

# **L2 Lead Examiner Report 1906**

May 2019

**Level 2 BTEC Technical in  
Music Production**

**Unit 14: Music Project (21314L)**

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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 14: Music Project (21314L)

Grade	Unclassified	Level 2		
		Pass	Merit	Distinction
<b>Boundary Mark</b>	0	21	32	44

## Introduction

The Pearson BTEC Level 2 Technical Diploma in Music Production is a new qualification and as such, this is the first series that this external synoptic assessment in the form of a set task has been available. The set task consists of two assessment activities. For Activity 1, learners must produce, create or record a piece of music in response to an industry brief. For this very first examination series, the brief was set by a gaming company who required learners to generate music to be used on various retro computer games. The given time period was 1975-1985 and the work submitted should evoke this era and be appropriate for the target audience of people aged 35-45. Working individually, learners had the following three options to choose from:

- Create an original composition to accompany the opening credits of a spy game called *Double Agent*
- Create a DAW project to accompany a car chase sequence in a game called *USA Highway*
- Produce a multi-track recording of a piece of music from the given era for use on a karaoke game called *Sing the Hits*.

Learners are assessed on their application of skills and techniques (20 marks) and on meeting the demands of the set brief (20 marks).

For Activity 2, learners must submit a commentary, that could be written and/or verbal, that accounts for their creative process and justifies their musical decisions. Learners can present up to 10-pages of writing with embedded screenshots etc. in addition to supplying a 5-minute audio/visual commentary. Learners can have access to their final musical product and any project notes when producing their commentary. Learners are assessed on their exploration of processes and techniques, their creative choices and their account of the development process (20 marks).

Each of the activities were marked using a levels based approach to assessment. The overall quality of the response was considered rather than the specific number of points gained.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

A wide of range of responses were submitted across the full range of grades available. The more successful submissions were those that fully adhered to the given brief and presented music that fully embodied the given time period. Less successful submissions paid little if any attention to the brief at all, often using musical material and styles from outside of the given period.

It may seem an obvious point but as this is a technical qualification, it is expected that learners will strive to meet the demands of the brief.

Although musical outcomes were sometimes successful in their own right, the fact that the music presented was not what was required by the brief stopped some learners from scoring highly. This would also mean that in an industry scenario, the musical product would be defunct and unfit for purpose as it had not met the given brief. It is important to stress that the music presented for this unit should be created or produced specifically for the given brief and an excellent musical outcome that does not meet the brief will struggle to score well.

## Overall Performance of Individual Options

### Option 1 – Individual Composition

The spy option was handled well by some learners and many musical clichés were well exploited. Some learners had clearly analysed existing spy music from the set time period and then applied their findings within their own pieces. The more successful pieces were those that offered some convincing variety through subtle handling of structure, harmony, dynamics and timbre. In order to meet the brief, musical elements and devices had to be used stylistically to create a sense of suspense and mystery. Commentaries would then discuss the musical features of the pieces and highlight how musical elements and devices have been used to meet the brief.

### Option 2 – DAW Project

This was the most popular of the three options and submissions ranged from some very well structured and creative interpretations to some more generic pieces of music, not always suitable for the brief. The brief called for the music to ‘reflect the excitement of a car chase’ and the better submissions took the listener on a journey depicting the different stages of the car chase and convincingly located their piece in The USA. It was difficult for submissions that lacked development and momentum to score well given the nature of the brief. There was a plethora of existing material to draw upon for this brief mainly from the many American TV Cop shows from the late 1970s and early 1980s and the more successful submissions had clearly explored some of these iconic pieces of music and applied their findings stylistically to their own pieces.

Some examiners experienced difficulty in ascertaining which brief learners had attempted and there was often confusion over whether they had tackled option one or two. Where this was the case, examiners applied the mark scheme assessing the piece as both an original composition and then a DAW project and awarded the higher mark of the two. Learners must make it clear which option they have attempted.

### Option 3 – Multi-track Recording

This was the least popular of the three options and it is important that once again the brief is followed. Learners had been asked to record a song that was released between 1975-1985 and learners who submitted recordings from outside of this time frame did not fully meet the brief. The final mix should also be of a high

quality given the nature of the option and much thought should be given to the presentation of the final submission.

## Individual Options / Activities

### Activity 1: Creating a final music product

In terms of the musical outcomes, the better submissions were the ones in which musical elements and techniques had been used creatively and stylistically and where it was evident that learners had investigated and researched the given time period and associated musical styles.

There were examples of work where learners had relied too heavily on pre-existing material such as loops and samples and had not exploited, developed nor adapted these with any individuality. There should be a convincing attempt to develop and manipulate musical material using musical elements such texture, structure and timbre, even if loops and samples are being used.

Learners taking the composition pathway tended to fare better than those who submitted DAW projects. Some of the DAW projects submitted tended to lack genuine sophistication and creativity and there were examples of pieces that lacked genuine musical organisation and control. The specification details the range of skills and techniques that learners should be taught before embarking on this set task and centres should refer to this content to ensure learners are fully equipped to undertake the external assessment. Learners should strive to demonstrate control and creativity in their selection and handling of processes, techniques, and resources.

### Activity 2: Commentary: Creative Focus

The supporting commentaries were also of varying quality with the better submissions accounting for learners' creative decisions and demonstrating their application of musical skills and techniques. Learners should discuss the development of their pieces and there is scope for them to refer to earlier iterations of their work and then to discuss how and why changes and refinements were made.

This then allows examiners to understand their creative processes and musical decision making.



To be awarded a mark between 11-15, learners must present a logical and coherent commentary. This would imply that learners account for the development of the piece from start to finish, highlighting their key decisions and offering some insight into the decisions they made along the way for example:

*'As this music is for a spy game, I wanted the atmosphere of this song to feel mysterious, ambiguous and full of suspense. I therefore used high pitched dissonant pizzicato strings as this added a chilling effect to the overall sound and created a detached, uneasy and almost uncomfortable sound that ties in with the brief.'*

Learners should also draw the examiners' attention to the range of skills and processes they have explored and deployed within their pieces for example:

*'I took into consideration where in the car you would be sitting. In the USA you sit on the left-hand side to drive a car. I decided to pan the music predominantly to the left to reflect this and to make the person playing the game feel as they were actually in the car.'*

Learners should also refer to pieces, styles and artists they have investigated and taken influence from for example:

*'I tried to create a funky baseline that wouldn't seem out of place in the 70s reminiscent of Stevie Wonder or Chic and I also added a gated snare drum and a Rhodes keyboard as these resources were very common in songs from the given time period by electro-pop bands such as Pet Shops Boys and The Human League'*

Many commentaries were overly descriptive and did not link the musical decision making with the intended effect for example:

*'I added echo to the bass and automation to the drums and I also added reverb.'*

Although this type of response states what was done, it does not give any rationale or insight into the approach and so would not receive much credit.

Many learners did not take full advantage of the opportunities available and most produced rather short commentaries that did not fully account for the creative process. Very few learners took advantage of submitting an audio/visual commentary and again, this may be a more advantageous route for some learners at this level who may be able to better account for their creative process and decision making verbally rather than through writing. For learners to score well, the examiner needs to understand how they have developed their final piece, the rationale behind the musical choices and the techniques and processes that have been explored.

## Summary

Based on their performance on this paper, learners should:

- Refer to the essential content in the specification as this lists the knowledge and skills that they should acquire before undertaking the set task
- Refer closely to the set task brief and ensure that they work within its parameters in terms of given musical styles, time periods etc. They should make it clear which brief they have attempted.
- Use their time prior to generating their final submission to explore music from the given time period, styles and artists so that they have secure reference points
- Aim to demonstrate creativity and imagination when handling musical techniques and resources. Musical elements such as texture, structure, timbre and harmony should be exploited in a stylistic fashion and learners should aim to create variety in their music
- Use their commentaries to offer a logical insight into their development process and justify how and why they selected, handled and refined techniques, processes and resources by referring to various iterations of their final piece. Remember that learners can keep a log of their ideas and developments as they create and refine their pieces that can then be used to inform their final commentary.

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