NCFE Level 3 Applied General Certificate in Music Technology (601/6779/8)

Assessment window: 7 May 2019- 12 June 2019

Assessment: Practical

Paper Number: P000763

This report contains information in relation to the external assessment from the Chief Examiner, with an emphasis on the standard of learner work within this assessment window.

The aim is to highlight where learners generally perform well as well as any areas where further development may be required.

Key points:

- grading information
- administering the external assessment
- standard of learner work
- Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment
- referencing of external assessment tasks
- evidence creation
- interpretation of the tasks and associated assessment criteria
- planning in the external assessment.

It is important to note that learners should not sit the external assessment until they have taken part in the relevant teaching of the full qualification content.

Grade Boundary Information

Each learner's external assessment paper is marked by an Examiner and awarded a raw mark. During the awarding process, a combination of statistical analysis and professional judgement is used to establish the raw marks that represent the minimum required standard to achieve each grade. These raw marks are outlined in the table below.

Max Mark	Distinction	Merit	Pass	NYA

Grade boundaries represent the minimum raw mark required to achieve a certain grade. For example, if the grade boundary for the Pass grade is 25, a minimum raw mark of 25 is required to achieve a Pass.

Maximum UMS Score*	Distinction	Merit	Pass	NYA

* In order to ensure that levels of achievement remain comparable for the same assessment across different assessment windows, all raw marks are converted to a points score based on a uniform mark scale (UMS). For more information about UMS and how it is used to determine overall qualification grades, please refer to the qualification specification.

Administering the External Assessment

The external assessment is invigilated and must be conducted in line with our Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment. Learners may require additional pre-release material in order to complete the tasks within the paper. These must be provided to learners in line with our Regulations.

Learners must be given the resources to carry out the Tasks and these are highlighted within the Qualification Specific Instructions Document (QSID).

Standard of Learner Work

This was the fourth window for the practical external assessment and learner numbers had increased from the previous summer session.

All learners in this window presented creditable evidence in all sections of the assessment including written work and audio mixes. The assessed work spanned the range of available grades.

The majority of learners had produced creative remixes based on the supplied audio and MIDI material, with some learners reinforcing their practical work with detailed and evaluative written process evidence.

Learners who achieved less well tended to have applied less focussed planning for the remix and were less aware of both musical and technical processes. Learners who had produced more narrative accounts of the process, often with less detailed commentary upon use of technology, tended not to be able to access the full range of available marks.

Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment

Malpractice

There were no reported instances of malpractice in this assessment window. The Chief Examiner would like to take this opportunity to advise learners that instances of malpractice (for example, copying of work from another learner) will affect the outcome on the assessment.

Maladministration

No instances of maladministration were reported in this assessment window. The Chief Examiner would like to highlight the importance of adhering to the Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment document in this respect.

Referencing of External Assessment Tasks

The majority of learners in this session had referenced evidence to each task clearly and in line with good practice.

Some learners had provided written work in the supplied log and had produced additional content, such as screenshots to reinforce commentary. Learners are reminded that screenshots should be clearly referenced to the task to allow for assessment.

Examples of good practice in electronic submissions included folders for each task, containing word-processed evidence and audio files as required.

Evidence Creation

In this session learners typically produced a mixture of handwritten responses, word-processed documents, screenshots and audio files.

Electronic submissions should be rendered to PDF to ensure that formatting and embedded graphics files are displayed correctly. If electronic document types other than PDF are used, learners should be aware that documents are potentially not displayed as intended and that information could be lost.

Some word-processed documents were submitted in formats not approved by NCFE (for example, as Apple Page documents). Learners should take care to ensure that files are submitted in a format approved by NCFE to ensure that work can be opened by examiners and assessed without delay.

DAW files and / or project folders were sent as evidence in some learner submissions. Learners should note that DAW files will not be accepted as evidence in this assessment. DAW files / project folders should therefore not be submitted as evidence.

Screenshots that are not referenced or explained in text are unlikely to provide useable assessment evidence and so the intention of screenshots as evidence should be made clear via annotation and referencing.

Tasks 3, 4 and 5 require stereo audio mix downs and omission of these files is likely to diminish the available credit in these tasks. Learners should be aware of CD standard as 44.1 kHz/ 16bit, particularly with reference to task 5 where the use of correct audio format forms part of the assessment.

The majority of audio files were presented as an appropriate type (.wav, .mp3 and.aiff) but in some cases files were found to be corrupted. It is important to listen back to audio files to ensure that they have exported as intended from the DAW to avoid export errors impacting upon assessment.

No learners had used screencasts as evidence in this session. This evidence form is acceptable and may be useful for some learners in allowing spoken commentary to be recorded. The Chief Examiner advises that for screencasts to be most effective in terms of assessment, the audio from both the learners' microphone and DAW should be recorded and that the screencasts should be concise and clearly referenced to the task.

Responses of the Tasks within the Sections of the External Assessment Paper

Section 1

In this section the learners were required to plan how they would undertake the remix task, based on the given audio and MIDI files. The learners were asked to explain their planning in the context of parameters set within the task and their own creative intentions.

A clear and detailed plan in this section tended to allow learners to produce more focused work in subsequent sections of the assessment, whilst a lack of planning tended to impact on available marks, time management and the eventual audio outcome.

The intended style of the remix was noted defined by the brief in this session, allowing learners to creatively explore a style of their own choosing. Learners who achieved well in this section tended to consider and explicitly define the style that they had chosen, which allowed in many cases for more specific focus in planning.

Learners were asked to consider musical elements and learners who achieved well tended to consider each musical element stylistically and in detail. Knowledge of musical elements informed planning of the remix. Learners were often more confident in considering instrumentation, rhythmic elements and structure than melodic and harmonic elements. Few learners were able to consider chord progressions, key signature or melodic patterns with reference to technical language.

A lack of consistency in understanding of key musical features in some cases impacted upon the outcome in this section, and upon the ability of learners to develop stylistically coherent musical ideas in the following sections, based on the given material.

The minimum track requirement of 16 audio and MIDI tracks was not always explicitly considered in learner work, and in some cases this was detrimental to planning. Plans should therefore clearly show how the learner anticipates that the track count will be fulfilled. It is important that learners demonstrate usage of sufficient numbers of tracks in order to achieve.

The brief required a final length of between 3 minutes 40 seconds and 5 minutes for the remix. Many learners did not explicitly consider this requirement in planning, and did not make links to structural development. A lack of planning in terms of time requirements and key musical elements tended to impact negatively on available marks in this section, and upon the compositional outcome.

Section 2

In this section learners were required to develop original sounds for use in their remix. The majority of learners had created a synth patch and a sampler patch using software instruments in line with the task requirements.

Learners who expressed clear intentions with regards to texture, style and musical purpose and were able to explain the editing process in developing original sounds in detail and using appropriate terminology, tended to achieve well.

The use of annotated screenshots often helped learners illustrate the work undertaken in this section by showing how software instrument controls had been manipulated.

Original synthesiser sounds were generally derived by variations of software based subtractive

synthesis, although some learners had explored other synthesis types. Some learners were able to relate how the use of components (for example – oscillators, filters, envelope generators and modulators) achieved the intended sonic outcome.

Successful learners were able to demonstrate editing and basic key mapping in the creation of a sampler patch. A number of learners made creative use of sampling; for example, by re-pitching an element taken from the supplied material to create an interesting textural effect. Not all learners were confident in the application of tools and techniques to create an effective sampler patch, with some learners not considering the tuning of samples and very few making use of more sophisticated processes (e.g. velocity switching or looping).

As in previous sessions learners who performed less well in this section tended to rely on pre-set patches and in some cases loops, which did not allow them to access the full range of the mark scheme.

A minority of learners continued to be unable to demonstrate appropriate skills or knowledge, for example by confusing creation of an original patch with application of effects to a pre-set.

Few learners made reference to saving patches independently of the DAW project. Saving patches would be good practice in ensuring accurate playback and portability and would avoid issues of patches not playing back correctly in the remix.

Section 3

In this section the learners were required to demonstrate the use of MIDI and audio editing tools in developing their remix.

Learners who achieved this section tended to be able to apply a range of editing tools, to meet a planned outcome.

Annotated screenshots provided some learners with opportunity to usefully evidence use of editing, for example by comparison of 'before' and 'after'.

Successful learners typically applied editing correctively and creatively (e.g. by removing unwanted audio, pitch tuning, corrective quantise, application of velocity to create 'feel' and use of crossfades to tidy audio edits).

Learners who performed less well in this section tended to use a more limited range of tools in less sophisticated ways. Whilst evidence often showed application, learners did not always demonstrate thought given to intentions, in using the tools.

As in the previous external assessment windows, few learners chose to make use of pitch bend or MIDI controllers to enhance areas of programming. Sophisticated MIDI editing was generally less well used by learners.

A small minority of learners appeared unfamiliar with basic editing tools and terminology, in some cases struggling to apply corrective tools. This lack of knowledge also tended to limit achievement in this

section of the assessment, although in respects to audio editing this seemed improved from the previous assessment window.

Learners were required to produce a stereo audio mix as part of the evidence for this section and the majority of learners achieved this. Few learners had presented no audio or audio with significant errors at this stage, which was an improvement from previous sessions.

Section 4

In this section learners were required to apply mixing apply tools and techniques to their work to produce an audio outcome.

Leaners who performed well in this section tended to have considered application of tools and techniques and approached all required areas of processing (e.g. EQ, effects, dynamics, balance and automation) to develop the audio outcome substantially. Some learners had made imaginative use of DAW tools in their mixes to refine the work.

Learners working at this level tended to consider mixing with reference to the stylistic direction of the remix.

Learners who were less comfortable in the use of dynamics processing and EQ in creating a mix and often did not fully consider the use of bussing in effects, tended to perform less well in this section.

Some learners relied heavily on pre-sets for EQ and dynamic processing, which were not always effective and generally showed limited evidence of intent and understanding.

More sophisticated mixing techniques including side chain compression and automation were in evidence again in this session and in most cases were used creatively to add interest. It was noted that a minority of learners, in applying more sophisticated techniques, had sometimes done so to the detriment of the audio outcome.

Learners were required to create a stereo audio file of the mix. As elsewhere in the submission learners should take care to listen back to the exported stereo audio file to check for errors.

Learners should be aware that credit is likely to be lost for omission of the required audio mix, but as in section 3 this session saw an improvement in this evidence being provided.

Section 5

In this section learners were required to produce two mastered stereo audio files. The majority of learners had applied mastering processing, usually via plug ins inserted on the stereo output of the DAW.

Learners who performed well tended to apply subtle and appropriate processing including EQ,

compression and limiting, based on specific intentions to enhance the mix.

A small number of learners had made considered use of metering plug ins to consider bandwidth and phase and assist the mastering process.

Learners who performed less well in this section tended to be less focused in application of processing. A minority of learners had chosen to apply a pre-set mastering chain with seemingly little consideration of the material and others had applied quite extreme processing which was detrimental to the audio outcome.

Not all learners had considered appropriate formats for the given purpose – with some continued misunderstanding of the requirements for CD production in terms of bit depth and sample rate. Learners who achieved well tended to have considered the audio formats in terms of purpose and related this to the mastering process.

As in Sections 3 and 4, learners should take care to listen back to the resultant stereo audio files and particularly consider if the audio has been enhanced by mastering.

A minority of learners had not provided two mastered files. Learners should be aware that omission of this required evidence is likely to result in loss of credit in this section.

Section 6

In this section learners were required to review the process and outcome of producing the remix.

Learners who performed well in this section tended to be able to evaluate their work consistently using technical language and related this back to their initial planning and intentions.

The majority of learners had approached this section logically and set out their response to each area required by the task.

Learners who had produced less detailed planning and developmental evidence in sections 1-5, tended to produce less focused commentary and did not always consider all required areas of the evaluation, which tended to limit marks awarded.

It was notable that many learners had provided limited detail in response to this section. It is advised that learners should take note of the marks available for this section and consider this in their planning to avoid running out of time during the assessment.

Chief Examiner: Graham Lees
Date: 6th August 2019