BTEC Lead Examiner Report

January 2020

Level 3 National in Music Technology

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:

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

Unit 5: Music Technology in Context

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	9	19	33	48

Pearson

Introduction

As a mandatory unit for the Pearson Level 3 Foundation Diploma, Diploma and Extended Diploma in Music Technology the external assessment for Unit 5 takes place twice a year in May and January. The January 2020 external assessment series was the sixth for the unit.

The external assessment asks learners to apply knowledge to specific material to analyse music technology contextually. Teaching and learning of the unit should allow learners to consider development and use of technology over time, and e aware of how this has informed music production.

The 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 must undertake Part A over 3 hours as a preparatory period. The learners should use this time to conduct research, including the application of listening skills to musical material. Learners should make brief notes that will assist them in responding to Part B of the assessment.

In this preparatory period the learner must complete work independently, and learners must be monitored to ensure that this is the case. Teachers/tutors cannot give any support to learners in undertaking research and producing notes.

Learners may take in up to 2 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. Centres and learners should be aware of the conditions with regards to font size and legibility placed on the notes as stated in Part A of the assessment.

In Part B learners are presented with a set task that comprises of four sections aligned to the areas of research presented in Part A. Each section asks the learner to respond in written form by making use of their research and knowledge. Learners have 3 hours in which to complete the Part B set task under formal supervision.

The notes produced in Part A 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.

When scheduling the external assessment, centres should be aware of the instructions stated 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 (Part B) assessment period:

- Learners will not be able to undertake further research
- Learners are not permitted to access the internet or other resources including audio material
- Learners can only access their work under supervision.

*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 Don't Believe You Want To Get Up and Dance (Oops!)' by The Gap Band and 'Uptown Funk' (feat. Bruno Mars) by Mark Ronson.

As in previous sessions the set task asked learners to write a detailed word processed article. The assessment specified that the article should be written in four sections and the majority of learners had produced creditable responses in each of these.

Evidence indicated that many learners had applied listening and research skills during Part A to inform their responses.

The Lead Examiner advises that earners should make focused 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 that were not supported by research or underpinning knowledge tended to be less successful in terms of creditable outcome.

Material found through research 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. Were possible information should be checked to establish reliability. It is important for learners to consider the level and timescale of the assessment, and be wary of including material which is not relevant .For example (and as in previous sessions) some learners recounted undeveloped biographical information about the featured artist which did not inform their response in a meaningful way.

Research sources must be referenced appropriately in Part B as in any other assessment. Unreferenced material included as part of the submission could also potentially be regarded as plagiarism and therefore subject to malpractice investigation.

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

Aural discernment with reference to musical and sonic elements of audio material is a key part of music technology work, and the ability to express conclusions based on what can be heard is an invaluable skill for music technologists at all levels. Learners who relied upon secondary sources of

information in regard to these elements tended to produce a less detailed and evaluative approach than those who had applied their own listening skills.

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. These submissions were generally not as well focused and often lacked depth and balance, leading to a less creditable outcome.

Explicitly sectionalised responses in submissions generally reflected the learners' knowledge of specification content and material found through research. Evaluative written work that remained concise and focused tended to develop from contextual understanding, along with careful consideration of audio material and written sources.

Individual Questions

Section 1

How music technology influenced changing practices in commercial recording during the 21st century and how this influence is exemplified by the recording of 'Uptown Funk' (feat. Bruno Mars).

Learners who achieved well in this section tended to have used knowledge of changes in practice over time and related this to research of the process used to produce Uptown Funk'.

Detailed learner responses were often based upon evaluation of interview material, articles, underpinning knowledge and aural description.

The majority of learners were able to identify some technology used with reference to internet research sources and knowledge of recording practices at the time of the songs release.

Learners who considered the question effectively tended to have drawn conclusions and made links between developments in technology and changing recording practices with reference to 'Uptown Funk' as an example :

> *The recording of Uptown Funk made use of both analogue and digital technology to create a specific sound required for the style of the song. In interviews with Ricky Damian he states that Studer tape machine was used to record some instruments, both for the sound quality of tape and also to make use of varispeed recording to create specific effects.*
>
> *A wide variety of analogue outboard effects were also used, and linked together to create sounds which would not have been obtainable by use of single units on their own.*
>
> *The tracks recorded to tape were then imported into Pro-Tools for editing. The use of both analogue and digital technology shows how producers and musicians can use a range of different tools to best represent the sound that they require. Analogue technology, which was used throughout the 20th century and abandoned in favor of a purely digital approach at the start of the 2000s as DAWs became more powerful and capable of audio recording has seen a resurgence as producers use it far its 'warm' sound and more tactile interfaces.*
>
> *The use of 'retro' technology has seen a resurgence in manufacturers responding to the needs of musicians and producing new versions of 'classic' hardware.*
>
> *The recording did also make use of DAW based processing 'in the box' with Mark Ronson quoted as saying "The one plug-in I use most is the Waves CLA-3A compressor…its makes everything tougher and makes the mix a little more centered'. This shows the flexibility of recording technology in the 21st century to use a mixture of modern, retro and reproduction hardware and software.*
>
> *The process of recording has also changes over time as a result of technology. Ronson and Mars were able to work on the song in studios across the world as the DAW project could be uploaded and sent via the internet very quickly. This allows for more creative freedom and flexibility, as well as potentially reduced studio costs. This is particularly important as the music industry in the 21st century relies more on artists touring and less on sales of albums. This method of working could not have been easily achieved prior to the 21st century as it would have required physical copies of recordings to be sent (perhaps as a tape which would require the use of a studio with compatible machines) or with the invention of digital recording a fast and reliable internet connection…*

Learners that achieved less well tended to be less aware of the links between technology and practice. Responses that did not score highly in this section often identified technology used in the recording with reference to sources, but did not use this information effectively to respond to the question.

It was evident in some responses that learners had not made effective use of research with regard to the given material and therefore produced very general commentary.

For example:

> *Music tech has progressed loads over the past couple of decades from analog to digital mixers, 8 track to 24 track recording and so on. Given the quality of technology, recording music in the modern day gives the artist / producer an endless amount of different ways to create a track, back in the 70s it would be recorded as a live band in the studio as an ensemble recording, but coming into the 21st century we now have DAW's and hundreds and hundreds of different synthesizers to create any sound. This made it easier for the producer / artist to be a lot more creative with their music. The introduction of synthesizers even created a completely new genre when first released. In the track 'uptown funk' they use all these new fancy gadgets but in the style of 70s funk…*

Some submissions showed a limited understanding of equipment and process in historical context, with some areas of confusion which limited available credit.

For example:

> *The technology changed practicing (sic) a lot because be for 1980 you had to hire a professional to edit the music unlike now when you can do it at home for free and with technology you can now just take parts straight away and start from that section again…unlike the old days when you had to do the whole song all over again.*

Learners should take care to consider the specific focus of this section in terms of material and time period in relation to music technology in order to produce an effective and creditable response.

Section 2

How wider technological developments, before 1979 may have influenced the recording of 'I Don't Believe You Want To Get Up and Dance (Oops!)'.

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

Learners who produced evaluative responses were able to wider technology in the specific context. For example:

A number of key advances were made during the 1950s, 60s and 70s which made the recording studio more accessible to musicians and allowed recordings to move away from purely 'live recordings' captured with musicians playing together, and made for a more sophisticated approach to production.

The development of tape as a format allowed recordings to be undertaken multiple times without needing to replace the recording medium, as was the case with recording direct to disc. Tape could be erased if a mistake was made and a new take recorded over. Tape was developed in Germany in the 1940's and after the second world war the technology became available in the US and Europe. As tape machines developed artists such as Les Paul experimented with sound on sound techniques, which led to the production of multitrack tape machines. The number of tracks developed from 4 track, via 8 and 16 with 24 tracks potentially being available to studios by the late 1970s. This meant that artists such as the Gap Band could record in isolation leading to more flexibility in mixing and that tracks would be available for overdubs - this can be heard in Oops ! with the use of close mic'd drum sounds and multiple vocal layers…

Electronics technology was also developing leading to processing mixer and synthesizer hardware becoming more available to studios. Advances such as integrated circuits, moving away from vacuum tubes made equipment portable, cheaper and more reliable.

Use of reverb processing and dynamics can be heard in the Gap Bands recording, and this was most likely a result of hardware in the studio. More complex mixing desks also evolved in the 1970's with more sophisticated EQ (for example, semi parametric control) used to shape sounds. Recordings in the 1970's tended to be more detailed and crisper than in the previous decades as a result of more opportunity for control.

Synthesisers by 1979 were also more easily available to musicians as companies in the US and Japan were mass producing instruments. The use of synthesised sounds in Oops! adds textures which could not have been created previously...

Some learners appeared offered more limited commentary, which tended to be limited in terms of discussion of underlying wider technology and was not historically accurate.

For example :

> *'I don't believe that you want to get up and dance' was recorded in an analogue studio. This meant that the DAW they recorded on did not include built in effects.*
>
> *MIDI was developed in 1970s which meant that musicians could hook up different instruments and mimic or even replace sounds such as orchestras…*

Section 3

How consumption of music has changed from 1979 to the present day and how these changes have affected artists as copyright holders.

This section allowed learners to explore how consumption of music may have been influenced by audio formats, and how this may have affected artists.

The most successful responses were able to demonstrate awareness of technology and listening habits within the specified time frame. Learners who had applied research and aural skills were able to comment on copyright in the context of the given musical material. For example:

> *A way in which people listen to music has changed substantially from 1979 to the present day. In 1979 the predominant format for purchasing music was vinyl…the version of 'IDBYWTGUAD' is an extended version which would have been released on 12'' maxi single. The 12'' single was important in the development of clubbing and DJs as tastemakers because the extended length of songs allowed DJs to sustain the dancefloor and led to artists creating extended and alternate to feed club play, which in turn promoted sales of the artists work into the singles chart…*
>
> *Another important development, which was released in 1979 was the Sony Walkman. The Walkman allowed people freedom to carry their own personalised soundtrack easily for the first time. The popularised the cassette tape (which was first introduced in 1963) which boosted sales of albums released on cassette, but also encouraged the audience to record their own 'playlist' onto blank cassettes….cassette was a format which was cheap and easy to record onto, this meant that copyright infringement was more likely (with the music industry announcing 'home taping is killing music!') as people recorded from the radio or from borrowed vinyl / cassettes – and from 1983 CDs.*
>
> *Copyright issues from home taping soon paled in comparison with the advent of the .mp3 and file sharing sites however, which ultimately changed the way in which the music industry operated and how artists generate income….*
>
> *….streaming, and the instant global availability of music also allows musicians to access music, and also to identify copyright concerns. In the example of 'Uptown Funk' the songwriters from The Gap Band identified similarities and made a claim, which was settled and meant that The Gap Band (amongst others) gained a song writing credit. 11 writers are currently credited as being responsible for 'Uptown Funk'…*

Less creditable responses tended to identify audio formats, but often did not relate this to consumption or copyright issues. For example:

> *…vinyl and cassettes started to decline in popularity, thanks to the creation of compact discs (CD) these were the start of the modern way we now consume music, CDs are still used today even though they aren't the most popular today with the younger generations they are still popular with the rest.*
>
> *Today there are so many ways to consume our favorite music, we can play it off our phones, computers, TV's, cars, and even gaming consoles. The internet has been (sic) a huge effect on how we consume music, now we can listen to music anywhere you want. The newest way of listening to music is streaming. Streaming is the most efficient way to listen to music today, you can search and play any song at just a few taps and clicks, computer, mp3 players and phones, they all give us a way of consuming music, all you need is an internet signal.*

Section 4

Provide a detailed analysis of the musical and stylistic elements used in 'Uptown Funk' (feat. Bruno Mars) and 'I Don't Believe You Want To Get Up and Dance (Oops!)'.

Learners who answered this section effectively were able to apply aural analysis of both given songs and consider this is relation to style. For example:

> *'I Don't Believe You Want to Get Up and Dance (Oops!)' is produced for the disco so it uses features to get people dancing and singing along. It has a very simple but prominent and driving bassline, along with a straightforward kick and snare pattern with few drum fills. This gives a solid foundation to build the rest of the song around… The guitar part adds a repeating melody line that sticks in the listeners head, alongside the various percussion elements in the mix…the vocals include group backing vocals emphasising hooks and the chorus and a spoken vocal contrasting with a smoothly sung lead.*
>
> *'Uptown Funk' uses influences from the Minneapolis sound (artists such as Prince) and funk. The song starts with a gang like vocal sound through what sounds like a talk box saying 'Doh'. This then later mimics the bass line. The claps then come in with added reverse claps and cymbals. The clean guitar with a quite treble tone comes in playing very typical funk chords on the 3 high strings. The distorted vocal shout that starts the main body of the song off is used in many funk songs. The drums are playing a straight steady rhythm that people can dance to. The tempo of the song is 115bpm, at this speed it is quite comfortable to dance around at. Every 8 bars the instrumentation changes this is to keep the listener interested…*

Some learners were able to consider the material comparatively within their response and add depth to their commentary. For example:

> *One of the main similarities is the hook in both songs. Both follow the same rhythm and syllables as well as them both being rapped instead of sung. Other similarities are the style of the song, although Uptown Funk is a bit faster at 116bpm v 105bpm Oops ! both start off with a reverbed clap and vocals that then go into the full song…*

Learners who achieved less well in this section tended to make less use of aural analysis and often stated restated research which was not entirely correct. For example:

> *The song 'Oops!' uses a bassline which repeats all the way through using the notes E-G-A…the song simply repeats a verse and a chorus…*

Learners should make use of access to materials to apply their own listening skills and avoid reliance solely on sources to identify musical and stylistic elements.

Summary

Based on submissions seen in this session learners should:

- Analyse how specific music technology equipment was used in production based on research and aural 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 past and current applications and process.

- Explain wider technology in direct relation to the production of music in context, with focus upon the specific given area of content.

- Evaluate the consumption of music in context, with reference to changing formats and an understanding of how changing patterns of consumption has affected artists as copyright holders.

- Methodically apply aural skills when listening to given musical material to produce an analytical response.

- Make use of related musical examples to inform discussion.

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.

- Available sources of information and examples should be considered and verified as part of research.

- 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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