

Course report 2026

Higher Dance, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 417

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 471

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	135	28.7	28.7	70
B	131	27.8	56.5	60
C	121	25.7	82.2	50
D	54	11.5	93.6	40
No award	30	6.4	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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.

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper performed as expected.

Section 1 performed better than section 2. Candidates gained marks across both sections.

There were few 'No Response' (NR) answers.

Practical activity (choreography and review)

The practical activity performed as expected.

The quality of choreography presented was varied, particularly in terms of creativity and the effective use of complex choreographic structures and devices. Candidates presented an increasingly diverse range of group work and solo choreographic work.

Many candidates consistently demonstrated the level of complexity required to fully access the higher mark bands.

The choreographic reviews were mostly of a good standard; however, some candidates significantly exceeded the recommended word count, making the work disproportionate for a task worth 10% of the overall marks.

Performance

The performance performed as expected.

The solo component requires two contrasting dance styles. Many candidates demonstrated strong technical and expressive skills, usually performing better in one style than the other. This varied across centres.

How candidates performed

Question paper

Candidates performed better in section 1 than in section 2 and in shorter-response questions, particularly for those questions attracting 2 marks.

Many candidates gave good responses to the command words in questions and applied their knowledge using the correct terminology. Some candidates demonstrated good subject knowledge but did not tailor their answers to the specific command words, so did not gain marks. Some candidates used recall without directly addressing the question, so their answers lacked focus and did not fully meet the demands of the command word or question asked.

Candidates focused on full professional choreographies, which is a requirement of the course. The works candidates studied were *Swansong* and *Ghost Dances* by Christopher Bruce, *Revelations* by Alvin Ailey, *Broken* and *Scattered* by Kevin Finnan, and *Young Men* by Ivan Perez. A recurring issue is that candidates do not always demonstrate a clear understanding of the themes and intentions of these pieces. Many candidates did not apply their knowledge to the questions asked with sufficient depth and clarity, and this prevented them from fully conveying their understanding and gaining marks.

Section 1

Question 1(a): Many candidates did not provide sufficient detail on a single development method and instead wrote about more than one. Most candidates described methods aimed at improving technical skills, such as stamina. Answers often linked increased stamina to developing timing, rather than focusing on methods that develop a dancer's understanding of timing itself.

Answers that attracted the most marks described development methods that could enhance candidates' ability to recognise musical counts, such as:

- visualisation and mental rehearsal
- filming and comparing to a model performer
- teacher or peer feedback followed by practise

- counting aloud and assigning counts to movements, improvisation and rhythm tasks
- when some of these tasks followed one another in a clear singular development method to improve timing

Question 1(b): Some candidates focused on explaining in general if the development method was effective, rather than explaining how it impacted their solo performance. As a result, candidate answers often lacked the specific detail required to gain marks. A few candidates included a clear, specific example demonstrating how improved timing enhanced the quality, accuracy, or overall performance of their solo, and these answers gained full marks.

Question 2: Many candidates used evaluative language; however, some candidates still relied on phrases such as ‘helps to show’, ‘highlights’ or ‘clearly shows’ which are not evaluative and do not make a clear judgement. To gain marks, candidate answers must move beyond description and explicitly evaluate the effectiveness or impact of the skill. Many candidates discussed power in a generic way, often repeating the term without sufficient detail or showing a clear understanding of what it was. For example, statements such as ‘my good power helped me to get height in my jumps’ lacked explanation. Candidates must develop this further by explaining how they applied power to enhance their performance.

Question 3: In comparison questions, some candidates made multiple, clear comparisons throughout their answers. In this question, comprehensive answers included three direct and detailed comparisons, such as comparisons between how candidates used facial expressions in the two dance styles, their head positions or eyeline in each style, and their projection. However, some candidates structured their answers less effectively by evaluating their self-expression in one style, then making a single comparative statement before evaluating the second style. This approach limited their responses, and candidates only gained straightforward comparison marks. It was clear that candidates understood the different elements that contribute to self-expression, as they discussed projection, head position, eyeline, and facial expression.

Question 4: Most candidates answered on jazz dance, with a few who used contemporary, ballet and commercial dance. Candidate responses followed a descriptive timeline of events, with limited focus on explaining impact. Candidates often presented their knowledge chronologically and then added a general statement at the end, such as ‘this impacted jazz dance because we still see this today’. Instead, they could’ve embedded clear, developed explanations of how the event specifically influenced the dance style. Candidates must link the event to its effect on jazz dance, clearly explaining the ways the event shaped the style, performance, or technique.

Question 5: Candidates performed well in this question, as most gained marks and demonstrated relevant understanding. Some candidate answers were particularly strong, as they offered detailed and well-developed answers. However, a few candidates misinterpreted the term ‘environment’ and referred to it as a social setting, rather than focusing on the physical space.

Section 2

Question 6(a): Many candidates limited their answers to stating and identifying the name of the structure and its sections, with only basic or minimal description. As a result, they did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the structure used. In some cases, candidate descriptions even contradicted the identified structure, showing a lack of understanding on how it was applied within the choreography. Stronger answers would’ve included more accurate and developed descriptions, clearly linking the named structure to how it was used in practice.

Question 6(b): Most candidates did not address the two concepts within the answer: motif development and its link to enhancing structure. While many candidates demonstrated a stronger understanding of what a motif is and described some aspects of motif development, they did not clearly connect this to the structure of the dance. As a result, candidate answers often lacked explanation of how developing a motif contributed to the progression or organisation of the choreography. Stronger answers explicitly linked how the dance evolved to the development of movement material, showing how it supported transitions, created coherence, or enhanced the structure as a whole.

Question 6(c): Most candidates answered this question well. They focused on relevant choreographic devices and explicitly linked them to the final section, demonstrating accurate application and understanding. However, some candidates did not gain marks because they did not fully address the final requirement of the question. Some candidates either did not link their discussion to the final section, or they inaccurately included elements that were not choreographic devices, such as spatial elements or theatre arts. Some candidates discussed devices that were not evident within the final section of the choreography, so did not gain marks for this part of the question.

Question 7: There were mixed responses to this question. Some candidates answered it well, demonstrating clear and consistent evaluative language throughout. Other candidates began their answers with appropriate evaluative statements and then reverted to more descriptive phrases. Candidates were not consistent when making judgements. Candidates could've gained more marks by using evaluative language throughout and making explicit judgements about how the costumes the choreographer used impacted their own understanding of the theme and intentions.

Practical activity

Choreography

Group choreographies remained the most common approach; however, candidates increasingly made use of solo choreographies.

There were significant variations between candidates' work. Some candidates demonstrated exceptional levels of creativity and choreographic understanding, while others presented work which often relied heavily on technical steps, rather than original, creative movement.

A key development area is the use of structure. For more complex structures, many candidates relied on changes in the music to signal new sections, rather than using changes in movement intention, spatial elements, motif and development and choreographic devices to highlight this change. When candidates used more complex devices, they often applied them in a simplistic way, limiting the marks available to them.

Motif and motif development also remain areas that require further focus. Candidates lacked a clear understanding of what constitutes a motif and how it can be developed effectively. This was reflected not only in the choreography itself but also in candidates' answers in section 2 of the question paper, where links between motif development, structure, and progression were often unclear.

Many choreographies lacked theatre arts.

Choreography review

Most candidates performed well in this section of the practical activity. Many candidate reviews were extremely detailed and, in some cases, exceeded the recommended word count.

Some candidate reviews were excellent, but this was not reflected in their answers in the question paper, where the level of response was often significantly lower. During visiting assessment, inconsistencies between candidates' verbal introductions to their choreography and their reviews was also common. When candidates were asked to give details of their theme, structure, and chosen choreographic devices before presenting their dance, some candidates did not demonstrate the same depth of knowledge shown in their written work.

In question 1(a) of the review, candidates did not consistently link their answers to their research. To gain marks, candidates must justify how they used motif development and choreographic devices. They must underpin their creative decisions with relevant research, rather than merely describing what they did.

Performance

Marks for solo performances covered the full range of mark bands

The most common dance styles presented were jazz, contemporary, lyrical and commercial, with a few candidates offering solos in styles such as ballet, tap and Highland.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should spend time with candidates developing their understanding of command words. Candidates should practise answering questions where they need to interpret the command word and then apply their knowledge appropriately.

Candidates would benefit from learning to structure answers for comparison questions, as this would help them gain marks for a clear and detailed response.

Section 1

When you teach dance history, try looking at the style currently and trace it backwards through time. Make clear links between the key characteristics of the style, including the style specific steps, music and/or sound, costume and/or attire. Encourage candidates to research how the style developed and what caused these changes. This method helps candidates increase their knowledge and understanding of how specific factors developed the style. This practical approach, supported with theory lessons, should help candidates develop a better understanding and prevent them learning facts in isolation.

Section 2

To gain marks in this section of the paper, candidates must study the full work in detail and have a good knowledge and understanding of it. Encourage them to watch the work multiple times, so they can support their answers with detailed examples. This helps candidates develop a deeper understanding, rather than making statements that are not supported.

You should help candidates develop a stronger understanding of the choreographic principles, such as complex structure, complex devices and motif development, and know how to apply these to their own choreography. Candidates develop a deeper understanding of these principles, if they understand the reasons they've chosen to use them to enhance their theme and intentions or enhance the mood and atmosphere.

Practical activity

Choreography

You must make sure the foundations for developing creative movement are in place before candidates start the choreography activity. Candidates should understand motif development, structure and the use of choreographic devices to support greater creativity.

You should spend time establishing what an initial motif is and how its development is key to the theme or stimulus. Help candidates understand that a motif is more than a single movement, and how they can fully use and develop it in their work.

At Higher level, candidates should create a motif that is approximately 16 counts, and each movement should be linked to their research. Candidates could 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
- changing the size of the movements to make some bigger, while others are smaller
- adding in embellishment to some movements to help show for example, confusion or that the dancer is becoming anxious

Candidates should choose movements for their motif that are creative and meaningful, as this gives them material to work with when moving on to motif development. Encourage candidates to produce their developed motifs before creating their choreography, as this helps them decide what they want to show through each section. Remind candidates that the movements must link to their theme and intentions, and their motif can help with this. Candidates are not limited to using the movements in their motif and can have more than one motif. They must use additional movements throughout the choreography; however, candidates must take care to link them to their theme and intentions and that they're not creating a technical piece of dance similar to their solo performances.

For group choreography, candidates should focus on using a complex structure and complex devices appropriate to a theme for three or more people. Discourage them

from long, drawn-out storytelling, and instead concentrate on developing original movement with a clear focus. Candidates should choose complex devices to meet the requirements of their theme and to help them portray their theme and intentions.

Choreography and improvisation workshops help candidates gain the skills and confidence required before starting the choreographic process. This helps them:

- apply creativity to develop original movement when creating and developing their motif
- use a complex structure and complex devices

We strongly recommend that candidates gain knowledge and understanding of all the choreographic principles before starting to create their own dance.

Theatre arts do not rely on specialist equipment, such as lighting. There are lots of [Understanding Standards examples](#) on our website, showing candidates gaining full marks by effectively using basic resources.

Candidates should not be performing in their own choreographies. This is stated in the Higher Dance Course Specification and the 'Instructions for candidates' section in the Higher Dance Practical Activity Assessment Task on [our website](#).

Choreography review

Although most candidates perform well in the review, question 1(a) continues to present challenges as some candidates do not refer to the research findings or relate devices to the intentions. We've recorded a [Higher Dance Choreography Review Webinar](#) to guide your approach to this question.

You 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, candidates understand an area from the choreography produced but miss marks because they did not discuss it in their final review. There are examples of choreography reviews in the Understanding Standards Materials section of [our secure site](#), that help you understand the assessment requirements.

To access the top mark band, candidates must include all sections of the marking criteria in their review. You should spend time, particularly on question 1(a), to make sure candidates provide a clear link between two pieces of research, movement, motif and development, complex choreographic devices and the intentions of the choreography. You could frame questions to help candidates with this.

You must make sure the support you provide to candidates for the choreography review is appropriate and not excessive. The work candidates submit must genuinely reflect their own efforts, and you must be confident that the candidate has not received undue assistance during the process. The emphasis should be on the candidate's personal creativity and independence to accurately demonstrate their skills and understanding. You must have processes in place to make sure all work submitted is the candidate's own.

Performance

Candidates need to build a solid technical foundation before working on their solo dances for assessment. By introducing the solo early in the course, combined with ongoing technique training, you can help candidates. Regular technique classes throughout the year can improve all candidates. Consistent practise develops skills and helps prevent bad habits.

Some candidates could benefit from extra opportunities to perform their solos to an audience in the assessment space before the assessment. This can help boost their confidence and improve their awareness of the space.

Some candidates are taking Higher Dance without any background in the subject, for example National 5 Dance, or regular technique classes. This impacts their technical ability and the foundation skills required to perform successfully at this level. Some National 5 candidates progressing to Higher find learning a second dance style challenging, and this often shows in their solo performances. These candidates tend to perform well in one style and not so well in the other, which lowers their overall marks.

One way to help candidates is to introduce two dance styles early (such as in the National 5 course). Candidates could learn both styles and then choose one for their

National 5 performance. This means they would not need to learn a new style when they reach Higher. However, you must make sure candidates are sufficiently prepared before progressing.