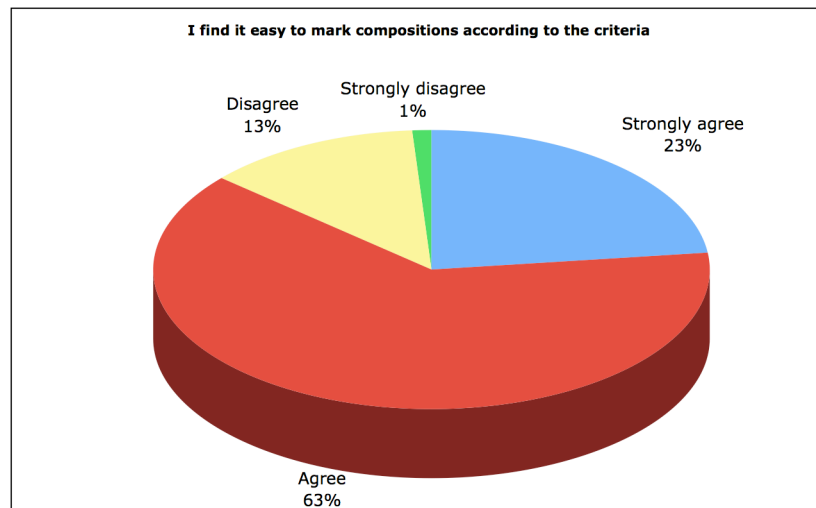
Figure 13: Exam Board choice
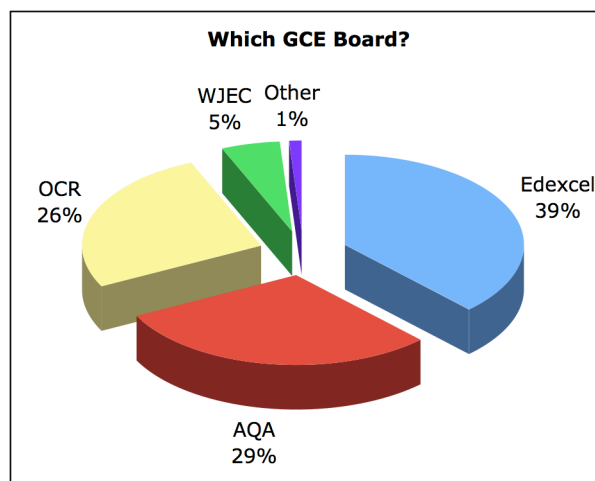
5.8 KS4 Assessment Criteria

At KS4 it is the assessment criteria published by the examination boards which form the backbone of what teachers do with regards to assessment of composing. There seems less concern, on an anecdotal basis, with assessment of composing at KS4, compared with KS3, and so we asked about how easy teachers found it to mark composing according to the examination board criteria.

Figure 14: Using Exam Board Assessment Criteria

I find it easy to mark compositions according to the criteria

Strongly disagree 1%
Disagree 13%
Strongly agree 23%
Agree 63%

The anecdotal evidence is confirmed by the statistical returns here, as 86% of teachers responded that either agree or strongly agree with the question statement. However, finding the criteria straightforward is of little utility if the results are at odds with teachers' impressions of how well (or otherwise) students are doing in schools, and so we asked whether teachers felt that the criteria are appropriate and whether they felt that the marks fairly represent each student's attainment in composition. Here again there was a feeling that this was the case, with a fairly close mapping to the satisfaction results of the previous question.

Figure 15: Do results match pupil attainment?

	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Frequency Analysis								
1.	Strongly agree	16	16.84%					
2.	Agree	64	67.37%					
3.	Disagree	15	15.79%					
4.	Strongly disagree	0	0.00%					
	Total	95	100%					

Where disagreement did creep in, however, was with the question "I feel that the criteria give marks that fairly represent the effort put in by the student, and progress made over the course". Here 42% of respondents disagreed with the statement in the question.

Figure 16: Results match effort?
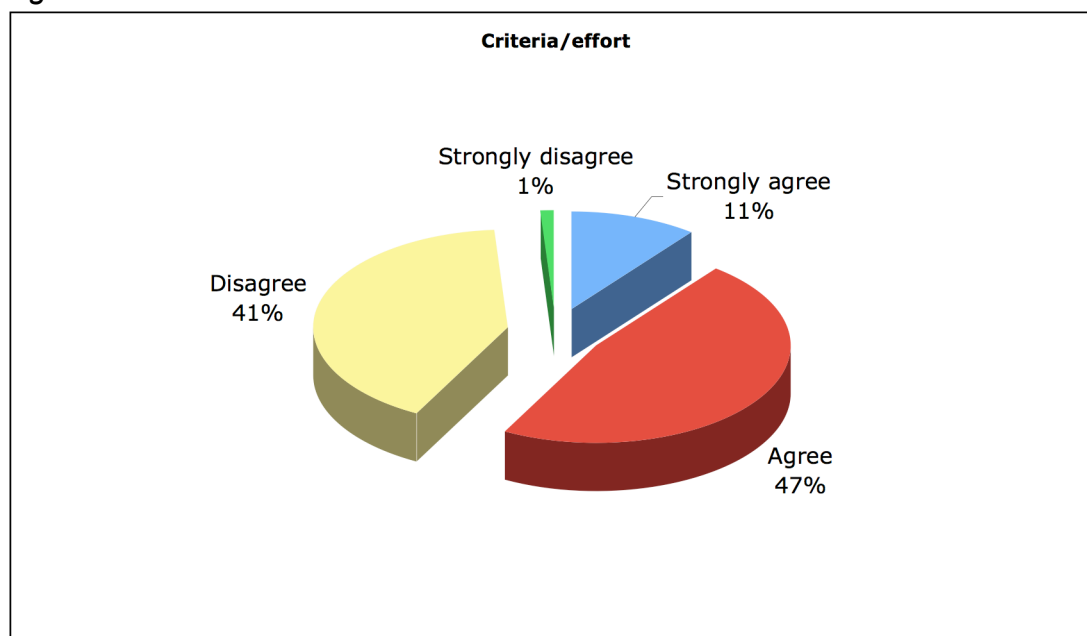
5.9 Improving KS4 criteria

We than asked the question "how could the criteria, or indeed the criteria system, be improved?". This provided some illumination with regard to the answers above. Here is a selection of the responses:

> The criteria as it stands is very vague, though it mentions areas of composition marks are awarded overall and this can make it difficult if a pupil does some things well and others very poorly.

> Take individual creativity into account, especially with terminal task. One of our students was penalised and accused of composing their terminal task piece before entering the exam room, despite clearly using one of the provided stimuli. The student was a very good composer and the exam board did not believe that the student had composed the piece within the allotted time.

> Provide criteria that are appropriate to the style or genre of the music-- one criteria does not effectively fit all styles of music

> Sometimes it may be easier to gain good marks by giving the examiners what they want rather than rewarding sheer creativity

> I feel they need to be more specific with their requirements and not just use statements such as makes appropriate use of ideas, possible past examples would be useful

> More specific. One's opinion of a piece played well might be another's of a bad performance. It still seems strange that students who play

poorly for one piece can get just as many marks as a student who plays well for all

I do seem to spend time trying to find areas of study to fit some compositions in or manipulating the children's work to fit into the criteria

Awarding bodies could trust the professionalism of the teacher and allow for greater freedom/flexibility in individual departments.

This range of responses seems to provide a general unease, not so much with the ways in which pupil work is assessed, but with there being a perceived mismatch between the grades pupils receive, and the grades teachers feel they should get. We know that teachers will want to do the best they can for their pupils, but even so, this does seem give a cause for concern. It is realised by the teachers that for an examination some form of marking criteria are needed, nonetheless there does seem to be a case for a system which allows for a little more by personalisation to the needs of the pupils.

Whilst 'teaching to the test' is probably unavoidable to some extent at KS4, nonetheless we asked teachers to respond to the statement "What I teach, in composition, is heavily influenced by the criteria I know the students' compositions will eventually be subject to".

Figure 17: Teaching to the criteria
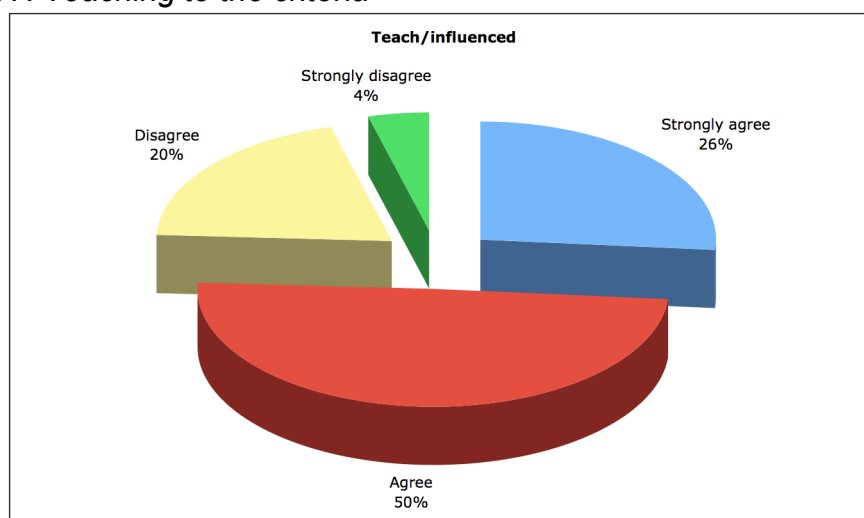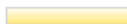
Here, only 24% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. We then asked whether teachers used the exam board's criteria for their own assessment purposes. Here 78% of teachers said they did. Despite this broad agreement with the issue of criteria, we wanted to know if teachers felt that they were appropriate, so we asked if teachers felt they were too vague. 67% of teachers did not think so, but a sizable minority of teacher (33%) felt that this was the case. Anecdotally we hear of teachers ignoring the criteria, and awarding the mark they feel the pupil deserves, and so we asked if this was the case. 94% of teachers said it was not, leaving about 6% of teachers for whom this is the case.

However, in the follow-up survey we asked teachers to respond to a series of statements, one of which was "I have a good idea of what mark/grade the composition should get before I come to apply the criteria specifically, and I try to ensure the criteria-based marking reflects my initial impression". Interestingly nearly 18% of teachers said they did this, so there do seem to be some liberal interpretations of the examination board criteria! In fact, a number of interviews confirmed our suspicion here. We should not be too critical of this approach. It seems well suited to the nature of musical appreciation and, providing that clear justifications according to examination criteria are provided, teachers, as professionals, should not be surprised if their initial judgements are confirmed by these frameworks.

The results for the rest of these statements was as follows:

Figure 18: "I have a good idea of what mark/grade the composition should get…"

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	I have a good idea of what mark/grade the composition should get before I come to apply the criteria specifically, and I try to ensure the criteria-based marking reflects my initial impression	7	17.95%					
2.	I rank order all of my cohorts compositions -- strongest to weakest -- and then mark to the criteria, ensuring that the marks and grade boundaries reflect fairly the complete spread	1	2.56%					
3.	I mark each composition very much individually, without reference to the other compositions from the cohort	10	25.64%					
4.	I make frequent reference to the awarding bodys exemplar compositions/marks	6	15.38%					
5.	I consult with teacher colleagues on compositions marks/grades	9	23.08%					
6.	Please describe any other specific circumstances/processes...	6	15.38%					
	Total	39	100%					

5.10 Alternative modes of criterion-referencing

In the interviews which followed the survey, we asked about criterion referencing as used by the examination boards. We asked "do you think GCSE music forces pupils into a straitjacket of pre-selected criteria?". Here, a range of answers were forthcoming. Most agreed, but for different reasons:

> Well yes it does, yes it obviously does because you know what the elements of particular styles are, they're only allowed to compose in certain styles. I'm talking about Edexcel which is the board that I do,

and the composition have to be related to the areas of study. And occasionally, somebody will come up with something which is wild and imaginative and doesn't really quite fit into an area of study. So you end up with shoehorning it into something, or you say well if you were just to add such and such, or change a few things here and there, then it would be more like, I don't know serialism, or obviously not that, but whatever the style is that you think it might be closest to. And therefore it would get you more marks, or, here are the assessment criteria. Now at the moment, I could only give you this, because your structure is simple but clear for example in African polyrhythm. But in order to make sure your structure is imaginative, to get five marks in that box rather than three marks, then you need to set outside that, like in the driving test where you proverbially reset the mirror, so that you have to squint to look in it so the driving instructor knows you've looked in it. So you make your composition, overtly structurally interesting, in order to prove that you can use structure and gain the marks. (106)

An interesting issue is identified here. If the composition is 'wild and imaginative' then this teacher feels that they have to 'shoehorn' the results into extant categories in order to maximise the pupil's mark-gaining potential. The second part of the response talks about over-emphasising things for the sake of examination marks, this again could be problematic in musical terms.

For this next teacher, working in a multi-ethnic inner-city school, the topic matter itself could be seen as alienating for the pupils:

> Yes, definitely. And it's got much worse; the new syllabus is rubbish, that's another reason why I've changed to BTEC. … If you could compose three pieces of classical music, and one heavy-metal song, you got credit that. But now, all of a sudden they're saying, you've got to do this and you've got to do that. You've got to do a waltz. My kids go 'Why have I got to waltz? I don't want to do a waltz.' And I don't know why they've got to waltz either. To me the Viennese waltz is the most redundant piece of music that anybody ever invented. All the composers of that era I respect and admire, turned their back on it as soon as they possibly could.
> Having said that, if you've got a brain as a music teacher then you can work your way round it. There is more freedom than people think. They don't have to write an 'Um-cha-cha' waltz, you can think around the subject. For example think about 70s disco music. 70s disco music, its influences previously, and forwards and afterwards, well, disco music, house music, garage. There's a long way you can go with this and it's a direct line, but, there's a million ways of teaching things. But it is definitely a straitjacket. (904)

As this teacher observes, waltzes have little relevance to the street-lives of his pupils (even allowing for 'Strictly Come Dancing!), so they resent having to 'do' them.

For this next teacher, working in a different city, the influence of the criteria is an issue in quite a different way:

> Yes, although I don't know that teachers use the composition criteria quite as explicitly as they might do at Key Stage 3, for GCSE, because it's so broad and difficult to assess against, I don't think that they actually, that pupils actually know what they're doing. In some ways there's a benefit to that because they're working, you know, they're working in a particular area of study, and they don't necessarily know where they're going with it because the criteria is so broad, and actually I do think that there are possible benefits to that because they may be more creative than some of the Key Stage 3 criteria that I've seen, which tends to be quite specific. (1112)

For this teacher, the broadness, which other teachers saw as lacking, is both an opportunity, in that it allows the pupils some freedom, and a problem, in that this makes it difficult for the teacher to assess.

For a number of teachers, the styles and genres that pupils might want to compose in was a problem, in a similar way that the teacher (904) above observed. However, these next teachers felt that this was a potential, rather than a real, issue e.g.:

> Possibly. I suppose with introduction of music technology now, it's sort of changing the scope of what the sort of things you can actually write I suppose. I mean with the use of technology you can write any sort of style of music can't you so, it's not stuck to your traditional sort of maybe classical sort of approach to it, it's more your average, I mean your normal sort of music that you might do for a GCSE that, yeah I suppose a lot more open now, but then it's down to, yeah without the criteria then teachers would, yeah, would maybe show favouritism towards certain genres I suppose. (303)

> To a certain degree, I think on the current GCSE, possibly yes and I think if you think about the content of it, you know you have to study the set styles, and it sort of disregards lots of other styles that pupils might want to study, and also what teachers might want to teach and what might be current. But looking at the latest spec for OCR, it does seem to be a little bit more in favour of the student now. (1312)

However, these responses should be contrasted with the replies of some teachers who were far more positive about the criterion referencing used by the exam boards:

> No, I don't. I think the criteria reflect what producing a piece of music is. You know, it's all, you can't produce a good piece of music without a structure. You can't handle, you can't write a good piece of music if you can't handle the resources effectively, and I think, especially Edexcel the criteria are very appropriate. Maybe, I'm basing that on our students here, because we have lots of very able students that like

to compose in that way. Maybe for other schools that have students which find it difficult to compose in that way, maybe for example if it's improvisation-based, I don't think the criteria reflect improvisation very well at all. (1320)

No. No, I really don't think it does. It might do by the end of, you know, the latter half of Year 11, by the time they've done a couple of, two or three compositions and you've looked at them in regard to the criteria. They might start asking, 'Can I have the criteria list? What does this do? But for the most part I don't think it does. I suppose it depends how you teach it. There might be some people say, this is what your composition has got to do, you must do it like this and they're, I think myself and my colleagues, we will just give them a task and see what it, see what comes out. (1018)

However, the remarks of the teacher above need to be offset against their refreshingly honest assertion that they subvert the assessment criteria by writing assignment briefs after the event, in other words the students compose, and then the teacher decides how the resultant music can be best considered to fit what is required:

Interviewer: So you wouldn't be one of these teachers that kind of, looks at what the children have produced in relationship to a particular piece of work, in full knowledge of what the criteria, of the exam specify, kind of go back to them and say, if you add some dynamics into your work, you'll access this range of marks or..

Teacher: Yes..

Interviewer: ..but if you do the other..

Teacher: ..but that would be much later on, that would be.. you know from Christmas in Year 11, when you're coming up to the end. I don't think it would be worthwhile doing at the beginning. And you do get students who ask, the switched on ones will say, how can I get more marks.

Interviewer: So you might say, in summary for this question, it might be that as you move towards the summative assessment that the sort of portfolio of compositions they're submitting for the examination, that the criteria which the exam board has set up become more influential?

Teacher: Yes. I do.

Interviewer: And you would, and you're saying that actually students are aware, become aware of those, they might, of their own, their own investigations..

Teacher: Probably not on their own but.. because you know, I'll have probably by that time, I'll have done a semi-formal marking of work they've done.

Interviewer: Does it become, would you, I mean, a bit of a supplementary question here but would it become, this become a sort of a game in the pupils minds about they've completed the bit of work where they've got to kind of do this because it's what they know, that they'll get extra marks.

Teacher: No the only game is doing the brief.

Interviewer: Yes.

Teacher: And that's going anyway. So we're like a, we are very naughty and like most other people we tend to write the briefs in retrospect, which I know you're not supposed to do. (1018)

This has an effect on the way in which assessment criteria are considered, as it means that this teacher, and probably many others, are giving the pupils some free-rein in composing, and then deciding *post-hoc* which criteria will afford the most marks for the pupils.

5.11 Choosing Criteria

We then asked out interviewees how they would feel about being able to choose which assessment criteria to apply, by, for example choosing from a list. As least one examination board, Edexcel, already facilitates this to a limited extent.

> Well, we already have part of that at Edexcel, I don't know I couldn't speak for other exam boards because I don't know, but we have the fourth set, and then we have the two optional from four, so we can choose the best ones that fit anyway. Would that work for the given criteria if we choose them, don't know! I honestly don't know. Maybe! (1320)

So for this teacher, there is a possibility that this might be helpful. For others there are lines to be drawn between composing, and composing for an examination, and for this next teacher, although the freedom of choice would be welcomed, they feel that examination composing is a specific activity:

> Yes, well there's an element of that in the Edexcel assessment, we have four compulsory core criteria and then you have a number of optional criteria and you, as the teacher examiner you select the two that will get you the most marks effectively. And I'd do that at the marking process rather than at the, introducing the task stage. But, if you could do without the compulsory core criteria altogether, I think it would mean that you weren't, certainly straitjacketing it or shoehorning

it into something that the piece was never going to be, just in order to get the marks. Yes I think that would be more inherently musical.

On the other hand you might say well, shouldn't you be setting out what you criteria are to start with, essentially GCSE is going to be a, jumping through hoops operation isn't it? You're not going to come up with something which is really creative and mould breaking, because if you did you'd say that's a great piece, but now you need to do you GCSE composition because that wasn't going to get you the marks. (106)

For this next teacher, the benefits of working in this fashion would need to be offset against the pupils composing in response to the criteria anyway:

For Edexcel you can do that already. I think it favours the grade outcome, the pupils grade outcome, because you can then celebrate the things they've done, but then in a way, you're starting to be prescriptive again because you're assuming that if it's African drumming, that you're going straight to the rhythm option, and you're, it depends how you teach it doesn't it? It depends how you go about it. If you let the pupils just do it, and it's the outcome and then you mark against it, then you're not stifling their creativity, whereas if you start to give them the formative assessment criteria, then they start to work towards it.

…which would mean a return to working to the test anyway!

One teacher observed that the removal of free-choice composing had more to do with internal standards at the examination boards than with allowing pupils the possibility of choosing what to do:

Well, the OCR exam board set one of them, which is the sort of set works, but the other one is related to the instrument that students play. So that gives students a lot of flexibility as it is. I mean if they went back to, I mean that would be going back to the old system where they could just do anything, free choice, wouldn't it? I don't know why they change a system. Presumably they changed it because it wasn't, they wanted more consistency amongst moderators, I don't know. I think students would certainly be happy with the free choice, it may well encourage more students to take GCSE music rather than being put off it by the fact they've got to compose in a certain style. But I think that might lead to problems with moderators.. I don't know.

This is an interesting viewpoint, as this teacher clearly feels that the restrictive nature of GCSE composing acts as a disincentive to pupils taking the subject as an option at KS4.

5.12 'Having' to compose in set styles

Being required to compose in certain styles has been an *idée fixe* among many of the interviewees, and this certainly seems to be an issue which

teachers want to be addressed. Urban and popular styles are felt to be hardest hit by this, and this dissatisfaction could lead to a move away from GCSE music, and towards the relative freedoms offered by BTEC, creative/media diplomas, and other examinations. It is certainly an issue which some longer-serving teachers feel has changed for the worse from the early days of GCSE. This is an area which clearly needs addressing.

5.13 Process or Product assessment

There is a long standing dichotomy in music education as to whether the *process* of composing is assessed, or whether assessment is that of the *product* which results. Most KS4 examination syllabuses for music privilege the latter, whereas at KS3 the process of composing seems to be the more important. We asked our interviewees whether there was an issue for them between assessment of process and assessment of product. For most teachers, the assessment was firmly entrenched in the product, and they had no wish to change this:

> No, we assess the outcome, it is purely outcome, you've got to, we make a CD, and listen to it, mark the CD. The process is completely divorced from it.
>
> *Interviewer:* Would you like to be able to do that? Some boards for drama and art have marks available for process.
>
> *Teacher:* No I don't, I think, getting them to produce an outcome which they're pleased with, and that sounds great and is, I think that's, I think that's better. For me I like the idea of, oh well, I think it's wishy-washy, well you put a lot of effort in or, you've demonstrated over time that you've made this better, I just think that sounds a bit wishy-washy to be honest. (1320)

This notion, of process being 'wishy-washy' in assessment terms, was linked by some to being an increase in workload for both teacher and pupils:

> No, not really, other than, they'd have to do a lot more writing, they'd have to, they would have to be much more organised thing to do, you know, really. A proper compositional diary which I have to confess we don't do. (1808)

It could also be seen as work which did not add much to the final grade:

> Yeah, I'm not quite sure really. I suppose I've never, if it, the only way I suppose is to have a progression of the compositions you've been working on I suppose, from the start to, and how they progress as they go along...I don't know if it would just create more work that's not really needed I suppose. (303)

For this next teacher, who had recently been inspected, there was the added pressure of feeling that they had to show a complete compositional

experience to an inspector who might not be a music specialist, and might not understand the intricacies of what was going on:

> To be absolutely honest, no. We tend to assess the finished product rather than the actual process, but we do allow plenty of time for that process, I mean one of the frustrating things we found in the recent Ofsted inspection, in the mini Ofsted, is that inspectors are sometimes in the room for five minutes, and at best if they come and formally observe, it's a half hour inspection, and during that time they want to see a starter activity, a process, and some sort of product, and some sort of plenary, and feedback to students, and all the sorts of things which a lot of subject areas can logistically fit into a half hour slot. In music, that is actually, that is not so easy to achieve because you've got to allow students enough time to brainstorm their ideas, to think about, to actually come up with the process, yes the whole process is such an important part of the whole thing, that trying to squash it into a half hour segment for somebody to come and observe, who's not a music specialist and who might not understand that there is a long drawn out process to go through, is proving to be quite a tricky one. But no, we just assess the finished product. (712)

The issue of the composing brief has been mentioned before, and, for this teacher, the brief offers the potential for the process to be taken into consideration:

> … yes, at Key Stage 4, there is an emphasis on, the summative outcome, and there is an issue with that. And I think the brief is, writing the brief, the composition brief, is one way of the exam boards trying to assess it, is just that, I'm not sure that teachers go about it in the right way. (1112)

However, there is a pragmatic response, which one teacher recognised, that although process matters, it is product which is easiest to asses!

> Yes well, I think that the thing that we ought to be trying to teach at any of these key stages is composing. And what we end up measuring is composition. So yes you end up measuring product, whereas the interesting thing is process. But that's partly because product is easier to measure and you measure the thing that can be more easily measured. And partly because process is not, you know you don't want to be weighing the process all the time, you want to be helping people to improve the process. (106)

This is an interesting response, in that outcome is measured because it is easier so to do. This has strong links with the observation that "we started out with the aim of making the important measurable, and ended up making only the measurable important" (Wiliam, 2000, p118).

But returning to process, BTEC again appeared as an alternative modality, where it could be accounted for:

BTEC is slightly different, they can do undeveloped pieces as well as a final piece, but the process, that is vital, and thinking about process helps them get a better final product. It's a bit of a strange way of working for me because I've never really done that.

Personally, as a composer, what I do is start a piece, finish it and if I don't like it, chuck it away, whereas for this, yes, I do like that process. I think it's good in the BTEC thing. I sat down with my external verifier and listened and talked about this, these pieces of music. (904)

Some subjects, such as Drama and Art, do allow for the process to be included in the final examination mark scheme, but apart from one teacher who observed that,

I think that's such a shame because people don't necessarily get credit for how they've approached it initially (1312)
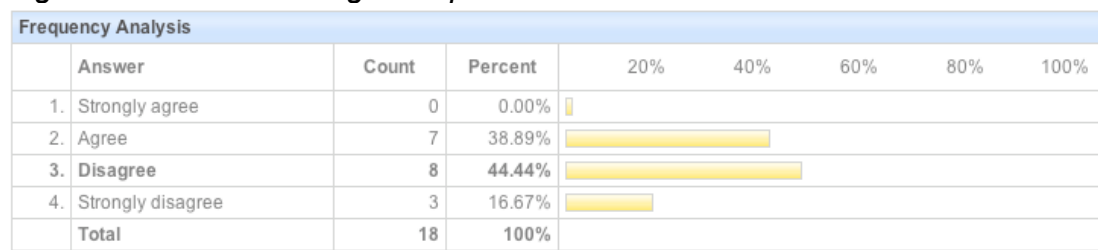
there seemed little enthusiasm for the process of composing to be assessed formally at GCSE level.

6 Rank Ordering

As an alternative to examination board criterion-referenced marking, we wondered whether rank-ordering compositions would meet favour with teachers. In order to prepare the interviewed teachers more fully for this aspect, we sent them a short piece of pre-interview reading which outlined the process, and what was involved[3]. We explained what this would involve, and then asked them what they thought about it.
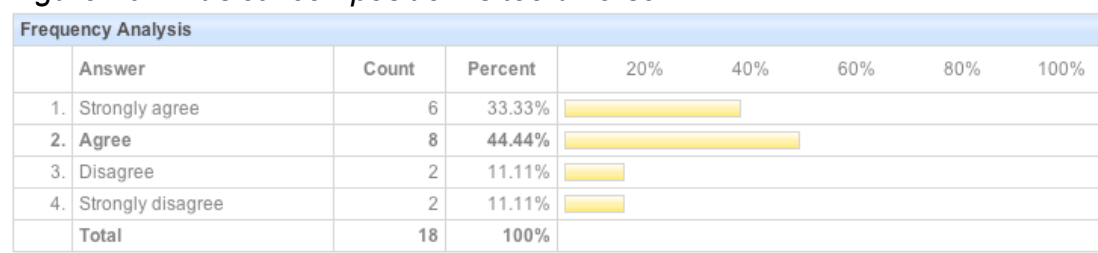
Firstly we asked if respondents thought this would be an improvement on the current system of criteria and their pockets of marks

Figure 19: Rank-ordering as improvement

Frequency Analysis								
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
1. Strongly agree	0	0.00%						
2. Agree	7	38.89%						
3. Disagree	8	44.44%						
4. Strongly disagree	3	16.67%						
Total	18	100%						

There was some agreement here, but this might be seen as a dissatisfaction with extant making systems, as opposed to endorsement of rank-ordering, particularly in the light of subsequent questions. Next, we asked if teachers would be uncomfortable with designating one composition as 'better' than another without relying on an established set of criteria. Here 78% of teachers agreed with this statement that they would be uncomfortable doing thins. The next statement was "Musical composition is too diverse, personal and individual to say that one piece is simply better than another". Here the results were little more split:

Figure 20: "Musical composition is too diverse…"

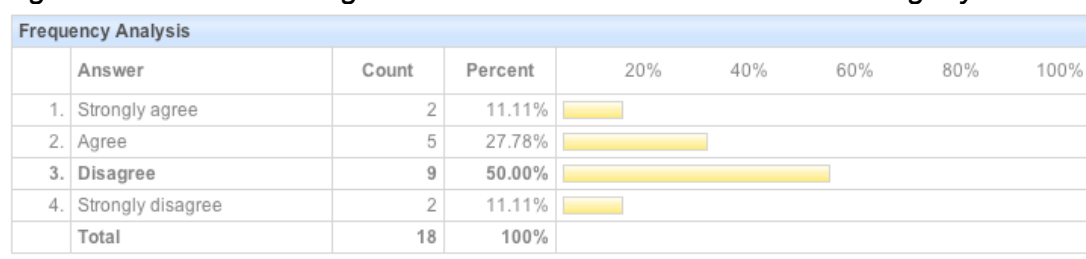| Frequency Analysis								
Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%	
1. Strongly agree	6	33.33%						
2. Agree	8	44.44%						
3. Disagree	2	11.11%						
4. Strongly disagree	2	11.11%						
Total	18	100%						

with 77% of teachers agreeing with the proffered statement.

We also wondered whether teachers would feel that this would make it easier to assess compositions of widely divergent styles and idioms (e.g. string quartets, electronica remixes and rock songs). Responses here were again divided:

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[3] Pre-reading included an extract from Bramley, T. (2005) A rank-ordering method for equating tests by expert judgement. *Research Matters*, 1, 7-8.

Figure 21: Rank-ordering would make it easier to assess differing styles

Frequency Analysis								
	Answer	Count	Percent	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
1.	Strongly agree	2	11.11%					
2.	Agree	5	27.78%					
3.	**Disagree**	**9**	**50.00%**					
4.	Strongly disagree	2	11.11%					
	Total	18	100%					

but again there was more disagreement than concurrence.

The general feelings of the teachers were not in favour of rank ordering as a means of assessment. However, a number of factors need to be offset against this; many KS4 classes are quite small, and this would present a correspondingly small sample. This would mark a change from an accepted practice, with which (certainly in comparison with KS3) teachers are both happy and secure. Finally, it has no ready correlation with other modes of assessment with which teachers have some familiarity.

There is an argument to say that rank-ordering is not dissimilar to a norm-referencing modality of assessment. This is not an assessment procedure which many young, and not-so-young teachers, certainly post O-level teaching, may have encountered in their careers so far. As such, for it to become accepted some retraining would be needed. Part of this training would involve the provision of a sufficiently wide statistical sample for it to have meaningful relevance and impact on teachers' work.

7 Division of time

Finally, we wanted to know what single aspect of composing, performing, or listening took place most frequently in classrooms. The answers to this surprised us somewhat. At KS3 performing is very slightly ahead, but at KS4 an overwhelming majority (66%) reported that composing was the most common activity.

Figure 22: Division of time – Composing, Listening, performing
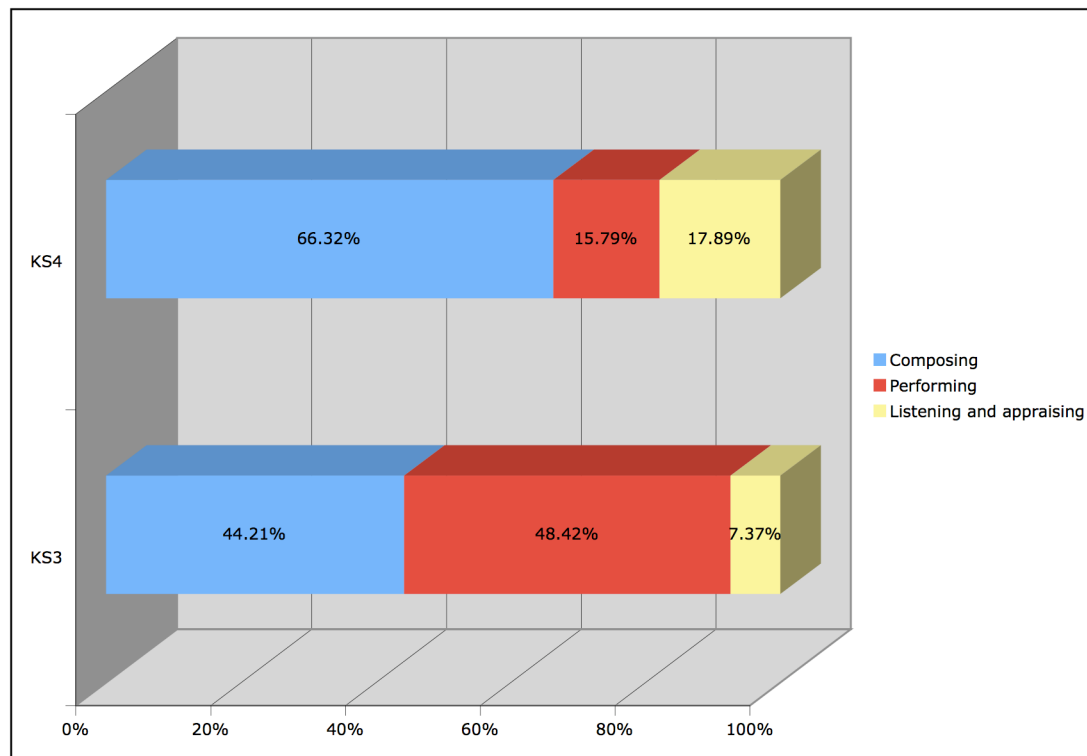
What we also found interesting, but beyond the scope of this survey, is the small response rating for listening related activities.

In the follow-up survey we asked about the reasons for these divisions, but, sadly, no clear picture emerged from the responses. However, over 17% of teachers reported that they left the performing aspect to individual instrumental music teachers.

There did seem to be a feeling that at KS4 it is composing and listening that need the most teacher input. As one respondent put it:

> performance is something students can work on the easiest in their own time and with help from lessons.

We were slightly perturbed by this finding. We believe, as do many other music educators, that the integrated model of musical development that underpins key stage 3 music teaching should also be underpin that at key stage 4. Whilst on paper, at least, it does as evidenced by each of the GCSE specifications; in reality, teaching music at key stage 4 is often about

separating out the various musical processes and teaching them in isolation from each other.

The status of music at KS4 is often reported as being somewhat precarious, so we asked if teachers are able to teach in the normal timetable time, or if they have to offer music as a 'twilight' class out of the normal school timetable. 62% of teachers taught as a normal daytime class, but nearly 15% taught as a twilight activity, and a further 24% taught a mixture of daytime and twilight classes. The situation is not entirely clear, but it would seem that at worse case, according to these figures about 40% of music classes at KS4 could be taking place as a twilight activity. This is not a reliable statistic, however.

8 Conclusions

This research has generated a number of interesting results. It seems that music teachers are, in general, more satisfied with the sorts of assessments which are being done at KS4 than they are at KS3, where there is considerable unease.

In essence we found that:

- Whilst the normal mode for teaching and learning composing is in groups, there is no adequate associated mechanism which allows for assessment of either the contribution of the individual, or the achievement of the group.

- Whilst group composing is the norm, functional or theoretical understandings of what cognitively distributed composing practices involve have not kept pace with this.

- The transitions from group composing to individuated composing have not been clearly conceptualised, and in practical terms these are enacted in most settings by a sudden transition at KS4.

- Starting points for composing vary, and do not seem to have been clearly thought through by teachers.

- What makes an effective composing stimulus might be related more to task completion than to a meaningful creative purpose.

- It is not clear what a composing skill is. This being the case, developing them is concomitantly problematic.

- An informal unregulated hierarchy of topics in music education has emerged for individual teachers, which enables them to say that development in challenge occurs in composing during the course of a key stage. This is by no means universal, and is, in itself, problematic in the way it could be operationalised.

- There seems little enthusiasm for published material available for the teaching and learning of composing at KS3 and KS4.

- The notion of what a creative response in composing might entail is by no means clear.

- The place of staff notation is currently under-theorised in terms of a developmental musical thinking tool, as opposed to what might be termed a storage system. Whilst it occupies a central role in the Western Classical canon, this is clearly not the case for other styles and genres of music, or for most of what is called 'World Music'.

- The changing role of ICT has brought composing to a wider range of participants than has hitherto been the case. Instrumental proficiency is no longer a sufficient precondition for compositional success.

- NC levels are being used for purposes for which they were never intended.

- The NC levels are not always found to be helpful in terms of charting progression.

- The NC levels alone are not sufficient to show progress

- Many teachers have had to re-write NC levels into three (or more) sub-levels, which they then are required to use to show progression within a level. This is inconsistent, and not reliable, or, possibly, valid.

- Possibly because the NC levels exist, few, if any, other tools are utilised by teachers in assessing composing at KS3. Criterion-referencing, where present, is not always clearly defined, or shared outside of a single-school situation.

- The role and purpose of AfL seems to have become subsumed, in the minds of many teachers, by the need to provide regular National Curriculum level data. True AfL has been subverted by this requirement.

- At KS4 Examination Board criteria for assessing composing are universally utilised.

- There is a feeling that examination board criteria, whilst fit for purpose, do not always reflect the effort that students have put into their work.

- Some styles which are 'set' by examination boards are seen as being inappropriate for some students to access.

- Assessment of composing almost invariably entails assessment of the compositional product. There was no wish of teachers to change this.

- The additional flexibility offered by BTEC examinations has been welcomed by a number of teachers. In our research, these tended to be from teachers in urban environments.

- The notion of rank-ordering compositions found little favour with teachers.

- At KS3 considerably more time is spent on performing based activities than composing or listening.

- At KS4 considerably more time is spent on composing than other activities.

The picture presented in this research is one of teachers struggling with assessment on a number of fronts simultaneously. They want to do the best for their pupils, and they want to know how to improve learning. However, at the same time, particularly at KS3, they are being forced by school-based based systems to provide data which 'demonstrate' progression. This, they feel, is linked more to statistical analysis by others than to improving the learning of their own pupils. These teachers would be helped considerably by having a clear set of assessment focuses which are specific, and in which they can see value. It would also help if the burden of quasi-scientific linear progression proof were to be lifted. All teachers want their pupils to get better, and would like to show this statistically, but 'inventing' grades is not the means to achieve this.

At KS4 teachers were generally happier with assessment systems, and felt they understood them. There was some concern about using these to show all aspects of a student's learning, but, in general terms, teachers felt here that systems were working to the advantage of their learners.

In conclusion, there are many issues facing music teachers today. The future of the subject as it is currently defined is under threat. There are a number of major policy initiatives that they have to face up to and contextualise within their schools. They often have to work more collaboratively with senior managers and make constructive links across subjects and with wider policy initiatives (e.g. the recently implemented personal, learning and thinking skills). The content of the music curriculum is being challenged by the requirements for greater degrees of cross curricular learning. Processes of assessment are developing apace and new advice will be forthcoming from the QCA in 2009.

It is a period of transition. Music teachers will need ongoing support in a number of areas. This research has identified many of these. We consider there to be an opportunity for groups such as the ABRSM to play a major role in providing this kind of targeted support. To do this, the ABRSM will need an over-arching vision for music education that, whilst acknowledging the wider political contexts within which music education is currently being delivered, is in tune with the needs and aspirations of music teachers as identified within this report.

There is a balance needed here. Music education, for too long, has been an elitist activity which has favoured the few and ignored the many. This is changing. Schools have adopted broad, inclusive approaches to music education in the majority of cases. But old habits die hard and there are remnants of old approaches to the teaching of music that need challenging and reinterpreting in the modern age. We find these in the work of many teachers (e.g. in the way composition is conceived and taught). Whilst established principles may be acknowledge (e.g. teach the sound before the symbol), in practice they may be somewhat lagging behind and, in some cases, there is a real danger of school-wide systems (e.g. in relation to assessment) or technological developments (e.g. the uncritical adoption of

pieces of software) over-powering these long held, valuable and distinctive patterns of music education.

We would suggest that teachers would value input and advice from the ABRSM in these areas providing that this advice is well informed of wider political dimensions and empathetic to the situations that many teachers face. However, this advice should be working towards a clear vision for music education which challenges existing practices and develops more critical thinking amongst music educations about what they do, why they do it and the potential educational benefits for all. To this end, we hope that this research has provided a useful starting point for ongoing considerations about how to best support music teachers in their important work.

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