



BBC Commissioning Guidelines for Media Composers

This document outlines how the BBC commissions original music and aims to ensure transparency, fairness, and clarity for all composers working with the organisation.

These guidelines have been collectively agreed with the BBC, BBC Studios Music Publishing, The Ivor's Academy and the Musicians' Union. If you have any queries, please contact BBC Head of Music Rights at musicrights@bbc.co.uk

1. Commissioning Responsibilities

BBC Music Rights manages all negotiations and contracts for music commissioned for BBC in-house productions. Production teams are asked to contact Music Rights as early as possible so that terms can be agreed. In the best interests of the composers and production, contracts should be issued before any work begins.

Whilst independent production companies are responsible for composer contracting when making content for the BBC, and the BBC has no oversight over any aspect of these deals, the BBC will share these commissioning guidelines with independent production companies. Equally, when BBC Studios are acting as a producer for a third party, BBC Music Rights are not involved in the composer contracting process.

2. Selection of Composers

The decision regarding which composer to engage is entirely the responsibility of individual programme makers. BBC Music Rights advise on a diverse range of composers when requested, drawing on its knowledge of media composers.

The BBC remains committed to improving diversity, creating an inclusive culture and works with The Ivors Academy and Musicians' Union to widen access for underrepresented groups. Within the contracting process composers are actively encouraged to provide their diversity characteristics via the Diamond online system to enable the BBC to share more accurate diversity data.

3. Pitching and Fair Consideration

Where there is a pitching process, the BBC will provide a clear musical or stylistic brief and will state the number of candidates involved. All submissions will be given equal and fair consideration. Music Rights also works with production teams to ensure expectations around pitching costs remain reasonable. Any music created for a pitch but not selected remains the property of the composer.

4. Fees and Contracting

BBC Music Rights usually negotiates a package deal fee that is representative of the work and covers all elements and reasonable costs required to create the final sound master, including composition, scoring, orchestration, copying, studio costs, and electronic realisation. Additional musicians or vocalists are contracted in line with the appropriate BBC MU terms. When composers perform on their own scores, the electronic realisation fee is included in the package. The BBC commits to negotiating in good faith to reach terms acceptable to both parties.

Composers should not be concerned that questioning proposed terms might affect their creative opportunities. Production departments focus on the artistic needs of the programme, while Music Rights focuses only on ensuring fair and consistent contractual agreements.

5. Rights and Royalties

The BBC owns the rights to the master recording created for the programme.

The composer is the first owner of all rights in the music they have written. The BBC acquires the rights to sync and broadcast the compositions for all purposes in connection with the programme in all media in perpetuity worldwide. This means the composer will receive their broadcast/making available royalties via PRS in the UK, and affiliated PROs throughout the world as appropriate for international programme sales. Likewise, the composer will receive broadcast mechanical royalties wherever such income is available under collective agreements negotiated by recognised collecting societies in relevant territories.

6. BBC Music Publishing

BBC Music Publishing supports production budgets and the creation of new commissioned music. Composers creating music for BBC idents or for programmes produced by or invested in by BBC Studios are required to enter into a publishing agreement with BBC Music Publishing. Agreements are negotiated individually, but for clarity all deals are non-exclusive, subject to a minimum 50/50 split across Mechanical and Performance royalties in the composer's favour – i.e. the BBC takes no interest in the so-called composer's share of performing rights - and supported by a dedicated team with global administration, incoming tracking and quarterly accounting. Secondary exploitation may be pursued through BBC Production Music or the BBC Studios R&M licensing team.

7. Payment and Delivery

Payment schedules vary by contract in discussion with the composer, taking music recording expenses into consideration amongst other things. An initial payment will always be made on signature of contract. Full payment is made once all services are completed and the sound masters have been delivered and accepted.

Composers must upload all compositions and metadata to Soundmouse or another BBC-approved auto-recognition database to ensure accurate tracking and rights management. This enables smooth and accurate music reporting and royalty payments back to the composer. Soundmouse offer support in this process at <https://soundmouse.com/bbc/>

8. Soundtrack Releases

The BBC does not automatically release original soundtrack recordings. However, BBC Studios are open to discussing further uses of the music with the composer on a case-by-case basis and permission will not be unreasonably withheld.

For more information on the process please email suzi.scott@bbc.com

9. Additional Music Writers/Composers

The BBC expects composers to be fully transparent with the BBC about who will compose the music for its productions. All contributing composers should be named on the contract, credited on cue sheets and also on screen where applicable. Where the BBC agrees that Additional Music Writers are required on a project, contract addendums will be negotiated and issued as appropriate with all parties concerned. ,

10. Generative AI (GAI)

The BBC has a responsibility to consider not only the rights of creators and artists in its use of AI but also not to jeopardise the role that they play in the wider creative community. Any use of AI must consider the rights of talent and contributors, while also allowing for the creative use of new forms of expression

The current approach to GAI by the BBC and BBC Studios can be found here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/policies/approach-to-ai/#ourapproachtousingaireresponsibly>. This incorporates the BBC's commitment to rights of creators, artists, contributors and rights holders when using AI and prioritise human creativity whilst balancing its duty under the Charter to innovate and develop new technologies.

The BBC recognises that this is a fast moving and developing new technology and will consult on any future changes to its approach to GAI with The Ivors Academy and Musicians' Union.

For information the guidelines around the use of GAI for independent producers making content for the BBC can be found here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/guidance/use-of-artificial-intelligence#useofaibythirdpartiesincludingindependentproducers>

11. Supporting Freelancers at the BBC

The BBC is committed to building a culture where everyone, regardless of contract type, background, or role, feels respected, supported, and empowered.

Freelancers are supported by the BBC through the following resources and schemes:

- [‘Call It Out’ Campaign](#): Promoting positive behaviour and informal resolution.
- Respect at Work Helpline: A single point of contact for seeking support and guidance, available to both employees and freelancers. This is provided by Care First, [online](#) (username: bbcmemployed, password: line1234) or by calling 0800 014 7154 (or +44 1452623367 outside of the UK).
- Composers are able to speak to their booker, BBC contact, or a senior leader in the BBC Music Rights department regarding any support they might need
- Independent Party productions are required by the BBC to meet the industry-wide [CIISA Standards](#) of expected behaviour.

For more information about what to expect when working as a freelancer at the BBC, including details about our workplace culture, values and how to raise any concerns please refer here: <https://www.bbc.com/freelancers/supportingfreelancers>