



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Dance

DANC4

(Specification 2230)

**Unit 4: Group Choreography and Solo
Performance**

Report on Examination

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General Comments

The despatch of practical examination question papers in the autumn term is generated by estimated entries received from Examinations Officers. Centres are therefore advised to ensure that this information is sent to AQA by the October deadline each year.

Examiners arrange visits directly with their allocated centres. A centre's DANC4 examiner will also be the DANC2 moderator.

It is essential that the Dance teacher liaise with colleagues within the centre, including the Examinations Officer, to identify several convenient dates when space will be available before agreeing an assessment date with the examiner. Examiners arrange their schedules at the end of the autumn term and the beginning of the spring term, meeting centres' preferences as far as possible. It is extremely helpful when teachers are prompt in their response to the examiner and provide an email address, as this can be a quick and effective means of communication. Once confirmed, the examination date may only be changed in **exceptional** circumstances.

Once the date and number of entries are confirmed with the examiner, he/she draws up a timetable for the DANC4 examination and forwards this to the teacher. If changes are made to the number of entries, centres should notify the visiting examiner so that the examination day timetable can be kept accurate. When completing the timetable, the examiner will request to assess all question 5 responses followed by the group choreography of each candidate. This order should be strictly adhered to and wherever possible the order of the candidates for both elements of the assessment should remain the same. Centres should inform their examiner of the practitioner(s) or choreographer chosen by the candidates for their responses to question 5.

Programme notes are required for both questions on the examination paper and, if possible, they should be printed on either side of one sheet of A4 paper. In some centres the word limit is commonly ignored, which can result in a delay of the assessment.

Video recording

Centres are reminded that:

- all assessments should be recorded
- the recording should ideally capture the whole of the performance space, **preferably shot from behind** the examiner's table. In centres where the camera is at the side, the choreographic exploration of spatial elements can be distorted. The use of a camera operator proved of great benefit in centres with limited space beyond the performance area
- the examiner will take away **all** video evidence at the end of examination. If required, arrangements for the efficient transfer of material from a hard drive to DVD need to be negotiated prior to the examination day
- all DVDs need to be finalised before being handed over to the examiner.

In some centres the rubric of the examination paper was not clearly adhered to and there were incidences of group dances being presented with the incorrect number of dancers and the time requirement ignored on both questions. It is also important to note that candidates should only be performing in their own work in the case of a last minute injury to one of their dancers.

Teachers should refer to the online *Practical Units – Examination Arrangements* for more guidance on the preparation and conduct of the examination.

Section A - Group Choreography

Every year, all questions are devised with a view to developing not only the choreographic skills needed to complete the tasks, but skills such as independent research, investigation, contextual understanding and the ability to make links to the theoretical content of the course. Careful preparation is vital and can also underpin the theoretical/written aspect of the course.

The questions were not designed to be a stimulus but, as in the written assessment, an opportunity to focus in on, develop and present coherent ideas around a **specific** topic/theme.

The assessment of the group choreography follows a similar approach to the assessment of DANC2 solo choreography. Mark bands and question-specific mark schemes are used. Specimen and past mark schemes are available on the AQA website.

As in 2010, it was evident that the choreographic work undertaken by some candidates in their first year of study had been extremely useful preparation for this unit in the second year.

All four questions were attempted this year, with questions 3 and 1 being by far the most popular.

Points relating to the choreography for each question

Question 1 was a popular question providing a choice of 'game' to develop ideas from. This allowed candidates to explore different approaches to the presentation; for example, some historical and factual, some humorous and some rooted in personal experience of playing the game specifically chosen.

Some extremely imaginative and inventive dances were presented in some centres, demonstrating a thoughtful consideration of a range of features linked to their chosen game. Care had been taken to undertake thorough research in order to inform and enhance choreographic presentation, often revealing complex intricacies and nuances of the game in their well-crafted dance. Attention to detail allowed for a full exploration of both spatial and group relationships and the form of the game dictated the appropriate dynamic variation, structure and pace of the dance effectively.

The less successful dances struggled to explore any dynamic contrast, usually impeded by the tempo and somewhat regular rhythm of the chosen aural accompaniment. These dances tended to focus in on only one aspect of the game, for example, linear pathways, competition and rivalry, which limited the development and manipulation of ideas in relation to the question. An over-reliance on unison and repetition was in evidence and sometimes the colour of the costumes was the only clue in discerning the meaning of the dance.

Question 2 was one of the least popular questions but when chosen often allowed the candidate to create a highly imaginative, thoughtful, original and extremely successful response. Research into the work of Paul Klee and an investigation into his artistic process in relation to musical structures were vital in answering this question. When detailed examination and analysis had taken place, the candidates were able to fully submerge themselves into applying the same process to their own work, often making reference to rhythm, linear structures, multi-layering, polyphony, harmony, colour, for example, in the production of their own carefully crafted composition.

For some candidates, the starting point was an analysis of a musical composition; for others it was an explanation of how one/some of his paintings evolved. Less successful dances, however, tended to concentrate on the

superficial representation of the features of one of his paintings, becoming sidetracked with either the narrative, theme or the visual outcome of the work chosen.

Question 3 was by far the most popular question on the paper and in some centres it was the only question chosen by the whole cohort.

A number of candidates produced responses that clearly reflected the illuminating research undertaken on the incidents surrounding the ‘dancing plague’ of 1518, often using the quote as a starting point for further investigation into possible theories and events of the time. Some candidates chose a very literal or narrative response, others a more emotional one. Both were appropriate if explored in depth and within the context of the question.

Less successful dances relied heavily on a simple narrative, often using predictable mimetic and literal action to convey the intent with a limited sense of progression in relation to the question. Others mainly concentrated on the themes of twitching, grabbing feet, head in hands, or running chaotically around the performance space with seemingly little understanding of how to create a coherent structure.

As with all the other questions this year, the candidates’ ability to select an appropriate aural accompaniment seems to have improved but sometimes how it is *used* to enhance the choreographic presentation is extremely variable. Often it would enhance the mood or atmosphere but then hinder the candidate when attempting to explore different dynamic potential and action content.

Question 4 was not as popular as the other questions but when attempted, allowed candidates to demonstrate extremely competent choreographic skills in relation to groups. The most successful dances used structure effectively to encapsulate the meaning of the poem and to translate the many vivid images

contained within the text. These presentations clearly revealed a complex understanding of and insight into the poem as a whole, as well as their own artistic craft.

Less successful dances attempted to focus on the distinction between the four seasons but sometimes this caused an imbalance in relation to the poem. Some dances were limited in the exploration of both the spatial and dynamic elements. Others had disjointed transitions that did not help the flow of ideas, again in relation to the poem.

Section B - Solo Performance

Points relating to Question 5

As stated in 2010, in some centres outstanding work was presented and teachers are to be congratulated for their part in supporting candidates in preparation for this aspect of the examination. It was also exciting to see work that had obviously evolved out of an in-depth analysis of the characteristic features of a practitioner's movement style, the performance of this style and the context in which the style is presented.

Centres also seemed to appreciate the broadening of the question to encompass the choreographer of a set work.

The assessment of this question requires a candidate to *apply* specific knowledge and understanding of a practitioner / choreographer to their practical performance. They are not merely being assessed on their own technical and performance skills as in the DANC2 unit. Candidates have the opportunity to link theory and practice and present work which shows clear insight into the

movement style of a specific practitioner. The assessment criteria refer to 'in relation to the specific practitioner / choreographer chosen' throughout. The emphasis is on the skills and qualities needed to demonstrate understanding of a practitioner's movement style and the performance of that particular style, in terms of: movement vocabulary and technical features; spatial and dynamic elements; musicality; the use of the physical setting; and focus/projection to communicate the dance idea.

The most popular area of study from which candidates chose practitioners was Modern Dance in Britain 1965 – 1985, but the other two areas of study were also represented. The most popular choreographer chosen from Section B (set work) was Alvin Ailey.

Practitioners chosen from an area of study viewed this year which allowed for an appropriate outcome included: Christopher Bruce, Richard Alston, Siobhan Davies, Robert North, Janet Smith, Robert Cohan (Modern Dance in Britain 1965 - 1985); Michel Fokine, Vaslav Nijinsky, George Balanchine (Diaghilev's Ballets Russes 1909 - 1929) and Gene Kelly, Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers (Dance in the American Musicals of the 1930s and the 1940s).

It should be noted that an appropriate practitioner to choose from an area of study is one who was *established* at that time and who made a very *significant* contribution to that particular area of study. For example, Christopher Bruce became both a leading dancer and choreographer working in Britain between 1965 and 1985, contributing significantly to the work of Ballet Rambert.

For this unit it is valid to analyse the chosen practitioner's style over the period of his/her choreographic career, as a more in-depth understanding of a practitioner's style may occur. Teachers and candidates are therefore not required to limit themselves to repertoire within the time frame given in Section A or from the set work repertoire of Section B of the Unit 3 examination paper.

As previously stated in 2010, the form of the solos varied from centre to centre and also within some centres, for example:

- a dance choreographed by the teacher
- a reconstruction of professional repertoire
- an extract from professional repertoire with adaptations
- a dance choreographed by the teacher with some student input
- a phrase learnt from a professional workshop and extended by the teacher and/or student
- a former AQA A Level set dance (sometimes adapted).

Each of the above ways of creating the solo could lead to successful performances. The degree of success related to the extent to which the movement style of the practitioner was in evidence (and understood by the performer) and also the suitability of the practitioner's style for each candidate.

Teacher input is vital to ensure all criteria are met. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to reinforce and expand on theoretical discussion and investigation.

On the whole, the selection of appropriate practitioners for individual candidates has improved this year, as has the choreographic content of the solo, allowing candidates more opportunity to display necessary skills and understanding linked to the assessment criteria.

Encapsulating the style of a practitioner requires training and development of bodily skills over a period of time. In some centres it was obvious that preparation for the presentation of this question had started in the first year of study, which is to be congratulated.

The less effective performances were able to present relevant movement vocabulary, but with limited reflection of the practitioner's use of dynamics and space. The ability to sustain the chosen style between two to three minutes was lacking at times. Sometimes the choice of aural accompaniment was inappropriate and did not enhance the performance.

It was clear that some candidates had viewed this aspect of the examination as an opportunity to pursue a choreographic task, concentrating on the choreographic style of a practitioner as a stimulus rather than an exploration or analysis of the *movement* style. This often led to work which had a similar theme to a chosen practitioner but which contained no recognisable movement material and expressive qualities of that practitioner.

Choosing a previous A-Level set dance by an appropriate practitioner was a valid way of answering this question. However, some candidates had spent little time on the exploration of the nuances of the chosen practitioner's style.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

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