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# A-LEVEL DANCE

7237/X: NEA Performance and Choreography  
Report on the Examination

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7237  
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## General administration

The externally set task list for Component 1 is published on AQA secure key materials (<https://extranet.aqa.org.uk>) on 15 September in the academic year of assessment. It is therefore the responsibility of the centre to ensure that students receive the correct externally set task list for the year in which they are certificating.

## Visits for examining this component

Examiners arrange visits directly with their allocated centres. It is essential that the Dance teacher liaises with centres colleagues and their Examinations Officer to identify several convenient dates when space will be available, before agreeing an assessment date with the AQA examiner. Examiners arrange their schedules at the beginning of the spring term after examiner standardisation has taken place, meeting centres' preferences as far as possible. The examiner will not necessarily have any details regarding 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. Examinations Officers must be included in all correspondence. 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 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 the assessment of all solo performance tasks to take place first, followed by performances in a quartet and then finally all group choreographic responses. This order should be strictly adhered to and wherever possible the order of the students for all three elements of the assessment should ideally **remain the same**. Quartets will only be viewed **once** by the examiner. If students have to perform more than once with different partners they will be assessed on the **first** viewing of the quartet.

## Recording of assessed work

The rules outlining how to record NEA work can be found on:  
<http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/dance/as-and-a-level/dance-7237/assessment-resources>

## Section A - Group Choreography

**AO2: 40 marks**

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 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; the use of the aural setting (and physical setting where appropriate) and the use of dancers – all in relation to group choreography and the task set.

The length of the programme note for the group choreography has a maximum word limit of **300 words**. This should allow students the opportunity to explain their own individual interpretation and approach to the question, clarifying how they have translated their research and subsequent

understanding of the chosen task and its focus into the final dance idea(s). It is therefore not necessary for students to describe the choreographed dance they are about to present. Having a word limit encourages students to develop a succinct writing style and therefore should not be disregarded.

All three questions were attempted this year with question 3 being the most popular, followed by question 1 and finally question 2. Popularity of individual questions varied in individual centres.

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

#### **Question 01**

This question, on the whole, was the most imaginatively explored, especially when adhering to the task and the context, ie 'as used in Physics'. Sometimes students found it difficult to transpose their research into movement material and its development – an approach/technique which may benefit from more workshops/application of similar tasks in year one. When students could translate their researched ideas, they tended to produce highly effective outcomes, especially in the selection and manipulation of the spatial and dynamic elements. Due to the openness of the question the structuring of ideas varied, for example the juxtaposition of the two concepts, revealing contrasting sections based on the two concepts or a carefully considered weaving of the two concepts throughout the three – four minute dance.

The choice and use of the aural setting for this question was key to the enhancement of the dance idea(s). Accompaniment ranged from classical structures to sound scores. The aural setting in some cases really assisted the student to create a coherent structure.

The less successful dances relied heavily on the use of simple canon without any consideration of spatial relationships and group formations in relation to the two concepts of echo and reverberation. A number of responses did stray from the question and examiners were taken on emotive, narrative journeys with only vague references to the two concepts.

#### **Question 02**

This was the least popular question and the choreographic outcomes covered a wide range of marks. The task was to explore a recipe from a specific source/context. The era of the 1950s and Elizabeth David's written language, lifestyle, and approach to cooking were all valid aspects to explore alongside the actual recipe itself.

The more successful responses managed to present an exploration of the recipe and its context into a coherent structure. The emotive language of David and the departure away from the austere and traditional recipes of post-war Britain were easy to identify and intriguing to watch. In these dances the structure and the understanding of the chosen recipe were presented with clarity and sometimes with humour. There were other different approaches taken in response to this question, including chef cooking and creating outcomes from the recipe, life in the 1950s from a female perspective to life in the Mediterranean and all the 'colour and flavour' that entailed. In all of these outcomes however, the recipe was at the core of the response.

The choice of aural setting was varied and, in some cases, imaginatively selected, ranging from the reading of the recipe, to popular music of the 1950s to atmospheric 'Mediterranean' music.

The less successful dances either became preoccupied with extracting the ‘action’ words from the chosen recipe and using them in an abstract way or choosing to ignore the recipe completely. Lack of understanding of the source was in evidence which resulted in a confused, superficial exploration of the task.

### **Question 03**

This was the most popular question on the paper and it provided an opportunity for students to be flexible in their research about ‘The Gilded Age’. On the whole it was refreshing to see the research clearly in evidence and being used judiciously to inform responses. Examples of aspects explored were social status, poverty, social depression, religion, immigration, industrialisation, travel, duality/contradictions in society. It was also pleasing to note that visual sources (for example satirical cartoons) were also accessed for inspiration re spatial design and group formations.

The more successful responses revealed a thorough understanding of the chosen research, resulting in highly inventive and sophisticated responses. Some students decided to concentrate on one aspect, others on an assortment of ideas. Both approaches were equally valid, but skill was needed when faced with either an in-depth or more broad exploration of the source to inform the development of ideas into a coherent whole.

In some centres the whole cohort decided to approach this question and the necessary research in a formulaic, unified way. Individual and independent research is to be encouraged, thus allowing for more originality of thought and creative ideas.

The use of duets became the norm in some responses, with many exits and entrances, thus restricting the exploration of the task in relation to group choreography. With these responses it appeared the choreographer did not know how to explore a range of other choreographic devices when trying to keep the focus on the ‘duet’, for example using foreground/background, counterpoint, different types of canon and/or stillness.

This question tended to attract the use of props/set/back projections. In some presentations this really enhanced the dance idea(s), for example status, industrialisation, reinforcement of images. This is an added skill for the choreographer to develop and unfortunately in some cases the relationship between live action and physical setting became distracting.

At times in the less successful dances, too many aspects were chosen which affected the depth of exploration and presentation. The outcomes became stilted with sudden stops and awkward transitions. It also meant students were more likely to choose more than one piece of music, which again caused problems with sectional structuring and transitions. At times, the dancers were under rehearsed and therefore could not fully commit to the performance and the enhancement of the choreographic intention.

## **Section B - Performance**

### **Points relating to Question 04**

### **AO1: 20 marks**

As stated last year, 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

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characteristic features of a practitioner's movement style, the performance of this style and the context in which the style was 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. Students have the opportunity to link theory and practice, and present work which demonstrates clear insight into the movement style of a specified practitioner. The levels of response assessment criteria refer to 'in relation to a specified practitioner' 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: physical/technical skills; spatial elements; dynamic elements and interpretative/performance skills.

As was the case last year, it is exciting to note that examiners viewed a range of performances taken from all areas of study. The introduction of a list of named practitioners alongside the set work choreographers across five areas of study seems to have provided a breadth of choice for both female and male students - allowing the practical exploration of the theoretical content of the course to take place in a meaningful way. 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 cohort.

For clarification, the selection of the practitioner from the compulsory 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 Siobhan Davies is chosen for the solo performance, the features of her movement style must reflect the features of her style as shown in the works created and performed by Rambert Dance company (formerly Ballet Rambert) 1966 – 2002, and not focus on stylistic features of her work with other companies.

The development and form of the solos varied from centre to centre, 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 and that students are not left to veer towards their own style when generating movement material. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to reinforce and expand on theoretical discussion and investigation.

On the whole the appropriateness of the choreographic content of the solo allowed students the 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 alongside their own movement style rather than an exploration or analysis of the practitioner's movement style. This often led to work which had a similar theme to a chosen practitioner but

which contained little recognisable movement material and expressive qualities of that practitioner. This then became more difficult to assess.

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. Occasionally some students presented work linked to a specific dance style/genre, for example tap, ballet, possibly due to familiarity with the style/genre – however these presentations lacked any clear understanding and exploration of the specified practitioner's actual movement style.

A programme note is required for all students in the cohort in order for the examiner to attach it to the individual mark sheet and Candidate Record Form. This can be personalised for the individual student or be generic for the whole group. The compiling of the programme note can be an effective classroom task in preparation for the Component 2 written examination. It should be noted that the word limit for this performance task (150 words) is different to the group choreography tasks in section A.

### **Points relating to Question 05**

### **AO1: 20 marks**

As stated last year, the performance in a quartet has been an exciting new addition to the assessment tasks of this component and, on the whole, the resulting performances were enjoyable and interesting to watch. It is an opportunity for the student to be assessed in a different way to that of the solo performance. The emphasis of the assessment is on a group context linked to a genre (as defined in the specification). This can be as broad as 'contemporary', 'jazz', 'ballet' or have more of a focus on a specific style, eg 'Alston', 'Fosse', 'Romantic'. If a specific style is chosen, it has to be a different one to that performed for question 04.

Sometimes when a specific style was chosen, students found it difficult to succeed, as they were faced with complex, ambitious technical/choreographic challenges which may not necessarily suit their own style and/or the development of a dance in which all four dancers can fully contribute to the final overall performance.

In this Component, the instructions on the question paper for the quartet state 'Your performance must last for a minimum of three minutes and the maximum duration of the complete dance must be no longer than four minutes'. This means that all dancers need to be 'on stage' for at least three minutes of the allocated three – four minutes.

The more successful performances were created to enhance the individual skills of the students and were well-rehearsed and polished in performance. They fully addressed the assessment criteria of: physical/technical skills; spatial awareness; timing and musicality; focus, projection, emphasis and expression - all within the context of a quartet and in relation to style/genre.

The less successful performances were either under-rehearsed or not enough time had been allocated to the development of trust and sensitivity between the group. Contact work was

perfunctory, timing had been considered but there was little evidence of musicality and the communication of the dance idea(s) was not fully clear in the presentation from all four dancers. A quartet performance that is essentially created in the form of two duets or four solos with little interaction as a group of four dancers does not always enable students to demonstrate the skills that are being assessed in this task.

The quartet does not need a theme but, in some cases, this really helped students to fully utilise their interpretative/performance skills.

As with the creation of the duet/trio in the AS qualification, in centres where the task was considered in an appropriate way there were different approaches to the creation of the quartet:

- dance material used which had emerged from a workshop environment and developed by the teacher, students or both
- original work by the student(s)
- original work created by the teacher specifically for the cohort
- the whole of the cohort performing the same dance (which allowed for interchangeable roles)
- the whole of the cohort performing the same dance with individual variation for each quartet
- every quartet completely different within the centres
- links to professional work and practice/practitioners being studied within either the compulsory or optional area of study chosen.

As with the solo performance task, the development of the quartet can commence in year one and can be used by teachers to aid them in the demonstration of the process of choreography and to develop the students' genuine understanding of group choreographic skills.

A programme note is required for all students in the cohort in order for the examiner to attach it to the individual mark sheet and Candidate Record Form. This can be personalised for the individual quartet or be generic for the whole group (if the same dance is being performed). The compiling of the programme note can be an effective classroom task in preparation for the Component 2 written examination. It should be noted that the word limit for this performance task (150 words) is different to the group choreography tasks in section A.



### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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