



Course report 2023

National 5 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 in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 762

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 766

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	237	Percentage	30.9	Cumulative percentage	30.9	Minimum mark required	69
B	Number of candidates	209	Percentage	27.3	Cumulative percentage	58.2	Minimum mark required	58
C	Number of candidates	172	Percentage	22.5	Cumulative percentage	80.7	Minimum mark required	47
D	Number of candidates	100	Percentage	13.1	Cumulative percentage	93.7	Minimum mark required	36
No award	Number of candidates	48	Percentage	6.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied 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 more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

All course components performed as expected.

The question paper continues to add validity and credibility to the course. However, many candidates did not perform well in this component, as discussed in this report.

Overall, centres were 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 to run smoothly for candidates. Most centres selected candidates to demonstrate a range of abilities from across the marking bands for visiting assessment, when there were more than 12 candidates. However, a few centres did not manage to meet the national standards for practical components.

Question paper

The question paper continues to strengthen external assessment for National 5 Dance, allowing candidates to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding developed throughout the course.

Generally, candidates understood the requirements for all three sections in the paper in terms of subject content.

The question paper sampled a range of content from the course specification, with many key skills included that candidates should be familiar with. The question paper was therefore fair and accessible for candidates. However, many candidates did not perform well because they misunderstood the demand of command words, and were unable to articulate the skills learnt in a practical setting in a written response.

Most candidates attempted all questions in section 1, indicating that they were familiar with most of the content. This is a pleasing improvement.

Some candidates were disadvantaged because they did not understand basic dance terminology used for National 5 Dance. It is essential that candidates understand all technical and performance skills to fully recognise and interpret the requirements of questions.

The most popular dance style option chosen for section 2 of the question paper was jazz, with a few centres using contemporary and ballet. The question paper provided appropriate balance with a range of 'A' and 'C'-type questions, with each section progressing in difficulty of command word and subject content.

It was pleasing to see many centres selecting a professional dance that allowed candidates to analyse the use of key choreographic principles and relate these to the intentions of the piece. However, a few centres used choreographies created for musicals, and some candidates were unable to provide the detail required. This was particularly evident for:

- ◆ question 8 on key movements, as some candidates discussed a basic gesture
- ◆ question 9 on devices, as some candidates' responses were limited and not clear in the explanation of the use of two devices

Practical activity

The practical activity component performed as expected.

The collaborative marking model of a sample of 12 candidates was well received by centres. Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities, and a wide range of marks were accessed, giving a clear indication that national standards are understood.

Choreography

It was evident during visiting assessment that some candidates found it challenging to present choreographies that demonstrated the originality and creativity required to communicate the intentions of the piece. Some candidates used technical dance steps that had no meaning in relation to the theme, and applied the structure and devices in a basic way. This impacted the marking bands that candidates could access, as each choreographic principle assessed within the assessment criteria links to the intentions of the choreography.

Choreography review

The assessment evidence for the choreography review was, for the most part, presented as a written report. Centres must mark the reviews prior to the assessment event, providing more time for professional dialogue between the visiting assessor and the centre's assessor. If candidates create a presentation for assessment, this should be filmed in advance of the visit, and marked by the centre assessor before the visiting assessment takes place. This assessment process was well received by all centres and beneficial to the smooth running of the day.

Many visiting assessors advised that centres clearly understand the requirements of the review and many candidates accessed the top band of marks for this component part.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected.

The collaborative marking model for National 5 Dance visiting assessment was a successful and positive experience for centres. Jazz, contemporary, lyrical and commercial were the most common styles of dance presented at National 5 level across all centres.

Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities and a wide range of marks were accessed, with many candidates accessing the top band of marks. This demonstrates that

the level of technical ability and performance quality has remained consistent across centres and gives a clear indication that national standards are understood for this component.

Most experienced centres were able to meet the demands of performance through suitably choreographed dances that demonstrated appropriate demand for National 5 level and allowed candidates to achieve the marking criteria. However, in some centres the tutor-choreographed solo presented for assessment had limited technical content and the style-specific steps lacked challenge and breadth. They lacked technical complexity for National 5 level and therefore did not allow candidates to access the full range of marks available. In some centres, the choreography included too many stylised movements, and didn't allow candidates to demonstrate contrasting dynamics. When candidates did not start at the beginning of the song, or would spend 20 to 30 seconds performing simple movements, the choreography did not meet the requirements.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Practical activity

Choreography

It was pleasing to see a small shift away from predictable themes at National 5. Some centres have spent time preparing candidates by carrying out creative tasks and improvisation workshops. Candidates then found the transition to the final choreography more straightforward and were able to apply creativity to the duet presented for examination.

Choreography review

Many candidates researched their themes thoroughly to ensure a secure understanding, and were then able to apply this knowledge to review their choice of choreographic principles. Many candidates could articulate their creative decision in detail to access the top band of marks. This will help with the transition to Higher for many candidates.

Performance

There was evidence that some centres had taken time to ensure candidates had acquired secure technical skills before preparing for course assessment, by taking part in regular dance technique classes within the course. These candidates were able to concentrate on the performance quality of their movement, as they had the required technical skills to meet the demands for National 5 Dance.

Some teachers and lecturers had worked hard to develop and improve candidates' performance, as some were able to add their own flair to the solo performance and demonstrate musicality, varying dynamics, and self-expression with confidence. This ensured that candidates were able to access the full range of marks.

Most candidates were well prepared for their chosen solo assessment and were able to concentrate and focus, ensuring they presented their best performance.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 1

Question 1: It was notable that many candidates may not be experiencing regular technique classes as part of course delivery, and therefore they did not fully understand what centre work was. Some candidates discussed generic dance skills rather than underpinning the use of alignment and posture for a centre exercise. Candidates that gave specific examples, such as a roll down or a pirouette exercise, responded with detail.

Question 3: Many candidates did not give specific examples from their solo performance, and therefore they found it difficult to provide the detail this question required on their use of timing. Timing is a key technical skill that should be covered both in the dance studio and in

theory lessons, as it is vital for dance performance. Candidates should be able to provide a straightforward response for this area of content.

Question 4: Many candidates did not use evaluative language, and therefore could not access any of the marks available. Others made a judgement on their use of space; however, the responses were straightforward and lacked the detail required. The few candidates that did access 4 marks gave specific examples from their solo performance on pathways, levels, facing or shape of movements.

Section 2

Question 5: Some candidates did not describe a travelling step, and therefore they could not access the available marks. Many had learnt a style-specific step, rather than describing how the step travelled through the space.

Question 5(b): This question had a high rate of no responses, demonstrating that there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding on the use of dynamics. This area of content crosses over all three components, as candidates:

- ◆ apply dynamics when performing, and reflect on this for section 1
- ◆ learn about dynamics when studying a selected dance style for section 2
- ◆ apply dynamics to their own choreography

The use of dynamics is a key skill in National 5 Dance. Candidates should be familiar with this skill, and able to articulate their knowledge and understanding.

Question 6: Many candidates demonstrated good knowledge of costumes used for a stage performance, however, many responded incorrectly by providing an explanation rather than a description, so they could not access the available marks.

Question 7b: Some candidates found it difficult to link their knowledge and understanding to the present day for the selected dance style. Many did not link their knowledge to the question or identify the correct command word. The scaffolding of this question on an influential choreographer, with parts A and B, helped focus some candidates' responses on this area of content.

Section 3

Question 8: Many candidates did not provide the detail required for this question on key movement. This should be one of the first areas of content that candidates study when analysing a professional choreography. Many did not link the movement back to the theme or intentions of the piece and found it challenging to provide the detail required.

Question 10(a): This question was poorly answered by many candidates, as they described details like the volume of music, rather than instruments, tempo, crescendos, or sound effects. Many also responded to the incorrect command word by explaining rather than describing.

Question 10(b): Most candidates did not make a judgement or use evaluative language and therefore they could not access any marks.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

It was evident that many candidates did not fully understand the requirements of the command words or have full knowledge of the course content. It is essential that learning and teaching prepares candidates with the relevant guidance and study skills to fully equip them for the demands of the question paper.

It is also vital that teachers and lecturers encourage the use of appropriate dance terminology, as this will ensure that candidates understand the demand of questions and help them to articulate their knowledge.

Quality and dynamics are worth 5 marks in the technical solo, and it is imperative that candidates understand these skills. They affect all three sections of the question paper component, both the performance and practical activity components, and candidates' ability to apply varied quality and dynamics to their choreography within motif development.

Posture and alignment are key skills included in the question paper and performance. Many candidates found it difficult to demonstrate their knowledge within a written response, however they could have accessed marks for these skills for the solo performance.

Many candidates found it difficult to link centre work with alignment and posture, suggesting that they have not participated in regular dance technique and set technical exercises as part of course delivery. This is fundamental in developing candidates' skills before they learn the technical solo for assessment.

It is vital that teachers and lecturers spend time during course delivery reviewing the use of music and sound, to ensure candidates can demonstrate their knowledge with confidence. Many candidates were able to access the top band of marks for Dance performance, particularly for performance skills. However, candidates found it challenging to transfer this knowledge to section 1 of the question paper. They were unable to articulate the fundamental skills, such as sense of performance, timing and use of space. Technical and performance skills can be taught through an integrated approach to learning in practical and classroom settings, to ensure that candidates fully understand all the key skills in the National 5 Dance course.

It seems that some centres are not delivering the course in its entirety or applying an integrated approach to course delivery. An integrated approach to course delivery, linking practical content with theory, benefits candidates and strengthens their understanding of the key skills that crossover all course components. Please refer to the National 5 Dance Course Specification for further guidance.

Candidates must be familiar with the following command words:

- ◆ describe
- ◆ explain
- ◆ evaluate

This helps them to fully understand the demands of each question in the question paper.

For section 2, it is important that centres take the time to guide candidates through learning and teaching activities, to allow candidates to develop a secure knowledge and understanding of:

- ◆ the key characteristics
- ◆ style-specific steps
- ◆ stylistic features
- ◆ the history and developments of the selected dance

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to provide detailed responses for written tasks and practice papers in preparation for the question paper. It is important to note that influential choreographers and present-day developments of the selected dance style are often sampled in section 2, and candidates should answer in relation to the question asked and be aware of the command word. Teachers and lecturers should take this into consideration when developing learning materials and practice papers. In relation to choreographic devices, candidates should be familiar with the devices in the course specification. Candidates should develop their knowledge on devices through choreography workshops, preparing for the review and when learning about the professional choreography for the question paper.

To prepare fully for the question paper, we expect candidates to watch a full dance production created for stage that includes the key choreographic principles listed in the course specification. This allows candidates to fully explain, describe and evaluate the choreography in detail, and justify it in relation to the theme and/or intentions.

Centres must select an appropriate professional choreography to study for section 3 and engage in the full piece. Candidates need to develop a knowledge and understanding of the use of theme, movement, structure, devices, spatial elements, and theatre arts to be fully prepared for the demands of the question paper. Some candidates could not access the full range of marks because there was not enough choreographic content to discuss in the professional work selected. As most candidates found this section particularly challenging, centres should ensure that they allocate enough time to this section and don't deliver it too late in the course, so candidates are confident with the content of the professional work.

It is important to highlight that all course content for the question paper is listed in the mandatory content in the course specification, and teachers and lecturers must be familiar with this document.

Practical activity

Choreography

In some centres, it was clear that candidates had been guided through choreography and improvisation workshops to gain the skills and confidence required before starting the choreographic process. This allowed candidates to apply creativity to develop original movement, with a slight move away from candidates selecting predictable themes. We strongly recommend that all centres adopt this approach, as candidates must be guided

through the process and gain a knowledge and understanding of all the choreographic principles before embarking on their own choreography journey.

Teachers and lecturers should spend time establishing what an initial motif is and explore motif development to help communicate the theme or stimulus. It is vital that candidates can learn through experimental choreography workshops to develop key skills and understanding. This approach to course delivery is essential to prepare candidates for the practical activity component. When candidates do not experience experimental learning with technique such as improvisation and creating a motif, they find it difficult to apply choreographic principles with creativity to communicate a theme clearly for assessment, and they may be discouraged from using technical dance steps.

Centres should focus on using a structure and three devices that are appropriate to the selected theme for two people. It is useful if candidates are encouraged to plan the use of choreographic principles before starting the rehearsal process with their dancers. A few candidates were using levels as a device. Levels are considered a spatial element in the National 5 course, therefore these candidates could not access all the marks available.

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

Choreography review

It aids the marking process when candidates follow a methodical structure, therefore we encourage teachers and lecturers to help candidates structure the order of their paragraphs. They should present the choreographic review to candidates with a methodical structure that encourages logical thinking. When candidates are allowed to present their thoughts in a disorganised manner, they often miss significant opportunities to gain marks.

When describing devices and structure, candidates will not be able to access marks for giving a definition only. If giving a definition, they must also describe how they have used the devices and structure in their own choreography to access the available marks. Teachers and lecturers should strengthen candidates' understanding of this, and the use of command words, as this supports course delivery across components. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to explore each device and explain the impact of its use within their own choreography, rather than giving generic definitions. Candidates will not access marks within the review if they describe the use of levels as a device.

Performance

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates have a strong technical foundation before they embark on set technical dances. They must give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their technical skills, as appropriate to the dance style, to reach the national standards for National 5 Dance. Some centres could work with candidates to develop a greater understanding of the essence of dance technique and the requirements for exercises and skills. It can help candidates' understanding if they have opportunities to observe professional dance works and dancers. This provides a greater insight into the performance of key style-specific steps, characteristics and features that are essential for performance in the dance style they are studying.

Teachers and lecturers should give attention to the development of performance quality, as appropriate to the selected dance style. They should also consider the best way to support the development of performance skills, and not leave this too close to the assessment event, or to the responsibility of the candidate.

The choreography for commercial dance must challenge candidates, while allowing them to use the marking criteria, particularly for demonstrating flexibility and use of general space. While this option is available for the performance component to ensure the National 5 Dance course is current for candidates, commercial dance does not lend itself to section 2 of the question paper, as it is difficult to define the history of the dance style that is still developing and changing alongside current music trends.

To help control nerves, some candidates would benefit from more opportunities to perform the dance as a solo before the final assessment day. Centre assessors should choose an appropriate environment for the live assessment, as it is important that candidates have had time to practise in the assessment space before the live assessment event. If using a dance studio, it is good practice to either perform away from, or cover, the mirrors. If candidates perform towards the mirrors, rather than the assessors, this can impact their mark.

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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).