



Course report 2025

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

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

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 423

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 417

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	109	26.1	26.1	70
B	123	29.5	55.6	60
C	103	24.7	80.3	50
D	52	12.5	92.8	40
No award	30	7.2	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- 'most' means greater than or equal to 70%
- 'many' means 50% to 69%
- 'some' means 25% to 49%
- 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Feedback from markers and visiting assessors, along with analysis of all available data, indicates that overall, the course assessment performed as expected. Average marks have increased for both the question paper and the practical activity — both the choreography and the choreography review — while the average mark for the performance component has remained consistent.

Question paper

Feedback from markers indicated that the question paper was accessible to candidates. While some questions presented a high level of challenge, many candidates accessed marks when they attempted to answer all questions.

The 2-mark questions however did not yield the expected level of performance. Although the content of these questions was accessible, candidates appeared to adjust the depth and clarity of their responses based on the lower mark allocation. As a result, responses were often limited and more closely aligned with National 5 level expectations. This affected candidates' ability to achieve marks, as the responses did not meet the standard required for a straightforward answer at this level.

Practical activity

The practical activity component performed in line with expectations, with the average mark showing a slight increase compared to previous years.

Most candidates presented group choreographies for assessment. However, there has been a gradual increase in the number of solo choreographies being submitted each year. Centres effectively used both assessment options and often combined solo and group choreographies in the same centre.

Analysis of assessment data, alongside feedback from visiting assessors, indicated that the quality of choreography reviews has improved compared to previous years.

While the average mark for this component continues to rise, some candidates still present choreographies that lack creativity, as well as choreography reviews that fall below the standard expected at Higher level. A range of resources are available on the [Understanding Standards](#) website to support the effective delivery of both elements of this component.

Performance

The performance component met expectations, with the average mark remaining consistent with the previous year. Feedback from visiting assessors, along with analysis of the available data, indicates that most candidates performed solos in contemporary, jazz, or commercial styles. Some centres also presented a wide range of styles, including ballet, Irish, tap, hip hop, and lyrical.

Many centres successfully met the demands of the performance component by providing suitably choreographed dances that were appropriately challenging and effectively showcased candidates' technical and expressive abilities. However, in some centres, solos continued to lack the level of technical difficulty required at Higher level. In such cases, the choreography did not adequately allow candidates to demonstrate the dynamic contrast expected in a solo performance.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Many candidates gained marks across all areas of the question paper compared to previous years. Markers observed that candidates are becoming more familiar with the command words and, in many cases, were better prepared to apply their knowledge to the questions using the correct terminology. This is a positive development, indicating that candidates are engaging more thoughtfully with the material.

Another positive trend is the reduction in the number of 'no response' answers across the question paper, which suggests that candidates are becoming more confident in their ability to respond.

However, it was clear that some candidates struggled, often writing everything they knew about a topic without fully addressing the specific question being asked. This led to incomplete or irrelevant responses that did not directly answer the question. This issue was particularly evident in section 2 of the paper, where candidates struggled more than in section 1. The marking team identified that the weaker performance in section 2 could be attributed to a lack of deep understanding of the work studied, especially in terms of mood, atmosphere, and intentions and how the choreography contributes to these elements. Candidates often struggled to articulate how the choreographic principles contributed to the work's themes and intentions, which further impacted their ability to engage with the questions at the required depth.

Most centres are now focusing on full professional choreographies, which is a positive development. The main works being studied include *Swansong*, *Ghost Dances*, and *Shadows* by Christopher Bruce, *Revelations* by Alvin Ailey, *Linha Curva* by Itzik Galili, *Broken* by Kevin Finan, and *Young Men* by Ivan Perez. While it is encouraging to see centres working with complete, established works, a recurring

issue is that candidates do not always demonstrate a clear understanding of the themes and intentions of these pieces. Some candidates gave statements about the piece but lacked the ability to explain them with sufficient depth and clarity, preventing them from fully conveying their understanding and accessing the marks. This remains the reason for the weaker performance in this section of the paper.

This lack of depth was particularly evident in responses to the 2-mark questions. Although these were perceived as more accessible for 'C' level candidates, many candidates struggled to achieve any marks. It appears that the lower mark allocation led candidates to underestimate the level of detail required, resulting in underdeveloped answers often more reflective of National 5 standard. These questions — of which there were two in the paper — proved challenging for candidates to gain full marks. Notably, some of the same candidates performed better on the 4 and 6-mark questions, with many candidates providing a partial or limited response. In contrast, the 2-mark questions required concise but sufficiently detailed answers to secure marks, with even a straightforward response needing clarity and accuracy to achieve at least 1 mark.

Like last year, responses in section 1 were generally stronger than those in section 2. In section 1, candidates demonstrated a more effective use of command words, whereas in section 2, many struggled to apply their knowledge in line with the demands of the question. Instead of responding directly to what was being asked, candidates often presented a broad range of information that lacked focus. This suggests a continued difficulty in aligning subject knowledge with the specific requirements of the command words, which limited access to marks. Overall performance in section 2 highlighted gaps in both the understanding of command words and in the work that they had studied to respond effectively to these types of questions in the examination.

Section 1

Question 1: Most candidates were able to access at least 1 mark for a limited response to this question. However, many demonstrated only a superficial understanding of the impact of a cool down in relation to safe dance practice, with

responses lacking the depth of explanation required to achieve higher marks. In contrast, some candidates were able to draw on their class-based knowledge to provide detailed responses that reflected a higher level of understanding, often supported by relevant examples.

Question 2: Candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the command word and consistently applied evaluative language throughout their responses. They made informed judgements about their control and/or balance, supporting these with relevant examples drawn from each of their solo performances. Some candidates provided more detailed responses and offered stronger, more specific examples to support their evaluations. While some candidates gave more basic responses, they still accessed marks by offering limited or straightforward evaluations, effectively addressing the command word.

Question 2(b): Initially this question appeared challenging as the command word was 'discuss'. However, it performed well overall, with most candidates accessing marks. Candidates who provided straightforward and limited responses, lacking depth in their discussion, were typically awarded 1 to 2 marks. In contrast, some candidates produced more detailed responses, allowing them to access the higher mark bands. There was variation in the approaches taken to development methods — some candidates applied dance-specific strategies, while others referred to more general fitness-related methods.

Question 3: Responses to this question highlighted a better understanding of what a model performer was than in previous years and showed the candidate's ability to make comparisons. In many cases, candidates described their own performance and then used linking words such as 'similarly' to introduce a discussion of a completely unrelated aspect of the model performer's performance. This approach lacked direct comparison and, as a result, limited candidates' ability to access marks because they were not showing a comparison of quality and dynamics between the model performer and their own performance. A more structured comparison would have demonstrated a clearer understanding of how to effectively relate aspects of their own performance to that of a model performer.

Additionally, in response to this question, candidates frequently referenced the terms 'quality' and 'dynamics', yet often failed to demonstrate a secure understanding of these concepts. Many responses focused solely on the speed of movement, rather than incorporating appropriate terminology associated with dynamics, such as 'sharp', 'sudden', 'frantic', 'erratic', or 'melting'. This suggested a limited grasp of what dynamics entail. Also, when referring to 'quality', some candidates simply stated that their performance was of 'good quality' without providing further explanation, which reflected a superficial level of understanding. In contrast, a few candidates addressed how movements were performed — using descriptions such as 'sustained control' or 'fluidity' — indicating a more developed understanding of performance skills.

'Quality' and 'dynamics' are performance skills that have featured in previous papers, and as such, they show knowledge and understanding that candidates are expected to be familiar with. However, many responses did not demonstrate appropriate vocabulary or depth in addressing these elements.

Question 4: This was the most challenging question in section 1. Candidates found it difficult to clearly explain how their chosen key characteristic had developed over time, from its origins to the present day. While some candidates provided a general description, many simply listed relevant knowledge or described the key characteristics of Fosse's style alongside associated social and cultural factors across different time periods. In most cases, references to how the key characteristic is evident in the present day were limited to brief statements, lacking meaningful development or analysis.

Frequently, candidates described the initial key characteristic from its origin and then stated, without further explanation, that it can still be seen today. These responses lacked detail on how or why the characteristic evolved, resulting in limited access to marks. In contrast, a few candidates explained the progression of the characteristic over time, linking its origins to its development and current application, demonstrating a more sophisticated understanding of the question requirements.

Section 2

Question 5(a): Most candidates described the mood and atmosphere but often their responses were too limited to access a mark for a straightforward description.

Question 5(b): Some candidates were writing about music and sound, which is not considered a theatre art in National 5 or Higher Dance, and so were not able to access marks.

Some candidates did not link the theatre art to mood and atmosphere; they linked it to intentions, so they did not answer the question and were unable to access marks.

Question 6(a): Most responses lacked the detail and clarity for candidates to access the marks for a straightforward response. Some candidates described levels or a spatial element, so they could not access the marks, as they are not choreographic devices.

Question 6(b): Some candidates did not show a clear understanding of the device and how it impacted on the intentions of the piece. Often responses were quite limited and short.

Question 7: This question was generally not well answered by candidates. While some were able to access 1 or 2 marks, very few achieved higher mark bands. Many candidates provided generalised responses, referring broadly to formations and directions without citing specific examples from the choreography they studied, which demonstrated a limited understanding of the material. Overall, responses indicated a lack of comprehension regarding what formations were and how they impacted on the piece; why different directions were used in the choreography; and the impact that it had on the intentions of the choreography. Additionally, many candidates did not employ evaluative language in their answers, which further restricted their ability to access marks for this question.

Practical activity

Choreography

From the visiting assessor's reports and the marking review, it is clear that there is a real mix between the exceptional choreography being presented by some candidates and other candidates who have very weak choreographies and use technical steps as opposed to creative movement. Markers reported that feedback from teachers and lecturers indicated some candidates are determined to maintain their own vision throughout their choreography which often impacts on the creativity and complexity of what is presented. This affects the mark they can be awarded. There is a lack of complex structures and devices being used. When complex devices are being used, they are being used in a simple way therefore gaining minimal marks.

There continues to be a lack of understanding of what a motif is and what motif development is. Choreographies are lacking theatre arts. This does not need to be elements such as lighting, as there are lots of examples on the [Understanding Standards](#) website that gain full marks for this element without using lighting or specialist equipment.

Choreography review

Choreography reviews were stronger this year, with many candidates accessing marks in the top band. From the marking review it is evident that most candidates performed better in this element of the course. However, there are still some reviews that were not able to access marks, as candidate responses were not in line with the command word or didn't include the required level of depth and clarity for a higher response.

Some candidates did not gain many marks in question 1(a) because they did not make clear links between two pieces of research, movement, motif and development, complex choreographic devices and the intentions of the choreography. It could help if candidates break this question down to ensure they are answering all required content within their response.

Performance

The average mark was higher than in previous years.

The main styles of dance that are being presented for the solo performance are jazz, contemporary and commercial. However, there are some schools, mainly private dance centres, that are presenting ballet, tap and Highland.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers must prepare candidates for the question paper by reinforcing appropriate use of dance terminology. This will ensure that candidates understand the questions and can apply their knowledge.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to spend time developing further understanding of the command words and practising questions where candidates interpret the command words and apply their knowledge appropriately. Candidates should practice referring to the question with summary statements to keep responses focused and on task.

Markers highlighted that teachers and lecturers could find it helpful when delivering dance history to look at the style currently and trace it backwards through time. They should make clear links between the key characteristics of the style including the style specific steps, music and/or sound, costume and/or attire. They should encourage candidates to research the development of the style and what has caused these changes. This would be an additional method to support the delivery of teaching this aspect of the course, and allows candidates to develop a greater knowledge and understanding of the impact the factors have had on the development of the style. Candidates found it challenging to make impact statements and show a clear understanding of the development of the key characteristics and how and why they changed over time from origin to present day. Using a more practical approach which is supported with theory lessons will hopefully help candidates develop a greater understanding and avoid rote learning facts.

In section 2 some candidates responses appeared to be rote learned responses, which meant they did not engage with the question asked and were unable to access marks. Candidates need a good understanding of the work and to watch it multiple times so that they can support their answers with detailed examples. This will help

candidates to develop a deeper understanding of the work, rather than making statements that are not supported.

Centres must choose an appropriate professional choreography to study for section 2 and study it in its entirety. While most centres are now studying a full professional choreography, there are still a few centres that are analysing inappropriate choreographies. Candidates must study a full professional choreography and not just a section of a full piece. The minimum requirements are highlighted in the [Higher Dance course specification](#). There are many professional companies that now make full length works available to view online and provide support packs to help with learning and teaching.

Candidates need to study the full work in detail and have a good knowledge and understanding of the work to allow them to access the questions in this section of the paper.

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 in their work, would also be helpful for candidates. At Higher level candidates should create a motif that is approximately 16 counts, and each movement is linked back to their research.

Candidates could then 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, and changing the size of the movements to make some movements bigger, while others are smaller as well

as adding in embellishment to some of the movements, could help to show confusion and that the dancer is becoming more anxious.

If candidates think about what their developed motifs are before creating their choreography, it helps them to think about what they want to show through each section. It also reminds them that the movements must link back to their theme and intentions and that their motif can help with this. Candidates are not limited to using the movements in their motif and they could have more than one motif. Candidates must use additional movements throughout the choreography; however, they should take care that these are linked to their theme and intentions and that they are not creating a technical piece of dance similar to their solo performances.

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. Complex devices should be chosen to meet the requirements of their theme and continue to help candidates portray their theme and intentions.

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 co-ordinator must contact SQA to receive advice before the live assessment event.

Choreography review

Teachers and lecturers 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 understands the area to be discussed from the choreography produced but cannot give marks because candidates did not discuss it in their final review.

For task 1b, teachers and lecturers could encourage candidates to use a professional piece of choreography to inspire their use of spatial elements. Candidates need to explain why a professional choreographer has used a particular spatial element in their own work to show their intentions, and then make links between this and how it has influenced them to use the same spatial element in their own choreography in a similar way. This is not the only way that this task can be completed, it is just one way that we think can be effective and help candidates to create links between the use of space and the intentions that are portrayed through a particular use of a specific spatial element.

For task 3, teachers and lecturers should work with candidates to identify one choreographic skill that has impacted on their final piece of choreography and candidates should provide 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.

There are examples of choreography reviews online on the [Understanding Standards](#) website and teachers and lecturers need to spend time analysing these and breaking them down to understand the requirements.

Candidates must include all of the marking criteria in their review to access the top mark bands. Candidates must spend time particularly on question 1(a) to ensure there is a clear link between two pieces of research, movement, motif and

development, complex choreographic devices and the intentions of the choreography. Teachers and lecturers could scaffold the questions to help candidates with this.

Performance

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates have a strong technical foundation to build upon before they start learning the solo dances that they will perform in the assessment. Teaching the solo early in the course and not working on developing the technique through technique classes disadvantages candidates. In some centres all candidates are demonstrating the same technical inaccuracies. Regular technique classes throughout the year help to develop skills and techniques before they learn a solo and develop inaccurate habits.

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 to an audience in the assessment space before the final assessment day. This would also help with their spatial awareness in the assessment environment.

Although more candidates are moving from National 5 Dance to Higher Dance, many start Higher without any prior experience in the subject. Some candidates coming through National 5 have little or no dance background before beginning the course. When they reach Higher, they're expected to learn a second dance style, which often becomes their weaker area. This is reflected in their solo performances, where they tend to score higher in one style but lower in the other, often resulting in overall marks below the halfway point.

Teachers and lecturers could introduce two dance styles earlier, for example giving candidates the chance to learn two styles and then select one style for their National 5 exam. This might ease the pressure of having to learn a completely new style when they reach Higher.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

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