



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

**ISTD Classical Indian
Dance Faculty:
Bharatanatyam Vocational
Specification**

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

Contents

Foreword and History.....	3
Qualification Purpose.....	4
Transferable Skills.....	5
Qualification Regulations.....	6
Entry Conditions:	
Age requirements, Prior Learning and Exam times.....	7
Dress Requirements, Music, Studio Layout and Language.....	8
Vocational Outlines and Formats:	
Intermediate Foundation Syllabus Outline	9
Intermediate Foundation Exam Format.....	11
Intermediate Syllabus Outline.....	12
Intermediate Exam Format.....	14
Advanced 1 Syllabus Outline.....	15
Advanced 1 Exam Format.....	17
Advanced 2 Syllabus Outline.....	18
Advanced 2 Exam Format.....	20
Method of Assessment and Mark Schemes.....	21
Determining a Mark.....	23
Examination Booking Information.....	25
Enquiries and Appeals.....	26
Results and Certification.....	27

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 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 our paramount priority.

Introduction

Aim

The aim of the ISTD Vocational Graded Examinations in Bharatanatyam 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 Bharatanatyam education to that of professional competence and readiness.

Qualification purpose

The Vocational Graded Examinations in Bharatanatyam, 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 Bharatanatyam genre, including an understanding of reference and context. Candidates studying the Bharatanatyam 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 Bharatanatyam 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 Bharatanatyam and in the wider horizons of dance.

The syllabus objectives of the Bharatanatyam Vocational Graded Examinations are:

- To impart the practical skills in Bharatanatyam creation and performance, as they are manifest today, complemented by appropriate contextual knowledge and understanding, through a programme of education and assessment
- To inculcate a holistic perception of Bharatanatyam in the context of the world of dance
- To lay a foundation of personal resources to survive and succeed in the professional dance world

Transferable skills

Performing skills	Technical skills	Personal skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artistry • Communication • Dynamic and rhythmic awareness • Expression • Fluency • Phrasing • Focus • Musicality • Projection • Sensitivity to others • Spatial awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Bharatanatyam)	501/0764/1	150	275	28
ISTD Level 3 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Intermediate (Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam)	501/0728/8	150	275	28
ISTD Level 4 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Advanced 1 (Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam)	501/0760/4	150	325	33
ISTD Level 4 Diploma in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Advanced 2 (Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam)	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. There is no upper age limit for Advanced 1 and Advanced 2.

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, otherwise these examinations must be taken in the correct order. 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 of an Ofqual approved dance awarding body. Application for exemption must be made in writing to the UK Examinations department.

From January 2027, candidates will be required to have achieved the Theory Examination in order to be certificated for Intermediate. Candidates who have not completed Theory examination by this point will not be able to receive a result.

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

Musical accompaniment

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

Dress Requirements

Appropriate attire is essential for Vocational Graded Examinations, as it promotes poise, confidence, and professionalism in candidates. The following requirements are expected:

- Candidates should be suitably dressed in clothes that enable the examiner to see the dance and allow 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 possible, 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 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.
- Ankle bells should be worn.

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 the next candidate/s to enter the studio. It would be helpful if the examiner could also be provided with an additional chair or small table to use as an overflow space for books and paperwork.

Language

All exams and assessments are conducted in English.

Intermediate Foundation qualification

This section sets out the required teaching and learning content and how they should be delivered. The learning and teaching content for each qualification in the specification is set out in a similar way.

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 syllabus document (which can be purchased from the ISTD Shop), following the learning outcomes and assessment criteria on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) table below.

Prerequisites

Candidates are expected to be familiar with the material of this level being assessed as well as all previous grade material and to be able to draw upon this information for any part of any examination.

Intermediate Foundation EQF Qualification information

Qualification title	Qualification number	Guided learning hours	Total qualification time (hours)	Credits
ISTD Level 2 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Classical Indian Dance - Bharatanatyam: Intermediate Foundation	501/0764/1	150	275	28

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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Ancillary Skills

- 1. Rhythm and Tāla**
 - 1.1 Introduction to the use of *taṭṭukazhi* to conduct *aḍavus* and practise in *pancajāti*.
 - 1.2 Recitation, with *tāla* as well as with *taṭṭukazhi*, of the *Jatiswaram korvais* and *Alāriṭṭu*.
 - 1.3 Recitation, with *tāla* as well as with *taṭṭukazhi*, of any rhythmic patterns pertaining to the *Śabdham* and *Kīrtanam*.
- 2. Music**
 - 2.1 Ability to sing the items learnt to *tāla* and demonstrating musicality. This may be demonstrated by following written *swaras / sāhitya*
 - 2.2 Knowledge of compositional structure ie: *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and of *rāgas* and *tālas* pertaining to the set dance pieces in this Grade.

Technical Skills and Performance

- 3. Nritta and Nritya**
 - 3.1 *Miśra Alāriṭṭu*
 - 3.2 *Jatiswaram*
 - 3.3 *Śabdham*
 - 3.4 *Kīrtanam*
- 4. Creative Exercise**
 - 4.1 Understanding composition of a *korvai* through tasks such as completing the missing part of a *korvai* or creating the end of a *korvai* set to *ādi* or *rūpaka tāla* and then dancing it.
The *śolkaṭṭu* will be a recitation of simple beats as opposed to words typically used in a *jati / tīrmāna*.

Health, Body Conditioning, Theory and File

- 5. Health and Body Conditioning**
 - 5.1 Understanding and demonstration of general and style-specific warm-up and cool-down.
 - 5.2 Demonstration of core stability exercises.
 - 5.3 Ability to demonstrate strengthening exercises of all major body parts.
 - 5.4 Controlled accuracy of limbs both in stillness and movement.
- 6. Theory**
 - 6.1 *Asamyuta hasta viniyoga ślokas - śloka* or Sanskrit names.
 - 6.2 Literal meaning of the *sāhitya* and mythological background of the narrative content covered in the syllabus content
 - 6.3 Candidates need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4
- 7. File**

This A4 ring binder should be clearly named in large on the front and spine of the binder and include candidates own notes and reviews on performances attended and any independent research of dance topics and articles, as well as set content listed below. Content shown in the folder should be on individual pages and not combined into A4 pockets.

- 7.1 A record, with notation of the items learnt.
- 7.2 Record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* covered, including a description of any *sancharis*.
- 7.3 Supporting material - Candidates should be encouraged to collect a rich variety of supporting material, including their own notes and reviews on performances attended and any independent research of dance topics and articles.

The File must be clearly sectioned as below:

- Content shown in a A4 Ring Binder, clearly named in large on the front and spine of the binder. All research shown on individual pages and not combined into A4 pockets
- A record of musical notations.
- A record of the movement vocabulary, prescribed *korvai*, rhythm and *tāla*, theory and *abhinaya / nritya* covered.
- Essay
- Supporting materials

Intermediate Foundation examination format:

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

Music of learnt compositions should be kept available by the teacher.

1. Prepared Dance Sequence performance of twenty-five minutes duration – This is created by the teacher and demonstrates the candidates' ability to perform the Intermediate Foundation syllabus through an appropriate proportion of *nritta* and *nritya*.

The prepared dance sequence can be created by using the syllabus content of the Intermediate Foundation syllabus in full or in part. However, all syllabus content from this level **MUST** be learnt whether it is included in the prepared dance sequence in full or in part.

2. Rhythm and *Tāla* and music section

3. Creative task – This task will be given by the examiner which may include demonstration of the compositions of a *korvai* and recitation of *śolkattū*

4. File - Presentation of the file must include a repertoire list of syllabus content learnt from this level and from Grade 3 upwards.

5. Theory - Response to questions testing theory knowledge – Questions are generated from the file, the prepared sequence and from safe dance practice. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4.

6. There may be further demonstrations requested by the examiner from this level. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the syllabus content in full if it is edited in the performance.

Intermediate qualification

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 syllabus document (which can be purchased from the ISTD Shop), following the learning outcomes and assessment criteria on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) table below.

Prerequisites

Candidates are expected to be familiar with the material of this level being assessed as well as all previous vocational grade material and to be able to draw upon this information for any part of any examination.

From January 2027, candidates will be required to have achieved the Theory Examination in order to be certificated for Intermediate. Candidates who have not completed Theory examination by this point will not be able to receive a result.

Intermediate RQF qualification information

Qualification title	Qualification number	Guided learning hours	Total qualification time (hours)	Credits
ISTD Level 3 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Classical Indian Dance Bharatanatyam: Intermediate	501/0728/8	150	275	28

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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Ancillary Skills

1. Rhythm and *Tāla*

1.1 Recitation, with *tāla* as well as with *taṭṭukazhi* of the prescribed *korvai* and *Tillāna korvais*

2. Music

2.1 Ability to sing the items learnt to *tāla* and demonstrating musicality. This may be demonstrated by following written *swaras / sāhitya*

2.2 Knowledge of compositional structure ie: *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and of *rāgas* and *tālas* pertaining to the set dance pieces in this Vocational Grade

Technical Skills and Performance

3. *Nritta* and *Nritya*

3.1 A *korvai* spanning between 60-90 seconds in a less commonly used *tāla*, such as *aṭa* and *jhampa*.

3.2 *Tillāna*.

3.3 One item from the following selection – *Padam / Jāvali / Aṣṭapadi*.

3.4 One item from the following selection – *Bhajan / Devarnāma / Tevāram*.

4. Creative Exercise

4.1 Be able to demonstrate a varied interpretation of, apart from the expressional material learnt in this vocational grade.

Health, Body Conditioning, Theory and File

5. Health and Body Conditioning

5.1 Further development of core stability exercises.

5.2 Thorough and in-depth understanding of strength training and stretching.

5.3 Detailed general and style-specific warm-up and cool-down.

5.4 Understanding of the use of breath.

6. Theory

6.1 *Samyuta hasta viniyoga ślokas - śloka* or Sanskrit names.

6.2 Understanding of *bhāva* and *rasa*, including *navarasas*.

6.3 *Nāyika* and *nāyaka bhedas* in relation to the items learnt.

6.4 Knowledge of the literal meaning of the *sāhitya* and mythological background of the narrative content covered in the dance items.

6.5 Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4 and Intermediate Foundation.

7. File

This A4 ring binder should be clearly named in large on the front and spine of the binder and include candidates own notes and any independent research of dance topics and articles, as well as the set content listed below. Content shown in the folder should be on individual pages and not combined into A4 pockets.

- 7.1 A record, with notation, of the prescribed *korvai* and *Tillāna korvais*.
- 7.2 Record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* covered, including a description of any *sancharis*
- 7.3 Essay on *bhāva* and *rasa*.
- 7.4 Essay on *nāyaka / nāyika bheda*.
- 7.5 Supporting material - Candidates should be encouraged to collect a rich variety of supporting material. including their own notes and reviews on performances attended and any independent research of dance topics and articles.

The File must be clearly sectioned as below:

- A record of musical notations.
- A record of the movement vocabulary, prescribed *korvai*, rhythm and *tāla*, theory and *abhinaya / nritya* covered.
- Essay
- Supporting materials

Intermediate examination format:

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

Music of learnt compositions should be kept available by the teacher.

1 Prepared Dance Sequence performance of thirty minutes duration – This is created by the teacher and demonstrates the candidates’ ability to perform the Intermediate Foundation syllabus through an appropriate proportion of *nritta* and *nritya*.

The prepared dance sequence can be created by using the syllabus content of the Intermediate syllabus in full or in part. However, all syllabus content from this level **MUST** be learnt whether it is included in the prepared dance sequence in full or in part.

2 Rhythm and *Tāla* and music section

3 Creative task – This task will be given by the examiner for the candidate to demonstrate a varied interpretation from the expressional syllabus content learnt at this level

4 File - Presentation of the file must include a repertoire list of syllabus content learnt from this level and from Grade 3 upwards.

5 Theory -Response to questions testing theory knowledge – Questions are generated from the file, the prepared sequence and from safe dance practice. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4 and Intermediate Foundation.

6 There may be further demonstrations requested by the examiner from this level. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the syllabus content in full if it is edited in the performance.

Advanced 1 qualification

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 syllabus document (which can be purchased from the ISTD Shop), following the learning outcomes and assessment criteria on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) table below.

Prerequisites

Candidates are expected to be familiar with the material of this level being assessed as well as all previous vocational grade material and to be able to draw upon this information for any part of any examination.

Advanced 1 RQF qualification information

Qualification title	Qualification number	Guided learning hours	Total qualification time (hours)	Credits
ISTD Level 4 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Classical Indian Dance - Bharatanatyam: Advanced 1	501/0760/4	150	325	33

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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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

Ancillary Skills

1. Rhythm and Tāla

1.1 Recitation, with *tāla* as well as with *taṭṭukazhi* of rhythmic structures in all items learnt as well as the *Varnam jatis / tīrmānas* and korvais in *Varnam swaras*.

2. Music

2.1 Ability to vocalise the *śloka* and sing the items learnt to *tāla* and demonstrating musicality. This may be demonstrated by following written *swaras / sāhitya*.

2.2 Knowledge of compositional structure ie: *pallavi, anupallavi* and of *rāgas* and *tālas* pertaining to the set dance pieces in this level.

Technical Skills and Performance

3. Nritta and Nritya

3.1 A minimum of one item from the following selection – *Mallāri / Puṣpānjali / Kavittuvam / Toḍayam*.

3.2 *Śloka*.

3.3 *Varnam* (Each line of the song should fit into one *āvartana* of *ādi tāla* or four *āvartanas* of *rūpaka tāla*).

4. Creative Exercise

4.1 Creating and performing a *nritta* sequence incorporating given *aḍavus* in suggested rhythmic structures set to two *āvartanas* of *ādi tāla*. For this, *śolkattu* from a *jati / tīrmāna* will be given by the examiner and the *aḍavus* to be used will be indicated.

4.2 Creating *sancāri bhāva* as stipulated by the examiner. This will be to a song that is unknown to the candidate. The examiner will prescribe the content of the *sancāri bhāva*.

Health, Body Conditioning, Theory and File

5. Health and Body Conditioning

5.1 Demonstration and explanation of exercises to help in implementation of core stability exercises within genre specific movement.

5.2 Demonstration and explanation of the importance of a cool-down sequence after a Bharatanatyam performance.

5.3 Ability to demonstrate and explain the concept and analysis of the principles of posture, balance and alignment for all *aḍavu* categories.

6. Theory

6.1 *Gati Bhedas* and *Bāndhava Hastas*.

6.2 Literal meanings and knowledge of the *sāhitya* and mythological background of the narrative content covered in the items learnt.

6.3 Understanding of a *mārgam*.

6.4 In-depth understanding of the four types of *abhinaya*.

6.5 Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the ISTD Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4, Intermediate Foundation and Intermediate.

7. File

This A4 ring binder should be clearly named in large on the front and spine of the binder. Content shown in the folder should be on individual pages and not combined into A4 pockets. Candidates should be encouraged to collect a rich variety of supporting material. This should include their own notes and reviews on performances attended and on independent research of dance topics and articles.

Set content is listed below:

- 7.1 A record, with notation, of *Varnam jatis / tīrmānas* and *korvais* in *Varnam swaras*
- 7.2 Record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* studied, including a description of any *sancharis*
- 7.3 Information on different *bāṇis* of Bharatanatyam
- 7.4 Researched material – on requirements for dance costumes and make-up for traditional Bharatanatyam performance. Candidate own notes and research on mythology and literal background of prescribed pieces

The File must be clearly sectioned as below:

- A record of notations
- A record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* studied, including a description of any *sancharis*
- Information on different *bāṇis* of Bharatanatyam
- Researched materials and supporting materials

Advanced 1 examination format:

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

Music of learnt compositions should be kept available by the teacher

1 Prepared Dance Sequence of thirty-five minutes duration. This is created by the teacher and demonstrates the candidates' ability to perform the Advanced 1 syllabus through an appropriate proportion of *nritta* and *nritya*.

The prepared dance sequence can be created by using the syllabus content of the Advanced 1 syllabus in full or in part. However, all syllabus content from this level **MUST** be learnt whether it is included in the prepared dance sequence in full or in part.

2 Rhythm and *Tāla* and music section

3 Creative task – This task will be given by the examiner for the candidate to demonstrate a varied interpretation from the expressional syllabus content learnt at this level

4 File - Presentation of the file must include a repertoire list of syllabus content learnt from this level and from Grade 3 upwards.

5 Theory - Response to questions testing theory knowledge – Questions are generated from the file, the prepared sequence and from safe dance practice. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4, Intermediate Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced 1 theory.

6 There may be further demonstrations requested by the examiner from this level. The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the syllabus content in full if it is edited in the performance.

Advanced 2 qualification

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 syllabus document (which can be purchased from the ISTD Shop), following the learning outcomes and assessment criteria on the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) table below.

Prerequisites

Candidates are expected to be familiar with the material of this level being assessed as well as all previous vocational grade material and to be able to draw upon this information for any part of any examination.

Advanced 2 RQF qualification information

Qualification title	Qualification Number	Guided learning hours	Total qualification time (hours)	Credits
ISTD Level 4 Diploma in Vocational Graded Examination in Classical Indian Dance - Bharatanatyam: Advanced 2	501/0761/6	150	375	37

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: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Demonstrate physical and technical competence safely
LO2: Perform a range of movement sequences showing sound and secure technical skills in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perform exercises, sequences, and dances
LO3: Perform a range of movement sequences showing an understanding of musicality in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perform exercises and dances to music
LO4: Apply and demonstrate a range of performance skills in Classical Indian Dance: Bharatanatyam	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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

Ancillary Skills

1. Rhythm and *Tāla*

1.1 Recitation, with *tāla* as well as with *taṭṭukazhi* of rhythmic structures in all items learnt as well as the *Varnam jatis / tīrmānas* and korvais in *Varnam swaras*.

2. Music

2.1 Ability to sing the items learnt to *tāla* and demonstrating musicality. This may be demonstrated by following written *swaras / sāhitya*.

2.2 Knowledge of compositional structure i.e.: *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and of *rāgas* and *tālas* pertaining to the set dance pieces in this Vocational Grade.

Technical Skills and Performance

3. Nritta and Nritya

3.1 One expressional item in *tālamālika* or a less commonly used *tāla*, other than *ādi tāla* or *rūpaka tāla*.

3.2 *Varnam* - a more complex one than previously done in Advanced 1, i.e., slower paced such as a Tanjore Quartet one, displaying maturity in *sancāri*. Instead of a *Varnam*, a similarly structured slow-paced item incorporating *jatis / tīrmānas* and *swaras* as well as equally elaborate *abhinaya* sections can be chosen. Candidates may choose to perform a *Swarajati*, *Pancarātna*, *Nrityopahāra* or even a *Kīrtanam* such as *Bhāvayāmi*, but these must display the required complexity and maturity and must be slow paced.

4. Creative Exercise

4.1 Creating a narrative based on a given theme (applying *padārtha*, *vākyārtha* and *sancāri*) where the examiner will choose a song unfamiliar to the candidate.

4.2 Creating and performing a *jati / tīrmāna* facilitated by the examiner. In this, the examiner will recite the *jati / tīrmāna* and the candidate will be required to set movement to it and perform it. The examiner will not make suggestions to what *aḍavus* should be used.

Health, Body Conditioning, Theory and File

5. Health and Body Conditioning

5.1 Ability to analyze movement thoroughly whilst suggesting appropriate corrections and developing methods.

5.2 Knowledge of safe dance practice for dancers and injury management.

6. Theory

6.1 *Navagraha hastas*.

6.2 Knowledge of the literal meanings of the *sāhitya* and mythological background of the narrative content covered in the items learnt.

Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4, Intermediate Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced 1.

7. File

This A4 ring binder should be clearly named in large on the front and spine of the binder. Content shown in the folder should be on individual pages and not combined into A4 pockets. Candidates should be encouraged to collect a rich variety of supporting material. This should include their own notes and reviews on performances attended and on independent research of dance topics and articles. Set content is listed below:

- 7.1 A record, with notation, of the *Varnam's* or the alternative item's *jatis / tīrmānas* and *korvais* of the *swaras*.
- 7.2 Record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* covered, including a description of any *sancharis*
- 7.3 History of Bharatanatyam through the ages, and to the present day.
- 7.4 A study of the requirements for lighting, sound and set for traditional Bharatanatyam presentation.
- 7.5 Research and own notes and material on mythology and literal background of prescribed pieces.

The File must be clearly sectioned as below:

- A record of notations
- A record of theory and *abhinaya / nritya* studied, including *sancharis*
- History of Bharatanatyam
- A study of the requirements for traditional Bharatanatyam presentation
- Researched materials and any supporting materials

Advanced 2 examination format:

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

Music of learnt compositions should be kept available by the teacher

1 Prepared Dance Sequence performance of forty-five minutes duration. This is created by the teacher/candidate and demonstrates the candidates' ability to perform the Advanced 2 syllabus through an appropriate proportion of *nritta* and *nritya*. The prepared dance sequence can be created by using the syllabus content of the Advanced 2 syllabus in full or in part. However, all syllabus content from this level MUST be learnt whether it is included in the prepared dance sequence in full or in part.

2 Rhythm and *Tāla* and music section

3 Creative tasks – The examiner will deliver a narrative-based task in which the examiner will choose a song unfamiliar to the candidate. Also, there will be additional creative tasks facilitated by the examiner for performing a *jati / tīrmāna*, in which the examiner will recite the *jati / tīrmāna* and the candidate will be required to set movement to it and perform it.

4 File - Presentation of the file must include a repertoire list of syllabus content learnt from this level and from Grade 3 upwards.

5 Theory - Response to questions testing theory knowledge – Questions are generated from the file, the prepared sequence and from safe dance practice. Candidates will need to have knowledge of the content of the Bharatanatyam Grades 1-4, Intermediate Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced 1 theory.

6 The examiner can request the candidate to demonstrate the syllabus content in full if it is edited in the performance.

Method of assessment – 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

ANCILLARY SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Music (10), rhythm and <i>tāla</i> (10) - recitation and timekeeping of <i>tāla</i> , singing the items learnt with <i>tāla</i> , demonstrating use of <i>taṭṭukazhi</i>	20
Section Total	20
TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
<i>Mīśra Alārippu & Jatiswaram</i>	18
<i>Śabdam.</i>	15
<i>Kīrtanam</i>	12
Creative Exercise	5
Section Total	50
HEALTH AND BODY CONDITIONING, THEORY AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Bharatanatyam	5
Theory – response to questions	15
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	10
Section Total	30
TOTAL	100

Intermediate

ANCILLARY SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Music (10), rhythm and <i>tāla</i> (10) - recitation and timekeeping of <i>tāla</i> , singing the items learnt with <i>tāla</i> , demonstrating use of <i>taṭṭukazhi</i>	20
Section Total	20
TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
<i>Korvai</i> in a less common <i>tāla</i>	5
<i>Tillāna</i>	15
<i>Abhinaya</i> , <i>Padam</i> , <i>Bhajan/Devarnāma/Tevāram</i> or any other devotional piece	25
Creative Exercise	5
Section Total	50
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Bharatanatyam	5
Theory – response to questions	15
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	10
Section Total	30
TOTAL	100

Advanced 1

ANCILLARY SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Music (10), rhythm and <i>tāla</i> (10) - recitation and timekeeping of <i>tāla</i> , singing the items learnt with <i>tāla</i> , demonstrating use of <i>taṭṭukazhi</i>	20
Section Total	20
TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
<i>Mallāri/Puṣpānjali/Kavittuvam/Toḍayam</i>	10
<i>Varnam</i>	25
<i>Śloka</i>	5
Creative Exercise	10
Section Total	50
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Bharatanatyam	5
Theory – response to questions	15
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	10
Section Total	30
TOTAL	100

Advanced 2

ANCILLARY SKILLS	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Music (10), rhythm and <i>tāla</i> (10) - recitation and timekeeping of <i>tāla</i> , singing the items learnt with <i>tāla</i> , demonstrating use of <i>taṭṭukazhi</i>	20
Section Total	20
TECHNICAL SKILLS AND PERFORMANCE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
<i>Varnam</i>	25
Expressional item such as <i>Jāvali/Aṣṭapadi</i>	10
Other items from the <i>mārgam</i>	5
Creative Exercise	10
Section Total	50
SAFE DANCE PRACTICE, THEORY, ANCILLARY SKILLS AND FILE	
Title of component	Marks attainable
Safe Dance Practice for Bharatanatyam	5
Theory – response to questions	15
File – adequacy, presentation and response to questions generated from the file	10
Section Total	30
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 (00-49 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

Appendix

Syllabus resources

<https://shop.istd.org/shop/ddi-and-dde-course-books/item-classical-indian-dance-safe-dance-practice-pack/>

<https://istddance.sellfy.store/cid/>

Written and digital external resources

<https://paipa.in/history-of-bharatnatya>

<https://www.culturalindia.net/indian-dance/classical/bharatnatyam.html>

<https://akademi.co.uk/learning-and-participation/dance-well/digital-resources>

Conditioning for Dance: Franklin.E, 8th September (2003). Published by Human Kinetics (ADVANTAGE)

Safe Dance Practice. Rafferty, S. Quin, E. and Tomlinson (2015) Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetic.

Anatomy, Dance Technique, and Injury Prevention. Howse.J. and McCormack.M. Fourth Edition (2009) Methuen Drama.

Nutrition for Dancers: Simmel. L. and Kraft. E-M. First Edition. (2017) Routledge.

Nutrition for the Dancer: Mastin, Z. (2009). Alton: Dance Books



**Imperial Society of
Teachers of Dancing**

First published in 2018 by Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing

Republished 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