

## **Comparability and Standardisation Exercise**

### **Report on meeting to discuss exemplar candidate work for Graded Examinations in Dance and Musical Theatre at Grade 5**

**21<sup>st</sup> November 2015**

**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 2015 followed on from the work carried out in 2013 and 2014 by considering the comparability of standards across a diverse range of genres at Grade 5.

The organisations participating in the comparability study 2015 were as follows:

- British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD)
- British Ballet Organization (BBO)
- 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)
- Rockschool Ltd (RSL)
- Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)
- Spanish Dance Society (SDS)
- Trinity College London (TCL)
- United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)
- United Teachers of Dance (UTD)

One organisation was unable to provide a DVD on the day and attended as an observer only:

- Russian Ballet Society (RBS)

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.

Awarding Organisation	Genre
BBO	Tap
BATD	Modern
GQAL	Modern Jazz
IDTA	Ballroom
ISTD	Tap
NATD	Contemporary
PTD	Ballet
RAD	Ballet
RSL	Musical Theatre
SDS	Spanish Dance
TCL	Musical Theatre
UKA	Jazz
UTD	Ballet

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 2015 study provided an 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, Rockschoool and Trinity College London, presented musical theatre qualifications which are not currently covered by the common dance unit template for Grade 5. 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 genres presented by the organisations could be seen as comparable when considered against the current common unit template at Grade 5 for dance and the level descriptor for level 2. This would then confirm a benchmark for Grade 5 which organisations could 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 NATD – Contemporary BBO – Tap RAD – Ballet	UTD – Ballet BATD – Modern TCL – Musical Theatre ISTD – Tap	UKA - Jazz PTD – Ballet Rockschoool – Musical Theatre SDS – Spanish Dance IDTA - Ballroom

Organisations presented their DVD material in their respective sessions. 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 two DVDs and the following general points were raised at the plenary:

- It was noted that as with the comparability study in 2014 there was 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 assessment of 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:

- **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 were seen, from repertoire completely set by the syllabus, to 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. However, these different approaches did not appear to impact on the consistency of standards.
- **Live and recorded music** – it was felt that the way in which music was provided for the examination could have an impact on the performances. This was felt to be particularly true for genre like Spanish Dance where the relationship between the performer and musicians/singers is particularly close and the standard of dance performance can be influenced by the quality of the music. It was agreed that live music was a more expensive option which could not be insisted upon for all examinations.
- **Grading** – the matter of variations in the grading boundaries operated by different awarding organisations was raised once again. This could lead to a possible misconception by the public that some examinations are “easier” than others because of a lower pass mark. However, given the different approaches to marking there were high levels of consistency in the awarding of pass, merit and distinction across the DVDs presented. 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 approaches to assessment was also seen with two organisations awarding grades only rather than marks (RSL and BATD). The approaches were discussed in detail and

were found not to have an impact on the consistency of the standards observed in the DVDs presented.

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

#### **3.1 Comparability of standards at Grade 5**

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 sets of DVD evidence. It was noted that there were variations in the emphasis of how marks were awarded. For example, BBO's Tap examinations placed emphasis on timing and musicality as these were considered a crucial aspect of tap technique. The GQAL marking criteria consider presentation with specific marks for knowledge and understanding demonstrated through the performance. It was noted that both BBO and GQAL are in the process of changing their mark schemes, with BBO considering a less holistic approach to assessment. The group also discussed wider issues such as the potential for more flexibility in qualification design with the removal of QCF rules.
- 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 TCL's Musical Theatre examination was more candidate-led with emphasis placed on the candidate preparing own material in the form of two songs, an oral spoken piece and choreographed dance. It was felt that the demands placed on the candidate in preparing own repertoire was balanced by the comparatively shorter length of the examination (18 minutes). It was also noted that the DVD submitted by the ISTD was of a high quality as it was an exemplar recording used for examiner training. However the level of demand was felt to be comparable with other DVDs presented.
- For Group 3, delegates were content that there was a high degree of comparability between the four sets of DVD evidence. It was noted that there were variations in the amount of set work required. Some DVDs presented showed borderline grades/attainment bands of pass, merit and distinction and the reasons for these awards were discussed in detail. The DVD presented by UKA highlighted an example where teacher experience is crucial in the presentation of appropriate unset work.

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 distinguished from each other. For example, it was agreed that the pass candidates were generally less consistent in their performance throughout the examination, showing areas of strength in certain elements but weaknesses in others.

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

All groups felt that the common unit template for dance and level descriptors for Grade 5 continue to be appropriate.

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.

#### **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 it was encouraging to see a high degree of comparability in terms of assessment standards and also a willingness to participate fully in discussions.

It was recommended that further comparability studies are continued in the future.

**Appendix A**

**List of awarding organisations and representatives**

Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET)	Glyndwr Jones Rachael Meech
British Ballet Organisation	John Travis Deborah Clark
British Association of Teachers of Dancing (BATD)	Richard McGilchrist Christine Grace
Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL)	Emma Chadwick
International Dance Teachers Association (IDTA)	Liz Murphy Jane Tumelty
Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD)	Cynthia Pease Jackie Hayward
National Association of Teachers of Dancing (NATD)	Annette Hufton Yvonne Creber
Professional Teachers of Dancing (PTD)	Patricia Roberts
Rockschool (RSL)	Frankie Denton
Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)	Andrew McBirnie Paula Hunt
Spanish Dance Society (SDS)	Theo Dantes Sherrill Wexler
Trinity College London (TCL)	Carol Harvey-Barnes
United Kingdom Alliance (UKA)	Chris Marlow
United Teachers of Dance (UTD)	Amanda Hanlon Neil Harris

Further, the following observers were in attendance.

Russian Ballet Society (RBS)	Robert Hampton Tasha Bertram
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