



Course report 2025

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 823

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 920

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	383	41.6	41.6	70
B	215	23.4	65.0	60
C	159	17.3	82.3	50
D	108	11.7	94.0	40
No award	55	6.0	100%	Not applicable

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 or equal to 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

All course components performed as expected. Many candidates found the question paper challenging and did not perform well in this component, as discussed in this report.

Most centres were well prepared for visiting assessment, with all documentation and candidate mark sheets complete and ready for use. This streamlined assessment time and allowed the process to run smoothly for candidates. However, a few centres did not have the paperwork complete ahead of the visiting assessor arriving. This delayed the start of the assessment and hindered the smooth running of the day for the 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 meet the national standards for all components.

Question paper

Generally, many candidates understood the requirements for all three sections in the paper in terms of subject content. The full marking range was accessed for all questions.

The question paper was fair and accessible. It sampled a range of content from the course specification, with many key skills included, which candidates should be familiar with. The most popular dance style chosen for section 2 of the question paper was jazz, with a few centres using contemporary, ballet and hip hop. 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.

Most centres selected an appropriate professional dance work. A few centres continue to select choreographies created for musicals or select one section of a full professional piece. Therefore, some candidates were unable to provide the detail required, as the selected choreography was inappropriate or insufficient in length.

Practical activity

The practical activity component performed as expected.

Choreography

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 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. Centre assessors must use the column provided for the centre assessor's marks on the marksheet to support the process. In a few centres this approach was not adopted.

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 assessment.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected. Jazz was the most common dance style presented for assessment, followed by contemporary, commercial, Hip Hop and lyrical across all centres. A few centres presented ballet and Highland. When presenting a variety of dance styles, centres should include a sample from each style for the visiting examination.

The collaborative marking model for National 5 Dance visiting assessment was a successful and positive experience for many 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. The level of performance 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 accurate levels of challenge for National 5 level and allowed candidates to achieve the marking criteria. However, in a few centres the tutor-choreographed solo presented for assessment had limited technical content and the style-specific steps lacked challenge and breadth, which lacked complexity for this level. Therefore a few candidates were unable to access the full range of marks available.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Question 2: Most candidates could demonstrate their knowledge of leg strength when performing travelling steps, with some candidates able to give a detailed response that included clear examples, and the muscles used to execute the steps.

Question 4: Most candidates provided a detailed response for the style-specific turning step, demonstrating secure knowledge of the stylistic features and the dance style studied. This was encouraging, as this is the first time this content had been framed as a turning step.

Question 9: A few candidates provided clear and detailed evaluations of the use of levels in the professional piece studied. Secure knowledge of this area of content was evident. Where candidates did not access marks, this was due to a lack of evaluative language, or no judgement being made.

Practical activity

Choreography

Many candidates presented a choreography for two people that was refined and well-rehearsed and included a clear structure and three devices. Some candidates selected interesting themes; and incorporated creative and original movements that developed to enhance the intentions. This allowed them to access the top band of marks.

When candidates selected appropriate research, used their findings to inspire movements, and selected appropriate choreographic principles, often they

communicated the theme with consistency. When this approach is adopted, many candidates were successful in accessing the top band of marks.

Choreography review

Many candidates performed well in the choreographic review, taking the time to research thoroughly and provide detail on their choice of choreographic principles and link this to theme and intentions to access the top band of marks.

Many candidates performed well in the music and sound task, with good understanding of the link to the intentions. However, many provided more detail than required.

Performance

Some candidates worked hard to develop the tutor-choreographed solo, and added their own flair and demonstrated musicality, varying dynamics, and self-expression with confidence. This ensured that many 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

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 and translate this into a written response.

Many candidates were able to access the top band of marks for Dance performance; however, they then found it challenging to transfer this knowledge to section 1 of the question paper. They were unable to articulate the fundamental skills, such as

selecting an appropriate performance skill for question 1 or detailing their use of centring and balance in their own solo performance.

Some candidates demonstrated a lack of subject knowledge and misunderstood key skills such as performance skills in section 1, influential choreographer and key characteristics in section 2 and unison in section 3, which are all fundamental principles to the delivery of all components.

Some centre assessors were inaccurate with the styles being presented. For example, some centres stated they were presenting contemporary when it was lyrical, or hip hop when it was commercial. This confusion translated into section 2 of the question paper at times where candidates then discussed inaccurate information.

Some candidates responded well in questions dealing with an influential choreographer's impact on an historical moment but did not attempt answering about an influential choreographer's key costume and characteristic.

It was clear that many candidates were not familiar with the opening section of their chosen professional choreography or the use of unison this year.

Some candidates were adopting the use of a formulaic answer structure used in other NQ subjects. This approach did not allow them to access the full range of marks. The Dance question paper has a holistic approach to marking therefore formulaic answer structures are not always suitable.

Question 1(a) and 1(b): Many candidates responded with a technical skill rather than a performance skill, with some also answering part (b) in part (a) and therefore many candidates did not access the marks available. This was an accessible question, and candidates are assessed on these skills for their solo performance, so should understand the difference between technical and performance skills.

Some candidates were explaining rather than describing in part (a).

Question 3: Some candidates did not respond with the correct vocabulary by explaining rather than evaluating. However, candidates did demonstrate good knowledge about centring and balance.

Question 5(b): Many candidates could not give the impact of an historical moment on the selected dance style studied and merely described the moment.

Question 6(a) and 6(b): Many candidates responded to the wrong command word for both part (a) and (b). Knowledge of the influential choreographer was evident, however responses lacked detail. Many could not identify a second key characteristic, which is a fundamental aspect of course content detailed in the course specification.

Question 7: Many candidates could not provide the detail required on the music and sound used in the opening section.

Question 8: *Swansong* by Christopher Bruce is one of the most popular professional pieces studied at National 5, however many candidates responded with the wrong choreographic principle. Candidates started explaining unison and then confused the principle with question and answer, therefore could not access all the marks available. Candidates should be aware of the difference between all the devices applied.

Question 9: Candidates had good knowledge and understanding of the use of levels. However, many applied the wrong command word, explaining rather than evaluating, and therefore could not access the available marks.

Practical activity

Choreography

Some candidates found it challenging to present a choreography that demonstrated originality and creativity to communicate the intentions of the piece. Some candidates used technical dance steps and acro tricks that gave no meaning in relation to the theme, or included acting rather than creative gestural movements. This impacts the marking bands that candidates can access, as each choreographic principle assessed in the assessment criteria links to the intentions of the choreography. Some candidates also demonstrated a lack of understanding of

structure as they often selected narrative when another structure would have been more appropriate to the selected theme or intentions.

Choreography review

Candidates can only access marks for **two** research sources. A few candidates included many different sources and often did not access the development marks as each source was straightforward, and they did not give detailed descriptions and explanation of two different sources. Some candidates selected a picture as a source of research to inspire movements, which is good practice. However, candidates can only select one picture, not multiple different pictures on the same theme for one research source. Candidates can achieve the development marks by describing and explaining what is in one picture, by including the colours, textures, lines, background, patterns and meaning etc to access the full range of marks.

Many candidates did not access the development marks for the structure task. This must be a developed explanation of the use and reason for the structure to help communicate the intentions. They cannot access marks for further description.

A few candidates could not provide the detail required for the spatial elements development marks. They provided many straightforward points for multiple spatial elements rather than one or two detailed points.

Performance

Some candidates were only able to access the middle band of marks for technical skills. Many candidates were accessing the lower band of marks for technical accuracy, centring, control, and use of turnout. Candidates should spend time acquiring skills through regular dance technique that are utilised in the solo, rather than learning the solo too early in the course.

The standard of solo content for jazz, commercial, hip hop and contemporary still varies across centres, with a lack of suitable technical content and challenge appropriate for National 5 level in some centres.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Learners must understand key dance terminology from the course, to achieve the marks available for the question paper. The gap between the candidates performing well and those finding it challenging to meet the national standard seems to be growing, which indicates the difficulties for some candidates who have no prior learning before embarking on the National 5 Dance course. Most candidates start national qualifications in Dance at National 5 level, with few candidates progressing from NPA.

Teachers and lecturers must 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.

Teachers and lecturers should spend time reviewing the use of all technical and performance skills to ensure that candidates can demonstrate their knowledge with confidence through detailed written responses. Teachers and lecturers can teach technical and performance skills through an integrated approach to learning in both the practical and classroom settings, to ensure that candidates fully understand all the key skills in the National 5 Dance course.

Candidates must study professional work early in the course, to ensure they are familiar with the work and confident with the movement material, choreographic principles and theatre arts used in the piece.

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

Teachers and lecturers must have an integrated approach to course delivery to link practical content with theory. This will benefit candidates and strengthen their understanding of the key skills that crossover all course components. Teachers and lecturers should refer to the National 5 Dance course specification on [our website](#) for further guidance.

Candidates must demonstrate their depth of knowledge in a detailed response rather than responding with point, evidence and impact for an explain or evaluate question. Candidates should understand the difference in providing a straightforward or detailed response for dance content rather than applying a formula from another subject area.

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. 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

Candidates must experience experimental learning through choreography workshops. This approach to course delivery is essential to equip candidates for the practical activity component, before starting on their own choreography to ensure they fully understand how to develop creative movements and apply appropriate devices and spatial elements to their own work. If candidates explore the use of spatial elements in a structured creative choreography or improvisation workshop, this will aid their application of spatial elements for their own work and avoid the use of predictable spatial elements such as side-by-side.

Candidates that continually create and incorporate new steps are often disadvantaged and it would benefit these candidates to develop key movements which reinforce the intentions. When candidates select elaborate themes or stories it is often difficult to communicate this in a 2-minute choreography. Therefore, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to streamline their ideas and consider what is the most important aspect to the intentions of the choreography. When the candidate selects a theme that is not clear and may be an abstract concept, they must select appropriate music and sound to help communicate the intentions and set the scene. Candidates should not perform in their own choreography. If an issue arises in advance of the assessment event, the centre assessor or SQA co-ordinator must contact SQA to receive advice before the live assessment. This is not something that should be negotiated with the visiting assessor on the day of the assessment.

Choreography review

When candidates describe devices and structure, they are not able to access marks for giving a definition only. 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 in their own choreography, rather than giving generic definitions. Candidates will not access marks if they describe the use of levels as a device.

For the spatial elements development marks, candidates should provide more than one element. However, candidates may choose to provide a clear and detailed explanation for one.

Performance

Candidates must experience regular technique classes, with set exercises that cover all the technical skills in the marking criteria, to develop the fundamental skills required for assessment. Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates work on

their technical skills throughout the course and not just when learning the technical solo.

Centre assessors should use the resources on the [Understanding Standards](#) website to familiarise themselves with the national standards and appropriate solo content. For the performance component, candidates must have opportunities to demonstrate musicality, contrasting dynamics or utilise the performance space.

To help control nerves, many candidates would benefit from more opportunities to perform the dance as a solo before the final assessment event. Candidates must have 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.

In some centres candidates were not adopting safe dance practice with appropriate attire and footwear for the assessment event. Centre assessors must ensure that candidates are appropriately presented so that the visiting assessor can see the lines of the body and they have appropriate dance shoes or are barefoot for performances.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).