

Auditioning for NCO 2026

Welcome to our Auditions Handbook where you'll find everything you need to know about auditioning for one of our seven NCO orchestras in 2026!

Please make sure you have explored this handbook thoroughly before you start preparing for your audition.

Whether you're new to NCO or you've been a member before, we would love to receive your audition. Everyone auditions afresh each year.

We are interested to hear from all young musicians, whatever their background, schooling or circumstances. We are particularly keen to increase representation in our orchestras from groups currently under-represented in classical music and to increase the number of children from state schools.

Auditions will be open from Wednesday 14th May to the deadline at 9am on Thursday 31st July 2025.

We are here for any questions you may have. If we can support you by providing this information in an alternative format or by giving you additional information relevant to you and your child personally, please let us know by emailing auditions@nco.org.uk

Contents

Page 2	About NCO
Page 3–4	What Does NCO 2026 Involve?
Page 5-6	Why Join NCO?
Page 6-9	Who Can Join NCO 2026?
Page 10-11	What Does it Cost to be Part of NCO?
Page 11-15	How to Audition for NCO 2026
Page 15	Contact Us and Timeline

About NCO



At NCO, our purpose is to champion the life-changing power of music.

We believe no dream is too big.

We believe orchestral music shapes skills and hearts.

We believe everyone has their own brilliance.

And we believe in the power of coming together.

Nearly 2000 children aged 8-14 connect with National Children's Orchestras each year through:

- auditioned **Orchestral Weeks** and Weekends,
- non-auditioned workshops
- activities with schools, music education hubs and other partner organisations
- free tickets to concerts

We empower children to uncover the joy of orchestral music, unleash their creativity, realise their ambitions and embrace a future filled with endless possibilities.

We use the power of music to create supportive communities that enrich lives. The confidence, resilience and teamwork learned through music become skills for life, wherever each young musician's journey takes them.

Play together. Be unstoppable.

What Does NCO 2026 Involve?

All auditioned NCO activities include world class in-person orchestral coaching with incredible tutors, guest artists and conductors, as well as access to our online activities and resources.

If you audition for NCO 2026 you will be auditioning to join orchestras who either meet for **Orchestral Weeks** or **Orchestral Weekends**. You can read more about each option on the next two pages.

NB If a young musician is offered and accepts a place in NCO 2026, they and their parent/carer make a commitment that the young musician will **attend in full the activities for their orchestra – that's either two Orchestral Weeks or two Orchestral Weekends in 2026.**

Orchestral Weeks

If you've been in NCO before, these orchestras were previously called our National Orchestras.

We have three age-banded symphony orchestras that meet for two **residential orchestral weeks** in the year – one week in the spring (April) school holidays and one in the summer (July or August) school holidays, leading to a concert at the end. As well as rehearsals and sectionals, members enjoy recreation and social activities, creative workshops and wellbeing sessions.



The three age-banded orchestras are based on the age they will be on the 31st of August of the year in which they audition for NCO, and young musicians come from across the United Kingdom.

The orchestra made up of our eldest members (those aged 13 on 31st August 2025) also meet up for a non-residential weekend in November/December, leading to a public performance.

Watch **A Day in the Life: NCO Orchestral Weeks**

(previously the 'National programme') on YouTube by clicking the image.

Spring residentials 2026

For those aged 11 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 12 Orchestra):

Sat 4th April – Sat 11th April 2026 residential at Shrewsbury School and final concert at Shrewsbury School.

For those aged 12 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 13 Orchestra):

Sat 28th or Sun 29th March – Sat 4th or Sun 5th April 2026, locations to be confirmed.

For those aged 13 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 14* Orchestra):

Sun 5th April – Sun 12th April 2026 residential at Sherborne Girls' School, Dorset and final concert at Bristol Beacon.

Summer residentials 2026

For those aged 11 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 12 Orchestra):

Sun 2nd August – Sat 8th August 2026 residential at Sherborne Girls' School, Dorset and final concert at Portsmouth Guildhall

For those aged 12 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 13 Orchestra):

Sun 26th July – Sun 2nd August 2026 residential at Sherborne Girls' School, Dorset and final concert at Bristol Beacon

For those aged 13 as of 31st August 2025 (Under 14* Orchestra):

Sat 25th July – Sat 1st August 2026 residential at Shrewsbury School and final concert at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall

If you've been in NCO before, the Under 14 Orchestra was previously called the Main Orchestra.

Orchestral Weekends

If you've been in NCO before, these orchestras were previously called our Projects Orchestras.

There are four orchestras where young musicians come together for two **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** – one weekend in the spring (February or March) and one in the summer (June). The weekends involve non-residential, daytime, orchestral activities bringing together musicians of mixed ages (8-14) and ability and currently take place in the North West, the Midlands and at two venues in London.

Each weekend has a musical theme, and the programme includes a range of well-known music, new discoveries and new music written specifically for the young musicians. Guest artists (previously including Jess Gillam, Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Nate Holder) play alongside young musicians.

Watch **A Day in the Life: NCO Orchestral Weekends** (previously the 'Projects programme') on YouTube by clicking the image.



Spring Orchestral Weekends 2026

NCO London Orchestras Sat 7th & Sun 8th March 2026 Venues tbc

NCO North Orchestra Sat 28th February & Sun 1st March 2026 at Bolton School

NCO Midlands Orchestra Sat 28th Feb & Sun 1st March 2026 at Ruddock Performing Arts, Birmingham

Summer Orchestral Weekends 2026

NCO London Orchestras Sat 6th & Sun 7th June 2026 Venues tbc

NCO North Orchestra Sat 13th & Sun 14th June 2026 Venue in Bolton or Manchester tbc

NCO Midlands Orchestra Sat 13th & Sun 14th June 2026 at Ruddock Performing Arts, Birmingham

As these weekends are non-residential, accommodation is **not** provided between the Saturday and Sunday.

All orchestras are enriched by our online resources, including events, resources and opportunities available during the membership year. Tutor welcome videos and online orchestra meet ups help young musicians prepare musically and socially for in-person activities and build long lasting friendships; whilst wellbeing resources, inspiring webinars and creative content expand their musicality and allow health and happiness to go hand in hand with musical excellence.

Why Join NCO?

For the children who are Members of NCO there are lots of opportunities:

- to be part of one of seven fantastic NCO orchestras
- to develop their playing and musicality
- to celebrate the joy of making music with others
- to make lifelong friends
- to work with incredible tutors, artists and conductors
- to discover their creativity
- to play a varied repertoire of music which is both challenging and fun, including themed programmes and creative activity
- to learn vital physical and mental wellbeing skills
- to find their voices and be heard

NCO has the great privilege of getting to know the musicians of tomorrow – both those who go on to become professional musicians and those who will take the enormous benefits of musical learning into every aspect of their lives beyond music.

NCO provides not only the highest quality in-person orchestral coaching but expands and enriches musical learning through its online offering, with events and resources including tutor videos, guest artist webinars and opportunities to build wellbeing skills and be creative.

What do young musicians who've been in NCO before say?

“Being part of National Children’s Orchestras has been like finding my people, my community — the place where I truly belong. I feel so privileged and honoured to have had the opportunity to be part of it all.” *Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks, 2024*

“It’s the real thing. It’s like taking your child and enabling them to access a future that without NCO would be something existing in dreams, if at all.” *Parent of a Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks, 2024*

“The last three years of NCO have been, quite frankly, the best times in his life. He has grown up, has developed musically, gained an increased sense of responsibility and made friendships that are way beyond special, ones that I’m confident will last forever. All through being in NCO.” *Parent of a Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks, 2024*

“NCO is the greatest orchestra of all time, you get to make new friends, create your own music and have the time of your life.” *Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks, 2024*

“Before my first NCO activity I had never even considered orchestra and didn’t know how awesome it could be! And now my music world has just opened entirely.” *Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks, 2024*

“NCO has given her immense confidence. Without the financial assistance it would not be possible for us to afford the fees for her to attend the NCO, even though we know she has much potential as a musician” *Parent of a Young Musician on Orchestral Weeks 2024*

“Everyone is so friendly at NCO! I want to play more orchestra music.” *Young Musician on Orchestral Weekends 2024*

“I think NCO was really creative. This is because I found lots of new ways to practise the music I’m learning. The new pieces of music were also really creative and fun.”

Young Musician on Orchestral Weekends 2024

“NCO’s THE place to be! You make a lot of friends, music, and more! My other favourite thing about NCO is that the conductors are very funny and kind.” **Young Musician on Orchestral Weekends 2024**

“The NCO Support Manager was fantastically understanding. I don’t know what happened while he was there, but we watched a happy little boy perform and he was so proud of himself afterwards – a different boy came home that day. Being able to be a part of NCO gave my son such confidence and an amazing sense of achievement, and he proudly wears his NCO hoodie every chance he gets.”

Parent of a Young Musician on Orchestral Weekends 2024

“My two sons were noticeably calmer and happier after a weekend of music! We talked in the car about how they had used a different part of their brain all weekend and you could really see it in their behaviour. We have a saying in our house - music is more important than maths!”

Parent of a Young Musician on Orchestral Weekends 2024

Who Can Join NCO 2026?

Everyone auditions for a place in our auditioned orchestras each year – players that have been an NCO member previously and players who are new to NCO, including those who may never have played in an orchestra before. This makes it fair for all young musicians interested in joining NCO.

It is **free to audition**, and auditions are submitted via a pre-recorded video.

We welcome auditions for NCO 2026 from young musicians who:

- are aged 8-13 years old (as of 31st August 2025) **and**
- play an orchestral instrument to the appropriate standard **and**
- are British citizens or are living/studying in the UK (please check with us if you are unsure)

Orchestral instruments are considered to be: Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion, Harp, Violin, Viola, Cello or Double Bass.

Depending on your child’s age and playing experience, they will be eligible to audition for our residential Orchestral Weeks, our non-residential **Orchestral Weekends** or to be considered for either.

Children do not need to have taken any formal grade exams to be part of NCO, because offers of membership are based on their playing and musicality in their audition video. However, in order for your child to have the best possible time at NCO, we recommend that they are able to play at a certain level and so we offer age band and grade guidance for each type of orchestra. We are looking for children at all levels in the bands listed. If you are not sure of their approximate grade standard, your child’s instrumental teacher may be able to help.

Please look at the table on the following page before applying. You will be asked in the Audition Application form to tell us which type of orchestral activity your child is auditioning for. A couple of things to note:

- If your child is applying for the orchestras who meet for **residential Orchestral Weeks** and they play **violin or cello**, you’ll notice that they will need to record orchestral excerpts as well as their main pieces. This is because we have high numbers of applications from violinists and cellists, and excerpts help us with the selection process.
- Players who apply for our orchestras who meet for **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** are mixed ability, with a wide range of players. In 2025 this has included many playing at the entry grades of 3/4, many at the higher grades of 7/8 and many in-between! We are so excited to hear young musicians play and to shape the programme according to those who audition. We create parts of different

difficulties so everyone can have a meaningful experience that is appropriate to them. The opportunities are exciting here for all players – including peer-to-peer learning and inspiration, building strong orchestral and collaborative players.

- If your child would like to audition on more than one instrument, please complete a separate application form for each instrument, with entirely separate audition recordings. Please note that should your child be offered a place, a membership offer will only be given for one instrument in one orchestra.

	NCO RESIDENTIAL ORCHESTRAS ORCHESTRAL WEEKS	NCO NON-RESIDENTIAL ORCHESTRAS ORCHESTRAL WEEKENDS
	<p>Membership includes taking part in two week-long residencies. One is in the spring (March/April) and one is in the summer (July/Aug) holidays.</p> <p><i>Audition requirement – two pieces via video audition plus orchestral excerpts if you play violin or cello</i></p>	<p>Membership includes taking part in two daytime, non-residential Orchestral Weekends. One is in Feb/March and one is in June.</p> <p><i>Audition requirement – two pieces via video audition</i></p>
Aged 8, 9 or 10 as of 31 st August 2025	Orchestral Weeks are not available for this age range.	<p>Grade 3+ for: Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion (check instrument notes), Lever/Pedal Harp, Viola, Double Bass</p> <p>Grade 4+ for: Flute, Violin, Cello</p>
Aged 11 as of 31 st August 2025	Grades 4 - 8+	<p>Grade 3+ for: Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion (check instrument notes), Lever/Pedal Harp, Viola, Double Bass</p> <p>Grade 4+ for: Flute, Violin, Cello</p>
Aged 12 as of 31 st August 2025	Grades 5 - 8+	<p>Grade 3+ for: Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion (check instrument notes), Lever/Pedal Harp, Viola, Double Bass</p> <p>Grade 4+ for: Flute, Violin, Cello</p>
Aged 13 as of 31 st August 2025	Grade 6 - 8+	<p>Grade 3+ for: Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon, French Horn, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone, Tuba, Percussion (check instrument notes), Lever/Pedal Harp, Viola, Double Bass</p> <p>Grade 4+ for: Flute, Violin, Cello</p>

Notes for specific instruments

Depending on which type of activity (residential **Orchestral Weeks** or non-residential **Orchestral Weekends**) that you would like to audition for at NCO, there may be some different guidance depending on your instrument. This is because of the music that is played at the different activities, so that we know that young musicians will be comfortable and confident taking part in those activities.

BASSOON

To take part in our **residential Orchestral Weeks**, bassoonists need to play bassoons in C, not transposing tenorboons or mini bassoons (in F or G). You can still audition for **Orchestral Weeks** on a tenoroon/mini bassoon as long as you are happy to commit to playing a full-size bassoon from February 2026.

Bassoonists can apply to take part in our **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** on a tenoroon, mini bassoon or bassoon.

CELLO

Cellists auditioning to take part in our **residential Orchestral Weeks** should be able to read the tenor clef fluently.

Cellists auditioning to take part in our **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** should have some familiarity with tenor clef.

If you are aged 11-13 on 31st August 2025 and are auditioning for the **residential Orchestral Weeks**, don't forget to prepare your orchestral excerpt(s).

CORNET

Cornet players are welcome to audition for our **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** but it's not possible to audition on cornet for our **residential Orchestral Weeks**.

FRENCH HORN

If you're auditioning on French horn for our **residential Orchestral Weeks**, it's worth being aware that you may need to do some transposition as part of your playing at NCO. We prefer older players to have some familiarity with transposition, and you may need to ask your teacher for help with F and E flat in preparation for NCO activity, but it's not essential for your audition.

HARP

If you are a harpist auditioning for the **residential Orchestral Weeks** you need to be playing on a pedal harp.

If you are a harpist auditioning for the **non-residential Orchestral Weekends**, you can be playing on a lever harp or a pedal harp and it's OK if you change from lever to pedal between your audition and the first NCO activity.

PERCUSSION

Percussionists auditioning should be able to read musical notation.

We ask percussionists auditioning for the **residential Orchestral Weeks** to prepare two contrasting pieces on different orchestral percussion instruments – one piece on a tuned instrument and one on a snare drum.

Percussionists auditioning for the **non-residential Orchestral Weekends** can perform on two different orchestral instruments or can prepare one piece on drum kit and one on snare/another orchestral percussion instrument.

If you would like to talk to us about this before preparing your pieces, please email auditions@nco.org.uk

We realise that percussionists may have to film their auditions in different spaces to access all the instruments required or may have to move the camera or instruments into different positions to get yourself and the instruments in full view. Because of these logistics, we allow percussionists only to edit together different videos, or press pause in between pieces to rearrange your instruments and set-up or move

locations. If you would like to talk to us about any of the above, including difficulty accessing a space or instruments to record your audition please don't hesitate to contact us at auditions@nco.org.uk

TROMBONE

Trombonists auditioning for the **residential** **Orchestral Weeks** should be able to read tenor clef fluently.

Trombonists auditioning for the **non-residential** **Orchestral Weekends** can audition whether they read bass or treble clef.

You can audition on Tenor or Bass Trombone.

TUBA

Tuba players auditioning for the **residential** **Orchestral Weeks**, should be able to read bass clef fluently.

Tuba players auditioning for the **non-residential** **Orchestral Weeks** can audition whether they read bass or treble clef.

TRUMPET

Trumpeters may come across transposition at NCO; it is a good idea to practise some parts in A and C with your teacher.

VIOLIN

If you are aged 11-13 on 31st August 2025 and are auditioning for the **residential** **Orchestral Weeks**, don't forget to prepare your orchestral excerpt(s).

VIOLA

Viola players auditioning for the **residential** **Orchestral Weeks** should be able to read the treble clef fluently.

For viola players auditioning for **non-residential** **Orchestral Weekends**, we prefer them to have some familiarity with treble clef.

What Does it Cost to be part of NCO?

To take part in NCO there are membership fees as outlined below. We are pleased to offer financial support to help ensure everyone who is offered a place has the opportunity to take part.

Orchestral Week fees

The membership fee to take part in **two Orchestral Weeks in 2026** is:

- **Under 12 and Under 13 Orchestras** (those aged 11 or 12 as of 31st August 2025) £2100
- **Under 14 Orchestra** (those aged 13 as of 31st August 2025*) £2300

*The fee difference is due to each residential being a day longer for this age group.

Orchestral Weekend fees

The membership fee to take part in **two Orchestral Weekends in 2026** is: £400

The true cost to NCO of providing a place in an NCO orchestra is more than double the fees above. NCO subsidises activities to keep fees as low as possible and works hard each year to raise the funds which cover the balance.

Financial Support

Our aim is that money doesn't create a barrier to a child hoping to take part in our activities. We want any young musician, no matter their background or circumstance, to have the opportunity to accept their offer of a place in NCO. It is possible to have all or part of your child's fees paid for you through our Financial Support programme.

NCO prioritises financial support for families:

- where the child is in state education **and/or**
- who are entirely based in the UK, with working parent/s (including single parents and/or those who are also receiving benefits to supplement their employment income, unless they are unable to do so on medical grounds/another exceptional reason).

NCO support is means-tested so once your child has been offered a place, we ask for a range of information and supporting documents from those who would like to make an application for support.

For **Orchestral Weeks**, NCO will consider providing financial support on a sliding scale (25% - 100%) to families with a gross household income less than c. £80,000.

For **Orchestral Weekends**, NCO will consider providing financial support (100% or 50%) to families with a gross household income less than c. £60,000. For **Orchestral Weekends** only, NCO will also prioritise families who are living a considerable distance from where activity is taking place, as well as being on a lower income.

Thank you in advance for your time in providing this detail and for your transparency – it really does help us to best consider your request. We will ask you for some information about:

- Your finances, including your gross annual income, dividends and company ownership, pension/s, savings and property ownership and any benefits or grants you receive
- Where your child goes to school, including whether they are receiving any bursaries or scholarships or are eligible for Free School Meals or Pupil Premium
- Your other dependants
- Whether you have applied for grants from other sources e.g. charities or your local authority (we recommend this)

- Any other circumstances which will affect your capacity to pay your child's membership fees

As a charity, NCO raises funds to provide financial support to young musicians each year. In a normal year, our Financial Support programme has the capacity to support around 10 - 15% of our members, depending on the funding level we have raised. There is no guarantee we will be able to offer support for every application we receive, even if you've received support from us before. We recommend that you apply to other funding sources alongside your NCO Financial Support application as we are expecting significant demand for support.

If you have any questions about Financial Support that you would like to ask before your child auditions for NCO, please email financialsupport@nco.org.uk and we will be happy to help.

How to Audition for NCO 2026 in 5 steps

Step 1: Tell us you are interested!

If you are interested in auditioning for NCO, it would be very helpful to us if you could let us know by completing this '[Expression of Interest](#)' form. This short form allows us to not only send you any audition reminders and updates we might have but also helps us to know if we are reaching children from different locations, backgrounds, who play different instruments and for both our residential and non-residential orchestras. This in turn can help us to focus our efforts spreading the word and to plan for the considerable number of staff we need for the next stage – adjudication and moderation of auditions.

Step 2: Read our video audition information

Please read through our video audition preparation and recording information before you start.

Everyone who auditions for NCO prepares a 'Video Audition'. If you play violin or cello and are applying to take part in residential **Orchestral Weeks, you will also need to prepare and record 'Orchestral Excerpts' in a separate video to your pieces.**

Many people get nervous about auditions, but there's no need to worry. All children are in the same boat and everyone is rooting for you. Also, as our auditions are by video, you can send us your best version!

Preparing for your Video Audition

Your Prepared pieces

- **Please prepare two pieces of music around 2-3 minutes each.**

Please note that you cannot submit portions of videos recorded for examinations, such as ABRSM Performance Exams. This is in breach of the terms and conditions of examination boards and can disqualify you from the exam the video was originally submitted for and from taking any future exams with that examination board.

- **Your pieces should contrast in speed and style** e.g. one fast and one slow, to show the range of your ability. It is fine for them to be extracts of longer pieces, but they should be no longer than five minutes each. It is not enough to play one longer piece with contrasting sections, please prepare two.
- Before you decide what to play, please read the notes for specific instruments in the 'Who Can Join NCO 2026' section earlier in this Handbook and bear in mind your whole recording (including your brief introduction as described in the Recording your Video section) **should not exceed 10 minutes in total.**
- When choosing your pieces, please think carefully about what you can play confidently. It's much better to play something you know really well, than to overstretch yourself with something new that might still need more practise!

- **You do not need to be accompanied for your prepared pieces.** You may have an accompanist if you choose to but there is no disadvantage to playing unaccompanied, so please think about what will make you feel most comfortable. **Recorded accompaniment is not permitted.**

Residential Orchestral Week applicants on Violin and Cello only – Orchestral Excerpts

- If you play violin or cello and are applying for the residential orchestras who meet for **Orchestral Weeks**, you will need to prepare and record 3 or 4 specified short orchestral excerpts in a separate video to your audition pieces. Orchestral excerpts are short passages from regular NCO repertoire designed to test certain qualities of your playing. They will help the audition adjudicators see how different players approach the same repertoire and make our audition process as fair as possible for these instruments where we receive a larger quantity of applications.
- It is important to practise them as much as your pieces as they are equally important.
- There are metronome markings/tempo indications on each excerpt – these are there simply as a guide – please play the excerpts at a speed that is comfortable for you and where you can get the greatest accuracy.
- We have also included a video to support your practice, with top tips from our NCO tutors and links to recordings of these excerpts on YouTube. Please watch and listen to both to help you in your preparation. These videos can be found on a link at the top of each excerpt.
- [You can find pdfs including the excerpts for each age group and instrument on our website.](#)

Top tips for your audition:

- We love to see that you're enjoying yourself and that you like making music! So, choose pieces that you enjoy performing and see how you can tell us a little bit of a story through your playing.
- We love to hear two contrasting pieces so that we can see the different ways that you can play. So please choose one that's fast and one that's slow – your teacher should be able to help you choose!

If you're a percussionist we want to see two different instruments and different styles of playing.

- Make sure you choose a piece that you can play really comfortably. For example, we'd rather hear a grade six piece you can play really well, than a grade seven piece that's still a little bit out of reach.
- Allow yourself to make a few mistakes! We know that when you are recording a video to send to us it's really hard to be happy sending off a few mistakes. But we ignore three or four mistakes in an audition – it's life and it happens to us all!
- **We really want you to do well so do your very best, have fun preparing your audition and we can't wait to see you play!**

Step 3: Record your Audition

How, where and when?

Don't worry if you've never done a video audition before, we have detailed instructions on how best to set up your video audition. All you need is a smart phone or camera with reasonable sound quality and a place to film your audition. You will need to read through our guidance, record your audition, upload your video to an **Unlisted YouTube link** and then submit the link to us in your application form.

If you don't have access to a smart phone or camera to record your audition, please contact us at auditions@nco.org.uk and we will be happy to help.

The date, place and timing for each audition is at the discretion of whoever is making the arrangements – it could be in your own home or where you have your instrumental music lessons for example.

What should my Audition Pieces video include?

At the start of your video, please introduce yourself briefly (around 30 seconds) by telling us:

- Your name, age and the pieces you are going to play **and**
- Tell us the answer to one of these two questions:
What excites you about making music in a group? or
What are your top 3 tunes (classical or not!)?

You can then pause the recording before you then record both of your pieces **in one take**. You may edit together your spoken introduction video and the video of you playing your two audition pieces if you need to take a moment to move to your instrument and set yourself up ready to play. **However, you should still play your two audition pieces in one take**. If you are preparing excerpts for the residential orchestras, they should be recorded and submitted as a separate video on the same form as your video audition. Please don't add any kind of video or audio editing/effects to your audition recording – it distracts us from hearing your playing.

What should my Orchestral Excerpts video include?

You only need to record additional orchestral excerpts if you play violin or cello and are applying for the residential orchestras who meet for **Orchestral Weeks**. These must be recorded and submitted as a **separate video** to your pieces, again **in one take**. [You can find the full guidance on excerpts on our website.](#)

You'll find everything you need to know about recording your audition video/s and uploading your video/s to an Unlisted YouTube link, explained in the pdf below:

[**NCO Instructions for Recording and Submitting your Video Audition 2025**](#)

Step 4: Checklist before starting the Audition Application form

Have you?	
Have you read thoroughly all the information in this Handbook about what you need to do for your audition, including the instrument specific notes?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Have you checked which activities you are eligible to apply for? And are you ready to say whether you are applying to take part in two residential Orchestral Weeks in 2026 or in two non-residential Orchestral Weekends in 2026 or are applying to be considered for either?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you recorded your two contrasting Audition Pieces (one fast and one slow) including your brief introduction?	<input type="checkbox"/>
If you are applying for the residential orchestras who meet for Orchestral Weeks , on Violin or Cello, have you recorded your Orchestral Excerpts?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you uploaded your recording/s to YouTube (Unlisted not Private) and have you got your link/s ready?	<input type="checkbox"/>

Step 5: Complete our Audition Application Form

Now that you have read through everything and finalised your child's recording, you can complete the Audition Application form.

The application form is where we will collect all the information we need to process your child's audition plus the very crucial video audition link/s!

You can complete the Audition Application Form at the link below:

[AUDITION APPLICATION FORM](#)

Are you making an audition application for more than one child?

If you are submitting audition applications for more than one child, you need to use a different primary parent/carer contact email address for each child so that their records don't merge in our system. Each contact email needs to be a parent/carer email address (**not a child's email**) and you will need to check it regularly as we will use it for communicating with you about your child's application.

What happens next?

Adjudication and Results

Your video will be adjudicated and then moderated by two NCO tutors and our official moderator. All footage will be held in accordance with Data Protection guidelines and will not be used for any other purpose.

Once decisions have been made, we will contact you by email. We aim to send out results for all auditions by email in the autumn term of 2025, from October onwards.

Please note, we do not give out results over the phone and our decision is final.

If offered a place in NCO 2026, in which orchestras will young musicians be placed?

If you are offered a place in one of our age-banded orchestras who meet for two residential **Orchestral Weeks** during the year, you will be placed in one of our three orchestras according to your age **as of 31st August 2025**.

If you are offered a place in one of our non-residential orchestras who meet for two **Orchestral Weekends** during the year, you will be placed in an orchestra in one of four locations. In order to create the best orchestral experience, we allocate places to create balanced orchestras in each of the four locations. Applicants who are successful in their audition for a non-residential orchestra will generally be allocated to the following locations based on where they live:

North: North West of England, North East of England, North Wales, Scotland, Yorkshire and the Humber

Midlands: South West of England; West Midlands; East Midlands; East of England; Mid, West & South Wales

London (x2 orchestras): Greater London, South East of England, Northern Ireland

If you decide you don't want to apply any more

Please note if you want to withdraw your application at any point, please email us to let us know so that we don't send you further auditions updates and so that we don't book tutors to adjudicate your audition. Letting us know as soon as possible can help us save valuable resources. Thank you.

Contact Us

We appreciate that there is a lot of information to take on board and we are here to help – if you have any questions or we can support you with making your application to NCO 2026, please don't hesitate to contact us at auditions@nco.org.uk

If you have a detailed enquiry and would like to speak to someone on the phone, please send details of your query by email and we will arrange a call back.

If we can support you by providing this information in an alternative format or by giving you additional information relevant to you and your child, please email auditions@nco.org.uk

Audition Timeline Overview

Date	Detail
Wednesday 14 th May 2025	Video Auditions for 2026 open
9am, Thursday 31 st July 2025	Deadline to submit your Audition Application form including your link to the Audition Pieces Video (and Excerpts Video if you are applying for the residential Orchestral Weeks on violin or cello only)
October/November 2025	Audition Results emails are sent out. Once you have received an offer, you have 2 weeks to accept including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• paying in full or paying your first instalment• OR completing an application for Financial Support