



**SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT
IN
PERFORMING ARTS**

**Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council
University Grants Commission
Sri Lanka**

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FOREWORD

The work in connection with the development of Subject Benchmark Statements was begun in August 2003 as a part of the overall quality assurance framework that supports academic standards and the furtherance and dissemination of good practice in Universities in Sri Lanka.

Subject Benchmark Statements will support and promote quality and standards by:

- Providing universities with a common and explicit reference point for internal and external programme approval and review;
- Guiding and promoting curriculum development, especially in new departments and new universities, and in other institutions of higher education;
- Evolving over time to take account of changes and innovations that reflect subject development and new expectations;
- Providing an authoritative and widely recognized statement of expectations of what is expected of a graduate in a specific (or designated) subject area in a form readily accessible to students, employers and others with a stake in higher education;
- Providing a clear and transparent reference point for External Examiners;
- Assisting international comparison and competitiveness of higher education awards and student achievement.

SUBJECT BENCHMARK STATEMENT

PERFORMING ARTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Subject Benchmark Statement – Scope and Purposes

- Subject Benchmark Statement is an essential component of quality assurance. It describes the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject, in the subjects of dance, drama and performance in this particular context. It attempts to provide a set of reference points to show how key features of a programme, its intended learning outcomes and the standards that derive these outcomes relate to what is considered to be appropriate by the subject community. It is a policy device aimed at improving the capacity of the subject community to regulate their academic standards. It also creates the subject-based information that can be used by teaching teams as prompt for self-critical reflection and further development.
- The Subject Benchmark Statement describes the nature and scope of the subject, subject aims and expected subject knowledge and understanding. It also serves to lay down expected skills and attitudes of award holders and explain teaching and learning strategies, assessment methods, strategies used to maintain standards as well as the minimum standards for the award of the degree in the subject area of dance, drama and performance.
- This benchmark statement considers programmes of study that are taught in a range of higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, that have quite discrete missions and objectives for learning and teaching dance, drama and performing arts, at Special degree level, some providing courses at General degree level only. There are also some degree and diploma awarding institutions affiliated to universities. There are still other universities providing combined degree courses of dance, drama and performing arts coupled with cultural studies, fine arts and so forth. There are also a couple of semi-governmental institutions providing courses with a more practical orientation, one of them conducting a drama programme leading to a degree in drama and theatre education, in collaboration with the Open University of Sri Lanka.
- Degrees of the extent of theoretical and practical components of these programmes differ widely, and this benchmark statement has been made sufficiently generic to allow for this diversity, while at the same time giving a clear indication of the kind of creativity, knowledge, understanding, skills and methods of learning appropriate to the field of study.

1.2 Level of Teaching

The subjects of dance, drama and performing arts are taught in several universities in Sri Lanka, to wit., the Universities of Jaffna, Visual and Performing Arts, Sri Jayewardenepura, Kelaniya, Peradeniya, Eastern University and the Sripalee

Campus of University of Colombo. The structure of courses taught in these universities is highly varied, and it is, therefore, difficult to formulate a benchmark statement common to all.

The University of Jaffna (Ramanathan Academy) and the Eastern University (Vipulanandan Institute) specialize in Bharata Natyam supported by Carnatic music much the same way as done in South Indian universities. The newly established University of Visual and Performing Arts (formerly, the Institute of Aesthetic Studies), and for that matter, all the remaining Universities teach the three traditional forms of indigenous dance, namely, Kandyan, Low-country and Sabaragamu. Of these, the University of Visual and Performing Arts and the Sripalee Campus conduct Special degree courses for four years beginning from the first year, whereas all the other universities select students for Special degree courses on their performance in the three subjects they offer in the first year. So they specialize in the relevant subjects only for three years. The Special degree courses conducted at Kelaniya and Sri Jayewardenepura Universities are very much similar in that 50% of the course is set apart for Dance or Music component with practical work, while the other 50% is taken up by other allied arts such as culture, theatre, arts and crafts, art history etc. Thus those students who complete the course will be equipped with an over-all knowledge ideally suited for school teachers. The University of Peradeniya teach dance, music and drama at General degree level only.

There are Special degree courses of drama at Jaffna, Kelaniya, Eastern and Visual and Performing Arts Universities and Sripalee Campus of University of Colombo. At University of Peradeniya it is taught at General degree level only. The drama courses conducted at Jaffna and Eastern Universities contain strong components of Tamil folk theatre or Kuttu. The newly started drama and theatre course in the Faculty of Dance at the University of Visual and Performing Arts has similarly a bias for Sinhalese folk theatre and indigenous dance.

1.3 Importance of the Field

The subject of dance (Bharata Natyam in Tamil schools and Indigenous Sinhalese dance in Sinhala Schools) had been taught since 1952. But since it was not taught at university level, students who offered dance at G.C.E. (A/L) could not continue it at University. It was only in 1974 that the former Government College of Fine Arts was affiliated to the University of Kelaniya as the Institute of Aesthetic Studies which started the Special degree courses of Fine Arts in Music, Dance and Visual Arts. The degree was known as the degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) awarded by the University of Kelaniya.

The subject of drama and theatre was introduced to schools as a subject for G.C.E. (A/L) examination in 1972. But students who offered drama and theatre for G.C.E. (A/L) had to choose other subjects at university until the University of Kelaniya started a Special degree course of drama and theatre a few years ago. Today it has become a popular subject in a number of Sri Lankan universities as was mentioned earlier.

1.3.1. Development required after Graduation

A Special degree programme lasting for three or four years is not at all sufficient to produce artists particularly in the fields of dance and drama. Students may receive a good historical background, a theoretical knowledge and a critical approach to the subject, but if any graduate wishes to become a professional in his field, he must receive further practical training from a good traditional school. Those who graduate in drama and theatre should get opportunities to write and produce or participate in dramatic productions.

1.3.2. Need for Experimental Studies

Graduates of dance and drama should of necessity gear themselves up to engage in experimental studies. While it is necessary to preserve the indigenous dance traditions, it is also necessary to try innovations in order to make it more appealing to the modern taste. The same is true of the Sinhala theatre as well. The majority of young Sri Lankan dramatists look up to the West for models. Very few have realized that ample source materials do exist in this country for ironing out a truly Sri Lankan theatre.

1.3.3. How it is offered

Those students who follow Special degree programmes are required to follow course units in dance/drama. Those who follow other Special degree programmes can offer certain elective units in dance or drama. All universities which conduct Special degree courses of dance and drama provide courses at General degree level as well.

Very few students following other degree programmes offer units belonging to Dance, Drama and Performance. The lack of a basic knowledge of the subject and the requirement of a training in the practical component discourage students from selecting units from these subjects

1.4. Scope of Employment of Graduates

No university in Sri Lanka offers a course called 'Dance, Drama and Performance'. Many universities offer courses of dance and drama separately, and the performance aspects are well taken care of in both types of courses. There is a highly developed indigenous dance tradition in Sri Lanka, which requires separate treatment. Such dance courses are conducted by two Sri Lankan universities, namely, the newly established University of Visual and Performing Arts and the Sripalee Campus of University of Colombo. University of Jaffna and the Eastern University at Batticaloa offer courses of Bharata Natyam supported by the local kuttu or folk theatre traditions special to the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka. Drama and Theatre courses with strong practical components are conducted by the Universities of Kelaniya, Jaffna, Eastern University and the University of Visual and Performing Arts as well as the Tower Hall Theatre Foundation which has worked out a degree course of drama and theatre in collaboration with the Open University of Sri Lanka.. Universities of Kelaniya and Sri Jayewardenepura too offer combined Special degree courses with strong components of dance and drama.

The former offers a course of Fine Arts with 50% devoted to music or dance. The students can select either of the two along with theory of fine arts as the other component. In the latter university Culture and Music/Dance form the two components. Both are Special degree courses.

Most of the graduates who have passed out in recent years after specializing in these subjects are employed as teachers of dance and drama for Advanced Level classes, and others in electronic media as presenters, producers and technicians. There are still others who are self-employed as models in the advertizing field. Some have their own private classes and institutions. So generally speaking, their scope of employment can be said to be quite good as compared with those who offer other courses in the field of arts and humanities.

2. SUBJECT AIMS

- Both the subjects, Dance and Drama & Theatre, consist of two main components, theoretical and practical.
- Although the subjects are mainly practical, the practice should have a theoretical base. Since drama and theatre embraces a number of disciplines, the theoretical knowledge provided should cover all such disciplines.
- Equally important is the history of the subject, on which depends future developments.
- Analytical and critical studies appropriate to the subject should also find an important place in the theoretical component.
- Practical work should contain physical exercises including head and foot movements, theatre games and training in the subject proper.
- This practical training should promote personality development, competence and confidence in physical and verbal communication, leadership, presentation skills and ability to work in groups.
- These experiences will provide the students with communication skills (written, oral and performance), ability to engage in research and analysis, to work independently, interpersonally and in groups, to work to deadlines and under pressure, with flexibility, imagination, self-motivation and organization.

3. SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- 3.1 It is difficult to determine exactly the scope of the subject knowledge and understanding required of graduates in Dance. Drama or Performance, owing to the broad-based, inter-disciplinary and multidisciplinary nature of the subject. Institutions are bound to differ in their emphasis and approaches, particularly in the weighting of practical, theoretical and historical components of their study programmes and also in the extent to which their programmes are rooted in

traditions, research and scholarship. However, several areas the programmes will touch on are listed in the following paragraphs:

3.2 Graduates offering courses of Dance, Drama and Performance should be able to demonstrate, where appropriate, knowledge and understanding and/or ability in a range of the following areas:

- histories, forms and traditions of performance and theoretical explanations of those histories.
- cultural background of indigenous dance, drama and performance.
- indigenous folk theatre such as *sokari*, *kolam*, *nurti*, *kuttu* and passion play.
- key practitioners and practices: theorists including writers, dancers, actors, playwrights, critics, performance artists, directors, choreographers, designers and producers; and applied and community theatre practice.
- traditional and contemporary critical perspectives on performance and relevant theories.
- creative process of performance including management, writing, scenography, improvisation, choreography, performer training techniques, production arts and rehearsals.
- research methodologies used to explore and investigate the fields of study.

3.3 Graduates of programmes in Dance, Drama and Performance should also be able to demonstrate understanding in a range of the following areas.

- the impact of past traditions on present practices.
- relation of theory to practice in the discipline.
- text-reading and translating the text into practice in the field of theatre.
- the performance and production skills necessary to communicate with the audience.
- group activity in the creation of a production.
- inter-relationships within and between different areas and aspects of Dance, Drama and Performance and production arts.
- the inter-disciplinary elements of Dance, Drama and Performance, and how to apply appropriate application of the practices and theories of Dance, knowledge, concepts and skills from other disciplines.
- Drama and Performance within a diverse range of social, educational and community contexts.

3.4 The range of study offered by any one degree programme may include selections from the following list of topics commonly found within Sri Lankan departments of dance, drama and performance. It is not, however, intended to be in any way exhaustive and prescriptive, and will be subject to individual programme specifications.

3.5 Different programmes may include particular versions and various combinations of these or other areas studied in relation to dance, drama and performing arts.

- history of indigenous dance forms and their distribution.
- the cultural background.
- relation between rituals and dance forms.

- relation between rituals and indigenous folk theatre.
- *Sokari* and *Kolam* theatre.
- *Nadagama*, *Nurti* and *Passion Play*.
- the *Kuttu* tradition and its distribution.
- Indian classical dance forms - Bharata, Kathak, Kathakli and Manipuri.
- dance exercises.
- acting, voice and body training.
- applied theatre.
- authors and texts.
- choreography and choreology.
- community programme and outreach.
- critical approaches to textual analysis.
- dance demonstration, analysis and reconstruction.
- education.
- dance and theatre genres.
- design.
- directing.
- drama/dance and therapy.
- gender, sexuality and performance.
- health, safety and fitness of dance, drama and performance.
- history, theory and aesthetics.
- live art and performance art.
- management and production.
- music and theatre music.
- performance theory and analysis.
- performance practice, and specialized performance skills.
- play-writing, writing for performance and dramaturgy.
- scenography.
- screen drama/theatre and screen/dance on screen.
- stage management.
- technical theatre.
- theories of dance, drama and performance

4 SKILLS AND ATTITUDES

4.1. Skills

Graduates of dance, drama and performance are expected to have acquired, a range of general abilities, and capacities, qualities of mind, and transferable skills.

- reflexive and independent thinking.
- critical, analytical and practical skills.
- creative and imaginative skills.
- awareness of inter-disciplinary approaches to study.
- interpersonal and team work skills.
- developing ideas and constructing arguments and the communication in a variety of media.
- capacity to present them in appropriate ways.

- producing written work with appropriate scholarly convention.
- IT skills.
- information retrieval skills, involving ability to gather, sift, synthesize and organize material independently, and critically evaluate its significance.
- understanding of group dynamics and an ability to implement it in practical contexts.
- handling creative, personal and interpersonal issues.
- negotiation and pursuing goals with others.
- managing personal workloads and meeting deadlines.

These skills and abilities are expected to have geared up the graduates to have acquired

- the ability to become good decision-makers in the field of Fine Arts
- the ability to become good organizers and co-ordinators of concerts and other types of show
- the ability to appreciate works of art
- the ability to become good connoisseurs of art

4.2 Subject-specific Skills

Graduates in dance, drama and performance are expected to acquire a range of critical, creative, performance and production skills. Some degree programmes will have a single discipline focus (as in the University of Visual and Performing Arts), while others will offer a multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary programme of study (as in the Universities of Kelaniya and Sri Jayewardenepura for example). However, graduates within the broad subject area of dance, drama and performance will have practised many of the following, and focused on some of them.

- ability to read and use appropriate literature on the subject.
- ability to give a clear and accurate description on the subject area.
- ability to appreciate and criticize works of art
- writing scripts for stage and screen
- creative writing skills
- art evaluation skills
- ability to fuse foreign art traditions with local art traditions
- ability to capture photographs in a creative manner
- ability to edit photos and images
- video filming
- video editing and video clip making
- describing, theorizing, interpreting and evaluating performance texts and performance events from a range of critical perspectives.
- reading the performance possibilities inspired by a script, score and other textual or documentary sources.
- developing skills of observation and visual, aural and spatial awareness.
- considering theories of spectatorship and developing an awareness of audience or client group for performance and an ability to respond and adapt to it through flexible means.
- engaging in research, whether independent, group or performance-based.
- engaging in current debates on cultural policy and funding.

4.3 Practical Skills

- realizing a script, a score and textual or documentary sources in public performance.
- engaging in performance and production, based on an acquisition and understanding of appropriate performance and production vocabularies, skills, structures and working methods.
- contributing to the production of performance and/or film or television for example, through direction, choreography, dramaturgy, stage management, scenography, sound and lighting production, editing, promotion, administration and funding.
- creating original work using the skills and crafts of performance making.
- using performance techniques associated with particular cultural forms and/or practitioners.
- achieving expertise in the use of various technical apparatus in live performance and/or recorded media.

5. TEACHING AND LEARNING STRATEGIES

- 5.1 In Sri Lankan higher education institutions, Dance, Drama and Performance may be studied in Special or General degree programmes. Modules or courses may, therefore, be open to students whose principal area of study lies elsewhere. Some highly specialized modules may not be open to students who are not majoring in the subject.
- 5.2 Within dance, drama and performance, teaching and learning will be closely related through a variety of approaches that facilitate students' creative development, and cohere, to a greater or lesser degree, around the integration of theory and practice. The relative contribution of each approach is likely to vary from programme to programme.
- 5.3 Since practice is based on theory, a sound theoretical knowledge of various aspects of dance and drama is an essential factor.
- 5.4 Students will usually experience work on practical performance, participating as appropriate in the process from initial research to engagement with an audience.
- 5.5 Throughout the programme, students will normally experience both tutor-led learning including the participation of professional practitioners, and self-directed methods of learning.
- 5.6 Teaching and learning will normally take place in a variety of continually evolving contexts, including an appropriate balance of
 - lectures, tutorials, practical classes, audio-visual aids, seminars, discussions, rehearsals, workshops, field work, excursions, project work.
 - group and individual learning.
 - tutor-led, student-led, self-directed study.
 - use of subject-specific and generic technologies.
 - resource-based learning, including library work and attendance at performances.
- 5.7 Students will be provided with hand-outs that comprise aims and objectives, structure and content, learning outcomes and indicative bibliographies. This programme information will be designed to be read by students in relation to the individual institution's degree programme regulations. Handbooks will typically

advise students in academic matters such as selection of course units, assessment criteria, information about health and safety issues for classes, teaching and performing environments and professional placements.

6. ASSESSMENT METHODS

- 6.1 Assessment within dance, drama and performance should enable students to demonstrate their level of achievement and the full range of abilities and skills. Modes of assessment should be designed to match the learning outcomes identified by programme components, programmes and institutions.
- 6.2 There should be opportunities for formative and summative assessment in a variety of modes, such as,
 - course work -
practical (group, individual)
written (essays, seminar presentations, project reports, dissertations, assignments, case studies, performance texts, oral (presentations))
 - examinations – closed-book
 - examinations, open-book examinations, practical assessments, viva-voce examinations.
- 6.3 Opportunities may be provided for self and peer assessment.
- 6.4 In all cases, assessment will be valid and reliable, supported by clear, published criteria for marking and grading.

7. MAINTENANCE OF STANDARDS

7.1 Involvement of external examiners

Successful conduction of dance, drama and performance programmes depends to a large extent on the contribution of external lecturers and examiners. It is, therefore, essential that services be obtained of only highly and appropriately qualified experts and practitioners in the relevant subjects.

7.2 Periodic Subject-reviews

This is a very important factor for maintaining a high academic standard in the subject areas coming within dance, drama and performance. It is recommended that a subject-review is conducted at least once in two years, with outside experts, of course with the co-operation of the academic and non-academic staff as well as students.

7.3 Institutional Reviews

In order to maintain a good academic standard of a study programme, a closely-linked over-all administration of the institution is a key factor. The entire working of the administration machinery of the institution should be geared up by conducting an institutional review by experts and veterans in the field as well as experienced administrators, at least once in five years.

8. LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENTS

Benchmark standards are expressed in terms of learning outcomes.

Students may graduate at the threshold level, if they have achieved, as appropriate to their programme of study, knowledge, performance ability, creativity, skills and understanding sufficient to provide a basic presentation of performance and/or information with respect to particular skills or material. This is the minimum acceptable knowledge and skill level for a graduate of Special degree in Dance, Drama and Theatre, Performing Arts or Fine Arts.

However, the typical goal of Dance, Drama and Performance is to raise the students' quality to good level. This can be reached by producing students capable of independently evaluating and engaging creatively and critically with performance, and, as appropriate, being capable of developing technical and artistic skills and critical analysis.

It is important that students are made aware of this distinction and inspired and guided to reach beyond the threshold.

The standards expressed are for single Special degree programmes. The stated learning outcomes are indicative and do not form a checklist. It is expected that all programmes will necessarily lead to the attainment of all the stated learning outcomes.

Threshold Level

Subject knowledge, Understanding and. Abilities.

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree programme at Special level, graduates should be able to demonstrate some of the following:

- knowledge of forms, practices, traditions and history of dance, drama and theatre or performing arts, as the case may be.
- knowledge of key exponents and theorists and their cultural and historical contexts.
- knowledge of key components of the art and how they are employed to create a work of art.
- understanding of the group and collective processes.
- understanding of the interplay between practice and theory within the field of study
- understanding of appropriate interdisciplinary elements of Dance, Drama and Performance and how to apply knowledge, practice, concepts and skills from other disciplines.

Subject-specific Skills

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree at Special level programme in Dance, Drama and Theatre, Performing Arts or Fine Arts, graduates should be

- able to describe and interpret performance scripts and production techniques
- aware of the skills and processes of production, design and rehearsals by which performance is created, and have experience of their realization and presentation in performance.

- able to contribute to the creation and/or production of performance through an understanding of appropriate performance vocabularies, techniques, crafts, structures and working methods.
- able to engage in independent research in relevant fields.
- able to identify the cultural background surrounding performance events.

Generic and Graduate Skills

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree at Special level in Dance, Drama and Theatre, Performing Arts or Fine Arts, graduates should

- be familiar with the old major concepts of aesthetic and literary criticism of India and the West, and their impact on the fine arts of Sri Lanka.
- possess a basic knowledge of the major trends and concepts of modern and post-modern theories and concepts of aesthetics
- possess a general knowledge of the new trends and developments in the field of arts, theatre, cinema and television, and the usefulness of electronic media and IT
- have skills in developing ideas and constructing arguments and the capacity to present them in appropriate ways.
- be aware of and be able to describe forms of discourse and their effects on representation in the arts, media and public life.
- be able to work in groups and have the skills needed for the realization of practice-based work.
- be able to manage personal workloads and to meet deadlines and to negotiate and pursue goals with others
- have an ability to manage creative, personal and interpersonal issues.
- have acquired information retrieval skills needed to gather, sift, synthesize and organize material independently.
- have acquired information technology skills and have developed some awareness of their application and potential.

Good Level

This is the level required to consider that the awardee has shown excellence performance in knowledge and skills.

Subject Knowledge, Understanding and Abilities

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree Special level in Dance, Drama and Theatre, Performing Arts graduates should be able to demonstrate comprehension and:

- intelligent engagement with forms, practices, traditions and histories of performance and of theoretical explanation of those histories.
- intelligent engagement with the work of key exponents and their work. and theorists and their cultural contexts
- intelligent engagement with the key components of performance and the process by which it is created and realized.
- creative and intelligent engagement with group and collective processes.

- intelligent engagement with the interplay between practice and theory within the field of study.
- intelligent engagement with appropriate interdisciplinary elements of Dance, Drama and Theatre and Performing Arts, and how to apply knowledge, practices, concepts and skills from other disciplines.

Subject-specific Skills

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree programme at Special level in Dance, Drama and Theatre or Performing Arts, graduates should be able to:

- describe, interpret and evaluate performance scripts and production techniques.
- engage creatively and critically with the skills and processes of production, design and rehearsal by which performance is created and have an ability to select, refine and present these in performance.
- engage creatively and critically with the creation and/or production of performance through a developed and sensitive understanding of appropriate performance vocabularies, techniques, crafts, structures and working methods.
- engage creatively and critically in appropriate independent research in relevant fields.
- identify and interpret critically the cultural background surrounding performance events.

Generic and Graduate Skills

It is expected that, on completion of a bachelor's degree programme at Special level in Dance, Drama and Theatre, Performing Arts and Fine Arts, graduates should

- have an excellent knowledge of the classical Indian and Western concepts of aesthetics and literary criticism and their impact on the artists of Sri Lanka and their work.
- possess and in-depth knowledge of the major trends and concepts of modern and post-modern Western concepts.
- possess an excellent understanding of the new trends and developments in the fields of visual arts, music, dance, theatre, cinema and television in Sri Lanka focusing on the use of traditional and modern techniques in Fine Arts.
- have critical and analytical skills in developing ideas and constructing arguments and the capacity to evaluate and present them in a range of ways.
- have a developed capacity to analyze and critically examine and evaluate forms of discourse and their effects on representation in the arts, media and public life.
- be able to work creatively and imaginatively in a group and have the developed creative skills needed for the realization of practice-based work.
- be able to manage personal workloads efficiently and effectively, meet deadlines, and negotiate and pursue goals with others.
- have a developed ability to manage constructively and effectively creative, personal and impersonal issues.
- have acquired information retrieval skills needed to gather, sift, synthesize and organize material independently and to critically evaluate its significance.
- have acquired and developed appropriate information technology skills, and have developed considerable awareness of their application and potential within the field of study.

9. ANNEX1. MEMBERS OF THE BENCHMARK GROUP

Prof. Walter Marasinghe	University of Sri Jayewardenepura
Dr. G. B. C. Dayawansa	University of Visual and Performing Arts
Dr. W. P. Udayasiri Widanapathirana	University of Visual and Performing Arts
Ms. Dhammika Lankathilake	University of Visual and Performing Arts
Dr. Lionel Bentharage	University of Visual and Performing Arts
Ms. Gayani Deepika Maddumage	University of Visual and Performing Arts