
GCSE DANCE

8236/C: Performance and Choreography
Report on the Examination

8236
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General

It was very clear that in this, the second year of the GCSE Dance specification, centres had gained confidence in their approach to the demands of the specification. This year moderators saw far more examples of exciting and extraordinary work in both the **performance** and **choreography** elements.

The quality of assessment in centres has improved considerably this year, resulting in many more centres being within acceptable tolerance of the AQA standard and fewer centres needing to have marks adjusted through regression. It is anticipated that as teacher confidence in marking develops as the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) resource grows and as the quality of feedback provided to centres improves, this upward trend in marking standards will continue. It is very important for centres to understand how regression works and to appreciate the importance of consistency in marking standards across the entire cohort. More detailed information about regression can be found on the AQA website and teachers are strongly advised to review this and Teacher Online Standardisation prior to undertaking assessments. Centres are also reminded of the need to consider the language used in the assessment grids which provides clear direction on the work suited to that particular band eg *exceptional* means outstanding or extraordinary. This applies as a national standard (exemplified on TOLS), not just in relation to the cohort within the centre.

There was a significant reduction in the overall number of rubric infringements this year and centres are to be congratulated on the considerable efforts they have made to ensure that wherever possible their students had met all the requirements of the specification, particularly the timing requirements. Information about these can be checked in the specification, and in the Technical Guidance for Component 1 document on the AQA website. Centres are also reminded that they have an allocated Non-Exam Assessment Advisor (NEA) who can provide general guidance on the suitability of coursework.

Performance 40%

Solo Set Phrases Performance

Most students looked reasonably at ease and were able to perform the phrases with confidence, even when there were insecurities in the learned content. However, it was often the case even with the most able performers, that that one performance was more secure than the other. Centres are reminded that marks have to be aggregated across both performances, so it is important to ensure that both are given the same level of scrutiny and attention prior to assessment. Many centres chose to count the students in to their performances using the permitted 'up to eight counts' and this certainly helped less able students to get off to a more positive start. Almost all centres met the specification requirements this year in terms of the performance being a **solo**.

Last year's report highlighted the importance of learning and rehearsing the phrases with equal emphasis on all three skills areas, and it was clearly evident during moderation that this advice had been noted and actioned in many centres.

The demonstration of **physical skills** was generally better this year and the most able students were able to use the medium of the phrases to showcase their own physical facility. In **technical skills**, most students achieved accuracy of action and spatial content, but the students marked in the higher bands were also able to demonstrate the nuances of the style as choreographed, and the finer details of the timing. Sometimes students allowed their enthusiasm for the demonstration

of dynamics to overpower the style, so this is something to be aware of for the future and to encourage more able students to review their work in order to find the right balance between those two elements. The biggest improvement this year was seen in **expressive skills** with greater numbers of students accessing the full range of marks and demonstrating understanding of how the use of these skills can be like 'colouring in' the performance even when musical accompaniment is absent. The most able students really understood and evidenced the expressive qualities of the performance, not just facially but also through their core and their limbs.

Infringements in Solo Phrases Performance

Very few students failed to meet the specification requirements this year, but centres are reminded that they have a responsibility to inform students that copying someone else off-camera; copying from a video recording playing off-camera; performing the phrase to a beat faster or slower than 105 BPM; performing the phrases to music; performing alongside another dancer; attempting only one phrase or being prompted by a teacher are all specification infringements which may be penalised.

Adapted Phrases

AQA approval must be sought well in advance of assessment if the content or tempo of the set phrases as published, needs to be adapted in order **to meet the needs of a specific student**. All approval requests must be received and approved by the deadline published in the *JCQ Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* document using the online form on the GCSE Dance website. The intention behind an access arrangement is to meet the particular needs of an individual student without affecting the integrity of the assessment. This is not the same as *Special Consideration*, which serves a different purpose and is only considered after an assessment has taken place. More information on both these arrangements can be found on the AQA website.

Duet/trio Performance

The quality, demand and range of work presented for assessment this year was on the whole, much better suited to meeting the requirements of the specification and it was noted that many centres had differentiated the content to embrace and challenge the abilities and strengths of every student in their cohort. The most effective work included expressive content which had been deliberately choreographed into the piece to support the choreographic intent; evidence of strong, contrasting dynamics which provided variety; and a range of relationships content, so that students were able to fully demonstrate their skills. Choices of accompaniment in the most effective performance work was often well considered to provide dynamic contrast, variety, interest and opportunities for expression.

The inspiration for and the choreographic content of the duet/trio is the responsibility of the teacher, and therefore this task provides a perfect opportunity for modelling good practice in the choreographic process. Where this task had been successfully modelled, students were really well supported in understanding how to begin creating their own choreographies and also in studying for the written paper, particularly Section A. When students were left to create their own work for this task they were often insufficiently challenged and the resulting performances were limited.

Teachers are reminded that they should use discretion when deciding on the overall length of the piece, which must meet the minimum requirement but need not be the maximum length.

The teacher's programme note

The most successful and most helpful programme notes succinctly and concisely identified a specific choreographic intent and named the two phrases that had been used in the creation of the piece. This is all the information the moderator needs in order to fulfil the requirements.

Infringements in Performance

Most centres had ensured that the duet/trio work met the specification timing requirements, but centres must also remind students that they have to attempt both set phrases and the duet/trio to be awarded any marks for performance. Centres are also reminded that they must film the students in such a manner that they stay in camera shot for the duration of the performance. If students go off camera, that time cannot be included in the total performance time and this might lead to a timing infringement for the student, so it is vital to ensure that this does not happen. If there is insufficient depth of field to keep all students in view for the whole time, the performance would need to be filmed several times following a different student each time.

Demonstration of safe practice underpins the performances of the set phrases and the duet/trio, and the vast majority of students were dressed appropriately and were able to execute their performance work safely. In some cases, however, the content of the duet/trio was not challenging enough to allow students to demonstrate safe practice so centres are advised to check that the performance piece is offering enough challenge for this purpose. Students must be reminded that if they are wearing socks or jewellery; have their hair down covering the face; or are chewing gum during the performance for assessment, that this will impact on the marks they can be awarded.

Mental Skills

The majority of centres had this year correctly acknowledged that the mark can only be awarded for the demonstration of all four criteria **during** the final assessment performances of the phrases and the duet/trio and must not be awarded as a process mark. Most centres were able to mark very accurately in this criterion.

Choreography 40%

The stimulus paper published online in September of the year of assessment provides a choice of starting points for each student to create their own choreography. A copy of the paper showing all the options and detailing the requirements for the programme note should be made available to every student. The options this year were:

- a) a recipe
- b) an album cover design by Storm Thorgerson
- c) an item that can be worn on the head
- d) a fractal
- e) something reported in the national press in the 1970s.

It is important for students to understand and engage with the complete choreographic process as detailed in the specification and it was clear from the outcome where students had been encouraged to spend time researching; improvising; generating; selecting; developing; structuring; refining and synthesising their ideas. This approach almost always led to well-crafted, creative work which successfully communicated an interesting and exciting dance idea.

The most successful and exciting work was demonstrated where students had focused on the detail and developed their ideas into a creative response which had genuinely emerged from the chosen starting point. More limited outcomes emerged when students had referred only thematically to the stimulus. There were many examples of innovative ideas for choreographies using the album cover stimulus and a wok recipe which led to a stunning group piece with dancers representing different ingredients and elements of the cooking process. There were also a number of pieces where students had used humour to good effect and created some very exciting and enjoyable work that was joyful to watch.

The importance of finding the right way into the task cannot be underestimated in terms of overall value to the student, and whilst there is a lot to fit into the course, when students are encouraged and guided to take the time to consider the task in a really creative way it always leads to a more successful outcome than when a student rushes into a decision and shoehorns a preconceived dance idea into a starting point. This is a creative task, and is important for centres to encourage students to be true to it if they hope to be successful.

When chosen for purpose, **action** and **dynamic** content was successful and varied, but where it had not been specifically chosen to support the choreographic intent it was less successful. Most students demonstrated a good use of **space** and where applicable, **relationships**, and were able to use these to support their choreographic intent. The majority of students showed a basic understanding of **structure** and **form**, and were able to use beginnings and endings to support their choreographies. Work marked in the higher bands demonstrated a more sophisticated use of these elements. Again, the majority of students demonstrated the use of simple choreographic devices such as repetition and motif and development, but contrast, highlights and climax were successfully used by only the most able students to inform their choreographic intent. There are two important considerations when marking the **aural /physical setting**, and these are *choice* and *use*. The most successful choices for aural settings were well-considered and provided dynamic contrast, variety and interest to enhance the chosen choreographic intent, but were also used well in supporting the choreographic intent, with highlights in the music matching highlights in the accompaniment and nuances of the accompaniment being picked out within the choreography. Some students had also chosen to place their work in a site sensitive environment, and again where the setting was used in a manner which had relevance to the dance idea, these choices were successful and supportive, but occasionally there seemed to be little or no recognisable connection between the chosen environment and the choreographic intention.

Infringements in Choreography

Very few students failed to meet the specification requirements, but students must be reminded that all of the following are infringements that could lead to penalties. These include but are not limited to; not meeting the minimum duration requirements; having more than five dancers in the choreography; two or more students sharing a choreography; submitting work without a programme note and claiming you have choreographed something yourself when someone else has done it.

Student Programme Notes

The most helpful programme notes were short, succinct and followed the instructions on the cover of the stimulus paper. These notes clearly explain which stimulus has been used and how the student has arrived at the specific choreographic intent from the stimulus. Where students have used an image, they must include a reproduction of that image. It was really helpful to the

moderator when an electronic copy of the students' programme notes had been included on the USB.

Administration and Presentation of materials for moderation

Moderators were very grateful to centres who had really gone to a lot of effort to present the sample material in a neat and well-organised manner. Where centres had followed the AQA guidelines for filming and submitting evidence, the work for each student was quick and easy to access from individual student named folders; the students had identified themselves at the start of each video; and in group performances it was possible to identify the student being moderated through a clear description of what they were wearing. All of these things facilitated a smooth and efficient moderation. However, centres are respectfully reminded of the importance of checking that the marks on the Candidate Record Forms match those entered on the electronic Centre Mark Submission and that any missing work, missing programme notes, unsigned Candidate Record Forms have all been accounted for before the pack is sent to the moderator as this can cause delays in what is a very tight schedule for moderation.

This year it was a requirement that all work be presented on USB which was intended to be easier for moderators to access. Unfortunately, issues with passwords, GDPR compliance, encryption and compression of files caused a myriad of problems both for centres and for moderators. These issues will be reviewed by AQA and new guidance about the manner in which the work on the USB should be protected will be provided in time for submission next year. In the meantime centres are reminded of the need to back up copies and to always retain a spare copy of student work in an alternative format to ensure it is not lost in the event of a computer malfunction, or in the event of a parcel containing the work being lost in transit. Centres should note that work can no longer be accepted on video tape or DVD.

Many centres had gone to great lengths to provide detailed, comprehensive prose annotations to the Candidate Record Forms. Centres are advised that all moderators need are succinct notes which simply give an indication of how the centre has arrived at the mark. This will hopefully ease the pressure on centres when preparing the CRFs and be less time consuming for staff. There were a number of instances where students disappeared off-camera and in these cases, centres would need to consider re-filming the piece following each student separately so as to ensure each student meets the time requirements and can be marked appropriately.

The quality of filming was very high-quality in the majority of centres making the work clear and easy to view but a few centres did submit work where the quality was poor and hindered clear observation of the work. This inevitably disadvantaged students. Issues included poor choices of camera angles, fuzzy or blurry recordings, dancers being cut off, filming from too far away or too close so sections are missed, clipping the start/end of dances, strong stage lighting obscuring facial expressions and students wearing black clothes performing against a black background which made it difficult to see movement clearly.

Overall, 2019 has seen a huge improvement in the quality of work presented for assessment and in the standard of centre marking. The moderation team would like to thank centres for their considerable efforts in making these improvements which have facilitated a much more efficient moderation period. They would also like to thank the majority of centres who ensured that the sample arrived with the moderator on time by the AQA published deadline, as this made a huge difference to the organisation of workloads over the very tight moderation period.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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