L3 Lead Examiner Report 1901

January 2019

L3 Qualification in Music Technology

Unit 5: Music in Context (31811H)

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Grade Boundaries

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:

http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html

Unit 5 Music Technology in Context. 31811H

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	10	21	34	48

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Introduction

Unit 5: Music Technology In Context is mandatory for the Pearson Level 3 Foundation Diploma, Diploma and Extended Diploma in Music Technology. External assessment of the unit takes place twice a year, in May and January. January 2019 was the fourth external assessment session for the unit.

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

External assessment is presented in two parts, Part A and Part B. In Part A musical material is identified as part of a brief which contextualises the assessment and set task information. Centres should ensure that learners are able to access the identified audio material during Part A of the assessment.

Learners undertake Part A over approximately 3 hours. The learners should use this time to conduct research including the application of listening skills to musical material. The learners should make notes which will assist them in producing their response in Part B. In this Part A 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). The notes must be hard copy and can be either handwritten or word processed. If the notes are 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 unit content and areas of research presented in Part A. Each section requires learners to respond by making use of their preparatory research and knowledge. Learners have 3 hours in which to complete the Part B set task.

The learner's Part A preparatory notes should not be submitted as part of the external assessment and do not form part of the assessable material. The notes should however be collected and held by the centre until results are released.

Following completion of Part B learners must submit a word processed response in .PDF format.

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 including audio material.

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

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

In this assessment the identified musical material was 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love' by Tony Bennett and Lady Gaga as released on the album 'Cheek to Cheek' in 2014. As in previous sessions the set task asked learners to produce a detailed word processed article written in four sections.

The majority of learners had produced creditable responses in each of the four sections. Examiners were pleased to note that many learners had attempted to engage with the tasks through use of listening skills and research.

Learners who produced an explicitly sectionalised response tended to be able to best reflect their knowledge of areas within the specification and material found through research. Concise, evaluative and focused responses tended to stem from interrogation of historical understanding, audio material and written sources.

Less focused submissions did not always directly respond to each section, and tended to lack depth and balance. 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 produce less coherently structured, and often more repetitive work.

It is suggested that learners should make efficient use of the Part A preparatory period to undertake research and detailed listening which considers the supplied material, available information, wider concepts and examples to provide material for their Part B response. Reponses presented by learners which were not supported by research or underpinning knowledge tended to be less successful.

Learners are reminded that research material should be used to inform a response, rather than be reproduced to make up the body of the submission. If information found through research is simply restated the response is unlikely to be explanative, critical or analytical.

Discernment in research sources should be employed to ensure relevance and validity. If possible facts should be checked to establish reliability. It is important for learners to consider the level and purpose of the assessment, and be wary of expending time by including material which does not serve a focused purpose (for example, some learners recounted extensive biographical artist information which did not tend to serve the response meaningfully).

Research sources must be referenced appropriately in Part B as in any other assessment.

Aural discernment is a key part of music technology work, and that the ability to express findings based on what can be heard is an invaluable skill for music technologists at any level. Reliance upon secondary sources of information in regard to musical material tended to yield a less detailed and evaluative approach. Learners should apply listening skills in order to inform their response, with reference to audible musical and sonic elements of the material.

Learners who made use of supporting examples, both in terms of musical and written sources tended to be able to produce a more contextually informed and balanced viewpoint.

Individual Questions
Section 1

How developments in recording and processing technology influenced this production and how the recording may have been undertaken differently if it had been recorded in the 1950s.

Learners who achieved well in this section tended to have provided a response which focused upon recording and processing technology, and considered historical development over time. Demonstration of research, underpinning knowledge and aural consideration of the musical material often underpinned detailed responses.

The majority of learners were able to identify technology used in this production by reference to research sources and knowledge of available equipment within the timeframe. Learners who developed this response to consider specifically how the technology affected this production tended to have formed an evaluative response.

For example:

> *The song was recorded to pro-tools using multitrack recording and a variety of condenser, ribbon and dynamic mics for close micing. According to Audio Technology magazine the recording was made 'live in the studio' so close micing was required for separation. Some mic placement is visible in the video produced for the song, but this may not reflect how the song was actually recorded. The drum kit was recorded using multi mics, with dynamics used for the snare and toms, ribbons for overheads and condensers on the hi-hat – the mics listed are very expensive, and include a Neumann condenser on the bass drum, giving a detailed and clear recording of the kit.....The mics were recorded using pre-amps to get the required signal. Pre-amps also allow the producer to give some 'colour' to the signal before the analog signal is converted into a digital signal by the A/D converters and sent to pro-tools...*
>
> *...the editing capabilities of pro-tools allowed the engineer to use clips from alternate takes to remove issues caused by the performers moving around during vocal recording and compile a final vocal. This would have especially helped the feel of the song that the producer was aiming for as he wanted to capture the performance aspect of the big band style. In an interview with audiotechnology.com Dae Bennet said "It may sound challenging but I'm used to cutting tape, so for me, cutting waveforms in pro-tools is easier and more flexible". This shows how the editing capabilities of the software helped the producer shape the sound of the song..*
>
> *Processing was used after recording and mainly used plug ins including reverbs and compressors. It is noticeable that effects are very subtle in the recording, and the reverb is used to give ambience, rather than be heard distinctly...'*

Learners that achieved less well tended to demonstrate less technical understanding, less reflection upon research and limited application of listening skills.

Responses that did not score highly in this section often identified a limited range of technology, and did not expand this into an explanation which showed understanding of how the equipment was used in the recording.

For example:

> *"The song was recorded using pro-tools which was likely run on an Apple Mac. Pro-tools uses plug ins to add effects which can help producers".*

Not all learners were comfortable with 'processing' technology as defined in the specification content (i.e. effects and dynamics), with some learners choosing not to respond to this element of the section. Lack of response to elements of the section tended to limit available credit, and in some cases produce an unbalanced response.

Consideration of emergent recording technologies to demonstrate knowledge of technological developments and an appreciation of historical context was in evidence in more focused responses.

For example:

> *"…from the 1950s magnetic tape became the most common format for multitrack recording until the mid-1990s. It is likely that in the 1950s professionally studios may have had access to 3 track tape machines, which would allow recording of a backing track to 2 tracks, and a third track for a vocal to be recorded – this meant that vocals could be overdubbed, in comparison to pro-tools were unlimited tracks are available, allowing for separation, overdubs and experimentation including building a 'comp' of various takes, as was done in*

Some submissions showed a more limited understanding of equipment and process in historical context.

For example:

> *"If this song was recorded in the 1950's the quality would have been lower, as the available equipment was of lower quality or just hadn't been invented yet. The song would have had to be recorded in one take as DAWs weren't available…"*

As elsewhere in the assessment learners should take care to consider the specific focus and elements present in the section to respond most effectively.

Section 2

How developments in computer technologies from the 1950s onwards may have Influenced this production.

The focus upon computer technologies allowed learners to apply knowledge of specification content explanatively and contextually.

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

Well considered submissions were able to discuss the accessibility of technology and make specific links to how this has influenced production practice.

For example:

> *"The development of the transistor in 1947 and subsequently the integrated circuit in the 1960s allowed the development of digital electronics, with benefits in miniaturization, stability and complexity. This, along with the development of cheaper high capacity storage memory allowed for the development of computer hardware, which developed into home computers in the 1970s. The development of MIDI in 1983 opened the way for early sequencing software to control synthesisers and drums machines, which allowed musicians to develop more complex layered music and not rely on live musicians or limited tracks on tape machines….in the 1990s audio recording became possible due to faster processing and high capacity hard drives, which allowed musicians to record audio directly into software greatly increasing flexibility as a production tool…'*

Responses that gained fewer marks tended to show limited recognition of underlying wider technology which fed into development of computer technologies, but showed some familiarity as to how computers could be used for music creation.

For example:

> *"computers developed from the 1950s and were not used for music at first, later the PC developed which allowed musicians and studios to access computers"*

A minority of learners repeated information in their Section 1 response. Whilst responses are credited by examiners to the relevant section learners should be aware that simple restatement of information already conveyed is extremely unlikely to receive additional credit.

It is suggested that learners should consider structure of their responses in relation to each section to maximise their ability to respond in the time given.

Some learners did not consider the specific focus upon computer technology, and choose to focus on other areas of wider technology. Often this limited the credit available.

For example:

> *"The Hammond organ used in this song was a very influential development in instrument technology…"*

Section 3

How patterns of music consumption may vary between the target audiences of Tony

Bennett and Lady Gaga as solo artists.

This section allowed learners to explore the links between technology and patterns of consumption with regard to the audience. Learners who achieved well in this section tended to be able to discuss how different audiences may make use of technology and broadcasting to consume music.

Learners who approached the task by contrasting audience demographics, based on consideration of the artists and related this to consumption tended to provide some evaluation in the response.

For example:

> *"With Bennett having a much longer career than Gaga, he would most likely appeal to an older audience. As he was around from the 1950s onwards it is likely, moving through the decades, that his music would have been consumed on vinyl, cassette and CD, only perhaps moving online at a later stage in his career. On the other hand Gaga is very much an artist of the twenty first century, likely with a younger audience listening to her music via CD along with downloads, and moving to streaming services.."*

Responses which showed less consideration of the nature of the music consuming audience, relying on more simplistic assumptions tended to be less creditable.

For example:

> *"Tony Bennetts audience is obviously a more elder demographic, clamouring for more music like it was back when they were young…"*

Less creditable responses did not engage with the task fully and simply restated research and knowledge regarding changes in formats.

Some learners were able to quote figures and examples to support their response, based on research undertaken. It was noted however that learners did not always identify sources or evidence checking of facts.

For example:

> *"The consumption of music for Gaga's solo music is much more heavily influenced by the development of the internet and streaming, as well as formats such as MP3. Nowadays all mobile phones are integrated with the internet allowing easy access for consumers to streaming sites such as Spotify and Apple Music…*
>
> *The broadcasting of music has changed over time, with the introduction of music TV providing a visual aspect for artists to explore…this led to the 'need' for a music video, and providing an extra way that artists could add meaning or tell the story of the song…the video produced for this song was made available on social media, which is a form of broadcasting which Gaga has mastered..*
>
> *The consumption of music has shifted in the last decade with CDs no longer being the main form of sales. Although in 2014 106.5 million CDs were sold this was a 9.4% drop since the year prior. In 2014 alone 164 billion songs were streamed, which was a 52% increase on 2013, due to this interesting shift Billboard started to count streaming data in chart rankings the year before this song was released…"*

Section 4

Provide a detailed analysis of the musical style and the production techniques used to achieve a vintage sound in 'I Can't Give You Anything But Love'.

Learners who were able to analyse the musical style and production techniques used tended to apply aural analysis, and made use of additional examples.

Responses which gained higher marks generally coherently related musical features to style.

For example:

"Gagas delivery is in contrast to Bennetts crooning vocal, a style of singing which along with scat features, interplay between the voices as a duet and elements of spoken phrases are in keeping with a Jazz style.

Other features which mark this as Jazz include the use of instrumentation – swung feel in the rhythm, use of stabs in the brass and an improvisatory feel in the Hammond organ part.."

Gaga and Bennett are not the first to recreate songs in a Jazz style for the modern age. Paul Anka recorded in a similar style arranging rock music for big band...a similar texture was produced in both recordings with a band recorded live in the studio, making use of microphone techniques to create a detailed but warm sound...."

Submissions which relied solely on written sources such as reviews, tended to present a less convincing response.

Some learners were able to consider how a vintage sound was achieved via the use of technology and the issues surrounding this.

For example

"The warm and vintage sound of this track would have been harder to recreate on demand without, ironically the use of modern digital technology...the use of a DAW allowed for edits which would have been impossible using analogue tape to create a 'live' feel. The use of EQ and compression is minimal, in keeping with a less processed sound...however, hardware has been used to add 'warmth' at source and plug in which recreate vintage hardware was applied to make the sound less precise."

Summary

Based on submissions seen in this session learners should:

- Analyse how specific music technology equipment was used in production based on research and analysis of musical material.
- Ensure that all elements and the specific focus of each section are considered.
- Understand music technology equipment in terms of historical development, and be able to make comparisons between application and process over time.
- 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.
- Methodically apply aural analysis of the given musical material to draw conclusions about style and sound.

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

- Learners should make 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 access to the audio material during the preparatory period by applying listening skills to discern musical and production features.
- 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 the development of their work. Particularly learners are advised to produce a response which features sections in a clear structure as requested by the set task.

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