

A-Level Dance

Unit 4 – DANC4 – Group Choreography and Solo Performance
Report on the Examination

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General

The dispatch of practical examination question papers in the autumn term is generated by estimated entries received from Examinations Officers. Schools 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 schools. It is essential that the Dance teacher liaises with school colleagues and 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 towards the end of the autumn term and the beginning of the spring term, meeting schools' 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, the examiner draws up a timetable for the DANC4 examination and forwards this to the teacher. If changes are made to the number of entries, schools 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 student. This order should be strictly adhered to and wherever possible the order of the students for both elements of the assessment should remain the same. Schools should inform their examiner of the practitioner(s) chosen by the students for their responses to question 5.

Programme notes are required for both questions on the examination paper. In some schools the word limit is commonly ignored which can result in a delay of the assessment. In some schools this year programme notes were not submitted for question 5. The programme note is to direct the examiner as to how the student has explored, analysed and interpreted the style of the chosen practitioner, which subsequently informs the performance.

Recording of assessed work

- 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 schools where the camera is at the side, the choreographic exploration of spatial elements can be distorted. The use of a camera operator can prove to be of great benefit in schools with limited space beyond the performance area.
- Mode of recording should be discussed with the examiner prior to the visit.
- The examiner will take away **all** recorded evidence at the end of examination. If required, arrangements for the efficient transfer of material from a hard drive to DVD need to be arranged and negotiated prior to the examination day.
- All DVDs need to be finalised before being handed over to the examiner.

As in previous years, in some schools 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 students 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 also 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 are 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. Each question is designed to allow students to thoughtfully consider the selection of movement components; choice, manipulation and structuring of material; choice and use of the aural setting and choice and use of dancers in relation to the student's chosen 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. Specimens and past mark schemes are available on the AQA website.

As in previous years, it was evident that the choreographic work undertaken by some students 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 question 3 being by far the most popular, followed by question 1, question 2 and finally question 4.

Points relating to the choreography for each question

Question 1

This question required the student to choose a *specific* land artist in order to gain insight into the creation of that particular artist's work. In some schools students had very clearly analysed both process and outcome of a range of works by one land artist, which in turn allowed them to present choreography exploring a specific style and approach to the creation of art within this milieu. A full investigation invariably led to a sophisticated presentation of pertinent dance ideas. The programme notes for these students also often showed evidence of thorough research and understanding to underpin the visual presentation. Aural setting was carefully chosen to complement the visual ideas and enhance communication.

The question was designed to allow for a flexible response, however some students chose to completely ignore the need to identify a specific artist and merely concentrated on the visual aspects of one work. These presentations tended to demonstrate a superficial knowledge and understanding of the *concept* of land art, with a heavy reliance on aural setting to guide the examiner back to the question in hand. Depth and texture of explored material was alas sadly missing, with very little dynamic or spatial variation and a limited utilisation of a range of choreographic devices.

Question 2

This question provided a variety of responses resulting in a wide range of achievement. This type of question allows students to fully concentrate on a musical score as *the source* for development and structuring of material. A narrative is not necessary but sometimes can aid a student to

produce a coherent response. At other times however, students can seem to focus purely on a narrative inspired by the score, used then therefore in this instance as a *stimulus* - to the detriment of any in-depth exploration of structure, rhythm and phrasing.

As witnessed last year, the most successful dances prioritised the attempt to embody the musical score whilst establishing and maintaining an appropriate dance 'style' throughout – regardless of the chosen genre in which to present the outcome. These responses tended to reveal an understanding of the characteristics of the musical composition, which were then appropriately utilised in the creation, manipulation and structuring of dance material.

The less successful dances tended to stick to the steady 'pulse' of the composition without any real exploration of the textures within the musical score; heavily relying on unison and repetition of arm gestures as choreographic devices and almost ignoring the opportunity to develop layers of movement material, variations in speed and dynamic highlights.

Question 3

This question was by far the most popular in this section and attracted a range of responses. This type of question allows the student freedom and a chance to present a personal response re the *choice* of specific crisis within history. An historical period or situation was a suitable starting point for research and investigation and provided a relevant context for the answer. However, within that context the student needed to attempt to pinpoint and analyse the *crisis* (specific event, moment, turning point, emergency) and *its defining characteristics*, which in turn could then be explored in detail to inform the movement content and choreographic outcome.

Some students chose to ignore the term 'crisis' and became sidetracked with a narrative visual re-telling of an historical event without any real reference to, for example, 'cause and effect', consequences or repercussions. The more successful dances demonstrated a careful consideration and manipulation of *all* the constituent features to present a highly sensitive and coherent choreographic outcome with a clear communication of researched ideas.

Occasionally insensitive choices had been made in some schools re the choice of crisis to explore, revealing a superficial understanding of the historical event - which resulted in an equally superficial presentation of dance ideas.

Question 4

This question was not as popular as the others in this section but when attempted, allowed students 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 an understanding and insight into the poem as a whole and the ability to weave themes and motifs in a highly imaginative and communicative way.

The less successful dances became distracted by the generic theme of family arguments resulting in a more stereotypical exploration of family life, which sometimes caused an imbalance in relation to the poem and its meaning. Some dances were limited in the exploration of both the spatial and dynamic elements, with choice of aural setting impeding variation. Others had disjointed transitions that did not help the flow of ideas, again in relation to the meaning and structure of the poem.

Section B - Solo Performance

Points relating to Question 5

As stated in previous years, some schools presented outstanding work and teachers are to be congratulated for their part in supporting students 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.

The assessment of this question requires a student to *apply* specific knowledge and understanding of a practitioner to their practical performance. They are not merely being assessed on their own technical and performance skills as in the DANC2 unit. Students 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 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 team of examiners viewed practitioners from all three new areas of study and all three new set works. In some schools the solo material presented was highly appropriate in relation to the assessed criteria and exciting to watch. Male students also seemed to relish the freedom of choice of practitioner the new areas and set works provided.

For clarification, the selection of the specific practitioner from the area of study needs to relate to the movement style of the practitioner as demonstrated in his/her work *for the company*. For example, if the practitioner Rennie Harris, Talley Beatty or Ulysses Dove is chosen for the solo performance the features of their movement styles must reflect the features of their styles shown in the works created and performed by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and not focus on stylistic features of their work with other companies.

It was disappointing to note that once again this year, some schools are still unable to recognise an appropriate practitioner to analyse and allowed students to present work that had tenuous links to an area of study. It was also noted that for the first time schools were ignoring the rubric and basing the solo on more than one practitioner. This was extremely concerning especially when two contrasting practitioners were chosen – outcomes often becoming disjointed and fragmented.

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 students are therefore not required to limit themselves to repertoire.

As stated in previous years, the form of the solos varied from school to school and also within some schools, 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
- the same solo for each student or different ones for the whole cohort.

Each way of creating the solo from the above list can lead to successful performances. The degree of success relates 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 student.

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. The length of the solo is also an important consideration. Overly long presentations can affect the performance of a student re their ability to sustain accuracy, an individual's stamina and consistency of style.

On the whole, and even with new theoretical study, the appropriateness of choreographic content of the solo has improved again this year, allowing students more opportunity to display necessary skills and understanding linked to the assessment criteria. However in some schools it was still apparent that some students had viewed this aspect of the examination as an opportunity to concentrate solely on the choreographic style of a practitioner 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.

Encapsulating the style of a practitioner requires training and development of bodily skills over a period of time. In some schools 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 and relationship to the aural setting. The ability to sustain the chosen style for between two to three minutes was lacking at times. Sometimes the choice of aural accompaniment was inappropriate and did not enhance the performance.

Teachers can find statistical data and grade boundaries information through the following link:
<http://www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html>

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion