



PERFORM | EDUCATE | INSPIRE

# NEW MARKING SCHEME

November 2023

# THE NEW SCHEME

The Board of Trustees, in collaboration with the Adjudicators' Council and the Festivals' Council, has approved the introduction of an updated marking scheme, which will replace the current scheme that has been in use since the 1980s.

The aim of the scheme is to promote BIFF's core values – *Perform | Educate | Inspire* – with a greater emphasis on the written and verbal teaching points and offering positive feedback to the performer to build confidence and self-esteem.

BIFF strongly recommends the use of the scheme to ensure a measure of uniformity across festivals.

# AIMS OF THE NEW MARKING SCHEME

praise for  
achievements

positive and  
constructive  
teaching points

honesty

kindness and  
warmth

encouragement and  
affirmation

**DESCRIPTORS  
BANDS  
(FORMERLY  
CATEGORIES)**

There are 7 Descriptors Bands

Developing (65 – 69)

Progressing (70 – 74)

Merit (75 – 79)

Commended (80 – 84)

Honours (85 – 89)

Outstanding (90 – 94)

Exceptional (95+)

# KEY POINTS

Marks will range from 65 to 95+ with a range of 5 marks in each descriptor band as shown above. This allows differentiation and flexibility, especially in large classes.

The exceptional band extends the range of marks and will reward and calibrate truly extraordinary performances.

The descriptors use positive and affirming language such as “developing” and “progressing” to replace less positive language such as “fair” and “moderate”. The intention is to provide encouragement to all performers irrespective of the standard of performance.

The criteria used by adjudicators have been thoroughly revised and re-written by teams from all three disciplines. They are more positive, developed, clear, and, we trust, helpful to all.

## GUIDANCE FOR FESTIVALS AND ADJUDICATORS



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The adjudicator report/mark sheet must display the descriptors; however, it is highly recommended that both the descriptors and criteria be included in the festival programme where possible.

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Alternatively, festivals may consider using a QR code to enable users to access the information on their digital devices.

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Whilst the descriptors are the same for all disciplines, festivals should be aware there are separate criteria specific to each discipline.

# GUIDANCE FOR FESTIVALS AND ADJUDICATORS



Adjudicators should use the language in both the descriptors and the criteria:

as a reservoir of terminology appropriate for each level

to provide a direct link with the mark awarded

to ensure the mark awarded is reflected in the comments made to maintain integrity

MARKING





# ADJUDICATORS

Marks, though seen as important by many, are secondary to the adjudicator's comments.

To be objective and fair, adjudicators must mark according to the descriptors and criteria.

## Failure to do so:

- compromises the standards set across BIFF
- compromises the judgment of the adjudicator
- has the potential to compromise the reputation of a following adjudicator who properly adheres to the scheme
- gives the performer an unrealistic view of their accomplishments
- devalues the achievements of more accomplished performers
- overstates the achievements of less accomplished performers

## ADJUDICATORS

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The bands of five marks offer the adjudicator flexibility to assess the performance within each band as low, middle or high.

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The “outstanding” descriptor band will embrace a performance of a very high quality, technically and artistically.

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The “exceptional” descriptor band will only apply to performances that are near professional standard and as such will rarely be awarded.

# FESTIVALS

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Festivals have freedom to use bands, marks, or both. However, where relying solely on marks, the festival organisers should be aware that adjudicators will base their decision solely on the criteria set out in the new scheme.

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Festivals are requested to adhere to the scheme in its entirety and not compromise the adjudicator's professional judgment, but to uphold the required BIFF standards.

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The language within the scheme is positive and affirming and is intended to recognise achievement and encourage progression.

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This guide should be read in conjunction with guidance currently available to all members in the resource section of BIFF's website.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



# FAQS

## When can I start using the new marking scheme?

- The new marking scheme comes into force from 1st April 2024. Any festival is welcome to apply it from that date. Some may delay introduction until 2025.
- We anticipate that all festivals will have adopted the scheme by the end of 2025.

## Can I use bands and not marks?

- Yes, bands may be used instead of marks, as at present.
- Normal practice is that festivals provide a “tick box” next to the descriptor lines, usually placed near the bottom of a page.
- Adjudicators will often use marks privately in their programmes to rank performers, but these are not announced, or written on the forms.

## Can I use marks and not bands?

- Yes, marks may be used on their own, but band awards are normally implied by the marks awarded. Some festivals may simply choose in general not to ask the adjudicator to announce the band or the marks of each performer, restricting it just to the winner or the highest three places in a larger class.
- However, every festival is different and some performers like to know where they have come in relation to others, whereas some performers might not wish to know. Festivals have complete freedom to use the marking scheme in this respect.

# FAQS

## Can I use medals e.g. gold, silver, bronze, etc?

- Festivals can apply medals to whichever bands they choose, as at present. They are also free to award certificates at any level.
- Nothing has changed in this respect.

## How do I calculate aggregate marks?

- In order to work out the aggregates a numerical scale can be applied to the band descriptors 1 – 7, which can then be added to give a total score.
- There is also the potential to award a 1st place 3 points, a 2nd place 2 points and a 3rd place 1 point, which can also help distinguish one performer from another in the process.
- Please remember that aggregate awards are specific to individual festivals, so there is no hard and fast rule.

## How much flexibility do I have?

- The new scheme offers a strong, underlying positive framework.
- While nearly every UK festival adopts the complete current scheme, as at present, there are some who use alternative band names, choices borne out of historical precedent, and BIFF respects their choice.
- All we ask is that the framework is kept intact so that standards may be maintained across BIFF.
- We trust that festivals will choose to adopt the full specification, which is positive and affirming of performers.

# FAQS

## Can we restrict adjudicators to not using certain bands?

- Adjudicators should not be restricted. The vast majority of performances will sit in the range from progressing, through to honours. Outstanding is a rare award; perhaps one or two given by any one adjudicator at any one festival, and that depending on the overall standard presented. Exceptional is intended to be a very rare award indeed.
- At the other end, we have performances that show promise but are as yet unfulfilled. The developing band is very appropriate here. To place such performers in a higher band is to devalue the achievement of other performers. The language used in the descriptors and criteria has dramatically changed to reflect how positively performances at that level are viewed. It is not a mark of shame to be placed in this lower band.
- Furthermore, adjudicators are professionals who use their experience to assess and encourage performers at all levels. They have been employed by the festival to undertake a professional job and should obviously be allowed to do so. There is a clear expectation they should be following the marking scheme and upholding the required BIFF standards. These are the same standards that give each BIFF festival its status and standing.
- We politely ask that their judgment should be respected and they not be compromised.

# APPENDIX 1

Aide memoire for Adjudicators



WE HOPE THAT THE  
FOLLOWING  
IMPORTANT  
QUALITIES WILL  
SHINE THROUGH IN  
OUR  
ADJUDICATIONS

**Experience & Knowledge**

Evidence of a sound knowledge of the subject area and a clear understanding of technique, identification of faults and problem solving skills

**Balance**

Balance of constructive criticism, praise and advice related to the marking criteria

**Marks**

Marks match written comments, and the marking descriptors and criteria

**Content**

Relevant and clear teaching points, expressed with an excellent command of the English language, with a variety of phrases and terms

**Appropriateness**

Comments appropriate to the age and development of the performer, expressed in a professional manner