



Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

Summer 2013

NQF BTEC Level 1/Level 2 Firsts in
Performing Arts

Unit 1: Individual Showcase
(20512E)

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Publications Code BF037399

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Introduction

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 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 prepared to present themselves individually, as for an audition or interview, wearing suitable clothing, having rehearsed/practiced their work.

No work needs to be devised by learners; published texts, scores and other people's choreography can all be used by learners as sources for their performances or presentations.

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.

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. Learners were invited to apply to become part of a team supporting a touring solo singer/guitarist. 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, as either a sound or lighting technician. The presentation had to include a short demonstration of technical skills.

Progression opportunity two:

Learners were invited to apply in writing and via an audition for a role in a summer celebration variety show. They were required to demonstrate their skills in two areas of performance, such as drama, dance, speciality acts or music.

Progression opportunity three:

This opportunity invited learners to become part of a Theatre in Education Company that would be touring in a show, for primary school pupils, called *Alice*

in Wonderland, with a Twist. The underlying theme of the work, and the practical workshops accompanying the performance, was to be “staying safe every day”. Learners could choose whether to offer their skills in dance, drama, music or production, although the latter could only be offered at presentation stage as design ideas. All learners were expected to have performance skills that could be used, as they would be, in a small Theatre in Education 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 “seasons”.

Examiners found that the most popular progression opportunity was number 4. Very few learners had chosen progression opportunity 1 in this series. The responses to progression opportunities 2, 3 and 4 were varied, ranging from limited to those that were more thoughtful, considered and, at times, showed insight and creativity. However much of the work did not seem to reflect the 30 guided learning hours recommended for this unit. It was also a concern that many learners were attempting this unit towards the beginning of their BTEC programme. Those learners with more maturity i.e. those at the end of their key stage 4 studies, tended to be more able to manage the requirements of the unit.

Letters of Application

Some learners did not relate their knowledge, skills and experience sufficiently to the chosen progression opportunity in their letters. Some missed out whole aspects of the progression opportunity, often only referring to some of the challenges they had taken on. Few learners managed to accomplish both of these aspects in enough detail and at the appropriate level. Learners often struggled to make clear their intentions for the audition(s) and often made scant reference to the work they were going to perform or present.

Some learners made up biographical details that were clearly not related to themselves and their own experiences.

Stronger responses made reference to the demands of the chosen advertisement as well as the instructions included with each progression opportunity. The best work seen met the challenges of the whole of the progression opportunity chosen and linked learners’ own skills with what they were going to bring, to both the audition/presentation, and the ensuing career or training. Where learners explained their choices of audition pieces and/or the content of their presentation they were more likely to demonstrate a clear understanding of the requirements of the progression opportunity. This also provided a context for the practical work which aided its assessment by the examiner.

Structure and language varied greatly across centres and within centres. Some learners wrote clearly and accurately whilst others struggled with punctuation,

spelling and phrasing making the communication of ideas difficult. However the structure, tone and language used within most letters were generally appropriate.

The majority of responses were typed with a small number being hand written. While it is not inappropriate for learners to hand write their letters, care must be taken to ensure writing is legible and that they are scanned carefully to ensure they can be read.

Practical Work

Progression opportunity 1

The small number of learners who responded to this progression opportunity produced work of widely varying quality. The strongest responses showed the learners' technical expertise off to good effect, applying skills, knowledge and experience to the challenge in hand. The best responses corresponded closely to the focus of the opportunity i.e. a solo performer working in venues as part of a tour and responded to the needs of both the performer and audience.

Less successful learners failed to link the presentation to the particular needs of the performer and audience. Some presentations were too long with demonstrations of individual skills simply 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.

Progression opportunity 2

Many disappointingly weak performance pieces were seen for this progression opportunity, some of which were unsuitable for its demands and audience. There was often very little sense that the work presented needed to be skilful and imaginative and that the performance should be appropriate for a summer show, to be performed in front of an audience, at a local arts centre. Where specialist skills were offered e.g. skateboarding or trampolining little effort was made to incorporate the skills into an "act". Many learners offering stand-up comedy simply read jokes from sheets of paper.

Some learners accomplished much for this opportunity using it as a showcase for their talents, particularly in dancing and singing. There were some excellent performances of solo guitar playing, singing, contemporary and urban dance. Some good examples of stand up comedy were also seen.

Progression opportunity 3

In some centres there seemed to have been confusion about, or disregard of, "Alice in Wonderland - with a Twist" as the theme of the production. There was little reference to this in many learners' performances and presentations. Performances and presentations that linked to the story of Alice in Wonderland

as well as the theme of "staying safe every day", tended to achieve higher marks because the work corresponded more closely with the demands of the progression opportunity.

Presentation skills were sometimes weak and there seemed to be scant consideration that this aspect of the work was being assessed. Where learners faced away from the camera for much of the time and simply read information from powerpoint slides, marks were limited. Some presentations lacked ideas and suggestions for the practical content of a drama workshop, relying instead on downloaded film presentations from the internet. Some learners used other performers to demonstrate what they would do in the workshop. This is not permitted. Some learners made little reference to "drama activities" focusing solely on presenting information about subjects such as road safety or safety online. Many presentations were also significantly shorter than the suggested five minutes and this was often self-penalising.

Audition work presented was not always suitable for the stated target audience or had little or no link to the community/educational focus of the opportunity.

The best work was seen where learners had developed a piece of performance that encompassed the ideas from the story of "Alice" as well as the "staying safe" theme in both the audition and the subsequent presentation.

Progression opportunity 4

This was the most popular of the progression opportunities. While some very good responses were seen, it was a pity that some technically gifted learners who gave strong auditions were unable to score highly across the full mark scheme because they had not responded to the theme of "seasons" in their choice of performance pieces.

Many of the strongest responses were in dance where choreography appeared to have been developed by the teacher, with learners then personalising their individual responses. Learners who had clearly explored the theme "seasons", with their teachers in practical classes using movements and motifs before placing these within their own framework tended to produce the most successful responses.

Some learners produced music performances of genuine quality, showing that they had responded to the whole of the progression opportunity, including the theme of "seasons". Some centres however allowed learners to sing to a music track, which included vocals, rather than using a musical backing track alone; this made it difficult to hear the work and generally did not support learners in demonstrating their own skills. Where learners sang reading lyrics from their phones marks were somewhat limited.

A few 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. Some appropriate "song and dance" routines were however seen including some particularly good tap.

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. Centres are reminded however that set, lighting and sound effects are not a requirement and can in some cases hinder the examiner. Many learners had not memorised their lines and were reliant on prompts or gave up mid performance. Some simply read their monologues from a script, thus limiting the marks available to them.

A small number of learners offered design skills for this opportunity. Some interesting ideas linked to the theme of seasons were presented in relation to set, costume, mask and make-up. Few learners however related these to a specific production they had chosen as was required.

Administration

Issues raised by examiners included the poor preparation of work by centres that did not fully adhere to the demands of either the progression opportunity, or the Administrative Support Guide.

Centres are reminded that work must be submitted, on time, 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.

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 where the camera had been placed too close or too far away from the learner assessment was challenging. Where centres provided a quiet and appropriate space for the auditions/presentations to be recorded, this aided the learners. In some centres however learners appeared to have been distracted by background noise and/or other learners. Where dancers dressed in dark clothing had been filmed in studio with black curtains it was sometimes difficult to see all of the movement 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 the skills, knowledge and understanding that they will bring to the table, appropriate to the 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.
- Centres should ensure learners have an appropriate, quiet space available for their auditions/presentations.
- Learners should fully prepare their audition pieces memorising choreography, lines, lyrics etc in order to perform with confidence, both in themselves and their chosen material.
- Learners offering presentations should practice their skills to ensure that material is presented effectively and with clarity and confidence.

Grade Boundaries

Unit	Max Mark	D	M	P	L1	U
20512E – Unit 1: Individual Showcase	42	35	27	19	11	0

Introducing external assessment

The new suite of 'next generation' NQF BTECs now 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. We will be awarding grade boundaries for the first time for our new next generation BTECs, so this means that a learner who receives an '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.

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