



Pearson

# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Report

Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel GCE  
Music Technology (6MT01) Paper 01

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The overall impression is that the broad pattern of submissions witnessed over the last few years has been maintained this year. The quality of submissions for task 1A was generally impressive, and multi-track recordings were again mostly completed to a high standard. Task 1C provided the greatest variation in marks and was, in general, not completed to quite as high a standard as the other two tasks.

The logs show that centres are continuing to make appropriate equipment choices, (a trend that has been apparent over the last few years). This is giving candidates an excellent chance of successful coursework completion.

There were very few examples of candidates failing to meet the criteria of the specification. Whilst many candidates are recognising the importance of questions 9 and 10 in the logbook, there are still significant numbers who put limited time and effort into completing these questions - the marks gained here can have a very significant impact upon the overall grade awarded.

There are still examples of submissions where the candidate has not listened to their final CD before handing it in – for example, leaving the original of 'King' in the mix of task 1a, or more basic issues with regard to cut ends or inappropriate level setting. Candidates must be instructed from an early point in the course that they have to listen back to their work as an ongoing process. Every year, some candidates lose many marks simply by having not checked their work thoroughly.

### **Sequenced Realised Performance**

This year's stimulus was "*King*" by Years and Years. The vast majority of candidates produced work where pitch and rhythm data had been input accurately. Some who entered this data accurately did little to shape the sequence musically producing a mechanical result, but many attempted to produce a musical performance with appropriate editing, shaping and general attention to detail.

There were, as usual, a number of videos posted on the internet giving step-by-step instructions on how to sequence the track. Candidates should view such resources very carefully. Teachers should be aware that such 'help' is always going to be posted online, but should advise pupils to treat such resources with great caution.

Some centres seem to adopt a 'rote learning' approach to this task, which results in all submissions sounding quite similar. This method of teaching does nothing to allow pupils to develop true understanding of the subject and the technology involved. It also brings into question how much help some teachers are giving students within the task, and all centres should take time to understand what is acceptable and what is not.

## **Pitch and rhythm**

The pitch/rhythm data entry generally was accurate. It was uncommon to find significant errors in pitch and/or rhythm in submissions and quite common to hear work that showed candidates had been listening closely to replicate the full arrangement of parts. Most candidates inputted the given skeleton score successfully, whilst many showed evidence of close study of the original recording through the programming of additional parts that had been omitted from the score.

The most common errors were:

- Missing synth sweep fx (eg bar 12/16)
- Missing the 'clicky' fill in 16 (and verse 2)
- Not programming the drum drop bars (eg 16, 24, 83-4 etc)
- Programming the vocal at the incorrect octave (often an octave high)
- Errors in snare pattern in verses and pre-choruses
- Missing the hi-hat drop in 41-45
- Not adding synth pad 1 in verse 2
- Not adding the extra synth timbre at bar 49
- Not programming the build at the end of the middle 8 (73-77) correctly
- A significant number of submissions did not programme the fade as directed in the score

## **Timbre**

Many examiners again noted the continued trend towards more successful timbre choice and editing. In most cases, candidates' work showed good evidence of accurate listening and analysis to select correct instrumental timbres. Many candidates had made some attempt to alter the envelopes of the sounds. Quite often, however, there was insufficient editing of sounds to match the characteristics of the original instrumentation. The use and application of reverb and delay was crucial to the success of the track, and the musical use of effects is one area that teachers may wish to focus on in future.

There are still numbers of candidates who rely too heavily upon presets, whilst some of the editing undertaken was not entirely successful, with a consequent impact on the success of the mix.

The vocal timbre was generally well selected, with fewer candidates choosing non-sustaining timbres (eg piano). Many candidates found it difficult to select/shape an appropriate bass timbre – often such complex timbres benefit from layering up more than one timbre.

## **Balance/Pan**

As in previous years, candidates who omitted timbres, for example, by missing out a part, were unable to access the full marks for this criterion. Most candidates, however, demonstrated good awareness of appropriate balancing. This is one area where close and continual reference to the original recording is particularly important, since even slight alterations to timbre or arrangement by candidates can impact the effectiveness of their overall balance, at any stage.

## **Dynamics**

This was one of the more disappointing areas for the majority of candidates. There is a noticeable dynamic uplift in the chorus, mainly caused by a thickening texture with both synth pads providing a bed for this. The vocal also double-tracks in the chorus and very few submissions made any attempt to thicken the texture of the vocal.

The other main dynamic marker was the build-up at the end of the middle 8, and this was, more often than not, handled quite poorly. Some candidates made no attempt to create a crescendo through the last four bars, and many more simply programmed the parts from the score with no dynamic shift. A relatively small number of candidates successfully built the dynamic during this section.

Failure to input all the instrumental parts often had a negative impact upon the dynamics because many of the shifts were due to textural changes.

## **Articulation and Phrasing**

The articulation and phrasing remains a challenge to many candidates. The majority scored 'inconsistent' because there was insufficient attention given to shaping the vocal part through *subtle* use of note lengths, pitch bends and modulation.

Where changes were made, they varied in the degree to which they were successful. Some candidates took great care to replicate the subtle nuances of the vocal line, whilst others took a more generalised approach to pitch bend and modulation, which often led to erratic outcomes. Such details are crucial in realising successfully the vocal part. Some candidates chose vocal timbres that had a degree of portamento build in. Whilst this can create a relatively pleasing effect, it does not represent a great deal of work by a candidate to replicate the phrasing of the vocalist or, for that matter, produce a realistic effect

There were also opportunities for candidates to shape the articulation on the bass line as well as pad 2 and some elements of the percussion.

## **Style/Music technology skills**

*King* had a number of added elements that helped create the overall sense of style. The reverb delay on the vocal was a key characteristic throughout the track, yet many candidates made little attempt to replicate this area of the mix. Other features included occasional snare hits with a large reverb, synth sweeps, and a reverse piano effect in the middle 8. Candidates who attempted these did so with varying degrees of success. However, high scoring submissions had included these features successfully and had also created a really good sense of groove that drives the track at different times by programming the drums creatively and avoiding an overly mechanical approach.

The success in handling the end of the sequence was mostly excellent, although some candidates continued beyond bar 92 and sequenced the whole song. Any material beyond bar 92 was not assessed.

The final masters continue to be of a good or excellent standard. Fewer candidates are chopping either the start or the end of the track (in all 3 tasks). However, there are still some candidates who are losing marks needlessly through careless errors that are easily avoided. Work should always be checked to ensure that the lead-in and lead-out is not excessive (no more than 5 seconds), and that details such as a reverb tail or the decay of a synth pad are not cut off.

Candidates should be encouraged to set the left locator of their track 0.5 seconds before the first note because setting the locator at the actual start time can often lose the first attack when bouncing.

## Multi-track Recording

This task was generally completed to a high standard. However, some candidates still do not consider the potential practical challenges that can be invoked or avoided by their particular choice of stimulus. Generally, the more successful submissions had selected a piece and arrangement suited to the given recording environment, resources and musicians. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage.

Some candidates are still choosing pieces that are beyond the demands of the specification (both in terms of track count and complexity). Whilst there are examples of outstanding work in these cases, more often than not such material proves to be beyond the level of skill demonstrated by most AS Level candidates.

There were still some examples this year of candidates adopting questionable means by which to meet the task requirements in terms of track and microphone count. Such an approach does not benefit the candidate because, at best, it does not give sufficient scope for candidates to demonstrate their skill level and, at worst, it can lead to a loss of marks.

Once again, centres should note that the following actions will almost certainly lead to a loss of marks:

- recording tracks with an inappropriate number of microphones (eg two mics on a bass amp)
- recording only the drum track and bass part of the song whilst still meeting the required number of mics/tracks (thus submitting a song that is regarded as 'incomplete' according to the mark scheme)
- using the studio software to copy a previously recorded track onto a second track. This does not count as an extra track.

There were still candidates who made up the track count by adding in untuned percussion tracks. These tracks are invariably recorded and mixed quite poorly and, almost without exception, resulted in a candidate losing marks. Successfully capturing an instrument with such a low dynamic as an egg shaker and then incorporating it meaningfully into a mix is very difficult. Candidates MUST be dissuaded from adopting this approach to make up their track count (or, for that matter, add in as a detail to a submission that has already met the track count).

Centres had clearly taken on board comments made in last year's examiners' report because there were far fewer submissions with Cajons this year, and this trend is to be encouraged. There is no requirement for drums to be recorded at AS level, and many of the most successful submissions do not record drums.

The most successful candidates continue to be those that keep things fairly simple; vocals, guitars, percussion, DI keyboards are typical examples of instruments that are largely well recorded.

Centres adopt very different approaches to this task. Some allow a free choice of song by their candidates (which is to be applauded), whilst others

all record the same song. In the latter case, centres must ensure that all recordings are made independently by every student. A 'production line' approach, which some centres very obviously take, may yield good marks, but it is questionable how much students actually learn through the process. In some cases, it becomes extremely difficult to hear any significant differentiation between candidates and some centres have been asked to provide DAW files to allow for examiners to confirm that file sharing has not been an issue. Sadly, there have been instances where files have been shared between students. This is an area of malpractice of which centres must be aware. Teachers must check all pupil work meticulously for any accidental or deliberate sharing of files.

## **Capture**

As in previous years, this was generally the most successfully achieved aspect of the recordings. The majority of submissions demonstrated that candidates had selected appropriate microphones and positioned them competently. Most centres now seem very aware of the requirements of this task across the mark scheme and, whilst lots of centres do not have access to purpose-built recording studios, the use of screens and acoustic panelling is making a very significant difference in many cases. Many candidates still find it difficult to achieve a consistently detailed focus across all parts, whilst room ambience continues to be an issue in some recordings, especially in recordings of pianos and drums. Correct positioning of microphones is crucial to overcoming such problems.

Candidates do have difficulty, sometimes, to achieve clear focus on "additional" parts in their arrangements. Percussion parts and backing vocals can often sound like an "afterthought"– recorded to make up the track count. Candidates need to ensure that all parts are carefully thought out in terms of their capture and positioning in the mix.

Candidates should also pay very close attention to initial recording levels. Too high levels and clipping will result. However, too low recording levels makes the mix process much harder, especially when dealing with dynamic control.

## **Noise and Distortion**

The majority of candidates demonstrated effective noise elimination. However, background noise could clearly be heard on a few recordings (mainly at the start and end of the track). Such noise needs to be edited out (where possible) and a re-recording made where not.

Candidates must take the time to listen to their finished CD to ensure that the start/end of the track is not chopped and that there is not a gap of more than 5 seconds at the start or end.

## **Processing**

This criterion continues to be the section which differentiates a lot of submissions. As seen in previous years, many candidates did not gain credit due to lack of attention or inconsistent application of effects and processes. The most successful candidates were usually those who had selected appropriate material and scored highly in criterion 1. In these instances, candidates usually had less corrective work to achieve at the processing stage. This point cannot be over-emphasised enough– time taken to select an appropriate track carefully before recording will have a very significant impact upon the processing. Candidates should be encouraged to consider what instrumentalists/vocalists they have available, in order to record a particular track successfully. They should be reminded that this task is a chance to demonstrate clear, basic recording techniques, rather than an opportunity to simply record a “favourite song” sung (often not very well) by their best friend, which simply creates insurmountable problems when attempting to produce a final mix.

In terms of EQ, as in previous years, common issues ranged from muddy mixes and booming bass guitars to very harsh electric guitars and dull vocals and drum tracks. In many cases, it was clear that no EQ had been used when the track would have benefitted from some.

Dynamic processing was handled with varying degrees of success (the choice of song again played a crucial role here). Many candidates found it difficult to get the lead vocal to “sit” in the mix, whilst kick drums and bass guitars were often lacking in sufficient control. Whilst many logs state that compression has been applied, it is often clear that recording levels were too low to allow for any meaningful benefit to be gained by compression. There is still a tendency for some of the least good submissions to have N/A in the dynamic processing box of the log.

FX were reasonably well handled. Most mixes showed some attempt to use reverb although its application was often inconsistent. Instruments occupying very different spaces was, again a common observation made by examiners. Delay is also being increasingly well utilised and there were examples of very effective guitar FX. There are still some candidates choosing to use no reverb at all in a misguided attempt to create a “dry” contemporary mix. Again, N/A is not a valid response in the logbook.

## **Balance and blend**

Many candidates attained an appropriate sense of balance (particularly if the stimulus material chosen was appropriate). However, it was still common for particular instruments to be over-favoured in the mix (often electric guitars, vocal or drums). The blending of instruments was more varied with many candidates having difficulty in achieving this aspect fully. In particular, candidates offering submissions containing a large number of DI’d instruments were often unsuccessful at blending these with the tracks captured via microphones. On the other hand, drums were often mixed poorly, with kicks and overheads very often completely masked.

In terms of stereo, most candidates attempted to establish an effective stereo field (although there were still a number of mono submissions). Many candidates panned the drum overheads (sometimes to an extreme), but greater care needs to be taken over panning other elements of the mix. Many mixes "pulled" to one side due to inconsistencies in this area. It is still quite common for mixes to feature noticeable imbalances between parts or extreme/irregular arrangements in panning. Centres should encourage students, as far as possible, to review their mixes on a set of adequate monitoring speakers as well as headphones and always keep in mind contemporary conventions in the use of stereo field.

## **Creative Sequenced Arrangement**

This year, the most popular style was Trance, although there was more of a balance between the two styles than in some previous years. Both stimulus songs were popular, with slightly more candidates choosing 'The Man Who Sold The World' over 'Breakfast at Tiffany's'

There were examples of outstanding work across both styles, with high scoring candidates demonstrating a secure and idiomatic understanding of their chosen style. There was a number of arrangements that showed extensive and convincing development of both stimulus tracks.

However, this task was often completed less convincingly than the other two. There was a tendency for submissions to be extremely formulaic with a fairly unimaginative approach. Many candidates regarded a four-on-the-floor kick as the main stylistic feature of Trance, and whilst there was a dance feel to such submissions, candidates in general found it difficult to achieve the euphoric anticipatory 'rise and fall' of the genre.

There were some brilliant Ska arrangements, with the nutty Madness sound extremely creatively built into tracks, and some excellent use of appropriate instrumentation. These students clearly had a lot of fun developing their arrangements.

## **Use of stimulus**

This is often one of the most disappointing aspects of submissions. Many candidates did little to change or develop the original melody or harmony, and quite often, the structure resulting in what sounded like a backing track in a slightly different style. At the other extreme, there was a number of candidates who submitted arrangements from which it was almost impossible to tell what song had been used as a stimulus.

## **Style/Coherence**

It is really important that candidates spend time researching the style carefully and understanding the detail that goes in to all successful tracks. The most successful candidates had clearly done this (and backed it up with evidence in the log book), and produced interesting and coherent arrangements. As in previous years, many candidates used cut-and-paste far too much and produced tracks that were simply too repetitive. All too often, Trance submissions appeared to be a 'one size fits all' generic dance track relying mainly on a four-to-the-floor kick, rather than really demonstrating an understanding of the style. As mentioned before, there were some amazing Ska tracks, but many candidates relied on a skanking guitar part to create the style, rather than thinking about the more quirky aspects of the genre.

## **Use of Music Technology**

Confidence, control and creativity with use of music technology continues to be increasing, with many students demonstrating a clear understanding of the technical requirements of the two styles.

Many candidates showed clear listening and understanding of the technology behind Trance. There were some stunning tracks submitted in both genres, where all the parameters in this area of the mark scheme (timbre, balance, stereo field, dynamics, articulation and phrasing) had been meticulously considered. Some students still do not understand the importance of the final mix process within this task and lose marks through carelessness – for example, not balancing the track or taking opportunities to add musical dynamics and articulation.

As in previous years, in both genres some candidates appeared not to have checked their final recordings for obvious errors, such as cuts/lead outs, which could have been easily rectified.

## **Melody**

The use of melody is one that many candidates find difficult. The more basic arrangements tend simply to replicate the given stimulus melody with very limited development or variation. Credit in this category is given to any musical development of the original stimulus, as well as to any additional melodic material composed by the candidate. This can be anything from interesting/idiomatic bass lines (a fundamental feature in Ska) to new melodies and short riffs. Fragmentation of the stimulus as well as riff-based counter-melodies were features of the better Trance tracks.

## **Harmony**

The development of harmony remains an area in which a very significant number of candidates again did not score higher than '3'. Many candidates simply completed the given chords without any successful development/new additions leading to a 'functional' harmony. A few candidates changed the chords to ones that did not fit with the melody, leading to uncomfortable passages. In House, the harmony was often taken directly from the stimulus with very little alteration. Where the harmony was developed the outcome was often successful. Candidates need to think carefully about how they can extend the given harmonic material.

## **Rhythm**

This aspect is, once again, an area where a large number of candidates gained high marks, although there was less extensive development in some submissions. Too many candidates tend to rely on pre-existing loops rather

than developing their own, which often led to arrangements where the rhythms were stylistically apt, but overly repetitive. Higher scoring candidates showed considerable rhythmic development in their work where loops were edited and new rhythmic motifs added as the piece progressed, as well as idiomatic and creatively composed fills and breaks.

### **Texture and Instrumentation**

There was some good work from many candidates in both genres to produce appropriate textures. The main issue with many candidates was a lack of textural development both within and between sections of arrangements. In trance arrangements, the higher scoring candidates were clearly aware of the need for a layered approach to texture as well as subtle changes and development, with a build-up to a hook-based chorus. Most candidates who submitted Trance arrangements chose appropriate timbres, but many did not then use them imaginatively. Most candidates who submitted a Ska arrangement were able to produce an appropriate texture, but again many failed to develop their arrangement using some of the quirky directions which many 2 tone Ska tracks move into. Choice of instruments was variable, with many 'out of the box' instruments sounding extremely artificial and mechanical without some careful editing.

However, as witnessed in previous years, most candidates' submissions did not develop the texture fully to reach the top mark box. There was too much repetition in many arrangements. Higher scoring candidates created idiomatic textures that maintained interest throughout the piece.

### **Form/structure**

Most submissions remain at least functional in this aspect with some sense of direction. A significant number of Ska submissions simply followed the stimulus, and consequently were excessively repetitive. In Trance, candidates were expected to produce a 3 minute track that built up layered textures and had a typical trance-like texture drop building to a final section that had a sense of drive and purpose following the euphoric anticipatory drop. Relatively few candidates managed to achieve this with any great degree of success. Candidates need to think about how to bring appropriate structural variety to their arrangements, creating contrast between the different sections.

## Logbooks

Many examiners commented on continued improvement in this aspect of the unit (particularly in Questions 9 and 10). However, the logbooks do continue to vary in quality considerably.

## Questions 1-8

Some submissions included photographs of mic set-ups and screen shots, whilst others gave very little information and contained several blank pages. Where included, photographs of mic positioning proved to be very helpful because they gave an accurate demonstration of the mic setup used. Questions 1-8 are a vital source of information for the examiner, who refers to them when marking. If features are not clearly identified they may not receive the full credit they deserve.

It should be noted that sharing of information in logs is not acceptable. Many centres submitted identical photographs, and sometimes had photographs of a female behind a microphone where the track was sung by a male singer. This leads to a lack of integrity in the process. The log is intended to be a candidate's own account of their journey and process and helps an examiner understand what has been attempted. It should be written in the candidate's own words and not from a teacher-provided template.

Fewer candidates this year included large numbers of additional pages attached to their logbooks for questions 1-8. **Additional pages are not helpful and should be discouraged.** Candidates are reminded that questions 1-8 in the logbooks are there to give some information to the examiner; **the space given in the logbook provided for questions 1-8 is sufficient for this to be achieved.** If candidates would like to add a few additional pages because they provide key additional information then they may do so. However, the added benefit of doing so is limited, and including many pages of unannotated screenshots is not at all helpful. A number of candidates had submitted very detailed answers (including large numbers of additional pages of screenshots) for questions 1-8 and then only brief answers for questions 9 and 10. More time spent answering questions 9 and 10 would have significantly increased their chances of gaining further credit.

## Questions 9 and 10

The quality of answers for questions 9 and 10 continues to be very varied.

**The addition of extra sheets for questions 9 and 10 is to be encouraged.** It is very difficult (though not impossible) for a candidate to produce an answer that is "substantial and thorough" in the space provided for these questions. Most candidates who scored highly on questions 9 and 10 had continued their answer on an additional sheet(s) of paper. (Please note: any additional sheets must be clearly labelled with the candidate's name and number and question number and a suitable phrase such as "*continued on a separate sheet*" should be written at the bottom of the question page in the logbook to clearly show that the answer has been continued). Some candidates made it very difficult for an examiner to know which question was being answered due to a lack of detail on additional pages.

However, some candidates are still missing out on further credit here. Centres are reminded that questions 9 and 10 are worth 20 marks and that the answers can be prepared thoroughly before writing up. Many candidates' submissions did not score highly in this aspect and this can have a very significant effect on their overall result for Unit 1.

Again, some centres appear to have a centralized approach to these two questions, with candidates writing almost identical logs.

### **Question 9**

This question requires the candidate to explain how the arrangement was developed from the stimulus.

The tendency is still for too many candidates to focus on the development of their style, rather than the stimulus. A worrying number of candidates still did not refer to the stimulus in any significant detail. The more successful responses again provided specific detail (bar/time references, chord/note names, section descriptions) and demonstrated correct use of musical or technical terminology, to indicate clearly their intentions and rationale when developing the stimulus. There was a number of examples again this year of candidates who had written a large amount for question 9, but not focused on how the stimulus has been developed. This reduces the amount of credit that can be awarded. Candidates must focus on the stimulus and how it has been developed in this question. Some candidates produced question 10 material when answering question 9, which is not credited.

### **Question 10**

This question requires the candidate correctly to identify the stylistic features of the chosen style *and* explain how these are used in the arrangement. As in previous years, most candidates appeared to have conducted some research around their chosen genre, but many still relied on a simplistic or generalised understanding of a few stylistic rudiments. Common shortcomings involved vague generalisations. Candidates need to focus on being as specific as possible when commenting on how they have included key features in their arrangement. Detail is required for full credit, including reasons for choice, details of technology used and examples of house/reggae artists and songs that use similar techniques. Bar numbers/time references should also be used where appropriate.

Higher scoring responses demonstrated a breadth of listening with reference to specific tracks/artists. They showed a more sophisticated appreciation of the specific subtleties of the genre, linking this understanding clearly to specific features of their own arrangement (often using time or bar references, where useful).

## **Administration**

The overwhelming majority of centres submitted work on time and complete.

A few centres failed to pack the CDs adequately so that they arrived broken, but the number of cases was very low. Candidates should be strongly encouraged to pack their submissions appropriately to avoid damage in transit. In other cases, work had not been thoroughly checked before sending to the examiner. A few CDs were blank or contained only data. In such cases, it is vital that centres respond promptly to requests for replacement work from examiner. Whilst it is understood by the examining team that CD errors do occur, all CD's should be checked for playback in a standard CD player (not computer CD drive).

If candidates want to submit additional sheets in their logbook these should be labelled clearly with candidate name, number and centre name/number, put in the booklet in the right place and secured with a treasury tag/staples. However, please refer to the comments in *The Logbooks* section above concerning the use of too many additional sheets.

It is important for centres to retain back-up material. Centres should refer to the *Administrative Support Guide* (formerly *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* document) that is available on the GCE Music Technology website under *Assessment Materials/ Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination*.

