

NextGen: HN unit specification

Dance History (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: JNAM 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.

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Unit purpose

This unit provides learners with an understanding of the history of dance, focusing on:

- the historical development of dance, including dance genres and key events
- the influence of social, political and cultural factors
- influential choreographers and dance organisations

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 work in the dance or performing arts industries.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. research the historical development of two dance genres
2. explain the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the development of two dance genres
3. research one influential choreographer or organisation in two dance genres

Evidence requirements

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

Outcome 1

Learners must research the historical development of two dance genres. They must:

- research and describe the historical development of two dance genres, including the country or countries of origin and a minimum of four key events
- describe at least two specific styles and four defining characteristics associated with each genre
- describe and analyse the music, costume, and staging or theatrical environment most closely associated with each genre

Learners must apply referencing techniques in their research.

To assess learners' competence, you assess their research and descriptions through a portfolio or presentation. Learners must make reference to two dance genres.

You must complete an assessor checklist.

You can combine the assessment for outcome 1 with assessment for the other two outcomes.

Evidence for all three outcomes can be combined and presented holistically.

Outcome 2

Learners must explain the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the development of two dance genres. They must:

- research the social, political or cultural environment in which each genre developed
- explain a minimum of two examples of the societal, political or cultural impact on each genre
- explain the global influence and international spread of each genre

Learners must apply referencing techniques in their research.

To assess learners' competence, you assess their research, explanations and examples through a portfolio or presentation. Learners must make reference to two dance genres.

You must complete an assessor checklist.

You can combine the assessment for outcome 2 with assessment for the other two outcomes.

Evidence for all three outcomes can be combined and presented holistically.

Outcome 3

Learners must research one influential choreographer or organisation in each of their two chosen genres. They must:

- analyse the background, professional connections or associations, legacy and key works associated with the chosen choreography or organisation

Learners must apply referencing techniques in their research.

To assess learners' competence, you assess their research and analysis through a portfolio or presentation. Learners must make reference to one influential choreographer or organisation.

You must complete an assessor checklist.

You can combine the assessment for outcome 3 with assessment for the other two outcomes.

Evidence for all three outcomes can be combined and presented holistically.

All outcomes

Learners must apply referencing techniques in their research. They can present their research in digital format or as an oral presentation.

Oral presentations must be recorded for evidence and should last no longer than 15 minutes. Written evidence for all three outcomes should come to a maximum of 2,000 words.

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 1 Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the difference between a dance genre and a dance style • the origins of a minimum of two dance genres • key events that have impacted these two dance genres over time • the development of these two genres up to the present day • the styles encompassed by each genre • the unique characteristics of each genre • the music, costuming, and staging or theatrical environment commonly associated with each genre • basic referencing 	<p>Outcome 1 Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research two dance genres • describe their two genres' origins, including country or countries, and their evolution to the present day, including a minimum of four key events that affected their development • identify a minimum of two styles associated with each genre • describe a minimum of four characteristics associated with each genre • describe the type of music, costuming, and staging or theatrical environment commonly associated with each genre • reference their research sources

Knowledge	Skills
<p>Outcome 2</p> <p>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the development of their chosen dance genres • the impact society, politics and/or culture can have on dance genres • the global influence and international spread of each of their chosen genres • basic referencing 	<p>Outcome 2</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the creation and development of two chosen genres • explain a minimum of two examples of the societal, political and/or cultural impact on their chosen genres • explain how their two chosen genres have been influenced and extended globally in the present day • reference their research sources
<p>Outcome 3</p> <p>Learners should understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the legacy created by influential choreographers and companies for each chosen genre • key works in each genre created by influential choreographers and companies • a variety of research methods • basic referencing 	<p>Outcome 3</p> <p>Learners can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research one influential choreographer or organisation for each chosen genre • analyse the background, professional connections/associations, legacy and key works associated with each chosen choreographer or organisation for each genre • apply research skills and document findings effectively • reference their research sources

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:
 - developing the ability to concentrate attention, filter distractions and stay mentally present during lectures and presentations
- integrity:
 - working independently and producing authentic work
- adapting:
 - coping with the stress of meeting deadlines set for reports or presentations
- initiative:
 - exploring the subject beyond what is covered in class to broaden and deepen factual knowledge

Social intelligence

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

- communicating:
 - active listening
 - asking questions
 - sharing ideas
 - gathering information
- feeling:
 - managing emotions to stay engaged and positive during lectures
- leading:
 - setting a positive example by demonstrating active engagement in lectures

Innovation

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

- curiosity:
 - exploring, asking questions and seeking new knowledge beyond the practical applications of dance
- creativity:
 - thinking and working independently to design original presentations with impact
- sense-making:
 - linking historical and/or cultural context and relevance to the practical dance styles studied

- critical thinking:
 - building a deeper understanding of the art form and evaluating the quality of information used for reports and presentations

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacies.

Communication

- active listening and questioning
- information gathering and sharing in group discussions

Digital

- developing digital skills and computer literacy by researching and producing portfolios or presentations

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

We suggest that the following SDGs are identifiable in the unit:

- 3 good health and wellbeing
- 4 quality education

Delivery of unit

This is an optional unit in 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.

We recommend that you run this unit throughout the duration of the HNC Dance course.

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

- Classical Ballet
- Contemporary Dance
- Jazz Dance
- Commercial Dance
- Choreographic Practice
- Tap Dance
- Hip Hop Dance

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

This unit is designed to provide learners with a broad overview of the history of dance and some of its key figures. This is achieved through lectures, and learners' own research. Studying a minimum of two genres of dance, and related influential choreographers and companies, should give learners a deeper knowledge of their area of focus.

You can help learners to choose an influential choreographer or organisation. This may be in a genre they study or one they wish to explore in more depth. The outcomes are designed to allow centres and learners autonomy in their selections.

Outcomes can be presented as individual tasks or combined into a portfolio.

Resources

The following examples are neither exhaustive nor prescriptive.

Recommended books

Anderson, J. (1994) *Ballet & Modern Dance: A Concise History*, 2nd ed, Princeton, NJ: Princeton Book Company.

Au, S. (2012) *Ballet and Modern Dance*, 3rd ed, London: Thames & Hudson.

Butterworth, J. and Sanders, L. (eds.) (2020) *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers*, London: Routledge.

Cohen, S. J. and Matheson, K. (eds.) (1992) *Dance As a Theatre Art: Source Readings in Dance History from 1581 to the Present*, 2nd ed, Princeton Book Company.

Cohen, S. J. et al (2005) *International Encyclopedia of Dance: 6 volumes*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Guarino, L. and Oliver, W. (eds.) (2015) *Jazz Dance: A History of the Roots and Branches*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Hartley, D. (2018) *The Essential Guide to Tap Dance*, Marlborough: The Crowood Press Ltd.

Trahearn, A. R. (2023) *Commercial Dance: An Essential Guide*, London: Routledge.

Influential professional dance companies

- Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater
- BalletBoyz
- English National Ballet
- Henri Oguike Dance Company
- Motionhouse
- Nederlands Dans Theater (NDT)
- New York City Ballet
- Rambert
- Rennie Harris Awe-Inspiring Works (RHAW)
- Richard Alston Dance Company
- Riverdance
- Scottish Ballet
- Scottish Dance Theatre
- Siobhan Davies Dance

Influential choreographers

- Carlos Acosta
- Alvin Ailey
- Richard Alston
- George Balanchine
- Pina Bausch

- Matthew Bourne
- Christopher Bruce
- Merce Cunningham
- Siobhan Davies
- Isadora Duncan
- Michael Flatley
- Bob Fosse
- Brian Friedman
- Itzik Galili
- Parris Goebel
- Martha Graham
- Gregory Hines
- Doris Humphrey
- Shobana Jeyasingh
- Akram Khan
- Rudolf Laban
- José Limón
- Edouard Lock
- Gillian Lynne
- Matt Mattox
- Ashley Page
- Twyla Tharp
- Jasmin Vardimon

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.

We recommend you deliver the unit sequentially to allow the subject matter to develop in a logical order.

You could deliver the outcomes as lectures supported by audio-visual presentations and performances.

Research the historical development of two dance genres (outcome 1)

Learners research the roots and historical development of two genres. They must understand the evolution and a minimum of four key events in the history of the selected genres, for example, the impact of the French Revolution on the development of classical ballet, or the introduction of the Hollywood musical on the evolution of jazz dance.

Learners should understand the styles encompassed by each genre and the unique characteristics of each genre.

They should also understand the music, costuming, and staging or theatrical environment commonly associated with each genre.

'Genre' refers to the overarching umbrella of a group of styles. For example:

- sacred/ritual dance
- social dance
- ballet
- contemporary
- jazz
- hip hop
- commercial

Examples of specific styles within a genre could be:

- the waltz, the jitterbug (social dance)
- Cunningham Technique, Graham Technique (contemporary)
- popping, locking (hip hop)

Examples of defining characteristics within a genre could be:

- use of circles and lines, simple steps (social dance)
- low centre of gravity, isolations (jazz)
- breadth of use, fusion of styles (commercial)

Explain the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the development of two dance genres (outcome 2)

Learners should understand the social, political and/or cultural factors that have influenced the development of two dance genres.

They should have a comprehensive understanding of the societal, political and/or cultural impact on dance genres, and the global influence and international spread of each genre.

Social factors might include accessibility; for example, hip hop emerged in an urban environment and did not require specialist studios, clothing or footwear.

Political factors might include national identity/control; for example, ballet in Soviet Russia was a propaganda tool, used to promote state ideals.

Cultural factors might include symbolism; for example, sacred dance is rooted in religious and storytelling traditions.

You could deliver this outcome as a lecture, or ask learners to research a specific genre or factor and share it with the class. This could be individually or as a group.

Research one influential choreographer or organisation in two dance genres (outcome 3)

You should use lectures to explore influential choreographers or companies for each genre.

You could provide one or two examples of suitable choreographers or companies for research, outlining:

- what learners could include in the background information
- what is meant by professional connections/associations; for example, New York City Ballet is strongly connected to the work of George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham and John Cage; Alvin Ailey and the way he demonstrated the African American experience in his choreography; or Christopher Bruce and his lifelong interest in illuminating political themes in his work
- what is meant by legacy; for example, contributions, innovation, style and impact

Key works could be:

- roles associated with a specific choreographer/dancer
- significant pieces that a choreographer has created
- works that are very popular within a company's repertoire

Research methods might include archival, observational, digital and theoretical research.

Approaches to assessment

Evidence for all three outcomes can be combined and presented as a portfolio or oral presentation.

Written evidence for all three outcomes should be a maximum of 2,000 words. Oral presentations should last a maximum of 10 minutes.

Learners could use a variety of research methods, including archival, observational, digital and theoretical research.

Learners must apply referencing techniques in their research. They must acknowledge any sources consulted in footnotes, or in a reference list at the end of their research. They must give specific details of the sources consulted. They may use any recognised system of referencing.

Research the historical development of two dance genres (outcome 1)

For their assessment, learners must complete a portfolio or presentation. They must include:

- research into two dance genres
- description of the origins and evolution to the present day, including a minimum of four key events that affected their development
- identification of the country/countries of origin of each genre
- description of a minimum of two styles associated with each genre
- description of a minimum of four characteristics associated with each genre
- description of the type of music, costuming, and staging or theatrical environment commonly associated with each genre

Explain the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced the development of two dance genres (outcome 2)

For their assessment, learners must complete a portfolio or presentation. They must include:

- research into the social, political and/or cultural factors that influenced their chosen genres' creation and development
- explanation of the societal, political and/or cultural impact for their selected two genres (including at least two examples)
- explanation of how their chosen genres have been influenced and extended globally in the present day

Research one influential choreographer or organisation in two dance genres (outcome 3)

For their assessment, learners must complete a portfolio or presentation. They select one influential choreographer or company from their two selected genres to research and analyse. They must include:

- background
- professional connections or associations
- the legacy created
- two key works

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

Dance History: An Introduction (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 will provide you with a broad overview of the roots and historical development of at least two distinct dance genres.

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:

- develop an understanding of the history of dance genres
- research the development of two genres
- learn about key figures or organisations involved in dance genres
- learn about the impact of key figures or organisations on the development of each genre you study
- research a key figure or organisation and their impact on a genre

You are assessed through written and/or oral assessment.

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 by paying attention and filtering distractions during lectures and presentations.

You develop integrity by working independently and producing authentic work.

You develop the meta-skill of adapting when you manage your time to meet deadlines for reports or presentations.

You develop initiative as you explore the subject beyond what is covered in class to broaden and deepen your knowledge.

Social intelligence

You develop the meta-skill of communicating by demonstrating active listening, asking questions, sharing ideas and gathering information.

You develop feeling by managing your emotions to stay engaged and positive during lectures.

You develop leading through setting a positive example by demonstrating active engagement in lectures.

Innovation

You develop the meta-skill of curiosity by exploring, asking questions and seeking new knowledge beyond the practical applications of dance.

You develop creativity by thinking and working independently to design original presentations with impact.

You develop sense-making when you link historical and/or cultural context and relevance to practical dance styles.

You develop critical thinking when you evaluate the quality of information you use in reports and presentations.

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

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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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