

**NCFE Level 2 Technical Award in Music Technology (601/6774/9)****Assessment Window: 18 October 2021 – 29 October 2021****Assessment: Practical****Paper Number: P002083**

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:

- Grade Boundary 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.

<b>NYA</b>	<b>Level 1 Pass</b>	<b>Level 1 Merit</b>	<b>Level 1 Distinction</b>	<b>Level 2 Pass</b>	<b>Level 2 Merit</b>	<b>Level 2 Distinction</b>
0	8	10	12	15	21	27

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.

<b>Maximum UMS Score*</b>	<b>Level 1 Pass</b>	<b>Level 1 Merit</b>	<b>Level 1 Distinction</b>	<b>Level 2 Pass</b>	<b>Level 2 Merit</b>	<b>Level 2 Distinction</b>
160	24	47	70	92	115	138

*\* 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 sixth external assessment window for the qualification, following disruption to assessments during the pandemic. Learner entries for this assessment were extremely limited but outcomes covered the full range of available grades, which was consistent with previous sessions.

The majority of learners had attempted all sections of the assessment and in most cases produced creditable responses.

However, in some cases learners had not attempted all tasks within sections or had not completed the paper in its entirety. The most common missing responses were in section 4 of the assessment. The Chief Examiner suspects that some learners did not complete all tasks due to running out of time. Learners should therefore consider the time requirements against indicated suggestions in each section and apply these to their work.

Learners should build confidence in preparing for the external assessment by sitting the available practice papers in appropriate conditions, in order to become familiar with the structure and time demands of the assessment.

A very small minority of learners failed to undertake any meaningful response to the tasks, which suggests that they may have been unprepared for the nature and scope of the assessment.

Learners who achieved well overall in the assessment tended to have responded to all tasks in each section and demonstrated relevant knowledge and creative application of skills throughout. Some learners had provided detailed explanative and evaluative work, which typically indicated confidence in using the DAW and was often backed up by convincing and creative audio work.

Learners who achieved less well tended not to have completed all sections, or missed significant numbers of tasks within sections. As in previous sessions some submissions suffered from issues with regards to audio files, indicating that learners are still not fully engaging with the process of checking the final audio prior to submission.

### **Evidence creation**

Learners should use the space provided to answer questions. Where answers are typed or additional pages included, the learners name, centre number, centre name and task number must be clearly visible. The additional paper must then be securely attached to the workbook.

## **Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment**

### **Malpractice**

There were no 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.

## Responses of the tasks within the sections of the external assessment paper

### Task 1

In this section learners were asked to configure the DAW project, including the import of the supplied audio and MIDI files.

Learners who achieved well in this section were able to complete practical work effectively and provide commentary for each element of the tasks. Learners who achieved less well tended to not fully complete configuration tasks and / or provide limited evidence of process.

**Q1a.** Detailed description of DAW hardware and software was included in high achieving submissions, with some learners able to relate the features of their equipment to the task and therefore consider the DAW contextually. Learners who achieved less well tended to provide limited description of equipment, or approach the task from a hypothetical viewpoint (e.g. by describing the purpose of a DAW, but not referencing the specific equipment that they were using).

**Q1b.** The majority of learners were able to create the correct number of audio and MIDI tracks and correctly set the tempo. Learners did not always describe setup of the audio output, which tended to suggest limited knowledge of hardware configuration.

**Q1c.** Import of audio and MIDI files was generally completed satisfactorily. A minority of learners, as per previous sessions, failed to align imported material correctly leading to timing issues. A small number of learners continued to (presumably) misread instructions and attempted to align files incorrectly.

Learners should be aware that it is standard practice for files supplied to be aligned from bar 1 for a mixing project, so it is unlikely that more complex alignment will be required.

Learners generally selected an appropriate software instrument patch and those who achieved well tended to be able to consider the part in context, apply knowledge of software instruments and using aural skills to make a musically pleasing selection.

Screenshots showing the entire DAW arrangement page, tempo settings, tracks and clear file alignment, were helpful to examiners in crediting learner work in this section.

### Task 2

In this section, learners were asked to edit the supplied audio and MIDI material using DAW tools.

Learners who achieved well in this section tended to have completed editing tasks successfully and logically. Learners who achieved less well tended not to have completed all tasks accurately.

Learners achieving higher outcomes tended to have explained the editing processes undertaken in detail and with reference to specific tools, often with illustrative annotated screenshots. Learners who achieved less well generally provided limited description of activities or merely affirmed that the task was undertaken by repeating the wording of the activity given in the assessment.

**Q2a.** Many learners were able to accurately identify and rectify pitch issues in the MIDI part with reference to the given chord. Learners who achieved well were able to identify the notes using musical knowledge and aural skills, and apply MIDI editing to move notes.

Learners who achieved less well tended to not be able to select the appropriate notes showing some lack of aural and theoretical comprehension.

**Q2b.** Many learners were able to accurately identify and rectify the timing error in the guitar by use of appropriate audio editing tools. Learners who achieved well undertook neat editing and explained the process effectively.

Learners who achieved less well tended to have misunderstood the musical application (perhaps not being familiar with key terms such as bars and beats) or did not use appropriate audio editing tools. Learners who had incorrectly aligned audio in Task 1 tended to compound issues in this section.

**Q2c.** The majority of learners were able to make use of audio editing to remove the unwanted audio. Many learners applied simple cut/delete tools to the task, although some learners were able to make use of more advanced tools (for example, application of crossfades to the edit). Learners who achieved less well in this task tended to have cut the audio at an incorrect point, or attempted to apply processing which did not entirely achieve the required result (for example, use of a volume automation which did not silence the unwanted audio).

**Q2d.** Many learners were able to apply audio / MIDI editing or volume automation to create a 'stop' as specified by the task. Learners who achieved well tended to be able to apply editing neatly and accurately and reference use of tools. Learners who achieved less well tended to have not aligned the edit effectively or musically.

**Q2e.** Learners had generally submitted a stereo audio file in response to this task as required. Learners who achieved well correctly exported the entirety of the song with parts muted as detailed in the task, showing the process undertaken to do this.

A minority of learners produced inappropriately long or short audio files (cutting material off, or with long periods of silence at the end of the track).

As elsewhere in this report the Chief Examiner strongly advises learners to check mix downs for audio issues to prevent mistakes.

### **Task 3**

In this section learners were asked to develop the supplied material by adding a musical part and editing a software instrument to create a new sound.

Learners who achieved well in this section were able to undertake creative editing and musical development, and document evidence of intent and process. Learners who achieved less well tended not to have undertaken software instrument editing or created an appropriate musical part.

**Q3a.** Learners who achieved well in this task tended to be able to apply the required effects processing via means of automation, or other editing. Some learners were able to explain their choices of effect and process. Learners who achieved less well tended to have applied effects without regard to the specified section, or were unable to select an appropriate effect.

**Q3b.** This task was noticeably not well handled by the majority of learners in this session. To achieve well in this task learners would typically be able to undertake and explain editing of instruments at sound generation level (e.g. by editing of filters to shape timbre and ADSR to shape the envelope). This aspect was absent in many learners work.

Some learners made no attempt create a new sound, and in some cases did not appear to

understand the concept of editing, with some learners simply selecting a new preset patch in response to the task.

Sound creation continues to be an area of weakness for many learners. The Chief Examiner would like to restate the importance of learners being aware of the range of creative options given by software instrument editing within a DAW.

**Q3c.** Learners were asked to create a part around a 12 bar chord sequence. Learners who achieved well tended to have produced well structured parts, and showed knowledge of creative musical understanding. Learners who achieved less well tended to exhibit limited creative application, or produced musically inappropriate elements which lacked justification for choices.

**Q3d.** Some learners did not appear confident in applying muting to tracks, leaving all parts playing. Similar issues were apparent in some submissions as described in commentary regarding task 2d. However, a number of learners had pleasingly refined audio at this stage showing musical and technical consideration.

A minority of learners did not submit an audio file in response to this task, which tended to limited available credit substantially.

#### **Task 4**

In this section learners were asked to produce a final mix by use of corrective and creative balancing and processing.

Learners who achieved well in this section submitted well considered and balanced audio, often showing creative application of processing, along with clear documentation of intention and application. Learners who achieved less well tended to produce inconsistent audio results with limited evidence of process.

Examiners noted that not all learners had attempted this section and suggested that this may be due to time management issues on the part of learners. Lack of evidence showing tasks being attempted may have impacted upon available marks.

**Q4a.** Learners who achieved well in this task were able to apply EQ appropriately following consideration of the issue. Learners who achieved less well tended to apply inappropriate EQ (for example, a HF boost) or did not engage with the task.

**Q4b.** Many learners were able to apply reverb successfully on the specified instruments to create ambience, with some learners intelligently using bussing from channels, alongside application of panning and volume information.

Learners who achieved less well tended to have applied reverb inappropriately (for example, by inserting across the stereo bus or making overly wet) or to have not applied reverb successfully (in some cases not being able to apply the effect by insert or bussing).

Learners seemed generally confident with automation, although panning was not always applied accurately in terms of L/R position. Some learners were able to create a pleasing fade – though often this was by application to individual tracks rather than automation of the stereo output.

**Q4c.** Learners who achieved well in this task were able to consider and apply mixing techniques (for example, extending commentary and application to further creative application of effects, dynamics processing and EQ) to their work. A minority of learners in this window were able to show clear intent and document technical decisions in creating their mix down.

Learners who achieved less well tended to apply minimal mixing (for example, application of static balance) at this stage or in some cases did not attempt this task.

**Q4d.** Not all learners submitted an audio file for this section, which as in other tasks concerned with audio file submissions, impacted on available marks.

As in other sections, the Chief Examiner would like to advise learners to listen back to the audio outcome in line with standard practice as a working music technologist.

**Chief Examiner: Graham Lees**

**Date: 19<sup>th</sup> December 2021**