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

Assessment window: 12 June 2019

Assessment: Written

Paper Number: P000765

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
80	62	47	32	0

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
150	97.5	82.5	67.5	0

** 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 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 third assessment window and third written external assessment paper for the qualification. Relatively small numbers of learners were entered for this paper but there continues to be a steady increase in learners registering on the qualification.

The majority of learners had attempted all questions and many had provided creditable responses across all sections, including those which required application of listening skills.

Learners in this session appeared most comfortable with questions which concerned the Digital Music Business element of the specification, and were generally much less confident with regards to Live Sound Performance Technology and Sound Creation.

Basic knowledge of DAW usage and Multitrack Recording was in evidence, but underlying technical knowledge was not demonstrated consistently in many responses.

Musical language in relation Creating Music was clearly understood in many cases, but equally this was an area of weakness for some learners.

Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment

Malpractice

There were no reported instances of malpractice in this session. The Chief Examiner would like to take this opportunity to advise learners that instances of malpractice will potentially affect the outcome on the assessment.

Maladministration

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

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

Section 1

This section comprised of 6 questions which referred to a supplied short audio example. All learners had successfully accessed the given audio file and the majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who performed well in this section tended to be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of DAW hardware, software and underlying principles of MIDI.

Q1 highlighted some lack of familiarity with MIDI messages. Many learners were not able to identify the function of the byte in an example Note On message from the given choices. The responses suggested limited understanding of basic MIDI communication in some cases.

In Q2 many learners were able to identify at least one MIDI controller, but not all learners could successfully identify two relevant devices. This suggested that not all learners had accessed a range of MIDI input devices during teaching and learning.

Learners were often able to identify the basic function of step time input in response to Q3, but could not always consider how this may be advantageous in the context of capturing a performance to extend their answer.

Learner responses to Q6 demonstrated some ability to describe sonic problems associated with lossy compression, but learners were not always able to explain the underlying technical reasons for these.

In Q4 and Q5 some learners had successfully applied aural skills to identify application of tools and processing in the given audio example. Many learners were able to correctly identify the application of reverb to gain credit in Q4, but fewer were able to identify either the tempo or time signature change and go onto explain how one of these may have been applied using arranging features to gain credit in Q5.

Section 2

This section comprised of 6 questions which referred to a supplied short audio example. All learners had successfully accessed the given audio file and the majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who performed well in this section were generally able to demonstrate knowledge of musical terminology and applied listening skills.

Many learners were able to correctly identify the correct musical term in relation to the given notation in Q7. Learners who did not identify the response from the given choices tended to achieve less well generally in this section of the paper. Learners were less confident in analysing the chord shown in Q8 based on the given graphic depiction, however some were able to identify both the underlying triad and the extension to achieve both available marks.

Consideration of structure and texture based on listening skills were well handled by some learners in Questions 9 and 10, but learners who achieved less well tended to use broad descriptive language in their responses which often limited available credit.

Similarly descriptions of rhythmic changes and tonal changes in Questions 11 and 12 in some cases did not use musical vocabulary, tending towards unfocussed commentary. However, some learners did produce precise and appropriate descriptions demonstrating both aural skills and familiarity with technical language.

It was noted that learners who tended to be able to apply aural skills successfully in this section most often also accurately used musical terms. This suggested a correlation between understanding of theory and application.

Section 3

This section comprised of 6 questions which referred to a supplied short audio example. All learners had successfully accessed the given audio file and the majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who performed well in this section tended to be able to demonstrate knowledge of multi-track recording, mixing and mastering and application of listening skills.

Many learners were able to identify the correct response in Q14 from the given choices, which suggested a familiarity with basic technical terms used in the recording process.

Learners were generally less able to explain how EQ may be applied to control sibilance in Q15, with not all learners confident with regards to the function of a ‘Q’ control in particular.

The majority of learners were able to apply problem solving to the issue outlined in Q16 demonstrating basic knowledge of the application of phantom power to condenser microphones.

Microphone polar patterns were familiar to many learners with the majority able to associate Cardioid patterns with spill rejection in Q13.

Not all learners were able to explain an advantage of creating digital backups, but many were able to consider potential issues with analogue tape as a medium in response to Q17. Responses suggested that in many cases learners were not familiar with hard disk recording systems.

Q18 was the first extended question in the paper and learner responses varied considerably in depth and detail. More limited responses tended to consider the use of DAWs generally, as opposed to laptop based systems and as such produced broader responses. Learners who achieved well evaluated the specific impact in a range of contexts and were able to demonstrate knowledge of both historical and technical developments to reinforce their conclusions.

Section 4

This section comprised of 5 questions which referred to a supplied short audio example. All learners had successfully accessed the given audio file and the majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who performed well in this section were able to demonstrate knowledge of sampling, synthesis and digital audio in terms of sound creation.

Many learners did not appear familiar with FM synthesis, with some responses to Q19 referring to other synthesis types (primarily subtractive synthesis). Some learners were able to identify typical textural outcomes associated with FM, which showed some underpinning knowledge but few were able to consider technical aspects of sound creation using FM.

Learners were more confident in considering the effects of bit depth reduction and application of filtering to the audio in Questions 20 and 21, which suggested some accurate listening skills in these areas.

Learners generally exhibited less refined listening skills in relation to manipulation of envelope settings in Q22 and as such did not always provide creditable responses.

Extended responses to Q23 showed varying degrees of knowledge with regards to both recording and sampling. Many learners were able to go some way to considering how a drum kit might be prepared for recording, but fewer were able to comment on more sophisticated editing measures and detailed considerations in building an effective sampled kit. Less creditable responses generally indicated a lack of understanding of sampling, and particularly lacked detailed consideration of how audio editing and sampler functions would be applied in context.

Section 5

This section comprised of 5 questions. The majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who achieved well in this section were generally able to demonstrate knowledge of roles, technology and planning in relation to live performance.

The majority of learners were able to correctly identify the answer from multiple choices in Q25, which suggested familiarity with the function of technical rehearsals.

Many learners were able to demonstrate knowledge of monitor systems and backline in Questions 24 and 27, although technical language and reasoning was not always detailed. Learners who achieved less well in Q24, for example, tended to have disregarded consideration of passive / active monitors and simply stated an advantage of having monitors for live performance.

Learners appeared more comfortable in considering advantages and disadvantages in Questions 26 and 28, although generally disadvantages in both responses were less well considered. Many learners were able to provide useful responses with regards DJs undertaking live performance, and some commentary in regards to the use of drum machines demonstrated clear learner opinions (although these were not always creditably substantiated by technical commentary).

Section 6

This section comprised of 5 questions. The majority of learners responded to all questions in this section.

Learners who performed well in this section tended to be able to demonstrate knowledge of the digital music business in terms of production, distribution and marketing.

Many learners were able to apply analysis of income to identify the most lucrative streaming services in Q29, indicating ability to analyse data successfully.

The majority of learners were able to provide creditable explanations in regards to the use of video clips and audio previews in Questions 31 and 32, which suggested useful knowledge of promotion in context.

Similarly learners appeared generally comfortable in discussing the distribution of physical product, with many learners providing useful explanative responses in Q30.

Merchandising was also familiar to learners, with the majority able to provide a creditable justification for their choice of either T-shirt or Poster as merchandise in Q33.

Learners who achieved less well in this section tended to be less able to consider concepts surrounding the audience for product and be less comfortable in terms of analysing data.

Chief Examiner: Graham Lees
Date: 4th August 2019