

Wymondham High Academy

Applying Musical Futures approaches to teaching GCSE Music

Kitt Garner is a Musical Futures Associate and the newly appointed Head of Music & Music Technology at Wymondham High Academy in Norfolk. He previously taught in Essex at Saffron Walden County High School, as part of large department with a long established, national reputation for musical excellence. In 2014, the school established a post-16 Music Academy where students have been able to benefit from ongoing partnerships with the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, The Britten Sinfonia and the Royal Opera House. Every year, the department enters around 50 candidates in Year 11 for GCSE Music and has followed OCR GCSE specifications for almost a decade; regularly achieving outstanding results. Kitt has a strong interest in ensuring teaching and learning at Key Stage 4 remains hands-on and practical. He is a strong advocate of the inclusivity and flexibility the current OCR course offers to both students and teachers alike; allowing them to explore course content musically.

We asked Kitt to share some thoughts about his experiences teaching the current OCR GCSE specification and his thoughts on our draft specifications for first teaching in 2016.

The OCR specification bridges the gap perfectly between Key Stage 3 and GCSE.

Students commence Year 9 by exploring Area of Study 3 (dance music) which I have found provides a particularly accessible starting point. We work-shop a whole class performance of a representative piece from each dance genre. For example, last year I used El Pollito (Francisco Canaro) to explore tango and 'I'm in the Mood for Dancing' (The Nolans) to learn about disco.



(c) Emile Holba www.emileholba.co.uk



(c) Emile Holba www.emileholba.co.uk

During the practical work, as students are putting together the performance we explore structure, texture, melody, rhythm, harmony and any other key features that students need to be able to recognise and understand for the listening exam.

“My favourite aspect of the OCR specification is that it allows me to teach the way I know my students learn best; through actually making music!”

A real advantage of exploring genres over set works is that teachers can choose ‘playable’ examples that can be broken down practically and can form models for subsequent composition tasks.

GCSE Music can invariably become all about memorising ‘facts’ about set works that are often quite inaccessible to approach practically. Therefore, the study of them can often become solely an academic exercise. This is the very antithesis of what Musical Futures advocates in terms of musical, music teaching. My favourite aspect of the OCR specification is that it allows me to teach the way I know my students learn best; through actually making music!

Wymondham High Academy

Applying Musical Futures approaches to teaching GCSE Music



(c) Emile Holba www.emileholba.co.uk

Keith Swanwick (1999) suggests that “just as there are ways of teaching musically... so there are ways of assessing musically.” The nature of how students are assessed is a key strength of the current OCR specification.

The mark schemes for performing and composing are clear, concise and student friendly and as such, we have not had any nasty surprises from moderation! The Creative Task has been particularly popular with my students – it really challenges them as a hands-on, practical musician.

The specification also provides excellent progression to A Level study. I have found that the focus of the listening examination on unprepared extracts, rather than set works means that students are better equipped for A Level. They have to really understand the musical features of each genre to recognise them in music that is unfamiliar. Knowledge of these musical features is reinforced through having actually explored them all in a practical context.

Marie Jones, Subject Specialist for OCR says:

“OCR has built on these strengths of our current GCSE specification during our design of the reformed GCSE, AS and A Level for first teaching 2016. This case study is just one example of learners and teachers with positive, musical experiences. OCR’s vision for the new suite of Music qualifications is to continue to be flexible, accessible, and most importantly MUSICAL, with a clear pathway of progression between GCSE and AS/A Level.”

Musical Futures and their advocacy for practical, musical teaching have inspired many music teachers nationally and internationally. More information can be found on their website <https://www.musicalfutures.org>

“OCR’s vision for the new suite of Music qualifications is to continue to be flexible, accessible, and most importantly MUSICAL, with a clear pathway of progression between GCSE and AS/A Level.”

www.ocr.org.uk/gcsemusic