



Course report 2023

Higher 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: 491

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 474

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	146	Percentage	30.8	Cumulative percentage	30.8	Minimum mark required	68
B	Number of candidates	117	Percentage	24.7	Cumulative percentage	55.5	Minimum mark required	57
C	Number of candidates	104	Percentage	21.9	Cumulative percentage	77.4	Minimum mark required	47
D	Number of candidates	70	Percentage	14.8	Cumulative percentage	92.2	Minimum mark required	36
No award	Number of candidates	37	Percentage	7.8	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

Overall, centres were prepared for visiting assessment, with candidates presenting solo performances, solo or group choreographies, and reviews. However, some centres did not have the paperwork complete ahead of the visiting assessor arriving. This prevented the assessments from starting on time. Centres should have all paperwork ready ahead of the visiting assessor arriving at the centre.

While many centres are meeting the national standards, some centres did not manage to meet the national standards for the practical components. 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.

There are more candidates now progressing through from National 5 Dance to Higher Dance and fewer candidates studying Higher with no previous experience of the national qualification. This could account for the increase in the average mark for the overall award being higher than previous years.

Question paper

The full range of marks was accessed for each question.

A higher percentage of candidates were gaining marks across all areas of the question paper than in previous years. Most candidates were well prepared for this component, and this was evident through their understanding of the command words and their ability to apply their knowledge to answering the questions using the correct command words. Compared with previous years' question papers, candidates wrote more and there were fewer questions with 'no response'.

There remains a percentage of centres where candidates are performing poorly in the question paper, scoring as little as 0 marks out of a possible 40, and this is often reflected in their performance at visiting assessment.

Practical activity

The practical activity component for Higher Dance performed slightly below expectations this session. Modifications were kept in place from 2021–2022, allowing candidates to create and present a solo choreography or to create and present a group choreography for a minimum of three dancers. Candidates were not allowed to perform in their own choreography. The choice to create a solo choreography will remain as part of the course and will no longer be a modification.

In visiting assessors' feedback, and at marking review, it was highlighted that choreographies were below the level that is expected for Higher Dance. This contributed to the change in grade boundary for this session.

There were no adjustments made for the choreography review that candidates complete to accompany their choreography. The choreography review demonstrates candidates' ability

to research, review and evaluate the whole creative process. The review can be presented in a variety of formats to allow for personalisation and choice.

The collaborative marking model of a sample of 12 candidates was well received by all centres and they gave positive feedback. This highlights the benefits to centres of this approach to assessment. Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities and a wide range of marks were accessed, giving a clear indication that national standards are mainly understood.

Choreography

Visiting assessors marked a range of both solo and group choreographies this year. It was evident during 2023 visiting assessment that many candidates found it challenging to present choreographies that demonstrate originality and creativity to communicate the intentions of the piece. Many candidates used technical dance steps that had 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 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 choreography reviews prior to the assessment event, providing more time for professional dialogue between the visiting assessor and the centre's assessor. Centre marks should be clearly filled in on the marking sheets for the visiting assessor. This assessment process was well received by all centres and found to be beneficial to the smooth running of the day. Many visiting assessors advised that centres clearly understand the requirements of the review and many candidates were able to access the top band of marks for this component part.

Performance

Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities, and a wide range of marks was accessed.

Most centres were able to meet the demands of performance through suitably choreographed dances that were appropriately challenging and well received by candidates. In some centres, the solos presented for the performance component lacked technical challenge for Higher level, and the choreography did not allow candidates to demonstrate dynamic contrast within the solo. Sometimes the choreography included too many stylised movements, and often it did not meet the requirements as candidates would not start at the beginning of the song or would spend 20 to 30 seconds performing simple movements.

Resources available on the SQA Understanding Standards secure site are beneficial to ensure centres are creating solos of the appropriate standard for this level.

The performance component performed largely as expected, with marks being slightly higher than previous years.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Section 1

Responses in section 1 of the question paper were stronger than responses in section 2. In section 1, candidates made better use of the command words. Section 2 responses did not always explicitly answer the questions asked.

Question 1: This question was identified as accessible content; however the command word 'evaluate' has been challenging in previous years.

In this question, many candidates demonstrated good use of the command word. Most candidates were able to access some marks due to their use of evaluative language. It was felt by the markers that an 'evaluate' question was an effective way to start the question paper, because the requirements of the command word were clear in the candidate's mind, and therefore they made good use of evaluative language.

Candidates did not perform as well in the section 2 'evaluate' question — they answered this question as an 'explain' question, with no use of evaluative language, and the marks reflect this.

Question 5: This question had not been previously included, but as it is mandatory content it was created as a 4-mark question, to allow all candidates access. The wording of the question allowed candidates to answer about either a choreographer or a company. Many candidates answered about Bob Fosse and, while some had excellent in-depth knowledge of his contributions and influence on jazz dance, other candidates had very limited knowledge and were unable to access the higher mark bands. Many candidates linked their knowledge of the choreographer or company back to the impact that their contributions had on the style of dance and this allowed them to access the full range of marks. However, others answered the question as a 'describe' question, and did not link the information to the impact on the dance style. Most candidates were able to access some marks for this question.

Section 2

Candidates performed better in this section of the paper depending on the piece that they had studied. The main pieces that candidates had studied that markers felt allowed them to access the full range of marks were:

- ◆ Swansong
- ◆ Revelations
- ◆ Ghost Dances

These pieces have strong narratives running through them, as well as a wealth of movement material, choreographic principles, theatre arts and teaching resources to support the delivery. There are many other professional dance pieces that have similar attributes to

those named above that could provide the same wealth of information for candidates to study.

Question 6: This question performed well, and candidates who knew the choreographer thoroughly accessed higher marks. Most candidates did only talk about one section and because it only asked about one section it encouraged candidates to write in more depth within their response. Markers commented that this was a good question.

Practical activity

Choreography

Centres presented candidates with a range of abilities and a wide range of marks was accessed. There was clear evidence that some centres had worked hard to help candidates gain the skills to be more creative and informed in their use of original movement; especially when they had progressed through National 5 before embarking on Higher.

In some centres, it was clear that candidates had participated in a range of choreographic workshops that helped to develop their knowledge and understanding of choreographic principles. Candidates achieving the top bands for the movement in their choreography had a clear knowledge of their theme and had spent time creating and developing a motif which embodied their theme and conveyed their intentions.

Many candidates demonstrated excellent creativity in their choice of music and sound to enhance their choreographic intentions. Some candidates had clearly spent a lot of time selecting and editing spoken word, and found sound and music to accompany their work. This clearly enhanced their choreography and helped the candidates to distinguish between the different sections within their chosen choreographic structure.

Some candidates are making excellent use of complex choreographic structures, motif and motif development and complex choreographic devices to help show their intentions for their choreography.

Some candidates were very creative when applying two chosen theatre arts to enhance the mood or atmosphere of their choreography and convey their choreographic intentions. Candidates achieved full marks for this element through creative use of resources such as costume and theatrical make-up or by using props or set.

Choreography review

Most candidates produced a written report and some were supplemented with a mood or stimulus board. It was clear that when a positive learning journey was experienced, discussion and reflection during the choreography review was meaningful.

Some candidates were able to articulate their creative ideas in a concise and organised manner.

Tasks 1c, 2a and 2b were generally answered well. In task 1c, candidates who described a complex structure and clearly and, in some detail, explained how their choice related to their choreographic intentions accessed full marks. A mere description of each section did not allow candidates to access the upper bands. In tasks 2a and 2b, candidates were confident

describing their choice of music and specific theatre arts and explaining their relationship to the intentions of their choreography.

Performance

There was evidence that tutor-choreographed dances provided greater depth and challenge, allowing candidates to access the full range of marks. There was a wide variety in the quality of the choreography of the solo performances. Some centres are presenting candidates who are well prepared and well beyond the standard for Higher Dance. Some centres are creating excellent choreography for candidates, which is helping them to access higher marks.

There was evidence that many centres had taken time to ensure the required technique (the foundations of performance) were put in place before focus was given to personal performance. This resulted in candidates being able to concentrate on the performance quality of their movement, as they were equipped with the required technical skills for Higher Dance.

It was evident that a number of centres had worked hard to develop and improve candidates' performance quality. This ensured that candidates were able to access the full range of marks.

The majority of candidates were well prepared for their chosen solo assessment and were able to concentrate and focus, ensuring they produced the best performance possible. Jazz, contemporary and commercial were the most common styles of dance presented at Higher level, although it is also commendable that centres are using a wider range of styles to ensure that candidates are demonstrating the most appropriate style for their learning.

There is still a range in levels of presentations, and this is largely dependent on the skills and experience of the presenting centre. However, presentations and skills are improving each year.

Areas that candidates found demanding:

Question paper

Section 1

While some candidates are getting better at identifying the command word and applying their knowledge to answering the question, many candidates are still finding it very challenging to identify either the command word or provide in-depth answers to demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of specific areas. Section 1 of the question paper also highlighted that many candidates had a limited knowledge in relation to technical skills and the requirement for these skills. There was also a lack of linking the knowledge and understanding gained through practical technique classes to the written element of the course. Candidates who appear to have a greater knowledge of dance technique are better prepared for this section of the question paper.

Question 2: Due to the selection of technical skills, this question had been identified as challenging content. The 'A' candidates would be able to access the higher marks.

Most candidates did not have a good understanding of the technical skills — turn out and parallel. Through many of the candidate responses there was a lack of understanding of the requirement of either position, and many of the marks allocated within this question were limited or straightforward. The candidates with a good knowledge and understanding of dance technique demonstrated excellent understanding of the anatomical requirements of turn out and parallel and their use through one of their solo performances.

Question 3: The content in this question is mandatory for the course. However, this was the first time that it was assessed within the question paper, therefore within the marking instructions it was split into two sets of 3 marks to allow candidates to access marks for each style. Candidates were able to discuss their spatial awareness for both styles and more marks were allocated for this than for in-depth responses. Some candidates answered this question very well, referring to their use of personal and general space, as well as their efficiency of moving between levels. However, many candidates referred to general space only and talked about their spatial awareness in group dances rather than in their solo performance. Marks were only awarded when candidates referred to solo dance performances.

Question 4: This question highlighted that many candidates had a good understanding of the command word ‘compare’, which helped them to answer this question. However, some candidates were confused about what a model performer was. Instead of comparing their performance skills in one chosen dance style to that of a model performer, they compared their own performance skills in one dance style to those in another dance style.

Section 2

Some centres are still not studying a dance work in its entirety, which limits the candidates’ ability to respond in depth to the questions within the paper. Again, there were some centres that had studied pieces that did not meet the requirements for the course.

In this section of the question paper, candidates demonstrated an inability to align their knowledge with what the question asked; therefore, the marks were not accessed. More practice and completing extended assessments could help candidates to prepare for this part of the question paper.

Question 7: This was the poorest performing question in the question paper, as many candidates did not use evaluative language and often answered it as an ‘explain’ question. They often had the required knowledge of levels and proximity and included a lot of detail within their response; however they did not apply that knowledge to the command word, therefore they were unable to access the marks. Some candidates made a general statement at the start or at the end of the question that allowed them to access limited marks.

Question 8: This had been identified as a challenging question, as candidates have struggled with ‘analyse’ questions previously, and knowledge of choreographic devices during visiting assessment is often limited within their own work. However, the question did not ask for complex devices, therefore candidates should have been able to access marks through this question if they were confident in their knowledge of the chosen professional work.

Candidates struggled with the analysis in this question and many responses explained the use of the devices but lacked any relationship to the intentions of the choreography. The structure of the answers to this question was weak and many candidates wrote as much information as they could on the topic without applying it to answering the question. It was apparent that many candidates find 'analyse' questions challenging and do not know how to analyse. They rarely related their answers back to the choreographer's intentions. In many instances candidates would provide a basic explanation, for example that unison was good at showing teamwork, without relating to the specific way the choreographer used the device or the overall intentions in relation to the theme.

Practical activity

Choreography review

From the visiting assessor reports and at marking review, it was evident that many centres are performing better than in previous years with the choreography review. This could be due to the Understanding Standards webinar, led by the principal assessor and deputy principal assessor, which focused on the command words, the question paper and the review. However, there are also many centres where teachers and lecturers are still not familiar with the marking criteria. Candidates are missing out vital information within their responses and they are unable to access the full range of marks. This is particularly evident in tasks 1a, 1b and 3, which continue to be the poorest answered questions, with many candidates scoring very low marks for these elements.

In task 1a, candidates were not able to access the top mark bands because they were missing areas of the criteria. There is a lack of understanding of what motif development is. Knowledge of motif and motif development is impacting on candidates' marks in the choreographic review, practical choreography and the question paper. Without this, they are unable to apply the knowledge in both practical and theoretical contexts.

Task 1b required candidates to use a third piece of research to influence and support their choice of spatial elements. More clarity and detail are needed when candidates are describing the relationship between their choices, their research and the intentions of their choreography.

When asking candidates to use a third source of research for task 1b, we encouraged centres, through the webinar as well as last year's course report, to use a professional choreography, even if this is the piece the candidates are studying for the question paper. This allows them to understand how to make the links between what they watch and what they do within their own choreographies. Many centres are now doing this; however, candidates are struggling to make links between the way in which the professional used spatial elements and how they have taken inspiration from this to help them show the intentions of their own choreography. Therefore, they are still not accessing the full range of marks.

Task 3 required candidates to evaluate a choreographic skill and the impact this has on the finished dance. While most candidates can provide ideas and information about one choreographic skill, they are not always justifying it with at least two specific examples. Many candidates are not providing clear evaluation linking the skill identified and the impact this has on the finished choreography. The evaluations within the review were extremely poor in

many cases. Many candidates seemed to use their National 5 evaluation, which follows a different format and does not allow them to access any marks. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use evaluative language. This will also help them with the question paper.

In Higher Dance, choreographic skills are skills that a choreographer has and can develop to help them throughout the process of creating their own choreography. These skills include leadership, creativity, time management, communication and organisation. These are the types of choreographic skills that candidates should be evaluating.

Choreography

There is a real mix between centres where there is exceptional choreography demonstrated and other centres where choreographies are very weak and technical steps are used as opposed to creative movement. The movement used within the choreography should be creative and help to show the intentions of the dance. A lot of candidates do not understand what a motif is, therefore their dance is lacking this element and they are unable to access higher mark bands.

At Higher level, choreography must have:

- ◆ an established motif, which should be 16 counts and embody the essence of the theme
- ◆ motif development, making use of a complex choreographic structure and complex devices

While candidates are using a choreographic structure and choreographic devices within their choreographies, many are opting to use a simple structure and simple devices, therefore they are not able to access any marks for structure and achieve a maximum of 3 marks out of 12 for choreographic devices. The marking criteria at Higher level requires the use of complex structure and devices. In some centres, all candidates are using the same choreographic structure and devices. It is good practice for teachers and lecturers to deliver workshops covering a wide range of complex structures and complex devices and then allowing candidates to select those that are most suited to portraying the theme and intentions for their own choreography.

Many candidates are opting to use a complex narrative within their choreography. This is one of the most challenging structures. If this is what candidates select to use, then there must be multiple strands to the story that they are portraying throughout their dance, rather than one single strand that would align with a simple narrative.

Focusing on the creative journey and the development of movements, devices, spatial elements, and structure throughout the year is key to providing the foundations for creating original movements that reflect the choreographic intentions.

Choreographies were lacking theatre arts. For Higher Dance, candidates must creatively apply two theatre arts to enhance the choreographic intentions. There are a lot of examples on Understanding Standards that highlight theatre arts being used without relying on lighting or any sort of budget for costumes or set, so a lack of facilities should not disadvantage candidates. When candidates are creative with their choices, this can lead to a higher quality of outcome.

Performance

In some centres, the tutor-choreographed technical solos presented for examination had limited technical content and the style-specific steps lacked challenge and breadth. It is vital that candidates have the opportunity to demonstrate their technical skills, as appropriate to the dance style, to reach the national standards for Higher Dance. On some occasions, while the music for the solo is long enough, the candidate spends much of the time waiting for the introduction or they do poses throughout the dance. They do not do any elevated movements to show power in the legs, or kicks to show flexibility and the dance does not challenge their stamina. This masks the candidate's ability and does not allow them to show their full range of technique and performance.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

It is vital that teachers and lecturers prepare candidates for the question paper by encouraging appropriate use of dance terminology. This will ensure that candidates understand the questions and can apply their knowledge.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates understand the command words and practise answering questions where they are required to interpret the command words and apply their knowledge appropriately. Teachers and lecturers should cover exam technique. They should refer back to the question with summative statements to keep responses focused and on task.

Section 1

It was evident in the 2023 paper that candidates are getting better at identifying and applying their knowledge to answer questions using the command word. It is vital that centres encourage appropriate use of dance terminology. This will ensure that candidates understand the demand of questions and help them to articulate their knowledge. Teachers and lecturers should use dance terminology throughout practical technique classes. Candidates should be aware of the contribution technical and performance skills have on their overall performance. Candidates should analyse their own performance, so that they can identify their own strengths and areas for development. Links should be made between practical technical and performance skills and application of this knowledge to the question paper.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage evaluation skills during practical and classroom sessions. This will help candidates to develop evaluative language. They should be able to evaluate their technical and performance skills in relation to self, peers and model performers.

Section 2

It is important that centres select an appropriate professional choreography to study for section 2 and study it in its entirety. Candidates need to study and evaluate the use of theme, structure, devices, space, and theatre arts. Some candidates could not access the full range of marks because the professional work selected did not have enough choreographic content for candidates to discuss.

For candidates to meet the requirements of the question paper, the selected choreography must be the work of an influential choreographer and include:

- ◆ an appropriate theme and/or stimulus
- ◆ motif and selected movements
- ◆ spatial elements
- ◆ structure
- ◆ motif development and choreographic devices
- ◆ music and/or sound
- ◆ theatre arts, including lighting, set, props, theatrical make-up, and costume

As a minimum requirement, the professional choreography must include lighting and costume. The Higher Dance Course Support Notes (appendix 1 of the course specification) contains further advice and guidance on appropriate professional choreographies.

Practical activity

Choreography

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that the foundations for developing creative movement are in place before allowing candidates to embark on choreography.

Teachers and lecturers should spend time establishing what an initial motif is and how its development is key to the theme or stimulus. Understanding that a motif is more than a single movement, and how to fully utilise and develop it within their work, would also be beneficial for candidates.

Teachers and lecturers should focus on using a complex structure and complex devices appropriate to a theme for three or more people. They should discourage long, drawn-out storytelling and concentrate on developing original movement with a clear focus.

Choreography and improvisation workshops help candidates to gain the skills and confidence required before starting the choreographic process. This allows them to apply creativity to develop original movement to create and develop their motif and use a complex structure and complex devices. We strongly recommend that all centres adopt this approach, as candidates must be guided through the process and gain knowledge and understanding of all the choreographic principles before embarking on their own choreography journey. In some centres, all candidates are using the same structure and choreographic devices throughout their choreographies.

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

Choreography review

Centres 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, the assessor can see

that the candidate has an understanding of the area to be discussed from the choreography produced, but cannot allocate marks because they have not discussed it in their final review.

For task 1b, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use a professional piece of choreography to inspire their use of spatial elements. They should explain why a professional choreographer has used a particular spatial element with their own work, to explain the influence that the professional work had on their own choreography.

For task 3, teachers and lecturers should work with candidates to identify one choreographic skill and give detailed ideas and information about that skill. Candidates should support their knowledge and understanding of the skill with at least two specific examples from their choreographic experiences. They must then provide clear evaluation linking their chosen skill with the impact that this had on their finished choreography. This is an area in which many candidates are not accessing marks.

Performance

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates have a strong technical foundation to build upon before they start learning set dances.

Candidates should spend time developing a strong performance quality, appropriate to the chosen dance styles. Teachers and lecturers should consider the best way to support this development; it should not be the sole responsibility of the candidate.

To control anxiety for the assessment, some candidates would benefit from more opportunities to perform their solo dances before the final assessment day. This would also help with their spatial awareness within the assessment environment.

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](#).