

# A-level **DANCE**

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. 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. It is essential that the dance teacher liaises with centre 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 very end of the autumn term and the beginning of the spring term, meeting centres' preferences as far as possible. The examiner will not necessarily have any details about the number of students. 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) chosen by the students for their responses to question 5.

Programme notes are required for both questions on the examination paper. In some centres the word limit is commonly ignored which can result in a delay of the assessment. In some centres this year programme notes were not submitted for question 5. Every student must have a programme note for question 5 even if all students in that centre are performing the same dance. 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. In some centres students did not provide drawings to accompany their practical response of question 4 as requested on the question paper. For questions 1 and 3 students did not always identify their chosen context clearly on the programme note. Both situations created a delay to the assessment.

## 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 centres 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 centres 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. The use of SD cards and memory sticks to store presentations will be accepted by the examiner. 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 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 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 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 1 being by far the most popular, followed by question 3, question 4 and finally question 2.

### **Points relating to the choreography for each question**

#### **Question 1**

This question was by far the most popular in section A and attracted a range of responses. The question allowed the student freedom in the exploration of the concept of *migration* within a chosen context, i.e. bird, cellular or human. The context could be explored through investigation into a specific event/species or from a universal viewpoint.

The most successful dances presented choreography which evidenced thorough research, leading to insightful understanding of the theme and an ability to place the outcome in an interesting and thoughtful contextual setting. Choreographic texture was added with the complex manipulation of the constituent features, especially the spatial elements and use of dancers. Aural setting was carefully chosen to complement the dance idea and enhance communication.

Some students chose to ignore the term 'migration' and became side-tracked with a narrative visual re-telling of either a specific historical event or a simple visual presentation of birds in flight. This was usually accompanied with limited exploration of the dynamic element and a heavy reliance on unison and clichéd gesture/movements.

**Question 2**

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, accessing marks in the higher bands with some outstanding responses presented.

This year students had some choice for the musical source, which allowed for individuality but also the need for careful research and analysis prior to studio experimentation. Some students chose to ignore the rubric of the question and picked other forms of musical composition. Further guidance at the start of the choreographic process may have alleviated this problem.

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 therefore in this instance as a *stimulus* - to the detriment of any in-depth exploration of structure, rhythm and phrasing.

As witnessed in previous years, 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 present a superficial exploration of the musical score often ignoring the opportunity to develop layers of movement material, variations in speed, dynamic highlights and interesting spatial pattern.

**Question 3**

This was a popular question but the level of popularity varied from centre to centre. The question required students to explore a specific 'sacred' number - an exploration of the qualities, meaning and characteristics of an individual number - from either a philosophical, spiritual or even magical perspective, rooted within any religion or culture.

This mode of question can provoke and encourage creativity and independent research and enquiry. As with questions 1 and 2, there was scope for some amount of choice and flexibility in a student's response. Some students embraced this opportunity and produced informative, exciting and sophisticated responses which had been meticulously investigated. The programme notes were extremely important in guiding the examiner to the individual response. These more successful dances demonstrated a careful consideration and manipulation of **all** the constituent features to present a highly perceptive and coherent choreographic outcome with a clear communication of researched ideas and attention to detail.

The less successful dances either tended to anchor the response within a narrative tenuously linked to the chosen source or attempted to present a plethora of ideas leading to a superficial exploration within the time allowed. This also impacted on the coherence and structure of the work and choice of aural setting.

**Question 4**

The most successful dances had clearly explored and analysed the notion of caricature drawing and its use within the context of both the work of Georges Goursat and Parisian high society at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These responses encapsulated the artist's observations - focusing on form, spatial design and subject matter. The development of dance material therefore had coherence

and structural links to the source, presented either with humour or astute attention to detail.

The less successful dances became distracted by the period in history resulting in a more stereotypical exploration of high society and the dance styles associated with the era. These responses relied heavily on mimetic gesture and an understanding of popular dance styles, with the relationship to the aural setting almost taking over as the source.

## Section B - Solo Performance

### Points related to Question 5

As stated in previous years, in some centres outstanding work was presented 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 areas of study and all three set works. In some centres 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 areas and set works provided. It was particularly pleasing to note that more centres and their students were investigating a wider range of practitioners and not just necessarily concentrating on one for the whole centre.

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 centres 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 once again this year, centres 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 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
- the same solo for each student or different ones for the whole cohort.

Each of the above ways of creating the solo 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 the appropriateness of the choreographic content of the solo has improved once again this year, allowing students more opportunity to display necessary skills and understanding linked to the assessment criteria. However, in some centres 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 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 and relationship to the aural setting. The ability to sustain the chosen style between two to three minutes was lacking at times and greater stamina was required to take the performance through to its conclusion. Often, because of this, focus and projection were not fully consistent throughout. 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](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)