

THE INTERNATIONAL VOICE OF THE IMPERIAL SOCIETY OF TEACHERS OF DANCING

Issue 505 • September – December 2025

# Dance

FEATURING

**Health and wellbeing**

For performing and exams

**Ensuring fair access**

Supporting boys in dance





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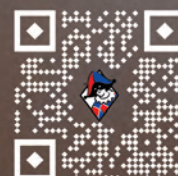
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Material Men by ISTD Vice  
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Editing and design by Membership  
and Communications Department



Printed by  
Micropress Printers Ltd  
Fountain Way,  
Reydon, Suffolk,  
IP18 6SZ

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## “Every dancer deserves the opportunity to thrive.”

Welcome to issue 505 of *Dance* magazine, where we explore the important theme of health and wellbeing in dance education, performance, and examinations.

At ISTD, we believe that every dancer deserves the opportunity to thrive, not just artistically, but physically, mentally, and emotionally. This issue reflects our ongoing commitment to supporting the whole dancer, from inclusive training to fair access in assessments.

On page 8, we highlight our Applications for Reasonable Adjustments (ARA) process, which ensures that all candidates, regardless of physical, emotional, or learning challenges, can access examinations in a fair and supportive environment. It's a cornerstone of our mission to make dance education inclusive and empowering.

We celebrate a decade of LEGACY Dance Company UK, founded to support boys in dance (page 10). Cat Chapman shares practical advice on creating safe spaces and building lasting engagement – an inspiring example of how we can transform boys' experience of dance.

Our new partnership with People Dancing (page 14) opens exciting opportunities for teachers to expand their practice with inclusive CPD courses, including training for working with older adults and people with Parkinson's.

As we shape the future of our events (page 12) and move *Dance* magazine into an exciting digital format (page 16), we remain focused on creating spaces, both physical and virtual, where dancers and teachers can connect, grow, and flourish.

Thank you for being part of our community. Together, we're building a dance world that celebrates excellence, embraces diversity, and prioritises wellbeing.

**Ginny Brown**  
Chief Executive



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## Supporting boys in dance

Lessons from a decade of LEGACY



# Meet our vice presidents

We caught up with Anthony van Laast CBE and Shobana Jeyasingh CBE.

## Anthony van Laast

### What sparked your interest in dance?

I spent most of my childhood avoiding anything to do with dance because my mum, Peggy Hawkins, was a dance teacher!

However, she took me to see Rudolf Nureyev dancing at Covent Garden when I was 16. I knew by the interval I just wanted to be a dancer. A week later I was in classes and three years later I was a professional dancer.

Peggy (my mum), taught by Ruby Ginner, was part of the ISTD's Classical Greek branch. She also worked with Dalcroze Eurythmics and taught into her eighties.

**I want to inspire dancers to dance and teachers to teach. I would also like to help with the future of the Society.**

### Your proudest achievement in dance?

I find the most satisfaction when someone tells me that something I choreographed or something I said inspired them to take dance classes or become a dancer or choreographer. Inspiring others to achieve is my greatest success.

A pivotal moment in my career was taking choreographic classes with Robert Cohan at the London Contemporary Dance Theatre. He inspired me to find my own voice as a dance maker.

### How did ISTD shape your journey?

I'll tell you a secret, even though I never wanted to be a dancer as a child and I rebelled against anything my mother was doing, I did go with her to one of her Classical Greek classes one day. And I took my shoes off and joined in. I still remember it being the best, most wonderful sensation, dancing, the freedom and joy of movement. And somewhere deep inside me, I must have known then that dance was my future. So thank you to the ISTD.

### Why is ISTD training important?

It's imperative that the standard of teaching dance is at its highest level. And I believe the ISTD training is of that highest standard.

### Goals as Vice President?

As vice president I would like to integrate myself into the family of the ISTD.

### What's next for dance and the ISTD?

I wonder if the future of dance is more about doing, participating and sharing, in which case the ISTD has a huge role to play in its development.

### How do you approach choreography?

If I'm doing a job, I get hold of the music. I know what the story is, I know what I'm trying to say. I take myself into the studio, with my assistant, and we spend days working on movement and story ideas. Choreography for me is more about solving problems. I create a problem, I solve the problem.

### Advice for dance teachers?

Teach what you know. Share what you know. And show and share how much you love it.

### How would you inspire someone to start dancing?

If you could have half the amount of fun I have had dancing, you will have the best time. Dancing is a completely and utterly brilliant life experience.



## Shobana Jeyasingh

### What drew you to dance?

I went to a school which had classical and folk dance in its curriculum and I found that it was something that I loved concentrating on. Classical Indian dancers were also the big movie stars in Sri Lanka and India so that helped too!

### Your biggest contribution?

I honestly don't rate myself in this way. I have tried to communicate that movement can be a powerful tool of communication as well giving pleasure to the performer and the audience.

### A career-defining moment?

I remember seeing a Rambert duet at Sadler's Wells in the late 1980s and being amazed by the composition of it. Film makers and painters have also taught me a lot about the use of space and time.

### How has ISTD supported you?

By the simple act of being there as a beacon for kinaesthetic literacy it gives much needed support for choreographers such as myself. Dance has always had a lot of historical catching up to do and ISTD is a crucial part of achieving this.

**Left** Anthony van Laast with Cher in 2018 on the film set for *Mamma Mia Here We Go Again*

**Above** Shobana Jeyasingh

**Right** Material Men by Shobana Jeyasingh



**Why do ISTD qualifications matter?**

People come into dance through different pathways and learn a variety of styles. It is important that a body such as the ISTD exists to uphold standards of quality so that the desire to dance and to teach dance is experienced and delivered safely, widely and to the greatest number of people.

**What excites you about your new role?**

I very much look forward to getting to know the many facets of ISTD and being of use in any way I can to help its vision of a world dancing in many diverse styles and genres.

**What's next for dance and the role of ISTD?**

The dance sector can seem a bit

fragile specially when the world is in a turmoil politically and economically. It is at moments like these that the achievement of a single young dancer doing their personal best becomes more precious than ever.

**Movement can be a powerful tool of communication as well as giving pleasure to the performer and the audience.**

**Your choreography is a part of the UK's National Curriculum for Dance. How does dance education shape young people?**

Dancers are some of the happiest and well-adjusted people I know! Learning how to master your physical

self and learn the inner mindfulness that dance teaches you is an invaluable gift that will always be needed.

**How do you blend tradition and innovation?**

As a choreographer I try not to think in binary terms such as traditional versus contemporary. The traditional can be very innovative and vice versa! The main driver is to find the best way of telling the story that one wants to tell,

**How would you encourage someone to dance?**

Your body is an amazing treasure trove of capabilities. Take a dance class and you will find out!



CHRIS NASH

# Mind over movement

Psychological skills that make a difference for performance and exams.



**Imogen Aujla PhD Dip. CBT**

Imogen is a freelance dance psychology expert and coach at Dance in Mind ([www.danceinmind.org](http://www.danceinmind.org)) where she shares free resources including courses, worksheets, and blogs.

Performances and exams are high-pressure situations that some students seem to breeze through, while others find them enormously challenging. Although your main focus during this time will be on your students' technical and artistic skills, there are also ways that you can assist with their psychological responses and reactions to events. This article offers some quick and easy tips so that you can help your students to...

## ... manage performance anxiety

Performance anxiety, otherwise known as stage fright, can be an uncomfortable feeling. But actually, it's a key way that our bodies prepare for an important event – increased heart rate and adrenalin give us more energy to perform, while a narrower attentional focus helps us to ignore irrelevant cues and information. So, the first step in managing performance anxiety is understanding that it can play a useful role in performance, and that it also shows that we care about the outcome of an exam or performance. Appreciating these aspects of performance anxiety can also make it feel more controllable.

It's also helpful to explain that there are cognitive symptoms (eg negative self-talk, worries, difficulties concentrating) and somatic symptoms (eg 'butterflies', dry mouth, shaky limbs), and that there are specific ways to deal with the different symptoms. One of the best ways to manage somatic symptoms is via a good warm-up, and some deep breathing while in the wings. These will help to regulate heart and breathing rates, enabling students to feel more in control. Cognitive symptoms can be trickier to cope with, but encouraging students to use a mantra such as "You've

**Teachers need to remember their own self-care during performance and exam seasons too.**

got this!" can be effective as it can boost motivation and confidence while simultaneously blocking more negative thoughts. Creating a pre-performance routine can also be helpful so that students stay busy and distracted in the run-up to going onstage.

Performance anxiety symptoms can be individual and unique, so encourage students to experiment with different strategies to find what works for them. For example, some dancers like to be with their peers while they're getting ready, while others prefer to be on their own.

## ... deal with exam stress

While performance anxiety is short-lived, consider stress its longer-term cousin: a state of tension that lasts longer and often applies to many areas of life rather than just one performance or exam. Students may find themselves feeling overwhelmed by pressures inside and outside of school, such as exams, coursework, part-time jobs, and social relationships.

Stress occurs when we don't believe that we





have the abilities to meet the many demands placed upon us. This can again result in a range of symptoms, including cognitive (eg difficulty concentrating or making decisions), physical (eg headaches, poor sleep) and emotional ones (eg irritability, loss of sense of humour). Ironically, many of these symptoms make dealing with stress more difficult.

Dancers are often proactive and goal-orientated, so a good first step could be in helping students to plan their time more effectively to help them meet various demands. This could mean scheduling things like practice or revision time, but do encourage students to make a little time for themselves, too: taking a break and engaging with something just for fun is a great way to combat stress. Constantly working is actually counterproductive! Self-care is critical too, so students should prioritise healthy eating, sleep and activities like meditation or yoga can help to calm a busy brain. Finally, advise students to view these challenges as being bumps on a much longer journey.

### ... reframe performance errors

We often focus on performance preparation, but it's important to consider what happens after a show or exam, too. Some students will just be happy that it's all over and will be ready to move on, but you may find others ruminating on mistakes or errors. This is particularly the case for perfectionistic dancers, who tend to be highly self-critical and hold themselves to excessively high standards. These dancers may benefit from journaling, with some particular prompts to help them put things into perspective:

- What did I do well in the performance/exam?
- What am I proud of about my performance?

- What was within and outside of my control during this situation?
- Is there anything I can learn from the mistake?
- Will the mistake matter in five years' time?
- What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?
- Did I enjoy the performance?

This last question is key, and a reminder that dancing should be joyful!

### And finally, don't forget your own self-care!

Performance and exam season is hugely stressful for teachers, too, so don't neglect your own self-care. While you may be rushed off your feet, try to carve out at least 10 minutes a day to do something just for you: ideally an activity you can get absorbed in, that has nothing to do with work! This could be anything from crafting, gardening, baking, or reading, to taking a long walk or a long bath. You may find journaling useful, or talk to a trusted friend, family member or partner to help you process any feelings around the event.



**The first step in managing performance anxiety is understanding that it can play a useful role in performance.**



**ISTD recommended exam uniform** is designed to support and enhance every movement a dancer makes. Using sustainable materials that provide the perfect balance of flexibility and support for optimal performance. Find out more [www.istd.org/examinations/dress-for-success](http://www.istd.org/examinations/dress-for-success)

**Membership**



Turn to page 20 to find out more about our **Step Up to Success** resources for members to promote the benefits of dance exams and medal tests.

# Ensuring fair access

## Understanding the ISTD's Applications for Reasonable Adjustments (ARA) process.

The ISTD is committed to ensuring every candidate has equal opportunities to succeed in their examinations. Recognising that candidates may face a variety of challenges – from physical disabilities to specific learning difficulties – the ISTD's Applications for Reasonable Adjustments (ARA) process ensures all learners can access assessments in a fair, supportive, and inclusive environment.

### What are reasonable adjustments?

Reasonable Adjustments are changes to the assessment process that remove or reduce barriers a candidate may face due to a disability, medical condition, or specific learning need. The goal is not to give an advantage but to level the playing field so candidates can demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding without being unfairly disadvantaged.

Adjustments are tailored to individual needs and may include rest breaks, extended preparation time, use of assistive technology, or alternative formats such as large print. The ISTD considers a wide range of conditions, including:

- Medical conditions (eg epilepsy, diabetes)
- Physical disabilities (eg cerebral palsy, scoliosis)
- Sensory impairments (eg vision or hearing loss)
- Specific learning difficulties (eg dyslexia, dyspraxia)
- Developmental disorders (eg autism spectrum disorder)
- Social, emotional or mental health needs (eg anxiety, panic disorders)

Adjustments are made without compromising the integrity of the assessment and reflect the candidate's usual way of working.

### Why ARA matters: performance and progression

In a performance-based discipline like dance, exam success can impact a young person's confidence, identity, and future aspirations. Reasonable Adjustments can make the difference between coping and thriving. By supporting candidates to perform at their best, ARA ensures outcomes reflect ability and effort - not barriers. This is vital for students working towards vocational qualifications or teacher training, where progression depends not just on ability, but also on its recognition



“

**Reasonable Adjustments can make the difference between coping and thriving – helping every candidate to perform at their best.**



### Case Study: Sally – Minor Adjustment

Sally has Down Syndrome, hypermobility, low muscle tone, and global developmental delay. She also has mild hearing loss. Sally can become tired or overstimulated more quickly and may lose concentration during prolonged activity or if the environment is overly stimulating.

Adjustments made:

- Extra time allocated to allow for brief rest periods and refocusing.
- Dance routines were broken into shorter segments: each performed twice, followed by a short break, and then repeated.
- Examiners were briefed on sensory sensitivities, such as volume levels, to avoid overstimulation during the assessment.

These examples show how the ARA process is flexible and centred around the individual, always aiming to remove barriers without altering the assessment's integrity or standards. Each adjustment is designed to reflect the candidate's usual working environment while maintaining fairness and consistency across all assessments.



through accredited pathways. ARA helps open doors to further study, teaching, and performance opportunities.

## The application process

### 1. Early identification

Teachers and schools are encouraged to identify students who may benefit from Reasonable Adjustments early in their training. This allows time to gather documentation and plan support.

### 2. Submitting an application

Applications must use the official ISTD forms:

- ARA Form for Examinations
- ARA Form for DDE Assessments

Applications should include details of the candidate's needs and the requested adjustments, supported by professional documentation (eg a letter from a GP).

### 3. Consent and submission

The candidate, or their parent/guardian if under 18, must give written consent to share their information. A sample consent form is available on the ISTD website. Completed applications should be sent to [ara@istd.org](mailto:ara@istd.org) and will be acknowledged within three working days.

### 4. Outcome and implementation

Once the application is approved, the agreed adjustments are communicated and put in place for the assessment. It's essential that all involved – teachers, ADCs, and examiners – understand the adjustments and how they are to be applied.

## Timeframes and deadlines

Timely submission is essential to allow the ISTD to review and action applications appropriately. Teachers and centres should refer to the ARA Process and Procedures documents for relevant deadlines, available on the ISTD website.

## Appeals and support

If an application is declined, there is a formal appeals process in place. The ISTD is committed to transparency and fairness, and encourages open communication if applicants need further support or clarification at any stage. For queries, support or further guidance, contact the ARA Administrator at [ara@istd.org](mailto:ara@istd.org)

## A commitment to inclusion

The ARA process reflects ISTD's belief that dance should be accessible to all – helping every candidate to shine. To learn more or begin an application, visit [www.istd.org/examinations/applications-for-reasonable-adjustments-ara](http://www.istd.org/examinations/applications-for-reasonable-adjustments-ara)

### Case Study: Adam – Moderate Adjustment

Adam has dyslexia, which can impact his ability to process and retain free work. He also has scoliosis, which affects hip alignment, and a knee condition that can limit certain movements. Adjustments made:

- 25% extra time granted to support processing and retention of free work.
- Examiner is made aware that certain positions, such as plié in 4th, may appear uneven, and that attitude alignment may be affected by scoliosis.
- For allegro and batterie, the music tempo was slightly slowed (with the pianist informed in advance) to reduce stress on the knee joint and support safe execution.

## Membership



## Supporting you: Step Up to Success resources

To help teachers and schools communicate the benefits of examinations, including how Reasonable Adjustments can support examination success – we have developed a suite of resources as part of our Step Up to Success campaign. These materials are designed to assist members in talking to parents and students about the value of dance exams and the support available through the ARA process. Resources include:

- Downloadable email template/web copy to help outline the ARA process to your students and parents
- Printable and digital leaflets explaining the benefits of taking dance exams
- Social media graphics and captions promoting the benefits of taking dance exams

Access all Step Up to Success resources and find out more about the campaign helping you to promote ISTD exams to students and parents here: [www.istd.org/examinations/step-up-to-success-the-benefit-of-dance-exams](http://www.istd.org/examinations/step-up-to-success-the-benefit-of-dance-exams)





# Supporting boys in dance

## Lessons from a decade of LEGACY



Ten years ago, **Cat Chapman AISTD** founded LEGACY Dance Company UK to create a safe, inclusive space in Norwich for boys to thrive through dance. Starting with 18 lads and a lot of determination, it's now the UK's largest all-male weekly training programme, with nearly 100 boys aged 4 to 21 training in styles from ballet to street. In this interview, Cat shares practical advice for teachers on supporting boys in dance, from tackling teasing to building lasting engagement.

### What inspired LEGACY?

"I created LEGACY after working on a project with New Adventures in 2014 called *Lord of the Flies*, which was about getting more boys into dance," Cat explains. "I saw the positive effect the environment had on the lads we worked with in Norwich and decided I needed to see if I could keep that going." LEGACY began with 18 boys meeting once a fortnight to train and create work together. "It was a teeny bit of funding, a lot of determination, and a belief that this could be something special."

### Celebrating 10 years

Their recent gala, *BROTHERS IN MOTION*, brought together boys and young men from across the country. "It was epic," Cat says. "The pride and inspiration they all took away from it – whether they were 4 or 24 – was breathtaking." Seeing graduates perform or send in videos from professional shows was especially moving. "It showed that the values and ethos of LEGACY have been carried with them on their journeys."

### Keeping boys engaged

"Brotherhood. Without a doubt," Cat says. "We work as hard on the environment we've created as we do on their training. Having role models and feeling like a team is paramount to them coming back week after week and genuinely committing."

### Creating a safe space

"It may sound like a contradiction – but discipline," she says. "All our boys, no matter their age, know the boundaries and what is



#legacydancecompanyuk







“  
The freedom  
to now  
perform A  
or B gives  
them the  
opportunity  
to develop  
more diverse  
dynamic  
qualities as  
a dancer.”

acceptable behaviour. But they also know they can come to the team or any of the older boys if they have any kind of issue.” Manners, kindness, hard work, and fun are the threads that run through everything. “They understand accountability. If someone does something wrong – which they will, because we’re all human – they learn to take responsibility with the support of the team and their Legacy brothers.”

### Challenges boys still face

“Sadly, the stigma of boys dancing is still heavily with us,” Cat says. “Some of our lads tell people at school what they do, but many don’t to save themselves grief.” LEGACY creates space for open conversations about bullying and how to cope. “The ironic thing is, often after the people who hassle them actually see what the lads can do, they change their tune. A backflip or a slick commercial routine usually leaves them with nothing else to say.”

### What is “Athletic Artistry”?

“Boys’ physiology is very different to girls and you have to tap into that,” Cat explains. “Giving them the opportunity to build strength, speed, and have a little healthy competition keeps them motivated.” They still learn how to plié and spot, but it’s blended with sliding floor work, press-ups, and games. “You’ve hit that instinctive part of them without them realising what’s happening. Once they’ve bought into the physicality, you can introduce technique in creative ways, and by the time they’re older, you’ve got the whole package.”

### The power of role models

Older students assist in junior classes and are a vital part of the younger boys’ experience. “They greet every Mini Legacy by name at the door and walk them to the studio, building those bonds from the very start.” Alumni often return to teach and give back. “They always want to come back. That says a lot.”

### Advice for teachers

“Get into schools. Run workshops in PE lessons that are tied to a subject they’re working on in other classes,” Cat advises. “Don’t try to introduce masses of technique straight away. Boys develop much slower but need way more stimulation, so keep the exercises energised and short.” She also stresses patience.

“When we launched Mini Legacy (4–6) after Main Company and Little Legacy (7–10), we had three boys for a year! But eventually people saw the work and trusted that we wouldn’t give up. Now we have two classes of 20 four- to six-year-olds.”

### Impact on ISTD work

Cat’s work with LEGACY has shaped her approach to ISTD syllabi. “Understanding how the male body works differently has helped, especially with things like hamstring or back flexibility. You can prep for that in the early grades so they get the best from their bodies by the Majors.” She also welcomes the flexibility in performance options. “With the freedom to now perform A or B, it gives them the opportunity to develop more diverse dynamic qualities as a dancer.”

### The ISTD’s role

“Change is a slow and patient process,” Cat says. “But by identifying instinctive actions from a young age and creating work that feels relatable, the ISTD has an opportunity to expand into an area that’s previously felt alien to a lot of boys.”

### Looking ahead

“I hope to help as many boys and young men find a passion for dance and theatre, and give them opportunities to see that they’re not alone,” Cat says. “The last 10 years has taught me not to try and do a one-size-fits-all. Boys thrive in an all-male environment. They may not master refined skills as quickly as girls, but with the right pathway and tools, they absolutely soar.”

### Success stories

People often assume the biggest success stories are the boys who’ve made it to the West End or are touring the world. “Which is amazing and we’re so proud,” Cat says. “But actually, it’s about those boys who were unbelievably shy but over time gained the confidence to go for things at school like a show or school council.” “It’s about those boys who were in a really tough situation at home but used LEGACY as a reason to make good decisions. It’s knowing that LEGACY has been a home for those who felt they didn’t fit in anywhere.”

# Shaping the future of our dance events

## Developing our training and event programme

Bringing people together to train, learn, perform and compete is an essential part of the ISTD calendar of events and courses.

The Dance Education and Training team, with the support of committee members, tutors and lecturers carefully plan and deliver an event and training programme that mixes online, in person, UK and International activities. All with the aim of bringing our amazing community of dancers and students together.

Our event programme provides competitions, workshops and masterclasses for the students of ISTD members to showcase their training, performance skills and enable them to share their love of dance with audiences comprising parents, teachers and their peers.

For ISTD members and dance teachers we offer a range of continuing professional development (CPD) courses to support pedagogy, genre knowledge, and business development. This ensures that we can support you to prepare your students in the best way for exams, performance, competitions and build your dance schools.

For anyone who's been on a course or attended an event, you'll know we gather feedback on what's gone well, what we could do better, and what else we could be offering. Your feedback, combined with the expertise of our events team, helps us shape our future programmes.

We know flexibility is important. So, we continue to offer in-studio and online courses. While there is nothing like being in the studio to learn work, we know that online works well for those with constraints on time and budget.

“  
**Really fantastic course, wonderful lecturer and fantastic new syllabus work.**  
– Regional Course

“  
**The organisation and communication ahead of the event was fantastic! The day was superb ...and the children experienced lots of positivity and feedback from the judges.** – ICB Awards

## The creative process – delivering courses and events

CPD courses are planned around new syllabus products and topics that have been requested from members or international/ UK regional reps. We work closely with our lead lecturers to create sessions that will appeal to new and experienced dance teachers. Once the courses are planned, the marketing begins and ticket sales open; courses are confirmed up to three weeks before the event takes place and are dependent on minimum numbers – so it's important to book early otherwise you may miss out!

The process from conception to delivery can take anything from 3 to 12 months for some of the larger and more ambitious events. During this time there is constant liaison with committees and lecturers on the artistic elements, marketing to produce plans and materials, and constant communications with venues, suppliers, teachers, parents to manage the event logistics, policies, risk assessments and safeguarding processes. Our staff are trained in safeguarding, first aid, fire marshalling and work hard to ensure that we have everything prepared so that we can provide a good and safe experience for all.

**Your feedback is shaping the future of ISTD's training and events.**



JAMES HUDDSON



**From April 2024–March 2025  
we achieved:**



### Events

**33 events**

**15,251 attendees**

**1,458 = Largest number  
of attendees in one single  
day – DFR Grand Finals**

**70% of all event attendees  
are Dancesport**



### CPD

**132 courses**

**1,769 delegates**

**640.25 course hours**

**41% of delegates  
attended online**

**47% attended courses in UK**

**12% attended  
internationally**

### The future of ISTD events and courses

We are currently taking some time to review our events. We have seen increased demand for our dancesport events and are looking forward to expanding the DFR Grand Finals in October 2025 into a weekend-long event.

However, our 2024 Member Survey revealed that 60% of members do not engage with our events, and data shows that the majority of engagement is concentrated within dancesport. As a result, we have been reflecting on how to develop our theatre event programme to ensure it is well attended by participants.

Over the past two years, we have published poster-style event calendars in *Dance* magazine, alongside termly event listings, monthly listings in the *What's On* newsletter, and social media promotion. Despite these efforts, we recognise the need to do more to inform our busy members about the events, competitions, and courses relevant to them. We are exploring how to better communicate through our committee, examiner, and representative networks to increase participation.

We are now working to create a new programme of theatre events that offer progression, recognition, and status, aiming to attract a broader audience across the UK. In time, we hope to mirror this approach within our international market.

Finally, we are also looking to expand our BLS (Ballroom, Latin, Sequence) events to better support our members and increase opportunities for competition and CPD for both teachers and students.

### Consulting for change

We have gathered a cross-genre panel of faculty committee members who meet monthly and are making some recommendations on how to rejuvenate Theatre events for 2026. These discussions have set out the aims for the programme:

- **To open access to more students** being able to participate and also have opportunities to celebrate the very best of ISTD work.
- **To streamline the event programme** for teachers and ISTD – bringing genres together to share work.
- **To broaden access to competitions** by reviewing criteria, online access and location.
- **To attract audiences** to engage and enjoy high quality performances.
- **To create community** and access by offering a combination of masterclasses and competition.
- **To acknowledge the heritage** of ISTD events, awards and alumni of winners.

So, we are working hard with our panel of experts to create a different theatre programme for 2026 that will inspire and engage our teachers, their students and audience.

We will be sharing our plans for 2026 with you shortly so that you can build participation into our events in your school schedule. In the meantime, check out our programme for the remainder of 2025 here: [www.istd.org/events](http://www.istd.org/events) and book training here: [www.istd.org/teach/continuing-professional-development-cpd/whats-on](http://www.istd.org/teach/continuing-professional-development-cpd/whats-on) to ensure you do not miss anything!

We look forward to seeing you out and about at events and courses this year!



# Expand your teaching practice with inclusive dance training

**We're delighted to announce our partnership with People Dancing.**

Discover exclusive CPD courses through our new partnership with People Dancing, designed to equip ISTD members with the skills to teach older adults and people with Parkinson's. Learn from leading experts, access flexible online training, and grow your impact in community dance.

People Dancing is the development organisation for community and participatory dance, driving forward inclusion and excellence.

Our partnership provides ISTD members with access to specialist CPD training at a special discounted rate. The courses and training available through our partnership focus on working with older adults and people with Parkinson's.

The courses are perfect if you're looking to expand your dance practice and explore working in community settings. The courses have been developed in partnership with leading dance artists who specialise in delivering dance in these sectors, such as David Leventhal (Dance for PD®/Mark Morris Dance Group) and Diane Amans (author of *Age and Dancing: Older People and Community Dance Practice*).

Each course will provide an in-depth insight into the areas of consideration for preparing to teach older adults and

those with Parkinson's. They will provide a firm foundation on how to approach planning and structure, providing the knowledge and skill required to develop safe and enjoyable dance opportunities. And best of all, you can participate in the course at a time, place and pace convenient to you!

**"It's an exciting opportunity to be working with People Dancing to expand our CPD offer to our members. This partnership provides opportunity for ISTD members to extend their knowledge with accessible online courses full of information and support on content delivery and development."** Said Louise Molton, Director of Education and Training who discussed the opportunity that this partnership brings. **"Working with People Dancing to share our CPD programmes, we can ensure that all dance teachers have the tools they need to develop their skills and knowledge."**

Our partnership will open opportunities for dance teachers connected with People Dancing to access ISTD CPD courses and teaching qualifications, bringing new networks of dance teachers together to share knowledge and best practice.

**"We are delighted be working with ISTD to support their members to extend their teaching practice, and to be sharing our expertise as providers of CPD resources that support greater inclusion in dance"** said Chris Stenton, Chief Executive, People Dancing.

## Explore the courses

Access the exclusive ISTD/People Dancing page: [www.istd.org/expand-your-teaching-practice-with-inclusive-dance-training](http://www.istd.org/expand-your-teaching-practice-with-inclusive-dance-training)

Select the Organisational Partners Price at checkout and allow 7–10 working days to receive your access code via email. Have your ISTD membership number ready.

For multi-user licenses (6+ learners) or group discounts (20+ users), email: [qualifications@communitydance.org.uk](mailto:qualifications@communitydance.org.uk)

“

**I found the actual course was terrific – loved how it was short, efficient, focussed, contained all the important info, and presented in a variety of fun, engaging and accessible ways.**

**– Philip Piggin,  
online course  
participant**

## Interested in Teaching Dance in a Community Dance Setting?

Find out more about the ISTD **Diploma in Teaching Community Dance (DTCD)**, a Level 4 Ofqual regulated qualification. The DTCD equips aspiring dance teachers with practical skills and knowledge essential for a successful teaching career in community settings.

The syllabus covers safe teaching practices, child development and practical teaching techniques, fostering professional dance teachers with knowledge, independent thinking and ability to analysis, adapt and evaluate.

Currently, online courses are available with the ISTD Academy. Course details are available here: [www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy/level-4-diploma-in-teaching-community-dance-dtcd](http://www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy/level-4-diploma-in-teaching-community-dance-dtcd)

**Are you a school wanting to offer the Diploma in Teaching Community Dance?** Find out more about adding this Level 4 qualification to your portfolio – email [PQManager@istd.org](mailto:PQManager@istd.org)





# A new chapter for *Dance* magazine

We're going digital.



In 1907, Charles D'Albert, the first editor of *Dance Journal*, wrote: **"This Journal is yours, therefore make use of it."**

Over 500 issues later, that spirit of community and collaboration remains at the heart of everything we do. Now, we're turning the page to an exciting new chapter.

## Why this is the last printed edition

As part of ISTD's digital transformation, we're saying goodbye to the printed version of *Dance* magazine. But this isn't the end, it's a bold new beginning. From now on, members will receive *Dance* in a fresh, digital format designed to be more accessible, interactive, and tailored to your needs.

## What's changing and why?

We know our members are busy, global, and increasingly digital. That's why we're evolving how we share stories, updates, and inspiration:

- **Instant access:** Read the magazine on your phone, tablet, or laptop – anytime, anywhere
- **Never miss an issue:** No more waiting for the post or misplacing your copy
- **Interactive features:** Watch videos, explore photo galleries, and click through to related content and resources

This isn't just a digital version of the print magazine, it's a whole new experience.

## Introducing Shorthand: our new digital home

We're proud to be launching the new *Dance* magazine on Shorthand, a platform designed to bring stories to life. Shorthand allows us to create a beautifully designed, immersive reading experience that goes far beyond a traditional PDF. So, you'll be able to:

- **Scroll through visually rich stories** with seamless design
- **Engage with multimedia content** like video, audio, and interactive elements
- **Navigate easily** between features, interviews, and teaching tips

It's a platform that matches the creativity and energy of our dance community and we can't wait for you to explore it.

## More personalised communication

Alongside the new magazine, we're also improving how we keep you informed:

- **Tailored newsletters:** You'll receive updates based on your interests and preferences, ensuring the content is always relevant to you
- **Timely information:** Monthly newsletters will include syllabus updates, faculty news, and CPD opportunities, delivered when you need them
- **Shorter, smarter content:** Easy to read, easy to navigate, and always relevant





**Not just a digital  
version of the  
print magazine,  
but a whole new  
experience.**



## **What you can expect from the new digital *Dance***

The new *Dance* magazine will continue to bring you:

- **Teaching advice and practical tips**
- **In-depth features and interviews**
- **Broader insights that connect our global community**

But now, it will also come to life with rich media and dynamic content, designed to inspire and inform in new ways. Published three times a year, in September, January, and May, we're guided by an Editorial Board of faculty committee members who represent your interests and keep us closely connected to our membership.

## **Thank you for the journey so far**

We're incredibly grateful to everyone who contributes to *Dance* magazine. Your voices, stories, and expertise have shaped a publication that has stood the test of time. We know the move from print to digital may feel bittersweet as many of you have cherished the physical magazine and the ritual of receiving it by post. Thank you for being part of that journey.

As we move forward, we invite you to help shape the future of *Dance*. Share your ideas, feedback, and suggestions with us at [dancemag@istd.org](mailto:dancemag@istd.org)

Together, we're building something even more vibrant, inclusive, and inspiring. **Welcome to the new era of *Dance*.**  
**Your first digital issue will come out in January 2026.**



# Setting the standard

## The vital role of qualification development in dance education.

**“Dance teachers rely on structured qualifications to deliver age-appropriate, pedagogically sound training. Through qualification development this ensures that every dance studio is guided by clarity and consistency.”**

For over a century, the ISTD has upheld a global standard in dance education and examinations. In today's dynamic and diverse dance world – where tradition meets innovation, and precision meets expression – developing qualifications is key to ensuring consistency, credibility, and progress.

### Why qualification development matters: maintaining globally recognized standards

ISTD examinations are delivered in over 75 countries, and so the need for standardized, equitable examinations is paramount. Whether a candidate is undertaking Modern Theatre in Manchester or Latin American in Mumbai, qualification development ensures parity in content, expectations, and outcomes. This consistency allows qualifications to be internationally respected and supports businesses and the mobility of dancers, teachers, and institutions across a multitude of locations.

### What is qualification development?

Qualification development is the continual creation, refinement, and regulation of syllabi, examinations, and grading structures across all dance genres. It's the 'behind-the-scenes' framework that defines how a Grade 1 Ballet exam differs from an Advanced 2 Tap exam or how a Bharatanatyam syllabus balances technical discipline with expressive storytelling.

The ISTD has now embarked on a clear **qualification development strategy** to ensure a committed, consistent and current approach to:

- **Creating new qualifications**, ensuring that they are relevant in the current dance sector

- **Reviewing existing qualifications** ensuring that they are meeting the needs of learners and that the ISTD is meeting its responsibilities as an awarding organisation.
- **Developing all qualifications**, ensuring that the resources that teachers need are available to them and that members can access relevant and up to date information.

This strategy is supported by a newly created **qualification development team** that are fully committed to placing members voices at the heart of the strategy. We do this by:

- **Holding regular members focus groups** to discuss ideas about new and existing syllabi
- **Taking advice** from committees, lead examining teams, industry specialists and regulator experts.
- Considering the traditions of each genre but also **ensuring we reflect evolving industry standards**, inclusivity, and the needs of modern students and teachers.
- Ensuring that the outcome is a range of up to date syllabi that **support artistic and technical development**, fosters consistency worldwide, and empowers both teachers and students alike.

### Empowering teachers and examiners

Dance teachers rely on structured qualifications to deliver age-appropriate, pedagogically sound training. The ISTD provides resources, CPD opportunities, and syllabi that are clearly mapped to progression paths. Examiners, in turn, benefit from transparent, standardized examination criteria that uphold the Society's reputation for quality and fairness. Through qualification development this ensures that every dance studio is guided by clarity and consistency.

### Reflecting and driving innovation

As dance styles evolve and global influences reshape movement vocabulary, qualification development ensures that examinations remain culturally relevant and inclusive. Recent updates, such as increased emphasis on contemporary and street styles, gender inclusivity through all genres, and diverse musicality, highlight the ISTD's commitment to both preserving heritage and embracing change. This adaptive spirit encourages creativity while maintaining the integrity of traditional genres.



**“Ensuring that the outcome is a range of up-to-date syllabi that support artistic and technical development, fosters consistency worldwide, and empowers both teachers and students alike.”**



### **How can ISTD members get involved?**

Dance is not just an art, it's a discipline, a vocation, and a lifelong journey. ISTD teachers use our qualifications to map this journey and so we want to hear your thoughts and ideas. Regular focus groups are held with teachers to ensure that we are responding to the needs of members and their students. Notice of any upcoming focus groups is sent out on Facebook and so please look out for them and come along to share your thoughts. To join your faculty Facebook group, visit: [www.istd.org/discover/our-governance/faculty-committees](http://www.istd.org/discover/our-governance/faculty-committees)

Faculty committees also play a vital role in advising on syllabus developments and in undertaking reviews of existing syllabi. Committees represent the membership with each genre and so **being part of a committee can be a great way of being at the centre of our developments**. Faculty elections are held regularly and so please look out for notice of them for your genre. You need to be a Full Teaching ISTD

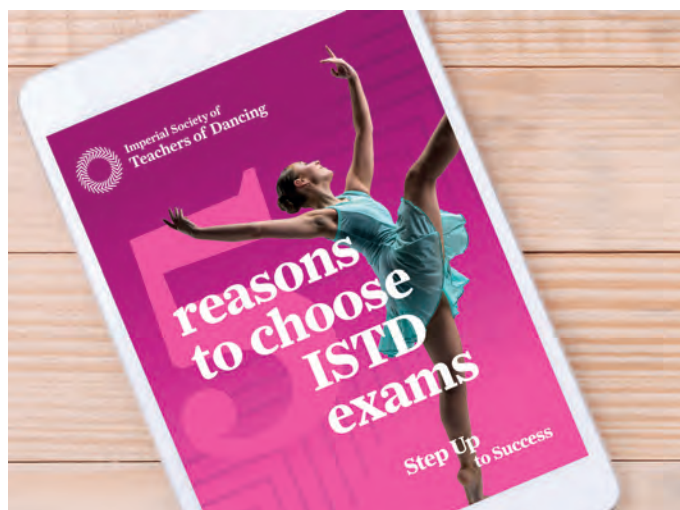
member and hold Licentiate to be eligible to join a committee.

**Faculty Committee elections** are to taking place this year for the Imperial Classical Ballet and Classical Indian Dance faculties. Find out more here: [www.istd.org/discover/news/shape-the-future-of-dance-stand-for-your-faculty-committee](http://www.istd.org/discover/news/shape-the-future-of-dance-stand-for-your-faculty-committee) – apply by 15 September 2025.

### **In conclusion**

Qualification development may operate behind the scenes, but its impact is felt in every dance studio, on every stage, and within every syllabus. It is the backbone of a system that values excellence, nurtures creativity, and ensures fairness. Through robust, reflective, and future-ready qualifications, the ISTD and the wider dance world continues to uphold the highest standards while empowering the next generation of dancers and teachers to thrive.





# Step Up to Success

New campaign assets now available on Canva.

We're excited to introduce a brand-new suite of editable marketing resources designed to help ISTD members promote the value of dance examinations and medal tests to students and parents.

As part of our **Step Up to Success** campaign, these assets are now available via the Member Resource Hub and can be easily customised and downloaded through Canva. Whether you're looking to boost enrolment, celebrate student achievements, or explain the benefits of ISTD exams, these tools are here to support you.

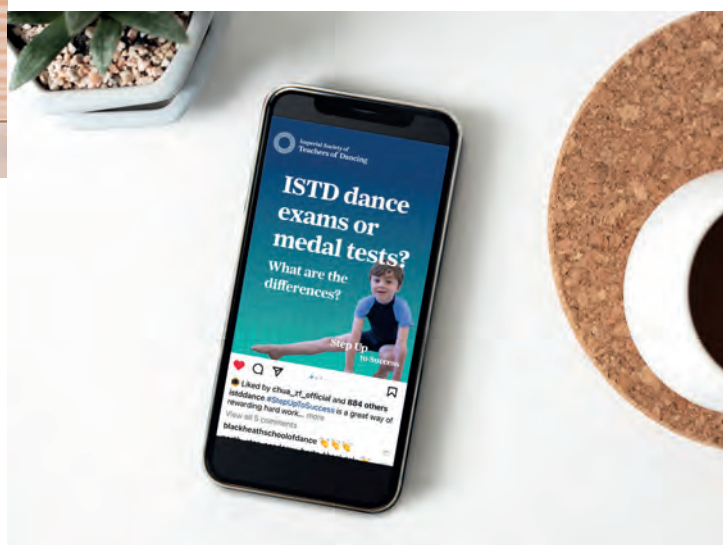
## What's included?

You'll find a wide range of resources, including:

- Downloadable social media carousels
- Editable testimonial templates
- Leaflets, postcards, and posters for your school or studio
- Email and website templates explaining the benefits of ISTD exams
- Templates outlining the ARA process for parents and students
- Specialist content for Theatre exams and Dancesport medal tests
- Over 15 editable Canva frames to celebrate exam success
- New social posts highlighting UCAS points and class exam benefits

These assets are designed to be repurposed for your own channels. Just don't forget to tag us **@istddance** and use the hashtag **#ISTDExamSuccess** to join the campaign and share your students' achievements.

Let's celebrate the power of dance exams together. Visit the Member Resource Hub today and start exploring.





# Tap Class Exams

**ISTD Tap Class Exams to launch this October.**

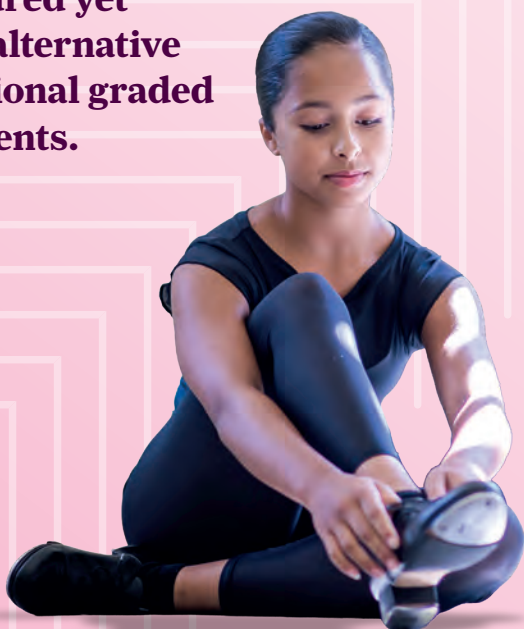
Launching in **October 2025**, the ISTD's new **Tap Class Examinations** offer a fresh, accessible way to measure student progress within a supportive, class-based format. Designed for students from Class 1 to Class 6, these exams provide a structured yet flexible alternative to traditional graded assessments.

Each level features selected set exercises drawn from the existing grade syllabi, followed by a **creative dance choreographed by the teacher**. The exams are conducted within the comfort of the regular class setting, led by the teacher and observed by an examiner—either in person or remotely.

The Tap Class Exams aim to build **technical and artistic development** through safe dance practice, ensuring students are well-prepared for more advanced work. Key objectives include promoting correct posture, understanding of tap technique and terminology, musicality, tone, spatial awareness, and performance artistry. Students are also encouraged to explore rhythm creatively and develop their sense of audience and interpretation.

Teachers can now access the **webinar and full specification** via the ISTD website, with everything needed to begin planning and delivery. Whether used as a motivational milestone or a stepping stone into the wider syllabus, these exams celebrate progress, participation, and the joy of tap.

**These exams provide a structured yet flexible alternative to traditional graded assessments.**



# ISTD Performance Awards

**Coming soon... a new way to shine.**

Launching in **April 2026**, the ISTD's new **Performance Awards** offer an exciting opportunity for dancers of all ages and abilities to showcase their creativity and progress in a supportive, celebratory setting.

Open to students aged **five and above**, the awards can be entered in **any dance genre**, with performances in **solos, duets, trios, or groups** – either in person or remotely. There's **no set choreography**, and choreography itself is not assessed, giving teachers and students the freedom to create and perform material that reflects their unique style and strengths.

Teachers play a central role in entering students and promoting the awards to parents. Each performance is observed by an ISTD examiner and receives **personalised feedback**, making the experience valuable for students who may not thrive in more formal exam structures.

The awards are designed to be **flexible and inclusive**, with short performance durations and optional costuming.

They're also a practical tool for teachers – ideal for boosting morale, supporting competition students with non-competitive feedback, helping to fill an exam day, or the perfect accompaniment to a school show.

With a focus on **joy, creativity, and achievement**, the performance awards are a vibrant new addition to the ISTD's offering – encouraging every dancer to shine in their own way.

**The full specification will be available from October 2025** via the ISTD website.

**Performance Awards are celebratory and supportive, with a focus on joy, creativity, and recognition.**



# A global village of support

Our international representatives are supported by a network of dedicated members across the globe. Their contributions are invaluable, and this update celebrates the collaborative spirit that drives the ISTD forward.

## Astrid Sherman – Americas

As this issue goes to press, we have received the very sad news that Gail Clifford passed away on 8 August.

Our thoughts and sincere condolences go to her family, friends and colleagues. A full tribute is being prepared, which will be published here: [my.istd.org/my-istd/in-memoriam](http://my.istd.org/my-istd/in-memoriam)

On these pages I wanted to acknowledge Gail, my right-hand in Mexico, whose tireless dedication shaped the ISTD's presence in the region. Gail was instrumental in developing ballet and dance education in Mexico, serving as Local Organiser and facilitating teacher training and examinations. Her legacy will continue to resonate through the many lives she touched.

Joan Mondellini recalls how Gail introduced ISTD Ballet and National Dance in Mexico, laying the foundation for future growth. Later, Joan and Mario Mejia expanded the offerings to include Modern Theatre and Tap.

**“Gail is the true meaning of tireless dedication. I admire her courage, strength, and determination.” – Joan Mondellini**

Gail shared how her ISTD journey began with examiner Robert Harrold's visit, followed by Elizabeth Harrison's encouragement. Martha Elena Trejo O'Reilly added how in 1975, Gail and her mum, Martha O'Reilly, attended a pivotal ISTD course in Burbank California with Joan Hardy, which led to the syllabi being introduced in Mexico.

**“Thanks to Gail's vision, passion, and dedication, the ISTD continues to shape and empower the next generation of dancers and educators.” – Militzen Lopez-Yuen**

Andrea Andraca, the first Mexican and Latin American ISTD examiner, shared:

**“Gail changed my life. I became an examiner because of her passion. The ISTD in Mexico is what it is today because of her determination and love.” – Andrea Andraca**



**Above** Gail Clifford  
**Above left** Gail's International Award  
**Left** Ballet teachers in Mexico meeting Margot Fonteyn: Martha O'Reilly, Andrea de Granda, Margot Fonteyn, Gail Clifford, Ana Del Castillo

**Every region has its heroes. Together, they make the ISTD a truly international stage.**





Gail's hospitality extended to visiting examiners, including Charmaine Nobes, who co-founded a school in Vancouver and often examined in Mexico:

**“Gail’s organisation skills were driven by enthusiasm, patience, and kindness. She will always have a special place in my heart.” – Charmaine Nobes**

In 1994, Gail received the ISTD’s International Award, calling it a “magic moment” in her journey. Her legacy exemplifies the ISTD’s global commitment to dance education.

### **Delia Sainsbury – Africa and the Middle East**

In Africa, we say, “It takes a village to raise a child.” For the ISTD, it takes a global village – and a visionary leader like Ginny Brown.

I met Ginny in 2019, and her vision for expansion and accessibility resonated deeply. The ISTD had long delivered exceptional artistic training, but Ginny saw the need for broader access and innovation. She encouraged entrepreneurship and diversity, helping the Society evolve into a sustainable, inclusive organisation.

Running my school in Cape Town for 33 years, I’ve faced many challenges. Ginny’s support helped us expand genres and access CPD, which was previously unavailable. Through APEL, we now welcome teachers from varied methodologies, embracing gender and ethnic diversity.

With Ginny’s guidance, my studio became an ADC this year, delivering all units in-house and through the ISTD Academy. She implemented long-standing recommendations, making it

**Behind every international representative is a global network of passionate, generous, and dedicated members.**

easier to connect with members and promote the Society.

Yes, it takes a village – but in African terms, it takes a great chief to lead the way. I must also thank the brilliant ISTD team:

- Chelsea Fox (International Examinations Officer) – for navigating exams around holidays, injuries, and last-minute changes.
- Valentina Grecchi (CPD and Events Coordinator) – for managing courses with charm and efficiency.
- Denisa Gregorio-Rey (Head of Membership) – my go-to for constant enquiries.
- Louise Molton (Director of Dance Education and Training) – for calmly fielding my suggestions on standardising international qualifications.

Thanks to this “village,” Africa and the Middle East are now part of a vibrant global artistic economy.



### Chua Zjen Fong – Asia

As ISTD Asia's International Representative, I'm often seen as the face of our region – but the truth is, I'm supported by an incredible team behind the scenes.

First, my deepest gratitude to my wife, Evon, who balances our dance studio and home life while raising two toddlers. Her quiet strength and belief in our journey make everything possible.

My parents also step in whenever needed, offering care and moral support – even while managing their own health challenges. Their selflessness allows me to focus on my duties.

I'm grateful to my staff team, who handle translations, rescheduling, and daily operations, ensuring our academy runs smoothly no matter where I am.

To fellow ISTD members: never hesitate to reach out to your local representatives or ISTD HQ. The team is kind, professional, and passionate about helping members succeed – from syllabus updates to career advice. Thank you to everyone who makes this journey possible.

**“It takes a village – and in my case, that village has made it possible for me to represent our community with pride.” – Chua Zjen Fong**

### Kim Scott – Australasia

Communication is the heart of our role as ISTD Representatives. It's how we keep members informed, inspired, and connected to the global dance community.

But this isn't a solo performance – it's a well-choreographed ensemble. Behind the scenes is a dedicated team that keeps the rhythm going. Special thanks to our incredible International staff at HQ:

- Eve Drakouli (Head of International Examinations)
- Denisa Gregorio-Rey (Head of Membership)
- Valentina Grecchi (CPD and Events Coordinator)
- Stephanie Russo (International Examinations Officer)
- Metaxia Ypsilanti (International Examinations Manager)

And to our globe-trotting examiners like Tereza Theoduolou – thank you for upholding the standards we all strive for.

From exams and CPD courses to international tours and training, this team keeps the ISTD show on the road. Without them, we in Australasia couldn't keep pace.

On our side of the world, it's our teachers and members who keep the conversation going – through Facebook chats, emails, and phone calls. Between classes and choreography (and the occasional costume fix!) we share knowledge, spark ideas, and offer support.

**“We are a community of movers and shakers doing our best in an ever-evolving world of dance. With open communication and shared purpose, we’ll keep leaping forward – together.” – Kim Scott**

### **Carole Ann Watson – Europe**

I’m incredibly grateful to the ISTD teachers who help me with translations for emails and newsletters – Kathy Ingram for Spanish and Christina Fotinaki for Greek. I also want to thank the International Exams Department and Denisa Gregorio-Rey for their invaluable support, and Theresa Lungaro-Mifsud for all she’s done for Malta. I could never manage without their help – and the help of many more. It really is teamwork.

**The ISTD’s strength lies in its people—those who teach, support, translate, organise, and inspire.**



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# Cecchetti Classical Ballet



PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASH

**Cecchetti holds the core fundamentals of ballet and dance, and I've really appreciated the training it provides – I can use it in every style of dance.**

## Jakob Wheway Hughes

### From Cecchetti roots to global recognition.

ISTD Fellow Jacqueline Lewis interviews rising star Jakob Wheway Hughes, whose journey from early ballet classes to international acclaim has been shaped by Cecchetti training and a deep passion for dance. A finalist at the prestigious **Prix de Lausanne**, Jakob won both the Audience Favourite and Contemporary Award. He shares insights into his artistic growth, the demands of elite competition, and the mindset that keeps him grounded.

#### What drew you to dance, and why Tring?

I was a very energetic child, and I can remember being in my cot, waving my arms to music. As I grew up, I went through a phase of spinning around, and my dad decided to enrol me in ballet classes to help channel my energy. I've been dancing ever since.

I met Ruth Brill during the COVID-19 pandemic, as I was recommended by Laura Day to work on the Chrysalis Project, where I danced alongside Brandon Lawrence. Ruth is such a wonderful woman, and she suggested that I audition for Tring. I had only really considered Elmhurst or the Royal Ballet School, but when I attended an open day at Tring, it felt right. The class really focused on the mechanics of dance, and I appreciated the advice I was given. Ruth took my Elmhurst audition video and sent it off to Tring.

I studied with Gillian Toogood at Tring for just over two years, and she is such a wonderful teacher. We did a Cecchetti class with her every Monday, and she coached me for Advanced 1.

#### How has the Cecchetti Method helped you as a dancer and artist?

It gave me the foundation to develop strong artistry, because I think the most important part of dance is the musicality and the port de bras. Yes, you can have gorgeous technique and legs, but if your port de bras are not warm and inviting, or giving to the audience, you're not presenting the full image of ballet. For me, Cecchetti holds the core fundamentals of ballet and dance, and I've really appreciated the training it provides – I can use it in every style of dance.

Cecchetti training has helped me because it introduced me to another style of ballet. I study many styles – ballet,

jazz, commercial, contemporary – and it made me realise that there are many facets within each style. There are many umbrellas of dance, and umbrellas within those umbrellas. It was good for me to learn the basic Cecchetti principles, like croisé arabesque. There are so many intricacies within the

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**There are so many intricacies within the Cecchetti Method, and I really enjoyed learning them. Cecchetti was such a foreign concept to me, and it has really added flavour to my performance.**

Cecchetti Method, and I really enjoyed learning them. Cecchetti was such a foreign concept to me, and it has really added flavour to my performance.

In 2022, I participated in the Barbara Geoghegan at Elmhurst, and I had such a positive experience. The dancers were all very talented, and the atmosphere was welcoming. The stage at Elmhurst is very unforgiving – the audience is so close and high – and it was a good experience to work on a stage like that. I was fortunate to win the Barbara Geoghegan and was offered the opportunity to perform at The Royal Ballet Upper School as part of Cecchetti Day in 2023.

#### **What was participating in the Prix de Lausanne like?**

The entire experience was transformative, and I really had to re-evaluate myself as a dancer. Going in and meeting all the dancers, who are at such a high standard, is terrifying – you feel like you have to keep kicking to stay above water or you'll sink. It's so inspirational, but it was also very overwhelming. I remember walking in and thinking, "I'm going to make friends here and try to learn as much as I can. It doesn't matter what I get." The experience of being in a room with so many talented dancers and people who love dance is one I will never forget.

It was very hard; I don't think I've ever experienced a competition like it. Everyone there was so lovely. I learned so much and appreciated the fact that it exists. You only had one chance.

I honestly did not expect to go through to the finals. I saw all the other dancers and thought, "Yes, that's me done." Hearing that I had won the Audience Favourite was such a shock. I really appreciate everyone who voted for me, and everyone around me was

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ASH



**Left and above** Jakob Wheway Hughes

so supportive. To hear that I had also received the Contemporary Award was another shock. My dad and sister came on the last two days, not knowing I had made it through, and it was lovely for them to watch me perform.

I didn't want to push myself to the front and centre – I was too nervous for that. I was there to learn as much as possible, and the advice and information I received from the teachers is so valuable.

I am so privileged to have been given the exposure to explore different companies across the globe, and the Prix has really developed my career.

#### **What advice would you give to young dancers currently training with aspirations like yours?**

The only advice I can give is to work harder and longer than you think you can, and to really listen and observe your surroundings so that you can absorb as many influences as possible.

### **New opportunity: Licentiate in Cecchetti**

#### **Advance your teaching practice with the ISTD's Licentiate qualification.**

This is now available fully online with ISTD Academy, making it accessible wherever you are in the world.

Guided by expert lecturer Cara Drower, this course supports experienced teachers looking to deepen their skills and progress their careers.

Need a refresher first? We've got preparatory options to help you get started. More information coming soon at [www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy](http://www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy)





# Classical Greek Dance

## How Classical Greek Dance shaped our studies

Two university students reflect on the lasting influence of their Classical Greek Dance training.

### Georgina Stock

**Cambridge student Georgina Stock, trained at Kilburn School of Dance, Wellingborough, where she earned ISTD Advanced 2 in National and Classical Greek dance. Grounded in this rigorous training, Georgina shares how the skills and discipline she developed continue to shape her studies and fuel her ambition for a career in theatre, film, and screen industries.**

Starting at Cambridge on my degree in History three years ago, I had no idea how much I would use the artistic skills dance has taught me. I had chosen not to go to drama school, knowing I could continue my passion for theatre as an extracurricular if necessary. However, three years later and a term into my Master's course, my competitive dance background has shaped my life in unimaginable ways.

Dance, particularly Classical Greek and National, featured on my initial personal statement to the University. I talked about my interest in the history



PAUL ASHLEY

**Above** Georgina Stock and the cast of *Gala* (ADC Theatre, 2024)

of the styles: the roots of Greek in classical mythology, the geopolitical background of folk dance, as well as the invaluable life skills dance has taught me, such as organisation and teamwork. Throughout my degree, the political influence of dance has permeated my studies; my undergraduate dissertation was on flamenco in fascist Spain, and I am considering Carlos Saura's 1980s flamenco choreographic film and the new politics of democracy and women's rights in contemporary Spain for my postgraduate dissertation.

During my time here, I've spent many hours at the ADC Theatre in Cambridge, which launched the careers of Eddie Redmayne, Trevor Nunn, Ian McKellen, and most recently Emma Corrin (*The*



**My Classical Greek dance training taught me more than movement – it instilled discipline, storytelling skills, and an understanding of cultural history that have deeply influenced both my academic work and creative projects.**

*Crown*) and Madeline Jackson-Smith (*Operation Mincemeat*). I choreographed student shows, weaving Classical Greek into the dreamlike sequence 'Tick Tock' in *Company* (2022), and creating an interpretive ballet-Greek fusion in *Chess* (2022) to represent a chess game through movement. I used National dance for any folk-like music, including a sea shanty in the *Footlights Pantomime* (2022), an Irish celebratory sequence in *The Tempest* (2023), and a Russian dance interlude in *Chess*. I also drew on my jazz and tap experience, choreographing for *Kiss Me, Kate* (2023), *The Drowsy Chaperone* (2023), *Songs For a New World* (2024), and a new musical that we took to the Edinburgh Fringe called *Palindrome* (2023).

From choreography, it was not a massive leap to directing and producing. My first semi-professional directing gig was *Romeo and Juliet* (2024) at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, where I assisted Josh Seymour on a Marlowe Society production and I am directing and choreographing a production of *Sweet Charity* at the ADC this year.

This dance-to-theatre trajectory has influenced my career plans massively, and I cannot credit dance enough. Taking the leap into the arts industry was not a decision I took lightly. However, dance has given me the endurance, ambition and passion I need to work in this notoriously difficult industry. I was still at the University of Cambridge during the 2025 academic year, studying Film and Screen Studies at MPhil level. Cambridge also has a thriving film scene, and as part of my role as Events Officer on Watersprite Film Festival 2025, we are hosting an event called 'Stage to Screen' where actors, directors and producers will discuss the practicalities of taking a script such as *Fleabag* or *Baby Reindeer* from a Fringe format to a script for the screen. I am ambitious for a career in the film, screen and theatre industries, where the tenacity and artistry I learnt from dance will be immensely welcome.

## Freya Cox

Trained under Fiona Sheehan at the Mayhew School of Dance and Performing Arts, Freya Cox completed her ISTD Classical Greek exams including Advanced 2. In this article, she shares how her deep-rooted passion for Classical Greek dance has profoundly influenced both her artistic development and academic journey, shaping her Theatre and Performance degree and inspiring her dissertation exploring dance as a medium to address climate change.

Classical Greek is, and always has been, my favorite style of dance. From my earliest solos all the way to my Advanced 2 Exam, its unique style of movement, as well as its integration with Classical Mythologies and Historical studies (a separate personal obsession of mine) has always made it a joy to learn. Towards the later end of my dance training I focused heavily on Classical Greek, representing the Classical Greek Faculty at the ISTD Bursary Awards in 2019 and placing first in the senior soloist category of the Classical Greek National finals later that year, as well as completing all of my Classical Greek ISTD Exams, despite the interruptions due to COVID-19.

However, my love of, and fascination with, Classical Greek did not end when I left for university. Despite not studying dance directly for my degree, I have used Classical Greek in many of my assessments, such as an essay focusing on how Classical Greek sits at a unique crossroads between recorded history and modern culture, and the additional research this has brought has only strengthened my love for the style.

However, it's even larger influence on my university career is the way in which Classical Greek is taught. With a style from such an early age requiring research and theoretical and



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**The training to connect physical movements with wider symbolism and historical context became an essential tool in my Theatre and Performance Degree, helping me to read the subtleties in art and performance with nuance and depth.**

historical knowledge in its exams, students learn how to connect physical movements with the wider symbolism and context. The training in, and ability to, read the movements and intentions of Classical Greek in such a nuanced way from an early age became an essential tool in my Theatre and Performance Degree while at university. With so many of our lectures and essays centering around how to connect performances to their wider historical contexts and read the subtleties in art and performance as links to its wider messaging, Classical Greek had already helped me establish those skill sets, which I was then able to build on academically.

I have also merged these academic skills and my physical training in the dance

style in my dissertation. As I am studying a Theatre and Performance Studies Degree, our dissertations can be practical performances and must be based around a research question and academic investigation. I decided to centre my project around how Classical Greek, as a dance style so inherently connected with both nature and the past, can be used as a form to discuss and represent the current – and more importantly, future – impacts of climate change.

My training in Classical Greek has given me a range of skills which has informed this project, from the use of the body in storytelling, to the symbolism of certain actions and positions, working with spoken words and poetry and the use of nature studies and the physical embodiment of nature. I have been able to pull on over a decade of training in a style, which – more so than many others – focuses so inherently on the theory and study around it in conjunction with its physical movements.

This unique training has made Classical Greek an integral part of my dissertation process and my academic journey more broadly.

**Left and above**  
Freya Cox







# Classical Indian Dance

## Dancing beyond steps

Lisa Harrison-Jones, our Head of Theatre Qualifications, looks at cultivating connections.

In the sacred spaces of the classical Indian dance studio, something profound takes root. More than just choreography and technique; resilience, creativity, and the courage to find one's voice is nurtured. As educators, the role stretches far beyond the mirrored walls, as mentors, guides, and catalysts of transformation.

Pushkala Gopal MBE explains: **"Dance is about relationships, with the music, the audience, the teacher, and ultimately, with oneself. When students feel seen and heard, they blossom, not just as dancers, but as confident individuals."**

In the world of dance education, it's not just about perfecting technique and choreography, it's about creating connections and a lasting positive impact on our dancers as people and artists. Building a deeper rapport with students, built on empathy and trust, creates an inclusive and empowering learning environment. Teachers are not merely teaching mudras and rhythms, but the essence of self-expression.

Nina Rajarani MBE says: **"What stays with a dancer is not always the Aḍavus or the Tāla, but how the teacher made them feel; kindness, patience, and respect are just as**

**important as technical precision."**

In every class, foundational values of discipline, grit, compassion, and creativity, are laid to last a lifetime. These life skills are subtly woven into the process of learning dance, equipping students far beyond the stage in whatever industry they choose.

Sujata Banerjee MBE comments:

**"I always tell my students that the stage is only one destination, and the journey is where they discover who they really are."**

Experimenting with musical styles, syllabus vocabulary, encouraging improvisation, and integrating new technologies can ignite excitement in students, unlocking fresh pathways for expression and learning. **"Syllabus work is important,"** notes Dr Swati Raut, **"but what brings it alive is when a student starts to infuse it with their individuality. That's when technique becomes art."**

As teachers, we embrace our own growth, by attending workshops, collaborating, expanding our communities, exploring innovative choreography, and developing our own teaching qualifications. As well as keeping up to date with emerging styles, and trends, which maintain vibrant and relevant classes.

**"Our traditions thrive when we innovate within them,"** affirms Urja Desai Thakore, **"when students see us learning and evolving, it gives them permission to do the same."**

Our legacies, as dance educators, are not only in developing our students

technical and artistic skills, but in the lives that are touched and the confidence built. When we cultivate mutual respect and openness, we create future dancers and teachers who lead with their hearts.

**"A great teacher doesn't just teach dance, they inspire transformation in our students, and they carry our energy forward into the world"** says Chitraleka Bolar MBE.

A fundamental lesson for us all as teachers, is to continue to invest in our personal growth, and trust the profound power of connection. After all, steps may fade, but how we made our students feel, will always dance in their memories!

**"Dance aids development of a person; physically, mentally and emotionally. In addition, not only does it bring joy to the dancer but also to the families and the larger public. In teaching dance, one becomes a mentor, guiding students not only in dance but also in life skills. Dance is a lifelong friend and there isn't a more satisfying job than giving that to the younger generation"** explains Kiran Ratna.





### Gratitude in every step

As we reflect on the many roles a classical Indian dance educator plays, mentor, artist, innovator, and guide, it becomes clear that their impact is far reaching. The insights shared by some of the most inspiring voices in the UK's classical Indian dance community remind us that teaching is as much about nurturing the spirit as it is about refining the art.

Heartfelt thanks go to our committee members and lead examiners for their thoughtful contributions. Their wisdom and passion continues to shape the next generation of dancers, not just into artists, and teachers but as empowered individuals.

We extend also our deepest thanks to our classical Indian dance teacher members, both new and experienced, whose dedication and enthusiasm play a vital role in inspiring and nurturing the dancers of tomorrow.

In the committees' words, we are reminded that the greatest legacy a teacher can leave is not only in choreography, but in compassion, connection, and creativity. We thank them for lighting the path so many are proud to walk.

### Update on age recommendations for classical Indian dance vocational levels

As part of our ongoing commitment to inclusivity and alignment with broader industry standards, we have consulted with our classical Indian dance faculty committee, stakeholders, and the exams department to review the recommended age guidelines for vocational levels.

We have updated the recommended age for Advanced 1 and Advanced 2 to 13 years. This change supports greater student progression while upholding training standards. Recommended ages for Intermediate Foundation (11 years) and Intermediate (12 years) remain unchanged.

These age guidelines help ensure candidates are ready to meet syllabus demands safely and effectively. Teachers remain responsible for assessing individual readiness. A 60-day leeway on either side of the exam session date still applies.

If you have any questions or require further clarification, please don't hesitate to contact your relevant exams department.

### Coming Soon: Licentiate in Classical Indian Dance

**Take the next step in your teaching journey with the ISTD's prestigious Licentiate qualification.**

This is becoming available delivered fully online for global access by ISTD Academy.

Led by Lead Examiner Sujata Banerjee, the course develops advanced teaching skills and opens new career pathways.

Not quite ready? Our preparatory courses can help. Full details coming soon at [www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy](http://www.istd.org/teach/istd-academy)





# Contemporary Dance

## Is contemporary dance technique still relevant?

Liam Francis examines why contemporary dance technique remains essential for today's adaptable dancers.

The question came up recently on the Candid Convos podcast: Is contemporary dance technique still relevant in today's industry? It's something I've reflected on often, but never answered directly. So here goes.

Over the last 17 years I've worked across companies like Rambert Dance Company, Lost Dog and ZooNation, as well as worked on commercial gigs, with music artists and on television and film. I don't speak for everyone, but I can speak from my own lived experience. For me, contemporary dance technique has remained a constant throughout my career. Not because it was always required, or because I was evangelical about it – but because it kept proving its worth, especially in a field defined by change.

### Contemporary dance and today's industry

'Contemporary dance' is hard to pin down. The term is often used to encompass both 21st-century innovations and established Modern and Postmodern techniques. As such, it serves as an umbrella for a wide range of practices

– from Graham, Cunningham, and Limón to Release, Flying Low, Countertechnique, FoCo, and Gaga. It also occasionally incorporates somatic approaches like Feldenkrais, Body-Mind Centering, and the Alexander Technique. While some of these methods are codified and highly structured, others are improvisational, adaptive, and continually evolving.

Today's industry is just as complex. Working across freelance and company environments, I've seen dancers expected to switch styles – sometimes mid-performance. So, can this shape-shifting form we call 'contemporary' prepare dancers for an unpredictable profession? I believe it can. Not because the techniques and aesthetics we associate with 'contemporary dance' are always visible on stage, but because its practice cultivates something deeper: embodied adaptability. And in this industry, that's what endures.

### Change is in its DNA

You could say contemporary dance, and all it embraces as an umbrella term, was born from a desire to challenge ballet's formality. It's splintered into a family of techniques and philosophies – all reflecting a mindset that's curious, responsive and always evolving.

That mirrors the dance world itself: dynamic, genre-fluid, demanding agility and experimentation. We can't predict what the industry will ask of us in five years – but we can train to be ready for the unknown. Contemporary technique helps build that readiness.

CAMILLA GREENWELL



**Above** Liam Francis in *Ruin* by LostDog

I often think of it as a family tree – its branches diverging, crossing, hybridising. Some techniques are close relatives, others distant cousins. But all survive through adaptation. And if adaptability is what the industry now values most, why would we abandon a form that's built on it?

**These classes became spaces to think through movement, not just execute it.**

### It's not just the technique – it's the teaching

During my training, I encountered a particular kind of contemporary class that stuck with me – a sub-genre of sorts. These classes were rooted in modern and postmodern techniques like Graham, Limón, Cunningham and Release, often taught by those only one or two degrees from the source. But they didn't treat the material as fixed. They honoured its principles while weaving in new threads.

A metaphor I return to: if these techniques are tightly woven rugs, the teachers unpicked the seams – not to unravel them, but to evolve them.

JEAN LOUIS FERNANDEZ



**Liam Francis** is an award-nominated dancer, award-winning choreographer, movement director, and facilitator. With a broad portfolio across dance, theatre, film, and TV, he has collaborated with leading choreographers and organisations. He founded Liam Francis Dance Company and The Artistic Gremlins, and has served as a panelist for ISTD's 'Talking Dance: Improving Racial Equity'.

These weren't easy classes. I struggled with balance, coordination and musicality – the same issues I had in ballet and tap. I didn't come in with much knowledge of Graham or Cunningham, and I wasn't in the same boat as everyone else. But I felt welcome. I felt like I could grow.

Why? Because I wasn't asked to imitate – I was asked to solve problems. To spiral, to contract, to collapse and rebound. These classes invited me to think through movement, not just execute it.

At 18, I was also training in ballet, tap, jazz and street. Contemporary felt like a semi-permeable membrane: structured but open. A place where knowledge could flow freely across genres. It let me bring the precision of ballet, the isolations of jazz, the groundedness of street and the musicality of tap — and apply them.

### Inside-out learning

What made those classes powerful wasn't just the technique – it was how it was taught. Contemporary taught me to move from the inside out. It prioritised process over image, inquiry over imitation. I began to build an internal map of my own dancing body.

Other forms often came with fixed templates – external expectations of what's 'correct'. Contemporary offered space to personalise. Over time, it became the space where my dancing matured.

### Relevance isn't visibility

Some say contemporary dance is less relevant because we see it less – fewer stage productions, less screen time. But visibility is a poor measure of value.

Contemporary hasn't faded because it failed – it just isn't always centre stage. But its tools – embodied intelligence, adaptability, and form without fixity – are more vital than ever.

We also need to question how technique is positioned. Ballet and contemporary have historically been seen as the 'serious' techniques, often at the expense of diasporic forms. That hierarchy has shaped training pipelines and excluded voices.

As a Black man who began formal training relatively late – at 18 – I've felt those tensions. Some spaces felt less inviting. But teachers who challenged those hierarchies made a lasting impact. They taught technique with rigour and welcome. I didn't feel diminished – I felt invited in. And that's where relevance truly lies: not just in the content, but in the delivery.

### These thoughts in performance – Was.Once.Now.Next

This September, I'll be exploring very similar themes to this article in a new solo performance called Was.Once.Now.Next at The Lowry (30 September 2025). The solo blends dance and dialogue in an alternative lecture-demonstration format. Drawing on excerpts from choreographers Merce Cunningham, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Kate Prince and myself, the piece reflects on lineage, embodiment and the shifting codes dancers navigate. Just as this article questions the relevance and evolution of contemporary technique, the solo questions what it means to carry, mimic and reimagine movement vocabularies across contexts – and what that tells us about the body as a site of knowledge and negotiation.

### Final thoughts

We keep asking if contemporary technique is still relevant. But maybe that's the wrong question. We should ask how we're teaching it. Are we inviting dancers to explore, problem-solve and connect across styles? Are we preparing them for a world that's always shifting?

Contemporary dance offers a framework, not a formula. A membrane, not a mould. When taught with care, curiosity and openness, it builds exactly what the industry needs: dancers with intelligence, adaptability, and self-trust.

Relevance isn't about stage time. It's about what a technique can still teach us. And in that sense, contemporary technique has never felt more vital.

## Essential takeaways for effective teaching

- **Teach technique as a process, not a picture.** Encourage students to solve movement problems rather than mimic shapes. Focus on exploration, inquiry and sensation – not just external form.
- **Honour tradition, but stay open to evolution.** Draw from established techniques (like Graham or Limón), but allow space to integrate ideas from other practices. Let the material breathe and grow.
- **Create spaces where all students feel welcome.** Especially for those entering training later or from underrepresented backgrounds,

the tone and delivery of your teaching can make all the difference. Strive for rigour with welcome.

- **Support cross-genre thinking.** Help dancers connect the dots between different styles – from the precision of ballet to the rhythm of tap or the attack of street dance. Contemporary technique can be a bridge, not a silo.
- **Emphasise adaptability over perfection.** In a fast-changing industry, dancers need to respond to new challenges. Use your classes to build embodied intelligence – the ability to sense, adapt and make choices in real time.

Find out what the Contemporary syllabus can offer you and your students – visit [www.istd.org/contemporary](http://www.istd.org/contemporary)



# Disco Freestyle and Rock n Roll

## New Adapted Dance Competition to debut at 2025 Grand Finals

This October, our DFR  
faculty will introduce an  
Adapted Dance Competition  
at Grand Finals.

The new Adapted Dance Competition  
offers a dedicated space for dancers  
with physical disabilities to perform  
and compete. Developed with expert  
guidance and community input, this  
pilot aims to create a more inclusive  
and accessible experience for all.

DFR has grown from strength  
to strength with their competition  
format and there is a highly successful  
Grand Finals showcased every year.

**“This important pilot allows  
dancers to demonstrate  
what they can do in a  
performance competition  
environment focusing on  
individual strengths.”**

For 2025 this is bigger than ever  
with a whole weekend of competitions on  
11 and 12 October. The reason for this  
is to allow more competitors to take part  
and enjoy this massive calendar event.

New for 2025 is the **Adapted  
Dance Competition**. Inclusion and  
access are high on the agenda for  
the ISTD and DFR have led the way  
with a new pilot competition for those

with a range of physical disabilities.

This competition section is for  
dancers of any age group with a  
physical disability who would like the  
opportunity to compete within an  
accessible adapted category to take part  
in the prestigious Grand Finals. These  
dancers may already be taking part in  
area competitions without being able to  
adapt to movement and therefore do not  
have the same competing opportunity  
to achieve a competition place.

**“We are very excited to be able  
to offer this and enable more  
young people to be included  
and enjoy the atmosphere  
and performing opportunity  
that Grand Finals gives us.”**

This important pilot allows  
dancers to demonstrate what they  
can do in a performance competition  
environment focusing on the  
individual strengths through a piece  
choreographed by their teacher.

### How can a competitor take part?

- Teachers will self-refer competitors  
with information about support  
needs that are relevant, to ensure the  
competitor can perform comfortably  
and to the best of their ability.
- This competition is open to any  
dancers with any physical disability  
that prevents them from taking  
part successfully or is currently  
a barrier to them taking part  
in the main competitions.



**Inclusion and access  
are high on the agenda  
for the ISTD and DFR  
have led the way with a  
new pilot competition  
for those with a range of  
physical disabilities.**

### Criteria for entry

- Anyone with a medium assessment  
Disability Living Allowance  
(DLA) and or an Educational  
Health and Care Plan (EHCP)
- Competitors must have taken an ISTD  
medal test or certificate of participation  
within the competition year.
- Eligible competitors may also take  
part in all events at area competitions.  
However, if qualifying for Grand Finals  
in either Set Dance or Rock n Roll  
events within the area competitions,  
the competitor will not be permitted to  
dance in the Adapted Dance section.

### What will the event look like?

- This competition is part of the  
whole event on day one and  
will give competitors the same  
performance experience and  
atmosphere that all dancers enjoy.
- We are offering a quieter green room  
for competitors to sign in with additional  
signage to support where we can.
- The competition will take place  
as an open solo event, currently,  
for dancers of any age.
- A set piece of music will be provided  
in advance, for the dance teachers to  
work creatively with their student.
- The competitor will perform  
the teacher's choreography  
within their own capabilities.
- Adjudicators will focus on individual  
achievements awarding to those  
who have met the criteria within a  
competition environment, eg musicality,  
alignment and use of space.
- There will be a final and award  
presentation with trophies  
as per all other events.



**Above** Tia, student of ISTD teacher, Anna Knowles-Hibbert, AK Academy of Dancing

We have worked together with Juliet Deiner, Founder and CEO of icandance and one of our valued trustees. Juliet has been supporting us with language usage and the types of tasks we set, as we trial this for 2025.

**“The most important thing is that we try and see what works. We may not get this right first time but with teacher and student feedback we will keep building on this for the future.”**

Louise Molton, our Director of Dance Education and Training, commented: “Juliet has been very encouraging and helped us to gain confidence with this. The most important thing is that we try and see what works. We may not get this right first time but with teacher and student feedback we will keep building on this for the future. We are very

excited to be able to offer this and enable more young people to be included and enjoy the atmosphere and performing opportunity that Grand Finals gives us.”

Registration for this is not difficult and is like all the other competitions. We just need the teacher to verify the individual needs so that we can have better knowledge about the support requirements of the individual.

For more information and to take part please contact [events@istd.org](mailto:events@istd.org)

Turn to page 12 to read about more exciting changes planned for ISTD events in 2026.

**“Adjudicators will focus on individual achievements, awarding to those who have met the criteria within a competition environment.”**

## Adapted Dance Competition: key information for teachers

### Who can enter:

- Dancers of any age with a physical disability.

### Eligibility criteria:

- Must have a medium assessment Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and/or an Educational Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Must have taken an ISTD medal test or certificate of participation within the competition year and have completed an Application for Reasonable Adjustment (ARA).

### Entry process:

- Teachers self-refer competitors and provide relevant support information to ensure a comfortable performance experience.

### Performance format:

- Open solo event with a set piece of music provided in advance.
- Choreography created by the teacher, tailored to the dancer's abilities.
- Judged on musicality, alignment and use of space.

### Event details:

- Takes place on Day One of the Grand Finals weekend (11–12 October 2025).
- Quieter green room and additional signage available for accessibility.
- Final and award presentation with trophies, like all other events.

### Important note:

- Competitors who qualify for Grand Finals in Set Dance or Rock n Roll at area competitions cannot also compete in the Adapted Dance section.

### Contact for more information:

- [events@istd.org](mailto:events@istd.org)

Turn to page 8 to read more about applications for reasonable adjustments (ARA).

**This competition is part of the whole event on day one and will give competitors the same performance experience and atmosphere that all dancers enjoy.**





# Imperial Classical Ballet

## The Imperial Classical Ballet Awards

Keely Power FISTD offers a heartfelt account of her experience supporting students, and her own daughter, at this year's prestigious event.

On Sunday 27 April I travelled to Elmhurst Ballet school for the Imperial Classical Ballet Awards. I volunteered to help chaperone the students, so I arrived early ready for a busy day. The location was ideal, beautiful studios and a lovely reception area all bathed in sunshine.

All of the participants were very polite and well-behaved. The younger students were buzzing with excitement meeting new friends while the older students were a little quieter, but I could still feel their pride at reaching finals. I was impressed with how well the students had been prepared and all of the helpers backstage were friendly to both me and the competitors. We helped the students pinning their numbers on and finding their allocated spaces. This year all of the warm up classes were taught by the class teacher they would have on stage. I think the students really appreciated the time they got with the teachers.

At lunchtime my role changed as my daughter, also my student, was taking part in the Advanced 1 and 2 section, so I couldn't be backstage. This

gave me a chance to have a break and a lovely lunch, kindly provided to the volunteers by the ISTD. I met my daughter in reception, wished her luck, reminded her to smile and sent her backstage, all in the knowledge that she would be well supported and looked after.

I took my seat in the auditorium with a friend and enjoyed listening to an excited audience – mostly teachers and parents, but some young candidates stayed to watch too. The Advanced 1 and 2 candidates danced very well, with lots of confidence and they filled the stage with different performance qualities through adage, pirouettes and allegro. It was nice to have two Option B dancers who wowed the audience with their virtuosity, and then it was the turn of the Option A dancers who equally impressed us with their pointe work. It was lovely to see such capable dancers performing double pirouettes with ease. I'm sure it was a tough category to adjudicate but we were lucky to have some very familiar faces on the panel, for the afternoon sections we had Vivienne Saxton, Gary Avis and Helen Crawford.

As the adjudicators left the room to confer, the audience also discussed who they thought danced well and I heard comments about the "lovely ease of movement" and "such powerful turns" along with "good feet aren't everything." As the awards and places were given out you could hear the audience's agreement and excitement. After second place was awarded, I was fearful of a bad journey home as my

daughter hadn't been called out and with so many talented dancers on the stage it was difficult to predict who would win. When her name was announced for first place, her smile beamed off the stage and I could relax knowing the journey home wouldn't be filled with 'what ifs.'

Although she has entered the ballet awards a few times, she has had mixed success, from a Commendation in Grade 2 to setbacks in Grade 4, reaching the finals in Grade 5 to placing first this year in Advanced 1 and 2 at just 15 years old. Each competition became an opportunity to grow, to observe, and to set new goals. This shows that perseverance is so important but also how our students can learn so much from taking part. Every time she took part she wanted to improve and see the other students, so she knew what to aim for. This year I hope younger students have been inspired by her and her fellow students who took part.

Well done to all of the participants, winners and teachers. Thank you to the Imperial Classical Ballet committee for organising this joyful event, and to the adjudicators, who I'm sure had an enjoyable but difficult day!

Full results were published online after the event: [www.istd.org/discover/news/imperial-classical-ballet-awards-2025](http://www.istd.org/discover/news/imperial-classical-ballet-awards-2025)

HUDSON PICTURES





**Each competition  
became an opportunity  
to grow, to observe,  
and to set new goals.**

## Notes from our pop-up surgeries

### Through the grades: do you release the foot to the side before the pas de bourrée?

It depends on what precedes the pas de bourrée. If taken from 3rd/5th, the working leg extends to à la seconde en fondu to commence the pas de bourrée. If the working leg is already extended or lifted following another movement, eg sissonne en avant, the working leg should close directly to 5th en demi-pointe to begin the pas de bourrée.

### Groups of 3 in exams: do they demonstrate the exercises in a 2 and 1? Are students 1 and 2 always together and student 3 alone?

Generally, the examiner alternates who dances solo.

### Unset allegro in exams: can candidates use their own choice of arms lines?

The examiner will set the arm positions they would like to be used.

### Is there really an attitude à terre (on the floor) if the gesturing leg is extended as in an arabesque? Or is the distinguishing feature the placement of the arms (which is mostly in attitude)?

Yes, it is called attitude à terre because the arms are placed in the attitude

position. Consider it as a preparatory position for attitude en l'air; once the leg is raised en l'air it will be placed in an attitude rather than arabesque line.

### When can ribbons be worn on shoes for graded exams and class exams (particularly level 3–8)?

The Clothing guide on the website and the guide section of our Facebook page both specify:

- Elastics on shoes may be worn for all Grades and Class Examinations.
- Ribbons may be worn from Grade 3 but are not compulsory.
- If wearing a white leotard and tights, or unitard, then white leather or canvas ballet shoes with white elastic.

### As a newly qualified teacher, training on the set variations would be useful.

If you have a regional representative in your area, please contact them with a request for a course or contact [imperialballet@istd.org](mailto:imperialballet@istd.org)

### Must we use CDs in the exam, or are iPads and music playlists allowed?

iPads or other music devices are fine; we have downloadable music for Pre-Primary to Advanced 2.

Select 'Guides' in [f](#) **ISTD: Imperial Classical Ballet Faculty** to read past pop-ups. And keep an eye out for new ones.

## Grade 6 examination webinar available

In response to feedback, minor changes to the ICB Grade 6 examination have been agreed, to ease time pressures on candidates during the examination. These changes will come into force on **1 October 2025**.

1. Barre
- 1.4 Battements frappés and battements frappés fouettés (set exercise)
- 1.5 Petits battements sur le cou-de-pied (set exercise)
- EITHER 1.4 OR 1.5 to be seen in the examination – Examiner's choice
- 1.8 Fouettés ronds de jambe en tournant – no longer seen in the examination

Centre

4. Adage

4.1 Temps lié en l'air en avant and en arrière (set exercise)

4.2 Fouetté of adage (set exercise)

EITHER 4.1 OR 4.2 to be seen in the examination – Examiner's choice

6. Pirouettes

6.1 Single pirouettes en dehors from 5th (set exercise) no longer seen in the examination.

For more information, please watch the webinar in [www.istd.org/my-istd](http://www.istd.org/my-istd)



# Latin American, Modern Ballroom and Sequence



**Above** Stephanie Noon

## The art of ballroom hair

### An interview with Stephanie Noon.

ISTD teacher Joanne Blackshaw caught up with Stephanie Noon of Styled by Steph to find out a bit more about what it's like being in the ballroom hair business. Stephanie was one of the first to start a ballroom hair business in the UK (if not the first) and it's gone from strength to strength.

#### When did you start doing ballroom hair and why?

I started off by just doing my own hair! Probably from the age of 13/14 I was able to do simple hairstyles on myself. From then I spent my evenings/weekends off just practicing different hairstyles. Luckily my teachers were always able to help (from my first ISTD dance teacher to my open dance teacher). When I was around 18/19 years old, I was asked to help my teacher out. She had been asked to do senior ladies' hair but unfortunately couldn't make it. So, she asked another girl from the dance school to go. Unfortunately, the other girl couldn't make it either! So, I was sent with my little bag of hair stuff. Luckily the ladies were absolutely lovely and asked me to do their hair again! After that I started advertising. That must have been around 2015

**Teachers: Why not encourage students to explore related skills like hair or makeup? It could spark a future career.**

#### How did your business develop?

Shortly after doing those first three hairdos, I was without a partner again. I think the first competition I officially 'worked' was the UK Closed in summer. As I am local to Bournemouth, I was travelling around to each appointment. I remember I got a parking ticket at one of the appointments... so didn't make any money that day!

**Teachers: Celebrate the artistry of hair and makeup – it's part of the performance too.**

I owe a lot of my success lucky timing (no one was really doing professional hair or makeup in the dance industry) and formation! Dance Crazy dance school quickly invited me to help doing the hair for their formation teams. This was where I really learnt to work under pressure and quickly. I thank them a lot for their trust. Some of the hair I was doing in the early days was a bit rough, to say the least. It's really thanks to the formation experience I am able to do hair in 30 minutes.

At one period I was travelling almost weekly to do in-person workshops at dance schools and private lessons. This really catapulted my business. One of the first 'fully booked' weekends I had was at Stars of the Future. I remember being so proud and excited at how many hair I had been able to do, that on the way home I was in a car accident. Safe to say, another time where I ended up not making any money!

I'm very fortunate now that almost every comp I work, I am now fully

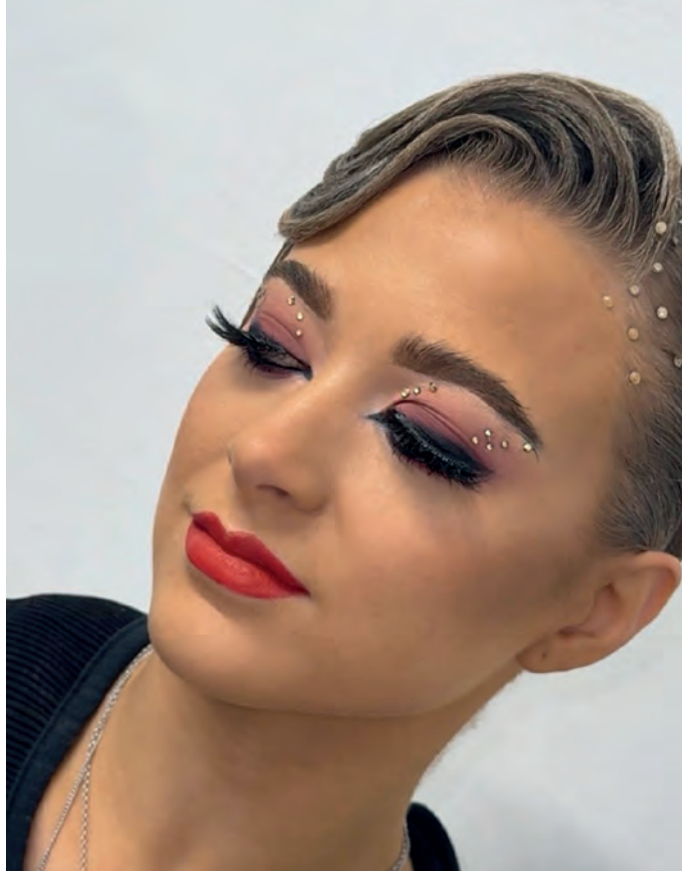
booked, often within minutes of opening bookings. I'm also very happy to say my driving has become much better!

#### You used to do make up as well, why did you stop doing this and would you ever consider restarting it?

Yes I used to do makeup! In fact, I'm actually more qualified in makeup! The only reason it stopped was because more people booked hair appointments. So really quickly my days were completely filled with hair appointments and I simply didn't have time to do the makeup. I would love to change my business to be able to offer both but that would take some serious restructuring, plus I now work with some of the best makeup artists in the country (and in my opinion the world!)

#### What's a typical day like for you on a competition day?

So typically, I will wake up at 3:00am, get myself feeling somewhat human, force myself to eat some oat bars or pastries, head down to the venue where I'm working and turn everything on and make sure I'm stocked and ready to go. Every day is slightly different of course, but generally I will start work at 4:00am and work until 11:30pm. I try to give myself an hour for lunch (sometimes that's at 11:00am and sometimes that's at 4:00pm). Otherwise, I have been known to work straight through with just one half an hour break. Once finished, I tidy up the space, head to my hotel room, sort out the money (my accountant and future self thanks me



for that), brew my pot noodle, jump in the shower, eat and sleep. Normally for 2–3 hours. Sometimes I get more sleep!

#### **How do you decide what comps to attend for hair?**

As I've been doing this for so long, I generally attend the same competitions each year. Most of the time it is comps where I can guess roughly what date they will be on, the location and the schedule. However, each year I always try to add a new comp and I'm always asking for suggestions. Often if I get a lot of people asking about a specific comp I will attend.

#### **Where do you buy all your hair products from?**

From everywhere! From some wholesalers, from online shops, from Superdrug and from Amazon! I always recommend Amazon for everyone!

#### **Teachers: Schwarzkopf Silhouette is a must-have for competition hair – worth recommending to your students?**

#### **What is your favourite product at the moment and why, what do you use it for?**

I will use a Schwarzkopf Silhouette product in every single hairstyle. It's a dancers must! I also love products from the Osis+ range (they smell delicious)

Outside of dancing my favourite hair care products are the Olaplex products, my favourite shampoo is K18 Peptide Plus and I have just got a new shampoo from L'oreal to try

I hate the feeling of dry/damaged hair. Which is hard for me as I have bleached my hair for over a decade!

#### **What's the longest weekend or time you have worked?**

In my busiest comps for example, Champions of Tomorrow, Nationals, UK Closed I will do between 100–150 appointments. That's anywhere between 50–75 hours of just doing hair! It's always funny to me, how I can work just a few days a month but it equals out to the same hours as a full-time job. Some months I'm working 80+ hours a week, including all the admin and scheduling.

#### **Don't your hands or fingers ever ache?**

Not just my hands! You should see my ankles by the end of the weekend. Swollen doesn't even begin to cover it! I've managed to bust both my wrists over the last years of my job. Both taking almost a full year to recover from the daily aches and pains, both however still ache after a comp.

#### **Do you ever get bored?**

I'm lucky that this job never gets boring.

You get to see a new person, new hair and new challenge every 30 minutes. I get to create art every weekend and catch up with so many friends.

I have to admit though, Instagram messages can be a bit overwhelming!

#### **Do you like it when people bring in new ideas or do you like to choose yourself their hair style?**

I recently did a comp where I'd say about 80% of clients let me do whatever I wanted, and I have to say it was an absolute treat! Sometimes it's okay to just have a rough idea of what you want and to trust your hairstylist to do what they think best. There's nothing worse when you get shown the same photos 30+ times in a weekend and you've run out of variations!







“  
The community  
we built was  
honestly one of my  
favourite times for  
Styled by Steph.

However sometimes, my last remaining brain cell can't make any decisions so always best to have at least some idea of what you'd like (or not).

#### How do you inspire creativity in yourself to come up with new styles?

Honestly, the biggest inspiration is my client. Their personality, their dress, their ideas. Otherwise, my Instagram feed is filled with amazing hairstyle videos from photoshoots, runways, braiding appointments... all sorts! Inspiration is everywhere.

**Teachers: Encourage dancers to come with clean hair and a rough idea of their style – but also trust the stylist's creativity.**

#### What are your pet hates when people come to their appointment?

Having very greasy hair. Look, I am the first to say that I don't mind hair being dirty. Because I really don't, I know life happens and it's not always convenient to wash your hair. However, when people come in and say they haven't washed their hair all week so it's easier for you it is really difficult. I know I won't be able to make the hairstyle the best it can be if the hair is too oily. Crimpers will smoke (hello fire alarms), products won't be absorbed and volume will be near to non-existent.

However, my absolutely biggest pet peeve is when someone doesn't bring any money to pay me but tell me after the appointment.

**Teachers: A dancer's personality and costume can be a great starting point for creative styling – encourage students to express both.**

#### Do you have any goals for the business?

I feel really lucky to have the business that I have. Although I know just how much of a marathon it has been. I would love to stop working competitions where I either don't break even or end up paying to work (poor expense markup). However, I'm not sure that will ever happen!

Otherwise, I just want to keep improving the service and delivering the best hairstyles I can to my clients.

I would also love to be able to be a voice for dancers by sharing previous stories on my Instagram reels and being able to talk to organisers so the dance industry can become a happier healthier place!

**I get to create art every weekend and catch up with so many friends.**

#### What do you like to do when not doing hair?

Outside of my job, I love to keep busy. I stopped my competitive career in the end of 2023 and since then have taken up lots of new hobbies. Surfing, snowboarding, marathons, crossfit and I've dabbled in some pottery (wasn't very good).

My favourite thing to do when not doing hair is travelling!

#### Have you done any celebrity hair?

I have done most of the finalists in the professional categories over the past nine years. Including multiple retirements. Which is seriously such a proud moment for me!

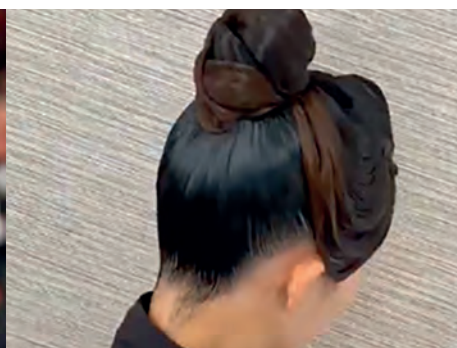
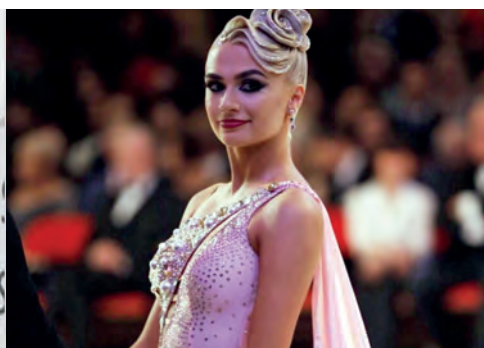
I've made it onto TV a couple of times for both dancing and doing hair!

Last year Scarlet Moffat contacted me directly to do her hair for a competition. Unfortunately, I was in Australia but I was really happy to let one of my besties (Cheyenne) do it instead. Still waiting on my Strictly call up.



#### Want to learn how to do ballroom hair?

Steph offers online courses:  
[www.styledbysteph.co.uk/course](http://www.styledbysteph.co.uk/course)





## Rhythm and dedication

### Chloe Blackshaw's competitive dance story.

ISTD teacher Michelle Postlethwaite spoke with competitive Latin American dancer Chloe Blackshaw, giving us an insight into her background and a typical week in the life of a competitive dancer.



**Could you tell the ISTD members a little bit about your background and how you got into the world of Ballroom and Latin dancing?**

So, I grew up dancing with my

mum being a dance teacher. When I was very young I spent a lot of evenings and weekends watching classes and lessons so, naturally, when I was old enough I joined in. From about four years old I started competing and working my way through the ISTD exams reaching the higher awards beginning in the Ballroom and Latin genres then adding Disco Freestyle and Sequence at a later date. From there, I worked my way through the grades as a juvenile and eventually my competitive career took over.

**What did you enjoy about taking the higher awards such as the Alex Moore and Peggy Spencer Award? Would you encourage others to take these examinations?**

For me, I enjoyed preparing all of the Ballroom and Latin dances. Often when people take part in competitions they focus on preparing only for the dances they have in upcoming competitions instead of practicing all dances, this is definitely one reason I would recommend the higher level exams.

The thing I loved the most about the Peggy Spencer Award was choreographing my own dance, it allowed me to show the examiner the type of character I love to perform.

**Now as a competitive Latin dancer could you give us an insight into what a typical week looks like for you and your dance partner? How often do you train, do you follow a strict regime or does it differ from week to week?**

As you can imagine our schedules are pretty busy with work, teaching and

practicing. We practice most nights of the week, typically taking one day off. On Fridays, we take class with our coaches, Saturdays we have lessons and Sundays again if we don't compete we practice. We try to keep our schedule the same from week to week as consistency helps so much with keeping the dancing on the right path but of course some weeks it changes whether it's due to a competition, show or even some extra work.

**Do you have any short term or long term goals that you are training towards as a couple?**

Our short-term goals vary from week to week with the focus in our lessons changing. However, they are always aligned with the bigger picture. The long-term goal is to be the most well rounded dancers we can be so we can pass on our knowledge in the future and of course become one of the top dancers in the nation along the way.

**What is your favourite part of competitive dancing, is it the training, the performance or a combination of both?**

For me, they come as a package and therefore I enjoy them both. The practice makes you feel confident in your performance and the competition is only good fun when you know you've put the work in. That said, I do love to put on a great dress and get my hair and makeup done.

**What do you like to do to relax in your spare time?**

I love to shop and try the coolest new restaurants, so if I have some time I'll definitely check the list on my phone and choose a place to eat.

**In your competitive career together have you travelled internationally?**

Yes, we've been lucky enough to go to many places such as Germany, Italy, Romania and Slovenia.

**What advice would you give to anyone beginning their dance journey?**

Be open-minded. There are so many things you can do and experience with dancing. Sometimes those things can seem scary but actually end up being great fun once you just let go and allow yourself to be in the moment.

**Above** Chloe Blackshaw

**Above left** Chloe Blackshaw

and Dragos Hepcal

**Left** Chloe Blackshaw



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**Nothing was as scary as ‘the bell’, but in coping with that, their confidence and poise withstood the most challenging interviews and auditions.**

# Modern Theatre

## Professional pathways

**ISTD teacher Sandi Baca on the lasting value of ISTD exams.**

From India to England and across the United States, Sandi Baca's journey in dance education has been shaped by the structure, artistry, and opportunity offered by ISTD examinations. As a teacher, examiner, and founder of the British Dancing Academy, she reflects on how these exams have transformed lives and built confidence in generations of dancers.



My name is Sandi Baca, and I live in Seattle, Washington. I was born in India, where I first fell in love with dance; though I later realised my early training was far

from ideal (pointe shoes at age six!). After moving to England for school, I began proper training in Sussex and later at Tring Park, where I studied RAD and Cecchetti Classical Ballet, ISTD Modern, Tap, National, and Greek, alongside music, drama, and visual art.

The teachers at Tring were exceptional. Ivy Baker, Virginia Fleming, and Lucy Keith (Ennis) gave me individual attention and encouragement that helped my confidence grow. When a flu epidemic hit, I was asked to step in and

teach ballet classes. Teaching felt natural, like something I'd always done, and from that moment, I knew it was my calling.

I went on to study at the London College of Dance, where I trained in Imperial Classical Ballet and Natural Movement. Though I didn't appreciate every aspect of the training at the time, I now see how invaluable it was. After

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**The response was amazing. Parents loved the structure and the expectations, students found the work challenging, artistic and all encompassing.**

college, I studied mime and ballet in Paris before returning to London and asking Mr Pearson at ISTD HQ about overseas teaching opportunities. That led me to Illinois, where I managed a dance school at just 21 years old.

From there, my journey took me to Okinawa, Japan, then upstate New York, and finally Seattle, where I opened the British Dancing Academy in 1973. We started with 40 students and quickly grew to nearly 1,000. I trained older students to teach, ensuring they understood the expectations and nurturing ethos of the Academy. My husband, a former Air Force officer, managed the business side with military precision.

Within three years, we began offering exams. Initially, we used RAD, but when Ivy Baker visited on a teaching

and examining tour, I realised the ISTD syllabus was the perfect fit. The response was incredible. Parents appreciated the structure and expectations, and students found the work challenging, artistic, and all-encompassing.

Over the years, we entered around 300 students annually for ISTD exams. Examiners like Miss Rycroft, Miss Crail, Miss Owens, and many others provided warm, encouraging experiences and invaluable feedback. The exams offered more than just assessment. They built strength, artistry, musicality, poise under pressure, and confidence.

Our senior students often trained from 3:30 to 9:00 pm after school. Many went on to prestigious universities and careers, including professional dance. My daughter danced in regional ballet companies and my grandson has just been accepted by a company in Ohio following a two year full scholarship at San Francisco Ballet School.

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**We were showing parents what training is all about, a careful, safe manageable progression building strength, artistry, musicality, poise under pressure and confidence.**

What makes me proudest is the sheer number of students, some with natural talent, others without, who persevered to be their best. I'm often approached by former students or parents



who share how the training changed their lives. They tell me that nothing was as intimidating as 'the bell' during exams, but learning to cope with that pressure gave them the confidence to face interviews and auditions with poise.

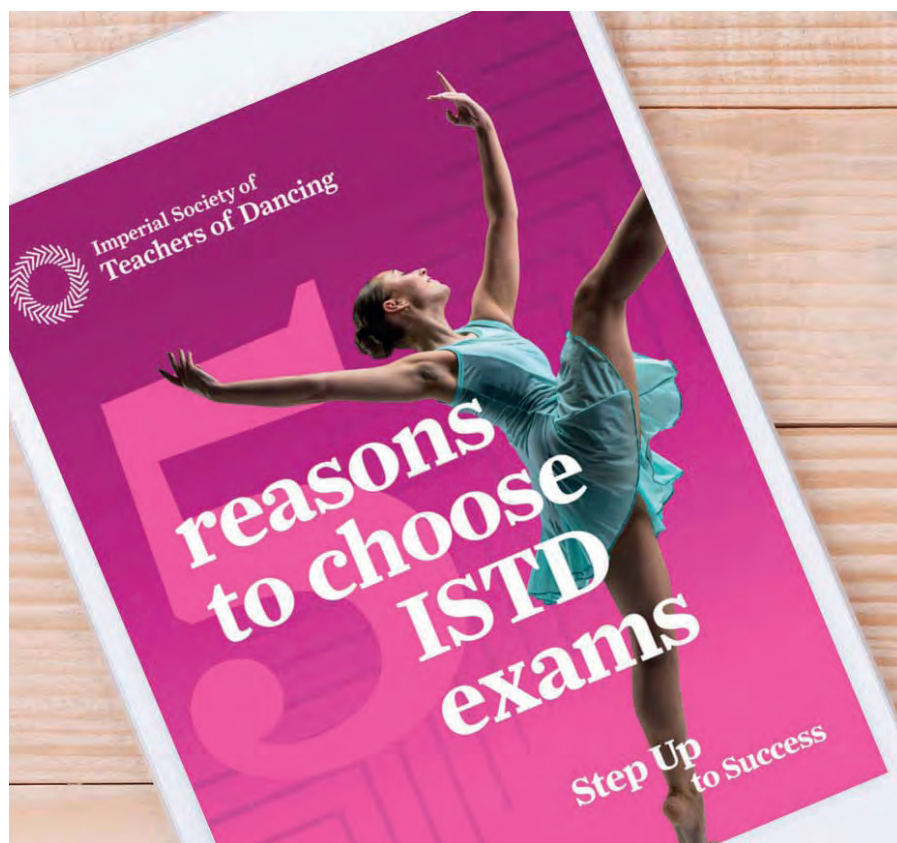
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**The examination... must be treated as something special... I can only hope I have left candidates, enthused and encouraged to be their best selves.**

Many of those students have returned, now with children of their own, to continue the tradition. The school, now run by my daughter, continues to thrive, even after the challenges of Covid.

To aspiring teachers, I say: teach anyone who wants to dance. Sometimes the most unlikely students will surprise you the most. Watching them grow into confident, capable, and creative adults is the greatest reward.

I was honoured to be appointed as an ISTD examiner in ballet, and later in modern and tap. It's a role I never imagined for myself, but one I've cherished. I strive to follow in the footsteps of the great examiners who inspired me. As Mrs Ashcroft once said, "It is a privilege to be invited into a teacher's studio to examine." I hope I've left candidates feeling encouraged and inspired to be their best selves.



### My ISTD member resource hub

To support our members, we have created a suite of assets that can be edited and downloaded to showcase on your own social channels that you provide ISTD dance examinations/tests and also suggest to parents why they should allow their children to take part in dance exams too: [www.istd.org/my-istd/member-resources-hub](http://www.istd.org/my-istd/member-resources-hub)

You can repurpose these social posts for your own channels, and be sure to tag us @istddance and utilise the hashtag #ISTDExamSuccess





# National Dance

## Celebrating culture, connection, and the joy of National and folk dancing

In a world that often feels increasingly fast-paced, finding ways to stay connected to cultural roots and community values has never been more important. One enriching, and joyful way to do so, is through our National syllabus and Folk dancing. These traditional art forms are far more than steps and music, they are living expressions of heritage, identity, and togetherness.

We hear from some of our committee members who not only teach and examine but adjudicate National and Folk dancing across the UK in various prestigious events and festivals.

### ISTD teacher, Jayne Wing, on the joy of National Dance in competitive dance festivals

Attending national folk dance festivals as an adjudicator is a privilege and an experience that fills me with joy, especially when witnessing the dedication and enthusiasm of our young dancers. Each routine showcases not only the vibrant colours and intricate designs of their costumes but also the deep appreciation the children have for the countries they represent. It's heartwarming to see how much research they've put into their chosen culture, from learning about traditional music to understanding the history and significance of each dance,

adding depth to their performances.

The commitment and countless hours of practice are evident in their performances. Each step and expression reflects their hard work and passion that honours the rich tapestry of world cultures.

Most importantly, folk dance serves as a powerful celebration of diversity. It develops an understanding and respect for different traditions, benefitting students, young pupils and their parents. Gaining invaluable insights into a variety of cultures and enriching their lives and broadening their global knowledge.

As I sit and watch these young dancers, I feel incredibly fortunate to be part of this celebration. It is a reminder of the power of dance to unite us and honour the many cultures that make our world so beautiful. At these festivals, I don't just witness dance; I witness a beautiful exchange of heritage and community, reminding us all, about the importance of cultural appreciation.

### ISTD teacher, Cathi Conroy-Jones, on dedication and detail

Having recently adjudicated at a Dance Festival filled with vibrant National dance performances; I was deeply moved by what I witnessed and reminded of just how vital these traditions are in the modern age. At the festival, it was a true pleasure to see the incredible care and authenticity brought to the stage by both dancers and teachers. From the crisp precision of footwork to the vibrant detail in costume, every performance radiated

pride in the cultural stories being told. These were not simply routines; they were respectful tributes to generations past, interpreted through youthful energy and sincere appreciation.

In many cases, these dancers had gone beyond simply learning choreography. They had taken the time to understand the origins, purpose, and cultural significance of each piece. This effort created performances that were rich in meaning and spirit, evidence that National dance is not just surviving, but thriving in the hearts of the next generation.

What struck me even more than the visual spectacle, was the joy radiating from the dancers themselves. When I asked some of them what they enjoyed most about performing National dance, their answers were both charming and profound:

- **"The rhythms"** – They loved the energy and drive of unfamiliar time signatures and musical styles.
- **"Feeling happy"** – The very act of dancing lifted their spirits and brought them joy.
- **"Being expressive"** – They relished the chance to communicate emotion and story through movement.
- **"Wearing such lovely costumes"** – The pride in donning traditional garments brought a sense of



transformation and identity.

- **“Working with a partner or team”** – National dance often involves patterns, formations, and teamwork that foster social connection.
- **“Hearing the inspiring music”** – Many dancers spoke of how the music itself filled them with excitement and wonder.
- **“Making lots of shapes and patterns”** – They were intrigued by the creative and intellectual challenge of forming patterns and storytelling through spatial awareness.

These responses were a clear reminder of how National dance connects with people on multiple levels, emotionally, intellectually, socially, and culturally.

#### **Head of Theatre Qualifications, Lisa Harrison-Jones, on preserving heritage in a global world**

In today's digital age, where trends shift rapidly National and Folk dance play a crucial role in preserving and celebrating diversity. They help young people understand where they come from and encourage appreciation for other cultures. Learning a dance from another country or region can spark curiosity, empathy, and respect, qualities we need now more than ever.

Moreover, National dance is a form of cultural continuity. It provides a tactile, physical connection to history.

It keeps languages, stories, customs, and traditional values alive in ways that books alone cannot. When children learn a dance passed down through generations, they become part of a living chain of tradition.

#### **The power of community and connection**

A benefit of National and Folk dance is the sense of community it nurtures. Many traditional dances are social by nature, they are meant to be performed in groups, with partners, or as part of a circle/group. This builds teamwork, trust, and a feeling of unity. In a world where digital communication often replaces face-to-face interaction, National dance becomes an essential space for real human connection. Dance festivals, workshops, and classes become more than just performance opportunities, they become places where people share stories, learn from one another, and gain a sense of belonging.

#### **Dance as expression and empowerment**

Beyond cultural and communal significance, National dance is a powerful tool for individual growth. It develops confidence, expression, discipline, and physical fitness. It offers a sense of achievement and pride, particularly when learning a style that may be outside one's


own cultural background and above all, brings joy. The infectious energy, the colourful costumes, the stirring music, all combine to create an atmosphere of celebration. Dancers light up with confidence as they perform, not just for an audience, but for the sheer love of movement and meaning.

#### **A call to celebrate and support**

Now more than ever, National and Folk dance deserves recognition and support in schools, communities, and performance platforms. They are not relics of the past, they are dynamic, engaging, and deeply relevant to today's world. Whether it's a Scottish Highland fling, a Polish Mazurka, or an African Gumboot dance, each style offers something valuable: a glimpse into the soul of a people and the chance to dance with meaning.

To every teacher keeping these traditions alive, to every dancer who takes the time to learn them, and to every audience member who celebrates them, thank you.

National dance is more than a performance; it's a bridge between past and present, self and others, and heart and heritage.



**National dance is more  
than a performance. It's a  
bridge between past and  
present, self and others,  
heart and heritage.**





**Please note: photography and filming are not permitted during medal tests.**

- Wear the correct clothing and shoes. Make sure laces are tied tightly.
- Choreograph fun and exciting routines, make sure your pupils are enjoying themselves. Just because this is exam (which sounds very serious) doesn't mean it shouldn't be fun and something they look forward to.

### **How can dancers manage nerves on exam day?**

Try to combat any nerves by having a practice exam before the day with the teacher acting as the examiner. This way the dancer will know what to expect. However, if a dancer is nervous on the day try to reassure them it's a fun experience and nothing to be nervous about. Going in with them if at an introductory level could also be a solution.

### **Guidelines for Medal Test candidates**

#### **What key practices should candidates follow when preparing for their test?**

- To know the music they are dancing to well. Know when to start and count themselves in. Listen carefully and to stop the routine when the music stops and move on to the next routine.
- Give yourself enough space, know where the routine travels and allow enough space.
- Try to be confident and focus throughout.

#### **How should dancers present themselves in terms of costume, hair, and overall appearance?**

A dancer should enter the examination looking smart and presentable. Tie the hair up neatly and no jewellery or watches, anything that could fall off or cause an injury should not be worn in the exam.

Shoes must be worn; a dance sneaker, jazz shoe or trainer is suitable, these should be well fitted to give the best foot placement. Sometimes in street, dancers will wear joggers or T-shirts which is perfectly acceptable, however please make sure these are not too baggy, and the examiner can see the body, arm and leg lines well.

# Street Dance

## **Teaching Street Dance**

### **Mastering Street Dance Medal Tests.**

Michelle Arnell, a DFR committee member and founder of Surrender Dance Academy in Portsmouth, shares her expert insights on teaching street dance, with a focus on preparing students for medal tests.

#### **General overview of Medal Test examinations**

##### **Can you give us a brief overview of what a medal test examination is and how it works?**

A medal test examination is a short performance assessment with an ISTD examiner. This can be in person at your studio or venue, or remotely. Dancers can gain a sense of achievement, technical skills and progress through the levels. The teacher will be responsible for the candidate's choreography which should be well rehearsed before entering the examination. Dancers should wear a number card corresponding to the number next to their name on the timetable. Make sure the numbers are clear and bold, can be seen from a distance and is on the front of the dancer.

Dancers receive a report form, certificate and medal after a successful test.

##### **What are the different levels of medal tests, and how do dancers progress through them?**

The introductory tests are the starting place for dancers starting with Under

6 and Under 8 Tests, and Social Dance Tests which can be taken at any age.

The medal series commences at Pre-Bronze with 4 tests available before moving on to Bronze 1 and 2, Silver and Gold.

You then move onto the higher awards; Gold Star 1–3, Platinum Awards 1–3 and finally the Supreme Award.

#### **Preparation and training for Medal Tests**

##### **How can teachers best prepare their students for medal tests?**

Teachers can prepare by making sure their dancers are well rehearsed. Dancing either solo or with another dancer if they are entering together, where to stand, and when to start and stop the routines. A marker can be used for the introductory tests only but should not block the examiners view of the candidates. Practicing how the exam works, such as saying 'good morning' to the examiner and 'thank you' at the end.

How important is musicality and performance quality in medal tests?

Performance and musicality are an important component of the exam. The examiner will be looking for this as part of the marking scheme. This can be found in the Street Dance specification.

#### **Tips for success**

##### **What are your top three tips for students taking their first medal test?**

- Start at a low level, let your dancer progress through the levels, they are there to be taken.



### Frequently asked questions from students and teachers

- **Pupil or parent: when do we get the results?** After examination, all candidate reports and results are subject to quality assurance checks. The Teacher can view the results on Quest within 10 working days. Report sheets and certificates are then issued and despatched within six to eight weeks.
- **Pupil or parent: how much does it cost?** Each level exam has a different fee ranging from £16.00–£52.25. Please refer to the Dancesport Qualification Fee Structure document available on the ISTD website for a breakdown.
- **Parent: can I watch?** Only the examiner, candidates and music operator should be present in the exam room. For Introductory level and Pre-Bronze level examinations, a demonstrator is permitted.

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**Just because this is an exam (which sounds very serious) doesn't mean it shouldn't be fun and something they look forward to.**

- **Teacher: how long should they dance for?** Each level exam has different routine requirements and different number of dances to be performed. This information can be found on the Street Dance Medal Tests Specification.
- **Teacher: can they all do the same dance?** If entering the exam together and all taking the same level, then that is fine. However, a Social Dance Test and Gold should not be performing the same routines for example.

**Are there any myths or misconceptions about medal test examinations that you'd like to debunk?**  
Medal tests are for everyone. No matter the age or skill level, there is a suitable level of exam for everyone. Remember if you have a pupil with specific needs, an ARA form can be submitted. Visit [www.istd.org/examinations/applications-for-reasonable-adjustments-ara](http://www.istd.org/examinations/applications-for-reasonable-adjustments-ara)

Dancers gain a great sense of achievement by following the medal test path.

## Street Dance Student Teacher and Associate syllabus outline updates

### Why has the Street Dance Associate exam changed?

To align with the refreshed Street Dance Medal Tests introduced in 2024.

### What's new?

The exam is now structured into three main sections (previously four):

1. Demonstration and analysis
2. Teaching approaches and unprepared sequences
3. History and Anatomy

While the core knowledge remains the same, the format, requirements, and marking criteria have been clarified in the updated specification.

### When does this take effect?

From 1 October 2025. Exams using the old format must be entered by 30 September 2025.

Find out more: [www.istd.org/examinations/dancesport-syllabus-outlines](http://www.istd.org/examinations/dancesport-syllabus-outlines)



# Tap Dance

**If you think  
you've 'finished'  
learning, it's  
game over.**

## Tap, trust, and tenacity Ryan Campbell-Birch on crafting a life in rhythm.

JON ROSS-ELLIOTT



Ryan Campbell-Birch is a leading figure in the UK's tap dance community – a performer, choreographer, and educator whose influence spans stages, studios, and

digital platforms. A First-Class Honours graduate of Bird College, Ryan returned to the institution as a faculty member and has since taught at many of the UK's top performing arts colleges, including ArtsEd, Italia Conti, Urdang Academy, and Guildford School of Acting. His international teaching credits include Brent Street in Sydney, the Australian Institute of Music, and workshops across New Zealand, Dubai, and Australia.

As Assistant Director of OKR Dance (formerly Old Kent Road), Ryan is deeply committed to artistic integrity and collaborative creation, contributing to acclaimed works such as *Fall Out*, *Dirty Tap Funk*, and *OSCILLATE*. In this interview, Ryan shares insights into his journey from chaotic boys' classes in Bristol to international stages, and

reflects on the value of structured training, the importance of continuous learning, and the role of patience and discipline in nurturing the next generation of dancers.

### You began tap dancing in Bristol. What are your earliest memories of those lessons?

My mum was a dance teacher, but she didn't teach me. I was encouraged to give dance a try, alongside other activities such as swimming and gymnastics. My early memories are of an all-boys class run by Melvyn Wingfield. We were all a little chaotic, but it was fun!

### What drew you specifically to tap, and how did your passion evolve during your time at Bird College?

The combination of music and movement has always been what's drawn me to tap dance. The artist has multiple responsibilities, audible and visual. But with that, you always get double the reward or satisfaction. My training at Bird taught me a lot about how to present my work. I was already

quite comfortable with the musical aspect of tap dance (although there was still a lot of learning to do). But Bird taught me how to engage with an audience and my responsibility to them. In addition to my training at Bird, around the same time I started to attend

London Tap Jam. This taught me loads about jazz music and improvisation, vital skills for any aspiring tap dancer.

### How did your ISTD training influence your approach to tap, both technically and creatively?

My ISTD training gave me good technical fundamentals, thanks to my early teachers. They had good knowledge and encouraged us to become technically proficient. In addition, a lot of credit also goes to Sue Worrall. She taught me how to take what I already knew and use it in different ways.

### You were the first British cast member of Tap Factory and a founding member of OKR (Old Kent Road).

**What were those experiences like?** Both great, but in very different ways. Tap Factory was great fun, pure entertainment, and we got to tour to some cool places. Old Kent Road (now OKR Dance) is a totally different experience. It's a team effort and everyone who works with the company needs the right mindset, work ethic and personality. It's a family, and we do pretty much everything ourselves.

### What role does continuous learning play in your development as both a teacher and performer?

It's absolutely vital. If you think you've 'finished' learning, it's game over. I learn a lot from those around me, especially when it comes to teaching methods.

“

**Do the repetitions of the basics – correctly and with good guidance. That's how you lay the foundation for becoming a great dancer.**

It might be something very small, that only applies to a few students who have specific requirements. But over time you develop a set of tools for a variety of situations and needs.

**What has been your proudest moment in your dance journey so far?**

That's really tough to answer, but I would say my work with OKR Dance. We put a lot of care into our work to ensure it holds artistic integrity.

**If you could give one piece of advice to young dancers starting out today, what would it be?**

Be patient and take your time. Do the repetitions of the basics (correctly and with good guidance) and lay the foundations of a great dancer.

“

**Exams can be great for building confidence, depending on how they're approached and how results are interpreted. With the right guidance, any result can be used to build trust and self-belief. It's not just about getting a high mark, it's about personal progress.**

**How important were ISTD dance exams in your early development as a dancer?**

They were useful as milestones and gave me something to work toward. They also helped me learn how to handle pressure.

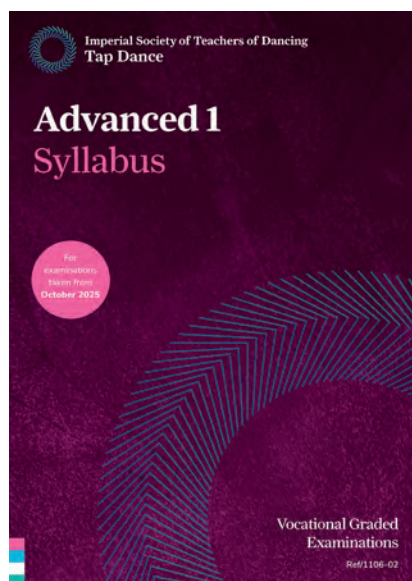
**How can our exams help build confidence, discipline, and long-term commitment in students?**

Exams can be great for building confidence, depending on how they're approached and how results are interpreted. With the right guidance, any result can be used to build trust and self-belief. It's not just about getting a high mark, it's about personal progress.



**NEW Tap Class Exams**

Turn to page 21 to find out more.



## Revised Advanced 1 Tap Syllabus

### Structure and transition timeline.

We have introduced a revised Advanced 1 Tap syllabus, offering a refreshed structure of technical and performance exercises. This guide outlines the new syllabus components and provides a clear timeline for the transition, including key dates for examinations and retakes under both the current and revised versions.

#### Advanced 1 Tap timeline

- **1 Oct 2025:** First examinations of the revised Advanced 1 Tap syllabus begin.
- **1 Oct 2025 – 30 Sep 2026:** Both the current and revised versions of the Advanced 1 syllabus are examinable.
- **30 Sep 2026:** Last date for examinations in the current version of the Advanced 1 Tap syllabus, including any retakes.
- **From 1 Oct 2026:** Only the revised Advanced 1 Tap syllabus is examinable.

Look out for Advanced 1 Tap CPD courses at [www.istd.org/events](http://www.istd.org/events)

**Above** Advanced 1 Syllabus, available from [shop.istd.org/shop](http://shop.istd.org/shop)

#### Advanced 1 Tap choice of exercises

##### Warm Up

##### Grounded Drills (2 out of 3):

- Shuffles
- Cramp Rolls
- Riffles

##### Close Work Drills (1 out of 2):

- Paddles
- Crawls

##### Elevated Drills (2 out of 5):

- Pullbacks
- Shuffle Pick Up
- Supported Elevated
- Ripple Down and Firecracker
- Running Flaps

##### Turning Drills (1 out of 2):

- Close Work
- Maxiford

##### Technical Sequences (3 out of 4:

1 to be taken unaccompanied):

- Lyrical
- Elevated
- 5/4
- Commercial

##### Turning Sequence

##### Time Steps (2 out of 3):

- Travelling
- Rhythm
- Roll

##### Free Time Steps

##### Dance Sequences (2 out of 4):

- Musical Theatre
- Latin
- Blues
- Quick Jazz

##### Free Work / Improvisation

##### Dance

##### Shim Sham Bow





# What's on

## Dates for your diary

 Discover more and book our events  
and courses at [www.istd.org/events](http://www.istd.org/events)



### ISTD office Christmas closure dates

Please note that the ISTD offices will be closed for the Christmas period from Wednesday 24 December 2025, re-opening on Friday 2 January 2026.

We wish you a joyful festive season and thank you for your continued support throughout the year.

### ISTD AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 80th Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Society will be held online on **12 November 2025 at 11:00**.



### Exam entries

Find full details of upcoming London Centre, Regional Centre and Tour examinations – including dates, venues and how to apply – at [www.istd.org/examinations/uk-examinations/regional-exam-centre-dates-and-locations](http://www.istd.org/examinations/uk-examinations/regional-exam-centre-dates-and-locations)



### Dance magazine is going digital

A bold new chapter begins in January 2026 – with interactive stories on a beautifully immersive new digital platform.

- Anytime, anywhere
- Fresh, inspiring, and made for you

Stay tuned – your first digital issue is coming soon. Turn to page 16 to find out more.

# ISTD Calendar

## Sep-Dec 2025

### September



#### Awareness Days / Months

Move More September



#### ISTD CPD Courses

**14 Sep** Regional Course: Tap Dance New Advanced 1 Refresher – Essex

**14 Sep** Regional Course: Modern Theatre Grades 4 and 5 musical theatre amalgamations and progressions – Hampshire



#### ISTD Events and Competitions

**07 Sep** DFR Area Competition – Guildford

**14 Sep** DFR Dance Exchange – Chesham, Buckinghamshire



#### ISTD Important Dates

**Ongoing** CPD courses – UK and International

### October



#### Awareness Days / Months

**05 Oct** World Teachers' Day



#### ISTD CPD Courses

**12 Oct** Regional Course: Grade 4 and 5 floor sequences with progressions – Hampshire



#### ISTD Events and Competitions

**11–12 Oct** Grand Finals 2025 – Guildford, Surrey

**26 Oct** Industry workshop day – Sidcup, London



#### ISTD Important Dates

**31 Oct** APEL applications close

**Ongoing** international member meetings

**Ongoing** CPD courses – UK and international

### November



#### Awareness Days / Months

**02 Nov** World Ballet Day



#### ISTD Events and Competitions

**2 Nov** Street Dance Competition – Grays, Essex

**2 Nov** Mabel Ryan Awards – Elmhurst, Birmingham

**2 Nov** Tap Fest – 1532 Performing Arts Centre, Bristol

**30 Nov** Malta Awards – Malta



#### ISTD Important Dates

**Ongoing** international member meetings

**Ongoing** CPD courses – UK and international



### How to book



**Explore awareness days and months** to boost your social media, promotions, and events. Find marketing support at [www.istd.org/findyourdancespace/marketing-toolkit](http://www.istd.org/findyourdancespace/marketing-toolkit)



**Continuous professional development (CPD)** courses are planned throughout the year. For details and how to book visit [www.istd.org/cpd](http://www.istd.org/cpd)



**ISTD events and competitions** for your students to showcase their talent and experience. For details on how to enter visit [www.istd.org/events](http://www.istd.org/events)



**ISTD important dates** to help you plan. For ISTD exam centre dates and tour dates, visit: [www.istd.org/examinations/uk-examinations](http://www.istd.org/examinations/uk-examinations)

Information correct at time of going to press but may be subject to change.



# Empowering young dancers

## Ayomi's journey with the Sue Passmore Award.



Dance has the power to transform lives, but access to quality training isn't always equal. In regions like Awka, Nigeria, talented young dancers often lack the resources and mentorship they need to thrive. That's where the **Sue Passmore Award (SPA)** comes in – supporting educators who are committed to broadening access to dance.

This year's SPA recipient, **Ayomi Tsalu**, is using the £2,000 award to bring **ISTD graded examinations** to students in Awka, where professional ballet training is scarce. His project is not only giving these students their first opportunity to take formal exams but also proving that **Nigerian ballet dancers belong on the global stage**.



EVEREST MEDIA FOR DAGUJAR

**Above** Ayomi Tsalu preparing students for ISTD graded examinations

**The SPA has literally given us wings to fly on this project without obsessing over how the funding would come about. That artistic freedom is priceless.**

### Breaking barriers through dance

"I've taught these students every August for the past three years," Ayomi shares. "They were a huge part of my own DDE exam preparations. Seeing their eagerness and the marginalization they face, I knew I had to do more – to honour their hard work and the dreams I couldn't pursue at their age. Presenting them for graded exams felt like the perfect next step."

Ayomi first visited their studio as a guest and immediately saw their potential. "They were ideal students – committed, talented – but cut off from qualified teachers and resources. Awka faces political unrest and kidnappings, yet these children and their parents have stayed dedicated to dance. When I discovered I could access funding, I knew they were worth it."

### Making a difference

The project is still underway, but Ayomi says the response has been overwhelmingly positive. "Everyone – from the

studio owner to assistant teachers, parents, and children – has been incredibly supportive. We're all working together to make this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity happen."

Receiving the SPA has been transformative. "I have many dreams for dance in my community, but funding is always a hurdle. The SPA gave us wings to fly without worrying about finances. That artistic freedom is priceless. We're redefining what's possible for Nigerian ballet students."

### Success stories and looking ahead

One standout moment? "A boy who used to just watch his sisters in class decided to join. In Nigeria, that's huge – to have a boy volunteer for ballet and be the only one in class, with full parental support. That's how we measure success."

Ayomi envisions long-term impact: "This is just the beginning. We'll have students progressing through grades, qualified teachers from Nigeria, and more people aspiring to artistic excellence. Because we've done it, others will see it's attainable."

### Encouragement for future applicants

"What do you stand to lose by trying?" Ayomi asks. "If you want to broaden access to dance, go for it. We can't just complain about inequality – we must act to create the world we want."

Thinking of applying for the SPA? "It's a game changer if you have a clear vision and plan. Just like it gave me, the SPA might be the wings you need to fly!"

Find out more: [www.istd.org/discover/funding-bursaries-and-awards/project-funding-opportunities](http://www.istd.org/discover/funding-bursaries-and-awards/project-funding-opportunities)

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## Imperial Benevolent Fund

Supporting ISTD Members in their time of need

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Words cannot express the gratitude and relief  
the contribution by the Imperial Benevolent  
Fund has brought to us. Please express our  
sincere thanks to the Trustees for this help.



The Fund offers support to deserving members and  
their dependents worldwide, whatever their age, who  
need help at certain times in their lives. If you need our  
help, or know of anyone who does, please get in touch.

To make an application, make  
a donation or leave a bequest  
please contact [www.ibfund.org](http://www.ibfund.org)





# Courses starting soon



## Level 4 Diploma in Dance Education (DDE)

This flexible, part-time course is ideal for new teachers or those seeking a regulated ISTD qualification. Units 1 and 5 are delivered at the Academy online as short courses, with interactive modules and live tutorials. These units focus on safe teaching and child development and can be combined with practical units elsewhere.

## Licentiate in multiple genres

Advance your teaching career with an ISTD Licentiate qualification. Delivered remotely, this flexible course combines intensive group sessions and one-to-one mentoring to deepen your knowledge, enhance teaching skills, and build confidence in advanced pedagogy and creativity.



**Get in touch**

**Courses  
starting  
January  
2026**

