

Writing for Music Education

ABRSM composer mentoring programme 2026-27 (UK)

Programme Terms & Schedule

Introduction

ABRSM's composer mentoring programme, [Writing for Music Education](#), is a six-month programme for emerging and early career composers* based in the UK looking to explore the world of composing for music education. The programme includes opportunities to join ABRSM behind the scenes, to develop skills in writing to a brief and to work alongside some of our partner organisations. Recruitment for the programme is supported through our partnerships with Black Lives in Music and the Ivors Academy.

Who's the programme for?

While not prescriptive, we're looking for composers who:

- are interested in writing music for educational settings
- are in the early stages of their careers as composers*
- are not tied into an exclusive publishing contract
- have a working knowledge of traditional notation and western classical music
- are based in the UK and can commit to attending the sessions as outlined in the Programme Schedule, including those held in-person at ABRSM's offices in London
- have good understanding of English
- are happy to take part in ABRSM's comms campaigns relating to the programme and other activities as relevant

**by 'emerging' and 'early career' we are referring to the area of composition specifically; there is therefore no upper age limit, as some composers may be emerging in this area later in life or from a change in career focus.*

Writing for Music Education aims to identify composers, arrangers and works that are new to ABRSM, our audiences and the world of music education. A key part of our [Diversity and Inclusion Plan](#), the programme aims to increase the diversity and breadth of our syllabus and publications by drawing on new sources of quality music from composers and a wider range of styles and influences.

We are really keen to receive applications from composers who are underrepresented in the music education sector, including composers from the global majority, Disabled and/or neurodiverse composers, and trans and/or non-binary composers. For the 2026/27 programme, we will be looking to allocate six places, including at least three places to composers from underrepresented backgrounds.

When is the programme?

The six-month programme will run from September 2026 to February 2027.

Please see the Programme Schedule below for the full range of activities.

What are the commitments?

We have confirmed dates and times for the majority of sessions already and would ask that prospective composers complete their expression of interest on the basis that they can attend all of the in-person sessions and the majority of the programme as a whole. Other dates will be firmed up in due course, while the 1:1 mentoring sessions will be arranged directly between composer and mentor.

The programme requires approximately 2 – 3 hours per week, in the form of workshops, mentoring sessions, preparation, composing or feedback and review. A number of opportunities to engage with our partner organisations will be available and composers can choose as many or as few of these as they like.

What are the benefits of the programme?

Music education around the world needs more composers who write well for beginners in particular and ABRSM is keen to open up our offer to give opportunities to more people to work with us as composers and arrangers. Specific benefits include:

- opportunities to explore the world of writing for music education, including ABRSM's commissioning, editing and publishing processes
- bespoke mentoring from leading educational composers
- a deep-dive into ABRSM's exam marking criteria and how knowledge of assessment can support effective educational composition
- opportunities to connect with ABRSM's network of partner organisations
- opportunities to write to a brief, including for ABRSM exam syllabuses, with the possibility of inclusion in future syllabuses and publications
- becoming part of a community of emerging composers who can share their musical ideas and experiences together in an inclusive and creative environment

The activities will be spread throughout the six-month programme so composers should be able to engage alongside other commitments and work opportunities.

Are there costs involved?

There is no cost to take part in the programme, and each composer will receive a bursary of £750 to support their engagement with the programme activities over the six-month period. ABRSM will also reimburse reasonable travel expenses for face-to-face activities.

How do I apply?

To apply, please ensure that you meet the eligibility criteria and that you can commit to the programme as outlined in the Programme Schedule below. Please take any other commitments you may have into consideration when applying.

The timeline for applications is as follows:

Tue 5 May: applications open

Fri 5 June: applications close at 9am

Application review and shortlisting will take place in June. It is anticipated that successful applicants will be invited to an informal interview via Zoom/Teams the week beginning 22 June prior to formal offers being made. We aim to notify applicants of the outcomes by early July.

Applications should be made via The Ivors Academy (via [this application form](#)) no later than **9am on Friday 5 June 2026**. Please note that we will not be able to accommodate applications after this.

In the application you will be asked to provide details:

- About your application and why you should be considered for this opportunity
- About yourself so that we can get in contact to confirm the outcome of your application
- Declarations that you agree with the privacy policy and code of conduct

Once submitted applications will be reviewed by a Selection Panel with representation from ABRSM, The Ivors Academy (current composer members) and a composer from a previous cohort.

Programme Schedule

The six-month programme will run from September 2026 to February 2027, as follows:

| When | Where | What |
|------------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Thu 10 Sept 2026 2pm - 3.30pm | Online | <p>Online intro session</p> <p><i>This session will kick off the programme and composers will meet each other and the programme mentors, as well as key colleagues from ABRSM. We'll spend some time getting to know each other and sharing some of our music ahead of the first day at ABRSM the following week.</i></p> |
| Wed 16 Sep 2026 9.30am - 4.30pm | ABRSM office | <p>Getting to know ABRSM</p> <p><i>A day with colleagues and teams from across ABRSM, taking a deep dive into how ABRSM commissions and selects music for exam syllabuses and publications.</i></p> <p><i>We will also set Compositional Task 1, which will relate to an ABRSM syllabus.</i></p> |
| Mon 21 Sep 2026 12pm - 1.30pm | Online | <p>Meet a graduate programme mentee!</p> <p><i>Composer Sarah Baker will share her thoughts and experiences as a member of our 2025/26 UK cohort</i></p> |
| Sep/Oct 2026 | Online | <p>1:1 mentoring sessions with Sarah Watts</p> <p><i>Sarah will be in touch with composers individually to arrange 1:1s. Composers can use these sessions to discuss anything relating to the programme, the briefs they're working on or their careers more broadly.</i></p> |
| Sep - Nov 2026 (various dates) | | <p>Getting to know our partners</p> <p><i>We work with a range of partner organisations on the composer programme, and composers will choose to work with one of these partners to write a piece of music from a specific brief (Compositional Task 2).</i></p> |

| When | Where | What |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Wed 7 Oct 2026 1pm - 2.30pm | Online | <p>Simultaneous Learning</p> <p><i>This will be a joint session with our 2026 Asia cohort, led by world-renowned composer and author Paul Harris. Paul will talk about his Simultaneous Learning approach to teaching and how this may inform how composers write for their students</i></p> |
| Wed 14 Oct 2026 11am - 12.30pm | Online | <p>Examining: understanding the ABRSM marking criteria</p> <p><i>Led by members of ABRSM's Chief Examiner Group, this session will look at the role of examiner, explore the ABRSM marking criteria and give thought to how understanding these can inform composers' approaches to writing music suitable for exam syllabuses</i></p> |
| Early Nov 2026 | Online | <p>1:1 feedback: Compositional Task 1</p> <p><i>The mentor for this task will be in touch with composers individually to arrange 1:1s, specifically to review and discuss initial submissions relating to Compositional Task 1.</i></p> |
| Nov 2026 | Various exam venues | <p>Half day ABRSM exam observation</p> <p><i>We will be in touch with composers individually to confirm venue and timings.</i></p> |
| Tue 24 Nov 2026 9.30am - 4pm | ABRSM office | <p>Filming and music workshop ABRSM</p> <p><i>In the morning we will do some filming relating to the programme, which will include some content for social media, as well as more conversational pieces.</i></p> <p><i>In the afternoon we will workshop the pieces that composers have been working on so far, providing an opportunity to share, learn and feedback together.</i></p> <p><i>At the end of the day we will set Compositional Task 3, which will relate to an ABRSM syllabus.</i></p> |

| <i>When</i> | <i>Where</i> | <i>What</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|---|
| Fri 4 Dec 2026 2pm - 4pm | Online | Ivors Academy live webinar: composing for education <i>Live discussion with ABRSM and the composer cohort, with an invited audience of Ivors Academy members</i> |
| Late Nov 2026 - Early Jan 2027 | Online | 1:1 feedback: Compositional Task 2 (partner organisations) <i>Mentors will be in touch with composers individually to arrange 1:1s, specifically to review and discuss initial submissions relating to Compositional Task 2. The timing of this will depend on the task and when the brief was set.</i> |
| Jan 2027 | Online | 1:1 mentoring sessions with Sarah Watts <i>Sarah will be in touch with composers individually to arrange 1:1s. Composers can use these sessions to discuss anything relating to the programme, the briefs they're working on or their careers more broadly.</i> |
| Jan 2027 | Online | 1:1 feedback: Compositional Task 3 <i>The mentor for this task will be in touch with composers individually to arrange 1:1s, specifically to review and discuss initial submissions relating to Compositional Task 3.</i> |
| Fri 26 Feb 2027 (afternoon) | ABRSM office | Celebration event: musical performances, congratulatory speeches, drinks and nibbles, networking opportunities |

About ABRSM and its partners

Inspired by the joy of music, **ABRSM** provides pathways, assessments and resources for music learners and teachers, in partnership with the Royal Academy of Music, Royal College of Music, Royal Northern College of Music and Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. As a music charity, ABRSM makes significant investments into music education around the world through a programme of scholarships, sponsorship, research and advocacy, and supports the next generation of musicians through an evolving suite of development programmes.

Black Lives in Music addresses the current inequality of opportunity for Black, Asian and Ethnically Diverse people aspiring to be artists or professionals in the Jazz and Classical music industry.

The Ivors Academy is a passionate community of songwriters and composers committed to campaigning for positive change, celebrating the highest achievements and providing music creators with practical support to develop their careers and craft while successfully navigating the industry.

