

Unit 40: Working and Developing as a Musical Ensemble

Unit code:	R/600/6902
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop learners' abilities to work together in musical ensembles.

● Unit introduction

Few musicians spend their working lives as soloists. Most regularly work as part of a group or ensemble of some kind. Sometimes these 'musical partnerships' are short-term, for instance a session musician being hired to play in a theatre band. Many musicians become involved in more long-standing group projects allowing them to develop complex creative partnerships. Such partnerships can be hugely rewarding for musicians and the mutual influences and challenges play a fundamental part in a musician's development.

This practical unit explores the nature of ensemble work by allowing learners to become part of a musical ensemble concentrating on the process of working together to produce a musically and artistically satisfying result.

An effective musical team is often a creative democracy – communication skills, the ability to discuss, compromise and work towards a shared goal are just as important as technical and musical ability.

This unit deals with the *communication* aspects of performance, in planning, in preparation, and in the performance itself. It includes approaches to structured ensemble practice; fine tuning of arrangements and parts in both original or cover material, and the production of appropriate tones and sounds.

This unit will inspire learners to set and understand how to achieve high standards of live performance and undertake organisational roles in an ensemble in addition to that of performer.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the elements of musical ensembles
- 2 Be able to plan as a musical ensemble
- 3 Be able to develop as a musical ensemble
- 4 Be able to perform as a musical ensemble.

Unit content

1 Understand the elements of musical ensembles

Elements: band members; organisation; communication eg musical interaction, interaction with audience, listening skills; co-operation; rehearsal; repertoire; strengths and weaknesses

2 Be able to plan as a musical ensemble

Forming an ensemble: ensemble types eg string quartet, rock band, jazz band, vocal group; auditions

Choosing repertoire: resources eg music library, CD collections, online music players, sheet music, real books

Choosing roles: eg band leader, musical director, frontperson, administrator, publicist, choreographer

3 Be able to develop as a musical ensemble

Rehearsal: ways of rehearsing eg personal practice, group rehearsal, sectional; use of equipment; methods eg use of tempo, use of click track, playing along to pre-recorded music, acapella, use of structure, use of improvisation

Reflection: eg watching videos of performances, band meetings, practice diaries, rehearsal logs, peer feedback, audience feedback

4 Be able to perform as a musical ensemble

Types of audience: eg peers, friends and family, public

Communication: type eg verbal, physical, musical; with band members; with audience

Stage presentation: image eg costume where appropriate, stage make-up; stage presence and awareness; use of space eg movement, placing of equipment; sight lines

Musical competency: intonation; instrumental tuning; pitching during performance; tightness; tempo; handling of section changes; beginnings and endings; technical proficiency; critical listening and response to ensemble requirements eg balance; sensitivity and dynamics

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 explain the elements of musical ensembles [IE, RL, SM]	M1 illustrate the elements of musical ensembles	D1 analyse the elements of musical ensembles
P2 plan as a musical ensemble competently with limited tutor support [IE, TW, SM, EP]	M2 plan as a musical ensemble confidently with total independence	D2 plan as a musical ensemble demonstrating mastery of the processes involved
P3 develop as a musical ensemble competently with limited tutor support [IE, CT, RL, TW, SM, EP]	M3 develop as a musical ensemble confidently with total independence	D3 develop as a musical ensemble demonstrating mastery of the processes involved
P4 perform as a musical ensemble with minor errors that do not detract from the performance. [TW, SM, EP]	M4 perform as a musical ensemble competently.	D4 perform as a musical ensemble with flair and interpretation.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This is a potentially diverse unit and delivery strategies will depend on the types of projects devised by learners. The bulk of this unit however should be based around learners working in groups in preparation for the performance. Depending on learners' prior experience it may be necessary to provide some foundations of ensemble skills in the initial stages of delivering this unit.

Key areas of focus should be on how musicians interact both musically, verbally and physically during a performance, and what sort of preparation is required before a performance. The unit should be introduced by the analysis of case studies, examining recordings and videos of seasoned performers, from a range of musical traditions. Although many of these are available on the internet, the tutor should also provide core resources, which could form an introduction to the area of study. Visiting ensembles, or visits to live performances, can also provide a valuable resource in setting a context for this unit.

Learners are required to form their own musical ensembles at the beginning of the unit. Auditions would be an ideal way for groups to be formed. Learners may be limited in terms of the instrumental skills of others in their group. There is no reason why an ensemble could not include learners outside the BTEC course if learner numbers are small.

Once ensembles have been formed the unit should be largely learner-led. Tutor support should take the form of ongoing monitoring and feedback and ensuring that the necessary evidence is being collated. Peer sharing of work in progress can also prove valuable and provide learners with the opportunity to evaluate and discuss each other's work.

Learners will need most initial guidance when choosing repertoire. It is possible that learners may try to select material based on a number of inappropriate factors. Therefore, it is important that learners are introduced to the factors on which they must base their decisions at an early stage. For example, consideration should be to the number of players within their group, their instruments, their abilities, and time and venue constraints are all factors that will have an effect. Learners may need guidance in where to obtain sheet music. Access to a music library may be required.

Whilst the performance of the group will be assessed as part of grading criterion 4, it is important that learners are aware of their being assessed on their decision-making and communication strategies. A fantastic performance at the end of the unit will not ensure higher level grades if musical and democratic communication has not been evidenced throughout the unit.

Learners will need access to a classroom style environment in which to conduct research and prepare and give presentations. Subsequently, learners will need access to rehearsal and performance facilities such that they might develop and perform their chosen repertoire with no restrictions.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the programme and structure of the programme of learning.
Understanding the elements of successful ensembles – learning outcome 1; tutor-led sessions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• what is a successful ensemble?• analysing performances• researching biographies• group discussions.
Assignment 1: What Makes a Successful Ensemble? – P1, M1, D1 Learners to prepare presentations with tutor facilitation. Learners to give presentations. Peer and tutor feedback to be reviewed and actions noted.
Forming musical ensembles – learning outcome 2; tutor-led workshops to cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• how to choose personnel• how to choose repertoire• how to assign roles in the ensemble.
Assignment 2: Getting the Group Together – P2, M2, D2 Learners choose personnel, repertoire and roles in a team meeting format. Tutor observation/video logs to be kept of meetings.
Developing the ensemble in preparation for performance – learning outcome 3; tutor-led workshops to cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• rehearsal techniques• communication – physical, musical and verbal• communication with members of the ensemble.
Assignment 3: Developing as an Ensemble – P3, M3, D3 Rehearsal. Tutor and learners to keep diaries/observations of developments.
How to give a performance as an ensemble – learning outcome 4; tutor-led workshops to cover: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• performance techniques• communication – physical, musical and verbal• communication with the audience.
Assignment 4: Performing as an Ensemble – P4, M4, D4 Observed performance.

Assessment

The majority of this unit consists of group work and it is important that both tutor and learner appreciate that musical ensembles are founded on this principle. Tutors must be very careful to award individual grades only where justified, and must be very aware that musical ensembles performing at the highest level do so because of teamwork and the group dynamic as well as individual musicianship, which is not being assessed in this unit. Building assessment evidence for this unit should be an ongoing process because the majority of evidence for practical outcomes will be generated spontaneously through group discussion, the rehearsal process and preparation. Learners could document their progress by keeping a project journal and effective use could be made of both audio and video recordings of sessions.

Learning outcome 1 will be evidenced by an individual presentation on a chosen musical ensemble. Where learners provide a simple and elaborated explanation of the main features of a successful ensemble they will be working at pass level. To achieve a merit they will need to elaborate their explanations with references to videos of performances, or biographical materials. For a distinction, learners will discuss the relative importance of each element, and the contribution it makes to the success of the musical ensemble. Cross-referencing to other musical ensembles could also be used to support their arguments.

Learning outcome 2 requires learners to form groups, choose repertoire and assign roles within the group. Learners who receive guidance through this process are likely to be working at pass level. Merit level learners will be able to achieve these goals with no tutor input, and will demonstrate good communication skills and the ability to work with others. Where questionnaires (or other written evidence) reveals that learners are fully aware of their pro-active role and its impact on the planning process, it is likely that learners are working a distinction level.

Learning outcome 3 requires that learners demonstrate they can develop the raw materials of both personnel and repertoire into a performing ensemble. To achieve P3 the evidence will show that they have prepared satisfactorily for performance, but will have required a significant amount of tutor guidance in order to do so. Learners who require no tutor input, develop sensible rehearsal strategies, and make significant improvements in their ability to perform as a musical ensemble will achieve a merit. Distinction level learners will have diaries or journals that show a rigorous and disciplined approach to rehearsal, and communicate effectively as a group at a musical, verbal and physical level.

For outcome 4 learners, in their musical ensembles, will give a performance consisting of the repertoire they have prepared in rehearsal. Pass level learners will show elements of musical communication within their performance, which will be generally competent. At merit level learners will be gelling as a musical unit. Musical communication will be supplemented by other elements of performance such as communication with the audience, which comes with confidence when working as a team. Distinction level learners will have a mastery of the skills required to perform as an ensemble to the extent that they give a performance, as a team, that shows flair, creativity and imagination.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	What Makes a Successful Ensemble?	Study the performances and bibliographies of a successful musical ensemble putting the key features into a presentation to be given to the rest of the group.	Presentation, to be videotaped. Tutor observation form.
P2, M2, D2	Getting the Group Together	Groups formed according to musical taste; decide on roles within the group and choose repertoire.	Evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • video log of meetings • tutor observation report • questionnaires.
P3, M3, D3	Developing as an Ensemble	Musical ensembles will rehearse their repertoire in preparation for a performance.	Evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tutor observation • video diary • rehearsal diary.
P4, M4, D4	Performing as an Ensemble	Ensembles will give a performance of the repertoire they have developed to an audience.	Evidence to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • video evidence • audience survey • tutor observation forms • learner questionnaires.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Music and Music Technology sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Music and Music Technology suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
	Developing as a Musical Performer	Music Performance Techniques
	Working as a Musical Ensemble	Musical Theatre Performance
	Rehearsal Techniques for Musicians	Pop Music in Practice
		Live Music Workshop

This unit also has links with the following National Occupational Standards:

Community Arts

- CA2 Provide direction and leadership for your team
- CA7 Assist in pitching for community arts work
- CA8 Obtain and use research information
- CA9 Keep up to date with developments within the arts
- CA12 Understand how your community arts organisation can meet market needs and satisfy customer's needs.

Live Events & Promotion

- LE1 Support publicity activities for live events
- LE6 Support the planning of live events
- LE10 Contribute to the production and distribution of publicity material for a live event
- LE11 Research and assess the appropriateness of different types of venues for different types of live events
- LE13 Assist in the production of press releases and evaluate their effectiveness
- LE16 Manage changes to a live event schedule
- LE17 Identify and gain alternative forms of publicity for a live event.

Essential resources

Learners will need access to adequate practice and rehearsal facilities, with instruments and equipment of suitable quality, where the learners themselves do not supply these. Opportunities for workshops and/or master classes will need to be provided with a reasonable timescale that fits the delivery of the unit. An appropriate range of workshops/master classes and jamming/rehearsal opportunities will need to be provided to cater for the needs and interests of the whole group. Where facilities do not exist within the institution to offer a range of performance situations, arrangements will need to be made with external organisations such as theatres and recording studios in order to provide a suitable range of performance situations.

Classroom resources that allow the viewing of video material, and monitoring of audio examples, together with suitable word-processing or presentation software will also be needed. Access to a wide range of historically and culturally important music (as audio and video resources) will be needed to support this part of the unit.

Indicative reading for learners

Reading about rehearsing is less important than witnessing other players' rehearsal processes. Learners should be encouraged to observe group performances on video/DVD where possible to inform their own practice. Bibliographies of performing groups are also available.

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	analysing musical ensembles
Creative thinkers	rehearsing and performing music
Reflective learners	responding to feedback during the rehearsal process
Team workers	rehearsing together
Self-managers	working towards a performance
Effective participators	rehearsing and performing in suitable groups.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	researching musical ensembles
Creative thinkers	devising rehearsal routines
Reflective learners	giving and receiving feedback in 'critique' sessions
Team workers	performing together
Self-managers	balancing individual musicianship skills against the requirements of the ensemble
Effective participators	planning performances.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	creating presentations
Use ICT to effectively plan work and evaluate the effectiveness of the ICT system they have used	preparing presentations
Manage information storage to enable efficient retrieval	preparing presentations
Follow and understand the need for safety and security practices	preparing presentations
Troubleshoot	preparing presentations
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	preparing presentations
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	preparing presentations
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text and tables • images • numbers • records 	preparing presentations
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	preparing presentations
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	preparing presentations
Evaluate the selection and use of ICT tools and facilities used to present information	preparing presentations
Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists	preparing presentations

Skill	When learners are ...
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	contributing verbally to rehearsals
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	preparing presentations and supporting scripts.