



Course report 2024

Higher Dance

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 474

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 423

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	106	Percentage	25.1	Cumulative percentage	25.1	Minimum mark required	68
B	Number of candidates	122	Percentage	28.8	Cumulative percentage	53.9	Minimum mark required	58
C	Number of candidates	93	Percentage	22.0	Cumulative percentage	75.9	Minimum mark required	48
D	Number of candidates	71	Percentage	16.8	Cumulative percentage	92.7	Minimum mark required	38
No award	Number of candidates	31	Percentage	7.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Feedback from the markers and visiting assessors as well as from all of the data analysed shows that overall, the course assessments performed as expected. Average marks have increased for both the practical activity and performance components.

Question paper

The full range of marks was accessed for each question.

Feedback from markers indicated that the paper was accessible for candidates and whilst some questions were more demanding, overall, candidates were able to access marks when they attempted to answer all questions.

The 2-mark questions did not score as highly as expected — whilst the content linked to these questions was accessible, candidates appear to have adjusted the depth and clarity of their response due to the mark allocation. Responses for these questions were often limited and were more in line with National 5 level answers. This impacted on the ability to access marks for these questions because answers were limited and did not meet the requirements for a 'straightforward' response.

Section 1

Question 1(a): This question was identified as accessible and a straightforward question and command word to open the paper. Markers agreed it was accessible to use a describe question at the start of the paper.

This question performed reasonably well.

Question 1(b): This question was identified to be accessible content and used a command word that had been focused on a lot through the Understanding Standards audio presentation as well as the live event.

The response for this question had to be linked to 1(a), and this was clear in the question's format. This question performed reasonably well.

Question 2: This question had been identified as accessible content and most candidates were able to access at least 1 mark for a limited response.

Question 3: This question was identified as challenging content because in previous papers at both National 5 and at Higher level candidates struggle to show an understanding of musicality as a performance skill.

Question 4: This question had not been included in previous papers, but it was derived from the mandatory content in the course specification and therefore the content should be covered in the course delivery. This was the question that had the most 'no responses'.

Section 2

Question 6(a): This was identified as an accessible question.

Question 8(a): This question was identified as being straightforward and accessible to all candidates.

Practical activity

The practical activity performed as expected. The average mark was slightly higher than in previous years.

Most candidates chose to present a group choreography for their assessment, although there were more solo choreographies this year. Centres are making good use of both options and often within a centre there is a mix of both solo and group choreographies.

Data analysed in the marking review as well as feedback from visiting assessors highlights that the choreography reviews are also stronger than in previous years. Whilst the average mark is increasing for this component there are many candidates still presenting choreographies that lack creativity and choreography reviews that are below the standards expected for Higher level. There are many resources on [Understanding Standards website](#) to support delivery of both these aspects of the course assessment.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected. The average mark was slightly higher than in previous years.

Visiting assessor feedback as well as analysis of data gathered through the marking review highlighted that most candidates are performing contemporary, jazz or commercial solos. Some centres are also presenting other dance styles such as ballet, Irish, tap, hip hop and lyrical.

Most centres are able to meet the demands of performance through suitably choreographed dances that were appropriately challenging and well presented by candidates. In some centres, the solos presented for the performance component continue to lack the technical challenge for Higher level, and the choreography did not allow candidates to demonstrate dynamic contrast within the solo. Some of the solos that had been choreographed by the centre included many stylised movements and did not meet the time requirements for Higher level as the candidate would not start at the beginning of the music or they would do simple movements for the first 20-30 seconds of the music.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

A higher percentage of candidates were gaining marks across all areas of the question paper compared to last year. Candidates appeared to be better prepared for the question paper, and this was evident through a better understanding of the command words as well as the length of responses. Compared with previous years' question papers, candidates wrote more and there were fewer questions with 'no response'. It appears that candidates may be more confident responding to the questions, and they are now attempting more of the questions.

It was felt that candidates are continuing to become more aware of the command words. However, many candidates write a lot of information but do not relate it back to the question and command word so do not answer the question being asked.

There were still many candidates that seemed unprepared for the question paper and appeared to have not studied the full course content to allow them to use their knowledge to answer the questions. There are a few candidates that are scoring 0 marks for this component. From analysing the scripts where candidates are gaining 0 marks it is evident that some of these candidates do not have the subject knowledge required for this level.

In section 2, some candidates did not access marks as they had not studied a full length or appropriate performance. Some candidates could not access the full range of marks because the professional work selected did not have enough choreographic content for candidates to discuss.

There were four, 2-mark questions within the paper and the markers felt that many candidates were unsuccessful in accessing marks due to the lack of depth of knowledge shown through their response. The same candidates that did not perform well in the 2-mark questions performed better in the 4 and 6-mark questions because they were able to gain marks for a limited response, whereas in the 2-mark questions they didn't provide enough depth in the response to access 1 mark.

Similarly to last year, responses in section 1 of the question paper were stronger than in section 2. In section 1, candidates made better use of the command words, whereas in section 2 they did not apply their knowledge to the command word as well and responded using all the information they knew rather than explicitly answering the questions asked. They demonstrated an inability to align their knowledge with what the question asked therefore the marks were not accessed by candidates. This highlighted a lack of understanding of the command word and of practice at answering these types of questions, linked to section 2 of the paper.

Section 1

Question 1(a): Some candidates did not provide enough descriptive detail and often gave a lot of explanation. The detail needed in describe questions remains an area that seems to be challenging for many candidates.

This was one of the 2-mark questions which appears to have limited the depth of knowledge that the candidates provided throughout the response. Many candidates wrote a brief description of their development method, but it lacked the depth and clarity required at Higher level. The responses generally lacked the detail to gain 2 marks and often candidates only gained 1 mark or were unable to gain any marks as their responses were so limited and vague.

Question 1(b):

The response for this question had to be linked to 1(a), and this was clear in the question's format. Some candidates performed reasonably well, and some candidates did use evaluative language throughout the response.

Question 2: Most candidates were able to gain at least 1 mark for a limited response.

In this question, some candidates used the terminology 'self-expression' within their response but did not actually demonstrate their understanding of the term. Many of those candidates spoke about facial expressions generically and were not specific about the types of facial expressions used at moments within their solo performances. Some candidates demonstrated a good understanding of all aspects of self-expression and also wrote about the use of the body to show self-expression and the intention behind movements to express themselves and show their personality through the performance.

Question 3: Many candidates wrote about timing or described the music instead of musicality.

Question 4: This was the question that had the most 'no responses'. Most candidates that attempted the question did gain marks for it.

Some candidates answered it about their own solo performance as opposed to the style of dance they had studied for key characteristics, history and development of the style. Marking allowed for a variety of approaches to be awarded so that candidates were not impacted if they had interpreted the question in a different way. A lot of descriptive information was provided in this question and there was a lack of explanation and impact statements used by candidates — this limited the marks that candidates were awarded.

Question 5: Many candidates demonstrated some knowledge throughout their response but there was a lack of understanding of the terms 'social' and 'cultural' and the impact that they had on the development of the style — many candidates wrote about everything they had learnt and did not address the question. There were also inaccuracies in candidate responses.

Analyse is a challenging command word; however, many candidates did not attempt to apply their knowledge to answering in this way they just wrote a description of all they had learnt in relation to the history of their chosen dance style.

Section 2

Question 6(a): Some candidates provided descriptions rather than explanations. Some candidates provided excellent answers which fully met the marking criteria; however, some were providing very limited responses and were not able to access any marks.

Question 6(b): Generally, responses to this question lacked detail and lacked information on the impact of the way the music enhanced the section of the choreography. Many candidates struggled to access 2 marks for this question due to a lack of detail within their response.

Question 7: Many candidates demonstrated good knowledge and explanation but lacked evaluation throughout the responses. Candidates fell back into writing an explanation of how the lighting communicated choreographic intentions and forgot to apply their knowledge to the command word. More evaluative language was needed throughout these responses.

Question 8(a): Some candidates wrote excellent answers for this and demonstrated a clear understanding of the work that they had studied. However, many candidates wrote very brief descriptions that lacked the detail needed to access full marks. Most candidates were awarded 1 mark for this question.

Question 8(b): Many candidates demonstrated a lack of understanding of motif development through their response to this question. Often candidates were referring to choreographic devices that did not alter the movement, such as canon, rather than motif development, such as instrumentation or inversion, where the movements were changing to help communicate the intentions.

Practical activity

Choreography

From the visiting assessor's reports and the marking review, it is apparent that there is a real mix between the exceptional choreography being presented by some candidates and other candidates who have very weak choreographies and use technical steps as opposed to creative movement. Markers reported that feedback from teachers and lecturers indicated some candidates are determined to maintain their own vision throughout their choreography which often impacts on the creativity and complexity of what is presented, thus impacting the mark they can be awarded.

There is a lack of complex structures and devices being used. When complex devices are being used, they are being used in a simple way therefore gaining minimal marks. Some centres seem to be teaching a few devices and then all candidates are using the same devices through their choreographies which then limits their creativity as they might not be the best devices for the candidates to use to show their intentions.

There is a lack of understanding of what a motif is and what motif development is, again this was reiterated in the question paper when question 8(b) performed poorly. Choreographies are lacking theatre arts. This does not need to be elements such as lighting, as there are lots of examples on the [Understanding Standards website](#) that gain full marks for this element without using lighting or specialist equipment.

Visiting assessors highlighted that there is a real change in what they are seeing for choreographies, and this is being influenced by less engagement from professional dance companies with school students. The change could also be linked to the competition scene for dance. The criteria for marking at competitions is very different to the criteria for the

Higher Dance course because SQA markers need to see technical elements and creativity. In competitions the technique is marked through their solo performance, but we are looking for creativity and application of complex structures and devices.

Choreography review

Choreography reviews are stronger this year with a lot of candidates accessing marks in the top band. From the marking review it is evident that most centres are performing much better in this element of the course, however there are still some centres that are not able to access marks.

Some candidates did not gain many marks in question 1a because they did not make clear links between two pieces of research, movement, motif and development, complex choreographic devices and the intentions of the choreography.

Performance

The average mark was higher than in previous years.

From the marking review it was apparent that the main styles of dance that are being presented for the solo performance are jazz, contemporary and commercial, however there are some schools, mainly private dance centres, that are presenting ballet, tap and Highland.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

It is important that teachers and lecturers prepare candidates for the question paper by encouraging appropriate use of dance terminology. This will ensure that candidates understand the questions and can apply their knowledge.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to spend time developing further understanding of the command words and practising questions where candidates are required to interpret the command words and apply their knowledge appropriately. Candidates should practise referring back to the question with summarise statements to keep responses focused and on task.

Through discussion with markers, it was highlighted that it could be beneficial when delivering dance history to look at the style currently and trace it backwards through time, making clear links between the movements that are currently performed and researching their development and what has caused these changes. This would be an additional method to support the delivery of teaching this aspect of the course and would allow candidates to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the impact the factors have had on the development of the style. Candidates found it challenging to make impact statements and show a clear understanding of the development and the role that it played in what we currently see. It is hoped that by using a more practical approach and supporting this through theory lessons that this will help to develop a greater understanding and avoid candidates rote learning work.

It seems some candidates may have learned rote responses for section 2, which meant they did not engage with the question asked and were unable to access marks.

It is important that centres select an appropriate professional choreography to study for section 2 and study it in its entirety. Whilst most centres are now studying a full professional choreography there are still some centres that are analysing a work that they have been advised against using as it is either a section of a full piece or it does not meet the minimum requirements which are highlighted in the course specification. There are many professional companies that are now making full length works available to buy or view online and providing support packs to help with learning and teaching.

Candidates need to study and evaluate the use of theme, structure, devices, space, and theatre arts. Some popular professional choreographies from this year were:

- ◆ Young Men (2015) Ivan Perez
- ◆ 1984 (2016) Jonathan Watkins
- ◆ Swansong (1987) Christopher Bruce
- ◆ Ghost Dances (1981) Christopher Bruce
- ◆ Revelations (1960) Alvin Ailey
- ◆ Infra (2008) Wayne McGregor

It is important that candidates have a clear knowledge and understanding of the key movements within the motif for the professional choreography that they have studied. It could be helpful for candidates to learn the movements so that they have a better knowledge of them, which would enable them to give a more detailed description.

This lack of understanding of motif development was also commented on in visiting assessors' reports. It was reported that choreographies lack motif and development. Therefore, this is an area that needs to be focused on more when delivering the course both practically and theoretically.

Practical activity

Choreography

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that the foundations for developing creative movement are in place before allowing candidates to embark on choreography.

Teachers and lecturers should spend time establishing what an initial motif is and how its development is key to the theme or stimulus. Understanding that a motif is more than a single movement, and how to fully utilise and develop it within their work, would also be beneficial for candidates. At Higher level it is recommended that candidates create a motif that is approximately 16 counts, and each movement is linked back to their research. Candidates could then create two or three developed versions of their motif. By changing the way that the movements are performed, for example varying the tempo throughout by having some movements faster, some slower, and changing the size of the movements to make some movements bigger, whilst others are smaller as well as adding in embellishment to some of the movements, this could help to show confusion and that the dancer is becoming more anxious.

If the candidate has to think about what their developed motifs are before creating their choreography, then it helps them to think about what they want to show through each section and reminds them that the movements must link back to their theme and intentions and that their motif can help with this. Candidates are not limited to using the movements within their motif and they could have more than one motif. Additional movements will need to be used throughout the choreography; however, candidates should take care that these are linked to their theme and intentions and that they are not creating a technical piece of dance similar to their solo performances.

Teachers and lecturers should focus on using a complex structure and complex devices appropriate to a theme for three or more people. They should discourage long, drawn-out storytelling and concentrate on developing original movement with a clear focus. Complex devices should be chosen to meet the requirements of their theme and continue to help the candidate portray their theme and intentions.

Choreography and improvisation workshops help candidates to gain the skills and confidence required before starting the choreographic process. This allows them to apply creativity to develop original movement to create and develop their motif and use a complex structure and complex devices. We strongly recommend that all centres adopt this approach, as candidates must be guided through the process and gain knowledge and understanding

of all the choreographic principles before embarking on their own choreography journey. In some centres, all candidates are using the same structure and choreographic devices throughout their choreographies.

Candidates **should not be performing in their own choreographies**. If an issue arises before the assessment event, the centre assessor or SQA coordinator must contact SQA to receive advice before the live assessment event.

Choreography review

Centres should present the choreographic review to candidates with a methodical structure that encourages logical thinking. When candidates present their thoughts in a disorganised manner, they often miss significant opportunities to gain marks. Often, the assessor can see that the candidate has an understanding of the area to be discussed from the choreography produced but cannot allocate marks because they have not discussed it in their final review.

For task 1b, teachers and lecturers could encourage candidates to use a professional piece of choreography to inspire their use of spatial elements. Candidates would need to explain why a professional choreographer has used a particular spatial element within their own work to show their intentions and then make links between this and how it has influenced them to use the same spatial element within their own choreography. This is not the only way that this task can be completed, it is just one way that we think can be effective and help candidates to create links between the use of space and the intentions that are portrayed through a particular use of space.

For task 3, teachers and lecturers should work with candidates to identify one choreographic skill and give detailed ideas and information about that skill. Candidates should support their knowledge and understanding of the skill with at least two specific examples from their choreographic experiences. They must then provide clear evaluation linking their chosen skill with the impact that this had on their finished choreography. This is an area in which many candidates are not accessing marks.

There are examples of choreography reviews online on the Understanding Standards website and teachers and lecturers need to spend time analysing these and breaking them down to understand the requirements.

Candidates must include all of the marking criteria within their reviews to access the top mark bands therefore it is important that time is spent particularly on question 1(a) to ensure there is a clear link between two pieces of research, movement, motif and development, complex choreographic devices and the intentions of the choreography. It could help if teachers and lecturers could scaffold the questions to ensure success.

Performance

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates have a strong technical foundation to build upon before they start learning the solo dances that they will perform in the assessment. It is apparent that many schools are teaching the solo early in the course and then not working on developing the technique through technique classes. Within some centres all candidates are demonstrating the same technical inaccuracies. Regular

technique classes throughout the year would help to develop skills and techniques before they learnt the solo and develop inaccurate habits.

Candidates should spend time developing a strong performance quality, appropriate to the chosen dance styles. Teachers and lecturers should consider the best way to support this development; it should not be the sole responsibility of the candidate.

To control anxiety for the assessment, some candidates would benefit from more opportunities to perform their solo dances before the final assessment day. This would also help with their spatial awareness within the assessment environment.

During discussions at centres, visiting assessors learnt that in many centres there are no foundations to dance and that candidates are entering into dance at National 5 level. Many candidates have had limited or no previous dance experience until they start the National 5 course and then when they move onto Higher, they must pick up a second style of dance and this is their weaker style. This is then evident through the solo performances where they achieve a higher mark for one than the other, but their overall mark is still less than half marks. It may be beneficial to develop skills in two dance styles earlier in their programme of study from which they can choose one at National 5 to be examined on to relieve pressure of learning a new second style for Higher.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).