

NextGen: HN unit specification

Contact Improvisation (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: JDWO 47

SCQF level: 7 (8 SCQF credit points)

Valid from: August 2026

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver and assess the unit.

Published: June 2026 (version 1.0)

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Unit purpose

This unit introduces learners to the principles and practices of contact improvisation.

It focuses on developing:

- fundamental skills and techniques
- improvisational skills
- choreographic skills

Entry is at your centre's discretion. We recommend the unit to learners who have completed one or more of the following:

- Dance at SCQF Level 6
- Higher Dance

Learners study this unit as part of Higher National Certificate (HNC) Dance. They can also study it on a stand-alone basis.

Learners who complete the unit may progress to further studies and/or seek work in the dance or performing arts industries.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation
2. apply creative and collaborative skills in contact improvisation
3. demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles in an improvised group dance

Evidence requirements

The standard of evidence for the outcomes should be consistent with the SCQF level of the unit.

Outcome 1

Learners must demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation. They must:

- participate in contact improvisation classes that include physical preparation, structured centre and travelling contact tasks, and solo, partner and group tasks
- apply physical listening knowledge to contact improvisation

To assess learners' competence, you observe their participation in classes, in which they demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for this outcome.

You must complete an assessor checklist. You may record the assessment for evidence.

Outcome 2

Learners must apply creative and collaborative skills in contact improvisation. They must:

- demonstrate safe practice with respect and responsibility for themselves and others
- demonstrate creative improvisational skills
- respond and adapt to a variety of stimuli

Learners should work individually, in pairs and in groups.

To assess learners' competence, you observe their participation in classes, in which they demonstrate the knowledge and skills required for this outcome.

You must complete an assessor checklist. You may record the assessment for evidence.

Outcome 3

Learners must demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles in an improvised group dance. They must:

- apply flow, momentum, gravity and dynamics in a group improvisation
- demonstrate connection and emotive response to music, mood and other learners
- demonstrate creative improvisation skills in a group setting
- demonstrate effective spatial awareness and respect for other learners
- demonstrate their ability to work with contact with a partner or in a group

To assess learners' competence, you assess their performance in a group improvisation lasting a minimum of 5 minutes.

You must complete an assessor checklist and record the assessment for evidence. You must clearly label each learner, for example, with a badge or a sheet of paper attached to their clothing, using either a number or a letter system. Each learner's

label must be clearly visible on the recording. No more than eight learners should be in each recording.

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 1</p> <p>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • trust building and focus • physical listening • point of contact • weight sharing • weight bearing/stable base • leading and following/push and pull • suspension and fall/fall and recovery • rolling, sliding and pivot • floorwork • lifting techniques • gravity and momentum • consent and readiness 	<p>Outcome 1</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participate in trust-building tasks, demonstrating awareness and mature focus that builds confidence within the group • interpret body language of partners instinctively, physically listening to subtle cues and sensations, without verbal interactions; encouraging intuitive responses, paying attention to weight placement, weight transference, direction and momentum • demonstrate the point of contact, through continuous touch with a partner while moving, rolling, sliding and changing direction or level together • demonstrate weight sharing by both partners equally giving and receiving support from one another to create a stable shape • demonstrate weight bearing by bearing the weight of another person through a stable base • demonstrate initiation of movement as a leader controlling the pace, direction and dynamic of movement • demonstrate the role of the follower, who is passive in response and easily led and manipulated by the leader • demonstrate fall and recovery techniques, safely moving at ease and with gravity in and out of movement and on and off the floor, showing strength and control

Knowledge	Skills
	<p>Outcome 1 (continued)</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • initiate movement and lifts from the centre of gravity (pelvis and core), and demonstrate a low centre of gravity (grounded), as well as using momentum in lifts • demonstrate spontaneous movement combinations organically and safely, using momentum and gravity to instantly and instinctively react to partners' dynamics and energy input • verbally communicate what they are comfortable with when working in proximity with another individual, to ensure a safe, comfortable and respectful working environment
<p>Outcome 2</p> <p>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • commitment, trust, consent and readiness • collaborative working • spatial awareness • using stimuli • solo improvisation 	<p>Outcome 2</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate commitment, focus and trust with partners or a group, working to consent requirements • contribute to group contact improvisation tasks, continually adapting, inventing and offering opportunities for each other to demonstrate key skills and techniques • perform with appropriate spatial awareness • engage with different stimuli, including physical, sensory, imagery/metaphoric, aural, visual and relational, to encourage original movement • participate in solo tasks responding to stimuli

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 3</p> <p>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contact improvisation skills, techniques and principles including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ flow ○ momentum ○ gravity ○ dynamics • points of contact, weight bearing and weight sharing • connection, responding to music, mood and others • suspension and fall/fall and recovery • strength and control • how to respond to a variety of stimuli • safe working in a group setting, including appropriate spatial awareness and respecting other learners 	<p>Outcome 3</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate techniques, skills and principles safely within a group improvisation, including points of contact, weight bearing and weight sharing • demonstrate connecting and responding to music, mood and other learners • demonstrate contrasting movements that combine leading and following/push and pull, as well as flow, momentum, gravity and dynamics • demonstrate fall and recovery techniques safely, moving at ease and with gravity in and out of movement, showing strength and control • demonstrate immediate organic responses to a variety of stimuli, including physical, sensory, imagery/metaphoric, aural, visual and relational • work safely while improvising in a group setting, including having sound spatial awareness and respecting other learners

Meta-skills

You must give learners opportunities to develop their meta-skills throughout this unit. We have suggested how to incorporate the most relevant ones into the unit content, but you may find other opportunities.

Self-management

This includes focusing, integrity, adapting and initiative. The most relevant are:

- focusing:
 - remaining focused throughout classes and performance assessments
 - retaining and applying feedback in a consistent way to build on technical and artistic development
- integrity:
 - contributing in a positive way to class (or rehearsals)
 - being punctual and prepared for class (or rehearsals)
- adapting:
 - working with others
 - responding to new and challenging tasks
 - responding and adjusting to a variety of stimuli
- initiative:
 - creating and developing movement phrases
 - instigating individual and group development tasks

Social intelligence

This includes communicating, feeling, collaborating and leading. The most relevant are:

- communicating:
 - engaging with tutors and fellow dancers
 - engaging in reciprocal feedback tasks
 - communicating through expressive movement qualities
- feeling:
 - developing empathy with fellow dancers
 - demonstrating empathetic responses to music and tone
 - developing synchronicity with emotional states of other dancers
 - demonstrating inclusivity in practice
- collaborating:
 - working with fellow dancers to develop movement ideas
 - working with fellow dancers to resolve challenges instantaneously within movement
 - absorbing and applying direction from a choreographer or tutor

Innovation

This includes curiosity, creativity, sense-making and critical thinking. The most relevant are:

- curiosity:
 - exploring self-expression
 - exploring responses to stimuli

- creativity:
 - developing artistry through creative and musical expression
 - exploring original movement through improvisation
- sense-making:
 - understanding terminology
 - analysing vocabulary
- critical thinking:
 - reviewing and reflecting on personal performance
 - strategising for achievement of long-term goals

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacy.

Communication

- presenting and performing
- communicating consent and boundaries
- working with others

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you should encourage learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

This includes:

- a general understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability
- a general understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- a deeper understanding of subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and values they develop in the next stage of their life

The following SDGs are particularly relevant to this unit:

- 3 good health and wellbeing
- 4 quality education

Delivery of unit

This is an optional unit in Higher National Certificate (HNC) Dance.

The notional time for delivery and assessment is 40 hours. The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion.

You can integrate and cross-assess this unit with the following mandatory and optional units at SCQF level 7:

- Choreographic Practice
- Contemporary Dance
- Dance Injury Prevention, Wellbeing and Health
- Dance Teaching Skills

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

This unit is designed to develop learners' contact improvisation techniques, with an emphasis on developing fundamental skills in contact improvisation, building trust, and increasing collaboration and communication skills. The unit culminates in a group improvisation — often known as a 'contact improvisation jam'. There is time during the unit to have discussions about responding to a variety of stimuli, and, most importantly, the need for communication, consent and readiness.

Learners develop physical listening, awareness and control by participating in regular studio-based classes. Regular classes offer learners a good opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of current contact improvisation techniques, as well as their physical and mental strengths and areas for development. Reflective questions allow learners to analyse their strengths and areas for development, increasing autonomy in their practice.

Learners have the opportunity to build trust and explore new vocabulary as individuals, as well as with a partner or in a group. Learners should understand the level of focus and commitment required to participate in a physically and cognitively demanding class while being responsible for another person's safety. You should emphasise safe practice in all classes, particularly when learners are working with lifting techniques or weight bearing and sharing techniques.

Resources

Classes, workshops and assessments should take place in an appropriate location, such as a dance studio, gym hall, assembly hall or stage. We recommend the location has:

- a wooden or sprung floor
- adequate heating
- a sound system
- audio and visual equipment

Staff teaching this unit should have subject expertise in Dance and be qualified to at least SCQF level 8 or equivalent. They should have knowledge of safe dance practice, including appropriate:

- posture
- alignment
- warm up and cool down
- hydration
- clothing, footwear and hair styling

Approaches to delivery

The overall unit delivery time is a notional 40 hours of contact time for delivery and assessment. We expect learners to carry out a further 40 hours of self-directed study.

Demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation (outcome 1)

Learners should take part in exercises designed to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation. They should work in different pairings or groups, and learn to adapt and be versatile in applying the correct techniques.

They should understand the importance of consent and readiness, ensuring the group always works together safely in a playful, creative and experimental way.

Tasks could include:

- physical preparation, involving whole body strength, for adequately and safely supporting themselves and others — for example, pushing, pulling, releasing, rolling, falling and balancing
- solo improvisations exploring key principles of contact improvisation (flow, falling and recovery, entry and exit from the floor, momentum, points of initiation, suspension, and release) and exploring responses to stimuli
- points of contact between partners or in a group that may or may not include weight bearing
- weight bearing and sharing, including counterbalances, table/base and explorer tasks, and safe lifting techniques including entry and exit points
- reflective tasks including peer feedback to enhance learning

Apply creative and collaborative skills in contact improvisation (outcome 2)

Learners should contribute to contact improvisation tasks, continually adapting, discovering and offering opportunities for each other to demonstrate key skills and techniques throughout class and in final assessment.

Tasks should use a variety of stimuli, including:

- physical
- sensory
- imagery/metaphoric
- aural
- visual
- relational

They should work individually and with a partner or group on improvisations, to generate ideas in an experimental way and create new movement patterns in the body.

Learners may explore:

- improvising (as a solo, with a partner or in a group), involving responding to and reflecting on different stimuli to find new movement patterns
- leader and follower relationship dynamics during contact improvisation tasks
- trust-building exercises including physical listening

Demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles in an improvised group dance (outcome 3)

Learners should combine techniques and skills they have gained from outcomes 1 and 2 in an improvised group dance (or 'contact improvisation jam') lasting a minimum of 5 minutes. Learners should be able to demonstrate their understanding of contact improvisation techniques and principles safely with other learners. During the group dance, learners must demonstrate their ability to work with contact with a partner or group, and may also choose to include moments of solo improvisation, stillness and observation of the group action.

Approaches to assessment

Use your professional judgement when observing learners in class and assessments to ensure all knowledge and skills are evidenced and consistent with the SCQF level of the unit.

Evidence can be generated through a range of assessment types. For this unit we recommend observation and performance.

You must record the assessment for outcome 3, and retain this as evidence with your assessor observation checklist. You may record the assessments for outcomes 1 and 2, but this is not mandatory.

Demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation (outcome 1)

For their assessment, learners should demonstrate contact improvisation skills, techniques and principles through a series of classes, which may include tutor demonstration and verbal instruction.

Practical demonstration should include:

- physical preparation
- trust-building exercises
- point of contact
- centre of gravity
- weight sharing
- weight bearing/stable base
- leading and following/push and pull
- suspension and fall/fall and recovery
- rolling and sliding
- entry and exit to the floor
- lifting techniques
- gravity and momentum

Learners should understand consent and readiness.

You assess learners on an ongoing basis.

Apply creative and collaborative skills in contact improvisation (outcome 2)

For their assessment, learners should demonstrate safe, creative and collaborative contact improvisation skills, techniques and principles through ongoing contact improvisation classes, which may include tutor demonstration and verbal instruction.

Practical demonstration should include:

- solo improvisation
- commitment, trust, consent and readiness
- collaboration
- spatial awareness
- responses to stimuli

You assess learners on an ongoing basis.

Demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles in an improvised group dance (outcome 3)

For their assessment, learners should demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation in an improvised group dance lasting a minimum of 5 minutes, without tutor demonstration or verbal instructions.

Learners should use the skills, techniques and principles developed in outcomes 1 and 2 throughout their group improvisation.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You must consider the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Information for learners

Contact Improvisation (SCQF level 7)

This information explains:

- what the unit is about
- what you should know or be able to do before you start
- what you need to do during the unit
- opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

This unit enables you to develop fundamental skills in contact improvisation. It provides an opportunity for you to increase your knowledge of the techniques and principles of contact improvisation, as well as create a contact-based dance with a partner or group, all while developing your performance skills.

We recommend the unit if you have completed one or more of the following:

- Dance at SCQF Level 6
- Higher Dance

During the unit, you:

- learn fundamental skills, techniques and principles of contact improvisation
- apply creative and collaborative skills in contact improvisation
- demonstrate fundamental skills, techniques and principles in an improvised group dance

You are assessed through performance and in-class observation.

When you finish the unit, you may wish to progress to further studies and/or work in the dance or performing arts industries.

Meta-skills

Throughout this unit, you develop meta-skills that are useful for the dance and performing arts sector.

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help you adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

Self-management

You develop the meta-skill of focusing throughout classes and performance assessments, and when implementing feedback.

You develop integrity by being punctual and prepared, and making a positive contribution to classes and rehearsals.

You develop adapting when working with others, when you respond to new and challenging tasks, and when you respond and adjust to a variety of stimuli.

You develop initiative by creating and developing movement phrases, and instigating group and individual tasks.

Social intelligence

You develop the meta-skill of communicating when you engage with tutors and fellow dancers, and express yourself through movement.

You develop feeling through having empathy with fellow dancers when you dance together. You also develop empathetic responses to music, tone, character and mood. You also develop feeling by demonstrating inclusivity in your practice.

You develop collaborating when you work with fellow dancers, and receive direction from your choreographer or tutor.

Innovation

You develop the meta-skill of curiosity by exploring self-expression and your response to stimuli.

You develop creativity through creative and musical expression, and by exploring original movement through improvisation.

You develop sense-making by learning, understanding and analysing terminology.

You develop critical thinking when you review and reflect on your personal performance, and plan how to achieve long-term goals.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you develop skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

You learn about social, economic and environmental sustainability principles and how they relate to the dance and performing arts sector. You also develop an understanding of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Administrative information

Published: June 2026 (version 1.0)

Superclass: LB

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check [our website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this unit.

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