



**Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing
Classical Indian**

ISTD Classical Indian Dance Faculty: Kathak Vocational Specification



For examinations
from
1st April 2026
Ref/CIK.01

Contents

Foreword and History.....	3
Qualification Purpose and Transferable Skills.....	5
Qualification Regulations.....	7
Entry Conditions:	
Age requirements, Prior Learning and Exam times.....	9
Dress Requirements, Music, Studio Layout and Language.....	10
Vocational Outlines and Formats:	
Intermediate Foundation Syllabus Outline	11
Intermediate Foundation Exam Format.....	13
Intermediate Syllabus Outline.....	13
Intermediate Exam Format.....	15
Advanced 1 Syllabus Outline.....	16
Advanced 1 Exam Format.....	17
Advanced 2 Syllabus Outline.....	18
Advanced 2 Exam Format.....	19
Method of Assessment and Mark Schemes.....	20
Determining a Mark.....	22
Examination Booking Information.....	23
Enquiries and Appeals.....	24
Results and Certification.....	25

Vocational Graded Examinations

Foreword

Kathak is one of the nine forms of Indian classical dances, originating from northern India. It is an art of storytelling, formed through music, text, and vocals. Kathak is distinctive because it is richly developed by rhythm interplay, improvisation and imagination.

This north Indian dance form has the stylistic qualities of the Moghul courts where it gained influence from both Hindu and Muslim cultural sensibilities. Kathak explores the natural alignment of the body with the dynamics of geometry, non-verbal communication, subtleties of expression and playful rhythm between footwork and percussion. The ISTD syllabus is designed to reflect holistic classical Indian dance training while considering the needs and experiences of present-day students worldwide.

History and development of the Classical Indian Dance Faculty

Kathak originated as a danced storytelling form in northern India in the precincts of Hindu temples, acquiring in Mughal courts its now signature flourishes and charisma subtly held body and limb lines, and a delicate expressiveness of face, showcasing a lyricism studded by bursts of intricate rhythmic patterns executed by fret-like footwork, fleeting arm movements and spins, punctuated by dynamic stillness. Kathak dancers require, respectively, knowledge of classical Carnatic and Hindustani music from southern and northern India.

Over a period of a little more than 150 years, Indian dance in the UK has made a stimulating and substantial journey. It has developed from being exhibited as an exotic artefact of the 'jewel in the crown' that was India, to becoming an established and exciting element of the contemporary British dance scene.

In 1838, traditional Indian temple dancers or devadasis appeared in performance for the first time in Europe at the Adelphi Theatre, London. Between the 1920s and 1960s, several non-devadasi modern, professional Indian dancers were presented in the UK and Europe. These included Uday Shankar, Ram Gopal, Ragini Devi, Mrinalini Sarabhai and Indrani Rahman.

By the mid-1970s, however, when Naseem Khan's seminal report on British ethnic minorities' arts was commissioned and published (1976), there were a significant number of teachers from the South Asian diaspora running thriving 'Indian classical dance' classes in the UK, and during the 1980s these dance forms, their performers and schools became extremely popular.

By the 1990s, Indian dance was recognized as 'South Asian Dance' in the UK's arts scene and began incorporating contemporary and hybrid styles, attracting public funding. Despite this evolution, many young people of South Asian descent continued to study Indian classical dance to maintain their cultural heritage.

The Faculty story

In 1996, the dance organisation Akademi, under the artistic directorship of Mira Mishra Kaushik, sowed the seeds for a South Asian Dance Faculty of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing.

Encouraged by Mike Browne, the Society's Chief Executive at the time, Akademi created, funded, and managed a three-year syllabus research project, led by Sushmita Ghosh. It involved consulting over a hundred teachers of classical Indian dance in the UK and abroad and sampling their existing curricula.

Akademi offered to the Society proposed Kathak and Bharatanatyam syllabi compiled respectively by Sushmita Ghosh and Pushkala Gopal by working closely with a core working group and helped recruit David Henshaw as Founding Chair of the South Asian Dance Faculty in 1999.

Under Henshaw's championing and meticulous leadership, the faculty committee commissioned Sushmita Ghosh (Kathak) and Nina Rajarani (Bharatanatyam) to develop and fine tune the syllabi and formulate specifications in line with the Society's pedagogical and examination systems.

Examining in Kathak and Bharatanatyam started in earnest in 2001 in various regions of the UK, with expansion by 2012 international as widely as Amsterdam, Delhi, Dubai, Johannesburg, Mumbai, Seattle, and Toronto.

In 2013, CIDF had the special honour of bestowing the ISTD's rare International Fellowship award on the Kathak maestro Pandit Birju Maharaj, whose Ang Kavya text is prescribed reading for CIDF Kathak examinations.

Faculty-led Misrana showcases and teachers' forums have fostered skills development, networking, and recruitment within the classical Indian dance community, whilst our classical Indian grades are also recognised in national advanced training applications.

Dancing forward

Bharatanatyam and Kathak have achieved global reach, disseminating their traditional pedagogical approaches internationally. However, the Faculty has recognised and taken active action to address some practices in traditional Indian dance training that may pose health or safety risks, especially when taken out of their original context, limiting dancers' growth in different environments. The current syllabi demonstrate this awareness and implement appropriate application of safe practices, facilitating the confidence for dancers to practice dance safely.

The faculty honours established techniques, repertoire, and cultural knowledge, while integrating progressive methodologies into its teaching philosophy. This approach prioritises comprehension, skill development, curiosity, responsibility, growth, safety, creativity, confidence, agency, and ultimately, the cultivation and appreciation of dance proficiency.

Keeping abreast of changes in the UK's official educational qualifications requirements is important to the faculty and updating the syllabus and specifications is completed regularly to ensure that students and teachers are kept up to date. This is all part of the faculty's aims, identified by the committee, as seeking to advance our members' teaching success, and grow our membership at home and internationally is of paramount priority.

Introduction

Aim

The aim of the ISTD Vocational Graded Examinations in Kathak is to provide an assessment scheme, which gives the basis for the measurement of the individual candidate's progress and development, in preparing to be a professional dance performer or teacher. There are four practical examinations graded to measure appropriate stages of development from a general standard of Kathak education to that of professional competence and readiness.

Qualification purpose

The Vocational Graded Examinations in Kathak, from Intermediate Foundation through to Advanced 2, develops the candidate's expertise in such a way as to provide the basis for either professional employment as a dancer or further training as a dance teacher. Throughout the study of the syllabus, candidates are following a vocational path, requiring a high level of commitment and with an increasing emphasis on safe dance practice.

Successful candidates at this level should show virtuosity in performance, a high standard of technique and a sound knowledge and understanding of the Kathak genre, including an understanding of reference and context. Candidates studying the Kathak Vocational Graded syllabus should also typically display a sense of self-awareness and be self-motivated in terms of their personal development. As distinct from the general graded examinations, a greater degree of personal interpretation is encouraged, and the candidate is expected to show the potential to communicate effectively with an audience.

Candidates will need to show the qualities of professionalism, commitment and focus, with the ability to manage a greater workload than that required for the general Graded examinations. This would typically result in a successful candidate spending significant additional time each week in lessons, in practicing and in studying independently.

The Vocational Graded Examinations are regulated qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF).

- Intermediate Foundation: Level 2
- Intermediate: Level 3
- Advanced 1: Level 4
- Advanced 2: Level 4

Objectives

This Kathak vocational syllabus encourages students to invest time and effort to create the necessary physical and cultural infrastructure for the dancer in training. Students are also encouraged to see dance performances to gain a cultural and critical understanding, and a lively interest in Kathak and in the wider horizons of dance.

The ISTD Kathak syllabus:

- Promotes correct posture and safe dance practice
- Develops an understanding of Kathak technique and terminology
- Develops the sense of line through arms, body, head and legs

- Promotes appreciation of varying expressions, styles and interpretation
- Encourages an awareness of the use of space and focus
- Encourages awareness of audience, sense of performance and artistry
- Develops a creative use of rhythm, footwork and movement within the Kathak style
- Develops understanding of the cultural, mythological and storytelling aspects of Kathak

The ISTD syllabus provides a structure equally suited to students of any of the different gharānās of Kathak, without favouring one over another.

In each examination the syllabus is presented in three sections:

- Technical Skills
- Performance
- Safe Dance Practice, Ancillary Skills, and Requested Additional Material

Transferable skills

Performing skills	Technical skills	Personal skills
• Artistry • Communication • Dynamic and rhythmic awareness • Expression • Fluency • Phrasing • Focus • Musicality • Projection • Sensitivity to others • Spatial awareness	• Accuracy • Application of feedback • Application of technique • Coordination • Creative engagement with movement material • Fitness • Flexibility • Kinaesthetic awareness • Mastery • Memory and recall • Movement intensity is appropriate to the style • Placement • Rhythm • Sensitivity to the cultural framework and/or stylistic influences of the technique • Stamina • Strength • Timing • Understanding of anatomy and physiology	• Ability to analyse • Application of knowledge • Commitment • Confidence • Concentration • Conviction • Cooperation and teamwork • Creativity • Critical self-reflection • Discipline • Individuality • Mental and physical wellbeing • Perseverance • Problem solving • Respect • Response to feedback • Self-challenge • Self-management • Self-motivation • Setting and achieving goals • Understanding and appreciation of cultural framework, style and genre

Qualification regulations

Regulation - UK

ISTD Graded Examinations are regulated by:

- Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) in England
- Qualifications Wales
- Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA Regulation) in Northern Ireland

The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) provides a single, simple system for cataloguing all regulated qualifications, indicating qualifications by their level (degree of difficulty) and size (amount or breadth of learning).

Size is indicated by a credit value, corresponding to a term used in the title. An Award is worth 1-12 credits, a Certificate is worth 13-36 credits, and a Diploma is worth 38 or more credits.

One credit corresponds to 10 hours of learning for the typical learner, which is divided into Guided Learning Hours (GLH), which is broadly contact time with the teacher, and personal study time, which together make Total Qualification Time (TQT).

The ISTD's qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) are as follows:

Guided Learning Hours (GLH) describes the amount of time the learner has spent in class under the direct supervision of their teacher.

Total Qualification Time (TQT) includes all of the Guided Learning Hours plus further independent study undertaken by the learner 13.

Regulation - Europe

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is an overarching framework that links the qualifications of different countries together and allows for comparison and translation.

The EQF has eight levels across which qualifications can be mapped. The levels do not correspond directly with the UK's Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), although they are similar.

The following table shows the level of our Vocational Examination qualifications on the RQF and the EQF.

In the UK, our Graded and Vocational Graded qualifications can contribute towards entry into higher education through the allocation of UCAS points. UCAS tariff points translate your qualifications and grades into a numerical value, which some universities, colleges, and conservatoires may refer to in their course entry requirements.

Equivalence of qualification levels

Grade 6 and Intermediate	Level 3 KS5 (year 12 and 13)	A Levels and T-levels
Advanced 1 and 2, plus Diploma in Dance Education	Level 4 Tertiary, Vocational or Higher Education	1st Year Degree

The ISTD's qualifications on the Regulated Qualifications Framework are as follows:

Qualification Title	Qualification Number	Guided Learning Hours	Total Qualification Time (hours)	Credits
ISTD Level 2 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Intermediate Foundation (Classical Indian Dance Kathak)	501/0764/1	150	275	28
ISTD Level 3 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Intermediate (Classical Indian Dance: Kathak)	501/0728/8	150	275	28
ISTD Level 4 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Advanced 1 (Classical Indian Dance: Kathak)	501/0760/4	150	325	33
ISTD Level 4 Diploma in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Advanced 2 (Classical Indian Dance: Kathak)	501/0761/6	150	375	38

Entry conditions

Age requirements

Recommended lower age limits are set in the interests of the health and safety of the candidate within the demands of the syllabus and are in the table below. There is no upper age limit.

Intermediate Foundation	Recommended minimum age 11
Intermediate	Recommended minimum age 12
Advanced 1	Recommended minimum age 13
Advanced 2	Recommended minimum age 13

Prior learning

Intermediate Foundation is an optional examination, and examinations must be taken in the correct order. Candidates are expected to be familiar with the material of the level being entered, as well as all previous level examination material, to be able to draw upon this information for any part of the examination.

From October 2026, candidates will be required to have achieved the Theory Examination to be certificated for Intermediate. Candidates who have not completed Theory examination by this point will not be able to receive a result.

Candidates wishing to enter for the Advanced 1 must have passed Intermediate, and for Advanced 2 must have passed Advanced 1.

Exemption from the Intermediate and Advanced 1 examinations may be obtained if the candidate is a student who already holds an equivalent genre Intermediate or Advanced 1 certificate with an Ofqual approved dance awarding body.

Application for exemption must be made in writing to the Examinations department prior to the examination session.

The examination does not require dancers to make a gender specific presentations, and any dancer can be presented together.

Time allowances and number of candidates

It is recommended that candidates are entered in pairs, although candidates may be examined individually. The table below shows the length of time allocated for each examination:

Examination	1 candidate	2 candidates
Intermediate Foundation	45 minutes	65 minutes
Intermediate	55 minutes	80 minutes
Advanced 1	65 minutes	95 minutes
Advanced 2	80 minutes	115 minutes

Dress requirements

Although examination attire is not formally assessed in Kathak examinations, it remains an essential component of training. Wearing appropriate attire and maintaining well-groomed hair contribute to poise, confidence and professionalism in examination candidates.

The following requirements are expected:

- Candidates are expected to dress suitably in dance garments that allow the examiner clear visibility of the dance and dancer and enable the candidate to perform without distraction.
- Candidates should wear suitably tailored salwār kamīz, or dhoti or a suitably tailored kurtā pyjāma.
- All candidates should have their waist firmly bound.

- Hair should be pinned away from the face and, if necessary, drawn back in a single plait or bun; a long plait should be secured at the back to prevent its movement distracting from the dance.
- If a head scarf is worn, please ensure that the hair and the scarf are tightly secured.
- No dance costume or costume jewellery should be worn. Body piercings should not be worn, unless for religious reasons. In such cases they should be properly secured and if needed, covered to prevent any potential injuries.
- Ghungrūs are a compulsory requisite to be worn in all vocational examinations.

Musical accompaniment

Teachers entering candidates must organise their own provision of live music accompaniment and arrangement for all levels.

Studio layout for examination

Teachers should select the most suitable studio layout for the examination, to allow candidates to demonstrate fully.

Teachers should ensure mirrors are covered or made opaque and are asked to provide a large table and a comfortable chair with a cushion.

Teachers are also asked to provide a bell on the table which the examiner can ring to signify that they are ready for a group of candidates to enter the studio.

Language

All exams and assessments are conducted in English.

Vocational graded qualifications

This section states the required teaching and learning content of each qualification in the specification and is set out in a similar way showing the learning outcomes, syllabus content and format of the examinations.

Candidates should only be entered for examinations once they are well-prepared and all content has been covered in full, following the study of the Kathak Syllabus document, (which can be purchased from the ISTD Shop), and following the RQF level descriptors on the pages below.

Intermediate Foundation qualification

Intermediate Foundation: learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
LO1: Apply and demonstrate through performance a range of fundamental and relevant knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary and technique of Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises and dances to music • Create short, coherent sequences of movement to music
LO4: Apply and demonstrate a range of performance skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Recall, perform and present exercises and dances to an audience using a range of performance and presentational skills • Demonstrate an understanding of style and theme

Outline of syllabus content: Intermediate Foundation

Technical Skills

1. Laya and Tāla

- 1.1. Ability to dance on ṭhékā in teentāl and jhaptāl
- 1.2. Introduction to dhamār: demonstration of barābar, dugun and chaugun laya through paṛhant and tatkāṛ
- 1.3. Ability to select the correct laya (jagah) for each composition
- 1.4. Demonstration of dādrā and kerhvā tāla ṭhékā through paṛhant
- 1.5. Understanding the difference between laya jāti and bol jāti compositions
- 1.6. Demonstration of panchajāti and its various rhythmic phrases through paṛhant and practice

2. Movement Vocabulary

- 2.1. Balanced use of double chakkar in nritta sequence
- 2.2. Thorough knowledge and execution of 'basic' and 'ornamental' hand movements (ref: AK)

Performance

3. Nritta and Nritya

- 3.1. Ability to perform in teentāl and jhaptāl in vilambit, madhya and drut laya with an appropriate range of compositions
- 3.2. Jhaptāl tarana or sargam
- 3.3. Dhamaar: tatkār, Four torās / tukrās, two tihais and two parans
- 3.4. Jugalbandi in teentāl
- 3.5. Any one composition from the selection of bhajan / dādrā / kajri / Chaitī/ sufi
- 3.6. A ṭhumri or ghazal
- 3.7. An elaborate kavitt or gat bhāva based on a mythological story/concept

4. Creative Exercise

- 4.1. Ability to create simple nritta movements with instructions given by the examiner
- 4.2. Ability to express and create a variety of movements for the same text using śabdārth, vākyārth and a combination, as instructed by the examiner

Safe Dance Practice, Theory, Ancillary Skills and File

5. Safe Dance Practice

Please purchase the Safe Dance Practice DVD with Manual from the ISTD Shop to learn the exercises that will be examined in this section of the syllabus.

6. Theory

- 6.1. Knowledge of rasa theory
- 6.2. Study of aṣṭanāyika
- 6.3. Knowledge of the musical concepts and text used in nritya compositions
- 6.4. Knowledge of the Kathak gharānās and of their pioneers
- 6.5. Notes on general and style-specific warm-up and cool-down
- 6.6. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Kathak Grades 1-4

7. Ancillary skills

Vocal rendering of learnt musical compositions in tāli and khāli.

8. File: A4 ring binder to be organised in the following order:

- 8.1. The sequence of the presentation
- 8.2. Notations of all learnt nritta compositions in Bhātkhaṇḍe tāla lipi
- 8.3. Notations of dādrā and kerhvā ṭhékā
- 8.4. Notes explaining the text used in the nritya compositions and their connection with the rasa evoked
- 8.5. A written record, covering the above-mentioned sections on theory
- 8.6. A critical review (100 words) of a Kathak performance attended by the candidate
- 8.7. Collected relevant materials supporting the experience of additional dance training / courses and of observing dance performances

Please ensure that the ring binder has the candidate named in large font on the front and on the spine of the binder.

Format of the Intermediate Foundation examination:

If there are two candidates in the examination set, they will perform the same prepared dance sequence simultaneously.

1. Presentation of the file
2. Submission on paper, of the complete dance sequence to be presented at the examination
3. A performance of **Prepared Dance Sequence**, with live music accompaniment (nritya pieces may be presented on prerecorded tracks) **of no more than 25 minutes**, demonstrating the ability to perform the syllabus through an appropriate proportion of Nritya and Nritya compositions, with approximately 9-12 minutes of Nritya.
4. Response to questions testing theory and questions generated from the performance
5. Further individual demonstration if requested by the examiner. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the item in full if it is edited in the performance

Intermediate qualification

Intermediate: learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
LO1: Apply and demonstrate through performance a range of fundamental and relevant knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary and technique of Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises and dances to music • Create short, coherent sequences of movement to music
LO4: Apply and demonstrate a range of performance skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Recall, perform and present exercises and dances to an audience using a range of performance and presentational skills • Demonstrate an understanding of style and theme

Outline of syllabus content: Intermediate

Technical Skills

1. Laya and Tāla

- 1.1. Demonstration of panchgun laya (5 layas) in teentāl
- 1.2. Demonstration of ṭhékā of all learnt tālas through tatkar and parhant with clarity and emphasis on its correct pronunciation
- 1.1. Ability to demonstrate barābar, dugun and chaugun ṭhékā of ektāl through parhant and tatkar
- 1.4. Confidence and clarity in executing bol jāti and laya jāti compositions

2. Movement Vocabulary

Knowledge and execution of all 'stances' or thāt (ref: AK).

Performance

3. Nritta and Nritya

- 3.1. Ability to sustain a performance with appropriately complex compositions in teentāl, jhaptāl, including a jugalbandi
- 3.2. Dhamār tāla: two thāt, one āmad, four toṛās / tukṛās, four tihāis (bedam and damdār), laṛi, two parans, a parmeli and one chakkardār paran
- 3.3. Ektāl: tatkar, three toṛās / tukṛās and three tihāis
- 3.4. One tarānā or sargam in ektāl / dhamār
- 3.5. One ghazal
- 3.6. One ṭhumri / kajri / chaiti / hori based on one of the ashtnayikas
- 3.7. One bhajan/ devotional song

4. Creative Exercise

- 4.1. Ability to create movements with the syllables given by the examiner
- 4.2. Demonstration of abhinaya with the given text

Safe Dance Practice, Theory, Ancillary Skills and File

5. Safe Dance Practice

Please purchase the Safe Dance Practice DVD with Manual from the ISTD Shop to learn the exercises that will be examined in this section of the syllabus.

6. Theory

- 6.1. Comprehensive knowledge of navarasa
- 6.2. Knowledge of the languages and the dialects used in the nritya compositions
- 6.3. Knowledge of traditional and contemporary Kathak costumes, make-up and jewellery
- 6.4. Knowledge of the Kathak exponents and their specific styles
- 6.5. Study of ashtanayika
- 6.6. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Kathak Grades 1-4 and Intermediate Foundation although taking the Intermediate Foundation examination is not a pre-requisite

7. Ancillary Skills

Ability to sing the learnt nritya compositions, demonstrating tali and khali

8. File - A4 ring binder to be organised in the following order:

- 8.1. Sequence of Presentation
- 8.2. Notations of all learnt Nritya compositions in Bhātkhaṇḍe tāla lipi
- 8.3. Notes explaining the text used in the nritya compositions and its connection with the rasa evoked
- 8.4. A written record, covering the above-mentioned sections on theory
- 8.5. A critical review (200 words) of a Kathak performance attended by the candidate
- 8.6. Collected relevant materials supporting the experience of additional dance training / courses and of observing dance performances

Please ensure that the ring binder has the candidate named in large font on the front and on the spine of the binder

Format of the Intermediate examination:

If there are two candidates in the examination set, they will perform the same prepared dance sequence simultaneously.

1. Presentation of the file
2. Submission on paper, of the complete dance sequence to be presented at the examination
3. A performance of the **Prepared Dance Sequence**, with live music accompaniment (nritya pieces may be presented on prerecorded tracks) of no more than 30 minutes, demonstrating at least two different tālas and ability to perform the syllabus through an appropriate proportion of Nritya and Nritya compositions approximately 10-13 minutes to be devoted to Nritya
4. Response to questions testing theory and questions generated from the performance
5. Further individual demonstration if requested by the examiner. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the item in full if it is edited in the performance

Advanced 1 qualification

Advanced 1: learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
LO1: Apply and demonstrate through performance a range of fundamental and relevant knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary and technique of Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises and dances to music • Create short, coherent sequences of movement to music
LO4: Apply and demonstrate a range of performance skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Recall, perform and present exercises and dances to an audience using a range of performance and presentational skills • Demonstrate an understanding of style and theme

Outline of syllabus content: Advanced 1 Technical Skills

1. Laya and Tāla

- 1.1. Ability to demonstrate aṣṭamangal tāla in barābar, dugun and chaugun laya through. paṛhant and tatkāṛ
- 1.2. Ability to demonstrate kramalaya in teentāl (8 layas)
- 1.3. Ability to improvise and create simple rhythmic patterns in teentāl, jhaptāl and dhamār
- 1.4. Ability to dance teentāl, jhaptāl, dhamār and ektāl compositions on ṭhékā

2. Movement Vocabulary

Knowledge and execution of all 'ornamental' hand movements and 'finishing positions' (ref: AK).

Performance

3. Nritta and Nritya

- 3.1. Ability to hold performance in teentāl, jhaptāl, dhamār and ektāl with rhythmically complex compositions
- 3.2. Lead jugalbandi in all learnt tālas and in different tempi
- 3.3. One expressional item portraying a nāyakheda
- 3.4. Any two compositions from the selection of: bhajan / vandanā / śloka/ ṭhumri / hori / kajri / chaiti / sufi

4. Creative Exercise

A short dance piece choreographed solely by the candidate using Kathak movement vocabulary.

Safe Dance Practice, Theory, Ancillary Skills and File

5. Safe Dance Practice

Please purchase the Safe Dance Practice DVD with Manual from the ISTD Shop to learn the exercises that will be examined in this section of the syllabus.

6. Theory

- 6.1. Knowledge of the Natya Sastra and Abhinaya Darpana
- 6.2. Thorough understanding of the bhāva and rasa theory
- 6.3. Understanding of sthāyi and sanchāri bhāva
- 6.4. Comprehensive study of Kathak dance artists and their unique roles in the development of Kathak
- 6.5. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Kathak Grades 1-4

7. Ancillary Skills

Ability to play leherā in teentāl, jhaptāl, dhamār appropriate instrument should be made available for assessment.

8. File - A4 ring binder to be organised in the following order:

- 8.1. Sequence of presentation
- 8.2. Notations of all learnt nritta compositions in Bhātkhaṇḍe tāla lipi
- 8.3. Notes explaining the text used in the nritya compositions and its full understanding
- 8.4. Description of the created dance piece including the process and the used technique
- 8.5. A written record, covering the above-mentioned sections on theory
- 8.6. Relevant materials supporting the experience of additional dance training / courses and of observing dance performances

Please ensure that the ring binder has the candidate named in large font on the front and on the spine of the binder

Format of the Advanced 1 Examination:

If there are two candidates in the examination set, they will perform the same prepared dance sequence simultaneously.

1. Presentation of the file
2. Submission on paper, of the complete dance sequence to be presented at the examination
3. A performance of the **Prepared Dance Sequence**, with live music accompaniment (nritya pieces may be presented on prerecorded tracks) of no more than 35 minutes, demonstrating at least two different tālas and ability to perform the syllabus through an appropriate proportion of Nritta and Nritya compositions approximately 12-14 minutes for Nritya
4. Response to questions testing theory and questions generated from the performance
5. Further individual demonstration as requested by the examiner. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the item in full if it is edited in the performance.
Demonstration of the creative task

Advanced 2 qualification

Advanced 2: learning outcomes and assessment criteria

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
LO1: Apply and demonstrate through performance a range of fundamental and relevant knowledge and understanding of the vocabulary and technique of Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Perform exercises and dances to music
LO4: Apply and demonstrate a range of performance skills in Classical Indian Dance: Kathak	• Recall, perform and present exercises and dances to an audience using a range of performance and presentational skills • Demonstrate an understanding of style and theme

Outline of syllabus content: Advanced 2

Technical Skills

1. Laya and tāla

- 1.1. Ability to demonstrate barābar, dugun, tigun and chaugun ṭhékā of all learnt tālas
- 1.2. Ability to use jāti in different tālas other than teentāl
- 1.3. Use of ati vilambit laya

2. Movement Vocabulary

Knowledge and execution of ‘chakkar’, ‘stances’ and ‘feet positions’ (ref: AK).

Performance

3. Nritya and Nritya

- 3.1. Confident performance of complete nritya sequence with appropriately complex compositions in teentāl, jhaptāl, dhamār and ektāl
 - 3.2. Aṣṭamangal tāla: laṛī, āmad, three torās / tukṛās, three tihāis and two parans
 - 3.3. Understanding and ability to create upaj
 - 3.4. One chaturang, clearly marking all four segments
 - 3.5. Ability to perform a dādrā or ṭhumri and one ghazal with explanation prior to dancing
 - 3.6. A gat bhav or baithak ka bhav showing the various rasas and characters
- ##### 4. Creative exercise
- 4.1. Ability to improvise and create upaj with the syllables given by the examiner
 - 4.2. Ability to create a simple tihāi in any of the covered tālas, as requested by the examiner
 - 4.3. On request, ability to create appropriate movement and depict correct bhāva in character portrayal of any nāyaka and nāyika

Safe Dance Practice, Theory, Ancillary Skills and File

5. Safe Dance Practice

Please purchase the Safe Dance Practice DVD with Manual from the ISTD Shop to learn the exercises that will be examined in this section of the syllabus.

6. Theory

- 6.1. Knowledge of the narrative and historical / mythological context of all learnt dance items
- 6.2. Comprehensive study of nāyak and nāyika bheda
- 6.3. Detailed study of the different social and cultural influences in the evolution of Kathak, in terms of its movement vocabulary and music
- 6.4. Knowledge of use of stagecraft and lighting design
- 6.5. Study of appropriate nutrition for professional dancers

7. Ancillary Skills:

Ability to play teentāl ṭhékā on tabla, ability to play leherā in teentāl, jhaptāl, dhamār, ektāl (appropriate instrument should be made available for assessment), ability to sing all learnt musical compositions on ṭhékā with tali and Khālī

8. File - A4 ring binder to be organised in the following order:

- 8.1. Sequence of presentation
- 8.2. Notations of all learnt Nritya compositions in Bhātkhaṇḍe tāla lipi
- 8.3. Notes explaining the text used in the nritya and its connection with the rasa evoked
- 8.4. A written record covering the above-mentioned sections on theory
- 8.5. Collected relevant materials supporting the experience of additional dance training / courses and of observing dance performances

Please ensure that the ring binder has the candidate named in large font on the front and on the spine of the binder.

Format of the Advanced 2 examination:

If there are two candidates in the examination set, they will perform the same prepared dance sequence simultaneously.

1. Presentation of the file
2. Submission on paper, of the complete dance sequence to be presented at the examination
3. A performance of the **Prepared Dance Sequence**, with live music accompaniment (nritya pieces may be presented on prerecorded tracks) of no more than 45 minutes, demonstrating compositions from three tālas and ability to perform the syllabus through an appropriate proportion of Nritya and Nritya items, minimum 15 to 17 minutes of Nritya
4. Response to questions testing theory and the performance
5. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the item in full if it is edited in the performance
6. Further individual demonstration will be requested by the examiner from Vocational syllabi as a compulsory part of this examination

Method of assessment for Vocational graded examinations

Vocational Graded Examination assessments are carried out by means of a practical demonstration of the knowledge, understanding and skills required.

All examinations are assessed by an examiner who is recruited, trained, and monitored by the ISTD.

ISTD examiners:

- are selected for their expertise and undergo rigorous training which continues throughout their career for marking both in-person and remote examinations
- create a welcoming and reassuring environment at the exam venue, ensuring a positive experience for candidates
- complete a check with the Disclosure and Barring Service (or equivalent body where available) and adhere to ISTD policies and procedures, including equality and diversity, safeguarding and data protection

In the examination, the examiner awards a mark of between 0 and 10 for selected components as shown on the accompanying grids below.

Intermediate Foundation

TECHNICAL SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Laya and tāla – rhythmic control, accuracy and dynamics of parhant	15
Movement vocabulary – neatness and coverage and other skills	5
Section Total	20
PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Nritta – content and coverage	20
Nritya – content, appropriate characterisation, depth and involvement	15
Creative exercise – ideas and imagination	10
Performance quality – presentation, enjoyment and rapport with musicians	5
Section Total	50
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Kathak	5
Theory – response to questions	10
Ancillary skills	5
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	10
Section Total	30
TOTAL	100

Intermediate

TECHNICAL SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Laya and tāla – rhythmic control, accuracy and dynamics of parhant	15
Section Total	15
PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Nritta – content and coverage	25
Nritya – content, appropriate characterisation, depth and involvement	20
Creative exercise – ideas and imagination	10
Performance quality – presentation, enjoyment and rapport with musicians	5
Section Total	60
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Kathak	5
Theory – response to questions	10
Ancillary Skills	5
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	5
Section Total	25
TOTAL	100

Advanced 1 and Advanced 2

TECHNICAL SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Laya and tāla – rhythmic control, accuracy and dynamics of parhant	15
Section Total	15
PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Nritta – content and coverage	25
Nritya – content, appropriate characterisation, depth and involvement	20
Creative exercise – ideas and imagination	10
Performance quality – presentation, enjoyment and rapport with musicians	5
Section Total	60
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Kathak	5
Theory – response to questions	10
Ancillary skills	5
File – adequacy and presentation	5
Section Total	25
TOTAL	100

Determining a mark

The examination is divided into sections, and each section is composed of several components, which are separately assessed and aggregated to give the section total.

The total number of marks available in the examination is 100 and candidates must gain at least 20% of the marks attainable in each Section, to pass the examination overall. A mark of 0 indicates that nothing was evidenced for assessment.

Candidates will, however, be unsuccessful if

- 20% of the marks attainable or below are given for any one component
- 40% of the marks attainable or below are given for any three components

This reflects the need to ensure competence across the range of components. Results are indicated using the following attainment bands below:

GRADE	MARKS
Distinction	80-100 marks
Merit	65-79 marks
Pass	50-64 marks
Not Attained	0-49 marks

Classification of results

Candidates receive both a final mark and an attainment grade. It is not expected that a candidate in a particular attainment grade will necessarily demonstrate all the characteristics listed in that band but will demonstrate most.

A candidate who achieves a '**Distinction**' classification (80-100 marks) is one who demonstrates the following attributes in performance:

- Flair, vitality and skill
- Fully appropriate style
- Inclusively focused dancing
- Precision in the technique of the genre
- Consistent, highly developed musicality
- Confident and accurate responses to questions asked and/or tasks set

A candidate who achieves a '**Merit**' classification (65-79 marks) is one who demonstrates the following attributes in performance:

- Skill and proficiency
- Largely appropriate style
- Focused dancing
- Competence in the technique of the genre
- Evidence of developing musicality
- Relevant and appropriate responses to questions asked and/or tasks set

A candidate who achieves a **‘Pass’** classification (50-64 marks) is one who demonstrates the following attributes in performance:

- Competence
- Basic ability to carry out the required movements
- Periodic moments of convincing focus
- Basic competence in most aspects of the technique of the genre
- Basic musicality
- Broadly relevant and appropriate response to questions asked and/or tasks set, but some prompting may be required

A candidate who achieves a **‘Not Attained’** classification (0-49 marks) is one who has not yet demonstrated the attributes required to gain at least a ‘Pass’ classification.

Examinations and quality assurance

Examination booking information

Examination bookings are only permitted to be made by members with the requisite active membership status of the ISTD who conduct themselves in accordance with the Member Agreement/Professional Code of Conduct. www.istd.org/documents/rules-and-standing-orders/

The examinations take place either at the examination venues hosted by the members such as the teacher’s dance studio or at the ISTD Examination Centre sessions.

Details of how to book an examination, cancellation fees, guidance, and examination regulations are available at:

UK Examinations

Website: www.istd.org/examinations/uk-examinations/
Email: ukdanceteachers@istd.org

International Examinations

Website: www.istd.org/examinations/international-examinations/
Email: InternationalTeachers@istd.org

Policies and quality assurance

The Society has put in place a set of policies and procedures to ensure that our examinations and assessments are inclusive and accessible, and students completing our qualifications are issued a fair grade based on their performance.

Our quality assurance processes are in place to safeguard the integrity of our qualifications by ensuring that high standards are always delivered in our examinations.

The detailed information about the quality assurance of our qualifications and the related policies can be found at www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance

For further guidance, please contact the Quality Assurance department at csqa@istd.org

Reasonable adjustment

The Society is committed to promoting an environment where all individuals are encouraged to achieve their full potential and develop their skills in dance and in examinations and we encourage teachers to maintain an open approach towards the different abilities offered by all their students.

Reasonable adjustments are changes or adaptations made to an assessment or to the way an assessment is conducted to reduce or remove a barrier caused by disability or individual learning or medical need. The teacher acting on behalf of a candidate can request the Society to make reasonable adjustments to the assessment processes and examination requirements, to make the assessment more accessible and alleviate a barrier to allow the candidate to show what they know and can do.

To request reasonable adjustments, the teacher making the application on behalf of the candidate should send their completed application form and supporting documents to ara@istd.org a minimum of 28 days before the date of the examination.

Further guidance for reasonable adjustments can be found in the ISTD Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustment Policy which is available on: www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance

Teachers can request any adjustments that are appropriate for the needs of their candidates, and these will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Special consideration

Special consideration is given after an assessment has taken place for learners who have been affected by adverse circumstances. The Society has a process in place for special consideration for candidates who participated in an examination but may have been disadvantaged by temporary illness, injury, indisposition, or adverse circumstances which arose immediately before or during the examination.

Enquiries and appeals about results

The Society endorses the principle of the right to enquire about a candidates' result. These appeals may relate to an unexpected examination result, assessment decisions being incorrect, or assessment not being conducted fairly. We ensure that enquiries are dealt with swiftly and fairly within the specified timescales.

Through the ISTD Enquiry and Appeal about a Result Policy, it is ensured that enquiries about results are processed correctly, fairly and in a timely manner. A copy of the Enquiry and Appeal About a Result Policy can be downloaded from: <https://www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance/policies-and-related-documents/>

Malpractice

The Society will act in accordance with the published documentation and will take all reasonable steps to prevent the occurrence of any malpractice, or maladministration, in the development, delivery and award of its qualifications.

Malpractice refers to acts that undermine the integrity and validity of assessment, the certification of qualifications, and/or actions that may damage the authority of those responsible for delivering the assessment and certification. The Society will take any form of malpractice very seriously.

Registered members and candidates must follow the requirements set out in this specification, examination regulations and all other ISTD policies about the delivery of our examinations.

In cases where registered members or candidates have committed malpractice, a sanction or penalty may be given.

For further information, please refer to the ISTD Malpractice Policy on:

<https://www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance/policies-and-related-documents/>

Results and certification

All ISTD examinations are single performances at one moment in time, with a detailed marking system awarded according to the mark schemes given for each examination.

The Quality Assurance Department will check the examination results for any errors before issuing the awarded results and certificates direct to the primary organiser, unless requested otherwise.

Examination session results and examination report sheets can be accessed online on the ISTD examination management portal, usually within 21 days of the date of the examination.

All examination result documents are subject to robust quality assurance checks, to ensure that they are correct and complete before dispatch.

The primary organiser will receive their candidates' examination report sheets, containing the overall result. Successful candidates will also be issued with a qualification certificate displaying the qualification title, and the subject that they have been examined in, date of award and the overall result achieved.

This section focuses on the administrative requirements for delivering the examinations and related quality assurance processes. www.istd.org/examinations/quality-assurance



First published in 2018 by Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

Re-published April 2026 by Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

22/26 Paul Street, London EC2A 4QE

Copyright © 2026 Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the copyright owner.

Registered charity number 250

Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

22/26 Paul Street, London EC2A 4QE

istd.org **@ISTDdance**