

music technology

BTEC National Subsidiary Diploma

Head of department: Claire Whittaker

Email: music@esher.ac.uk

Exam board: Pearson Edexcel



What is this subject about?

BTEC Music Technology is a nationally recognised vocational subject. This subject provides the opportunity to build understanding of the technical processes and principles that underpin effective use of music technology in creating, performing, recording and producing contemporary music. This is a two year course equivalent to one full A Level.

What will I study in the first year?

In the first year students will cover three units. 'Music Production Techniques' teaches students to create a musical product using studio recording facilities (including Pro Tools software), taking on the roles of performer, producer, engineer and assistant and learning to edit and mix on Cubase. 'Sequencing Systems and Techniques' involves students working with both MIDI and audio to create sequencing projects on Cubase. Recognising and describing qualities in recorded and live sounds is essential in this subject, and 'Listening Skills for Music Technologists' will engage students in active listening practice and teach them to be able to hear and correct errors in performances and recordings.

What will I study in the second year?

Students will cover another three units in the second year. 'Delivering a Music Product' will extend and develop recording studio skills, but with a focus on working to a deadline and, in performance ensembles and production teams, to simulate the real-world environment of the music industry. 'Music and Sound for the Moving Image' builds

on sequencing software skills with the addition of mapping created sound to movie clips. This unit involves using VST instruments as well as recorded audio to create score and sound design. 'Special Subject Investigation' allows students to undertake an in-depth exploration of a chosen area before presenting their findings in a written report, presentation, video clip or blog etc. and has links to areas of employment including journalism, promotion, active research and marketing.

How is the course assessed?

The course is internally assessed, with each unit graded as pass, merit or distinction. Students will achieve a pass, merit or distinction overall depending on their results across all units.

What skills will I need for this course?

You must have the ability to play an instrument or sing. An existing ability to read notation is desirable but will also be taught as part of the course (reading Guitar TAB will also be useful). You will be required to develop proficiency in sound engineering so will need to have a good ear and ideally a working knowledge of pulse, rhythm, keys and chords. Some experience of music notation software and recording/sequencing software will be useful.

What can the course lead to in terms of higher education and future careers?

There are many opportunities for further study at higher education institutions, and many career possibilities for those proficient in handling music technology. Level 3 BTEC in Music Technology is widely accepted by higher education providers and continues to provide valuable experience and preparation for students aiming for higher education in the subject. Music technology careers could include work as sound engineers, record producers and teachers. Many employers are interested in Music for its artistic and creative aspects, which can also lead potential employees into fields such as media and marketing.

The Music Department enjoys a progression agreement with a local Music Technology higher education provider. Music at degree level is incredibly varied from institution to institution, so it is necessary to consider which element of music you want to pursue. There are courses in sound design, audio engineering, creative digital arts, production, contemporary music and performance.

What are the formal entry requirements for this course?

Aside from the general entry criteria that the College requires, the ability to read standard music notation and have a good ear is very important. If you are concerned that your music theory is weak then you will be offered the opportunity to take extra lessons to improve this in order to support your progress on the course.

Do I need Music Technology GCSE to Study BTEC Music Technology?

It is advisable to have studied Music or Music Technology at GCSE/BTEC Level 2. You must have some performance skills and the ability to play an instrument or sing. Aural skills are very important. Most importantly you must be able to hear what is accurate musically and what is not.

What extra support/enrichment activities are on offer?

There are regular concerts and open mic events, facilitating both solo and ensemble performance, Choir, College Band, Jazz groups, College Production, contemporary bands, and the opportunity to form smaller ensembles. Music Tech students are encouraged to work with those students writing their own music on the complementary study Song Writing course, to facilitate recording and to manage the mixing and producing of the final CD and performances. Students have individual access to computers running Sibelius and Cubase software to assist with composition and sequencing coursework completion, and Logic and Pro Tools to support multi-track recording. There are also workshops on music technology, composition and performance techniques, which are led by professionals in their field. There are a number of trips including the chance to attend opera, symphony concerts, musicals and jazz events. Additionally, we take students on a Music tour to Europe during Wider Skills Week.

Subject combination advice:

BTEC Music Technology combines well with Music A Level as skills learnt in both subjects are very complementary. It can also work well alongside Maths and Physics, or Performing Arts and Media Studies.

What is the difference between Music and Music Technology?

BTEC Music Technology is very different from Music A Level. Music Technology involves the study of software such as Cubase, Logic, Sibelius and Pro Tools 10, sound recording equipment and methods of studio production used in the popular music industry; whereas in Music we study music from all periods of history, perform using studio equipment to record performances, and compose with software programmes such as Sibelius and Cubase.

Both courses are made up of three Units in each year which are assessed internally at regular intervals. A Level Music has a formal written exam and an externally marked unit. Both courses are practical in their approach, but also include some written work, research, reading, and presentation-type assignments. Music A Level and BTEC Music Technology can be taken together as they offer a broad spectrum of musical study which would support any career in Music.