# Examiners' Report
# Principal Examiner Feedback

# Summer 2019

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music Technology (8MT0)
Paper 02: Technology-based composition

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Submissions for the second year of this assessment yielded, as last year, a range of technologically musical responses.

The marks ranged from 14-53 with most candidates appearing between the 20-45 region. Candidates and centres who had studied the specification and mark scheme in detail yielded higher marks overall. The splitting of synthesis, sampling and creative FX in to separate assessment grids ensured candidates demonstrated musical uses of these technologies throughout their work. Candidates who did not explore all of the three categories in their work therefore tended to score lower as a result.

The provision of the samples as part of the task ensured excellent scaffolding for the composing process. Sample 1 provided candidates with a narrow range of pitches and note durations from which to manipulate and incorporate within their piece. Sample 2 provided candidates with one of the most famous samples of all time, the breakbeat from the Led Zeppelin song 'When the Levee Breaks'. The breakbeat provided candidates with a range of individual kick, snare and hi-hat 'one shot' samples, as well as the reverb/slap delay on the drum kit, from which to manipulate, explore and incorporate in to their work.

It was pleasing to hear that teachers had read last years examiners report and had guided candidates to explore more suitable styles as well as teaching more creative synthesis, sampling and FX techniques.

**Administration**

Disks: Thank you to the vast majority of centres who read the Administrative Support Guide (ASG) on the Pearson website and ensured that all candidates were submitted correctly. Fewer centres had to be contacted about missing Data disks containing proprietary software files.

Logbooks: Thank you to teachers who did not encourage their students to submit additional screenshots, written accounts and/or diaries with the log books. The space in the log book is more than enough to provide examiners with the information that they need in order to mark the work. Higher end candidates had submitted accurate information about the synthesis creation, sampling techniques and creative FX applied to the main parts in their work. Lower end candidates tended to either write very little or wrote a lot without providing any relevant information.

**Assessment Grid 1: Synthesis**

At the lower end of the cohort, candidates used minimal synthesis timbres in their work. When they were included they tended to be pre-set timbres with minimal/no editing. They also appeared as sporadic, fragmented token gestures, rather than being features of the work. Higher end candidates had used a good range of synthesis techniques and created most of the timbres themselves using subtractive soft-synths. Common techniques used were: Oscillators octaves apart and blended, sometimes with some subtle de-tuning. Filtering using a LPF with some cut-off movement. Attention to long/short attack and decay/sustain settings were used. Envelope Generators on Filters were popular at the higher end as were creative uses of LFO's. Stylistically appropriate synthesis techniques in styles such as EDM, Drum 'n' Bass and Dubstep, were clearly researched in some work, which not only showed a clear demonstration of synthesis knowledge, but also demonstrated stylistic awareness and application. Candidates who tried to fit in as many synthesis techniques as possible without employing them in a musical fashion only scored 4/5 marks in this area due to the misjudgement of their musical use.

**Assessment Grid 2: Sampling**

Candidates were assessed on their sampling techniques here, not only on the provided samples, but also on any other samples that they have included themselves. Examiners were assessing techniques commonly found on both traditional hardware samplers and software samplers. Lower end candidates had explored minimal sampling techniques. Typically, sample 1 was cut-up and re-triggered, perhaps with some small tokens of pitch mapping. Sample 2 tended to simply be looped with the odd kick and snare cut out and re-triggered. Higher end candidates explored a variety of sampling techniques, mostly from the supplied samples, and included some or all of the following: Cutting up, re-triggering, stuttering, pitch mapping, filtering (commonly LPF) sometimes with variable resonance and automated, stretching, reversing, pitch bending.

As with synthesis, candidates who tried to fit in as many sampling techniques as possible without employing them in a musical fashion only scored 4/5 marks in this area due to the misjudgement of their musical use.

**Assessment Grid 3: Creative FX**
Any processes applied to the samples that cannot be found on a sampler were assessed here. Lower end candidates used very few creative FX and tended to limit themselves to reverb, delay and a little bit of distortion. Higher end candidates explored the plethora of creative FX a modern DAW can offer which could have included; creative and musical use of reverbs and delays, flange, phase, distortions, tremolo and chorus. Re-pitching the sample with flex-pitch / vocal transformer to create new melody and harmony was also popular, as was vocoding on the vocal sample. Side-chaining dynamic processors was also popular, however, it yielded mixed musical results.

Candidates who chose to use as many FX as they could, tended to yield poor musical results. There was often little care for the mix clarity of the FX being used, and more importantly, on the musical purpose that the effect produced within the piece.

**Assessment Grid 4: Editing of mix**
A well-balanced mix with all parts clear and evenly spread across the stereo field was required, as well as care and attention to EQ, compression and reverb use for mix purposes. A suitably strong signal to noise ratio was expected without the need for extreme loudness from 'mastering' processes. Lower end candidates tended to have a confused and inconsistent balance, often with muddy synths and uncontrolled dynamics in most parts. Higher end candidates produced carefully crafted mixes that had clearly been mixed on monitors with suitable EQ and compression decisions taken. They also contained a musical spread across the stereo field which enhanced the structure and texture of the work as and when necessary.

**Assessment Grid 5: Response to brief**
Students were assessed on two factors here: How well they had kept to the 2:30 time of the brief and how well they had incorporated the given samples in to their work. Lower end candidates tended to either sound the samples sporadically throughout the piece in an unmusical fashion or looped them, often throughout the whole piece. Higher end candidates transformed the given samples creating new musical ideas from them. Very high attaining candidates did this several times throughout the piece. However, it is important to note that whilst some candidates did attempt to transform the samples in to new musical ideas, some did not do so in a convincingly musical fashion. Some candidates tended to focus on creating new musical ideas out of just one of the samples, normally the vocal and tended to disregard the drum loop and sounding it in loop form in a small section of the song.

Teachers are reminded that the samples are there to assess the students' knowledge of technological technique and how they employ these in a musical setting, as well as providing scaffold and a starting point from which to begin their composition. They are a central part of the task.

**Assessment Grid 6: Style and coherence**
Examples of styles successfully worked in this year included: Grime, Drum 'n' Bass, Dubstep, Trap, EDM, Rock, Electroacoustic, Jazz, Funk, Reggae, Chill-out, House; and fusions of all the previously mentioned. Lower end candidates tended to have a confused style without any real sense of drive and an over-reliance on copy and paste with no musical developments of copy and pasted material. Higher end candidates were composing in a variety of different pastiche styles with varying moods/atmospheres created within each composition. Pieces written in naturally repetitive styles, such as Grime and Drum 'n' Bass, contained constant evolution of the textures used in order to maintain interest.  Higher end work also had a constant sense of drive, interest and momentum throughout, with the two-and-a-half-minute time limit feeling very short.

**Assessment Grids 7-11: Musical elements**
Melody, Harmony, Rhythm, Texture and Structure are all assessed for each candidate, with the highest three marks being carried forward to the composition mark total. This is the same as the legacy specification and facilitates work in different styles to be rewarded equally. Lower end compositions tended to be simplistic and functional in nature. There was often an over-reliance on copy and paste in most parts and no real attempt to sculpt contrasting textures to create a guided structure to the piece. Higher end candidates tended to score highly in all elements and utilised a lot of different musical techniques, devices, textures and structures to craft the composition. It is important to note that high end candidates all had a carefully crafted structure that neatly took in to account the 2:30 time limit of the task.