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Assessment Overview

(Internal NSCD processes mapped against QAA Guiding Principles 1-10 throughout document, available at: <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/assessment#>)

All course at NSCD are validated by the University of Kent and as such follow the Credit Framework and grading system which can be accessed here:

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/index.html>

Assessment is used to test and evaluate your skills and knowledge, to ensure the intended learning outcomes of each module, and of the programme, are being met. It offers a formal opportunity to feedback on your progress. The details of all assessment points, alongside assessment briefs module aims, learning outcomes, and details about draft and final submission dates, are given in the **module page on Moodle**. (QAA 1, 3, 5, 6, 9)

There are two modes of assessment used at Northern School of Contemporary Dance: **continuous assessment** and **summative assessment**. In continuous assessment, all of your work in class and your progression over a period of time is taken into consideration when arriving at a grade. Summative assessments take a variety of forms but are concerned with assessing you at a given point in time and generally allow you to prepare in advance. Modes of summative assessment include written assignments, presentations, performances, and class work in the case of dance technique. (QAA 2, 3, 5, 9)

Assessments differ from module to module and are conceived to most appropriately and effectively test the skills and knowledge gained during each module. Each assessment is designed to evaluate the learning aim and outcomes of each module, which in turn provides evidence of the ways in which each student is able to fulfil the overall aims of the programme. A range of assessment modes and activities allows you to demonstrate your knowledge and skills in ways that best represent your overall profile as a learner. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

Following each assessment, you are given a grade, based on the **grading criteria** found in the assessment section on Moodle, and feedback from the marking tutor or panel. **Feedback** is either **written** and made available on Moodle, or **verbal**, offered in a tutorial setting and recorded on Moodle via Poodle. **Tutorial support forms** are available to encourage self-reflection ahead of the tutorial and provide a section to record thoughts during or after the tutorial. You are also permitted to make a verbal recording of the tutorial should that best suit your learning needs. **We aim to return your feedback as soon as possible after assessment and no later than within 4 working weeks (20 working days)**. (QAA 6, 7)

Feedback is an important element of the learning process and should be received attentively as it allows you to understand your tutor's/panel's perspective on your work relative to the assessment criteria and can serve as a basis for future development, alongside highlighting the strengths to be maintained. (QAA 6)

The variety of feedback mechanisms offered allows you to receive feedback in a range of ways to best support your learner profile. (QAA 2, 4)

NSCD staff, in conjunction with external assessors and examiners, do make academic judgements about your level of achievement and all grades on a feedback sheet are provisional until confirmed by the Board of Examiners at the end of the year. (QAA 2, 5)

Inclusive Assessment

At NSCD we encourage students to be creative in their presentation of knowledge and understanding surrounding the context of learning outcomes. We also recognise that due to specific scenarios and circumstances, at times, students may be best able to evidence their learning through less conventional assessment methods. Our curriculum has therefore been designed to **include a range of complementary assessment choices**. This approach ensures the curriculum can respond to industry needs and allows you to continue exploring your learning style and preferences, developing a range of skills to increase employability as you progress through your programme of learning. For example, where a module might have previously specified a written essay as the assessment type, you might choose to prepare a verbal presentation or in some cases a lecture demonstration.

NSCD's inclusive and flexible approach to assessment provision does not replace alternative assessment. We do find, however, that employing multiple assessment modes complements and supports the approach to alternative assessment. (QAA 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 10)

Modes of Assessment

Continuous Assessment

Continuous assessment takes place throughout each level of your programme and is an ideal assessment method to use for a **period or 'process' of skill/knowledge development**. It will often be applied in practical contexts where there are stages of creative, technical and/or professional development over a period of time. It enables specific milestones of formative feedback to be given in any or all aspects of the above and to support time frames for development over specified assessment periods.

The processes through which you are continuously assessed are the identification of evidence that supports your ongoing engagement with learning during sessions and in tutorials. Areas for consideration include:

- Attendance, punctuality, and other professional attributes applied over a specified time period.
- Preparation for sessions, as evidenced by an appropriate state of physical, creative, intellectual, and emotional readiness.
- Commitment, engagement, and response to teaching and learning within the sessions; this may include working independently or with others.
- Completion of directed study or independent study as preparation for the next session.

- Growth and development evidenced beyond basic participation in a session.
- Ability to apply reflexive practice to improve own performance over a specified time period.

The tutor observes and draws out evidence of how the student is applying their 'professional' attributes to the learning through the continuous assessment process. The tutor may keep a record of an individual's approach and/or level of attainment within taught sessions and be able to make references to specific 'instances' over a period of time for analysis and discussion. Commitment and preparation are readily observed in practical classes and through evidence of development in the time in between. Engagement in research and further scholarly activity which supports professional growth e.g., further reading, research, complementary classes are often evidenced through a student's approach to class. Tutors may also identify evidence in classes and tutorials relating to professionalism in relation to appropriate nutrition, fitness, rest, and well-being, all of which support effective training as a creative dance artist at this level. Tutors will also note the ways in which students respond to feedback from tutor(s) and peers in practical classes with reflexive practice being assessed in both class and tutorial scenarios. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9)

Formative feedback offered throughout the process of continuous assessment periods enables opportunities for improvement in areas of a student's physical, analytical/reflective, and/or creative practice. It is an invaluable tool to support a dance artist's growth and increase levels of achievement as measured by summative assessment outcomes at the end of a module. It is a good tool to measure the affirmation of learning during a creation/rehearsal/performance period for example or over the weeks in Dance Practices classes. (QAA 6, 7, 9)

As a student it is important to remember that forms of language used in formative feedback offer in class and tutorial may not be reflected in the numerical grade and/or verbal or written feedback you receive. For example, if following an exercise, a tutor says, "Very Good" or "Excellent", this may refer to your effort or your achievement relative to the situation you are in, or your normal level of work and concentration. This does not refer to the language used in level descriptors as applied to grade boundaries. These comments are used as a way to encourage you to do better. The written or verbal feedback you receive will indicate your level of achievement, and it is important that you do not confuse this with your standard of effort, or comments designed to give you encouragement. (QAA 4, 5, 6)

Moderation of continuous assessment

Within the curriculum timetable tutors most often work in teams across student cohorts for a period of time. These tutors will usually teach each of the cohorts several times during the week. Tutors will engage in discussion surrounding a student's continuous process. Teaching teams and the nature of the subject enable this moderation to happen effectively. At the end of the assessed period **tutors meet to formalise this moderation through further discussion to form consensus around marks and relevant feedback with an internal moderator**, ensuring that marks awarded for continuous assessment come from more than one tutor, are fair and transparent, reflect the student's profile in its entirety and have been arrived at through a robust multi-layered process. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)

All marks are subject to external moderation ahead of final decisions at Exam Board. (QAA 2, 10)

Summative Assessment

Summative assessment is a **snapshot of your level of achievement in relation to a specific assignment brief**, designed to allow the student to evidence their learning in relation to the module's Learning Outcomes.

Below are some of the summative assessments that you may be involved with during the course:

- Dance Technique class work
- Essays / written reports
- Verbal Presentations
- Lecture Demonstrations
- Performances – self-choreographed or directed works in theatre, studio and off-site settings
- Lecture Demonstrations
- Structured presentation assessments

(QAA Guiding Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10)

Moderation of summative assessment

Summative assessments are often assessed by a panel, chaired by a moderator, meaning that marks and feedback are arrived at through robust discussion supporting an ultimate consensus. Where panel member's feedback varies, this would be relayed to the student to ensure they are fully aware of the panel's thoughts. In placement settings work is marked by a single tutor with qualitative feedback offered by a guest mentor to inform the process. There is then a process of internal moderation, and review by the External Examiner of a sample of work to ensure parity. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)

Written work is either marked by one tutor, then sampled by an internal moderator who checks for parity across the team of markers allocated to a module or marked by a first and second tutor. The internal moderator highlights any discrepancies across the marking team in relation to the awarding of numerical marks, offers comments on tutor feedback and makes suggestions for amendments. The internal moderator will see samples of marks from all tutors across all grade boundaries and any work that tutors consider having failed the requirements of the assessment task. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)

All marks are subject to external moderation ahead of final decisions at Exam Board.
(QAA 2, 10)

Alternative Assessment

In addition to the inbuilt approach to inclusive assessment at NSCD we provide students with alternative assessments where required. Alternative assessment arrangements can be made for students who are managing physical injuries, health issues or other specific scenarios which may require reasonable adjustment. Alternative assessment enables students to engage with the programme and demonstrate learning in a number of different ways. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10)

If you feel you need an alternative assessment, speak to the relevant module tutor or Head of Faculty in the first instance.

Assessment Processes

The following describes how assessment works in practice. The key principles that frame assessment are:

- Assessments are either marked by a team of tutors (assessment panel), or sample second marked and/or moderated. NSCD is obliged by the University of Kent to ensure that at least 80% of all assessments comply with this.
- A panel assessment will sometimes include an industry professional from outside NSCD and will often include cross faculty representation.
- Where appropriate, in practical assessments marking tutors fill in feedback sheets during assessment and then meet to discuss marks and comments to be fed back to students in tutorial or in writing.
- When written work is marked by a tutor who provides an initial mark and comments, a sample is then reviewed by a moderator. During the process of moderation, it is common for the moderator to suggest tutor's review each other's work to ensure parity. A sample of written feedback is also reviewed by the moderator. Alternatively, in some modules, written work is double-marked, meaning it is marked by two individual markers who then discuss the marks and feedback in order to arrive at consensus on the final grade awarded.
- Assessment criteria reflect the learning outcomes for the module and are described in the module page on Moodle.
- NSCD aim to return feedback as soon as possible. This is normally with 4 working weeks (20 working days) of the completion of a module of work. Verbal feedback can be delivered within the 4 working weeks (20 working days) of the completion of a module of work, with marks being received in the 4th and final week of that period. These dates are outlined in the Module page on Moodle.
- Internal moderators complete an internal moderation form for each assessment item in a module. These outline strengths and areas for development in either the students' achievement and/or the process of assessment.
- The External Examiner has access to all work that contributes to the undergraduate degree award and has the right to recommend that marks are adjusted if they believe they are too high or low (this is undertaken at Board of Examiners meetings at the end of the academic year). External examiners fill an assessment sheet where all criteria and grade descriptors are displayed. (It is not always possible for the External Examiner to access all work completed by students on postgraduate placements where alternative arrangements are made to ensure as broad a sample of student work as possible is available.
- Students have the right to appeal against decisions made by the Board of Examiners on the grounds of administrative error or consideration of concessions but cannot challenge the academic judgement of an assessor.

(QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10)

How to query an assessment mark or comment

If a student has concerns around any assessment marks or feedback, they may query this to seek clarification. In the first instance, **you should arrange a tutorial with the marking tutor or Head of Faculty**. In this scenario it is permissible to ask a friend to come to this tutorial for support and to help listen/make note of what is said (the friend must remain passive in this meeting).

The academic assessment of the tutor is final. However, if you feel there were specific circumstances affecting your performance that have not been taken into consideration, you can choose to make this known.

Claims that academic performance was adversely affected by factors such as ill health must be supported by contemporaneous, independent, medical, or other evidence.
(QAA 2, 4, 5, 9)

Grading

Marks for all modules and module components on the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are given as a grade between 0 and 100 (with the exception of Level 4 which follows a pass/fail system) following the University of Kent Categorical Marking scale:

<https://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/qa/credit-framework/documents/2021-credit-framework-annex-6-marking.docx>

An assessor reaches a decision about a grade by consulting the **grade indicators and feedback descriptors** (available in the assessment section of Moodle) and using one of the grades available in the categorical marking scale. Students should always refer to the criteria for greater understanding of the standard of their work following assessment.

For most modules on the programme, the overall module grade will be reached through averaging or aggregating marks. The method by which the final module grade is reached will be outlined in each individual module brief, along with the assessment methods for that module. (QAA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)

Averaging Grades

The grade for some modules is reached through averaging two or more grades.

(QAA 2, 4, 5, 8, 10)

Aggregating grades

Some modules will contain separate components which are weighted - meaning they represent a particular percentage of the overall grade. In these cases, the grade for each element is multiplied by its corresponding weighting. These outcomes are then added

together and divided by 100 to reach the module grade.

For example, where Component A of a module is 30% and Component B is 70%:

Module grade = $((A \times 30) + (B \times 70)) / 100$

(QAA 2, 4, 5, 8, 10)

Rounding of marks

If the averaged grade or the outcome of an aggregated grade is not a whole number, it is rounded to the nearest whole number.

The exception to this is when an overall averaged or aggregated mark for the whole module falls within one mark of the boundary for a higher classification or grade category (e.g., 39, 49, 59, 69) - in this case the mark is always rounded **up** to the next whole number.

For further information about the grading system and credit framework, you can visit the University of Kent's website: <http://www.kent.ac.uk/teaching/ga/credit-framework/index.html>

(QAA 2, 4, 5, 8, 10)

Attendance

NSCD provides world class contemporary dance training and expects the highest standards from students. Due to the practical nature of the NSCD programmes you are expected to attend 100% of timetabled sessions where this is in your best interest. As training professionals, the attendance replicates the professional world in which you are present unless there are circumstances that prevent this, such as illness or personal problems. For further details please refer to the NSCD [Student Engagement Policy](#).

(QAA 4, 7, 8, 9, 10)

Award Classification

Taught courses at both undergraduate and postgraduate level will normally be classified by both the 'average' and the 'preponderance' methods, with students to benefit from the better result derived from each method. (QAA 2, 4, 5, 8, 10)

Cert HE Classifications

The outcome of a Certificate of Higher Education award will be awarded as a Distinction, Merit or Pass. The classification of the Cert HE will be based on the overall grade point equivalent of the year, as follows:

Grades	Classification Cert HE
70 and above	Distinction
60 – 69.4	Merit
40 – 59.4	Pass
Below 40	Fail

BA (Hons) Classifications

The outcome of the BA Honours Dance (Contemporary) will be awarded as a First, Upper Second, Lower Second- or Third-Class Degree. The classification of the BA will be based on the overall grade point equivalent of the year, as follows:

Grades	Classification BA
70 and above	First Class (1 st)
60 – 69.4	Upper Second (2:1)
50 – 59.4	Lower Second (2:2)
40 – 49.4	Third (3 rd)
Below 40	Fail

Undergraduate classification methods

BA degree classifications are calculated in two ways, with the highest outcome awarded.

1. Averaging: the average grade across all credits (a calculation based on module grades and the credit weighting of each module). Where the overall average mark falls within 0.5 of the boundaries for a higher classification (e.g. 39.5, 49.5, 59.5, 69.5) the mark is always rounded **up** to the nearest integer.
2. Preponderance: if a student has a percentage of credits in a grade band and an average grade over a specified number, they will be awarded the higher classification.

Classification of BA awards using preponderance:

- For a 1st the student needs 50% of the credit graded as 70 or above, plus an average grade of 67 or over.
- For a 2:1 the student needs 50% of the credit graded as 60 or above, plus an average grade of 57 or over.
- For a 2:2 the student needs 50% of the credit graded as 50 or above, plus an average grade of 47 or over.
- For a Third (BA only) the student needs 100% of the credit graded as 40 or above

MA classification

The outcome of a Postgraduate award will be awarded as a Distinction, Merit or Pass. The classification of the Postgraduate course will be based on the overall grade point equivalent of the year, as follows:

Grades	Classification BA
70 and above	Distinction
60 – 69.4	Merit
50 – 59.4	Pass
Below 50	Fail

Postgraduate classification methods

Postgraduate course classifications are calculated in two ways, with the highest outcome awarded.

1. Averaging: the average grade across all credits (a calculation based on module grades and the credit weighting of each module). Where the overall average mark falls within 0.5 of the boundaries for a higher classification (e.g. 49.5, 59.5, 69.5) the mark is always rounded **up** to the nearest integer.
2. Preponderance: if a student has a percentage of credits in a grade band and an average grade over a specified number, they will be awarded the higher classification.

Classification of Postgraduate awards using preponderance:

- For a DISTINCTION the student needs 50% of the credit graded as 70 or above, plus an average grade of 67 or over.

- For a MERIT the student needs 50% of the credit graded as 60 or above, plus an average grade of 57 or over.
- For a PASS the student needs 100% of the credit graded as 50 or above

Deadlines and submission of work

Assignments and tasks on the course are subject to deadlines. These are the dates and times that, for example, an essay must be handed in or a specific task completed.

Deadlines are to be respected at all times, and **failure to submit or present work at the required time without an agreed extension will lead to a student being awarded a '0' for that element of the module.**

A timetable of deadlines for the year can be found on the assessment schedule and module guides on Moodle. (QAA 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Procedures for the submission of work

Written submissions

The **deadline for all submission of work through Moodle will be on a Friday at 5:00pm.** Moodle is connected to Turnitin which is a software programme that checks written work for evidence of plagiarism. All written works should be submitted either in Word or PDF format. (QAA 2, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Please refer to the separate [Writing Guidance](#) available on Moodle for information regarding:

- Guidelines for quoting and referencing
- Instructions for word processing of work for submission
- Plagiarism, duplication, and academic misconduct (QAA 10)

You should always keep a copy of your work for your own reference.

Practical work

Module guides and/or tutors will set out the time and place allocated for practical presentations. For continuously assessed practical work, assessment periods rather than specific dates are given (week commencing). These periods will be set out in module page on Moodle. (QAA 2, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Please refer to the separate [Codes of Conduct](#) available on Moodle for information regarding:

- Presentation for practical assessments
- Use of the School facilities in relation to practical assessments

Late submission / non submission of work

Late submission of any required element of a module (without approved mitigating circumstances) will be recorded as '0' for that element and the final module mark will be calculated in the normal manner.

All elements of a module must be submitted, even if they are submitted incomplete or are submitted late. (QAA 10)

Students will have **two opportunities**, with the exception of MA Research Project module where there is only one, **to retrieve (resit) failed modules**. Modules passed through retrieval will be **capped at the pass mark (40 for undergraduate course and 50 for postgraduate courses)** – retrievals are confirmed at the Board of Examiners at the end of each academic year. (QAA 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Extension request

Extensions to written assignments will only be granted in exceptional circumstances and should usually be **discussed at least 1 week (5 working days) in advance of the submission** deadline with the Module Tutor or Learner Support Tutor where relevant.

Extensions will only be agreed for students with Specific Learning Difficulties if they can demonstrate they have engaged with learner support with the specific task.

To apply for an extension a student must complete the Extension Request Form on the relevant module page of Moodle.

An assessment deferral in the case of injury or illness should be discussed with the module leader and/or Head of Faculty with as much notice as possible. Medical evidence may be required. (QAA 4, 5, 7, 9)

Mitigating Circumstances

Mitigating circumstances are **significantly disruptive or unexpected events which are beyond a student's control, and which might affect academic performance**. If a student experiences difficulties that may have affected (or might affect) their ability to meet the attendance requirement, or to complete assessments, it is their responsibility to advise the School as soon as possible. Such circumstances which are generally accepted include:

- Illness of more than 5 days / Ongoing illness
- Being taken ill on day of assessment
- Serious / ongoing injury
- Chronic conditions
- Mental health problems
- Bereavement involving a close relative/friend
- Serious illness of close family member
- Burglary or theft

- Religious observation on assessment day
- Extreme weather conditions

Mitigation in most instances should be supported with appropriate evidence, which can include:

- Letter from physiotherapist (or another physical therapist)
- Letter from doctor / doctor's sick note
- Letter from hospital
- Doctors/hospital/physiotherapists appointment cards
- Copies of prescriptions/medication packaging with prescription attached
- Written statement from a member of NSCD staff
- Crime Report

All cases of mitigation are handled by the Assessment & Attendance Officer, and enquiries should be made with them in the first instance. The process of mitigation involves completing a form and submitting appropriate evidence to support your case via Moodle prior to the Board of Examiners. Your request will be considered by the Concessions Committee and ratified by the Boards of Examiners. (QAA 2, 4, 5, 9)

Board of Examiners & External Examiners

At the end of each academic year all module grades and degree outcomes are confirmed at the Board of Examiners convened with members of staff from the University of Kent and our external examiner.

The **External Examiner** is expected to make informed, independent assessment of our programmes and marking procedures. **They ensure that all students are treated fairly and that our standards are in line with other degree programmes in the country.** The External Examiner has access to all assessed work, is invited to see performances, is asked for advice concerning learning, teaching and assessment on the programme, attends the annual Board of Examiners and writes an annual report for the NSCD and the University of Kent. Occasionally the External Examiner asks to meet a group of students to discuss their work. External Examiner reports are considered at Student Voice Forums, made available on Moodle and considered as part of the annual course monitoring review process. (QAA 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10)

Under no circumstances should students contact External Examiners directly.