

Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

June 2015

NQF BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Firsts in
Performing Arts

Unit 1: Individual Showcase (20512E)

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General Comments

This examination requires learners to respond to one of four progression opportunities. The paper is set every year and published in the autumn term (in September) prior to examination (Submission deadline in May). This Level 2 externally assessed unit is intended to be summative; in that it allows learners to showcase the skills they have developed on their BTEC Performing Arts programme.

The progression opportunities are written in the form of advertisements for employment or education programmes and learners are required to submit a letter of application as well as a recording of a practical activity.

There is full guidance published with every progression opportunity and this must be read, along with the advertisement itself. Centres must ensure that learners have to read and understand the whole of the progression opportunity, and the relevant guidance. The work should be viewed as a vocational opportunity and treated as such. This implies learners should be fully prepared to present themselves individually, as for an audition or interview, wearing suitable clothing, having rehearsed and practiced their work.

Published texts, scores and other people's choreography can all be used by learners as sources for their performances or presentations as appropriate.

In the letter, learners are assessed on their understanding of the chosen opportunity and their ability to communicate using appropriate structure, language and tone. The letter should also be seen as an introduction to the learner's practical work providing the opportunity for learners to explain their choice of material and how it relates to the requirements of the chosen opportunity. The letter gives an opportunity for creative intentions to be outlined and to provide a context for the performance work to be viewed.

Practical work is marked according to its technical merit and how well it meets the requirements of the chosen opportunity and communicates the learner's creative intentions as identified in the letter.

Progression opportunity one:

This opportunity was best suited to learners interested in technical aspects of theatre and production arts. Learners were invited to apply to be lighting or sound technicians for a Jazz group. They were asked to state in their letter, and show in their practical presentation, how they would respond to the challenges of the opportunity as a whole. The presentation had to include a short (5 minute) demonstration of technical skills.

Progression opportunity two:

Learners were invited to apply in writing and via an audition for a role in a gala event marking the opening of a new arts centre venue. They were required to demonstrate contrasting skills in two areas of performance, such as drama, dance, speciality acts, comedy or music.

Progression opportunity three:

This opportunity invited learners to become part of a Company that would be touring arts centres, for young people 11–16 yrs, on the theme of 'rights and responsibilities'. Learners could choose whether to offer their skills in dance, drama, music or production. All learners were expected to demonstrate their performance skills and present workshop ideas relevant to the theme, target audience and company.

Progression opportunity four:

Learners were invited to apply for a course at a Performing Arts school. They could specialise in one of the following disciplines: dance, drama, music performance, musical theatre (the audition for which had to include a dance sequence), or production design. Performers were required to present two contrasting audition pieces in their chosen discipline. Those specialising in production were asked to present design ideas for a specific production of their own choosing. The theme for the auditions or presentations was 'discovery'.

Examiners again found that the most popular progression opportunity this year was number 4. Progression opportunity 1 was offered in the minority of centres but proved to serve production candidates well. The responses to progression opportunities 2 and 3 were more popular than last year and offered some creative and varied work.

There was a large increase in the number of entries this year and most centres appeared to present work at the right stage of the course.

Letters of Application

This year saw a range of quality in terms of both the form and the content of the letters. Again this year, some learners did not communicate their knowledge, skills and experience in relation to the chosen progression opportunity.

Learners in some cases did not make clear their intentions for the audition and only made passing reference to the work they were going to perform or present. Stronger responses made reference to the specific demands of the chosen progression opportunity and took account of the instructions included with each one.

The most successful letters met the challenges of the whole of the selected progression opportunity and outlined detailed links between learners' own skills with what they were going to bring to the audition and/or presentation.

Where learners explained and justified their choices of audition pieces and/or the content of their presentation they were more likely to demonstrate a clear understanding of the demands of the particular progression opportunity. This also provided a context for the practical work and led to a more coherent response overall.

The letter should be viewed as an opportunity to demonstrate a full understanding of the progression opportunity which may include theme, target audience, intentions of an event or production and the skills that would be 'wanted' in order for learners to make a successful application.

Structure and language again varied greatly across centres and within centres. Some learners wrote clearly and accurately used punctuation, spelling and phrasing, making the communication of ideas effective. Where learners used bullet points and lists, this was not appropriate, however overall the structure, tone and language used within most letters were generally appropriate. Where learners presented handwritten letters it was often the case that the opportunity to type them may have been beneficial.

This year saw an increase in the number of centres submitting letters that were of a 'house style'. The set framework often appeared to support a weaker learner but also to possibly be preventing a more able learner from accessing the full range of marks available. In a few cases the letters were very similar and did not give learners the opportunity to express individual understanding or ideas.

Practical Work

Progression opportunity 1

The learners who responded to this progression opportunity mostly produced appropriate work. The strongest responses showed the learners' technical expertise off to good effect, applying skills, knowledge and experience in a well-prepared and appropriate technical setting.

The best responses corresponded closely to the focus of the opportunity and responded in particular to the technical needs of a musical performance.

Some presentations were too long with demonstrations of isolated skills showing the examiner how to set up lights or sound in a general context rather than the specific one called for in the progression opportunity.

In a small number of centres the environment was chaotic and noisy and made it difficult for the learner to give an appropriate presentation.

Progression opportunity 2

A range of performance pieces was seen, some of which were more suitable than others in terms of meeting the requirements of the progression opportunity. In some cases there was little evidence that the work presented had been selected to relate to the themes and intentions of the progression opportunity, such as the community centre and new venue setting, the chocolate factory link or the gala event.

On the other hand, for several learners' the selection of performance pieces showed a coherent and informed response to the progression opportunity, and engaging work was seen. We again saw some very imaginative work presented for this progression opportunity.

Some learners successfully used this progression opportunity as a showcase for their particular skills and talents.

Progression opportunity 3

Performances and presentations that explicitly and consistently linked to the theme of 'rights and responsibilities', tended to achieve higher marks because the work corresponded more closely to the demands of the progression opportunity. Where there was simply a few references made to the theme and it was not embedded in the work, there was less opportunity to access the higher marks. In some centres the theme was almost instantly interpreted as 'bullying' and no clear explanation of how this linked to the theme was given. This led in some cases to previous work undertaken as part of an anti bullying project being presented.

Presentation skills ranged from well prepared, confident and clear to simply reading from a piece of paper, and for some there was a lack of consideration that this aspect of the work was being assessed.

In some cases, presentations lacked ideas and suggestions for the practical content of the workshop.

The audition work that was presented was mostly, suitable for the stated target audience and had considered the theme.

Again, this year the most successful work was seen where learners had prepared a piece of performance as a result of their consideration of the target group, the theme and their skills.

For a small number of learners there was no recording of the presentation included and instead a copy of PowerPoint slides was included. This was very limiting for the learners in terms of them accessing the full range of marks available.

Progression opportunity 4

This was again the most popular of the progression opportunities. Learners who had clearly explored the theme of 'discovery' in practical workshops and classes before selecting repertoire or creating work tended to produce the most successful responses.

Some learners produced performances of genuine quality, showing that they had responded to the whole of the progression opportunity, including the theme of 'discovery'.

A small number of learners did not respond appropriately to the demands of the musical theatre pathway, as they failed to include a dance sequence as part of one of their audition pieces.

Where learners were singing to a music track, which included vocals, it was more difficult to hear the work and generally did not support learners in demonstrating their own skills.

Many learners chose to present their acting skills for this opportunity and stronger responses were well rehearsed and presented as if for a professional audition. The most successful responses had taken extracts from established and rigorous texts as required and were able to demonstrate their understanding of the work in its wider context, making stronger and more imaginative links to the theme.

It was however also the case that several learners had not learnt their lines and were reliant on prompts or gave up before the end of the performance. Some learners simply read their monologues from a script, thus limiting the marks available to them.

Where teacher choreography was performed it was often fit for purpose and supported learners. However, where learners had then had the opportunity to add individual motifs or sequences, it gave them more possibility to develop the work and make it their own.

Administration

Most centres presented the work as required, which is appreciated and greatly aided the examiners work. However, the issues raised by examiners included the poor organisation of the work on the recordings by a small number of centres.

Centres should fully adhere to the demands of both the progression opportunity, and the requirements as detailed in the Administrative Support Guide.

Centres are reminded that work must be submitted by the deadline to the examiner in the correct format in terms of recordings and pdf files. Each learner's work must be presented in its own folder, along with others in the cohort, on a new, undamaged, DVD or memory stick that will play on any commonly used laptop.

Centres that did not adhere to these rules created problems for the examining team and much time was spent requesting new, playable recordings or for further aid in the identification of individual learners. Where DVD's were sent without a protective case, it caused delays, as replacements were needed as often they had been broken or damaged in the post.

Centres are reminded that learner work, including auditions, presentations and letters are assessed as a whole, so must be submitted together as such, in a single folder for each learner. It is unhelpful if examiners are required to search for audition pieces and letters on separate DVDs. Centres are also reminded that it is **not** necessary to use a separate DVD for each learner.

Similarly, centres are reminded that they must complete the essential documents relating to each learner, and the centre itself as these are required by the examiner for marking and centre/learner identification.

Recordings were generally of a good quality however in some cases the quality of sound was poor, which made assessment more problematic. Where centres provided a quiet and appropriate space for the auditions/presentations to be recorded, this better supported the learners. In some centres learners appeared to be distracted by background noise and/or other learners.

It should be noted that learners as individuals must present work submitted for this unit and it is not acceptable to submit pair work/duologues or group work.

Summary

Based on the performance seen during this series the following lessons should be learned:

- Centres should ensure that learners read and respond to the whole of the chosen progression opportunity including the relevant guidance, written below each advertisement.
- Learners should produce a clear and informative letter of application, telling the reader about their skills, knowledge and understanding that is appropriate to the specific requirements and demands of the chosen progression opportunity.
- Learners should use their letter of application to explain their choice of audition pieces and/or introduce the content of their presentations and give clear creative intentions so work can be viewed in context.
- Learners should not include actual personal contact details, such as personal email addresses and telephone numbers. If they wish to use this in their letters, then general centre details can be given.
- Centres should ensure learners have an appropriate, quiet space available for their auditions/presentations.
- Learners should fully prepare their audition pieces learning choreography, lines, lyrics etc. in order to perform with confidence and to the best of their ability.
- Learners offering presentations should practice their presentation skills to ensure that material is presented effectively and with clarity and confidence.
- Where a progression opportunity asks learners to perform extracts from published texts, it should be noted that if they simply perform monologues that are not extracts from existing work, they are not fully meeting the requirements of the progression opportunity. Repertoire that is understood as a whole and has clear and rigorous creative content will better support a learner to access the marks available.
- It is not acceptable to place a 'prompt' outside of the view of the camera, such as words on a whiteboard or someone marking through dance moves. The recording should capture the work, as it would be seen in an audition setting.

Grade Boundaries

Unit	Max Mark	D	M	P	L1	U
20512E – Unit 1: Individual Showcase	42	35	26	18	10	0

External assessment

The suite of 'next generation' NQF BTECs include an element of external assessment. This external assessment may be through a timetabled paper-based examination, an onscreen, on demand test or a set-task conducted under controlled conditions.

What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we 'set' the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass and Level 1 fallback).

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries - this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries ensures that a learner who receives a 'Distinction' grade next year, will have similar ability to a learner who has received an 'Distinction' grade this year. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to make sure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in externally assessed question papers

Each exam we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries year on year because then it wouldn't take into account that a paper may be slightly easier or more difficult than the year before.

Grade boundaries for all papers can be found here:

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

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