



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2022

Pearson Edexcel International GCE

Music Technology (8MT0) Paper 1

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AS Music Technology Component 1: 8MT0/01

Recording (Adapted) Report to Centres – June 2022

Due to restrictions placed on assessments because of the Covid-19 pandemic, candidates in the June 2022 exam series completed an adapted task for Component 1 (Recording).

Candidates were supplied with multitracks of acoustic guitar, vocals, bass and keyboard parts along with a guide track of “Without You” by The Kid LAROI and Miley Cyrus. The task was to match the processing and mixing in the guide track, using the audio provided by Pearson, to produce a final mix which recreated the guide track as closely as possible.

In order to successfully complete this task, candidate would have to draw on their listening skills to analyse the guide track for its use of EQ, stereo field, effects dynamic processing and balance. It was clear from both the final mixes presented for assessment and the information written in their logbooks, that most candidates had spent a good deal of time listening to and analysing the guide track. The task then required knowledge of their chosen DAW software in order to select and edit the plug-ins needed to recreate this processing. The supplied audio was unprocessed, dry and recorded with flat EQ and no dynamic processing. Also, multiple takes were supplied for most parts (apart from the keyboards). Therefore, candidates had to listen critically to all the supplied multitracks and decide which take was the most suitable, or (as most candidates did) comp the takes to create a ‘best performance’. Candidates were not allowed to add any additional audio or re-record any part: the final mix had to be created using only the audio supplied by Pearson. The style, length and musical arrangement of this track was very similar to what would normally be expected for an AS Recording. Therefore, although the approach was slightly different, the range of skills being assessed was analogous to a ‘normal’ year (with the obvious exception of capture, which was removed from the assessment for this exam series). Having said that, centres might take note of this approach to processing and mixing AS Recordings – listening and analysing a selection of example tracks to guide the way candidates produce their own work is good practice. Future candidates could learn a lot from this year’s assessment task in terms of how much time should be spent on processing and mixing. Capture is only one part of the mark scheme, but some candidates seem to dedicate a disproportionate amount of time to it. Centres might consider using this year’s assessment as teaching material in future years.

Logbooks were variable. Most candidates had used the digital template document supplied by Pearson, using screen shots to support the written work. Overall, this was successful, making it clear to the examiner what processing decisions had been made by the candidate. Centres are reminded that, although the logbook does not carry its own mark, it is used by the examiner alongside the audio to assess the candidates’ work. A

detailed and accurate logbook supports the marks awarded. Conversely, a logbook which is incomplete or lacking in detail can mean that the candidate's work is not fully credited.

As in previous years, all the work had to be the candidate's own individual work – collaborative working with other candidates was not permitted and teachers were not allowed to have input into the work.

Administration

This year was the first time AS Music Technology used online submission for NEAs. Whilst not without some teething troubles, all centres were able to successfully submit their candidates' work. Most centres met the May 15th deadline. It is essential that centres familiarise themselves with the information in the ASG, particularly in relation to the requirements to submission. Some centres supplied work in the wrong file format. Also, many centres did not follow the naming format for the files. This is particularly important to ensure the marks are awarded to the right candidate. In some cases, these administrative issues delayed the assessment of candidates' work. Centres are also reminded that online submissions are still required to be signed by both the candidate and the teacher (digital signatures are accepted). In most cases, the administrative mistakes encountered would have been avoided if centres made sure all the files were checked before uploading.

Assessment

AG2-4 are split into 3 columns – acoustic guitar, lead vocal and other parts. Examiners use this to assess the success of the work both as individual parts and in terms of how the parts work together – such as distribution of frequencies across the whole mix or consistency of how reverb has been applied. The underpinning question that was guiding assessment was 'How closely does this processing match the guide track?'

AG1: Capture

AG1 was not used for assessment in this series.

AG2: Processing of EQ

The guitar and vocals in the guide track had quite distinctive EQ; the multi-tracks provided by Pearson were recorded flat. This part of the assessment was successful in that many candidates showed evidence of having listened and analysed the guide track and had made an attempt to replicate the EQ. There was a range of responses with some candidates really capturing the feel of the guide track and, at the other end of the scale, candidates who were unsuccessful often by over exaggerating the features of the EQ. The most successful candidates had considered EQ shaping not only for each individual track, but also for the whole track, making sure that the full frequency range was covered across the parts without excessive exaggeration coming from two or more parts boosted at the same frequency.

AG3: Dynamic Processing

Again, the guide track had quite distinctive modern hard compression across the whole track. As with AG2 there was a lot of evidence (in the audio and the logbooks) that candidates had heard this in the guide track and were attempting to replicate it. On the whole candidates under compressed the audio, but there was a range of responses from no compression at all to those high-level candidates who crafted the compression very successfully. Candidates should make sure they fully understand all the controls of a compressor and how they affect each other. Many of the lesser successful submissions had only edited the compression ratio (often making it very high) but had not made any changes to the threshold level, attack or decay rate meaning the compressor was not having any discernible effect. Some candidates chose to use either the same compression settings across many parts, or to bus the compression. This was generally unsuccessful as it didn't take into account (for example) the very different dynamic ranges of the two singers. As with EQ, the most successful candidates considered how dynamic processing was used for individual parts and for the track as a whole to ensure consistency across the mix.

It should not be underestimated how important dynamic processing is to balance. Whilst these two areas are marked separately, poorly controlled dynamics will inevitably result in inconsistent balance.

AG4: Use of Effects

The guide track had a modern sound, with quite dry, tight reverb on the guitar and lead vocals, but with a longer, more washed effect on the backing vocals. In terms of the vocal parts, this provided a good challenge for the candidates, with some making successful

use of bussing to give their recordings a sense of coherence. Reverb should be considered one of the 'nuts and bolts' of modern recording processing, and early all candidates applied it with a good deal of control and subtlety to reproduce a similar sound to the guide track.

There was a vocal delay in the intro which produced a range of responses both in terms of the method of creating it and in the success of the response, making this quite a good challenge and creating range in the marks. Some candidates used a delay plug-in, with automation to stop it affecting the rest of the song; some chose to cut, copy, and paste audio from the vocal track onto a second track. Both of these methods were a valid solution to this challenge, and they both produced some excellent results. Common mistakes here were the timing of the delay and the balance between the lead vocal line and the delay, which was quite far back in the mix in the guide track.

Many candidates double tracked the lead vocals. In most cases this was quite successful and was given credit in AG4. Likewise, some candidates had applied pitch correction to the vocal tracks. Where the double tracking and/or pitch correction had been applied carefully and paying close attention to the guide, this was successful. Common mistakes included setting the pitch correction plug-in to the wrong key and poorly aligned double tracks sometimes resulting in some phasing between the vocal parts (This was often a result of attempting an ADT rather than making use of different vocal takes).

AG5: Balance and Blend

The guide track had nothing particularly unusual in the balance – it was focussed on the vocals and the guitar sitting on top of a 'bed' of synth/keys and bass parts, with the backing vocals and echo vocals 'floating' around it. Many candidates were able to replicate this quite well. Most candidates captured the 'essence' of the mix with only a few minor slips (often stemming from under compression affecting the way parts sat together – or rather, didn't sit together). Future candidates would do well to take note of this. The expectation for component 1 recordings is for a mix like this – focused on vocals over acoustic guitar, with the other parts supporting.

A small number of candidates omitted some parts from their mix (often backing vocal parts) or did not mute the guide track in their final bounce. Missing parts affected the mark in AG5 (see the mark scheme). In the case of the guide track not being muted, this was treated as 'additional audio' (note the instruction in the brief that 'You must not include '8MT001_Without_You_Guide_Track.wav' or any samples from it in your mix.') and the candidate received no marks in AG5 (and AG7). Candidates are strongly advised to always check their files before submission to avoid this kind of technical error which could have been easily fixed.

AG6: Use of Stereo

One of the reasons this track was chosen was because there were some interesting subtleties in the use of stereo, such as changes in the stereo width of the guitar. Unfortunately, very few candidates had attempted these changes. In general, most candidates had done very little with the stereo field; the majority had double tracked the guitar and panned left and right. However, there was more to the stereo in the guide than this and only a handful of the highest scoring candidates had really appreciated this. As well as the changes in stereo width of the guitar double track – which some candidates had automated very effectively – some of the backing vocals were spread across the stereo field (e.g., at Bar 28/1'35") and the echo vocals were panned slightly left. Candidates who had matched this were credited for their work. However, many candidates didn't pan much, and a surprising number panned quite differently to the guide, which would have not gained them marks in AG6.

AG7: Management of Noise, Distortion, Master Level and Audio Editing

There were a few things to be considered in this task. The guitar and vocal recordings had some unwanted noise on them, which some candidates successfully edited out either by cutting up the audio, or by making good use of noise gates. Most candidates were able to assemble the track from the supplied audio, comping where necessary to create a 'best take'. There were a small number of candidates who did not assemble the track with all the audio parts in the right place. Candidates are reminded of the importance of listening in this recording task. In most cases it was very clear when (for example) a vocal part had been displaced by a bar and should have been corrected.

It was pleasing to hear that nearly all candidates successfully bounced their track at a sufficiently high level, but without distortion. Also 'top ad tail' edits were generally well handled. The usual 2 seconds limit for silence at the start and end of the recording was applied and nearly all submissions fell within this limit.

The guide track had a fade out. This is something that is not often heard at AS level, but it should be considered. It is a valid way to end a song, it helps with meeting the maximum length requirement of 8MT0/01 and requires control over volume automation. Many candidates successfully automated the stereo out volume. However, there were a number of submissions which had no fade out. Also, there were a surprising number who created an uneven fade out by automating the volume on each track separately (and in some cases, not all the tracks). Volume automation is a fairly basic technique in a modern DAW and candidates should be familiar with how to apply it in a range of situations.

Overall, the majority of submissions showed an understanding of the requirements of the task and what they were aiming for. Some of the top candidates produced a final mix which was professional sounding and quite a close match to the guide track.

Logbooks

References have already been made above to the ways in which a well completed logbook can support the awarding of marks in this component. The most successful candidates gave detail and some explanation of their processing choices in their logbooks, which helped the examiner to award marks. Many candidates referred to the guide track in their logbook, explaining what they had heard and how they had edited their plug-ins to recreate the sound of the guide track. A requirement this year was to insert a screenshot of the DAW arrange screen. Not all candidates had done this. This screenshot was invaluable for the examiner: for example, to be able to see how the candidate had edited and comped the audio and how the fade out had been programmed. The requirement for a DAW screenshot is likely to stay in future exam series.

Also, with the return to a normal recording task in the 2022/2023 academic year, there will be the requirement to include photographs of the candidates' mic positioning. Candidates should consider what the photograph is communicating to the examiner. Good practice is to take the photo with the instrumentalist/singer in position so that the examiner can assess distance, angle, mic type etc. If more than one mic has been used for capture, try to take a photograph that shows them all. The candidate should take the photo at the time of recording (not 'stage' a photo on a later date) and the photo must be of their own work. Sharing of photos between candidates is a form of malpractice – all work submitted must be the candidate's own work.

Finally, a reminder that the logbook should be completed in full and should be considered an integral part of the recording component, not an 'add on' to be completed at the end of the process. Most centres made use of the electronic logbooks supplied by Pearson and these were much easier to read and allowed for much more detail to be included. A well detailed logbook which clearly communicates the candidate's intentions will help the examiner to award marks for the work that has been done.