

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

GCE Music Technology 8511/9511

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Contents

1.	Unit 6713 Sequencing / Recording	1
2.	Unit 6714 Arranging	7
3.	Unit 6715 Listening and Analysis	13
4.	Unit 6716 Sequencing, Recording and Producing	15
5.	Unit 6717 Composing with Technology	23
6.	Unit 6718 01 Controlling and Interpreting MIDI Data	29
7.	Unit 6718 02 Music Technology in Context	33
8.	Statistics - Grade Boundaries	37

6713 Sequencing & Recording

General Comments

The examining team reports that the standard of work this year has generally remained consistent with that of last year. The majority of work fell into the good and competent holistic categories. Some excellent work was submitted and a small number of submissions were of a very poor quality.

The recording option continues to be the most popular pathway, with around 70% of candidates taking this route. Most centres again focused on one pathway, often providing the same stimulus material for all candidates which led to a very consistent approach.

Candidates from a small number of centres were disadvantaged by teaching that clearly did not understand the requirements of the specification, or teachers that do not have the expertise needed in this subject. This is particularly true of centres offering Music Technology for the first time. Such centres often appear to think that Music Technology can be taught in a similar way to Music. Both the course and the candidates that are attracted to it are very different to the Music course and teachers should ensure that they are confident in how to deliver the course.

Centre Administration was, as in previous years, inconsistent. Some of the best organised centres were the bigger ones and many thanks to those centres who followed administrative procedures accurately. However, some examiners reported problems with over 50% of centres. The most common issues are:

- Log declarations not signed by candidates
- Log declarations not signed by teachers
- Structured commentary papers posted separately to coursework (very common)
- CDs that won't play/are blank
- Coursework for 6713 and 6714 sent to the incorrect examiner
- Scores for sequences not sent
- 1 score enclosed for all candidates in a centre
- Contact details on logs either missing or illegible
- Candidates work not presented in separate sealed envelopes
- Unmarked CDs

It is recognised that this is a subject that is, by necessity, administratively heavy and this creates pressure at the busiest time of the year. However, some centres had clearly not read the ICE document which provides accurate and detailed information on the required administration and this was a cause of much frustration for examiners. Most centres were prompt and co-operative in rectifying mistakes.

One of the most worrying problems is that of blank CDs. Clearly these CDs had not been checked by either candidate or teacher. Checking the final submission is the responsibility of the candidate and should be something taken into account when setting deadlines. Whilst an examiner can easily pick up a problem with a blank CD, one can only speculate on how many CDs are submitted that do not contain the correct final version and have never been checked all the way through by the candidate. Examiners can only mark the work that is submitted and by not checking their work thoroughly, candidates run the risk of losing many marks.

Sequencing Pathway

Choice of stimulus for sequencing is vital in this pathway. Many centres take a uniform approach with sequencing, especially with the classical sequence and this generally works well. It is noted that many centres have invested in improving the quality of available sounds and there was a marked increase in candidates using suitable VST's as well as improved soundcard timbres. The number of centres relying on basic soundblaster soundsets is now in the minority.

The best classical sequences generally came from chamber music stimuli. For example, Beethoven Septet and Stravinsky Pulcinella which were quite commonly used. Centres who set full orchestral works gave candidates an unnecessarily hard task and many struggled to deal with this. Extreme examples such as the Rite of Spring, are poor choices and seldom achieved good marks. Excerpts from larger works or movements also created problems for candidates when completing Q1 of the Structured Commentary.

The same principle applies to the pop sequence. Many centres gave candidates greater freedom to choose a stimulus for this and in general choices were appropriate. However, there were still a small number of centres who did not provide anything other than a very skeletal lead sheet (or in a few cases just a recording). In these cases, candidates treated this task as an arranging exercise, and consequently scored very poorly in pitch and rhythm.

Most candidates input the notes fairly accurately and high marks for pitch and rhythm were not uncommon. Some candidates did not understand the function of an accidental in a bar and only applied this to one note and not those later in the bar. Some did not manage to deal with transposing elements at all, resulting in sequences that sounded almost atonal.

Too many candidates relied heavily on Sibelius for their sequence, using the dynamic and articulation facilities on this programme to add detail. This often produced a very mechanical sequence. When candidates used Sibelius to add dynamics, without careful control, the programme converted hairpins to master volume controller messages, which invariably produced results that were far too extreme.

The best sequences were those where candidates had been clearly taught and understood how controllers worked within sequencing programmes and applied expression, modulation and other controllers sensitively and musically. As in previous years, marks for dynamics, articulation, phrasing, balance and panning were in general disappointingly low.

There were examples of excellent sequences where candidates had looked at all aspects of producing a musical performance and scored very high marks accordingly.

Recording pathway

As with sequencing, it is clear that many centres have invested in good quality recording equipment and it is clear that the days of the MD8 are numbered. The majority of centres are now employing direct to hard disc recording on PC or Mac. The range of submissions varied from the near professional, to recordings where candidates clearly did not understand the concept of mic placement or mixing. The vast majority of work fell into the competent and good categories.

Ambient Recording

The majority of successful submissions were soloist and accompanist recorded using a coincident pair positioned to capture a good blend of direct and ambient sound. However, there were, as in previous years, many centres that clearly regarded this task as a close mic exercise and candidates produced work where microphones were placed far too close to the musicians to have any chance of capturing ambience and in many cases, spot mic techniques were employed, which is clearly an infringement of the published specification. These recordings consequently scored low marks in mic placement and balance and blend.

Candidates who scored highest marks demonstrated a great deal of care and attention with mic placement in order to capture a good sound. They understood the concept of capturing a stereo ambient recording and the need for time to be taken in setting a good balance at the sound capture stage. A good capture often needed little change in the mix down stage and many candidates scored high marks with little in the way of post recording mixing, although some candidates disadvantaged themselves by completely ignoring any mixdown process when there were clearly problems that could have been solved by the judicious use of EQ or a subtle use of additional artificial reverb. There was a marked increase in candidates using compression to their ambient recordings, which more often than not restricted the dynamic range of their recording. Compression is not to be encouraged for this task as a well set up recording should capture the full dynamic range without any further need for processing. Additionally, compressed and/or normalised recordings often amplified any background noise which reduced the mark awarded.

Once again, many centres submitted recordings of the same piece recorded on the same day by each candidate. In such cases, it is difficult to see where the work of one candidate ends and the next begins. Teachers are reminded that the work submitted must be the unaided work of candidates from selecting and setting up microphones, through to setting up recording equipment as well as mixing. A very few centres presented identical recordings which candidates had mixed individually. This clearly was in violation of the specification and dealt with accordingly.

Close Mic Recording

It is worth re-emphasising that a good quality four track recording at AS level can score top marks, and that ambitious projects are not a guarantee of a good mark. The point of this task is to demonstrate that candidates have a good grasp of the basics of capture and mixdown procedures and attempting something too complex almost invariably results in a low mark. Almost without exception, the theory of 'less is more' works best in this unit. Many centres avoid recording drums at AS level, and this allows them to demonstrate some excellent work in capturing acoustic guitars, basses and vocals. Centres should therefore take great care when allowing candidates to select material.

Whilst the majority of candidates demonstrated a good understanding of how to capture sounds, the most successful candidates also spent a great deal of time mixing, paying close attention to EQ, balance, stereo field, dynamic control and effects. The vast majority of candidates are now using direct to hard disk recording, and many are mixing using the internal plug-ins on such programmes which allow all aspects of the mixdown process to be focused upon.

However, as in previous years, the less successful candidates generally paid very little attention to the mixdown process, often with logs that clearly reflected their lack of knowledge about this. In these cases, balance was often poor and little attention had been paid to creating a realistic stereo field. It is worth pointing out that one mistake often seen was the extreme panning of a poorly positioned overhead stereo pair on drums, where a crash would be panned hard left and a ride hard right, a quite unrealistic setting that was penalised accordingly.

Many candidates made serious mistakes on ambience, with candidates often adding no reverb, or using a variety of different settings creating some inconsistencies. EQ was also often dealt with poorly, especially at the bottom end of a mix, where bass instruments (bass guitars and kick drums) were sometimes almost indistinguishable. The reason for the problem with EQ is often caused where candidates are mixing on headphones - something which many centres have no choice over. It is imperative that candidates are given the opportunity to check their work on speakers in a controlled environment as it was clear that many mixes could never have been listened to in this way. Many problems could have been avoided had candidates listened to their mixes on speakers.

Centres should note that this is a public examination and recordings should not contain any rude or offensive words/lyrics or subject material.

Logs

A well written log is of great use to examiners in understanding the candidate's intentions and understanding of the processes involved in producing their submission. Some logs were detailed and well written, although this year, the quality of logs was in general less good than in previous years.

Some centres submitted logs that were almost identical from candidate to candidate and looked like an exercise in dictation. Often such logs were in variance with what the candidate actually submitted and on occasions quite detailed logs scored a very low mark for this reason. Often candidates produced identical logs for both sequences, which again often did not reflect the submission. Such an approach is not helpful to examiners and also disadvantages the candidates.

The best logs are those written honestly by the candidate demonstrating that they understand as an individual the technology behind the process.

There was the usual crop of logs that had been thrown together at the last minute and had almost no useful detail.

Many candidates clearly had some misunderstandings about some of the very basic terms in the logs, which was disappointing. For example, candidates often referred to panning when writing about balance and often wrote about quantising in the section for phrasing. Descriptions of EQ were often very vague as were those for compression.

Structured Commentary

The performance for this paper remained very similar to last year. Many centres had chosen to record/sequence the same piece for all candidates, and had clearly prepared the paper, with candidates all writing virtually identical papers.

Question 1

The main issue here was that 1a asks for the structure of the **extract**. Therefore candidates that had, for example, sequenced the first section of a sonata form movement did not get credited for the answer 'Sonata form'. They needed to be more specific with the extract to get credited.

In 1c candidates needed to provide evidence backing up the answer in 1a, including bar references. Information not relating to 1a did not get credited.

Question 2

This question was generally well answered, although some candidates had problems understanding the difference between tonality and harmony. Response to identifying the first six chords was variable with some candidates choosing not to use the first six actual chords. Marks were often lost where candidates did not understand chord inversions (most commonly referring to root position as first inversion etc).

Question 3

3a continues to be poorly answered by the majority of candidates, with answers often far too generalized with no direct reference or relevance to the extract in question.

Most candidates did well in 3c, d and e, but some failed to answer 3c correctly (which asks for composer **and** title of the comparison piece) and consequently did not get any marks for any of these questions.

Question 4

This question was often poorly answered and candidates showed a serious lack of knowledge and understanding on both the recording and sequencing sides. The key part of the question is 'explain how you used **music technology**' and this was often ignored. Answers such as 'I balanced the instruments as they would have been in the original', which is not uncommon, completely fail to address the question, which should include reference to edit pages used, controllers and CC numbers and tools used.

Recording candidates often confused dynamics with balance and provided very sketchy information on EQ and reverb settings used. Most recording candidates provided good and accurate information on microphones used and positioning, but information on spot mic techniques used were not credited as this is at variance with the published specification.

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6714 Arranging

General Comments

The examiners are pleased to report a general rise in candidate success this year, and would extend their thanks to colleagues for preparing candidates effectively.

The 'Quality of Arranging' strand identifies 3 distinct areas for assessment:

Instrumentation - the effectiveness and practicability of the chosen instrumentation - range, idiomatic writing, texture.

Style - how effectively the candidate defines and maintains a new style within their arrangement - choice of instrumentation, tempo, melodic harmonic and rhythmic elements of the style - egg bass riffs, chord patterns, drum rhythms.

Development - the musical development of the stimulus in relation to melody, harmony, rhythm, structure and modulation.

Successful work generally included a clear score for Arrangement and parts, suitably annotated with dynamics, articulation and interpretation markings. Realistic use of instruments, whether acoustic or midi based stylistic change and imaginative development of the material chosen, attracted high marks.

There are continuing issues regarding lack of understanding in many centres as to what is required in this Arranging Unit and, as a consequence, candidates risk not developing vital skills needed for the A2 course. Centres are urged to refer to the specification and the assessment criteria which explicitly codify the musical skills that examiners are assessing.

A significant number of candidates are submitting work which is a transcription, or 'cover version' of the stimulus material and not an arrangement. This is especially applicable to Arrangement 2. The intention of an arrangement in the context of this examination is to produce an original re-working of the stimulus with development of rhythmic, melodic, harmonic and stylistic aspects of the music chosen. It is still not uncommon for whole cohorts of candidates to write in submission booklets variations on the sentence: "I tried to make this arrangement sound as much like the original as possible", apparently completely missing the point of the task.

Arrangement 1 - Notated Arrangement

Score and Parts

Scores were generally accurate in terms of pitch & rhythm, but the application of modulation caused difficulties for many candidates. Again, a lack of understanding of traditional musical conventions regarding key changes, especially when using software transposition, resulted in inaccurate enharmonic notes appearing in the score.

Recurring problems in the preparation of scores and parts were:

- bunching of the staves at the top of a page
- clashes of notes with other markings
- scores being formatted with only one or two bars per page

- empty bars - either at the end, or where there should be multi-rests
- scores/parts that do not specify transposition
- inappropriate placement of other graphic elements such as instrument names and titles

Other essential elements which needed to be present were: titles, instrument names, appropriate transposition, key/time signatures and a 'key' for drum notation - still missing in the vast majority of submissions, even though it had been identified in this report for several years.

A lack of knowledge of standard music terminology was an issue for a significant number of candidates. Particularly apparent was a lack of awareness of both opportunities and limitations regarding the use of instruments. Many candidates arranged for 'Strings', but very few gave bowing instructions, many showed e.g. Second Violin parts above First Violins in the score and some even presented String parts as block chords. With regard to brass and woodwind instruments, very few candidates seemed to be aware that wind players actually have to breathe, writing impossibly long phrases. Very few candidates provided clear and appropriate articulation for wind instruments. Especially, there was a lack of 'slurred' or 'tongued' markings. These kinds of omissions had significant implications when being considered by examiners in the marking process.

Dynamics, articulation and interpretation was, at best inconsistent and, at worse, non-existent. Many candidates gained high marks for presentation and use of music technology, but lost marks because of their lack of knowledge regarding these elements. There were still many candidates who failed to include a drum-key.

Looking at the specification synoptically, such skills are essential to produce suitable compositions with accompanying scores for the A2 element.

Arrangement 1

The choice of stimulus material for Arrangement 1 was generally more appropriate this year. However, some of the material chosen had harmonic progressions in the original, that only the most accomplished of arrangers will be able to tackle, if, as they are required, they are to produce some originality into their arrangements. Although songs such as 'Scarborough Fair' and 'House of the Rising Sun' (two particularly common choices) have straight-forward harmony, to score high marks for development of the harmony is a challenge beyond the reach of most candidates.

Most Arrangement 1 submissions included an attempt at development, ranging from simple rhythmic variation to complex stylistic and harmonic development. Only a minority made interesting, creative use of instrumentation either in terms of orchestration/playability or texture. All too often the instrumentation remained the same throughout the piece, despite being competent in many cases. Lower scoring work tended to show little understanding of instruments and often confusion between GM sounds and the real thing, some with wildly inaccurate ranges and impossible phrases playable only on a keyboard.

In terms of realisation many candidates produced competent work, often using the original harmony from the stimulus and with some simple development and change of style. Creative harmonic development, chord substitution and modulation - was found only in a small number of submissions. Style was often indeterminate and sometimes changed several times in the course of a piece, lacking coherence. This

can be effective in a clearly defined 'theme and variations' but needs to be treated with caution in less structured forms.

Where distinct styles are intended, it is important that candidates demonstrate some detailed knowledge of their features. Common suggestions in submission booklets are unspecified 'dance', Reggae and Jazz. Some research is needed to produce a convincing shift from one style to another, rather than a superficial change of rhythm or instrumentation.

Stronger work included some imaginative re-working of the material with changes of harmony and style as well as rhythmic and melodic development and there were indeed some excellent submissions. Transcriptions were less common here than with Arrangement 2, although weaker submissions showed little in the way of creativity other than changing instrumentation and adding a simple accompaniment.

Arrangement 2

There were a number of imaginative and accomplished Arrangement 2s this year. However, there was an increase in the number of candidates who merely changed the drum rhythm and called it an arrangement.

Basic issues included:

- Poor choice of stimulus material
- Inappropriate changes of style
- Significant problems with supplied stimulus material
- Poor quality recordings - both of midi and live performances

Choice of stimulus and intended change of style are fundamental. Many candidates chose inappropriate material that was very hard to develop. A great many also had only vaguely defined stylistic intentions such as 'dance track' or 'a more laid back version' that could not attract many marks for creativity or realisation.

High scoring work had well chosen stimulus material from which melodies, rhythms and/or chord changes were taken and developed following a planned strategy that varied the texture and developed the material in a coherent style or styles.

A great deal of work featured little development, the original harmony and an unchanging, often dull use of instrumentation and texture.

Improvised and recorded arrangements were all too often transcriptions of the original song, candidates often apparently being under the impression that this is simply a multi track or band recording task.

Recording is indeed part of the task, and for sequencing pathway candidates this is an opportunity to demonstrate the techniques required, but creativity and arranging skills are also essential. A commonly stated misapprehension was that by changing from male to female vocalist (or vice versa) the candidate had produced a new arrangement of the original song.

Once again this year, many centres had offered only one or two stimuli and often used the same group of musicians to perform all submissions. In these cases it was difficult to assess the role of the candidate, especially where logs were lacking detail. This is a particular concern with jazz ensembles featuring improvised solos.

The work of candidates should be supervised during the year, ensuring that they play the appropriate roles of arranger, performer and director as well as noting the details of their work in a clear log so that examiners are able to assess their work appropriately.

A small number of **sequencing arrangements** were highly imaginative and made good use of the technology available including sampling and manipulation of timbres. In general, the standard of work was poor in this area especially in terms of style and timbre.

Although more sequencing arrangements made some attempt at development (rather than transcription), it was often very limited consisting simply of a drum beat added to the original melody.

Dance styles produced some of the most and least imaginative submissions. Where the knowledge of the style and technology is well researched and understood these can be exciting and stylish pieces of music, but where this is not the case the outcome is usually dull and unrewarding.

As with recorded arrangements, it is essential that the timbre and texture of the piece is varied in order to achieve high marks, but this did not happen in the majority of cases.

Centre Administration

Once again, although many centres offer well organised and packaged submissions, examiners noted a large number of problems with the administration and organisation of this work.

Guidelines are clearly set out for this in the ICE document, published on the Edexcel website.

Candidates work should be supervised by their teachers and this must include the packing up and final submission of work with signatures from both teacher and candidate.

Many examiners experienced problems with centres omitting various aspects of their submissions:

- a) **Missing signatures and/or dates (both tutors and candidates).**
Although this aspect of the submissions was much improved over last year, where it did occur it caused serious delays to the marking of the work and, as with (b) below, caused unnecessary extra, time consuming work for the examiners.
- b) **Missing/inappropriate stimulus material.**
This was a very common problem faced by a significant number of examiners. Apart from cases where the stimulus was missing completely, as in previous years, stimulus material sometimes comprised song lyrics or TAB, neither of which is helpful for someone trying to assess an arrangement. Examiners were pro-active in trying to find missing stimuli by using You-Tube, but this really should not have been necessary and it added to an already very significant workload.

The other relatively common problem concerned CDs that did not play. It is quite clear from the nature of these problems that there is a lack of rigour by staff in some centres when it comes to checking their submissions. In connection with this problem, several examiners had to wait far too long to receive replacement CDs. Centres really must keep back-ups of all exam work in order to deal with these issues promptly.

Where it was necessary for examiners to contact centres, it was not always easy to make contact with the appropriate person. Again, staff in centres must ensure that an appropriate person can be contacted where the need arises.

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6715 Listening and Analysis

The paper contained a wide range of questions designed to test vocabulary - both in music and music technology, as well as a knowledge of the development of popular music and jazz, recording techniques and music theory. The pattern of responses suggested that most candidates performed better in some areas and less well in others but a wide discrimination was maintained and the standard overall was felt to be comparable with that of 2007. There was little change in the mean mark for the paper.

Music theory questions, identifying tonality and chords, writing out passages from dictation, were either done very well or very poorly. These questions account for approximately 10% of the total marks of the paper and present little challenge to a candidate with good music theory. Others, however, skip these questions entirely, apparently regarding them as dispensable and hoping to pick up marks elsewhere in the paper.

Time management appears to have been a problem for many - the answers to the last question frequently grew increasingly sketchy and the final two sections were often left blank. Overall grasp of recording techniques was good, but often quite basic. Question 4, for example (*Metallica's Enter Sandman*) tested the candidate's ability to think beyond the standard studio set-up and anticipate problems with monitoring, capture and mixing. Most candidates achieved 2-3 marks here, while the stronger candidates scored the full 6.

The most common cause of loss of marks was lack of detail. Vague or generalised references to reverb and 'thinner textures' seldom gained marks and many candidates, apparently stuck for an answer, made random guesses and offered terms such as 'multitrack' or 'panning' in the hope of hitting the target.

Comments on specific questions

Questions 1 and 2 presented few challenges although 1e) (identifying terms associated with keyboard programming) was answered only by the stronger candidates and those familiar with keyboard synthesis. These candidates also tended to answer question 7b) (also on synthesis) successfully.

Question 3 included two types of question on recording. 3b) (identifying the way in which the piano changed in the mix) required candidates to listen, rather than rely on learnt material, whilst 3e) (on how to mic a piano) required them to elaborate to gain the full four marks.

Guitarists had few difficulties with question 4b). The 6 mark question (4a), referred to above, produced a wide range of answers. Most candidates identified more than one problem, but only the stronger candidates provided a range of viable solutions.

Question 6 was generally answered well. However, year on year many candidates confuse performance (how the musicians are playing the music) with production (how it is recorded and mixed). There is a similar confusion in section e) questions 9/10 where performance techniques and recording techniques are thought to be the same.

A surprising number of candidates mistook a saxophone for a trumpet in 7d). Whether this was due to lack of attention, or an inability to hear a difference between the two instruments was not clear. However, a similar problem has been noted in the

GCE Music listening tests where candidates who have been taught on a diet of GM sounds are not able to distinguish between timbres in the tenor register (for example by confusing clarinets and violas) and are not able to tell any of the brass instruments apart.

Question 8 included a 4 mark question which required candidates to explain how a tape splicing technique might be replicated today using modern digital technology. Not all candidates spotted that the various sounds on the recorded loop were panned differently and so missed gaining marks here. As with question 3 they were required both to listen and to demonstrate theoretical knowledge. Very few undertook the dictation part of the question successfully.

Question 9/10 requires answers for sections a, b and c to be written in continuous prose. This was done with varying degrees of success. The standard of spelling and grammar was only fair, perhaps because these were the last questions and energy was beginning to flag at this stage. Many candidates, having listed the sections of the song in question b) simply continued through section c) writing more lists. Centres are reminded that in the new GCE 2009 specification there are specific references to written English and a loss of marks if this aspect of the answer is weak.

Examiners felt that slightly more candidates answered questions on Nelly Furtado but that the answers to the Arctic Monkeys were generally rather better. 'Maneater' was the more eclectic and offered more marks for comments on stylistic features. *If you were there...* had a wider range of technological features.

Listing the sections with timings and listing the instruments used in b) and c) were all relatively easy marks. The stronger candidates gained extra marks by providing details about textural contrast with locations. The table format of questions adopted for d) and e) elicited more focused answers but, as stated above, many confused performance technique with recording technique. In question e) many confused dynamic processing with EQ and balance with panning and it was clear to the examiner that they had not simply put the wrong answer in the wrong box.

Comments on the rubric

Fortunately there were few instances of candidates having put their headphones on incorrectly, which was commented on last year. However, some seemed to have attempted the examination this year with equipment that did not show timings. Centres are reminded that to give a location is often crucial in securing a mark and a candidate is severely disadvantaged if they have to rely on a wristwatch or similar.

6716 Sequencing, Recording & Producing

General

The observations of the examining team for the overall standard of this year's submissions are that while the amount of weaker work continues to decrease, reflecting a rising of standards in teaching and learning, there is little in the way of excellent work. Most candidates produce work that falls into the competent or good categories of the holistic mark scheme, with generally better results in Task 1 than in Task 2 or 3. Task 2 continues to be a weak area as discussed below; there is plenty of room for improvement.

Log book

Whilst many centres clearly encourage their candidates to keep accurate notes during the coursework tasks, which can then be used to fill in detailed and informative logs, there are still a large number that are scant on information, contain generic statements that do not relate directly to the work.

Photos are being increasingly used to demonstrate recording set-ups; while this is often informative and show good practice, some centres have used a generic set of photos for each candidate which doesn't reflect the fact that these pieces are individual tasks.

Following on from this, some candidates also use generic statements across the board in a centre, which do not actually relate to the work done and often are incorrect. Some centres also chose not to follow the layout of the log book but to produce extremely long and detailed typed logs in their own style. It is not necessary to write a thesis on this work; whilst it is encouraging to see that candidates are so enthused about the subject that they want to, for examiners it is better if centres organise the write ups in the categories presented even if they choose to word process it.

In some cases the purpose of the track listing for the Multi-track Recording and the integrated task were misinterpreted. The rows showing EQ, pan, FX and dynamics processing relate to settings used at the mixdown stage. Section 5 of the Multi-track Recording log also relates to these settings, with the opportunity to explain the reasons behind the choices made. If additional processing has been used post mix on the stereo file, at the mastering stage, these details can be explained in section 2 or on a separate sheet of paper.

It should be made clear that the log, although not marked, is the candidates' opportunity to fully detail all the good practice and attention to detail they have put into the work.

The log book has a number of other functions; the inside front cover forms a checklist of the submission, including space to list any parts of the work that has been omitted. It is important to avoid confusion by filling this in accurately; much time can be lost by examiners having to make enquiries about work that is indicated as present when it is not. In the most extreme cases it was very difficult to obtain information, though this was infrequent.

The signatures of teacher and candidate act as authentication of the work, that it has been completed under the supervised conditions required for all examination

coursework; without these signatures the submission cannot be marked. It was felt that this was handled with much more care this year, with very few omissions.

Centre Administration

Many centres submit very well organised work, with all parts of the submission present and in the correct formats, but there seemed to be an increase in the number of centres that failed to do this.

The centres with the most successful approach submitted one CD containing all three tasks, and another CD with stimulus material, plus a CD or floppy of the data (type 1 MIDI file and host sequencer file for task 2 - it is not required to submit the associated audio files produced during task 3). They also used paper or plastic pocket sleeve CD cases and avoided standard 'jewel' cases, which are bulky and break easily.

Common problems were

- missing MIDI files or stimulus material
- stimulus for Task 1 should be a CD not a score
- MIDI files with unnamed tracks, e.g. once opened the file displays MIDI 1, MIDI 2 etc for track names
- log books missing one or both of teacher and candidate signature
- unlabelled CDs/floppys making it uncertain which work belongs to which candidate
- incorrectly burned CDs - either with errors or submitted as data when audio is required - THIS SEEMS TO BE INCREASING. Use good quality CDs optimised for audio use, and burn at suitable speed, usually half the max of the burner or 1x/2x for stand alone audio burners
- each task submitted as separate CDs - the three mixes of the coursework need to be on the same audio CD, in the order task 1, task 2, task 3. No other material should be recorded on this CD
- a very few cases where centres thought the task 2 submission was *only a MIDI file* - an audio recording is marked and the recording and production of the final mix is a vital part of the process
- contact information was illegible or incorrect making it difficult to follow up on missing items.
- coursework for other units sent in submissions

Checking the final work produced for submission is the responsibility of the candidate, and represents the final part of the process of music production. If the wrong mix is included on a CD the examiner will not necessarily be aware of this and will only mark the work that is submitted.

Examiners appreciate that in a complex submission the odd mistake can easily be made, but for some centres it would appear that there was a lack of understanding of what the submission requirements are. The latest information can always be found in the Instructions for Conduct of Examinations document (ICE) which is available on the Edexcel website. To the credit of most centres, when contacted about the problems most were quickly rectified. A small number did fail to produce the missing material, which can be to the detriment of the candidate; this illustrates the importance of keeping archive material of all submissions.

Unfair practice/Breach of the Specification

The following list shows methods of producing coursework that are not permitted by the specification, and regrettably are sometimes seen as viable exam entries. The basic principle of all examinations, whether coursework or any other type, is that the work is entirely and uniquely that of the candidate.

Task 1

- Submitting work where a professional engineer/producer has been hired to carry out some or all of the work, either at the centre or in a commercial premises
- Passing off other artists commercial material as the candidate's own work
- Candidates sharing the same multi-track audio recordings but producing different mixes

Task 2

- Submitting commercial/third-party MIDIfiles as candidate's own work
- Scanning scores from third parties into Sibelius

It seems that with Task 2 there is an increase in candidates using downloaded MIDIfiles; centres have a responsibility to ensure this does not happen by monitoring candidates' coursework regularly.

Task 3

Sharing audio files between task 1 and task 3
Different candidates working with common audio files

When the candidate and teacher sign the submission booklet, they are authenticating the work as genuinely that of the candidate. The work needs to be supervised by the teacher throughout to ensure that this is the case.

Task 1 - Multi-track Recording

Approaches to the work

The choice of material for this task was generally suitable, and shows that centres continue their careful consideration of the approaches needed to achieve the best outcomes for this task. The majority of pieces used vocals, drums, electric guitar and/or acoustic guitar, bass guitar and often keyboards. Backing vocals were quite common. Some submissions featured brass/saxophones. Strings and percussion were rare.

Unsuitable approaches did occur for some submissions, such as:

- Choosing material that is beyond the ability of the performers resulting in a ragged performance
- Material that allows for the majority of tracks to be DI'd, not allowing the candidate to demonstrate skill with microphone use

All candidates using the same set-up to record in the same session using the same performers. *Each candidate's work should be a discrete recording that is managed from start to finish by the candidate, including set-up and positioning of equipment and performers.*

In very few cases, centres used the same recording for all candidates, who then produced an individual mix using the same audio tracks. This approach is not allowed as the candidate is marked on their individual choice and management of capture; it is not a group task.

An Arrangement of a song can be counter-productive as no marks are awarded for arrangement, and the candidate does not have a direct reference to the recording and production techniques of the stimulus.

Also in a few cases, the choice of material was a candidate's original composition or a 'local band'. This approach is unsuitable as the stimulus material needs to be a commercially available recording; i.e. the work of established artists with top quality producers.

Some submissions used sequenced material. This is not permitted, this applies to midi and audio sequencing/looping. Recording should be thought of as capturing the performance of a musician from start to finish, using drop-ins or comping if necessary.

The final outcome of any recording depends on good quality performances; the task requires the candidate to act in the role of producer to ensure the quality is the highest possible by careful preparation of performers, and using re-takes/drop-ins where necessary. It is expected that a variety of recording approaches will be used, so competence can be demonstrated in microphone use with different instruments as well as DI and overdubs.

It was encouraging to see that more candidates submitted recordings using the minimum requirement of 8 tracks, and the length of submissions was usually between the required 3-5 minutes.

It seems that the majority of centres are now well-equipped for this task. They are using simple techniques to improve the acoustic environment.

Quality of work

The most consistent area of achievement was in capture. Most candidates managed to choose and position microphones well and handle DI inputs with success. It was unusual not to see at least a couple of small problems; often there was a lack of focus in drum kit capture due to poor positioning of overheads. Vocals also gave rise to some problems with singers who need to be encouraged to stay at the same distance to the mic and to control their performance. Plosives are becoming an uncommon fault as most candidates now use pop shields. Centres could encourage candidates to experiment with damping and other simple acoustic treatments, especially for drum kit and vocals.

The area of balance and blend tended to show more errors. Virtually all submissions showed some over or under balance in at least one instrument, Quite often one instrument would dominate the mix; guitar or bass drum were common culprits, and vocals also caused problems.

The use and management of EQ was another area where it was unusual to see consistent good work. This was either unused or inconsistent with common areas of difficulty being over-emphasis of low end (either kick drum, bass or both), muddy mid-range and dull high-mids/top end.

Many candidates now mix in the box and have the capability to use many compressors, but there seems to be a lack of understanding of how to use the settings to achieve suitable results. Often it seemed candidates rely on pre-sets and no attempt had been made to modify the settings to suit the material. Common problems were vocals being over-compressed, and careless use of mastering compression on the whole mix leading to unpleasant pumping or sucking. Stronger submissions showed care and skill in producing processed sounds that matched the stimulus or followed accepted practice.

Application of effects and positioning of parts within the stereo field (beyond simple L/R panning of drum overheads) were treated almost as an after-thought in many cases, often with little regard to recreating the panorama and specific types of effects present within the stimulus. Again, higher scoring work showed a degree of care but often with some misjudgements.

The familiar presentation issues of long lead-ins/lead-outs, chopped reverb tails/sustained notes at the end, extraneous off-mic noise/talking/handling, audible editing artefacts (early/late mutes etc.), low send to master and glitchy recordings (a possible downfall of mixing in the box with underpowered/incorrectly set-up computers), were still present in some cases though there seems to be less instances of these types of problems.

Problems with distortion were still present in some work, but this seems to be a decreasing trend.

Sometimes centres made errors across the recordings. For example, all candidates using a multi-band compressor across their recordings to unify the sound, which potentially can be excellent practice, but using poor settings which resulted in FM-radio style pumping and subsequent loss of marks in dynamics categories.

This could also arise as a result of using stimulus material that is not full CD quality; if for example the stimulus is a poorly encoded mp3 the top end is likely to be inaccurate, or if the material was recorded from FM radio, the additional compression and limiting added greatly changes the sound of the original production.

Task 2 - Sequenced backing track

Many of the submissions ended up in the good or competent brackets of the holistic mark scheme, with reasonably accurate pitch and rhythm data but a lack of musicality and shaping of the performance. There were relatively few inconsistent pieces of work and very few unsuccessful ones.

In general the standard of work in this task was weaker than in task 1. This was due largely to a majority of candidates using step entry or notation programs to enter data, resulting in rigid mechanical timing, uniform note lengths and velocity. These methods of data entry must be combined with detailed editing to avoid a rendition with little musicality. In many cases there was little or no attempt to improve the shaping of these aspects of the sequence.

The use of notation programs such as Sibelius for data entry is a major cause of mechanical outcomes. If anything, this approach seems to be on the increase. Even when humanise functions are used, the resulting performance is a long way from being truly musical.

Step time entry or using notation programs is a time-consuming approach, and it is more productive in the long run to use real time data entry, even though learning and playing in parts may initially appear more difficult; parts can be learnt a few bars at a time and even for non-keyboard players this technique will result in a more musical outcome with more natural phrasing. Some editing and shaping will still be needed but the raw material will exhibit much more feel. Subsequent editing is still a substantial task, as attention to detail using the full range of sequencing techniques is required to achieve the highest quality outcomes.

Where there was large amount of real time data entry, centres are advised to encourage candidates to experiment with partial/iterative quantise techniques, as well as exploring the use of groove quantise where the material is suitable. Emphasis needs to be placed on attempts to create realism in the musical performances for this task.

The choice of material also has a large impact on what approaches to the work can be taken. Where the original stimulus is mainly electronic in nature, including many dance styles, there may be limited possibilities to shape the performance using the expected range of sequencing techniques, apart from the vocal lines. Even so, while many dance styles rely on repetition and loops they also often have subtleties of rhythm and timing that are not reproduced when these styles are attempted. Similarly guitar based rock can be a poor choice; some techniques of sequencing can recreate certain guitar playing styles effectively but in many cases it is hard to achieve successful results. This appears to be recognised by centres, with less candidates attempting this approach this year.

The choice of material also has to take into account the requirements of task 3, so consideration of the available musicians/singers and their suitability needs to be part of the initial choice for task 2.

There was a better choice of material from most centres this year, though still a large number of guitar based hard rock pieces that produce limited success.

In some cases the melody line was poorly sequenced when the rest of the music was good. The melody line is not an insignificant part of the performance. It is intended that the whole piece functions as a high quality musical performance and production in all aspects, including the melody line(s).

The areas of timbre balance and pan were also handled with mixed success. Timbres in general were well chosen and suitable. The choice of melody timbre has a big effect on the outcome of the final piece. Inappropriate timbres for main vocal lines include piano and vocal aahs/oohs; thankfully the incidence of these misjudgements is becoming much less frequent. More centres now have access to a range of VSTi and Soft Synths, with many opting to use Reason's soundbank in rewire mode. While this makes a wider range and arguably a better quality of timbres available, care must be taken to ensure that the timbres chosen can respond to controller data in order for the full range of marks to be accessed. Sounds that have built-in performance

characteristics will not be given additional credit, unless it is clear that the use of controller data has been used to shape these sounds.

Balance of instruments in the mix was handled well, with the strongest work showing excellent achievement with all parts well balanced. Typical problems included over-balance of drums and/or bass, melody line either over or under, and there were often problems with parts that come in and out of the piece such as backing vocals being under or over balanced. Use of Pan was often a weak area, with little consideration given in some cases, or nothing beyond the built-in pan settings of a drum set. Higher scoring work showed consideration of the stereo field in the stimulus and used appropriate settings to recreate this.

The areas of dynamics, tempo, articulation and phrasing also received little attention in many submissions. Use of controller data such as expression, modulation (vibrato) and pitch bend was sometimes not used at all, or used to poor effect. Tempo in particular seems to be a weaker part of the work; while most pop/rock/jazz songs do not have extreme changes in tempo, gradual changes do happen to correspond with high points/breakdowns. High quality submissions used a wide range of controllers appropriately including portamento and sustain.

Significant problems were caused when centres did not meet the requirement to submit a type 1 MIDI file and the program's native sequence file as part of this task. It is also necessary to name the tracks clearly in the MIDI file. In some cases the submitted MIDI files did not bear much resemblance to finished mix.

The aim of this task, is to finish with a recorded stereo mix of the piece. Producing a completed stereo mix is a requirement for all tasks throughout the Music Technology qualification, and it is a significant part of the process to ensure that a high quality recording of the finished work is made. It is always good practice to allow time for reflection on completed mixes and remixing to achieve improvements after auditioning the work on a range of listening equipment, including studio monitors, ipod headphones, car stereos, small CD players, computer speakers and hi-fi. A well-crafted mix should translate accurately onto any system.

The same degree of care is needed in preparing the final mix for burning on CD as for task 1, with editing start and end times, without cutting notes short at the end, and ensuring a good send level to the master.

Task 3 - Integrated recording

The same principles that govern any music production need to be applied here. To achieve high quality work the producer must have control over each individual instrument/part of the mix, and be able to apply effects, EQ and dynamics processing, as well as balancing the levels and placing parts across the stereo field. There are a number of ways of achieving this depending on the equipment used - individual sequenced parts (including individual drums) can be bounced to audio thus giving the same degree of control as in a multi-track recording. Alternatively, with many VSTi there are also fairly good quality reverb/effects, EQ and even dynamics processing built in which can be used on individual parts/instruments. Either of these approaches can allow a coherent mix to be produced using comparable and compatible effects and processing across all parts. In the high quality approaches that were seen, these approaches had been adopted and a highly musical, well-produced finished mix was attained.

In most cases candidates did not take advantage of the opportunity to revisit sequencing work, and improve weak sections from Task 2. Sequenced tracks were simply left unaltered with two or more audio tracks recorded on top; dynamic management and use of EQ were often neglected in this task (particularly with the sequenced parts), and panning restricted with no additional consideration to that done in task 2. Problems of over and under balance between live parts and sequenced parts were common. The resulting mix often had a karaoke-like quality with the two aspects of live and sequenced parts not blending together.

The capture of live audio parts for this task was generally given slightly less attention than that demonstrated in task 1, even though similar techniques were usually employed. There was a higher incidence of problems such as vocalists drifting off-mic, plosives and distortion. In a few cases the vocalist had problems with the performance because the music is in a difficult key for them - this can be simply addressed by using the transpose function for the sequenced parts.

Treatment of the recorded audio using EQ, dynamics processing and effects was also somewhat neglected, though more attempts were made than with the sequenced parts. Other live audio parts were similarly neglected in these areas, and another common cause of poor integration was the use of DI guitar amp modelling units (e.g. Line 6 pod) where the original pre-set had an unsuitable EQ or extreme compression, which was out of keeping with the rest of the production. Where high quality work was achieved, the level of attention to detail in all these aspects of music production had been considered and carefully worked on, showing progressive improvement through the stages of mixing, listening and remixing.

6717 Composing with Technology

There were less faulty CDs or missing items in the submissions this year, but many centres are still using non-CD labels, that cause problems playing the CDs. Either proper CD labels should be used, or the CDs should be labeled using a pen (the latter being the preferred option). There were still a small number of unlabelled CDs.

Note that CDs should be submitted in audio, not data format.

There were one or two candidates who used the wrong paperwork: note that the paperwork has changed significantly from previous years, the purpose being to guide the candidate to supply information that will help the examiner to give credit, particularly in use of technology.

Many candidates had limited appreciation of what sample loops are compared to individual samples. Loops are complete riffs or drum patterns (such as Apple Loops) that can be used as building blocks in the composition process. Individual samples usually fall into the sound effects category. Examiners need to know where these came from in order to know how to mark the work. More credit is given for self-recorded samples than for dragging and dropping a loop out of a sample collection.

Samples should be put on the sample CD *unprocessed*, so that the examiner can see what processing has been applied to them by the candidate. Too many candidates recorded the samples for the sample CD directly from their composition, making the samples appear to have effects already on them.

Merely choosing sounds from a hardware or software synth is not synthesis: this section in the submission booklet was for the candidates to say how they had *manipulated* sounds to create new, unique sounds.

Candidates were required to supply information about what recorded tracks had been used. The most important information here was who had recorded it and whether it was improvised.

The processing section in the paperwork was for the candidates to explain what effects had been applied (reverb, delays, EQ, etc, i.e. channel strip settings), and the MIDI shaping section was there so that the candidate could draw attention to MIDI editing such as velocity shaping and track automation of volume.

Response to particular questions

Free Brief

Often the written briefs failed to go into sufficient detail. For example, 'I wanted to write a song in pop/funk/dance style' or a basic title such as 'film score', with very little specific information present. The number of briefs that went into a similar amount of detail to the published briefs was small. To score highly in response to the brief, there should be some information that suggests structure and style, and possibly other attributes such as timbre, texture, etc. Many submissions suffered from the fact that they were poorly planned, so they ended up with poor structure. Briefs were often an analytical description of the piece, (hence duplicating other parts of the booklet), rather than an outline of intent.

Occasionally, and worryingly, some centres gave out free briefs that specified certain criteria. For example, 'there will be no use of sampling or audio in the composition', or instructed candidates to do tasks that were difficult to produce good results from making a composition derived entirely from recorded speech (which would be unlikely to result in good marks for melody, harmony, or timbre). This was felt to disadvantage candidates.

Video clips should not be submitted in lieu of a written brief. Examiners are not expected to watch clips supplied with compositions. A detailed brief similar to the ones supplied by Edexcel should be written for compositions of this type. It should also be borne in mind that composing to a film clip can lead to a very poor musical result, with the momentum being carried by the *video*, rather than the music.

There was a wide variety of styles used, but the style of many submissions limited the credit that could be given - there were many dance-influenced compositions, which by the nature of the style were limited in melody and harmony, and had repetitive structure. The use of sample loops can be a very sharp double-edged sword, leading to good texture but very poor structure.

There were more attempts to manipulate sounds than in previous years, but often this had no clear part of the concept of the piece. Too often the submission booklet would say words to the effect of 'I changed some settings from the preset sounds' without saying specifically what had been changed and why, with a resulting sound that could have been achieved from a preset.

Set Briefs

Brief 1

This was the most popular brief, as usual, but a lot of the music was unoriginal. Most scored reasonably well in the composition options but less well in use of technology.

Often sound effects (e.g. digging, gunshots, dogs, trains) were incorporated, but often at the expense of musical control of the mood. While the better candidates recorded at least some of these sounds themselves, in the real world, the composer would be unlikely to be involved in the sound design of a film, although there is often a strong collaboration between the composer and the sound design team.

Two schools of thought were generally in evidence with this brief. The majority of candidates opted for the traditional orchestral approach, with a nod to Elmer Bernstein, but some were heavily influenced by the more modern and electronica-styled writing of Ramin Djawadi's '*Prison Break*' scores.

Mostly the timings were well kept to, with the style of the music usually being suitable, although in quite a few cases there was insufficient development within sections, with a musical idea being established but not developed.

Brief 2

The responses for this brief varied greatly in quality.

The weaker submissions often suffered from either incoherence, with no common material between movements, or monotony caused by using the same material in every movement. Submissions that successfully maintained a unified style but that

also maintained interest were not common. There were some that showed inventiveness, but these were rare. Most used pentatonic clichés coupled with oriental sounds (often Japanese).

There were quite a number of submissions that were a continuous track, in spite of the instructions in bold type to submit individual tracks for each cue.

Brief 3 & 4

These generally showed an awareness of the need to include a range of technology, and because of this, showed the highest levels of imagination.

Brief 3

Generally the least successful submissions were songs where the words scanned poorly. The best were narrations set against a soundscape. There were a number of songs in styles that were not really suitable for the subject matter of the poem. Some candidates placed too much emphasis on the poem itself and not enough on the music.

Brief 4

More popular than in recent years, this brief allowed candidates to capture and process samples, attracting marks for use of technology, but in many cases, the marks for melody, harmony and structure were low. Submissions ranged from badly structured monotonous pieces to pieces that were highly original and interesting.

Composition options

The most common area of inadequacy was melody, with many candidates unable to create melodies that had clear direction and shape. Rhythms were often very repetitive in lower quality submissions. The use of sample loops contributing to this problem and often the interest was confined to the percussion parts. Harmony varied from a very basic level (sometimes the chords not even fitting the melodic content) at the lower end, to varied and confident harmonies (sometimes quite complex) at the higher end. It was disappointing to note how often the timbres used were limited. Often orchestral compositions had several instruments missing, even sometimes whole woodwind or brass sections, limiting the palette of timbre combinations available.

Use of technology

In set brief 1, many candidates only used 'foley' samples, and there were many orchestral style compositions that did not make much use of technology beyond adding basic reverb. Briefs 3 & 4 produced more creative use of technology.

To score marks for sound manipulation, candidates are expected to noticeably enhance sounds, to create unique sounds that could not have been found in presets. Often candidates said they had completed manipulation, but the resulting sound was still rather ordinary and could easily have been obtained from a preset. Processing rarely went beyond obvious application of reverb.

Recording quality

The majority were good, but there were still a number that had hum, hiss, or clipped reverb tails. The biggest problem was distortion. Candidates should ensure that they check that when all of the individual channel signals are mixed together, this does not overload the main output channel. There were a significant number of recordings that were poorly mixed, with poor balance and with some important parts masked by other parts.

Scores

The quality of graphic scores has improved, but there are still too many that are just basic arrange page screen shots, or where every possible page has been printed without an attempt to annotate in a way that shows necessary information clearly.

It should be remembered that the point of a score is that it would enable the piece to be recreated, whether a graphic score or a traditionally notated score. Many graphic scores lacked musical information. The note programming was either shown as blocks in an arrangement page, or as piano roll screenshots that were too small to be able to read. In many, there were large parts missing, and the candidate had mentioned the general process followed, rather than giving enough specific information to realise the piece.

In notated scores, often samples and live played parts were missed out (for live playing there is no MIDI info to import into the scoring software). Live parts in graphic scores were often shown as waveforms, which did not help to realise the composition.

A good notated score should show accurate notation, with good layout and attention to detail, with dynamics, phrasing, etc, included. A good graphic score should show evidence of how the sounds were made (where applicable) as well as processing applied alongside the musical data needed to recreate the composition. Candidates should not waste time explaining what processing techniques are, but should detail what they have done and why, as succinctly as possible. Many candidates put a good deal of effort into producing well presented, ring bound work that had little practical value as a score.

There were still many notated scores that were basic 'import MIDI file and press print' scores, showing no detail and having very poor layout.

Conclusion

Teachers should be sure to check out the mark sheets that the examiners use to assess the coursework. This will draw awareness to the areas where marks are awarded, and candidates should write their compositions with this in mind. For example, if a candidate writes an ambient piece with very little melody, harmony or rhythm, then they **must** make certain that the composition is strong in texture, timbre and structure, or the score will be low. In other words, candidates should make sure that they write a pieces that will score well under the criteria by which they will be judged.

It should also be noted that to gain marks in the higher bands, candidates must score consistently in all categories - composition, use of technology and score. Many quite good compositions were let down either by almost no creative use of technology, or by a very poor score.

Centres should keep backups of candidates work, so that replacement CDs can be quickly sent should this be necessary. All CDs should be carefully checked before being sent off to make sure that they are in the correct format, contain the correct tracks (in the correct order), and play correctly.

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6718/01 Controlling & Interpreting MIDI Data

General comments on whole paper:

The paper itself seemed to be pitched at the right level for candidates. Most candidates were able to attempt all questions. The paper differentiated well because there was a wide range of marks for most questions.

Examiners felt that candidates were not thoroughly prepared for this examination. Music notation skills and knowledge of chords seemed to be widely underdeveloped.

Questions covered a wide range of techniques, and enabled the candidate with a wider culture in music technology to show their potential, while allowing those with some knowledge to obtain some marks.

However, it is disappointing to report the lack of knowledge about basic effects and also how to utilise these within a MIDI setting. Many marks were gained from candidates using listening skills rather than existing knowledge for this exam which restricted their responses and slowed their work rate.

The knowledge base required for Section B should be developed throughout the A2 year and is closely associated with the skills needed to successfully input and shape a MIDI backing track for SRP (unit 6716) task 2. Therefore, this content should not be taught purely in isolation, but instead, integrated with practical work to reinforce understanding.

As is common every year, many complaints were received from centres who were unable to load the MIDI file correctly. The MIDI file supplied is thoroughly tested on a range of hardware and software combinations. It is a standard MIDI file which will load correctly into any software.

Some centres reported that some of the controllers were not showing in their sequencer. Their software may have been incorrectly set up. The centre needs to refer to page 8 of the test pack to ensure that controllers are not filtered during MIDI file import.

A particular complaint from centres was that the chorus was not visible. In Cubase SX3 as in most sequencers, 'Chorus' is displayed as 'ExEffDepth 3'; in some other sequencers it is displayed as '93'. Candidates are expected to know this as part of their learning about MIDI. This question was deliberately put in to differentiate between candidates that had knowledge of this and candidates that did not prior to the exam.

If centres complete the Test Pack these issues would be highlighted before the day of the examination. Completing a mock exam using previous year's papers would further highlight any problems with software set up and mean better preparation for candidates.

There were even some cases of centres not having any type of sound source to play the MIDI back on.

In addition, it appeared that some centres seemed to be using inappropriate equipment to run the examination, for example:

- Basic 'gaming' soundcards, which do not respond to all MIDI controllers listed in the GM specification.
- LOGIC PRO 7 and most other sequencers do not have an inbuilt GM sound set so they must be used in conjunction with a GM sound module.
- Free or 'lite' versions of sequencing software, which are often limited in terms of edit screens and support of tempo/time signature changes.
- Headphones with limited low frequency response/mono headphones.

It is the duty of the centre to provide appropriate software/hardware for candidates to use. If in any doubt centres should consult the published Teacher's Guide as a starting point and contact the board with specific queries if necessary.

Comments on specific questions:

Q1c only a few candidates knew all 3 Italian terms - vibrato was answered the most commonly. Sim. was usually written as "similar", not simile. A significant number of clearly knowledgeable candidates lost marks by not making 2 statements in each box; many knew correct terms but failed to explain these or how they are achieved.

Q2a Candidates who cannot read music well are advised to use the sequencer to identify the chords. Most sequencers will name the chord in the transport bar if the chord is correctly played on the keyboard. Only a handful of candidates scribed the chords correctly using the correct superscript for the maj on the 7ths. This year, we credited correct 7ths even if the triad was wrong so mid-cohort candidates were able to pick up a few marks if they knew how to express a 7th chord. Some stronger candidates incorrectly wrote E6 for bar 19, not noting that the question states that the chords are in route position.

Q2b There was a huge improvement on this question this year, probably because the music was in more familiar 4/4 territory. However, about a fifth of all answers were still random scribbles and blobs. Again the sequencing software can be used to give the candidate the answer using the score edit page.

Q3b Many answers incorrectly referred generally to the use of synths, drum machines and fast tempo and showed confusion between club/dance and traditional disco music so scored few marks. Most correct answers referred to octave bass line and wah-wah.

Q3c There were some very good answers to this question. It was clear that some candidates either had access to analogue synths or had been taught well on them. However, this was a minority and most candidates scored nothing either leaving the question blank or making vague references to synths breaking.

Q4 Most candidates incorrectly stated that the vocals were double tracked where there were layered harmony vocals. Examiners felt that the descriptions of how the mix was enhanced were bland and vague. It was difficult to attribute much credit to most answers because there was not enough accuracy.

Q5 This was fairly well answered with the exception of ring modulation which was very weak. Some candidates gave effect preset names or brand names specific to software, which were not credited, instead of the generic type of effect. Very few candidates knew what ring modulation sounded like; only a handful knew how it worked.

Q6b Most candidates noticed that the tracks were opposite panned. However, some candidates were not aware of what MIDI channels were. Most recognised the tempo increase and change and showed awareness of the tempo track.

Q7b Less than 20 candidates in the entire cohort noticed that bars 69-70 were not quantised. Only A-grade candidates chose the correct quantise value for bar 68 because of the grace note.

Q8a Nearly all candidates answered the volume levels. However, some candidates had difficulty in finding the chorus values in their software.

Q9 This is a list edit question which is intended to differentiate at the top of the cohort. (a)-(d) were quite accessible, then the question got progressively harder. Few candidates answered the remaining questions correctly. There were a lot of incorrect responses for 9e as well as a few very well explained answers. Candidates usually scored 0 or 3 for 9e and 9gii because they either knew it or did not. 9f was largely well answered but there were a significant number of answers that showed a lack of knowledge of the functionality of MIDI.

Q10 There was an improvement on last year as more candidates were getting this far in the paper. However, a lot of candidates giving the same answers verbatim. i.e. "Pitchbend, vibrato, modulation", possibly because it has been commonly assessed. Over three-quarters of candidates scored full marks on Q2.

3 - Wah-wah: lots identifying brightness but not how it was applied and there were a lot of irrelevant comments about articulation of guitar strums.

4 - Double tracking: there were a number of 0 and 1 mark responses with lots saying 'copied', not many identifying panning despite this being a standard concept. The most common 1 mark was for noticing there was a separate track.

5 - There were many irrelevant comments about pan. Marks were awarded to candidates that explained reverb clearly and concisely.

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6718/02 Music Technology In Context

General Comments

The format of the paper remained the same as for the previous year.

The papers provided candidates with opportunities to demonstrate a breadth and depth of understanding of the specified works, within the standards and requirements of this level. Candidates needed to show transferable skills, particularly in being able to describe salient details about the works with information gathered through their aural perception. In many cases, the inability to communicate their knowledge, especially through the use of standard music terminology led to low marks, even though the examiners did all they could to interpret candidates' responses positively.

The other common issues regarding low marks in the essay questions, stemmed from the very significant number of candidates who filled their papers with facts - often accurate facts - but including material that was completely out of context. As a consequence, these candidates did not answer the questions set.

There were some very good responses from many centres demonstrating a good interest and knowledge of the content of the papers, especially for Paper 2B. The excellent teaching which continues to be demonstrated by some centres is to be highly commended, with many candidates able to provide detailed and insightful answers showing a good understanding of the set works and the genres from which they come.

Candidates are required to sit a 1 hour written paper based on a number of audio extracts on a CD. They are able to listen to the extracts as much as is necessary. However, the extracts are there as an aid to recalling prior knowledge and not as an aural analysis. There is still a number of centres whose candidates demonstrate poor standard of preparation. As with previous years, these candidates rarely score well on any questions, and score particularly poorly on those requiring a detailed background knowledge of the set works and the context in which they were composed.

Question specific

Paper 2A

Question 1 was largely dealt with very well on the whole, with a significant number of candidates scoring full marks.

Question 2 Most candidates successfully identified the "Bat Theme" and the use of the minor key. Responses were often not contextualised enough when it came to Instrumentation and Texture, with lots of comments about "high and low textures" and "dark sounding instruments".

Question 3 was answered best of any question, testing the candidates' aural perception.

Question 4a was answered well.

Question 4b. Although most candidates recognised "Pitch-bend" and "Heavy use of reverb", very few added further details.

Question 5 was answered quite well overall.

Question 6. This essay question was answered more successfully than question 7, even though a much smaller percentage of candidates chose to answer it. However, many candidates concentrated on an analysis of the “Goldfinger” score, which did not answer the question.

Question 6 and 7 (in general). Few candidates demonstrated the ability to write clear, concise and well-constructed essays. Within a time-restrained examination, this proved to be a serious disadvantage.

Question 7. The responses to this question were very disappointing. Despite the fact that there were 38 possible marks on the mark scheme, answers often lacked any real substance, rarely getting beyond the “dark, Gothic” references. Some candidates gave very detailed analyses of the “Batman” score, but this did not answer the question.

Paper 2B

Questions 1, 2 and 3 were all answered well.

Question 4a Many candidates failed to interpret the lyrics and/or had not studied the video of “*Material Girl*” as a consequence, they missed the opportunity to gain several marks.

Question 5 provided some good responses.

Question 5b was disappointing in as much as many candidates resorted to providing negative comments about the track that they *didn't* like, as opposed to being positive about the track they did like.

Question 6 The more able candidates provided appropriate, reasoned answers, although many ran out of time.

Question 7 Fans of “The Who?” had a more detailed knowledge of the genre than was generally the case with candidates who were not into Rock music.

Performance indicators

Candidates at the standard required for a grade ‘A’ should be able to:

- Demonstrate an excellent musical knowledge of the film score/album
- Demonstrate an excellent understanding of the relationship between the image and the music, or the lyrics, production and music
- Demonstrate an excellent understanding of the score-writing/song-writing process
- Place the score/album in context, both within the genre and popular music as a whole using clear reasoning processes
- Write fluently and imaginatively using a range of accurate and appropriate technical and musical vocabulary
- Draw comparisons between different extracts of music within the AOS

Candidates at the standard required for a grade ‘E’ should be able to:

- Demonstrate a sound knowledge of the film score/album
- Demonstrate their awareness of the relationship between the image and the music, or the lyrics, production and music and be able to identify some simple key points
- Demonstrate some understanding of the demands placed on film score composers/songwriters

- Demonstrate a limited understanding of the importance of the score or album using simple facts as evidence
- Write coherently using a limited range of accurate musical and technical vocabulary
- Demonstrate an awareness of similarities and differences between different extracts from within the AOS

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Grade Boundaries

6713

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	57	51	46	41	36
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

6714

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	43	38	34	30	26
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

6715

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	100	62	57	52	47	42
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

6716

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	42	38	35	32	29
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

6717

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	100	62	56	50	45	40
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

6718/2a

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	150	80	72	64	57	50
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

6718/2b

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	150	92	83	75	67	59
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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