



## Course report 2019

Subject	Dance
Level	Higher

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Question paper

In session 2018–19, a question paper was introduced to Higher Dance. The question paper consists of two sections, totalling 40 marks (30% of the overall marks for the course assessment) and is completed in 2 hours. In October 2018, the Understanding Standards event focused on the new question paper.

Feedback from the marking team and teachers and lecturers indicated that the 2019 question paper was positively received by centres, and was fair and accessible for candidates.

The full range of marks were accessed for each question.

## Section 1: Dance Appreciation in Context

This section samples candidates' knowledge of two contrasting dance styles and their understanding of key characteristics, principles and technical requirements, performance skills and knowledge of dance history. Candidates are also required to evaluate technical and performance skills in relation to self, peers and model performers.

Candidates found this section of the question paper most challenging. This section samples a larger proportion of content than section 2. Candidate responses to question 1, on technique and development methods, highlighted a lack of knowledge and understanding of the content required.

For question 3 (influential choreographer) and question 4 (social and cultural factors) many candidates demonstrated their knowledge through their responses, but were unable to apply this knowledge to the question asked and, therefore, did not access the full range of marks.

## Section 2: Study of a Professional Choreography

This section requires candidates to give a personal evaluative response to a professional piece of choreography for three or more people, which they have studied in its entirety. Candidates are asked to demonstrate their understanding of how choreographers convey their intentions by using choreographic principles; and the impact, effect or mood and atmosphere created by the use of choreographic principles music and/or sound and theatre arts.

Candidate performance in this section was greatly affected by the choreography they chose to answer on. Choreographies with a strong narrative and a wealth of movement material, choreographic principles, theatre arts, and teaching resources to support delivery, allowed candidates to answer more successfully. Examples of these include *Swansong* (1987) and *Ghost Dances* (1981), both choreographed by Christopher Bruce, and *Revelations* (1960) choreographed by Alvin Ailey. Candidates found it difficult to access marks if they had not studied pieces in their entirety. Candidates performed well in question 7. They appeared to be more confident with the content required to answer this question.

Throughout the question paper, many candidates struggled to either identify the command word or provide in-depth answers to demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of specific areas.

Overall, this component performed as expected. Candidates found the question paper challenging, particularly question 2, which was more demanding than expected and this was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

### **Practical activity**

Changes were made to the 2019 practical activity to ensure an appropriate weighting between the practical and written elements of the course assessment.

### **Choreography**

The marks for choreography increased by 10 marks to 45 marks. The extra marks were allocated to the use of theme and/or stimulus to create and develop motif/movements to convey theme and the use of theatre arts, where candidates must now apply a minimum of two theatre arts.

Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities and a wide range of marks were accessed. There was clear evidence that centres had worked hard to help candidates gain the skills to be more creative and informed in their use of original movement, especially when they had progressed from the National 5 Dance Course.

Feedback from visiting assessors highlighted that candidates need to continue to work on the originality of the movement content and ensure that they are using the movements to communicate their theme, as opposed to using traditional dance steps that show the dancers' technique.

Candidates are using structure and devices, however, many candidates are not using a complex structure or a minimum of three complex devices effectively, and this is reflected in their marks. Candidates are still using levels as a choreographic device rather than a spatial element.

Candidates need to apply two theatre arts effectively to gain access to the full range of marks. Candidates need to be creative in their choices and make sure that their choices clearly enhance the mood/atmosphere of their choreography, and are appropriate to their choreographic intentions. Elaborate costume and lighting are not required.

The choreography part of the practical activity performed largely as expected.

## **Choreography review**

The marks for the choreography review have been reduced by 10 marks. The application of research is now integrated throughout the whole piece of work so that candidates can highlight how their research has affected the decision-making process.

Task 1a of the choreography review requires candidates to cover many aspects in their answer. Many candidates did not relate their choices to their two chosen pieces of research, while others did not describe individual movements in enough detail or convey a sense of the motif working as a whole.

Task 1b requires candidates to use a third source of research to explain spatial elements. Candidates must make sure this is a different piece of research to the one they used for task 1a.

Task 3 requires candidates to evaluate a choreographic skill and the impact this has on the finished dance. While most candidates are able to provide ideas and information about one choreographic skill, they did not always justify it with at least two specific examples. Many candidates did not provide clear evaluation linking the skill identified and the impact this has on the finished choreography.

Feedback from visiting assessors highlights that some centres are still using the same structure for the choreography review as they used before it was revised. This does not allow candidates to access the full range of marks.

The choreography review part of the practical activity performed as expected.

## **Performance**

There were no changes to the 2019 performance.

Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities, and a wide range of marks were accessed, which gives a clear indication that national standards were understood. Feedback indicates that on a few occasions there were presentations of styles that were not sufficiently contrasting. There is guidance on suitable contrasting styles in the [Higher Dance Course Support Notes](#) (appendix 1 of the Course Specification) on SQA's website.

Most centres were able to meet the demands of performance through suitably choreographed dances that were appropriately challenging and well received by candidates. In some centres, the solos presented for the performance lacked technical challenge for this level, and the choreography did not allow candidates to demonstrate dynamic contrast within the solo. Resources available on the SQA Understanding Standards secure website demonstrate the appropriate standard for this level.

Almost every centre was very well prepared for visiting assessment, with all documentation and candidate mark sheets complete and ready for use. This streamlined assessment time and helped the process run smoothly.

The collaborative marking model of a sample of 12 candidates was well received by all centres — the positive feedback centres gave highlights the benefits of this approach. Visiting assessment for the performance and practical activity was a successful and positive experience for centres.

The performance performed largely as expected.

## **Section 2: comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas that candidates performed well in**

#### **Question paper**

Candidates who had a clear understanding of the command words and applied their knowledge performed well in both sections of the question paper. These candidates tended to write a summative statement that would relate the answer back to the question. This helped to keep their answer focused and concise.

#### **Section 1**

In question 1(a) some candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge and understanding of the impact of one technical weakness on their performance in the two contrasting dance styles that they had studied. It was very clear from their responses that they had a thorough grasp of dance terminology and were able to explain the impact weakness had on their performance.

#### **Section 2**

Question 6 was answered well by many candidates. It was clear that they knew the choreography well and had a lot of content to write about.

Most candidates were able to choose two choreographic devices relevant to the piece. Candidates who performed well in this question were able to provide different examples of each choreographic device being used within the piece to allow a more structured and comprehensive answer.

Question 7 was answered well by many candidates, who were able to link their answers to the intentions of the choreography.

Candidates who accessed higher marks continually linked their points back to the choreographers' intentions using linking words such as 'this conveyed', 'portraying', or 'highlighting'.

### **Practical activity**

#### **Choreography**

In many centres, it was clear that candidates had participated in a range of choreographic workshops that helped to develop their knowledge and understanding of choreographic principles. Candidates achieving the top bands for the movement in their choreography had a clear knowledge of their theme and had spent time creating and developing a motif that embodied their theme and conveyed their intentions.

Many candidates demonstrated excellent creativity in their choice of music and sound to enhance their choreographic intentions. Some candidates had clearly invested the time to select and edit spoken word, and found appropriate sound and music to accompany their work. This clearly enhanced their choreography and helped the candidates to distinguish between the different sections within their chosen choreographic structure.

Some candidates were very creative when applying two chosen theatre arts to enhance the mood/atmosphere of their choreography and convey their choreographic intentions. Candidates achieved full marks for this element through creative use of resources such as costume and theatrical make-up or by using props or set.

Some candidates excelled in their effective use of choreographic principles.

### **Choreography review**

The majority of candidates produced a written report. Some reports were supplemented with a mood or stimulus board. The majority of candidates were able to articulate their creative ideas in a concise and organised manner.

Tasks 1c, 2a and 2b were generally answered well. In task 1c, candidates who described a complex structure clearly and in some detail and explained how their choice related to their choreographic intentions, accessed full marks. A basic description of each section did not allow candidates to access the upper bands. In tasks 2a and 2b, candidates were confident in describing their choice of music and specific theatre arts and in explaining their relationship to the intentions of their choreography.

### **Performance**

There was evidence that tutor-choreographed dances provided greater depth and challenge, allowing candidates the opportunity to access the full range of marks.

There was evidence in many centres that time had been taken to ensure the required technique (the foundations of performance) were put in place before focus was given to personal performance. This resulted in candidates being able to concentrate on the performance quality of their movement, as they were equipped with the required technical skills for Higher Dance.

The majority of candidates were well prepared for their chosen solo assessment and were able to concentrate and focus, ensuring they produced the best performance possible.

This year, many candidates benefitted from performing in the most appropriate dance style for their learning. Some centres presented a wide range of styles, to accommodate their candidates' learning styles and allow them to access the widest possible range of marks.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

### **Question paper**

#### **Section 1**

In question 1(a) most candidates were able to highlight their weakness, however their explanations lacked depth and did not focus on the impact of the weakness on their performance. This prevented them achieving full marks. Many candidates talked from an extremely positive point of view about the skill and, instead of explaining the impact of their weakness, spoke in general terms about the importance of it in their chosen dance style.

In question 1(b) candidates' descriptions often lacked the detail required to access the full range of marks. Brief overviews of a development method and an outline of the stretches and/or exercises were often used without going into detail about how to complete these. This

prevented candidates gaining the second mark. Candidates, at times, explained the impact the development method had on their performance rather than providing a description of what they did to improve it.

Question 2 was the most poorly answered question in the question paper. The question asked candidates to compare their use of quality and dynamics to a model performer. In many cases candidates missed one or more of the details required to access the marks. 'Quality' and 'dynamics' are performance skills that are listed within the mandatory content in the Higher Dance Course Specification. Candidates misunderstood the term 'quality' and they took it to mean how well they performed the skill, for example, how good or bad they were at it, rather than, for example, how fluid it was. Candidates used descriptive language instead of comparative language to answer the question and so could not access the marks. Some candidates answered this question very well using clear, comparative language and demonstrating a clear and sound understanding of the terminology.

In question 3, some candidates were very effective in linking their information back to the contribution the choreographer made to the style. However, many candidates gave an overview of the history of one or more choreographers without linking it back to the impact on the style, or mentioning key characteristics or steps.

In question 4, the 'A' candidates answered this question well, using good analytical language and linking their answer back to the question. Overall, there was a lack of analysis. Candidates mostly gave lots of information about the development of a dance style, but found it difficult to relate this to social and cultural factors. Candidates wrote highly descriptive answers and wrote the timeline for the dance style instead of making analytical points. More-able candidates made this link and were able to achieve high marks for this question.

## **Section 2**

Question 5 did not perform as expected. Many candidates described the structure rather than explaining the impact that it had on the choreographers' intentions. Some candidates did not explicitly state the structure of the piece and demonstrate an understanding of the structure through their answer; they were, therefore, unable to access the full range of marks. Candidates made descriptive points about the structure and were explicit in saying what the piece was about; however, they did not go in to any explanation or link it to the intentions of the piece.

In question 6, most candidates were able to choose two choreographic devices relevant to the piece. However, some candidates evaluated the use of spatial elements within this answer, such as levels and pathways, which prevented them from accessing marks. Guidance on choreographic devices and spatial elements can be found in the [Higher Dance Course Support Notes](#) (appendix 1 of the Course Specification) on SQA's website.

Some candidates found it challenging to link the device chosen to the choreographic intentions, often just using the description of movements from the device without showing an explicit understanding of the device and stating how this showed the choreographic intentions.

In question 7, some candidates gave very descriptive responses instead of analysing the choreographer's use of two theatre arts to communicate the choreographic intentions. As a

result, their answers did not always relate back to the question and they could not access the upper mark bands.

Some candidates chose music and sound as a theatre art. Music and/or sound is separate from theatre arts in the mandatory course content, so candidates could not gain these marks.

## **Practical activity**

### **Choreography**

Some candidates lacked knowledge and understanding about what equates to original movement and how it can be developed.

Some candidates' use of set steps within choreography proved very limiting when awarding marks for creativity.

While candidates are using a choreographic structure and choreographic devices within their choreographies, many are opting to use a simple structure and simple devices, therefore they are not able to access any marks for structure and a maximum of 3 marks out of 12 for choreographic devices. The marking criteria at this level requires the use of complex structure and devices.

### **Choreographic review**

When candidates were unable to follow a methodical structure in the choreography review, it was challenging to follow their thoughts in an organised manner.

In task 1a, candidates were not specific enough about how their research influenced their movement choices. They did not give specific examples of individual movements from their motif and relate these to their two chosen pieces of research. Their explanation of how the movements relate to the theme needs to make clear their intended meaning and convey a sense of the motif working as a whole. There needs to be a clear and detailed explanation of the relationship between motif development, three complex choreographic devices and at least two research findings. The choreographic principles discussed in this section must all relate to the intention(s) of the choreography clearly and in detail.

Task 1b requires candidates to use a third piece of research to influence and support their choice of spatial elements. More clarity and detail are needed when candidates are describing the relationship between their choices, research and the intentions of their choreography.

Task 1c requires candidates to describe their complex structure and explain how their choice relates to their intention(s) of the choreography clearly and in detail. Many candidates are giving a basic description of what happens in each section instead of explaining how their choice of structure relates to their choreographic intentions.

Task 3 requires candidates to evaluate a choreographic skill and the impact this has on the finished dance. While most candidates were able to provide ideas and information about one choreographic skill, they did not always justify it with at least two specific examples. Many



candidates did not provide clear evaluation linking the skill identified and the impact this has on the finished choreography.

## **Performance**

Where attention to the development of a strong and appropriate technical skills base was not evident, candidates struggled to perform well. For some candidates, a lack of centre and alignment affected almost every aspect of their performance.

Lack of technical ability meant that candidates did not give attention to performance quality. Some candidates gave their full focus to completing the performance correctly, and therefore were unable to access the full range of marks.

Some candidates were not able to utilise the full performance area because they were used to performing the solo facing a different direction or as part of a larger group. Practising the solos individually before the performance assessment would help with the candidates' use of space.

In a small number of centres, the centre-choreographed technical solo had limited technical requirements and style-specific steps that lacked challenge and breadth. It is vital candidates are given the opportunity to demonstrate their technical skills as appropriate to the dance style to reach the national standards at Higher level.

Some centres could work with candidates to develop a greater understanding of the essence of their chosen dance styles. In some cases, this could have provided more opportunities for candidates to observe professional dance works that would allow for a greater insight into the performance of key style-specific steps, characteristics and features that are essential in their chosen dance performances.

## **Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment**

### **Question paper**

It is vital centres prepare candidates for the question paper by encouraging appropriate use of dance terminology. This will ensure candidates understand the questions and can apply their knowledge using appropriate terminology.

Centres should ensure candidates understand the command words and practise answering questions where they are required to interpret the command words and apply their knowledge appropriately. Exam technique should also be taught to candidates. They should refer back to the question with summative statements to keep responses focused.

### **Section 1**

Dance terminology should be used throughout practical technique classes. Candidates should be aware of the contribution technical and performance skills have on their overall performance. Candidates should analyse their own performance so that they can identify their own strengths and areas for development. Appropriate development methods should then be used throughout classes to help candidates have a clear knowledge of the process involved in relation to maintaining and improving both technical and performance skills. If they have been through the process, they should have the knowledge to answer about the process in the question paper. It is imperative that candidates provide responses that are dance-specific in section 1. Candidates should have knowledge of dance-specific exercises that help to develop technical and performance skills.

Centres should encourage evaluation skills during practical and classroom sessions. This will help candidates develop evaluative language. They should be able to evaluate their technical and performance skills in relation to self, peers and model performers.

Centres could prepare candidates for questions about influential choreographers and the history of dance through different classroom activities and practical sessions. For example, take steps and key characteristics of a style of dance and research what influenced the development of those characteristics and steps and look at examples of where they can be seen today. This will allow candidates to have a deeper understanding of the origin of the dance style and the impact of historical developments, race, gender, social and cultural factors, influential choreographers, and dance companies. Having specific examples to support their knowledge will help candidates to answer to the question fully.

### **Section 2**

It is important that centres select an appropriate professional choreography to study for section 2 and study it in its entirety. Candidates need to study and evaluate the use of theme, structure, devices, space, and theatre arts. 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.

For candidates to meet the requirements of the question paper, the selected choreography must be the work of an influential choreographer and include an appropriate theme and/or stimulus, motif and selected movements, spatial elements, structure, motif development and

choreographic devices, music and/or sound, theatre arts including lighting, set, props, theatrical make-up, and costume.

As a minimum requirement, the professional choreography must include lighting and costume. The [Higher Dance Course Support Notes](#) (appendix 1 of the Course Specification) contains further advice and guidance on appropriate professional choreographies.

Some candidates found it difficult to refer back to the intentions of the piece. This is essential to demonstrate understanding of the choreographic principles and their impact on conveying the theme. Where candidates simply stated the intention provided in the question introduction, they were unable to access marks. When preparing candidates for the question paper, centres should encourage candidates to consistently refer back to the intentions of the piece.

## **Practical activity**

### **Choreography**

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

Centres 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.

Centres should focus on using a *complex* structure and *complex* devices appropriate to a theme for three or more people.

Centres should discourage long, drawn-out storytelling and concentrate on developing original movement with a clear focus.

Candidates should be encouraged to incorporate a range of spatial elements within their choreography to help effectively show their choreographic intentions. Feedback from visiting assessors highlights that many choreographies are rehearsed in a small space and have not been spaced in the performance space. This often results in choreographies that are very static. Encouraging candidates to make use of floor patterns, formations, proximities, pathways and levels will help them to creatively convey their intentions. Rehearsing in the performance space will also allow them to evaluate their work and make any adaptations to ensure their use of spatial elements is conveying their choreographic intentions.

### **Choreography review**

Centres should present the choreography 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 visiting assessor can see that a candidate has an understanding of the choreography they produce, but cannot allocate marks because they do not convey this understanding in their final review.

### **Performance**

Centres should ensure that candidates have a strong technical foundation to build upon before they start learning set dances.

Centres should ensure that they spend time developing a strong performance quality, appropriate to the chosen dance styles. Centres should consider the best way to support this development; it should not be the sole responsibility of the candidate.

Some candidates would benefit from more opportunities to practise their solo dances in the assessment setting before the final performance assessment day.

## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	461
Number of resulted entries in 2019	498

### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
<b>Maximum mark</b>				
<b>A</b>	31.7%	31.7%	158	68
<b>B</b>	25.5%	57.2%	127	58
<b>C</b>	25.7%	82.9%	128	48
<b>D</b>	13.1%	96.0%	65	38
<b>No award</b>	4.0%	-	20	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

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

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional 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 every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.