

Music Department Development Plans – A Whistlestop Tour in 10 Steps

Alex Aitken

alexander.aitken@cantab.net

What they are, and what they aren't...

They are	They are not
A strategic document, recommended by the Arts Council.	A statutory requirement.
Useful for speaking up to SLT about your department and its needs, and for justifying performance.	An excuse to moan to SLT, as much as you might want to.
Useful to wheel out in shiny form if inspected, to explain the department's trajectory and ambition clearly, and to inform discussions.	Required at inspection, or likely to be looked at.
Time consuming to create but quick to update. Best created in small chunks, as outlined in this document.	Done quickly to check a box and filed away to die, like Year 9's Blues Homework.
Useful to justify funding requests or changes to departmental budgets.	A 360 of staff performance, or an opportunity to highlight problems that should be dealt with another way..
Designed to enrich, enhance and deepen the quality of music education offered in your school, both within and outside of the curriculum.	Difficult, once you know the tricks, and once your way of thinking is honed.
Created in consultation with the whole department.	A method through which to wield a stick at underperformance, either by leadership, staff or students.
The highest-level evaluative document of the department's trajectory, vision, ambition and drive, regardless of GCSE and A-level specifications.	Trivial, box-checking admin.

To be, or not to be...

Be	Do Not Be
Formal, fair and objective in your tone when writing them.	Personal, casual or show frustration.
Open, ambitious, inspiring, adventurous, inventive, positive and honest.	Negative, fixed, unambitious, boring or dishonest.
Open to challenging conversations, both within your department, and with SLT.	Afraid of using it to inform conversations about change.
Clever with your analysis, and your requests (more below).	Critical of existing circumstances; words are powerful, and often change can be induced by presenting objective facts, and clear, formalised objectives.

Pedantic Yet Useful Definitions of Key Concepts in Music Department Development Plans

Below are the important ingredients or key words associated with creating an outstanding department development plan. Revisiting these regularly during the process of discussion and the creation of the plan makes your life easier. The definitions are a mix of the dictionary definitions and applications to Music education, plus thoughts from me.

Aim A purpose or intention to achieve something; a desired outcome. A broader and more general statement of purpose or intent for the educational process, rather than something defined by SMART. Aims are overarching goals that provide both direction and focus for curriculum development, and the students' experience of Music in the school. Aims help you to clarify what you want to achieve in terms of student learning and development across their entire experience at your school, from entrance to exit (ideally at Year 13).

Relevant synonyms: focus, strive for, pursue, aspire to, work towards, try for, go after, propose, intend, wish for.

Analysis A detailed examination of the elements or structure of something; in this case the entire educational process and experience of music that students experience in your school, from the moment they join to the moment that they leave. The whole-school experience should be considered regardless of GCSE or A-level Music uptake.

Relevant synonyms: inspection, survey, scrutiny, exploration, research, audit, review, evaluation.

Assessment The action of evaluating or estimating the nature or ability of someone or something. In Music, this is most likely to be formative for the student (i.e. shaping next steps), rather than summative (i.e. a final cumulative judgement at the end of a topic, term or course). It also includes evaluating the department's performance.

Relevant synonyms: evaluation, judgement, rating, estimating, opinion.

Curriculum The course of study, regardless of GCSE or A-level specifications (although, practically, this will include them). The level to which you arm students with the skills, knowledge, understanding, experience and curiosity to drop back onto and tackle the specification requirements, applying their cumulative experience to unfamiliar situations (both practically in the case of their life as a musician, and academically in terms of their appraising and listening papers for GCSE or A-level).

Development The process of growing and becoming more advanced, or an identifiable event (e.g. a performance, presentation or a simple demonstration of learning) constituting a new stage in a changing situation. The level to which a student's musicianship (knowledge and understanding in their head) and musicality (emotional engagement and musical instinct in their heart) are developing, being nurtured and supported by the activities, mindset and vision of the department.

Relevant synonyms: evolution, growth, expansion, enlargement, progress, blossoming, headway, invention, generation.

Goal A specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and either time-bound or long-term outcome or objective that provides a sense of purpose, and guides planning, implementation and assessment of any educational activities or programmes. The aim or desired result of sustained ambition and effort. Visualise your department in a year's time: what are the defining features, and what will make it shine even brighter than now?

Relevant synonyms: target, end-point, desired result, intention, intent, purpose, idea, aspiration, wish, dream.

Objective A SMART, short-term goal of what students should either achieve or demonstrate as a result of a particular education activity, with clear outcomes that guide future planning, assessment and education. Objectives help students to understand the purpose and expectations of the learning experience of that lesson or task.

Outcome The consequence of a process. An observable result or achievement demonstrated as the final product of a learning process (over any time frame: lesson, lesson sequence, term, year, etc.). Outcomes include evidence that can be used to assess the effectiveness of the task, its instruction and any resource or guidance given after its completion (something we often do not have time to do).

Relevant synonyms: result, consequence, net result, after-effect, aftermath, conclusion, end product, development, pay-off, success.

Plan A detailed, well-thought-out and comprehensive proposal for providing a rich, varied, holistic and high-quality music education to students. An intention or decision about what one is going to do differently to the status quo. It should be flexible and adaptable, student-centred, and align or significantly overlap with the whole-school development or improvement plan.

Relevant synonyms: masterplan, game plan, idea, proposal, proposition, suggestion, system, strategy, agenda, tactic, manoeuvre, intent, objective.

Process A series of steps, activities and methods used to facilitate the learning and development of musical skills, knowledge and understanding over a period of time (usually a lesson sequence, a term or a year). These will all combine to induce student engagement with music, and facilitate learning (i.e. make it easier).

Relevant synonyms: sustained action, activity, approach, mentality, task, sequence of events.

Strategy The art of planning and directing overall operations and movements in a war or battle... (!) A well-devised, defined and purposeful plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. A strategy outlines the methods, actions and steps to enrich the provision of music education in the school, in order to deepen and improve experience, and to assign greater value to the Arts. If 'aim' is the end point, strategy deals with how to get there.

Vision The ability to think about or plan the future with imagination or wisdom. A clear and inspiring image of what the Music department is like at a defined point in the future (e.g. at this point next academic year). A guiding set of indicators that bring together long-term goals, values and aspirations; these need to be clearly defined so that you know when you've achieved it!

Relevant synonyms: creative power, inventiveness, innovation, inspiration, intuition, perceptiveness, breadth of view, insight, awareness, shrewdness, cleverness, aspirational.

You will need to continually revisit these ingredients and key words as you revise, or devise, your department development plan.

Done well, Department Development Plans are the secret weapon to making lasting positive change, and demonstrating the value of Music to SLT. But what you get from them correlates directly to the amount of time you spend creating one, and thinking deeply about where things are at, and where you'd like to be. What follows is a step-by-step guide to creating an outstanding department development plan.

Section 1: Money Money Money

Start with explaining how you spend your budget each year. A simple table works well.

Overall Budget: £xxx		
Figure	Spent On	Notes
£150	Instrument Repair	x, y, z now fixed; 1, 2, 3 still need repair
£200	New Headphones	One-off purchase; reassigned next year to blah.
£400	New Sibelius License	Annual cost for GCSE Composition
£20	Sanity Tablets	Need more

etc.

The ultimate aim of this is to start by showing how well you spend your far-too-small budget, and just how much you achieve with it. In the notes section you could propose further savings, e.g. changing the person who repairs the instruments, who will do the same job for slightly less.

Then it's good to list what needs doing, or fixing, just to maintain the status quo.

Repair Item	Estimated Cost	Notes
£150	Keyboard Repair	Broken keys, new adapters, etc. needed
£200	Amp repair	4 amps, £50 each.

etc.

I then briefly summarise what could be possible within the existing budget if the repair costs did not come out of the budget (e.g. for the above, the £350 additional money for repairs could mean you could spend £350 on percussion to allow for students to set up a percussion ensemble themselves.

Extra Funding of	Would allow us to instead to use the budget for	Benefits / Additional Provision
£350 for keyboard and amp repair	New percussion	Could set up a student percussion ensemble (led by them) – leadership / independence / helps with samba scheme of work

Then any other information that's useful for the budget setters on one page. This order is useful because you're not technically asking for more money, but instead showing how you spend it, why you need every penny, and what could easily be achieved with a little extra funding for one-off repairs, etc.

Section 2: Current Departmental Performance and Activity

It's then good to celebrate what you've achieved, what you current do well, and academic performance. It's a snapshot of the department for anyone who wants to know (this can also be adapted for the website, prospectus, marketing materials, etc.)

Department Achievements in the Last Academic Year

This can be conflated with a summary of everything you do, as SLT won't always realise; it's always good to write it in a way that demonstrates what benefits you bring to the whole school, and the rich provision inside and outside the timetable. Examples:

- Whole school production of *Oliver* – 55 cast, 12 musicians, 23 students backstage and technical, 4 cats and a goldfish;
- Uptake for GCSE improved, or numbers expressing interest up;
- x number of ensembles involving a total number of y students across Years 7-11 (feel free to count this in imaginative ways!);
- x trips: musical, opera, composition workshop, battle of the bands, concert at Royal Albert Hall, big sing, etc.

What We Do Well

Don't be modest! Examples below.

- Amazing engagement in Year 7 and resulting instrumental trials; integration with MK Music Hub / Music Cooperative
- Whole-school singing, house music, bands, clubs, choirs, a capella groups, etc.;
- Whole-school presence for open evenings, awards ceremonies, etc.
- Trips, workshops at The Stables, music competitions, etc.
- Student success with music (e.g. Playda Rongnote got into the Royal Academy of Music and Iona Drumstik went to the ACM).

Academic Performance

This can be essentially a summary of your results analysis that you've done. Include statistics.

- GCSE – Grade 9 (5%)
- GCSE – Grades 8-9 (25%)
- GCSE – Grades 7-9 (66%)
- GCSE – Grades 6-9 (100%)
- A-level – A*, A*-A, A*-B, etc.

You might like to make a table showing several years of this data. It can be encouraging to see the difference you're making, as results analyses tend to only focus on the one year. A table showing the above bullet points for each row, and the years as columns works well, along with a few bullet points underneath the table explaining additional circumstances (e.g. pandemic). If you have access to value-added data as well, this is good to include. You might like to also show achievement data for non-GCSE years.

SWOT Analysis

Then a SWOT analysis of academic performance.

- Strengths might include value-added, a particularly high statistic, comparisons to national averages, etc.
- Weaknesses might include reflections on any low results, or surprising results, analysis of any papers that came back, etc.
- Opportunities might include quick ways of improving results (e.g. CPD on essay technique, sharing marking with other schools)
- Threats might include, for instance, reduced uptake from Music being in the same option block as Drama, which means some students choose Drama over Music, for instance. Threats also includes any external factors that affect the department's work.

Section 3: Anything Else at the Moment

This is where you then put any additional information, which might be a summary of where the department is at, where it has come from, or just anything that doesn't fit in above. By the end of this section you're ready to then move forward and think big.

Section 4: Aims, Goals and Objectives (aka Thinking Big to Thinking Small)

Aim	<p>A purpose or intention to achieve something; a desired outcome. A broader and more general statement of purpose or intent for the educational process, rather than something defined by SMART. Aims are overarching goals that provide both direction and focus for curriculum development, and the students’ experience of Music in the school. Aims help you to clarify what you want to achieve in terms of student learning and development across their entire experience at your school, from entrance to exit (ideally at Year 13).</p> <p><i>Relevant synonyms: focus, strive for, pursue, aspire to, work towards, try for, go after, propose, intend, wish for.</i></p>
-----	--

Start this section with the aims of the department going forward. Aims are broad and general, unlike SMART objectives or goals. They describe the big picture, and overall fundamental purpose of music education in your school, and should provide purpose and direction. Aims have a long-term focus that remains relatively stable over time, and represent more the goals of education in general (i.e. to make someone better).

They often reflect or align with the values, beliefs, and educational philosophy of the school, or of us as music teachers (e.g. nurturing curiosity, deepening musicianship, building character, widening general knowledge of music, and fostering a love of learning).

Whatever aims you devise, they should guide the development of your curriculum content, the teaching methods of the department, and your assessment strategies. They’re also sometimes useful in helping you to make decisions about what to include in the curriculum, and how to design tasks.

Example aims:

- To deepen students’ musicianship (i.e. knowledge and understanding) and increase their engagement with music in order to develop their musicality and love of the subject.
- To embed a love and appreciation of the academic practice of analysis, listening and appraising music, both familiar and unfamiliar.
- For Music to have an all-school presence, and be a significant part of the social interaction and extra-curricular

Specific objectives or goals then break down your aims into smaller, measurable and manageable steps.

Goal	<p>A specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and either time-bound or long-term outcome or objective that provides a sense of purpose, and guides planning, implementation and assessment of any educational activities or programmes. The aim or desired result of sustained ambition and effort. Visualise your department in a year’s time: what are the defining features, and what will make it shine even brighter than now?</p> <p><i>Relevant synonyms: target, end-point, desired result, intention, intent, purpose, idea, aspiration, wish, dream.</i></p>
------	---

Department Development Plans should first think ahead by imagining the end point. The rest of the document is then about how to get there. This section, in my experience, takes the longest. Think big, and use the definition and synonyms above to inform your discussions. Involving all of the department, including visiting music teachers, is often time consuming but VERY worthwhile.

You might also want to bounce ideas off other Heads of Music (or me, as I’m at the end of an email!). You should specify the overarching goals and objectives that the department aims to achieve by this time next year. Align these goals with the school’s overall improvement plan and any internal school-wide educational priorities. There are different types of goals, explained below. Ignore money, as that comes later! Dream big, but be thorough.

Type of Goal	Some Examples
Academic Achievement	<p>Pure statistics (e.g. 100% A*-A / 9-8), uptake numbers you wish you had, curriculum updates to make everything more musical, second sets, number of students going to read Music after, number of Year 9s expressing interest in GCSE Music.</p> <p>Changing methods of assessing and monitoring departmental performance and the effectiveness of teaching strategies, using assessment data to make informed decisions and improve educational outcomes.</p>
Student Development	<p>More student-led ensembles, more musical teaching, wider and richer curriculum, greater whole school presence, practice rooms open more, more resources for students, online learning, remote access to notation or sequencing software, more practice rooms, more instruments available, student ambassadors for Music, student-led outreach (performing in primary schools, the community, for the elderly, etc.), workshop participation, projects, shows, concerts, etc. Anything that develops their musicianship, musicality, confidence, character and love of music.</p>
Career Preparation	<p>More Q&A opportunities/contacts/talks with professional musicians, more music personal statement help, former students coming back to talk about university, departmental resources about post-16 music and undergraduate music, workshops at conservatoires, open day lists, photos of professional musicians put up, alumni of the school that have been successful, biographies of staff members and visiting music teachers, links with professional organisations, DofE skills focused on Music, an internal school qualification on musician skills, etc.</p>
Fostering a Love of Lifelong Learning Through Musical Experience	<p>Teaching students how to practice, teaming up with visiting ensembles, masterclasses, DJing workshop, song writing workshops (The Stables), etc.</p>
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	<p>Looking at participation or engagement rates of SEND students, or increasing the outreach work of the department to reach those with specific needs. Increasing diversity captured in marketing, diversity of instrumental take-up, challenging stereotypical norms (e.g. white middle class orchestral musicians, instruments associated with gender identity, pupil premium instrumental lessons, etc.). Staff members playing in ensembles, expanding the curriculum to reflect the diversity in the school (i.e. not just covering Western Classical Music), primary school outreach and collaboration, singing days, etc.</p>
Personalised Learning	<p>Separate learning programmes for music scholars or high-level musicians, having music scholars and ambassadors, pianists accompanying more (low grade exams?), support programmes for those who have received poor music provision in primary school. Community engagement, cross-curricular integration.</p>
Endangered Orchestral Instruments	<p>Specific programmes for endangered orchestral instruments (e.g. French Horns, Oboes, Cors-Anglais, 'Cello, Violin, Tuned Percussion). MK Music Hub and Music Cooperative discussions?</p>

The goals section is essentially for articulating where you want the department to be, given unlimited budget (!). Keep referring back to the synonyms under the definitions, as they can often open up new avenues of thought.

Objectives then break down goals further, and specify what students should be able to do or know as a result of instruction and serve as a means of achieving the broader aims.

Objective A SMART, short-term goal of what students should either achieve or demonstrate as a result of a particular education activity, with clear outcomes that guide future planning, assessment and education. Objectives help students to understand the purpose and expectations of the learning experience of that lesson or task.

Objectives are specific, precise and clearly defined (compare this to aims), and focus on developing a particular skill, deepening knowledge, or changing a behaviour (e.g. teaching students practice techniques and subsequently changing students' approach to their independent practice).

A reminder that objectives should be worded in such a way as to allow for assessment and evaluation (usually the following year in a DDP). The easy way to do this is to include observable actions or outcomes for the department to easily measure.

Be realistic with your objectives, given the context of your department and school. They can grow over time. Whatever objectives you decide upon, they should align with the broader music curriculum that you want to have in place.

Remember to include a timeframe or deadline by which the desired outcome should be achieved.

Objectives on your Department Development Plan are separate to any objectives in your particular schemes of work, so should not relate to topic units.

Types of Educational Objectives:

Cognitive Objectives focus on intellectual or cognitive skills, such as knowledge acquisition, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. They are often associated with Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (yawn).

Affective Objectives relate to emotions, attitudes, and values. They aim to change or influence students' feelings, beliefs, and behaviours relating to Music. Examples include objectives related to developing musicality, promoting collaboration, or fostering a love of learning.

Psychomotor Objectives pertain to physical skills and abilities (the obvious example being playing or singing). They involve any tasks that require coordination, dexterity, and motor skills. Examples include objectives related to helping every student to have some level of keyboard skills, to deepen their understanding of harmony.

Done well, objectives within a Department Development Plan provide a clear roadmap for your teaching, at a level above that of individual units or topics. They help you to design instructional activities quickly, select appropriate assessment methods, and track students' progress toward achieving desired outcomes more accurately.

The aims, goals and objectives section is the longest of the Department Development Plan, and will take the most thinking. Aims usually are pretty easy to come up with, goals a little harder, and objectives take the longest, since they are the most specific. This section is the most important, since having started by evaluating where you are, you then propose in this section where you'd like to be. The rest of the Department Development Plan is then concerned with how to get there.

Section 5: Strategy and Immediate Actions

Strategy The art of planning and directing overall operations and movements in a war or battle... (!) A well-devised, defined and purposeful plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim. A strategy outlines the methods, actions and steps to enrich the provision of music education in the school, in order to deepen and improve experience, and to assign greater value to the Arts. If ‘aim’ is the end point, strategy deals with how to get there.

Plan A detailed, well-thought-out and comprehensive proposal for providing a rich, varied, holistic and high-quality music education to students. An intention or decision about what one is going to do differently to the status quo. It should be flexible and adaptable, student-centred, and align or significantly overlap with the whole-school development or improvement plan.

Relevant synonyms: masterplan, game plan, idea, proposal, proposition, suggestion, system, strategy, agenda, tactic, manoeuvre, intent, objective.

Having spent time thinking about where you want to be, what you’re doing and why, this section then sets out how you’re going to begin to get there. This section should contain specific, actionable steps that the department will take to achieve first the objectives, then the goals, and finally satisfy your aims. It’s always good to work backwards in this section, i.e. from specific (objectives) to broad (aims). You could think of this section as a simple to do list. Again, ignore money for the moment – this is about justifying your wishes above with actionable steps that, again, can be measured. When planning this, you might like to separate this section into Curriculum Changes, Extra-Curriculum Changes, Resources, Staffing (e.g. teacher x starting to teach A-level next year, and tweaking staffing to play to strengths), Whole-School Presence, Teaching Strategies, CPD for staff (both teaching and visiting music teachers), and teaching approaches (e.g. greater focus on flipped learning, more independent work, a greater integration of musicianship, etc.).

Analysis A detailed examination of the elements or structure of something; in this case the entire educational process and experience of music that students experience in your school, from the moment they join to the moment that they leave. The whole-school experience should be considered regardless of GCSE or A-level Music uptake.

Relevant synonyms: inspection, survey, scrutiny, exploration, research, audit, review, evaluation.

This section is basically just a to-do list. Once you have your long to-do list, it should go into a table like this, to please the people that look at DDPs and like tables. You should show with initials who is going to take the lead on each action, which might be ‘all’, and indicate by when each action will be completed.

	Action (or Target) and Responsibility (Initials)	Timeline and How It Will Be Measured
Short Term		
Medium Term		
Long Term		

Section 6: Financial Resources (aka Money Money Money Round 2)

This is where you return to the all-important subject of money, and outline what it's going to cost to do the above actions and put your strategy into motion. This can again be a simple table. Some significant examples are below. This section can be very persuasive, if written well!

Resource Needed	Estimated Cost	Justification / Suggestions	Notes / Potential Savings
CPD on Essay Technique	£280 Keynote Course	Led by Examiner; results show that our students struggle with essays.	One member of the department goes, then distributed resources. Saves 2 places (i.e. £560).
Music Administrator	£15 per hour; 4 hours per week; £60 per week.	Takes on mundane admin tasks to free up workload for two staff members. Looks after absence reports, trips, and timetables for VMTs. 60 instrumental lessons per week at the moment; increase cost by £1 to pay for Music Administrator.	Frees up department to run additional extra-curricular activities, at subject expert level. Needed to increase efficiency of department.
Whole class set of violins	30 student violins = c. £1800	Lack of string instruments in orchestra; leavers put whole orchestra at risk. Needed to ensure future of the ensemble. Discussions also with MK Music Hub and MK Music Cooperative.	This could be fundraised by asking for donations from parents, setting up a bar at concerts for parents, and charging £5 per ticket for each concert.
	Total Cost to School:	Total That Could Be Fundraised in Addition:	Total Potential Savings:

You might also want to colour code each as light red, yellow and green for high-priority, mid-priority and low-priority. Then you can push SLT and the finance department to get money for the red high-priority items first. If they say no, you immediately have some leeway the following year when you haven't been able to do something in your strategy, and have not achieved your objectives or goals as a result.

In my experience, careful plotting out of costs for what you need adds a lot of weight to your request, as it appears more reasonable. If it's a significant cost, the conversation should be how that can be met, rather than just a 'no'. Any good SLT or Finance department heads should see how something could benefit the department and the school, but it depends on us making the effort to make the case objectively, and demonstrate how we've thought it through, and found other avenues of money for other items (e.g. through fundraising, or savings elsewhere).

You also need to consider staffing in this section, since that can have a cost. Essentially, you should consider these questions:

- Is the academic timetable assigned or distributed in such a way as to play to staff members' strengths? If not, what is needed in terms of resources to fix this?
- Can you free up any mundane tasks and assign it to someone who could do it with less expertise (e.g. a Music Administrator or gap year student?)
- Do you have enough academic staff?
- Do you need more visiting music teachers? This works both ways – for over demand, and when there is currently no provision.

Section 7: Assessment

Assessment obviously plays a crucial role in measuring student progress, providing verbal and written feedback, informing decisions regarding task instruction, and helping students and teachers to gauge understanding and progress. A Department Development Plan is a chance to ask whether the assessment strategies employed by the department as a whole are the most efficient and most effective that they can be, and to propose changes (outside of the restrictions of individual specifications or topics) that increase accuracy and validity of data, deepen student engagement and ownership of their work, and decrease teacher workload – the holy grail.

There are many questions to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of departmental assessment. A non-exhaustive list is below.

- Is the department harnessing the full potential of formative assessment, and using it in as efficient and musical way as possible? A brief overview of the current assessment strategies employed is useful in this section.
- Can quick Google Forms (or similar) be created to assess students quickly and efficiently through teacher observation? Designing the form takes longer than the assessment process itself, ideally, but once it's there it can be easily created or duplicated for multiple sets, topics, etc.
- What self-assessment methods are used, and can they be made more efficient, to reduce teacher input but increase validity and accuracy of assessment?
- Is the process of recording student performances as efficient as it can be, particularly regarding file labelling and storage?
- How well do departmental assessment criteria align with final exam-based criteria? It's always good to combine A-level criteria across boards, and then create an assessment flightpath from Year 7-13 that incorporates GCSE assessment criteria along the way. This takes time but is worth doing.
- To what extent does any assessment strategy deliberately blur the boundaries of GCSE and A-level specifications (i.e. performance, composition and appraising) in order to be more musical, and to provide a richer assessment?

An example of this would be deepening the assessment of a performance to include looking at the student's ability to spot or analyse musical detail (like a set work), to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the composer and their musical language, and to listen to and spot detail in a similar musical work, thereby showing understanding of that musical world.

- Can you assess less often, but demonstrate greater progress? (The answer is often yes).
- Can self-assessment be made more effective through incorporation of other methods such as elaborative interrogation?
- How well is the department turning summative exam assessment criteria (e.g. composition marking grids, recital criteria and essay mark schemes) into formative, active, assessment rubrics that help students of all abilities improve?
- Is it possible to reduce teacher workload without sacrificing assessment quality? (The answer is often yes).
- Can rubrics be designed and used more consistently across units, topics or schemes of work to provide greater standardisation.

An example rubric would be a simple scale out of 5, where students have to commit to an integer number (i.e. no half marks). 1 might be used only when something makes absolutely no sense whatsoever, but 5 might be reserved for when that student could teach it to another student without teacher assistance. Defining the outer points means you can then decide a mid-point where teacher intervention stops (e.g. a 4 means that the student needs to do more work independently, but a 3 means that they still need teacher input). Carefully designing such rubrics can actually be remarkably effective, not least because students quickly get acclimatised to them, and this then provides increased consistency.

- How musically are you assessing students? Criteria used by exam boards and practical exam grades are not always the most inspiring, engaging, or musical. A cursory comparison between ABRSM Grade 8 and A-level Performance marking criteria is enough to open a can of worms about assessing performance. How musically and formatively can an assessment by the department be, without generating much workload? (This is where a good Google Form, or similar, comes in).
- To what extent does the current assessment strategy ignore transferrable knowledge, skills and understanding across topics, units or areas of study?

An example of this would be assessing students for their Blues performance, and then a term later assessing their pop music performance, but not looking at their cumulative harmonic understanding across the two units, and assessing the level to which they've used what they've learnt from the Blues module the term before (e.g. sevenths, use of primary chords, and blues progressions) in their use of similar harmonies in the pop song unit.

- Does the department have an agreed language of critique for performances or compositions, that is used by students and teachers? Self-assessment could include pre-designed statements that focus student thinking on musical detail, interpretation, expression, character, style, etc.
- Does any self-assessment demand sufficient technical detail from students, and get them to talk like a musician? Examples include encouraging technical terms like 'semiquaver' instead of 'fast notes', or simply responding to students' answers with 'and how would a musician say that?'
- To what extent is the department, through assessment, encouraging and instilling a mentality within students of thinking technically, musically, creatively and imaginatively?
- How engaged are students with the assessment process, and can the necessity of assessment be disguised to increase engagement, enthusiasm, and a love of musical learning? E.g. writing, designing and producing a short three minute BBC News-esque introduction to the Baroque period over two sessions, embedding suitable background music, rather than setting homework to come back with bullet points about it (probably lifted off Wikipedia).
- Is the department creating enough of an assessment portfolio for students, demonstrating and celebrating their progress over time, separate to individual topics, schemes of work or units of specifications?
- How well do student self-reflections integrate into a wider assessment strategy, particularly in terms of performance and composition?
- Is the department sufficiently showcasing the products of assessment (e.g. posters, performance videos, compositions, etc.)
- To what extent does the department's current assessment strategy induce students to take ownership of their own learning?
- How well is the department developing musicianship (i.e. knowledge and understanding) through assessment? An example would be developing students' understanding of key signatures and the links between keys and mood through film music, rather than just covering film music in general.
- To what extent does the department present all types of music on a level basis (i.e. not placing a greater importance on classical music than pop music, or prioritising student tastes over the idea of equally exposing all types of music to them on a level playing field)?
- Is assessment harnessing and using technology in the most effective way?

Assessment should always be well-rounded, and encompass not only technical proficiency and talking like a musician, but also creativity, expression, and an understanding of the cultural and historical context of all types of music. It should align with the specific learning goals and objectives of the department, and should be a method through which evidence of the rich, varied and inspiring musical education provided is captured.

Section 8: Curriculum Changes

Is the department's music curriculum as rich, holistic, musical and rewarding as it can be? In this section you should both celebrate what is good about your current provision, but also suggest curriculum improvements. Maintaining a comprehensive and effective music curriculum involves continually considering it from various perspectives. Below are the most common lenses through which to assess the effectiveness and richness of any music curriculum.

Content: you should review and suggest improvements to the musical content to be covered in the curriculum, such as musicianship, history, performance, composition, analysis skills, appraising and improvisation. Ideally the curriculum should blur the boundaries between each of these, so that students do not separate them in their head. To what extent can you initiate the idea of dropping back onto GCSE or A-level specifications, to consolidate learning rather than aiming for the exam?

Learning Objectives: are the learning objectives as succinct, effective and clear as they can be? They should outline what students should know and be able to do by the end of their musical education. Would it be beneficial to have overarching learning objectives, that operate over multiple topics or units?

Styles and Genres: is there a sufficiently diverse range of musical styles and genres, including gothic, medieval, renaissance, baroque, classical, romantic, early 20th century, jazz, late 20th century, 21st century, Indian classical music, Spanish music, folk music, world music, musical theatre, film, pop, etc. Can you play the game of 'is this music' more to cultivate curiosity?

Performance Opportunities: could there be more opportunities for students to perform individually or in groups? How much of this can happen outside of timetabled sessions? Could there be greater participation in school and community events (e.g. open evenings, parents evenings, school productions, visiting community projects, etc.)

Musicianship and Musical Literacy: how much is the continual demand for musicianship and musical literacy integrated into the subject matter of the curriculum. Asking students to talk like musicians (i.e. technically and imaginatively) sets them up well for GCSE and A-level specifications. Musical literacy includes developing their ability to read music (both notated and tab) and to talk about music in a musical way. Don't underestimate the power of challenge mode on musictheory.net!

Ear Training and Aural Skills: to what extent does the current curriculum allow students to develop their musical ear, and recognise intervals, chords, rhythm, tonalities and other musical features through the act of listening? Regular integration of this, alongside asking 'how would a musician say that' can work wonders. Can you do it more?

Music History and Context: to what extent does the current curriculum help students to explore the historical and cultural contexts of music, including the study of famous composers (of equal male and female divide), musical eras, and the social, political, and cultural influences on music, along with its overlaps into the world of art, history, architecture, science and fashion/taste.

Composition and Creativity: to what extent do students currently compose or create their own music with an academic understanding of what they are doing, rather than just experimenting? Can there be a greater integration of research and composition (e.g. wanting to compose a pop song, so analysing common patterns, harmony features, accompaniment patterns and their structure to create something of greater worth, rather than writing a two-chord song using just chords I and iii).

Technological Integration: to what extent is technology currently incorporated into the curriculum, and can its power be further harnessed? Can help sheets be created to head off common technical problems and free up teaching energy? To what extent is Music Technology integrated into extra-curricular activities, such as running the sound for a school production, or producing soundscapes for drama department performances?

Instrumental and Vocal Training: do students have enough opportunities to take up instruments through initiatives like taster days, trial lessons and bursaries for endangered instruments?

Music Ensemble Participation: is there a sufficiently varied number of music ensembles, from vocal (choirs, a cappella groups, consorts and barbershops) to instrumental (orchestra, quartets, chamber groups, brass bands, jazz bands, big bands, etc.)

Inclusivity and Differentiation: does the current curriculum accommodate students with diverse abilities, backgrounds, and learning styles? Does it fully cater for the school's demographic?

Teacher Professional Development: does the current curriculum demand the ongoing professional development for the department to stay current with best practices, technology, and teaching strategies? We all fall into teaching what we know...

Community and Performance Outreach: does the current curriculum permit engagement with the local community through performances, collaborations and partnerships with community organisations? Simple additions like performing in retirement homes, or to primary schools can work wonders for students' musical education. Are there further opportunities for links with professional associations or companies (e.g. Marshalls in Bletchley or The Stables) that could open up the opportunity to provide student ambassadors, apprenticeships, and other mentoring?

Cross-Curricular Integration: are there further opportunities to integrate with other departments – particularly art, drama, dance and design and technology? Is there as much interdisciplinary learning as there could be?

Parent and Community Engagement: does the department involve parents and the broader community as much as it could? Ideas might include a Parents Music Association, parents running a bar at concerts for fundraising for the department, utilising parent contacts and expertise, and giving concerts in local venues. Collaboration with local organisations and charities provides further performance and fundraising opportunities.

A well-designed music curriculum should provide students with a comprehensive and enriching musical education, nurturing their musical abilities, fostering creativity, and instilling a lifelong love and appreciation for music.

Section 9: General Department Development

This section covers anything that is not covered in any of the other sections, but that pushes the department forward. You may wish to consider the following, and have separate sections for each.

Pedagogical Advances: this includes any ongoing research and pedagogical developments in music education (and other subjects) that might lead to more innovative teaching methods and strategies, and foster deeper musical understanding and greater engagement. My current interests, for instance, are in the role of elaborative interrogation in Music, and in research and discussions relating to teaching more musically. Creating departmental priorities with this is a good idea (e.g. sending someone on some CPD, or to observe something happening elsewhere). This category also includes teacher skill development (e.g. learning how to use Dorico with a view of switching to it from Sibelius).

Technological Integration: are you using the best software for your curriculum? Could you use different software, or devote time to seeking more online resources to make the department's teaching more effective?

Inclusivity and Diversity: what does the department need to do to further integrate and reflect the diverse musical traditions, cultures, and backgrounds of the UK? Is the music provision in your school as welcoming and accessible as it can be to students of all abilities and backgrounds?

Interdisciplinary Approaches: could the department actively seek out further opportunities for interdisciplinary learning? You may not yet know what these may be, but committing to find more occasions, both within and outside the curriculum, is good. Examples might be asking other Heads of Department about their curriculum and discovering overlaps (e.g. the English department teaching *Romeo and Juliet*, and therefore timing this with an exploration of *West Side Story* and how Shakespeare has influenced composers).

Online Learning: are there further opportunities to explore whereby students can learn at home online as well? E.g. www.masteringlevelmusic.co.uk.

Music Technology Education: are there further opportunities to integrate Music and Music Technology, e.g. sessions on audio production, DJing tutorials, DAW composition, remixes, a school radio station, mentoring from sound professionals, etc.

Music Therapy and Wellness: can the department create a further overlap with PSHE and student wellbeing, e.g. providing study areas with calming music playing (Renaissance polyphony!), or by encouraging whole-school engagement with relaxing music to combat study stress, exam nerves, anxiety, etc. Could students play on a rota over break times, etc. to provide background music?

Community Engagement: similar to what was discussed in the curriculum changes section above, are there further opportunities for the department to engage with the community through outreach, performances, collaborations with local organisations, and initiatives that promote the role of music in society?

Research and Scholarship: could the department make links with universities, or offer itself up for either PGCE, SCITT or Teach First training, or for educational research (aka using students as guinea pigs)?

Student-Centred Learning: in what ways can the department foster greater levels of student-led learning? Examples might include older students leading ensembles, a research competition, music ambassadors that conduct parent tours, students teaching each other about their instruments, etc.

Marketing: is the department selling itself well enough? Does it need its own prospectus?! A music department Instagram page, or a dedicated page on the school website? Is the department competing on an equal footing with sport and drama? Are there enough photos of students playing, of concerts, or other events? Are the music staff sufficiently celebrated (this is particularly important to demonstrate that you're a professional musician first and teacher second).

Alignment with Whole-School Strategy or School Improvement Plan: relatively self-explanatory, but it is important to demonstrate how the department is looking in the same direction as the whole school strategic vision, rather than striking out a lone path. Lifting brief quotes from the school improvement plan, or key documents to demonstrate how your vision for the Music department aligns with that of the SLT is a quick and valuable way of getting allies high up!

Section 10: KPIs

You should then summarise with KPIs (Key Performance Indicators). These show how you're going to assess the level to which you've achieved what you've set out in your strategy above, and how you know you're getting there. This section would also include how and when you were going to review the progress towards everything that you've set out in your development plan.

KPIs should be:

- Relevant, and linked to the goals and objectives in the DDP;
- Quantifiable and measurable in quantitative and qualitative data (e.g. through student surveys and assessment results);
- Specific to provide clarity and focus;
- Achievable and realistic, and ideally agreed upon by the whole department;
- Time bound by either a time frame or reporting period – this is usually the final term of the academic year ready to rewrite the DDP in the Autumn term;
- Aligned with the broader school aims and objectives;
- Sufficiently detailed to drive discussion and subsequent change if needed;
- Allow for the tracking of measurable trends over multiple year groups over time;
- Subject to periodic review (you should specify how often you are going to review them as a department – even if it is every academic year).