

Qualification Title and Code

NCFE Level 1 Technical Award in Music Technology (601/6777/4)
NCFE Level 2 Technical Award in Music Technology (601/6774/9)

Paper number: P001405 (Practical)

Assessment window: 21 February 2022 – 11 March 2022

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.

NYA	Level 1 Pass	Level 1 Merit	Level 1 Distinction	Level 2 Pass	Level 2 Merit	Level 2 Distinction
0-7	8-9	10-11	12-14	15-19	20-25	26-36

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*	Level 1 Pass	Level 1 Merit	Level 1 Distinction	Level 2 Pass	Level 2 Merit	Level 2 Distinction
400	80	120	160	240	280	338

** 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 seventh external assessment window for the qualification, and the first following the pandemic.

Learner 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.

Some learners had not attempted all tasks within sections or had not completed the paper in its entirety. Missing activities included latter sections of the paper, which the Chief Examiner suggests may be a function of learners running out of time. Learners should therefore consider the time requirements of the assessment against indicated suggestions in each section and apply these to their work.

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 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.

It was noted that learners in general appeared well prepared, and this was reflected in the percentage of learners who achieved at Level 1 Pass or better. The Chief Examiner suggested that this, in part, may be a function of centres making extensive use of past papers as teaching material as part of remote learning.

Learners who achieved well throughout the assessment tended to have responded to all tasks in each section and demonstrated relevant knowledge and creative musical 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, however this was markedly less of an issue in this session.

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.

Audio files should be checked to ensure that they playback in the way expected.

DAW files and assets should not be included as part of the submission and will not be regarded as evidence.

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

One instance 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.

Question 1 (a) High achieving submissions generally included detailed description of DAW hardware and software, with some learners able to relate the features of their equipment to the task and therefore consider the DAW in the context of creating music.

Learners who achieved less well tended to provide limited description of equipment, or approach the task from a hypothetical viewpoint of describing the generic functions of a DAW but not relating it to the equipment used to undertake the assessment.

Question 1 (b) The majority of learners were able to create a project, add the correct number of audio and MIDI tracks and correctly set the tempo. Learners did not always describe setup of the audio output as part of the task, which tended to indicate more limited knowledge of hardware configuration.

Screenshot evidence suggested that a minority of learners had failed to create the correct number/type of tracks, which tended to inhibit their ability to complete the following tasks.

Question 1 (c) Import of audio and MIDI files was generally completed satisfactorily. A minority of learners, as per previous sessions, failed to align imported material correctly which led to timing issues. The examiners noted however that this issue was

markedly less significant than in previous sessions, indicating that learners are more aware of standard practice of providing audio files aligned from bar 1 as part of a project.

Learners generally selected an appropriate software instrument patch and those who achieved well tended to be able to apply knowledge of software instruments and aural skills to make a contextually pleasing selection.

Learners who supplied additional annotated screenshot evidence were often able to use this to gain additional credit in using technical terms and elevating descriptions of their process.

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.

Question 2 (a) Many learners were able to accurately identify and rectify pitch issues in the MIDI part. Learners who achieved well were able to identify the notes using musical knowledge and aural skills, and apply MIDI editing to move notes and form the correct chords.

Learners who achieved less well tended to not be able to select the appropriate notes showing some lack of aural awareness. Some learners were able to correct one of the two errors, but did not attend to both.

Question 2 (b) Many learners were able to accurately identify and rectify the timing error in the kick drum part by use of appropriate audio editing tools. Learners who achieved well undertook neat editing and explained the choice and use of tools effectively.

Learners who achieved less well tended to have displayed more limited musical understanding of rhythmic placement when editing. A minority of learners had deleted audio and pulled the remaining track 'into the gap', which led to significant timing issues for the remainder of the project.

Question 2 (c) The majority of learners were able to make use of audio editing tools to remove the unwanted 'click' in the audio. Some learners, as in Q2b applied more advanced editing including use of fades to good results.

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 completely silence the unwanted audio). As in Q2c a small minority deleted the audio and moved the remainder of the tracks forwards, with unmusical results.

Question 2 (d) Learners had generally submitted a stereo audio file in response to this task as required. 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) or did not mix down and only supplied DAW project files.

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.

Question 3 (a) As in previous sessions this task was noticeably not well handled by many learners. 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.

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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.

Some learners applied effects and other processing to edit sounds, which went some way to gaining credit.

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.

Question 3 (b) Learners who achieved well in this task tended to be able to apply musical knowledge and aural skills, along with MIDI editing to add missing chords. High achieving learners explained the process and indicated how they had come to note choice selections.

Some learners correctly copied the part from elsewhere in track, but did not apply musical terminology in their response.

Learners who achieved less well may not have attempted the task, have selected incorrect notes or made incorrect rhythmic placement choices.

Question 3 (c) Learners were asked to create a melodic 4 bar part. Learners who achieved well were able to apply musical knowledge, aural skills and MIDI editing to produce a creative and musical idea. Creative process was awarded where possible alongside musical outcome.

Learners who achieved less well often did not attempt this task, or made unmusical pitch and rhythm choices. Notably a minority of learners chose to add a chordal part, which was sometimes contrary to the underlying harmony of the track and was therefore contextually difficult to appreciate in terms of musical outcome.

Question 3 (d) Learners who achieved well in this task had submitted an audio file in an appropriate format, included parts muted as per the task. Some issues were seen as described in Task 2d, which led to a reduction in available marks. 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.

Question 4 (a) Learners who achieved well in this task were able to make use of automation to correctively change the volume of a track, alongside the application of automated panning and creative use of EQ to remove low frequencies from a section of the vocal.

Learners seemed generally confident with automation, although panning was not always applied accurately in terms of L/R position.

High performing learners applied automation accurately and logically to all three aspects. Learners who were not familiar with automation of EQ bypass in some cases creditably applied other methods, such as splitting the audio, to apply EQ to the required section.

Learners who achieved less well tended to be unable to control automation effectively or had applied EQ throughout the track.

Question 4 (b) Many learners were able to apply reverb successfully on the specified vocal tracks, with some learners intelligently using bussing from channels to give some blend.

Learners who achieved less well tended to have applied reverb inappropriately (for example, by inserting across the stereo bus or making the outcome overly wet) or to have not applied reverb successfully.

Many learners were able to name a chosen reverb preset, but very few gave evidence of editing or reasons for their choice.

Question 4 (c) 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. High performing learners were often able to confirm technical and creative decisions via written and screenshot evidence.

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.

Question 4 (d) As in previous tasks learners who achieved well produced successful mixdowns in an appropriate audio file format. Not all learners submitted an audio mix down for this section. The Chief Examiner extrapolates that this was an outcome of running out of time. As elsewhere 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 and to be aware of time spent on the assessment in order to attempt all tasks.