



January 2018

**Level 3 National in Music
Technology
Unit 5. Music Technology In Context
(31811H)**

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What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade, at Distinction, Merit and Pass.

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the external assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark is for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in external assessments

Each external assessment we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each assessment, because then it would not take accessibility into account.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

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Unit 5. Music Technology In Context (31811H)

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3		
		P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	21	34	48

Introduction

As a mandatory unit within the specification, the external assessment for Unit 5 takes place twice a year, in May and January. January 2018 was the second series for this assessment.

The unit allows learners to develop the skills to analyse music contextually, by recognising the development and use of technology and how this has informed the development of music over time with reference to given musical material.

The external assessment is presented in two parts, Part A and Part B. In Part A learners are presented with musical material, a set task brief which contextualises the assessment and set task information which provides areas of research specific to the given material.

Learners are to undertake Part A over 3 hours. The learners should use this time to conduct research and study the given musical material. The learners should produce notes which will assist them in producing their response in Part B. In this preparatory period work must be completed independently by the learner. Teachers/tutors cannot give any support to learners during the production of the notes.

Learners may take in up to 4 A4 sides of notes to the supervised assessment period (Part B). These must be hard copies and can be either handwritten or word processed. If word processed, the font size must be 10 point minimum. If handwritten, the words must be visible to the naked eye. Centres and learners should be aware of the conditions placed on the notes as stated in Part A of the assessment.

In Part B learners are presented with a set task which encompasses four sections aligned to the areas of research presented in Part A. Each section asks the learner to respond making use of their research, knowledge and aural skills. Learners have 3 hours in which to complete the set task.

The learner's notes should not be submitted as part of the external assessment and do not form part of the assessable material.

It is important to note that in scheduling the external assessment, centres should be aware of the instructions in Part A, Part B and the Instructions for Conducting External Assessments (ICEA) document to ensure that the assessment is supervised correctly.

Centres should note particularly that during the supervised assessment period:

- Learners will not be able to research further during the completion of the set task.
- Learners can only access their work under supervision.
- Learners are not permitted to have access to the internet or other resources.

Failure to observe the task instructions may result in investigation of suspected malpractice /maladministration.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

In this second series of the assessment examiners were pleased to note that in some areas submissions were of a higher standard than in the first series.

As in the first assessment series, the Part B set task asked learners to produce a detailed word processed article written in four sections. In this series the article was based on the recording of the song 'Since I Left You' by The Avalanches released on the album of the same name in 2000.

Examiners were pleased to note that the vast majority of learners had produced creditable responses in each of the four sections and attempted to engage with the provided material.

Learners who wrote clearly, accurately and concisely to communicate their response tending to show evidence of planning and underpinning knowledge of the specification content. Convincing written work presented by learners tended to be able to make use of well selected and referenced quotes to back up and allow interrogation of key points.

Learners who wrote in a less focused manner tended to lack balance in terms of depth of response across sections and in did not always produce an even response all sections. Less successful responses presented by learners tended to not be fully supported by research or underpinning knowledge. A limited range of research materials may have been in evidence, sometimes with some misunderstanding of content.

Some learners quoted research material, but did not seek to engage with the information to inform their own response. Responses are unlikely to be explanative, critical or analytical if found written information is simply restated. Learners are therefore reminded that research material should be used to inform a response, rather than be reproduced to make up the body of the submission.

Using a very limited range of research material in Part A to inform responses may allow factual inaccuracies to occur, which is likely to limit the viability of the learners' response in some areas. Learners should use discernment in sources and if possible cross check information to establish validity.

Learners should apply aural skills to the material in order to inform their response, particularly with reference to section four. Learners who relied solely upon secondary sources of information in regard to the sonic aspects of production, sounds and style tended to achieve a less consistent and balanced approach.

Examiners noted that aural discernment is a key part of music technology work, and that the ability to express findings based on listening is an extremely valuable skill for music technologists.

Learners who made use of supporting examples, both in terms of musical and written

sources tended to be able to produce a more informed and balanced viewpoint and show a more detailed understanding of the material in context.

To best inform the Part B response it is suggested that learners should make efficient use of the preparatory period to undertake research and detailed listening which considers the supplied material, available information, wider concepts and examples to provide material for their response.

Not all learners focused on the music technology aspects of the research, with some learners producing detailed but not always relevant background material (for example, exploring the history of the band or providing narrative in regard to personnel changes). It is suggested that whilst such material may be intrinsically interesting to music consumers it should be used to inform the response within the framework of the assessment, rather than as a journalistic trope.

Learners are reminded that material drawn from research must be referenced appropriately in Part B as in any other assessment.

Examiners noted that not all learners produced responses in four sections as requested by the task. Whilst responses are marked holistically by examiners, those learners who did not respond section by section tended to provide less focused evidence and did not always address each section coherently.

It is therefore suggested that learners should sectionalise their responses in order to convey their ideas with consistency and balance. It may be useful for some learners to consider the structure of their responses in terms of point, evidence, explanation and links.

Individual Questions

Section 1

How developments in sampling technology influenced the recording and how the recording may have been undertaken differently if it was recorded today.

The majority of learners in this session had accessed sources including published articles and interviews as research for their response to this section.

Based on their research, the majority of learners were able to identify sampling technology used in the recording of 'Since I Left You' with many learners able to comment on historical context in terms of both the development of sampling technology and current practice.

Responses that achieved well in this section tended to make use of a variety of research sources to support the underpinning knowledge of the learner.

Responses that achieved less well did not always access more than one source, and did not always demonstrate clear understanding of the information in terms of content or context. In some responses information found online (including, in a minority of cases technical specifications) was simply restated with little attempt to construct an independent response, which significantly limited the outcome for the learner.

Learners that gained high marks in this section were likely to be able to provide a detailed explanation of how sampling technology was used in the recording with reference to application of specific tools and processing, based on research and understanding of sampling tools.

For example:

"The sampler that they used was the Akai S2000.. Akai pioneered the use of processing techniques in their sampling technology, such as crossfade looping...it is likely that crossfade looping has been applied to create a smooth transition between each occurrence of the loop, rather than a sudden jarring cut..."

Some learners were able to draw coherent links to emergent sampling technologies successfully to demonstrate knowledge of technological developments with an appreciation of historical context.

For example:

"The S2000 had a sampling rate of 44.1kHz which would have coloured the sound much less than earlier samplers with lower sampling rates...as the 1990s approached sampling became more popular which meant that the equipment was much cheaper than earlier samplers such as the Fairlight and Emulator...storage of samples onto floppy discs, while limited by today's standards was much more reliable than a tape based system such as the Mellotron in the 1960s.."

Learners producing creditable work were able to compare and contrast equipment with present day resources, demonstrating some secure and specific knowledge of current music technology equipment and practices.

For example:

"If this song was to be recorded now it would be likely that the samples would be much easier to manipulate, this being due to software instrument samplers being designed for ease of use. In contrast to the small screen available on the S2000 a software sampler like EXS24 in Logic allows you to manipulate samples within a DAW.....showing things like looping points, key assignments and velocity switching much more easily which would save considerably time when using hundreds of samples as in SILY....a DAW based sampler also has almost unlimited memory in contrast to the S2000 which allows for many more samples to be stored and loaded up as needed..."

Responses that did not score highly in this section often identified sampling technology based on research, but did not expand this into an explanation which showed understanding of how the equipment was used in the recording.

Some learners had undertaken research but not fully understood the content. For example, it was notable that some learners had confused the Yamaha Pro-Mix desk with sampling hardware or considered that the Akai S2000 was an 'analogue' device. Some learners had misread sources and made reference to equipment that was not used in the recording. This sometimes led to comments which did not support their responses convincingly.

In some responses it was noted that learners appeared to have some difficulty in understanding sampling as a process, the function of sampling hardware and relating this to their own experience of music technology. For example, a minority of learners appeared to consider that the Akai S2000 acted in the manner of an audio interface and some learners did not appear to appreciate how sampling was used within the given material.

Examiners noted that some learners produced limited specific commentary in regards to current practice, which whilst being correct, was very general and therefore limited in terms of detail. For example, learners were able to consider that sampling would be undertaken 'by using a computer' but not extend this to consider sample based software instruments within a DAW.

Section 2

How developments in wider technology, including record players, may have influenced this recording.

Responses that gained higher marks in this section tended to make use of research and underpinning knowledge to relate developments in wider technology to music production.

Some learners were able to discuss the accessibility of technology and make links with wider creative changes which may have influenced the recording.

For example:

"...the rise of digital technology and computers lead to a rise in home studios... which allowed artists such as The Avalanches to produce high quality recordings with less bulky and expensive hardware..."

Responses that gained fewer marks tended to show limited recognition of underlying technological developments, but may have referenced some areas of consumer technology.

Responses that gained high marks tended to recognise that accessibility of technology affects artists in undertaking recording. Some learners creditably related technological development to wider changes in working practices.

For example:

"Many features of this recording where made possible by advances in digital technology...wider technology in music developed from analog circuits, to digital microchips to software

recreations in the 1990s...for example, The Avalanches made use of looping in this song which in the 1960s and 70s would have to have been undertaken by use of physical loops of tape...which was a space and time consuming process..."

The example of record players was drawn from the specification and provided as an area of focus for learners to explore in relation to the development and use of technology in engaging with this section.

For example:

"Moby, an artist who uses similar production techniques said "The Technics SL1200 is the only turntable, that's where all the samples come from". The Avalanches used the SL1200 to sample from records, as many other producers did....the SL1200 had direct drive and high torque which allowed it to reach the correct speed quickly, with a variable pitch control which made smooth beatmatching possible...a more sensitive hi-fi turntable may have been more suitable for studio use to produce high quality samples, but the SL1200s influence on dance music and hip-hop made it the go-to turntable for sampling..."

Not all learners commented on this aspect of the task, and this tended to reflect a more limited level of understanding and ability to critically appreciate wider technological developments.

It is suggested that learners undertake a wider critical approach to wider technologies as stated in the specification, but should be careful to relate their responses back to the specific given material and focus within the task to gain credit in this section.

Section 3

How the use of copyrighted sample material to construct music may reflect changes in the way that music is valued and has been consumed since the release of 'Since I Left You'.

Some learners were able to respond to the discursive nature of this task effectively by consideration of the notion of value in relation to changes in consumption of music and copyright over time.

For example:

"Since the development of sampling technology there has been controversy over its use in the production of music. Many people see it as 'cheating' because it uses someone else's music to enhance your own. It could also be said that when some samples a recognisable piece of music it is using the familiarity of someone else's song to like their own, which might be seen as a lazy way to increase sales...However in his TED talk about 'How Sampling Changed Music' Mark Ronson states that "They were sampling those records because they heard something in the music that spoke to them..." He goes onto compare 60's rock musicians using techniques from the Blues to enhance their own songs...He is saying that sampling can be viewed positively as a production technique when it is used to pay homage to the styles of music and artists which came before it..."

Some learners related how attitudes to sampling amongst artists and the music business changed over time, although this was not always well backed up with examples or factual information. Some responses showed comprehension of licensing and how this may affect artists.

For example:

'When creating this song The Avalanches were not expecting the success that it had...this approach freed them to use whatever sounds they liked...when it was decided that the track was going to be released it was important to clear up the legal side...if a sample could not be cleared it would be removed from the song...the use of snippets of samples to create a full song could be argued to have more value artistically and creatively, using the sounds themselves as an instrument..'

Some learners did not attempt to engage with the task fully and simply restated research. Learners who produced more limited responses which generically considered changes in consumption over time, with no explicit reference to the task, material or timeline tended to achieve less well in this section.

Examiners noted that a minority of learners approached this section seemingly with reference to the focus of Section 3 from the 1706 assessment and concentrated heavily on file sharing. Whilst this narrative may have fed into the responses with some credit it was unlikely to allow the learners to engage fully with the task. Learners should be aware that their responses should consider the focus given in Part B in each session in order to achieve.

Section 4

Why 'Since I Left You' might be considered 'a landmark of creative sound collage', analysing both the musical style and technology used.

Responses that gained higher marks in this section tended to respond effectively to the task and use coherent analysis of musical features, sounds and music technology.

Some learners were able to reference other musical examples to reinforce their discussion of the task. Some learners were able to usefully consider plunderphonics and other stylistic ideas related to development of the song.

For example:

"The idea of talking slices of many different songs and different genres, almost like a jigsaw...breathed new life into the art of sampling...it could be considered a landmark as it takes pieces and through clever audio manipulation changes meaning and turns them into a whole piece.."

Learners who were able to analyse the sounds used in the song in detail had applied their own aural analysis and made more refined references to the use of technology.

Some learners showed an able grasp of music technology and aural skills in relating production ideas to the sonic outcome.

For example:

"The main vocal sample has been pitched up in the sampler...and the drum pattern is looped throughout the song...many different sampled instruments can be heard including flute, organ and strings...all the individual samples have been edited in length, speed and pitch to fit together...there is noticeable use of effects such as reverb and filtering applied.."

Responses that gained lower marks tended to rely solely on information found in written sources or upon generic comments linked to style. Some learners did not attempt to engage with the task fully and simply restated research.

A minority of learners approached this task seemingly with reference to the focus of the 1706 paper and attempted to define the style of the material as an outcome – while this may have yielded some commentary it did not allow learners to fully explore the task.

Examiners felt that in many cases evidence of learners listening to the material was limited, and that detailed analysis of musical ideas (for example, commentary on structure, rhythm and tonality) was lacking. It was noted that this was somewhat disappointing given the wealth of textures and ideas incorporated into the material and available for commentary.

Summary

Based on submissions seen in this session learners should:

- Analyse how specific music technology equipment was used in production of the given song.
- Understand music technology equipment in terms of historical development.
- Consider current music technology equipment and make relevant comparisons to application and process.
- Explain wider technology in direct relation to the production of music in context.
- Evaluate the consumption of music in context, with reference to changing audience habits over time.
- Provide perceptive discussion of copyright issues in relation to the perceived value of musical material.
- Use methodical aural analysis of the given musical material to draw conclusions about style and technology.

It is suggested that the following areas should be considered in future sessions:

- Learners should make use efficient use of the given preparatory period to undertake research which considers the supplied material, available sources of information and examples.
- Learners should make use of the preparatory period in applying aural skills to discern features within the given material.
- Learners should use research as a basis for commentary, explanation and evaluation rather than simply restating found information.
- Learners should reference information found through research appropriately within their submission.
- Learners should consider the skills of written communication in producing their response.
- Centres should ensure that the assessment is completed in line with the ICEA document.

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