



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Dance

DANC4

(Specification 2230)

**Unit 4: Group choreography and solo
performance**

Report on the Examination

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General

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. The DANC4 examiner will also be the DANC2 moderator for your centre.

It is essential that the Dance teacher liaise 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 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 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. 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 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. In some centres 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.

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 arranged and 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 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 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. 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 the most popular, followed by question 3, question 2 and finally question 4.

Points relating to the choreography for each question

Question 1

Was the most popular question and provided students the opportunity to explore and research design principles from another artistic/design perspective. The most successful responses demonstrated a clear and informative insight into the statement by Francis DK Ching. This invariably led to students utilising **all** of the constituent features to explore and present concepts associated with the **whole** statement, usually in a highly imaginative and wholly original way. The programme notes for these students also often showed evidence of thorough research and understanding to underpin the visual presentation.

Less successful dances tended to concentrate solely on either the concept of opposites or the concept of foreground/background with, for example an overuse of two dancers positioned downstage and two dancers upstage, including little or no variation in group relationships and limited consideration of the spatial and dynamic elements. These dances tended to rely sometimes on the colour of the costume to distinguish the 'opposites' and an over reliance on unison also hindered the student's ability to explore any contrast. Sometimes students became too preoccupied with a complicated and at times emotive narrative, which actually detracted from the exploration and presentation of the design concepts included within the statement.

Question 2

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

The most successful dances this year prioritised the attempt to embody the musical score whilst establishing and maintaining an appropriate dance style throughout. These responses tended to reveal an understanding of the genre and 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 beat' without any real exploration of rhythm, heavily relying on unison and repetition as choreographic devices and almost ignoring the development of layers and dynamic highlights. Often the end phrase of the score was not fully exploited to provide a satisfying conclusion.

Question 3

Attracted a range of responses. This type of question allows the student freedom and a chance to be imaginative in the *choice* of a map to explore – however some students took this to the extreme and lost sight of the question completely, becoming sidetracked with the exploration of the specific theme/content of a map and a build-up of a story surrounding the theme, rather than the map itself.

A map may be for example, a visual representation of an area, a diagram that displays connections between the elements presented or a symbolic representation. Maps can be spatially accurate to the territory/region, more pictorial or topological, or diagrammatic. All definitions/meanings of what a map is however emphasise the **connectivity** between the elements and this concept was key to fully exploring the question.

The more successful dances recognised the relevance of pathways and intersections and connected them to aspects/places/themes on the map with a sense of progression, proportion and coherence. There was an appropriate (and at times highly imaginative) choice of accompaniment and effective use of dancers and transitions to show map features and their connections.

Question 4

Allowed for a wide range of responses, focusing on both the illustration **and** accompanying text. Both elements of the question were equally as important and were included on the paper to aid students in the development and presentation of the dance idea. There were many ways to explore this question, for example: visual representation, exploration of character, meaning of text, dynamic exploration, context of image within the context of the whole story.

The more successful dances demonstrated an exploration and consideration of **both** the visual image and the meaning of the text, often conjuring up images of teamwork, characters within the team, trust/support, building/guiding, travelling from A to B within an environment and resolution. Appropriate dynamic and spatial elements were taken from both the visual and the text and weaved into the structure in a highly imaginative and sophisticated way. Choice of dancers (re number and attributes) had been thoughtful and the aural setting carefully selected to enhance choreographic ideas and overall presentation.

The less successful dances became distracted by the generic theme of ‘circus’ and dances were presented which revealed little connection to the crux of the question and became more a stereotypical exploration of the daily lives and skills of circus characters (sad/happy clown, dancing girls, acrobat, tightrope walker), without placing these characters into the context of the Mr Benn/visual scenario. The choice and use of aural setting was varied. At times students attempted to edit three or more pieces of music together, which did not always help to present a coherent structure.

Some students managed to interject elements of humour into their pieces, which resulted in highly engaging presentations.

Section B - Solo Performance

Points relating 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 most popular area of study from which students 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. It was disappointing to note that even in the third year of this present Unit 4 examination, some centres are still unable to recognise an appropriate practitioner to study and allowed students to present work that had tenuous links to an area of study.

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 within the time frame given in section A or from the set work repertoire of section B of the Unit 3 examination paper.

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
- 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 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 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 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. 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.

Choosing a previous A Level set dance by an appropriate practitioner was a valid way of answering this question in relation to a choreographer from the area of study Modern Dance in Britain 1965-1985. However, some students had spent little time on the exploration of the nuances of the chosen practitioner's style.

Centres are reminded that there are new areas of study and set works for 2013.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available at www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html .
UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion