



# **Graded exams in Music, Dance & Drama and the educational regulatory landscape in the UK**

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## Section 1: Executive Summary

This is a revised and updated version of the report which was drafted to inform the development of the Sector Qualifications Strategy for Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) in 2008. The report covers graded exams at levels 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the Qualifications and Credit Framework which are regulated by Ofqual in England and Northern Ireland and the Welsh Government in Wales.

This version of the report differs from the original and reflects the vastly different nature of the educational and regulatory landscape of 2014. In 2008 Sector Skills Councils were in the process of developing Sector Qualification Strategies which were seen as important in determining the numbers and types of qualifications that were available in a particular sector. In the cultural industries there were a large number and range of qualifications which were seen as needing "rationalisation" implying that numbers should be reduced in order to make the offer easier for learners to navigate. There was also a pressure on Sector Skills Councils to describe provision in terms of "sector" and "employers". Graded exams, in order to have their place in the Sector Qualification Strategy, were required to be described in these terms.

Whilst a great deal of research was undertaken in 2008 to gain the views of employers and the "sector" about the use of graded exams in employment, for the most part the findings were relatively anecdotal. This was partly because in the performing arts industry the concept of "employers", as used in other sectors, could not be applied in a similar manner given the limited number of large organisations with sets of defined occupations and job roles. For the most part, those employed in the performing arts work in a freelance capacity or are employed within small or medium-sized companies. Also, graded exams are taken by a large number of disparate people, which makes it very difficult to chart progress and other factors in absolute terms. The nature of performance in the arts means that most employees are recruited via audition, therefore the usefulness of their qualifications was seen as a less important factor in recruitment than their ability to deliver the employer's requirements in a live situation. However, most respondents to the research agreed that the qualifications were useful in their career development.

The qualifications and training landscape has also shifted significantly in recent years, with Sector Skills Councils playing a different role in concentrating only on core occupations rather than trying to encompass the offer across the whole sector. Also, CCS approval is no longer a requirement for Ofqual recognition of graded exams.

This report will therefore follow the original report only in documenting the background and history of these qualifications from the time that the awarding organisations first approached the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (the predecessor organisation to Ofqual)<sup>1</sup> to include them on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and, subsequently, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

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<sup>1</sup> Ofqual, the Office of Qualifications and Exams Regulation, came into being as a consequence of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, which set out the requirements for a regulatory body that was independent of the Department for Education. The regulatory work of QCA was moved to Ofqual, and the curriculum development work of QCA was taken over by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), which is now itself defunct.

## Section 2: Introduction

Graded exams have been in existence, in one form or another, for over 150 years. Over the decades, millions of candidates throughout the world have taken graded exams in music, dance, speech and drama. In the UK, the qualifications attract over half a million candidates each year and are rivalled in candidate entry numbers only by GCSEs and A levels.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, for young people and adults these qualifications are almost entirely elective: the candidate, or their parents, will choose to undertake graded exams and will normally fund themselves. Most people in the UK will have either taken a graded exam or will know someone who has.

Some of the awarding organisations offering these exams are extremely well known and have maintained a high number of candidates, even during the recent recession, through the continued involvement of teachers, parents, other adults and young people in selecting these qualifications and viewing them as a mark of quality. Indeed, they are often regarded as setting a 'gold standard' in terms of recognised benchmarks.

This report provides updated information showing the current position of graded exams in the UK education system. In 2008, when the original report was written, the educational and sector landscapes were very different. Graded exams were established within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and awarding organisations had a well-established working relationship with the regulatory bodies. The awarding organisations were also making the most of government initiatives of the time: their qualification results were included in school performance tables and contributed to the attainment of national qualifications such as the 14-19 Diploma.

Since 2008 there has been a period of rapid policy change, much of it due to a change of government in 2010, resulting in a significant shift in both the landscape of the sector and the educational context. A new regulatory body, Ofqual, was established in 2010 and since then has itself undergone a period of significant development with a new location and a large number of new staff. This, along with substantial changes being made to GCSEs and A levels by the present government, has resulted in a period of uncertainty for awarding organisations, as Ofqual has sought to find a way of regulating that is consistent, proportionate and cost effective.

Added to this landscape was a recession which affected all parts of the country and in particular the "middle" classes. The government also brought in sweeping funding cuts to the arts which has led to a number of arts organisations scaling back their operations, changing focus or, in some cases, ceasing to exist.

Significantly, the position of graded exams within the performing arts sector has remained largely unchanged and the qualifications have altered little despite a rapidly changing regulatory and educational landscape.

The body of this report focuses on the factual context for graded exams and the author has tried, as far as possible, to give a selective, evidence-based report which provides information about the past and current picture of graded exams and their relationship with the educational and regulatory landscape in the UK.

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<sup>2</sup> Section 3.9 of this report provides a more detailed analysis and figures to support this statement.

The report also provides detailed information about the background, development and current status of graded exams including the history, structure and nature of these qualifications and their cultural significance over the last half century.

The report considers graded exams in music, dance, speech and drama, from grades 1-8 and includes vocational graded exams where they are offered in dance and music. The report also focuses on those organisations that award graded exams regulated by Ofqual but may also refer to other qualifications as appropriate.

## Section 3: What are graded exams?

### 3.1 The origins and development of graded exams

Graded exams were originally developed as a means of providing a vehicle for the cultural development of young people by encouraging them to study a discipline in the arts. Students would progress from learning the most basic functions within their chosen subject to practising at a high technical level. A number of music, dance, speech and drama organisations were founded during the late nineteenth century to formalise these study programmes by providing exams, and a number of these were linked closely to well-known conservatoires, teaching organisations or vocational schools. Many of the organisations date back over the last century with LAMDA and Trinity College London amongst the longest running providers, offering graded exams since the 1870s.

The majority of graded exams are taken by candidates who are privately funded either by themselves or their parents - even though the qualifications researched as part of this report are eligible for funding through public measures. This means that candidates have selected their chosen discipline and have invested in their studies independently of government policy and initiatives.

Graded exams have also been closely linked with the school curriculum for a number of years, particularly with the National Curriculum programme of study for music, the programme of study for physical education, which includes dance, and the programme of study for English which includes speech and drama. Peripatetic teaching by private teachers (particularly in music) complements teaching and learning throughout the primary and secondary curriculum where this option is available in schools.

### 3.2 The graded exams model

Graded exams are based on a model of “progressive mastery”. This means that students develop and demonstrate skills in a specific discipline which increase in technical difficulty and complexity as they progress up the levels. Once the skills at one level have been mastered, the student moves on to the next. Students are tested when ready throughout the year and so they can take the amount of time that is appropriate for them to master one stage before progressing to the next.

Graded exams are usually offered as a suite of 8 qualifications, with other assessments offered below and above these levels. They map to the QCF level descriptors as follows:

**Table 1 – the equivalence of graded exams to QCF levels**

QCF level	Graded exams levels
1	Grade 1 Grade 2 Grade 3
2	Grade 4 Grade 5
3	Grade 6 Grade 7 Grade 8

### **3.3 Applications of the graded exams model**

The range of approaches to defining content, as adopted by awarding organisations, varies from discipline to discipline, with music and dance syllabuses tending to be more defined than speech and drama. However, even within disciplines there is diversity. For example, speech and drama candidates can opt for a narrowly defined range of texts or for a more flexible approach with own choice and devised performance options.

The graded exams model has been used in other subject areas over the years, most notably in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) as offered by Trinity College London since the 1930s.

In 2003, a similar approach was adopted by the National Languages Strategy, resulting in the ASSET language qualifications offered by OCR. Unfortunately, OCR withdrew this provision in November 2013. Qualifications in Peer Mentoring and Sex Education (PEARL), developed by The Manchester College and the Graded Qualifications Alliance, are still regulated by Ofqual.

### **3.4 Graded exams in music**

Graded exams in music are perhaps the best known graded qualifications as they are taken by very large numbers of candidates each year. Many people will have encountered music exams at some time, either through their own experience of lessons or through someone they know.

Four awarding organisations have offered graded exams in music for a number of years, firstly in the NQF and then in the QCF. They are:

- The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)
- Trinity College London (TCL)
- Rockscool Ltd (RSL)
- London College of Music (LCM) - recognised as the University of West London (UWL)

### **3.5 Graded exams in dance**

Dance is a popular qualification, particularly for younger female candidates. The awarding organisations listed below offer a wide range of qualifications in different disciplines, although the main dance styles are ballet, tap, jazz and modern dance. As with music, some of these organisations have been offering regulated qualifications for a number of years, firstly in the NQF and now in the QCF. The Ofqual recognised awarding organisations in dance are:

- British Ballet Organization (BBO)
- Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL) - incorporating British Theatre Dance Association (BTDA)
- Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)
- International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA)
- Rockscool Ltd - working in partnership with the Spanish Dance Society (SDS), the Russian Ballet Society (RBS), the Professional Teachers of Dancing (PTD) and the United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)
- Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)
- Trinity College London (TCL)

Vocational graded exams in dance are also offered at levels 2, 3 and 4 in the QCF. The purpose of these qualifications is to provide a more focused route for those candidates wishing to progress to further vocational training.

The Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) works closely with the awarding organisations in dance and has been instrumental in guiding them, firstly through approval by QCA and then through the QCF supplementary recognition process in 2009. All the awarding organisations regulated by Ofqual are also validated by the CDET along with a number of organisations who are not yet Ofqual recognised such as the National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD).

### **3.6 Graded exams in speech and drama**

Graded exams in speech and drama have perhaps the widest variety of applications, including communication skills, musical theatre, performance arts, acting, public speaking, as well as verse and prose reading. The awarding organisations are:

- English Speaking Board (ESB)
- London College of Music (LCM)
- London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA)
- New Era Academy (NEA)
- Trinity College London (TCL)

### **3.7 The different uses of graded exams**

It is tempting to group all the awarding organisations above together; however, they operate in very different ways. For example, by attracting different types of students through the disciplines offered; the structure of qualifications; and the support and resources they provide. Furthermore, these organisations offer a wide spectrum of subject disciplines, from very traditional syllabuses to a variety of diverse cultural and contemporary disciplines.

Although graded exams are derived from an overarching model of assessment - that of “progressive mastery” - the range of awarding organisations that offer the qualifications, the variety of disciplines in which the qualifications are offered and the different levels at which candidates can access the qualifications means that candidates will take them for a wide variety of different reasons. However, their uses can be placed broadly into four categories, with some disciplines spanning more than one category, as follows.

#### **3.7.1 Leisure/hobby activities**

As mentioned above, large numbers of candidates of all ages take graded exams. A number of these candidates will be undertaking these simply for their own interest, to broaden their knowledge, skills and understanding, and to enhance and support their personal development, in particular in aspects of popular dance and music. However, that is not to say that the skills they gain cannot be used in other areas of their life. In particular, for young people, the learning is a significant aspect of curriculum enrichment and graded exams are an important activity outside of school or college. Adult learners are likely to take graded exams for very different reasons to children or young people, selecting appropriate qualifications to meet their leisure and lifelong learning needs.

### **3.7.2 Multicultural perspectives**

As well as providing a means of creative and cultural development through supporting appreciation of music, dance, speech and drama, there are cultural benefits to candidates. For example, the range of dance styles offered extends to Spanish and Indian genres, to name but two, and a wide range of non-western musical styles and instruments may also be explored through the qualifications offered by some awarding organisations.

Speech and drama qualifications also make a valuable contribution to the development of communication skills in English.

### **3.7.3 Personal and social development**

In music and dance, as well as developing technical skills and competence in a particular discipline, qualifications can also contribute to the development of a wide range of personal skills. The amount of self-initiated study required means that learners have to develop good organisational and problem-solving abilities whilst maintaining motivation and focus over time. Being assessed through their personal performance helps candidates to develop confidence and self-assurance, as well as honing both the mental and physical skills required in all performing arts.

In speech and drama qualifications, the range of personal skills that may be strengthened can be wide ranging, including not only motivation, confidence and self-esteem but also practical skills useful for interviews, giving presentations and similar activities. Group exams take on a particular importance when encouraging learners to participate in team-based activities, as these build confidence in those who would not respond well to an individual assessment. Group assessments are popular despite the fact that some are deemed unsuitable for Ofqual recognition (because they do not meet the criteria for individual assessment).

### **3.7.4 Technical competence**

Whilst the majority of candidates taking graded exams are at the lower levels (grade 3 and below), a small but significant number progress on to the higher and more demanding levels. Some will do this for personal interest but others will have a definite progression pathway in mind, such as securing UCAS points for university study, other higher education opportunities or audition. These candidates will be developing important skills such as technical competence, creativity, musicality, self-discipline and performance. A number of these candidates are likely to be younger learners, particularly in music and dance.

## **3.8 The international dimension**

All the awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual have a significant presence in countries other than the UK and for some qualifications candidates are entered in numerous countries around the world. Interestingly, one of the benefits perceived by those who take graded exams abroad is that approval by the qualifications' regulators in the UK is a mark of quality, guaranteeing a high level of assurance. For example, ABRSM conducted over 650,000 exams worldwide in 2012 (of which around half were taken in the UK and Ireland) with 641 examiners involved in assessing across 90 countries.<sup>3</sup> Trinity College London operates across 60 countries<sup>4</sup> and LAMDA 18 countries<sup>5</sup>. In dance, the RAD delivers exams across approximately 70 countries<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Source: ABRSM annual report 2012

<sup>4</sup> Source: Trinity College London website – [www.trinitycollege.com](http://www.trinitycollege.com)

<sup>5</sup> Source: LAMDA website – [www.lamda.org.uk](http://www.lamda.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> Source: RAD website – [www.rad.org.uk](http://www.rad.org.uk)

The numbers of international candidates who take graded exams annually varies between awarding organisations and depends on the range of countries in which they operate.

A unique selling point for these qualifications internationally is that the awarding organisations operate the same quality assurance process globally as in the UK. These organisations do not franchise out their operations overseas, so standardised examiners travel across the world to assess all candidates. Most of the awarding organisations have coordinators (or regional branches) in different parts of the world who act as a point of contact for a particular region for registrations, entries, and the organising of assessments.

### **3.9 Graded exams statistics**

As part of the research for the initial report in 2008, all awarding organisations were asked to provide the number of candidates entering grade 4 (equivalent to level 2 in the NQF and QCF) and above over the previous 3 years to give an indicative number of candidates in the UK who take graded exams to a higher level.

Generally speaking, most candidates entered at grades 1 to 3, with fewer at grades 6 to 8. Awarding organisations explained that young people often develop an interest in other subjects or wished to focus on GCSEs and A levels as their schooling progressed. However, many did return to graded exams in later life due to experiences in post-18 study, career purposes or leisure interests. The figures also showed a year-on-year increase in the numbers of candidates overall taking grades 4 to 8 until 2008. It is understood that the recent recession did impact on this trend with some organisations now reporting an upward swing, particularly from markets in the Far East.<sup>7</sup>

It is important to note that a key feature of the graded exams model is that candidates are tested when they are ready for assessment. This means that statistics might vary year on year as candidates decide to defer their entry to the next exam or simply not to undertake grades for a while. There may also be prerequisites in place which impact on progression. For example, at ABRSM there is a requirement for candidates to achieve Grade 5 Theory before moving further with their practical studies. This could delay entry to the next level and thus potentially introduce a bias into the statistical analyses.

The figures below are indicative for each discipline and grade and are an amalgamation of all the awarding organisations offering qualifications in that discipline. These are also totalled to give an indicative figure for entries in all disciplines.

#### **3.9.1 Music**

It is estimated that, at present, there are approximately 400,000 entries for graded exams in music annually across the UK and a further 410,000 worldwide. As a comparison, entries for GCSE and A levels in music for the June 2013 sitting totalled just over 55,000 candidates.<sup>8</sup>

#### **3.9.2 Dance**

The estimated number of regulated dance grade entries is currently around 149,000 in the UK with a further 144,000 entries worldwide. Dance organisations also offer a wide range of provision that is deemed unregulated as it does not meet Ofqual's definition of "qualification" (see Section 4.2 page 22). This totals 369,000 entries in the UK and 89,000 entries worldwide.

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<sup>7</sup> Source: ABRSM annual report 2012

<sup>8</sup> Source: Joint Council for Qualifications published GCSE and GCE results at [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk)

### 3.9.3 *Speech and drama*

It is estimated that, at present, there are approximately 90,000 entries for graded exams in performing arts annually across the UK and a further 85,000 worldwide. This is broadly similar to the just under 90,000 candidates recorded in the June 2013 sitting for Drama GCSE and Drama A level combined in the UK.

### 3.10 Candidate age ranges

There is no minimum or maximum age specified for entry to graded exams in music, speech and drama, although as with all regulated qualifications, they are offered according to the funding parameters specified by the Department for Education (i.e. 14-16, 16-19 and 19+). The age of learners tends to range from about 7 upwards, with instances of candidates in their 80s entering for music and dance. For initial or preliminary qualifications, which are broadly equivalent to Entry level in the QCF, candidates can be as young as 4 in some dance genres and music exams.

Naturally, different disciplines have an appropriate age range where aspects such as the candidate's physical or vocal development or health and safety issues need to be taken into account, and for this reason some dance exams stipulate minimum ages of entry. The table below shows an indicative average age for entry to each grade.

**Table 2 – average age of learners undertaking graded exams**

<b>Grade</b>	<b>Average age (indicative across all awarding organisations)</b>
1	9-12
2	10-13
3	11-14
4	12-15
5	13-16
6	13-16
7	15-18
8	15-18

The lower end of the age range tends to apply more for dance (in particular disciplines like ballet) with the average for music typically resting in the mid point of the age parameters identified above. This is a particularly important aspect when considering progression routes as some candidates are likely to reach a high level within particular disciplines at a relatively young age.

## **Section 4: The relationship between graded exams and the regulatory authorities**

### **4.1 National recognition and accreditation of graded exams**

#### **4.1.1 Initial recognition and accreditation by QCA**

In the late 1990s, the awarding organisations for music, dance, speech and drama made separate approaches to QCA requesting recognition of their provision. Awarding organisations were keen to obtain approval for their qualifications as this would raise their status abroad and would also show that they offered qualifications which met national standards, operating robust quality assurance procedures. Organisations like CDET fully supported this development.

Several initial meetings were held with awarding organisations to consider how much work was required to be recognised formally. At first these were held individually and then later via a group called the Graded Exams Forum which helped to confirm that awarding organisations had common interests and operated similar qualification models. As awarding organisations became recognised by QCA through the awarding body approval process (then known as “Part A”), they submitted their qualifications to QCA officers for approval. It was decided to give the qualifications a short approval period in the first instance, which allowed further work to be carried out to establish agreements for the location of these types of qualification within the NQF.

A number of documents were developed by QCA in 2003 in consultation with the awarding organisations and were submitted to QCA’s Senior Staff Accreditation Group. These documents established the graded exams model in the accreditation landscape and the way forward for resubmitting the qualifications. It also gave graded exams a strong rationale for inclusion in the NQF as a distinct qualification type and produced a common national set of standards which were approved by QCA.

#### **4.1.2 Supplementary recognition and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)**

The implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and publication of new regulatory criteria in 2008 saw a considerable amount of work undertaken by awarding organisations to migrate their qualifications from the NQF to the QCF.

The migration process consisted of two elements, the first being the recognition of awarding organisations wishing to operate in the QCF and the second, the submission of their qualifications to replace those offered in the NQF.

Many awarding organisations found elements of the new QCF regulatory criteria challenging to meet whilst simultaneously preserving the ethos and purpose of their graded exams and associated processes. Awarding organisations faced challenges with the conceptual framework of the QCF and how it would work in practical terms for their units and qualifications, in particular:

- Requirements for centre approval (para 5.11) when they do not operate a centre-based model for graded exams
- Drafting procedures for units and rules of combination development for qualifications which were already well-established and which had evolved through a set of detailed syllabuses. This procedure proved challenging due to the narrow and somewhat inflexible requirements placed by Section 1 of the regulatory criteria which undermined established processes.

However, all those who had been part of the NQF worked to submit their “supplementary recognition” to meet the new regulatory criteria and were approved by QCA/Ofqual by early 2011.

Following approval of organisational processes and procedures, awarding organisations were required to re-submit their qualifications to the QCF according to the requirements set out in the regulatory criteria. Some organisations chose to submit these independently and others submitted qualifications based on units which were collectively developed.

Issues with the submission of units and qualifications to the QCF included:

- Establishing clear, consistent and meaningful qualification titling for graded and vocational graded exams within the conventions set out by the QCF regulatory criteria
- Allowing qualification structures to indicate achievement of separate individual units within an overall structure to allow for appropriate recording within national databases (for example the achievement of two different disciplines at the same grade)
- Designing unit templates for performance-based exams based on a detailed syllabus
- Uncertainty over unit ownership and the impacts on collaborative working

## **4.2 Qualification design principles**

### **4.2.1 NQF design principles for graded exams**

As part of the process of accreditation to the NQF, sets of design principles were agreed between QCA and awarding organisations. These were issued separately for music, dance, speech and drama which described graded exams in relation to the key accreditation criteria headings in QCA documentation, in particular rationale, content, assessment and quality assurance.

#### **a) Rationale**

The design principles stated that graded exams were based on a model of “progressive mastery” in which students had to prove that they had mastered one level before moving on to the next. It is interesting to note that, with the exception of the vocational graded exams in dance, all graded exams were accredited as “other general” qualifications. This was felt to be a suitable typology as the qualifications were considered to be neither purely vocational nor occupational in nature.

#### **b) Titles**

The titles accredited by QCA in the NQF were:

- Graded exams in Music Literacy (Grades 1-8)
- Graded exams in Music Performance (Grades 1-8)
- Graded exams in Dance (Grades 1-8)
- Graded exams in Vocational Dance (Grades 4-8)
- Graded exams in Speech (Grades 1-8)
- Graded exams in Drama (Grades 1-8)
- Graded exams in Speech and Drama (Grades 1-8)

Qualification titles were endorsed for individual subject disciplines (for example, classical ballet, tap, modern, piano, trumpet etc.) or to denote the type of performance (for example, solo, pair or group performances). This titling was agreed as an appropriate way of cutting down on the proliferation of possible titles within each individual discipline.

### **c) Content**

The design principles stated that the content of graded exams will typically address the following areas:

- Technical competence and artistry in a specific discipline
- Expression and communication to a range of audiences
- Creativity and independence (through interpretation, improvisation etc.)
- Knowledge and understanding of the discipline shown through performance

For vocational dance, the principles stated that the content of vocational graded exams will typically address the following areas:

- Technical competence and artistry in a specific discipline or in a range of disciplines
- Expression and communication to a range of audiences
- Creativity and independence shown through interpretation and improvisation
- Knowledge and understanding shown through performance
- Awareness of health and safety, and healthy dance issues
- Progression opportunities to further training or employment
- Managing oneself as a performer

For music literacy (i.e. music theory), the principles stated that these exams were concerned with the understanding, manipulation and application of musical symbol systems (notations), and that the written exams placed varying emphasis on the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- Musical terms and ornaments
- Scales and harmony
- Rhythmic and melodic features
- Creative use of musical devices

### **d) Assessment**

The design principles confirmed that graded exams are assessed by external examiners appointed and standardised by awarding organisations. Assessment is usually of a performance or in the case of theory exams via a written paper. Assessment approaches developed by awarding organisations are of a comparable standard with procedures regularly monitored.

### **e) Grading**

The design principles stated that all graded exams are awarded as pass, merit and distinction with attainment descriptions published by awarding organisations. Grading criteria exist for all aspects of candidates' performance (for example technical competence, musicality, confidence in performance) with an accompanying mark scheme showing the range of marks needed to gain each attainment band (i.e. pass / merit / distinction).

## f) **Level descriptors**

The awarding organisations and QCA agreed that:

- Grades 1 to 3 would be equivalent to level 1 of the NQF
- Grades 4 and 5 would be equivalent to level 2 of the NQF
- Grades 6 to 8 would be equivalent to level 3 of the NQF

Level descriptors for each discipline took into account progression through the NQF levels.

The descriptors for **speech and drama**, for example, were split into performance and repertoire (communications), and described the progression through the levels in terms of increasing ability to understand and interpret material; to present clearly and audibly; to prepare; to put across mood and atmosphere; to use technical skills; and to use voice, body and space to enhance the performance and to develop confidence. Repertoire descriptors described the content, nature and demand of the material that should be selected at each NQF level.<sup>9</sup>

The descriptors for **dance** described the progression through the levels in terms of: increased technical ability; range and vocabulary of movement; increased length and complexity of sequences; the quality and control of movement; and confidence in performance, style and audience awareness.

The descriptors for **vocational dance** described the progression through the levels in terms of, for example: increasing technical ability required for professional work; range and vocabulary of movement; increased length and complexity of sequences; the quality and control of movement; confidence in performance, style and audience awareness; understanding of the professional context; and awareness of personal abilities and aspirations, and the demands of professional employment.

The descriptors for **music performance** describe the development of the following areas: fluency, expression, accuracy, control of tempo, sense of rhythm and harmony, intonation, phrasing, awareness of style and musical shape, secure techniques, control tonal contrast, rhythm, and pulse, use range of dynamics and tone colour sensitively and expressively, convey mood and character of piece, sight-reading, maintain posture, balance and breathing, prepare, developing control/technical mastery of instrument, sense of performance, perform confidently, clearly and audibly, personal interpretation, engage audience, engage with material, understanding of theory, time and key signatures, aural awareness, notation.

The focus of **music literacy** (theory) exams is on the understanding, manipulation and application of musical symbol systems (notations), and place varying emphasis on the following skills, knowledge and understanding:

- Musical terms and ornaments
- Scales and harmony
- Rhythmic and melodic features
- Creative use of musical devices

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<sup>9</sup> Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: Identifying the potential for Common Units and the Assignment of Credit for graded exams – Final Report: 23 March 2005

#### **4.2.2 Design principles for the QCF**

With the introduction of a new set of requirements, the awarding organisations had to work on devising a format which both preserved the ethos and value of the graded exams model but which would also be acceptable to QCA in terms of Section 1 of the QCF criteria with its specific requirements on the design of units and rules of combination.

##### **a) Titling requirements of the QCF**

Two main forms of titling emerged from discussions with QCA and its successor organisation, Ofqual.<sup>10</sup> The first simply followed the rules set out in the QCF titling conventions of Level X Award/Certificate/Diploma in X. The second was agreed for those awarding organisations that felt that it was important to retain “Graded Examinations” in the title of the qualification. However, this has proved to be an unsatisfactory titling structure, i.e. Level X Award/Certificate/Diploma in Graded Examinations in X.

##### **b) Qualification structures**

As with titling, there was much discussion about the ways in which units should be structured into rules of combination for graded and vocational graded exams. At discussions held between the awarding organisations and Ofqual, it was agreed that each individual discipline would need to have a separate unit in order for these to be recorded as separate achievements within various databases (in particular the Skills Funding Agency’s funding database and the Diploma Aggregation Service). If there were only generic units available that covered all disciplines, learners would face having only one achievement counted on these databases if they took more than one discipline under the same qualification title.

This meant that the number of units needing to be developed for dance, as an example, increased from 13 to over 200. The impact on music, speech and drama qualifications was similar.

Concerned about the ways in which achievements were being recorded and not wanting to disadvantage learners, awarding organisations decided to develop separate qualification titles for each individual grade. This meant that for each grade there would be a separate qualification number and attached to it would be an individual unit number for each discipline, thus making the recording of achievements more transparent for the relevant databases. Awarding organisations also had to be mindful of qualification sizes and how these were represented in titling conventions, so opportunities for reducing titles at levels 3 and 4, in particular, were limited because of the different qualification sizes within these levels.

##### **c) Design of unit templates**

A full suite of graded exams comprises 8 qualifications across levels 1, 2 and 3 of the QCF (with vocational graded exams offering a further 5 qualifications across levels 2, 3 and 4). The QCF criteria demanded that awarding organisations draft distinct assessment criteria to differentiate 8 levels of achievement rather than 3 in the NQF. Added to this was the challenge of producing assessment criteria in a criterion-referenced template for a compensatory method of assessment through examination. Awarding organisations therefore had to find ways of recording marks to ensure that a pass reflected the achievement of all assessment criteria in a QCF unit.

#### **d) *Levelling of qualifications within the QCF***

Ensuring that 8 qualifications of progressive mastery could fit comfortably within three levels of the QCF was challenging for awarding organisations and indeed has been an ongoing debate since graded exams were first submitted to the NQF. Awarding organisations adopted a similar approach to the design principles of the NQF for migration to the QCF with a set of level descriptors being developed which reference the QCF descriptors but which set them clearly in the context of performance-related outcomes and specialist disciplines.

#### **e) *Assessment methodology***

Graded exams in dance, music, speech and drama operate a particular assessment methodology in which examiners that are recruited, trained and standardised by awarding organisations carry out the assessment of candidates through a performance-based exam. In order to protect this assessment methodology and secure the integrity and purpose of the qualifications, awarding organisations ensured that the new QCF units preserved this approach. They also took part in lengthy discussions with Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS) and Ofqual concerning whether units should be shared or restricted.

#### **f) *Unit ownership***

In 2005 QCA commissioned a study of all accredited graded exams<sup>11</sup> to ascertain how much work needed to be done to reformat their syllabuses and specifications into the QCF template, particularly with the intention of developing common units, i.e. expressing the content as learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

The report concluded that it would be possible to develop common units for each discipline in the following areas:

- Music: Music Performance
- Music: Music Literacy (Theory)
- Dance
- Vocational Dance
- Speech: Communication Skills/Spoken English
- Speech: Speaking Verse and Prose
- Drama: Acting
- Drama: Musical Theatre
- Drama: Performance Arts
- Speech and Drama

The report also stated that awarding organisations had reached a consensus that common units could be written for each NQF level, provided that credit values for each grade could be confirmed. The report concluded that more work was needed to further explore credit values for units to arrive at a 'common' unit agreement.

Subsequent discussions between CCS and awarding organisations suggested that CCS should act as the unit owner of collaboratively-developed units, which the awarding organisations supported. Unfortunately, a decision was taken by CCS in 2011 not to proceed with their application for Ofqual unit submitter status, which forced awarding organisations to find their own solutions to unit ownership.

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<sup>11</sup> Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: Identifying the potential for Common Units and the Assignment of Credit for graded exams – Final Report: 23 March 2005

Most awarding organisations subsequently worked together on unit development, and then shared the ownership of units, usually taking responsibility for a QCF level each. This resulted in a shared approach but only across the awarding organisations who worked together, and the resulting units are restricted to their use only. From 2010, the following collectively deliver common units in the QCF.

- Music—ABRSM, LCM (UWL) and TCL
- Speech and drama—ESB, LCM and TCL
- Dance— BBO, GQAL, ISTD and the RAD worked with CDET to develop a shared unit offer. One awarding organisation, ISTD, took responsibility for submitting the units on behalf of the others.

In some instances, awarding organisations operated independently, as in the case of LAMDA, NEA and Rockschool, which submitted their own units for music and drama.

### **g) Credit**

In 2004, ABRSM, TCL and LAMDA all worked on the relationship between credit and graded exams on the principle of 1 credit equalling 10 hours of learning. They produced a working document which gave recommendations for credit ratings for grades 1-8. The work was based on the initial research carried out by an Expert Group, convened to consider the inclusion of graded exams in music, speech and drama into the University and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) tariff.

The report concluded that, given assumptions of a notional average time for both taught time (expressed as “teaching”) and personal study (expressed as “practice”), the following indicative notional times could be established as a basis for credit-rating graded exams in music:

**Table 3 – indicative notional times for graded music exams<sup>12</sup>**

Grade	Teaching		Practice				Total
	Lesson (mins)	No. of lessons	Teaching (hrs)	Practice per week (hrs)	No. of weeks	Practice (hrs)	
<b>1</b>	20	60	<b>20</b>	1	76	76	<b>96</b>
<b>2</b>	30	30	<b>15</b>	1.24	40	50	<b>65</b>
<b>3</b>	30	32	<b>16</b>	1.5	43	63	<b>79</b>
<b>4</b>	40	32	<b>21.25</b>	1.75	44	77	<b>98.25</b>
<b>5</b>	40	34	<b>22.5</b>	2.25	46	103.5	<b>126</b>
<b>6</b>	45	36	<b>27</b>	2.5	48	120	<b>147</b>
<b>7</b>	45	36	<b>27</b>	3.5	48	168	<b>195</b>
<b>8</b>	60	54	<b>54</b>	4	60	240	<b>294</b>

From these indicative hours, the awarding organisations were then able to propose credit values for graded music exams:

<sup>12</sup> Source: Towards a Credit Structure for graded exams in Music, Drama, Speech, Speech and Drama – ABRSM, TCL and LAMDA – working document for QCA 2004

**Table 4 – proposed credit values for graded music exams<sup>13</sup>**

<b>NQF level</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Proposed credit value</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	1	10	10
	2	6	16
	3	8	24
<b>Level 2</b>	4	10	34
	5	12	46
<b>Level 3</b>	6	15	61
	7	20	81
	8	30	111

The same process was repeated for graded exams in speech and drama with proposed credit values as follows:

**Table 5 – proposed credit values for graded exams in speech and drama<sup>14</sup>**

<b>NQF level</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Proposed credit value</b>	<b>Cumulative</b>
<b>Level 1</b>	1	8	8
	2	6	14
	3	7	21
<b>Level 2</b>	4	9	30
	5	11	41
<b>Level 3</b>	6	14	55
	7	18	73
	8	24	97

Subsequent discussions and the practicalities of submitting units and qualifications to the QCF led to a revised set of credits being produced for each discipline. The following credit values now appear for the individual qualifications on Ofqual's Register of Qualifications.

<sup>13</sup> Source: Towards a Credit Structure for graded exams in Music, Drama, Speech, Speech and Drama – ABRSM, Trinity College London and LAMDA – working document for QCA 2004

<sup>14</sup> Source: Towards a Credit Structure for graded exams in Music, Drama, Speech, Speech and Drama – ABRSM, Trinity College London and LAMDA – working document for QCA 2004

**Tables 6 – current credit values for graded and vocational graded exams**

\* Please note that the credit values for music, speech and drama reflect the numbers identified in shared unit submissions and are not indicative of those organisations who submitted individually.

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Dance credit values</b>	<b>Music Performance credit values*</b>	<b>Speech and Drama credit values*</b>	<b>Music Theory credit values</b>
<b>Grade 1</b>	7	6	6	2
<b>Grade 2</b>	7	9	8	3
<b>Grade 3</b>	7	12	10	5
<b>Grade 4</b>	10	15	13	7
<b>Grade 5</b>	10	18	15	9
<b>Grade 6</b>	13	22	17	13
<b>Grade 7</b>	13	27	19	17
<b>Grade 8</b>	13	32	25	21
<b>Intermediate Foundation</b>	28	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Intermediate</b>	28	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Advanced Foundation</b>	28	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Advanced 1</b>	33	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Advanced 2</b>	38	N/A	N/A	N/A

In addition to the above, two awarding organisations offering graded examinations in speech and drama developed own units based on the following credit values.

LAMDA and NEA	<b>Grade 1</b>	<b>Grade 2</b>	<b>Grade 3</b>	<b>Grade 4</b>	<b>Grade 5</b>	<b>Grade 6</b>	<b>Grade 7</b>	<b>Grade 8</b>
Credit values	6	7	8	10	12	14	18	24

### **4.2.3 The future of the QCF**

At the time of writing this report, the QCF has recently undergone a major review by Ofqual, the outcome of which has yet to be formally reported. It is likely that some of the recommendations from the review will include a need for more flexibility in the design of qualifications and assessment, a fact which many organisations will welcome.

Another possible consequence will be the removal of unit submitter status from the QCF, meaning that the concept of shared unit offers will become the responsibility of awarding organisations working collaboratively and then submitting their own units.

Ofqual recently announced that it would be conducting a consultation on the future of the QCF which means that a revised qualifications framework may be introduced during 2015.

## **4.3 The Conditions of Recognition**

In 2012 Ofqual, the Welsh Government and the Council for the Curriculum, Exams and Assessment (CCEA) published an initial version of new regulatory Conditions. This document superseded the majority of previous regulatory criteria and introduced an approach to regulation which focused on awarding organisations rather than qualifications. This development was in line with Ofqual's new powers under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning (ASCL) Act 2009.

The General Conditions of Recognition have been updated twice since - in November 2012 and September 2013. The majority of qualifications are now regulated via sets of qualification specific criteria which are applied in conjunction with the Conditions of Recognition. These include criteria for GCSEs, A levels and ESOL qualifications.

The ASCL Act of 2009 also sets out the statutory requirements for awarding organisations to distinguish between 'regulated' and 'unregulated' provision offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Ofqual produced an official definition of what is considered a 'qualification' as opposed to a product which is not a 'qualification' in a formal letter to awarding organisations in 2013.

The dance awarding organisations, with CDET, put forward a position paper on what they consider to be 'regulated' and 'unregulated' provision in early 2014, which was generally supported by Ofqual. It made clear distinctions between graded exams and other types of provision such as medals, performance tests and class awards.

Updates continue to be made to the Conditions, the most recent of which is that of regulating the endorsements of published resources made by awarding organisations. This is currently being consulted on at the time of writing and is likely to lead to further regulatory Conditions.

One of the Conditions requires awarding organisations to submit a formal Statement of Compliance to Ofqual, the Welsh Government and CCEA annually. This year, 2014, is the third year of submission. Awarding organisations are expected to review their compliance with the conditions, declaring any potential or actual non-compliance. Ofqual, the Welsh Government and CCEA consider the statements and decide whether further action needs to be taken to ensure compliance, either by on-going monitoring of the organisation or by taking regulatory action. Ofqual published *Taking Regulatory Action* in 2011 which sets out the range of sanctions that could be applied to awarding organisations which are non-compliant. An updated version was published in May 2012.

The regulatory landscape could potentially become more complicated in the future as the Welsh Government is in the process of evaluating its own position and has consulted on plans to set up “Qualifications Wales”, a new body which would regulate qualifications in Wales and act as an awarding organisation itself. This would be like the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) which both regulates and awards national qualifications.

#### **4.4 Schools performance points**

In August 2001, QCA was asked by the Department for Education and Skills to assign scores to qualifications approved for 14-18-year-olds in England and relate these to each other so that they could be counted in school and college performance indicators, which are based on attainment at ages 16 and 18. The aim was to design a manageable method for assigning figures to all qualifications approved for use by 14-19-year-olds.

The work was divided into two phases. The first phase, for qualifications approved for pre-16 use, was completed and a report submitted to Ministers in October 2002. The second phase of this work, for remaining qualifications used by 16-19-year-olds, was completed in April 2004.

In 2011, the now Department of Education (DfE) commissioned Professor Alison Wolf to review vocational qualifications in England. One key recommendation in the report was for performance table methodology to be radically modified to ensure that only “high quality” vocational qualifications count towards schools’ scores. This has demanded, for 14-16 qualifications and more recently for 16-19 qualifications, substantial changes to some awarding organisations’ provision in order to meet DfE’s technical requirements for size, content, progression and a minimum proportion of external assessment.

Awarding organisations offering graded exams applied for their qualifications to be recognised as part of the performance tables, particularly for 14-16-year-olds. Applications for dance, speech and drama were rejected partly on the basis that the qualifications were too small—due to the DfE size requirements which specified guided learning hours rather than credits. However, the DfE decided to include graded exams in music at grades 6-8.

#### **4.5 Graded exams and the UCAS tariff<sup>15</sup>**

In 2002, ABRSM and TCL approached UCAS to establish graded exams in music within the UCAS tariff. An expert panel was set up to consider the relationship between these qualifications and appropriate AS and A levels (the “benchmark” for the tariff), exploring how they then could be expressed as tariff points. The expert group looked in detail at the syllabuses both for related A levels, and practical and theory graded music exams, and decided on the following points tariff:

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<sup>15</sup> Details taken from report of the Expert Group established to consider the role of graded exams in music in the UCAS tariff (copy provided by ABRSM)

**Table 7 – UCAS points for graded exams in music<sup>16</sup>**

P=Pass, M=Merit, D=Distinction

UCAS Points	AS	A2	Practical			Theory		
			Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
120		A						
110								
100		B						
90								
80		C						
75					D			
70					M			
65								
60	A	D		D				
55				M	P			
50	B							
45			D					
40	C	E	M	P				
35								
30	D							D
25			P					M
20	E						D	P
15						D	M	
10						M	P	
5						P		

The scores above apply to graded exams in music offered by ABRSM, LCM, RSL and TCL.

A similar exercise was carried out for speech and drama in 2006 and the following tariff scores were confirmed for qualifications offered by ESB, LAMDA, LCM and TCL. The NEA was added to this list in 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Source: report of the Expert Group established to consider the role of graded exams in music in the UCAS tariff (copy provided by ABRSM)

**Table 8 – UCAS points for graded exams in speech and drama<sup>17</sup>**

P=Pass, M=Merit, D=Distinction

UCAS Points	AS	A2	Speech and Drama		
			Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
120		A			
110					
100		B			
90					
80		C			
75					
70					
65					D
60	A	D			M
55				D	
50	B			M	
45					P
40	C	E	D		
35			M	P	
30	D				
25					
20	E		P		
15					
10					
5					

In 2009 the dance awarding organisations started the process of submitting evidence towards the allocation of tariff points for graded and vocational graded exams. Following lengthy discussion alongside the development of units for the QCF, the tariff points were agreed in 2011 as follows:

**Table 9 – UCAS points for graded and vocational graded exams in dance<sup>18</sup>**

Advanced Foundation	Intermediate	Grade 8	Grade 7	Grade 6	Tariff points
Distinction					70
	Distinction	Distinction			65
Merit		Merit			55
	Merit		Distinction		50
Pass		Pass	Merit		45
	Pass			Distinction	40
			Pass	Merit	35
				Pass	20

<sup>17</sup> Source: UCAS tariff tables [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/tarifftables](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/tarifftables)

<sup>18</sup> Source: UCAS tariff tables [www.ucas.com/students/ucas\\_tariff/tarifftables](http://www.ucas.com/students/ucas_tariff/tarifftables)

In 2012 UCAS ran a consultation on the future of the way in which university applications should be managed. A report was produced<sup>19</sup> which recommended the withdrawal of the tariff system in favour of Qualification Information Profiles. However, in April 2014, UCAS announced that the tariff system would be retained but with a simpler approach to calculating tariff points based on qualification size and grading criteria. The new system is expected to be announced in Summer 2014, with implementation for the 2017 admissions cycle.

#### 4.6 Graded exams in Scotland

A small number of awarding organisations, including RAD and RSL, have sought accreditation by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). This has involved becoming recognised by SQA Accreditation as an awarding organisation in Scotland, submitting graded exams to SQA for accreditation, and (discretionally) applying credit according to the requirements of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

**Table 10 – Royal Academy of Dance qualifications<sup>20</sup>**

Qualification title	SCQF level	SCQF credit value
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 1 (Ballet)	3	5
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 2 (Ballet)	4	5
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 3 (Ballet)	4	7
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 4 (Ballet)	5	8
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 5 (Ballet)	5	10
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 6 (Ballet)	6	11
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 7 (Ballet)	6	11
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 8 (Ballet)	6	14
Vocational Graded Exam in Dance: Intermediate Foundation (Ballet)	6	21
Vocational Graded Exam in Dance: Intermediate (Ballet)	7	24
Vocational Graded Exam in Dance: Advanced Foundation (Ballet)	7	24
Vocational Graded Exam in Dance: Advanced 1 (Ballet)	8	37
Vocational Graded Exam in Dance: Advanced 2 (Ballet)	8	37

**Table 11 – Rockschoool and UKA qualifications<sup>21</sup>**

Qualification title	SCQF level	SCQF credit value
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 1 (Highland Dance)	3	7
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 2 (Highland Dance)	4	7
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 3 (Highland Dance)	4	7
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 4 (Highland Dance)	5	10
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 5 (Highland Dance)	5	10
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 6 (Highland Dance)	6	13
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 7 (Highland Dance)	6	13
Graded Exams in Dance: Grade 8 (Highland Dance)	6	13

<sup>19</sup> Qualifications Information Review published by UCAS in July 2012

<sup>20</sup> Source: Royal Academy of Dance

<sup>21</sup> Source: Scottish Qualifications Authority website

## Section 5: The relationship between graded exams, other qualifications and educational initiatives

Within confines of the present frameworks, qualifications have been treated as separate entities with no formal links between one qualification and another. When designing curriculum models, however, providers have often linked complementary qualifications.

### 5.1 Relationship with GCSEs and A levels

Graded exams complement specific GCSEs and A levels which further relate to programmes of study within the National Curriculum. Qualifications which graded exams usefully support include:

#### 5.1.1 GCSE

- Music – offered by WJEC, OCR, Edexcel, CCEA, AQA
- Dance – offered by AQA
- Drama – offered by WJEC, OCR, Edexcel, CCEA, AQA
- Performing Arts – offered by WJEC and AQA

#### 5.1.2 GCE AS and A level

- Music Technology – offered by Edexcel
- Music – offered by WJEC, OCR, Edexcel, CCEA, AQA
- Dance – offered by AQA
- Drama and Theatre Studies - offered by WJEC, Edexcel, AQA
- Performing Arts - offered by CCEA, Edexcel, OCR
- Performance Studies – offered by OCR

Although no prior knowledge is required to study towards any of the above qualifications, students will typically prepare for graded exams simultaneously.

This is supported by a statement in the UCAS Expert Group report which confirmed how graded music exams should be recognised in the tariff. It particularly noted that the Edexcel specification for GCE Music stated “*The qualifications have been designed on the assumption that they are available to everyone who can achieve the required standard. However, it is recommended that students embarking on the course should have shown themselves capable of operating at a level of practice and understanding equivalent to that required for one of the higher grades in GCSE Music. They should be able to perform to a standard roughly equivalent to a pass at Grade IV.*”<sup>22</sup> This shows that the relationship between graded music exams and the GCE is quite specific in terms of determining one as a benchmark of achievement in the performance area included in the other.

### 5.2 Relationship between graded exams and other qualifications

A range of other qualifications in music and the performing arts are also included in the QCF. These qualifications often have broader content than the specialist graded exams, for example BTECs in Performing Arts, OCR Nationals etc. Given the focused vocational nature of these qualifications, they are likely to serve a different candidature from that which attracts graded exams, though many candidates enter for the grades simultaneously to support their performance studies.

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<sup>22</sup> Source: report of the Expert Group established to consider the role of graded exams in music in the UCAS tariff [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

## **Section 6: Potential progression routes from graded exams**

Although potential progression is not a focus of this report, some comment can be made on the nature and types of progression routes taken by candidates who have achieved graded exams. This section of the report is intended to be a brief description of possible routes rather than a detailed analysis.

### **6.1 Progression to further training and education**

Further training enables students to specialise and acquire new and complementary skills to those already gained through graded exams and other qualifications. Students are able to choose from a range of available provision as described below.

#### **6.1.1 Conservatoires, Vocational Training schools and Universities**

Many awarding organisations have longstanding links with conservatoires such as the ABRSM which was originally formed by four major conservatoires—the RAM, RCM, RNCM and RSC. Further, Trinity College London has a relationship with Trinity Laban, and the London College of Music became, in 1991, a department of the University of West London (or Thames Valley University as it then was), which is now the awarding organisation. Some awarding organisations are vocational training schools in their own right, such as LAMDA, whilst others have links to conservatoires and vocational training schools, sharing senior staff on each other's academic and management boards. The RAD, as well as being an awarding organisation, has a Faculty of Education which is an accredited institute of the University of Surrey.

Vocational training schools in dance, musical theatre and drama are usually accredited by the Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) and Drama UK. Many of these accredited institutions offer two or three year courses funded privately by students or through the government's Dance and Drama Awards scheme.<sup>23</sup> In order to access funding under this scheme, students must register for a Professional Performing Arts Diploma in Dance, Musical Theatre or Acting at Level 5 or 6 awarded by Trinity College London. Also, a number of training institutions came together and established the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama in 2001.<sup>24</sup>

The route from graded exams to degree courses appears to be more established than to vocational training schools, particularly for music, speech and drama. HE institutions offering degree courses in the performing arts, particularly music, regard graded exams as a useful addition to a student's portfolio of qualifications, providing benchmarks from which to judge the level of achievement in a particular set of performance skills and techniques. In many cases achievement at grade 8 or Intermediate (for dance) is stated as a requirement for course entry.

According to the UCAS website, there are currently 183 providers of degree courses relating to music, 123 relating to drama and 75 relating to dance, showing the popularity of these subjects amongst undergraduates.

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<sup>23</sup> For more information visit <https://www.gov.uk/dance-drama-awards>

<sup>24</sup> [www.cdd.ac.uk](http://www.cdd.ac.uk)

### **6.1.2 Higher level qualifications offered by awarding organisations**

Some awarding organisations, notably in music and speech and drama, offer a range of higher level technical specialist diplomas, which typically follow an “Associate, Licentiate, Fellowship” model. Many students choose to continue their studies with the awarding organisation through which they have attained their graded exams or stay within the sector but prepare for assessment with another organisation. Such diplomas complement university and conservatoire degrees, and have traditionally been seen as a route into teaching, particularly private practice.

Some awarding organisations also offer qualifications to bridge achievement at grade 8 with progression to further training. For example, LAMDA offers the LAMDA Certificate in Speech and Drama: Performance Studies, which LAMDA states “*is designed to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding required for the performance of verse, prose and drama and provides a pre-requisite qualification for candidates to gain the essential underpinning skills, knowledge and understanding to enable progression onto the LAMDA Diploma in Speech and Drama Education and the LAMDA Diploma in Dramatic Art*”.<sup>25</sup>

## **6.2 Progression directly into employment**

It is important to note that “employment” in this sector includes a diverse range of occupations, not just performing. However, for the purposes of this report, two main areas of employment are dealt with: teaching and performing.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a positive experience of performing arts education provided by participation in graded exams influences an individual’s choice of career, many choosing job roles in the creative industries as a result.

### **6.2.1 Progression into teaching**

Once a student has completed grade 8, or in the case of dance an Intermediate level vocational graded qualification, a number of progression opportunities are open to them in teaching, depending on the discipline studied. Teaching is an extremely popular choice for those who embark on a career in the performing arts - it is thought that around 75% of those involved in dance are teaching in some form or other.<sup>26</sup>

A number of students across the disciplines decide to teach privately after achieving the requisite qualifications and often combine it with further study, for example through one of the awarding organisations’ higher level qualifications. There is no requirement for a teacher in private practice to have a qualification denoting Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) or Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills (QTLS), and as mentioned above, this is a prime driver for awarding organisations to offer their own diplomas, many of which are well established internationally. Further, in the case of dance, CDET has developed design principles for teaching qualifications which illustrate the relationship between these awarding organisations’ diplomas and government teaching standards. This mapping was published in 2001 and used by the awarding organisations to structure their teaching qualifications.

In music, the existence of a Programme of Study in the National Curriculum means that there are a number of universities offering Post Graduate Certificates of Education (PGCE) for music teachers. For teachers of dance, speech and drama the route is more difficult as the majority of suitable PGCE courses are likely to be broader in content than the chosen

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<sup>25</sup> Source: LAMDA website [www.lamda.org.uk](http://www.lamda.org.uk)

<sup>26</sup> Source: *Mapping Dance* – report by Susanne Burns for Palatine

specialist field of study. However, some courses do exist, for example that offered in dance by the Royal Academy of Dance and validated by the University of Surrey.

Despite the wide range of approaches to teacher training now available to students—including training in the workplace or taking a first degree in Education rather than a PGCE—there is a concern that a gap has developed between the private and state sector, especially in terms of the stipulated qualification requirements for the role of teaching. This can be particularly frustrating for those who have either gained qualifications to teach privately or are working as performers but wish to carry out a teaching or training role in the state sector, for example as a peripatetic teacher in schools and colleges.

There was a drive by the previous Labour Government to qualify teachers and trainers across the state-funded education sector. By contrast, the current Coalition Government has relaxed the rules for teacher training and the achievement of qualifications (e.g. a PGCE leading to QTS) is now only one of several routes into the sector. This means that private teachers will potentially be able to teach in schools and colleges without needing to attain a PGCE or similar qualification. However, the current picture is still not confirmed as discussions about changes to the organisations which, in the past, were gatekeepers of teaching qualifications are still ongoing.

Other recent initiatives addressing the needs of dance and music teachers, working especially in a community or workshop setting, have involved the development of the Level 6 Diploma in Dance Teaching and Learning and the Level 4 Certificate in Music Education.

### **6.2.2 Working as a performer**

Evidence from employers (such as performance companies and orchestras) has shown that qualifications in general are regarded as a less important consideration when looking at potential employees than where they have trained, what types of role they have had in the past and other key aspects of professional experience. Ultimately decisions on recruitment tend to be by audition.

However, qualifications can help a potential performer to get and keep work. It was suggested by respondents to the 2008 survey that qualifications, particularly those related to professional training and higher level diplomas, do give potential employees an advantage in terms of the acquisition of skills and techniques and, in a lot of cases, access to information and contacts which will assist them in pursuing performance careers. This is especially important when considering the relationships some awarding organisations have to orchestras, dance companies and theatres. Ultimately a qualification is usually seen as a positive asset by a potential employer.

## Section 7: The future of graded exams

Graded exams in the performing arts remain hugely popular in the UK and as such have made, and continue to make, a significant contribution to the cultural development and awareness of large sections of the population. Although this report has focused on the factual (or 'hard') aspects of graded exams, this context itself does not adequately cover the informal (or 'soft') influences the qualifications do and could have. The author has given a selective, factual report of the history and the current picture of graded exams and their relationship with the education sector and regulatory frameworks. It is the author's view that this gives a reasonable and sufficient overview of the current picture but does not cover the impact these influential qualifications have made to the social and cultural context within the UK and worldwide.

Graded exams have contributed significantly to the growth of an educated audience for the performing arts, who have developed their sense of cultural awareness through the study of an instrument, dance or speech and drama genre. In essence, where graded exams are situated in the various qualification frameworks is not as important as the significance and meaning they have for the hundreds of thousands of candidates who take them every year.

Graded exams have weathered many changes in the education sector over the last two decades and have remained largely unchanged as there is no particular reason to change a system that has been, and indeed is increasingly, popular and successful for so many candidates. Indeed, the awarding organisations have fought to preserve the identity of these qualifications against a backdrop of shifting political expectations and initiatives, knowing that their original meaning and purpose is valid and greatly valued.

Candidate numbers for most awarding organisations have remained stable in the face of the recent economic difficulties and in many cases – particularly in new and emerging markets such as rock, pop, jazz, world, traditional and urban art forms - have grown and continue to grow. Awarding organisations have continued to raise their profile through successful marketing and communication activities. The organisations are also all working together to promote and advocate graded exams through the continuation of the Graded Exams Forum, now facilitated by CDET, most notably in the recent launch of a booklet and website. It is hoped that these will further promote graded exams to a wider and more influential diversity of audiences, including government and regulatory bodies.

However, constant changes to the education landscape mean that the qualifications are expected to meet differing, and often poorly defined, expectations of what is deemed to be a "high quality" qualification. The awarding organisations continue to encounter challenges to the integrity and purpose of graded exams by successive governments. They have met the challenges on their own terms and continue to provide graded exams in the form that is known and loved by so many candidates and teachers around the world.

The future holds many potential further changes and uncertainties in the political, educational and regulatory landscape. But what seems certain is that graded exams will continue to go from strength to strength, evolving to meet the needs of contemporary teachers and learners through innovative practice which builds on the best traditions of the past.

## Appendix A: Bibliography

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Available from the Palatine website [www.palatine.ac.uk](http://www.palatine.ac.uk)

Expert group report for awards seeking admission to the UCAS tariff - Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music – music awards at grades 6, 7 and 8 – April 2002 – available through the UCAS website [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk)

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority: Identifying the potential for Common Units and the Assignment of Credit for graded exams – Final Report: 23 March 2005  
(copy obtained from QCA for the 2008 report)

### Websites used in this report

UCAS – [www.ucas.ac.uk](http://www.ucas.ac.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority – [www.qca.org.uk](http://www.qca.org.uk) (date last accessed 5<sup>th</sup> June 2008)  
NB this website no longer exists but archive information can be found through the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music – [www.abrsm.org](http://www.abrsm.org) (date last accessed April 2014)

British Ballet Organization – [www.bbo.org.uk](http://www.bbo.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

London College of Music – [www.uwl.ac.uk/academic-schools/music/lcm-exams](http://www.uwl.ac.uk/academic-schools/music/lcm-exams) (date last accessed April 2014)

Trinity College London – [www.trinitycollege.com](http://www.trinitycollege.com) (date last accessed April 2014)

Graded Qualifications Alliance – [www.gqal.org.uk](http://www.gqal.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing – [www.istd.org](http://www.istd.org) (date last accessed April 2014)

London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts – [www.lamda.org.uk](http://www.lamda.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

Council for Dance Education and Training – [www.cdet.org.uk](http://www.cdet.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

Royal Academy of Dance – [www.rad.org.uk](http://www.rad.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

Palatine - [www.palatine.ac.uk](http://www.palatine.ac.uk) (date last accessed 22 May 2008)

NB this organisation no longer exists – work has been taken forward by the Higher Education Academy  
[www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines/music-dance-drama](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/disciplines/music-dance-drama)

Joint Council for Qualifications – [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk) (date last accessed April 2014)

## Appendix B: Awarding Organisations

### The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)

24 Portland Place  
London W1B 1LU  
020 7636 5400  
[www.abrsm.org](http://www.abrsm.org)



### British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD)

Pavilion 8 Upper Level  
Watermark Business Park  
315 Govan Road  
Glasgow G51 2SE  
0141 427 3699  
[www.batd.co.uk](http://www.batd.co.uk)



### British Ballet Organization (BBO)

1 Down Place  
Hammersmith  
London W6 9JH  
020 8748 1241  
[www.bbo.org.uk](http://www.bbo.org.uk)



### British Theatre Dance Association (BTDA)

The International Arts Centre  
Garden Street  
Leicester LE1 3UA  
0116 262 2279  
[www.btda.org.uk](http://www.btda.org.uk)



### English Speaking Board (ESB)

9 Hattersley Court  
Burscough Road  
Ormskirk L39 2AY  
01695 573439  
[www.esbuk.org](http://www.esbuk.org)



### Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL)

The International Arts Centre  
Garden Street  
Leicester LE1 3UA  
01162 624 122  
[www.gqal.org](http://www.gqal.org)



### Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)

Imperial House  
22/26 Paul Street  
London EC2A 4QE  
020 7377 1577  
[www.istd.org](http://www.istd.org)



### International Dance Teachers' Association (IDTA)

International House  
76 Bennett Road  
Brighton BN2 5JL  
01273 685 652  
[www.idta.co.uk](http://www.idta.co.uk)



**London Academy of Music & Dramatic Art (LAMDA)**

155 Talgarth Road  
London W14 9DA  
020 8834 0500  
[www.lamda.org.uk](http://www.lamda.org.uk)

**London College of Music (LCM)**

University of West London  
St Mary's Road  
Ealing W5 5RF  
020 8231 2364  
[www.uwl.ac.uk/academic-schools/music/lcm-exams](http://www.uwl.ac.uk/academic-schools/music/lcm-exams)

**National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD)**

44-47 The Broadway  
Thatcham  
Berkshire RG19 3HP  
01635 868888  
[www.natd.org.uk](http://www.natd.org.uk)

**New Era Academy (NEA)**

2 Aglaia Road  
Worthing  
West Sussex BN11 5SN  
01903 246790  
[www.neweraacademy.co.uk](http://www.neweraacademy.co.uk)

**Professional Teachers of Dancing (PTD)**

The Studios  
Morecombelake  
Dorset DT6 6DY  
01935 848547  
[www.professionalteachersofdancing.co.uk](http://www.professionalteachersofdancing.co.uk)

**Rockschool (RSL)**

Harlequin House  
7 High Street  
Teddington TW11 8EE  
0845 460 4747  
[www.rockschool.co.uk](http://www.rockschool.co.uk)

**Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)**

36 Battersea Square  
London SW11 3RA  
020 7326 8000  
[www.rad.org.uk](http://www.rad.org.uk)

**Russian Ballet Society (RBS)**

PO Box 17319  
Edinburgh EH12 1BB  
0131 334 2031  
[www.russianballetsociety.co.uk](http://www.russianballetsociety.co.uk)

**Spanish Dance Society (SDS)**

1 Blakett Close  
Staines  
Middlesex TW18 3NW  
01784 460 419  
[www.spanishdancesociety.org](http://www.spanishdancesociety.org)



**Trinity College London (TCL)**

Blue Fin Building  
110 Southwark Street  
London SE1 0TA  
020 7820 6100

[www.trinitycollege.com](http://www.trinitycollege.com)



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**United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)**

Centenary House  
38/40 Station Road  
Blackpool FY4 1EU

[www.ukadance.co.uk](http://www.ukadance.co.uk)



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**United Teachers of Dance (UTD)**

58a High Street  
Coleshill  
West Midlands B46 1AZ  
01675 463700

[www.unitedteachersofdance.co.uk](http://www.unitedteachersofdance.co.uk)

