

Level 3 Lead Examiner Report 1906

Summer 2019

**BTEC Level 3 National in Music
Performance**

**Unit 3: Ensemble Music
Performance (20175K)**

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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:

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Unit 3: Ensemble Music Performance (20175K)

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	17	32	47	62

Introduction

This is the first test for Unit 3: Ensemble Music Performance and is a mandatory externally assessed unit for the BTEC Level 3 National Certificate and Extended Certificate in Music Performance. This unit has 120 guided learning hours and 1 opportunity is provided for learners to undertake this paper during the summer series.

Learners complete five individual activities in response to a set brief consisting of a vocational scenario and repertoire of different styles and periods. There are two lists (A and B) from which learners select and create a performance to an audience as part of an ensemble. This must consist of a minimum of three and a maximum of eight members. This assessment takes place within a supervised period timetabled by Pearson, with the final submission consisting of both written and video evidence. There is a total of 80 marks for the paper.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

This session, the scenario for the brief required learners to perform to a live audience as part of Century Sound's 'Eclectic Mix' session in a live-lounge setting. By far the most popular pieces selected for repertoire this series were 'Wake me up' by Avicii, 'Learn to Fly' by the Foo Fighters, 'Hoochie Choochie Man' by Muddy Waters and 'Wide open spaces' by the Dixie Chicks.

Evidence seen supports that the paper is accessible, with the outcomes generating marks across the full range. Learners have embraced the challenges well and central to this is learner achievement in activities 3a and 3b for music performance. All activities performed as intended with no shortcomings.

The majority of the learners sitting the paper are in the first year of a two-year programme. At best, learners were able to demonstrate fluency in their playing and mastery of the instrument/voice.

At the lower level, learners were challenged in skill acquisition and adequate preparation for activity 3. Stylistic awareness and application were also limited. These learners were unable to score higher than the middle level of the first band.

There was some evidence, in those most commonly achieving the upper part of the second boundary in activity 3, showing a tendency to peak irregularly in activities 4 and 5. Whilst they showed a good level of performance, they were unable to consistently communicate their musical or stylistic awareness and understanding of ensemble dynamics.

Those achieving the upper mark band showed a more balanced overall accomplishment in all five areas of study.

The appropriate selection of pieces is vital to achieve well in this unit. Whilst most learners had selected their repertoire carefully, there were instances where learners engaged in pieces that did not support their skills level or show best musicianship. Learners do not gain any additional credit for playing different instruments. It is therefore strongly advisable for learners to perform on their main instrument. This supports a higher level of competency and confidence.

The overall administration of the test was completed effectively and in line with Pearson procedures. However, some instances were seen showing the presence of a teacher/tutor in each of the activities. Centres are reminded that learners may not be assisted during the recording by any means.

Set Task Activities

Activity 1: AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the skills needed for rehearsals and ensemble performance.

Learners are assessed on:

- **Individual engagement focus and discipline during the rehearsal session.**
- **Individual ability to show collaborative working during the rehearsal session.**
- **Individual ability to respond to musical developments during the rehearsal session.**

This activity requires learners to participate towards a single group rehearsal session, where they must demonstrate their ability working as a member of an ensemble. Their individual contribution to the rehearsal is the focus of assessment where aspects such as engagement, contribution, collaboration and response to musical developments are assessed.

At best, learners showed most impressive musicianship where they clearly had sound understanding of rehearsal technique, showing confidence in the ability to provide solutions to problems eg. ability to transition fluidly between keys to support vocal ranges in the ensemble in order to establish the most appropriate keys and arrangements. These learners were able to lead whilst also providing support to others. Solutions were offered for some of the more challenging aspects in order to move the piece forward.

Most learners were able to access marks from the second band upwards with the lower range reflective of the contribution made to the process. These lower range learners did not fully engage in the activity and very rarely contributed to discussion or provided suggestions to move the piece forward. Some also showed limited preparation, consequently preventing them from being able to play their instrument or sing adequately.

Learners who were able to access the higher mark range led rehearsals, demonstrating a mature approach to all aspects of the planned activity. This included leading with confidence and showing ability to offer ideas, apply technical knowledge and provide solutions in a perceptive manner with full awareness of others.

Whilst planning the arrangement is integral to the ensemble and musical development, this must not be the sole focus of rehearsals. There were several instances where this was the main objective, subsequently learners were unable to demonstrate acquisition of skills in musicianship and rehearsal discipline.

The level of difficulty is not explicitly assessed, however it may mean that the full range of marks are not accessible if there are limited opportunities for learners to demonstrate technical proficiency if individual parts are not carefully considered.

Selecting the appropriate time to record the rehearsal session is of most importance. It is recommended that learners focus on presenting milestone rehearsals which demonstrate some progress and also allows for further development. This will also support possible target setting and show initial acquisition of skills and competency.

Learners must ensure that they have a clear focus prior to commencing the rehearsal, this will avoid informal and anecdotal discussion where progress is limited. Personal ensemble management skills are essential and those learners who had clearly undertaken personal practise prior to the rehearsal, were invariably able to access the higher band. These learners showed a more skilful application of techniques to the progress of the rehearsal.

It is also advisable for learners to plan how they intend to organise the rehearsal before-hand. As well as remaining focused this will allow more opportunities for the group to show the way in which they give instruction, offer ideas, co-operate fully and engage in problem-solving. Providing opportunities for all members to respond is also important as well as ensuring that they are positioned well so to be seen and heard clearly on the recording.

Centres are encouraged to consider the appropriateness of the rehearsal room and the scheduling of the recorded rehearsal. Examiners commented on being unable to hear the learners due to external noise from outside the room or other activities taking place at the same time as the recording.

It is vital that learners are seen clearly when working in a group. Centres are therefore encouraged to ensure that the camera is positioned carefully. Similarly, learners must avoid sitting behind other members of the group.

Activity 2

A02 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how to interpret an original musical piece.

Learners are assessed on how they communicated:

- **Reasons for any actions and decisions made during the rehearsal.**
- **Understanding of any strengths and areas for improvement from the rehearsal.**
- **Individual and group targets and goals for the next rehearsal.**

For activity 2, learners must present a debrief of the rehearsal focusing on the decisions made, understanding of strengths and areas requiring improvement as well as setting targets.

Most learners were able to provide adequate reasons for actions and decisions made. Those who had prepared well were able to show more assurance in their communication with relevant examples underpinning their understanding. Some discussed examples whilst others were able to illustrate through practical demonstration which was most effective and highlighted a more sound understanding of the necessary requirements for development. At the higher level, learners spoke animatedly about their own and others' musicianship in support of the strengths of the piece.

The rehearsal debrief must be conducted after the rehearsal as this enables learners to remember intricate detail. Whilst it is permissible to have notes, learners must avoid reading extensive and pre-written notes verbatim. This restricts learners from being able to communicate fully and provide an accurate reflection of the rehearsal that has just taken place. It is also important for learners to discuss the rehearsal that has been recorded and no other.

Learners must also ensure that the de-brief focuses on own skill acquisition and technique development, as well as the arrangement. This balance is essential to ensure accessibility of the full assessment criteria.

Whilst ensemble dynamics and communication is important, learners must try to avoid discussing relationships and focus on the skills progress and musical development.

To achieve at the higher level, learners must provide a comprehensive understanding of their actions, set targets and provide coherent and justified examples.

Activity 3:

A03 Apply skills and techniques when contributing to an ensemble during rehearsal and performance.

Learners are assessed on:

- **Technical proficiency**
- **Creative musical expression of learner's own part in the performance.**
- **Accuracy of musical material.**
- **Confidence and command of own musical role**
- **Ability to communicate with the audience and group members during performance.**
- **Control of rhythm and timing.**

Learners must perform three of the pieces as part of an ensemble demonstrating application of the skills, techniques, musical expression, stylistic awareness and confidence.

A good number of learners displayed confidence in their playing. There were some exceptional examples showing high level of proficiency and particularly notable was the range of instruments used. There were also good examples of effective ensemble dynamics, where the more musically able provided support to those that were less confident in their playing, subsequently this enhanced the overall performance.

All learners participated at their own level and presented three contrasting pieces that were created as an ensemble. All learners clearly understood the need to perform in a style different to that of the original. Most ensembles had prepared well and had considered the styles carefully particularly in terms of the suitability for their ensemble. At best, learners had some stylistic awareness of the original and the style chosen for their own interpretation. However, there were some instances where learners were unable to sustain or apply the style accurately eg. reggae pieces that did not demonstrate awareness and application of accurate rhythm and timbre. It is therefore essential that learners select their repertoire carefully and have a firm grasp of the style chosen for interpretation. Centres are reminded that learners are not assessed on the arrangement itself.

Those achieving the higher mark range were able to show proficiency in their application of techniques, skilful playing of their individual parts and creative expression. These learners were totally at ease with their instrument, culminating in a skilful, engaging and expressive performance. It was clearly evident these learners had prepared well and appeared to be enjoying the experience.

There were some good examples of centres providing opportunity for learners to perform in an appropriate setting and this sense of occasion invariably enhanced the performance. These learners showed creativity in their interpretation and applied musical expressions effectively throughout. It was evident learners enjoyed the experience of performing to an audience where the majority demonstrated a sense of performance stagecraft.

In contrast, the learners who performed in the classroom or without a specific purpose did not allow themselves opportunity to engage in this experience and subsequently did not give adequate focus on stagecraft. The performance environment must be quiet and centres must ensure that learners are provided with the best possible space to undertake this external exam.

When performing, it is also essential that learners consider their positions in the performance space. All members must be seen clearly at all times. Consideration should also be given to the use of musical stands and whether they are necessary. Vocalists in particular must be encouraged to learn their songs so that a copy of the lyrics or lead-sheet is not necessary as this also emulates industry practice.

Centres are advised to ensure that learners have the necessary level of competency on their instrument when undertaking this qualification as there were examples of learners participating with limited skills-sets.

Activity 4:

AO4 Be able to contribute towards a performance as part of an ensemble.

Learners are assessed on:

- **Justification of the musical decisions made**
- **explanation of the musical elements used**
- **explanation of the stylistic features used**
- **critical analysis of how successful learners were in meeting the stylistic intentions**

For this task, learners must explain how they have deployed musical elements and stylistic features in one piece.

Most learners had prepared notes for this activity and were able to provide justifications of their musical ideas. There were also examples of learners producing a PowerPoint presentation, although on occasions these tended to detract from the main focus area where learners discussed several aspects but without specific detail. The lower level learners were able to identify the style applied but were challenged by the more demanding aspects of the stylistic features, traits and technical demands such as metre and tonality.

A significant number of learners were confident in their intentions with many providing highly detailed explanations of the way in which the stylistic features had been deployed. At best, these learners supported their explanations by practical demonstration on their instrument/voice. This is a highly effective method which substantiates knowledge and understanding. Centres are reminded to encourage learners to adopt this approach in future tests. Others provided examples through discussion and were able to draw on some musical elements.

Learners were able to justify reasons for their selection well with most able to draw on the stylistic demands required for individual instrumentation, particularly in terms of their own contribution. Occasionally, learners discussed stylistic features that were inaccurate, such as rhythmic elements.

Some learners experienced difficulty in articulating their response and invariably the points made were not relevant or demonstrated stylistic awareness.

A small number did not make reference to any stylistic elements and instead provided information on a different expressive interpretation.

To achieve at the higher level, learners must critically analyse the musical intentions and their use of the different stylistic features, playing techniques and musical elements. It is essential that detailed reference is made to specific ideas, techniques applied and effects to illustrate and elaborate their analysis.

Activity 5:

A05 Be able to reflect and make connections between responding, planning, rehearsal and performance.

Learners are assessed on:

- **Evaluation of the individual preparation.**
- **Evaluation of the individual contribution to group rehearsals.**
- **Evaluation of the individual role in the performance.**
- **Suggestions on how the performance could be improved in future, providing clear targets.**
- **Justification of how they selected and used musical skills.**

For activity 5, learners must critically analyse the process from the rehearsal period through to the performance. Within the review, they must comment on the success of the final work, drawing references to the appropriateness of the event in terms of its audience and purpose.

A good number of learners were able to score well, showing a firm and developed understanding of the whole process. At best, these were well articulated supported by a competent analysis of each piece in terms of the musical demands. There were a few learners who failed to include suggestions on how the piece could be developed in future, thus minimising their ability to gain marks higher than the 7-9 range.

There were several descriptive accounts of the way in which parts had been developed, however these were not entirely convincing in reference to the application of music techniques. These responses demonstrated a methodical approach to rehearsal planning and organisation with limited references to support the musical development. The higher level answers provided a more critical review of the way in which techniques had been deployed.

Most learners were able to discuss aspects of the way in which the group had communicated. The more basic responses referred to making eye contact, whilst the more sophisticated answers showed more sensitivity towards the playing demands of each instrument, importance of verbal and physical communication and taking/providing direction.

All learners were able to provide some justification of their own application of musical skills and at best these encompassed skills acquisition, identified a range of techniques and were able to apply musical knowledge and technical language confidently to justify reasons, as in the example below:

We changed the song 'Higher Ground' by Stevie Wonder from funk to reggae. I started learning this song by listening to the track repeatedly. I then started to play along to the track at home on my drum kit. I decided to learn the funk version of the song regardless of the fact we are changing the genre. I did this, as it is an effective way to quickly learn the structure of the song and learning lyrics, which will help with cues later on in rehearsal.

When it came to creating a reggae drumbeat, I turned to reggae music for inspiration. I listened to artists such as Bob Marley to listen to the kind of drum beats that are commonly used. I also used my existing knowledge of reggae drumming; accented notes on 2 and 4, back beat skank, rim clicks, snares off and slow tempo. I used accented notes on 2 & 4 on the hit hat; this complimented what the pianist and guitarist were playing. I used YouTube for inspiration with my fills, I noticed a lot of use of toms and syncopation, so I made sure I implemented this into my own fills. I practised a lot at home the switch in the bridge from reggae skank to straight rhythms as I wanted this to be as slick as possible. I practised my reggae beat with a metronome, starting at a tempo as slow as 60bpm up to 100bpm, to ensure I could play this with control and fluency. I practised my fills on any surface when I remembered to, for example, table or my lap. I changed my drumbeat in the chorus because we noticed from the point of view of an audience member, you can't tell when the chorus is, and so I created a more upbeat 'dream' beat. When I rehearsed at home and with the band I made sure my musical expression was as good as I want it to be in the performance. I achieved this by pretending every rehearsal was the real thing, therefore, in the performance it will be habit. This was a successful way of learning my part for this song, as I learnt it quickly and my performance was smooth. By being thorough during rehearsals it meant that my performance didn't have errors and because of my research it stayed true to reggae.

A number of learners had not offered suggestions on how the performance could be improved. It is essential that learners reflect holistically on the positive areas as well as aspects that could be further developed. This will also support musicianship in other areas of the qualification.

The example below includes developed and balanced suggestions for how the performance and process could be developed, supported with meaningful targets set to support future progress.

□ If I were to repeat this process, I would have more regular sound checks so there would be a better balance between instruments and vocals. Also this would enable me to ensure that when my instrument was warmed-up properly, it was still in tune with the piano, as I had to pull my clarinet barrel out so that it was in tune during one of the pieces.

□ Also I would take out the drums, as I felt that in some parts of the pieces (in 'Hoochie Coochie Man' and 'Higher Ground'), the percussion was overpowering the other instruments. Instead, I would have a short clarinet riff or a long note being growled (a technique where you hum whilst playing to make a very brassy sound on your instrument, from the vibrations of the reed).

□ I would possibly add in more vocals, where I would sing a harmony in the chorus of 'Hoochie Coochie Man', so that when the lyrics 'hoochie coochie man' are sang, I would harmonise to add more texture and a greater balance between instrumentalists and vocals.

□ In addition to this, I would play the original improvisation section in 'Higher Ground' as opposed to manipulating the melody line to add more contrast to the piece.

□ I would also seek to ensure that all the instrumentalists in the ensemble make regular eye contact with each other so we are all aware of our musical direction for each section of each piece. Therefore it will further improve our accuracy when playing and when to finish playing at the end of each passage, particularly at the end of 'Hoochie Coochie Man', as I need to know when to finish playing the long note of B.

To achieve the higher band, learners must reflect sensitively on the whole process drawing on aspects considered in the selection process through to performance. A comprehensive understanding of what went well and less well supported with strategies and actions for future improvement is essential. It is also necessary to provide examples to support conclusions.

Summary

Based on the performance seen during this series the following should be considered:

Administration (**ASG**):

- Centres are reminded that learners may not be assisted during the recording by any means.
- Learners must state their name and registration numbers clearly at the beginning of all activities. It is also helpful if they provide information on the instrument played.
- Centres must consider the appropriateness of the rehearsal room and the scheduling of the recorded rehearsal, ensuring that no external noise is heard from outside the room.
- It is vital that learners are seen clearly when working in a group. Centres are reminded to ensure that the camera is positioned carefully. Similarly learners must avoid sitting behind other members of the group.
- All mandatory documentation must be completed by the centre as they are necessary for marking purposes. These must be presented as hard copies.
- Each activity must be clearly labeled on all external drives. This must include learner name and registration numbers, saved in individual files.
- All pages for activity 5 must include the learner's name and registration numbers.
- Learner work needs to include the centre name, number, learner's name and registration number.

For learners:

- To achieve well in this unit, learners need to ensure appropriate selection of repertoire that supports their skills level and to show best musicianship.
- Learners do not gain any additional credit for playing a variety of instruments. It is therefore strongly advisable for learners to perform on their main instrument. This supports a higher level of competency and confidence.

- Ensure that the sound is balanced and all instruments can be heard and clearly seen.
- Provision must be made to allow all learners in the ensemble to demonstrate technical proficiency by selecting individual parts carefully.
- It is recommended that learners focus on presenting milestone rehearsals which demonstrate some progress and also allows for further development.
- It is advisable for learners to plan the rehearsal before-hand, demonstrate skills acquisition, offer ideas, co-operate fully and engage in problem-solving.
- All learners must be seen clearly and the camera must be positioned carefully. Similarly, learners must avoid sitting behind other members of the group.
- The rehearsal debrief must be conducted after the rehearsal and whilst it is permissible to have notes, learners must avoid reading these verbatim.
- Consider an appropriate setting to provide a sense of occasion as this will invariably enhance the performance experience.
- Consider the necessity of musical stands. Learners are encouraged to learn their songs to emulate industry practices.
- Support explanations in activities 2 and 4 by practical demonstration on the instrument/voice. This is a highly effective method which substantiates knowledge and understanding.

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