Non-Examined Assessment

Band 2 Exemplar Learner Response

**NCFE Level 1/2 Technical Award in Music Technology
(603/7008/7)**

Contents

Introduction

The following are sample learner responses for each task within an assignment alongside examiner commentary for each assignment. They show how learners might respond and can help assessors in making their overall marking decisions.

Learner responses

Each learner response should demonstrate _what_ a **mark band two / third band** response looks like alongside any evidence which is required to be completed. All responses use content from the mark schemes and align with the standards in the mark band descriptors and indicative content.

Assessor commentary

The assessor commentary demonstrates _why_ the responses given throughout the assignment meet the criteria for the mark band they have been awarded. The assessor commentary will be linked to, and supported by, the descriptors in the mark scheme.

	Production of the piece
Marks	**Descriptors**
10–12	AO5 – **Excellent** analysis and evaluation of the processes used and decisions made as they progress in producing the piece, providing a **comprehensive and highly detailed** evaluation of all processes and tools used that is **highly relevant** to the brief, showing understanding of all being used in context. AO2 – **Excellent** application of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software. The musical piece **fully meets** the requirements of the brief, **successfully** and with **highly accomplished** execution. The piece is **fully realistic** and would be suitable for submission in a real-life context. AO1 – **Excellent** recall of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software that is **comprehensive** and **highly detailed**.
7–9	AO5 – **Good** analysis and evaluation of the processes used and decisions made as they progress in producing the piece, providing a **mostly detailed** evaluation of **most** processes and tools used that is **mostly relevant** to the brief, showing understanding of being used in context. AO2 – **Good** application of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software. The musical piece **mostly** meets the requirements of the brief and with some **accomplished** execution. The piece is **mostly realistic** and would be suitable for submission in a real-life context. AO1 – **Good** recall of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software that is **mostly detailed**.
4–6	AO5 – **Reasonable** analysis and evaluation of the processes used and decisions made as they progress in producing the piece, providing a **reasonably detailed** evaluation of **some** processes and tools used that has **some relevance** to the brief, showing **some** understanding of being used in context. AO2 – **Reasonable** application of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software. The musical piece meets **some** requirements of the brief and with **reasonable** execution. The piece is **reasonably realistic and would be reasonable** suitable for submission in a real-life context. AO1 – **Reasonable** recall of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software that has **some detail.**
1–3	AO5 – **Limited** analysis and evaluation of the processes used and decisions made as they progress in producing the piece, providing a **minimally detailed** evaluation of **limited** processes and tools used that has **minimal relevance** to the brief, showing **limited** understanding of being used in context. AO2 – **Limited** application of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software in meeting the brief. The piece is **limited** in terms of its suitability for submission in a real-life context. AO1 – **Limited** recall of knowledge and understanding of the creative use of hardware and software that has **limited detail.**
0	No rewardable material

Project brief

Sounds for Your New Content (S.Y.N.C)

You are a music producer running your own company called Sounds for Your New Content (S.Y.N.C).

S.Y.N.C specialises in sound creation and music for use in TV shows, adverts, film and games. A well-known sports brand has sent you a brief requesting original music and sounds to be used in an advert for a new range of running shoes.

The brief states that the final piece **must:**

- be produced using DAW software and hardware
- be between 1 and 2 minutes in length
- be submitted as a stereo audio file
- include sounds which create the atmosphere of a sporting event
- include music written in the style of 21st century pop:
    - o the music must be energetic and recreate the excitement of a race
    - o the music must use a four to the floor rhythm
    - o the music must use a drop in the structure
    - o the music must use audio recordings and software instrument.

Evidence:

You **must** provide:
- your proposal for the piece
- your internet browsing history used for research and planning purposes.

Your proposal **must** include the following to meet the requirements of the brief:
- the musical elements of your piece including:
  - melody
  - harmony
  - rhythm
  - structure
  - instrumentation
  - style
  - the sound creation elements of your piece
  - your reasoning for the decisions made.

You should present your work as a word document but may use the following formats to provide supporting evidence for your proposal:
- written report
- mind maps
- technical notes
- digital presentation
- annotated diagrams.

Task 1: responding to the brief

House Music started in the 1980's in Chicago created by Franky Knuckles who people call the godfather of house. It was called house music because they used early Roland TR-807 and 809 drum machines and didn't need to record their tracks in an actual recording studio. It then got big around the world and people started combining it with other types of music to make different types of house (all from masterclass.com). It's still popular and you hear it on the radio.

House music uses lots of different rhythms to keep it exciting to listen to. It usually has four beats in a bar on the bass drum (called 'four to the Floor') and then other rhythms move around it on different instruments. Claps are often used on the two and the four of each bar. These drums are programmed using a drum machine and then you can loop them round and round to make people want to dance. We have practiced drums in class with snares and claps so I know I can do this.

House music normally has drums, base and someone singing over the top. Sometimes there are synths and guitars in it too. Usually these are mainly programmed on the computer but they can be real instruments if necessary too. On some of the tracks I listened to there were background recordings of sounds / people chatting at the start or the end to kind of set the scene. We have software instruments at school on the laptop which I can use to make this track with.

Here is an example like we did in class
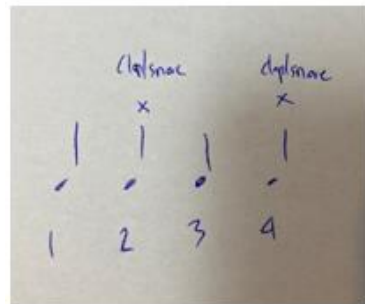
Most house music tracks start off with an introduction which then builds into the main part of the song which is known as 'the drop'. Pop music has different structures which includes verse, chorus, middle eights and bridges. What I can see here is that the brief wants a song which is only 1-2 minutes long meaning I will have to be careful with my song structure. There are also things like 'risers' and breakdowns which help to make a song more interesting, so it doesn't get boring.

Assessor comments:

A lower level response such as this one is likely to be poorly structured, with some elements missing or considered only briefly. Content is generalised, lacking in a clear focus as a response to the brief. Compared to high level responses, there is a reduced number of relevant research references; the learner doesn't establish clear links between the research and their future direction for the project.

AO1: The learner demonstrates a reasonable recall of knowledge and understanding of music and sound creation elements in relation to the brief. There is some detail (for example, 'four to the floor' and associated notated example and specific terminology) though it is often underdeveloped and it is not clear how deep the learner's understanding of terminology is.

Because the track has to sound like a sporting event and be like a race I will include some crowd noises to make the listener feel like they are really there. I think I can record these off the TV onto my phone or maybe take them off a YouTube video somehow.

Normally house music just uses four chords that can be either major or minor. I will write mine in the same way. Major chords fit with major scales and minor chords with minor scales but I'll probably stay with Major chords because I know how to make a major scale.

Final idea -

My track will use sampled drums, bass, synths and some sounds that relate to the idea of a race. I will use the house music four in a bar drum beat as the brief requires and I will use a mix of instruments and patches off the computer. I hope to record some guitar over the top with a DI input.

The structure will have two main ideas. A happy, major part and a sad building section.

Section 1	Section 2	Section 3
Happy idea	Minor build idea	Major/happy idea
Major chords	Some minor chords	Major chords
Lots of layers	Not so many layers but building up	Lots of layers

Websites I used:

Wikipedia
YouTube
skapestudios.com
https://www.masterclass.com/articles/house-music-guide

Assessor comments:

Technical terminology is accurate and appropriate in some parts but not entirely consistent throughout.

AO2: The learner's response is not particularly clear, nor has it used a very logical structure in response to the requirements of the brief. Most elements, but not all, of the brief have been covered, although much of this is quite underdeveloped. There is a reasonable application of knowledge in relation to the brief (for example, the suggested structure, though terminology is a bit inconsistent) although at points the learner includes less relevant information such as pop song structure.

AO3: The learner's response demonstrates a reasonable analysis of the brief with some detail and relevance. The learner has offered some considered approaches to the brief (for example, sampling crowd noises, reducing structure to fit the brief). They have provided some reasoned judgement based on their analysis and evaluation of the brief, but it is limited at best.

Task 2: planning for production

Plan -
I've made a plan for the rest of the project tasks including producing and mixing.

PRODUCING (remember to take notes and screenshots as I go along!)
- Making the backing
  - Getting the chords and EDM beat right. Working out main sections - 2 hours
  - Adding extra layers and finalising – 2 hours
- Adding samples to give the feel of sporting event - 1 hour
- Recording the guitar and writing-up Task 3 (allow enough time for writing up as this always takes me longer than I expect) - 2 hours

MIXING
- Getting the levels and pan right (1 hour)
- EQ and effects (1 hour)
- Trying compression and doing the stereo bounce/checking it (1 hour)
- Write up for Task 4 (1 hour)

EVALUATING for Task 5 – 2 hours
- What went well/not so well?
- What different way could I have approached the brief?

Things I need and why -
1. Keyboard – to play MIDI notes into software instruments. This method means I'll be able to edit stuff later on.
2. Computer – to run the DAW. This needs to have lots of RAM to hold samples plus storage space.
3. Logic – this will be my DAW. It allows me to record/add audio tracks as well as software instrument tracks I can edit later on as they use MIDI.
4. An audio interface with a DI input and mic input. I can plug a guitar straight into this and use some amp plugins to change the sound. I will also try miking up an amp with an SM57 mic if I have time (this is dynamic to cope with loud sounds).

5. Speakers and headphones – for listening back. I won't need to worry about the type of headphones (open/closed) if the guitar is being recorded directly without a microphone. Bluetooth headphones don't work for this as there will be too much delay.
6. Crowd noise from a free sample website – I've saved some from freesound.org.

Safety -
Looking at notes from lessons on safety, I need to make sure that bags are tucked away and don't have messy cables. You don't want anyone to trip over things.

Don't spill coffee onto the gear – tell everyone involved not to bring in food and drink as this could be unsafe near mains electric.

Review –
Positives -
Splitting the allowed time into a bullet point plan allows me to see what I need to do and when.

Also handy to write down everything I will need to produce and mix the piece as I might need to book some of these out at school.

I have a good idea of what the main safety risks might be as I did a basic assessment.

Negatives –
My plan could be a bit more detailed perhaps, but I am going to write some to-do lists as I go along to help divide things up a bit.

I could have put the risks into a table too, like the risk assessments we looked at in class.

Internet research
- https://freesound.org/

Assessor comments:

AO2: There is reasonable application of knowledge here, the learner forms a functional plan which considers likely timescales, required resources and some aspects of health and safety. There is functional use of terminology to justify points.

AO3: There is reasonable consideration of the brief that's been set. The learner's decisions are reasonably clearly set out and there is some surface-level explanation of decisions taken, including the terminology/specifications relating to hardware and software needed to undertake the project (for example, the knowledge that a dynamic mic is needed on an amp, but without sufficient technical explanation to back this up).

AO5: There is a functional evaluation of the planning skills used by the learner, these are sometimes justified by accompanying explanation. A few apt development points offered, but lacking specific detail or linking the alternative approaches offered to a real-world music production context.

Task 3: production of the piece

Evidence:

You **must** provide:
- an exported stereo audio file
- evaluation of the production process.

You **must** consider:
- set up of equipment
- configuration of software
- use of hardware
- use of software
- use of musical elements
- creative use of sound creation
- export of stereo audio file.

You could use any of the following formats to provide evidence of your production process:
- digital presentation
- written report
- blog/vlog
- annotated screenshots
- annotated images
- video/screencast with commentary.

I started with the beat. On two tracks I played the four on floor rhythm on the bass drum and then added snares on beat 2 and beat 4. I planned to use the same beat through the whole piece to make it stronger - thought it would be good to have the beat on its own at the start of the piece. It was a bit out of time so I used a 1/4 quantise – to put notes to the nearest beat.
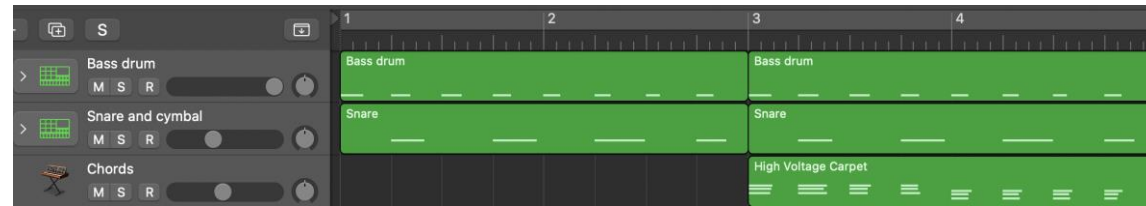
I created the main chords. I chose a sound called 'High Voltage'. I felt the sound was too bright, so I turned down the 'Cutoff' slider. The sound was a bit slow to play so I also set the attack lower. The main chord pattern was 2 bars to be repeated, with major chords make it happy.
- C > G

I then worked on the chords for other section, where there was going to be a build. I played 2 chords again but this time I switched to A minor for the first chord. This is related to the C chord but sounds less happy. I thought this would be good for a build.
- A minor > G

I played longer notes in the chords to match the less happy feel, but it was too slow for the build so the rhythm turned back to fast notes at the end of the section:


Assessor comments:

There is reasonable musical detail in this learner's account of creating the piece of music.

Choices within the software are described with some detail, accompanied by competent justification at times – the learner explains what has been done, but often without the technical detail or depth to link decisions to the brief or intended musical effect. There is limited discussion of recording hardware.

There is some reasonable reflection in the evaluation, with apt development points put forward at times.

Creating new sounds -
- I added in long synth bass notes in the first section to match the chords. I wanted to make it thick so I mixed two waveforms together in the RetroSynth – the saw one sounded most thick
- From a sample of 'ready go' I'd found online I first trimmed it down using the scissor tool I pulled this part into the sampler so I could trigger it to make a new rhythm. I then sent it through some extra effects so it sounded muffled and distorted. I made a short video (see screencast attachment) to show this being set up.
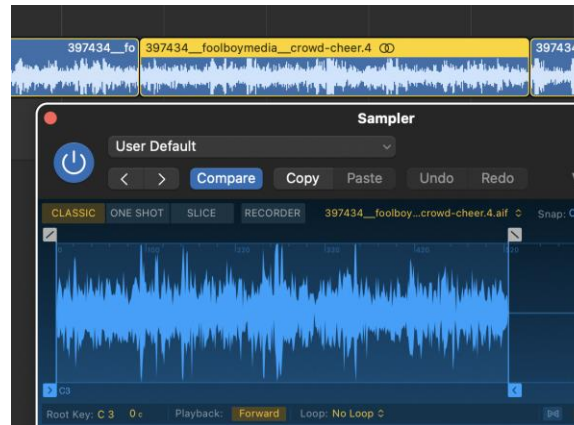
Then I added crash cymbals so the changes of sections would sound bigger. Cymbals were also added into the build. I thought the crowd noise I found worked best here, so I put it in and then trimmed it down. Here you can see the chords, cymbals and crowd noise.
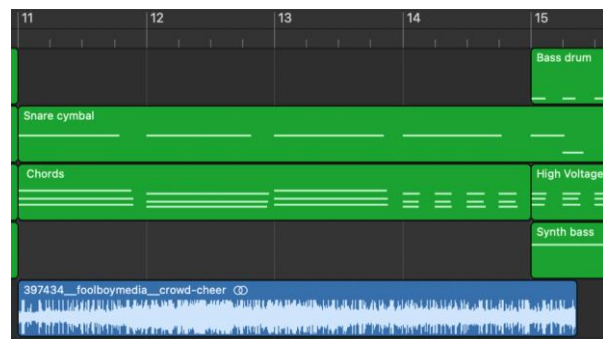
From my preparation I knew the piece had to be made up of 4 or 8 bar sections and that I could do this by copy and pasting parts I already had.

Assessor comments:

AO1: There is a reasonable account of the musical and technical processes used to produce the piece. The learner here is recalling how things should be done, according to taught content, and this is accompanied by competent use of technical terms.

AO2: The learner demonstrates a reasonable understanding of music production processes, they consider musical elements in a broadly logical way and use relevant functions in the DAW software to approach the requirements of the brief in a basic way. The final piece is musically simplistic, but the use of technology helps to make it more acceptable in terms of a real-world producing context.

AO4 – Technical skills: Competent technical skills are shown in this example. There is reasonable handling of the various resources. Terminology is sometimes lacking, and the evidence of hardware-related skills needs expansion.

I decided to have an intro with drums, 8 bars of the main chords then go into the sad build. Then I did the same again, but with a shorter first bit. I thought this was more exciting like a sports event. I finished with the first section again with a crash cymbal. Here's the finished structure, without the guitar bits in:
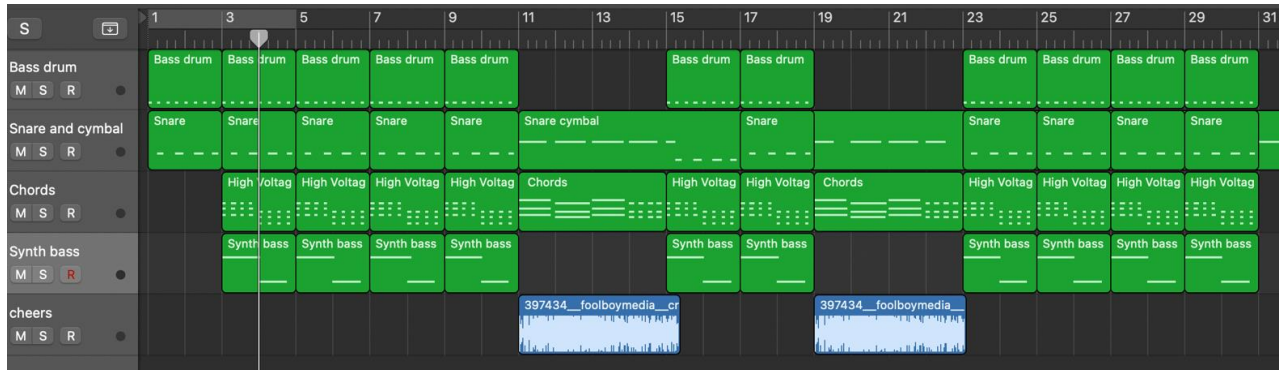
In the studio I worked out bits for the guitar with it plugged into the instrument input on the audio interface and an amp simulator plugin turned on.

I used runs from the first 5 notes of the scale to match each chord. It didn't sound much like running so I tried to mainly go up and make the rhythm faster (e.g.1/8 notes). Right at the end I added a few extra drum layers to work up the build section.

Review -
The production process went well. I had time to finish all the bits from my plan and ended up with something the right length and to do with running/sports. It also has the rhythm they told me to use.

I added crowd noise and some samples taken from these. I couldn't quite work out how to make these fit well with the other parts. Next time I would do more research on how to edit and change volumes for things.

I think I would add more chord and drum layers too if I had more time.

Assessor comments:

AO4 – Techniques: A range of music production techniques shown, but these are often single-stage processes that lack significant development or experimentation. Discussion of melody and rhythm techniques is limited.

AO4 – Processes: There is reasonable sequencing of processes in the production process, although the learner doesn't adequately reflect on these and develop them further, as they work through the production phase of the project.

AO5: The learner's evaluation of the production process has reasonable starting points but, as in earlier tasks, accompanying explanation is either extremely brief or missing entirely. There are development points, but they do not say exactly *how* they'd go about achieving them.

Task 4: mixing

This part of the report is about editing and mixing the piece so it sounds more finished.
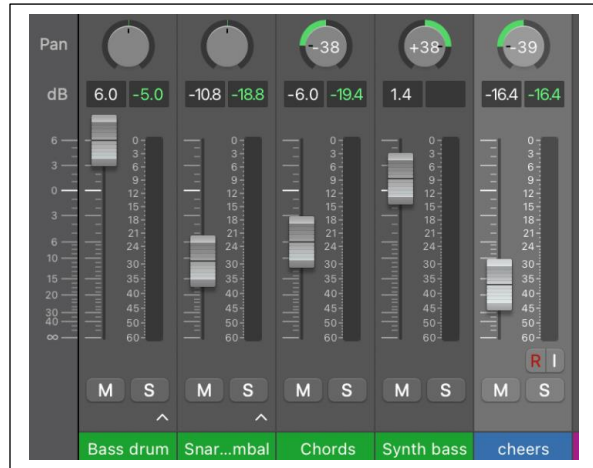
I started getting the volumes right but struggled with the crowd noise and chords. They seemed too loud but when I turned them down, they got lost. I wanted the drums to be loud as it's common in EDM.

With panning I was trying to create more stereo feeling, so I panned the chords and the bass to opposite directions. I also sent the crowd noise to the side as it's not a main part.

The synth bass sound was thin, so I added an EQ to do a low boost. On the guitars I decided to cut the bass instead.

When listening back to the guitar parts I found a few notes that were out of time, so I used the scissor tool to separate these and then moved them to be a bit earlier as they were late. I found that Logic was trying to move each of these cut bits to the nearest 16th rather than exactly where I wanted to put them, so I turned the 'Snap' function off.

Where there was some unwanted noise on top of the part, I trimmed each bit and put in a fade using the fade tool from the tools menu at the top of the screen.
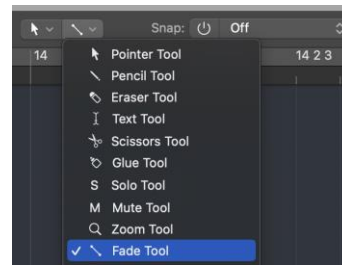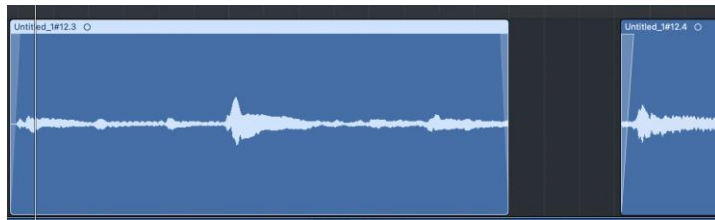
Reverb –
I wanted the drums to sound like they're in a big space and so the snare would have a nice tail. I added reverb using the Space Designer plugin. Some of these were a bit too 'dark' sounding so I chose a brighter 'plate' type. The real plate reverbs are made of metal so they sound this way. It was sounding too long so I turned the length knob down.

Assessor comments:

AO1: The assembled evidence and stereo mix demonstrate a reasonable understanding and application of mixing practices, plus a basic grasp of mastering practices, which culminate in a moderately successful final mix.

AO4 – Technical skills: The learner demonstrates a reasonable 'working knowledge' of how to control the software resources. Application of technical skills is broadly successful, but there needed to be more on skills relating to recording hardware.

AO4 – Mixing techniques: The learner's evidence covers the more fundamental mixing techniques and they use these to create a final mixdown that is free of unwanted noises but has some technical shortcomings in regard to balance and blend.

To make the overall mix a bit louder I added a limiter. It is a sort of compressor. This squashes louder parts so that they don't jump out. Then you can turn everything up more.

Mixing down -
Once the limiter was added, I highlighted around the parts to bounce down and pressed bounce. My teacher said wav files are best so I chose that. It's good not to add data compression like on an mp3 – this can make it sound crunchy and is not suitable for adding to a video. A wav file can be played on any software and hardware.

Review -
This part was challenging – some bits I struggled with and wish I'd done some more preparation for. E.g., volume automation and getting cleaner guitar editing skills.

The piece sounds quite finished – I really like the reverb, the added bass boost and the limiter to make it louder. Being louder will be better for an advert. Panning things to opposite sides of the mix also works to allow individual things to be heard and cut through.

The drum parts could sound thicker, also the guitar parts sound a bit too dull. I need to spend time going through each part separately next time I do mixing.

Task 5: summative evaluation of musical piece

Evidence:

You **must** provide:
- your evaluation.

You should consider the following when evaluating your practice:
- how the demonstration of essential skills, processes, tools and techniques used in your finished musical piece met the brief
- how you could improve your finished musical piece in relation to the brief
- an alternative approach to the brief.

You could use the following formats to provide evidence of your evaluation:
- annotated screenshots
- written responses
- video with commentary
- digital presentation.

Organising and writing up –
It was interesting to do some research on dance music and write notes on it as I went along. I listen to a lot already and it was good to find out more about the music and effects better.

I also enjoyed taking screenshots when doing the composing and mixing, but sometimes forgot to take these in order. I had to go back and do it again sometimes.

The final piece –
The final thing sounds pretty good. I used some good effects to make it sound louder and more bassy. But some bits do sound a bit boomy now and I needed to spend longer finding out how to automate the volume of some bits.

The lively rhythm and major chords make it sound like a race and there is a build section too. The build could have had more layers probably and my chunks of music that I repeated might have been better as 4 bars rather than 2.

Next time I would do more research into compression as I don't understand that ATM. The guitar didn't sound that good so I need to research into how to make that sound even bigger.

I also need to listen to more songs so I get a better idea of the style and effects that are needed in it. I could also compare my finished mix to some songs in the same style on Spotify.

How I could have met the brief a different way –
It would have been good to record a whole choir and give it a gospel feel as this is quite an uplifting sound. I could have used a mainly-live band with some drum parts recorded, but this bit might have been a bit tricky as we only have 4 inputs on our audio interface.

Assessor comments:

AO5: The learner presents a brief evaluation with successful and less successful points put forward in a reasonably coherent way.

They refer to their work's relevance to the brief and provide suggestions for future improvements they could make in order to better fulfil the brief in a satisfactory way.

There is brief discussion that considers an alternative response to the brief, but it lacks specific detail and is perhaps too adventurous, given the allotted time.