

## **Comparability and Standardisation Exercise**

### **Report on meeting to discuss exemplar candidate work for Graded Examinations in Dance and Musical Theatre at Grade 3**

**18<sup>th</sup> September 2014**

**Held at the office of the  
Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), London**

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## 1. Purpose and format of the comparability study

### 1.1 Purpose

The comparability exercise for 2014 follows on from the work carried out in 2013 by considering the comparability of standards across a diverse range of genre at Grade 3.

The organisations participating in the comparability study 2014 were as follows:

- British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD)
- Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL)
- Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)
- International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA)
- National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD)
- Professional Teachers of Dancing (PTD)
- Rockschoool Ltd (RSL)
- Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)
- Russian Ballet Society (RBS)
- Spanish Dance Society (SDS)
- Trinity College London (TCL)
- United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)

One organisation attended as an observer only:

- British Ballet Organization (BBO)

A full list of representatives from the awarding organisations is listed in Appendix A.

Each Awarding Organisation was asked to provide one genre for the meeting. The list of organisations and genre appears below.

<b>Awarding Organisation</b>	<b>Genre</b>
BATD	Modern
GQAL	Modern Jazz
IDTA	Latin
ISTD	Disco Freestyle
NATD	Contemporary
PTD	Tap
RAD	Ballet
RBS	Legat system of Russian Ballet
RSL	Musical Theatre
SDS	Spanish Dance
TCL	Musical Theatre
UKA	Jazz

The accepted level of demand for dance genres is currently articulated by means of a common QCF unit which was submitted to Ofqual in 2010. This was produced after the original comparability exercise conducted in 2009. The September 2014 study provided an ideal opportunity for organisations to reconsider the unit content and agree if it is still an accurate summary of the standard, or whether it needed to be revised.

Two organisations, Rockschool and Trinity College London, presented musical theatre qualifications which are not currently covered by the common unit template for Grade 3. They have however developed their own units and these were also considered in relation to the application of a consistent standard.

In addition, organisations were asked to consider the common level descriptors which were drafted to support the common unit and have been in use since 2009.

The main focus of the study was to review whether the standard across a range of diverse genre presented by the organisations could be seen as comparable when considered against the current common unit template at Grade 3 for dance and the level descriptor for level 1. This would then confirm a benchmark for Grade 3 which organisations can apply internally across genres.

## 1.2 Format

As a considerable number of awarding organisations were involved in the process, it was decided that participants should discuss the DVDs in small groups. Three groups were established as follows:

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
GQAL – Modern Jazz SDS – Spanish Dance TCL - Musical Theatre UKA – Jazz	NATD – contemporary RBS – Russian Ballet ISTD – disco freestyle PTD –Tap	IDTA – Latin RSL – Musical Theatre RAD – Ballet BATD - Modern

Organisations presented their DVD material in their respective sessions. As most of the organisations are now familiar with the format of the comparability exercise it was felt that there was no need to have a “control” organisation for each group. However the groups were mixed so that there were larger and smaller organisations as well as multi and single-genre organisations within each group.

A plenary was held after each group session so that participants could come together to discuss any key issues arising, feedback on points of interest, and highlight any topics which required further exploration.

## 2. Report of the meeting

Delegates were welcomed by Glyndwr Jones, Director of CDET, who introduced the meeting and set out the format for the day.

### 2.1 First group session and plenary

Each group reviewed the first two DVDs and the following general points were raised at the plenary:

- It was felt that the term “knowledge and understanding” in the level descriptor for level 1 could be misinterpreted. It was agreed the text should be broad enough to describe knowledge and understanding as implicit within the candidate performance but also encompass the assessment of knowledge and understanding through questioning where this is used by some organisations.
- It was noted that with a wider range of organisations involved there were a variety of approaches to the examination format including the numbers of candidates assessed (e.g. up to 9 for Rockschoo), variations in the amounts of set and unset work specified according to different syllabus requirements and the difference between group and individual performances. However, this did not appear to influence standards which group feedback suggested was consistent after the first session.

### 2.2 Second group session and plenary

The second group session considered the remaining DVDs. The following issues were raised at the plenary:

- **Variation in skillset** – the variety of genres considered during the day raised some interesting observations about the variety of skills on display. This ranged from the exacting nature of the ballet genres shown by RAD and RBS to the wider range of acting, singing and dancing shown by the RSL DVD. It was felt that on the whole these skills balanced out with regard to “breadth” and “depth”, with some being “deeply focused” on a particular genre whereas others were broader in content encompassing a range of skills.
- **Timings** – although there were variations in examination timings the groups felt that these did not have a detrimental impact on the standards shown by the candidates and that all candidates were able to show a clear standard on the DVDs presented.
- **Set and unset work** – the amount of set and unset work varied by genre and organisation. A range of approaches was used, from repertoire completely set by the syllabus, work developed through varying forms of teacher adaptation and/or choreography to sequences/repertoire entirely set by the teacher and agreed with the organisation prior to the examination (RSL). However, these different approaches did not appear to impact on the consistency of standards.
- **Grading** – the issue about the variation in the grading boundaries operated by different awarding organisations was raised again. This could lead to a possible misconception by the public that some examinations are “easier” than others because of a lower pass mark. Awarding organisations felt that this issue required further discussion as it can affect the choices made by candidates, teachers and parents about which examinations to enter. A

variety of grading approaches was also seen with two organisations' awarding grades only based on a more holistic judgment of the examination (RSL and BATD). The approaches were discussed in detail and were found not to have an impact on the comparability of the standards observed in the DVDs presented.

- ***Minimum age requirements*** – organisations noted the range of minimum age requirements set on different genre and syllabuses. This was mainly due to the physical requirements of the syllabus and the strength and stamina needed by candidates. It was noted that some DVDs presented younger candidates (e.g. Ballet) and others presented older candidates (e.g. Spanish Dance). It was felt that on the whole the age of candidates had little impact on the standards observed.

### **3. Discussion of standards**

#### **3.1 Comparability of standards at Grade 3**

In general the groups found that there was comparability across all the DVDs considered.

- For Group 1, delegates were content that there was a high degree of comparability between the four sets of DVD evidence. It was noted that during the viewing of the two Jazz examinations presented that there was a clear merit candidate in each although it was felt that one was a “low” merit and the other was a “high” merit.
- For Group 2, delegates were content that there was a high degree of comparability between the four sets of DVD evidence. It was noted that in the RBS examination the teacher was present in the examination and demonstrated enchaînements before they were danced by the candidates. The teacher stayed completely still while the candidates were dancing. This is very different to other examinations which are conducted only with the examiner and the music operator present. Some delegates felt that this needed further exploration. However, it was not considered to impact on standards.
- For Group 3, delegates were content that there was a high degree of comparability between the four sets of DVD evidence. A variety of genres were discussed which ranged in terms of approaches to grading, the amounts of set and unset work used and the numbers of candidates assessed.

All groups felt that the standards of the candidates performing in the DVDs could clearly be seen and that the pass, merit and distinction candidates could be clearly distinguished from each other. The group members felt that at this level the differences in grade could be shown through the security of some candidates in their knowledge and understanding of the syllabus (this could also be described as clear “intention”). This meant that the pass candidates were generally more hesitant in their performance, sometimes showing a slight pause in movements as they remembered the syllabus requirements or followed their fellow candidates.

#### **3.2 The unit template and level descriptors**

All groups felt that the common unit template for dance and level descriptors for Grade 3 continue to be appropriate, subject to clarification of knowledge and understanding as highlighted above in section 2.1.

It was felt that although TCL and RSL use different unit templates, overall the standards viewed were at a comparable level to those genres using the common unit template and that both qualifications were consistent with the level descriptors in terms of standard. It was agreed that the level descriptors could be amended to encompass musical theatre as well as dance.

#### **4. Recommendations and future meetings**

It was agreed by all that this was an extremely useful exercise and could be used as model of good practice by individual organisations when standardising examiners.

Given the number of organisations taking part, and that a number of them had not participated in an exercise of this nature before, it was encouraging to see a high degree of comparability in terms of assessment standards and also a willingness to participate fully in discussions.

The recommendations to be taken forward are:

- To hold further comparability studies focussing on different levels and genres.
- To revise the level descriptors to reflect the age of candidates and their transition to professional practice by adding/amending agreed wording where appropriate.
- To further explore issues arising, including:
  - Public perceptions of grade boundaries and whether anything can be done to reassure parents, teachers and candidates of the comparability of standards across the awarding organisations.

**Appendix A**

**List of awarding organisations and representatives**

Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET)	Glyndwr Jones Rachael Meech Lauren Showler
British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD)	Richard McGilchrist Christine Grace
Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL)	Emma Chadwick Yvonne Novelli
International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA)	Liz Murphy Linda King
Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)	Cynthia Pease Yvonne Taylor-Hill
National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD)	Annette Hufton Yvonne Creber
Professional Teachers of Dancing (PTD)	Eleanor Cochrane
Rockschool (RSL)	Joanna Taman Jon Tatum
Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)	Andrew McBirnie Lynne Reucroft-Croome
Russian Ballet Society (RBS)	Robert Hampton Tasha Bertram
Spanish Dance Society (SDS)	Theo Dantes Sherrill Wexler
Trinity College London (TCL)	Anna Leatherdale Liz Burville
United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)	Chris Marlow

Further, the following observers were in attendance.

British Ballet Organization (BBO)	John Travis Janet Lupino
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