

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

Assessment window: 28 January 2020 – 27 February 2020

Assessment: Practical

Paper Number: P000980

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
60	47	34	22	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 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).

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## Standard of learner work

This was the fifth external assessment window for the qualification.

Assessed learner work spanned the full range of available grades. The majority of learners in this session provided creditable submissions, both in terms of audio outcome and process evidence by responding to each section of the paper.

The majority of learners had attempted all tasks, to a variety of creative results. Musical outcomes which were the result of focused planning, experimentation and careful application of processing in line with the given tasks, tended to be more convincing than those which relied on a less structured approach to the assessment.

## 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.

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## Referencing of external assessment tasks

Learners should clearly reference submitted materials to the external assessment task for which they are intended to provide evidence. In this session the majority of learners had correctly referenced their work, producing word processed and electronic submissions.

Examples of good practice in electronic submissions included folders for each task, containing .pdf documents and audio files as required.

If the hard copy of written work is printed from electronic evidence for submission, it should be checked to ensure that content and formatting is as expected.

The definitive version of the evidence should be submitted for the purposes of assessment, and duplicates of evidence (for example, a .pdf and .doc version of the same evidence, or the .doc file from which a printed submission is derived) should not be submitted.

Learners may make use of the spaces in the paper to submit written evidence, but may wish to consider that additional evidence (for example screenshots) may be useful in assessing their work.

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## Evidence creation

Learners in this session typically produced a mixture of handwritten responses, word-processed documents, screenshots and audio files. No learners had made use of screencasts in this session, but these would potentially form a creditable form of evidence should learners wish to make use of them.

Word processed work was in many cases appropriately presented in PDF form. If electronic document types other than PDF are used, learners should be aware that compatibility issues could potentially mean that documents are not displayed as intended, and that information could be lost.

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.

Learners should note that DAW project files will not be accepted as evidence in this assessment and examiners were pleased to note that submission of these had diminished in this session.

When screenshots are used, they should be accompanied with annotation to explain the intent and details shown within the graphic. Screenshots that are not referenced or explained in text are unlikely to provide useable assessment evidence.

The majority of audio files were presented as an appropriate type (.wav, .mp3 and .aiff). Tasks 3, 4 and 5 require stereo audio mixdowns, and omission of these files is likely to diminish the available credit in these tasks.

Learners should be aware of CD standard as 44.1kHz /16bit, particularly with reference to Task 5 in which the use of correct audio formats forms part of the assessment.

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.

## 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.

Learners who performed well tended to clearly define the intended style of the remix to inform musical decisions at this stage of the assessment.

The majority of learners were generally more confident in planning rhythmic, structural and instrumental features. Melodic and harmonic ideas were often more limited, with few learners considering, for example, key signature, chord progressions and melodic patterns as related to the intended stylistic outcome.

A more limited musical understanding tended to impact on development and completion of musical material during the assessment.

The task requires that a minimum of 16 tracks to be used, and that these should be a combination of software instrument / MIDI and audio tracks. A detailed plan 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.

A length of between 3 minutes 40 seconds and 5 minutes was specified, which the majority of learner submissions met. Learners who achieved well tended to be able to relate track and time parameters to musical development in their initial plan, which allowed them to develop their work with more focus in subsequent tasks.

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### Section 2

In this section learners were required to develop original sounds, including a minimum one synth patch and one sampler patch for use in their remix. The majority of learners had created a synth patch and a sampler patch using software instruments to meet the basic task requirement.

Learners who achieved well tended to refer to planning in developing sounds with specific intentions for use, and explain the editing process using detailed and appropriate language.

The majority of learners created synth patches based on variations of (software based) subtractive synthesis, and many learners were able to relate the use of components (for example – oscillators, filters, envelope generators and modulators) to the intended outcome.

Learners were generally less confident in creating sampler patches, and many learners did not make use of more advanced sampler functions (e.g. looping, velocity splits). Successful learners were able to demonstrate basic key mapping, although tuning of samples was not always considered.

Learners who achieved less well tended to make use of pre-built sampler instruments and perform basic editing, which did not always allow for detailed and contextual development of sounds.

Few learners made reference to saving software instrument 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.

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## 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 well in this section tended to be able to apply a range of both audio and MIDI editing tools to meet a specific creative or corrective need. The majority of learners were able to use basic functions to develop their work, with some learners demonstrating knowledge of more advanced procedures to enhance their remix.

Whilst evidence often showed application, learners did not always demonstrate thought given to intentions in using the tools. As in previous external assessment sessions, few learners chose to make use of pitch bend or MIDI controllers to enhance areas of programming.

Learners were required to produce a stereo audio mix as part of the evidence for this section, and the majority of learners achieved this.

The Chief Examiner would like to stress the importance of listening back to mixes to ensure that they are free from errors (for example missing audio, solo's or muted tracks and output distortion) which may adversely affect the audio and therefore the outcome.

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## Section 4

In this section learners were required to apply tools and techniques to create a final mixdown of their work.

Learners who had made imaginative use of EQ, effects, dynamics and automation in their mixes to refine their mix and add interest, tended to achieve well in this section. Learners working at this level were often able to evaluate use of tools in technical and musical terms in the context of the remix.

Learners who performed less well in this section, tended to be refined in the use of dynamics processing and EQ in creating a mix, and often did not fully consider the use of bussing in effects. Some learners relied heavily on the application of EQ and dynamic processing pre-sets, which were not always sonically effective and gave more limited scope in evidencing intent and understanding.

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.

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## Section 5

In this section learners were required to produce two mastered stereo audio files. The intention of this task is to allow learners to consider appropriate audio file formats for specific contexts and apply tools to sonically enhance the mix produced in Task 4.

In this session all learners had provided two mastered files as requested by the task. However, as in previous sessions a number of learners supplied files that would not be immediately suitable for CD production in terms of bit depth and/or sample rate. Learners should seek to be aware of conventions as applied to audio files.

The majority of learners had made use of plug in processing to apply mastering techniques, 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 aural discrimination.

Learners who performed less well in this section, tended to be less confident in the application of processing, sometimes leading to output level issues or significant sonic detriment in terms of EQ and dynamics (for example, significant reduction in clarity, dynamic range and introduction of distortion). Some learners relied heavily on application of pre-sets with limited consideration of the effect upon the material, and provided little evidence of intent.

Learners should take care to listen back to the resultant stereo audio files and particularly consider if the audio has been enhanced by the mastering applied.

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## Section 6

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

The majority of learners had approached this section logically and set out their response to each area required by the task. A minority of learners did not consider all required areas of the evaluation, which tended to limit available credit.

Learners who performed well in this section tended to be able to consider their work based on evidence produced in previous sections using appropriate evaluative and technical language.

Learners who had produced less detailed planning and developmental evidence in Sections 1-5 tended to produce a less focused commentary.

A minority of learners did not provide any evidence in response to this section, which potentially significantly limited achievement. Learners should consider the suggested time allocation for each section of the assessment to inform planning and ensure that the available 10 hours are used effectively.

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**Chief Examiner:** Graham Lees

**Date:** April 2020