

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2018

Pearson Edexcel GCE
Music Technology Portfolio 1 (6MT01)
Paper 01

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General Introduction

As this was the legacy paper from the 2008 Specification, the overwhelming majority of candidates were resitting the paper, and the total number of candidates was far smaller than in previous years. It is therefore not possible to make any particularly meaningful comparisons with previous cohorts.

However, as with previous years, there was a wide variation in the quality of work submitted, with some very high quality work as well as some that was of a far lesser standard.

All centres entering candidates had access to appropriate equipment, and most candidates were able to demonstrate that they were capable of making informed decisions about the use of both DAW technology as well as recording equipment. This enabled all candidates to have the best possible opportunity to complete coursework successfully.

It must again be stressed how important it is for both candidate and teacher to check and listen to final CDs before submission as any incorrectly burned tracks are unlikely to be picked up by during the marking process and can result in a candidate being awarded a lower mark than they might gained. There were some glaringly obvious errors that should have been picked up by the centre had work been systematically checked. In one instance, two candidates from a centre had identical tracks submitted for 1A, 1B and 1C, and another candidate had submitted tracks from last year's paper. Errors such as this are relatively easy to correct, although do cause the examiner some easily avoidable extra work. What is more worrying is that it is clear that CDs are very often still not checked by either candidate or teacher despite this point being emphasised in this report year on year.

The final masters were generally of a good or excellent standard. Some candidates are still chopping either the start or the end of tracks. Work should always be checked to ensure that the lead-in and lead-out is not excessively long 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 as setting the locator at the actual start time can often lose the first attack when bouncing.

Task 1A – Sequenced Realised Performance – Miss You (James Hersey)

Overall the quality of response to this task was often quite disappointing. In order to access the higher marks, candidates had to incorporate the many non-scored details in the original track, but many candidates failed to do this resulting in them dropping marks in several areas. Some candidates attempted to add musicality to the note input, but as in previous years, many candidates

did little to shape their sequence musically. There were some examples of high quality work with attention to detail and these candidates generally achieved good marks in all aspects.

Pitch and Rhythm

Pitch and rhythm input from the skeleton score was generally accurate, but the majority of candidates missed opportunities to develop their sequence by adding some of the very obvious details not included in the score.

The most common omissions were

- A lack of detail in the percussion parts throughout, often missing timbres such as hi hats and finger cymbals as well as timbre changes in the Click/Snare track.
- Missed percussion drops (e.g. bar 12, 20 etc.)
- No FX filter sweep sound (e.g. 20, 56 etc.)
- No sub bass added in chorus
- No pad synth added in chorus
- Vocal parts often at the incorrect octave
- Vocal harmonies missing
- Unscored vocal 'Ooh' and 'Ah' fragments missed
- Changes in Kick pattern were routinely ignored – bar 29-36 was often incorrect and a surprisingly large number of candidates completely missed the change when the kick moves to a 4 on the floor at bar 73
- Synth 2 was often not doubled at a third
- Hi-hat fills in 21/25 etc.

Timbre

This mark was often compromised by non-scored parts that had not been programmed. Basic timbres were generally well chosen, although the use of monophonic timbres for synth and vocal parts caused some problems with missing harmonies.

Balance/Pan

Whilst some candidates showed a good awareness of the balance required, as in other areas, this mark was often compromised by missing parts. Some candidates struggled to get a good balance between percussion and vocal with one or the other over-dominant.

Dynamics

Those candidates who failed to add in the sub bass and pad timbre in the chorus (eg from bar 21), subsequently found it very difficult to achieve the wide dynamic variation between different sections. There were very many opportunities to include dynamic detail into this task, but disappointingly few candidates made any great attempt to add any variation.

Articulation and Phrasing

The majority of candidates achieved the staccato feel of the synth accompaniment successfully. As in previous years, a limited number successfully created a musically accurate vocal line, often relying on the pre-programmed portamento between every note of a monophonic timbre to create phrasing, which required very little candidate input. Pitch bend, when used, was often not applied musically or with a great deal of control.

Style/Music Technology Skills

The stimulus track had a number of added elements which helped create the overall sense of style. The reverb and delay on the vocal was a key characteristic in the vocal production, 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 subtle use of percussion. 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 creatively programming the drums and avoiding an overly mechanical approach.

Task 1B - 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 clearly 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.

There were fewer examples this year of candidates adopting questionable means with which to meet the task requirements in terms of track and microphone count. Such an approach does not benefit the candidate as, 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. Centres should again note that the following actions will almost certainly lead to a loss of marks:

- Recording tracks with an inappropriate number of microphones (e.g. 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 a small number of candidates who made up the track count by adding in un-tuned percussion tracks such as shakers and tambourines. 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 a 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).

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 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. This is an area of malpractice that centres must be aware of and 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 paneling is making a very significant difference in many cases. Many candidates still struggle 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 struggle 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. Amp hum and buzz was a problem in some submissions.

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 carefully select an appropriate track before recording will have a very significant impact upon the processing.

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 some cases it was clear that no EQ had been used when the track would have clearly benefitted from some.

Dynamic processing was handled with varying degrees of success (the choice of song again played a crucial role here). Many candidates struggled 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.

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 the most common issue. There are still some candidates choosing to use no reverb at all in a misguided attempt to create a “dry” contemporary mix.

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 struggling to fully achieve this aspect. In particular, candidates offering submissions containing a large number of DI'd instruments often failed to successfully blend these with the tracks captured via microphones. On the other hand, drums were often mixed poorly with kicks and overheads very often completely masked.

Stereo Field

Most candidates attempted to establish an effective stereo field. Many candidates panned the drum overheads (sometimes to an extreme), but greater care needs to be taken over panning other elements of the mix. Some 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.

Task 1c - Creative Sequenced Arrangement

Wonderwall (oasis) or My heart Will Go On (Celine Dionne) 1970's Disco or Dubstep

This year, both styles were popular with slightly more candidates choosing Dubstep. ‘Wonderwall’ was a more common choice of stimulus across both genres.

There were examples of outstanding work across both styles with high scoring candidates demonstrating a secure and idiomatic understanding of their chosen style. There were a number of arrangements that showed extensive and convincing development of both stimulus tracks. However, this task was also completed unimaginatively by less able candidates, who. Whilst capturing a basic sense of either style, did not manage to develop ideas at all creatively, resulting in a very bland arrangement.

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. On the other extreme, there were a number of candidates who submitted arrangements from which it was almost impossible to tell what song had been used as a stimulus. Some candidates successfully fragmented the stimulus in Dubstep arrangements, and others idiomatically rearranged the melody and harmonies in disco arrangements.

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, dubstep submissions appeared to be reliant on a pre-recorded drum loop. Often the classic 'Wub' sections had little connection with other parts of the arrangement and made structure far too episodic. Disco tracks often were extremely over generic, or based upon one specific track rather than an understanding of the overall features. It was not uncommon to hear riffs from tracks such as the Bee Gees 'Stayin' Alive' as the basis to a submission with the tune to 'My Heart Will Go On' superimposed over the top, sometimes with scant regard for tonality.

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 Dubstep, and the characteristic 'wub' effect was generally well handled. 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 struggle to 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.

Melody

The use of melody is one that many candidates struggle with. The more basic arrangements tend to simply 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 any additional melodic material composed by the candidate. This can be anything from interesting/idiomatic bass lines to new melodies and short riffs. Fragmentation of the stimulus as well as riff based counter melodies were features of the better Dubstep tracks, whilst good string countermelodies and brass lines were features of the more imaginative Disco arrangements.

Harmony

The development of harmony remained 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 which did not fit with the melody, leading to uncomfortable passages. Candidates need to think carefully about how they can extend and develop the given harmonic material.

Rhythm

This aspect is, once again, an area where a large number of candidates scored well, 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 as 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 dubstep 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 for both styles chose appropriate timbres, but many did not then use them imaginatively. 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 fully develop the texture 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 Disco submissions simply followed the stimulus, and consequently were excessively repetitive. In Dubstep, candidates were expected to produce a three-minute track that built up layered textures and had an idiomatic 'wub' section. Whilst some candidates created some very imaginatively structured responses, many needed to think about how to bring appropriate structural variety to their arrangements, creating contrast between the different sections, whilst maintaining an overall sense of unity.

Logbooks

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 as 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. Candidates from some centres all 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 candidates 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. **This is 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 score highly on questions 9 and 10 have 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 worth 20 marks and that the answers can be thoroughly prepared before writing up. Many candidates' submissions failed to score highly in this aspect and it 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 were 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 to correctly identify the stylistic features of the chosen style *and* explain how these are used in the arrangement.

As in previous years, most students 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. 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 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. In such cases, it is vital that centres respond to requests for replacement work from examiners promptly. 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 are wanting to submit additional sheets in their logbook these should be clearly labelled 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*

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>