



BOARD OF STUDIES
NEW SOUTH WALES

1998 HSC

**EXAMINATION
REPORT**

Classical Ballet

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1998 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE

CLASSICAL BALLET

EXAMINATION REPORT

The HSC Classical Ballet examination comprises two sections:

1. Written Paper
2. Practical Performance

PART 1: WRITTEN EXAMINATION

There are three written papers which are related to the relevant unit levels and the Major Elective choices made.

1.1 2/3 Unit Related Studies Core Paper – compulsory for all candidates

This paper is divided into two sections:

- (a) Section I: Repertory Studies and Ballet Appreciation – both questions are compulsory
- (b) Section II: Anatomy for Ballet – Part A has two questions – both compulsory
– Part B has a choice of one out of two questions.

1.2 2/3 Unit Related Studies Major Elective – this is only done by those who have chosen the Written Major Elective.

This paper is divided into two sections:

- (a) Section III: History of Ballet in Australia – candidates are required to answer two out of three questions.
- (b) Section IV: Further Anatomy and Physics of Ballet – candidates are required to answer two out of three questions.

1.3 3 Unit Additional Paper – this is completed by 3 unit candidates only. It is compulsory to answer two out of seven questions.

PART 2: PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

The Practical Performance division is divided into three parts:

2.1 2/3 Unit Core – compulsory for all candidates

2.2 2/3 Unit Major Elective

2.3 2/3 Unit Additional

Candidates make their choice and nominate and prepare for this choice during their Higher School Certificate studies in Year 12.

2.1 2/3 Unit Practical Performance – Core – compulsory for all candidates

This section is divided into two segments:

- (a) 2/3 Unit Core Performance – there are three components – Steps and Exercises and a choice of two out of the four Prescribed Works.
- (b) 2/3 Unit Core Composition – which has two components – Improvisation and Composition.

2.2 2/3 Unit Major Elective

- (a) Performance Major Elective – for all those who chose performance as their major elective.

This section has five components:

- (i) Steps and Exercises
 - (ii) Two remaining Prescribed Works (not presented in their Core Performance)
 - (iii) Further Steps and Exercises (Pointe/Grand Allegro)
 - (iv) Pointe (females), Grand Allegro (males) – Prescribed Works
 - (v) Personal Solo
- b) Composition Major Elective – this entails students' own compositions recorded on video.

2.3 3 Unit Additional Performance

- (a) 3 Unit Major Elective: Performance

This section has four components:

- (i) Steps and Exercises
 - (ii) 3 Unit Pointe Study
 - (iii) Repertoire
 - (iv) Personal Solo or another prescribed repertoire.
- (b) 3 Unit Major Elective: Choreography – recorded on video.

SUMMARY OF 1998 CANDIDATURE

In 1998, 44 candidates presented for the Higher School Certificate Examination in Classical Ballet.

The breakdown of their choices was as follows:

(a) Summary of the Candidature – Written

Written Options	Number of Candidates
1. 2 Unit – Core paper only	31
2. 2 Unit – Written Major Elective (Core + Major Written)	4
3. 3 Unit – Written Additional (Core paper + 3 Unit Additional)	7
4. 3 Unit – Written Additional (3 Unit Additional only, having done 2 Unit in 1997)	2
Total	44

(b) Summary of the Candidature – Practical

In the Practical Examination there were 7 pathways available to candidates, of which 6 of the 7 options available were selected.

Practical Options	Number of Candidates
1. 2 unit – Performance Major	19
2. 2 unit – Composition Major	11
3. 2 unit – Related Studies Major	14
4. 3 unit – Performance (first completing 2 Unit practical on the same day)	7
5. 3 unit – Choreography (first completing 2 Unit practical on the same day)	1
6. 3 unit – Performance only (having completed 2 Unit the previous year)	2
7. 3 unit – Choreography only (having completed 2 Unit the previous year)	0
Total	44

PART 1: WRITTEN EXAMINATION

1.1 2/3 UNIT RELATED STUDIES – CORE PAPER

SECTION I: Repertory Studies and Ballet Appreciation

Apart from a few exceptions, the general standard was higher than that in 1997.

Question 1 (Compulsory)

As stated in the syllabus, this question required students to have a sound background knowledge of two of the set ballets. The question tested this knowledge.

Many candidates were not sure of the meaning of the term ‘choreographic style’ and tended to tell the story of the ballet rather than discuss elements of choreography.

Question 2 (Compulsory)

Candidates enjoyed discussing the extension of classical ballet into contemporary ballet and the majority answered the question quite well. Some candidates could not relate to the Sydney Dance Company but marks were given for the quality of discussion of the main points of the question.

SECTION II: Anatomy for Ballet

Part A

Question 3

This question was divided into two sections:

- (a) Candidates had learnt the anatomical names and, on the whole, applied this knowledge quite well.
- (b) Candidates were not clear about the relationship of ‘turn-out’ and ‘classical line’. In fact, most did not know of what classical ballet line is composed. The use of correct ballet terminology with specific reference to classical ballet steps gained higher marks.

Question 4

Answers to this question were better. Most candidates had learned the names of major muscle groups and understood how the shaping of the arms is controlled by these.

Part B

Question 5

It is strongly advised that students know how to analyse the specific question, and answer what is asked in a methodical manner. While candidates were generally well informed on this subject, they did not always know what was relevant to the question and what was not. It is important for them to include in their answers everything that is relevant to the question.

Question 6

The answers to this question were average to good. Candidates were able to write menus for a single day but were not able to relate this to energy levels and control of body weight, points that are relevant to a classical ballet student.

1.2 2/3 UNIT RELATED STUDIES – MAJOR ELECTIVE

SECTION III: History of Ballet in Australia

Question 7

Here, although candidates were well informed, they did not define ‘artistic success’ very well.

Question 8

Candidates handled this question well since they were obviously conversant with the career of the principal artist selected.

Question 9

Here candidates correctly identified an Australian choreographer and a classical ballet by him/her, but were unsure of the elements which distinguish traditional ballet and contemporary ballet.

SECTION IV: Further Anatomy and Physics of Ballet

Question 10

- (a) Answers to this question tended to be superficial. Candidates did not understand the way in which tension affects the muscles, restricting flexibility and locking up joints.
- (b) This was not well answered because of the lack of information given about ‘natural flow of movement’ and the effect of negative tension on it.

Question 11

Students knew the basic angles of the adjustment from arabesque ordinaire to arabesque penché but were not clear about the changing action of gravity on the various body parts when adjusting from one to the other.

Question 12

The majority of candidates answered this well, although many were unsure about the change of direction in the saut de basque itself which should not travel horizontally in the air.

1.3 3 UNIT ADDITIONAL – HISTORY OF BALLET

Summary of the Canditure

Options	Number of Candidates
1 Renaissance	1
2 Pre-Romantic	0
3 Romantic	7
4 British Ballet	0
5 Russian Ballet	0
6 Diaghilev	5
7 American Ballet	1
Total	14

Question 1: Renaissance

On the whole this was answered quite well, with candidates losing marks only for lack of information about social expectations, the effect on ballet today and examples.

Question 2: Pre-Romantic

This question was not attempted.

Question 3: Romantic

The answers to this topic improve every year. More work needs to be done, however, to set the topic clearly in context. Social changes distinguish this period from others and influence the development of ballet during the period.

Question 4: British Ballet

This question was not attempted.

Question 5: Russian Ballet

This question was not attempted.

Question 6: Diaghilev

This question on the association of Diaghilev, Nijinsky and Fokine was handled very well.

Question 7: American Ballet

Setting the background context for the impact of two specific dancers on American 20th century dance was the major problem for those answering this question. Examples of specific choreographies were required.

General Comments and Recommendations

- Candidates should practise reading each question and analysing it before they start to write. Students need to plan an answer – not simply write anything that they know related to any terms used in the question. Key terms must be identified and the point of the question evaluated before candidates start to write their answers.
- Students must know the set ballets thoroughly.
- Students must learn to evaluate the information they are learning and relate it to a classical ballet itself. Giving examples can help to make this connection.
- Information on anatomy, physics, nutrition, and safe dance practices needs to be integrated into the field of Classical Ballet and not just learned as belonging to unrelated fields of study.
- Students need to be able to solve simple problems. Knowing how to formulate a solution to a problem, as in the question on injury prevention, is an important skill to acquire.
- The use of Classical Ballet terminology should be encouraged. Many students cannot write the names of steps in French and few give any examples. It was felt that this might be caused by both the lack of reading of Classical Ballet terms and inability to spell the words or write them. It could also be due to the fact that the syllabus does not require students to learn the French terminology that is standard in classical ballet. Many students also seem to find it difficult to describe the steps, even in English.
- Students also need to be able to visualise the context of a ballet to which they refer. The social and historical setting of the origin of a ballet is fundamental to an educated appreciation of it.
- In answering, it is important to do more than just show accumulation of information. An attempt must be made to come to terms with the purpose behind the question and to show that a real attempt is being made to answer what the question specifically asks.

PART 2: PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

2.1 2/3 UNIT PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE – CORE

(a) 2/3 Unit Core Performance

The general standard in 1998 was higher than that in 1997.

Unseens

The unseens given were representative of those listed in the syllabus. Most students responded relatively quickly to directions given by the examiners. Many, however, were unsure of ballet terms and it was obvious that theory and use of the correct French terms must be emphasised in class. 'Ballet literacy' was seen to be an important teaching/learning responsibility.

Although examiners demonstrated the movements where necessary, it was agreed that use of correct terminology is most important.

Top marks were given to those who danced the enchaînments correctly, showing technical precision and accuracy, good style and presentation and using arm positions which enhanced their balletic lines. Those who made mistakes were allowed a second attempt without penalty.

Prescribed Works

The candidates then performed their choice of two out of the four Prescribed Works. All were able to complete the content of the set pieces with varying levels of proficiency.

Some candidates chose both the Lyrical Study and the Dramatic Study, with only limited discrimination material. Both these studies feature similar lyrical qualities and provide very little contrasting dance abilities to assess. This combination was considered to be a 'soft option' and it is recommended that perhaps the pairing of these two should not be allowed for those presenting the 2 Unit Written Major Elective. It was felt that performing this combination only makes it difficult to give a wise general evaluation of the dance ability of those who chose the 2 Unit Written Major Elective and who, therefore, did not present again for further performance.

The marking criteria for all the Prescribed Works are listed under this heading because the applicants can choose two out of the four for the 2/3 Unit Core Performance.

(i) Lyrical Study

The marking criteria were:

- sense of centre and ability to sustain it
- lyrical flow in transition from one position to another
- physical strength
- sense of line
- musicality
- interpretation.

Any obvious sacrifice of technique in order to gain height did not meet with approval. Those who had the capability, flexibility and strength to lift the leg above 90 degrees whilst still correctly placed, received extra commendation.

It should be noted that the lyrical quality is the essence of this study and the technique must be understated in the interpretation of this lyricism and in the total projection.

(ii) Virtuoso Piece

It was felt that this piece is too difficult for the less efficient dancers and should not be chosen in the compulsory Core component by those who find this a challenge.

The marking criteria used were:

- completion of all the content as prescribed
- technical precision
- stamina and physical readiness
- appropriate balletic dynamics
- artistic presentation.

Those candidates who completed this piece showed a wide range of abilities. The stronger applicants performed the technically difficult parts of this study well (for example the fouetté, ronds de jambe en tournant, the pirouettes en arabesque, the cabrioles and the brisés). The weaker dancers left out the batterie and substituted simpler versions. Stamina and examination readiness were discriminating elements in grading the candidates.

(iii) Grand Allegro

On the whole, this was also well done this year. The way in which the dancers dealt with the changes of direction, the sustaining of the uplift in the air and the landing identified the strong, the average and the weaker dancers.

The marking criteria used were:

- completion of the content as prescribed
- extension and elevation/flight
- equality control of landings
- resistance to gravity.

(iv) The Dramatic Study

It was considered that the characteristic refinement of the classical ballet dramatic interpretation of a role was the most difficult part of this study. Technique was still an essential component but the interpretation of expression discriminated standards in this study.

The marking criteria were:

- completion as set
- interpretive response and harmony with the music
- thematic integrity
- expressive projection
- technical foundation.

(b) 2/3 Unit Core Composition

This section comprises two components:

(i) Improvisation

The quality of participation in this section is improving each year and there appears to be a continuous upgrading of the quality of improvisation in balletic study.

Highest marks were awarded to those students who were able to interpret the music and respond to changes in the music in an imaginative way. Top marks were given to those who responded in mood and showed an inspired response to this stimulus. The performance of classical ballet steps which had no relationship to the music and the overuse of walking or acting received fewer marks.

The marking criteria were:

- response to the music stimulus
- interpretation and expression
- appropriateness of movements chosen
- thematic unity (including starting and finishing poses).

(ii) Composition

This section is about putting theory into practice; it was obvious that students needed more guidance about compositional elements. They benefit from some theoretical knowledge of these, through understanding the application of these elements and by the use of composition terminology.

The marking criteria were:

- thematic development
- choice of movements
- compositional elements (clever use of repetition, spatial design, use of time/music, relationships created, flow, use of dynamics, artistic unity)
- performance presentation
- appropriateness of level of difficulty chosen.

Viva Voce and Diary

Applicants were expected to be clear about their work and to understand simple basic composition terminology and concepts.

Being verbally articulate and explaining the composition process was considered most important.

2.2 2/3 UNIT MAJOR ELECTIVE

(a) Performance Major Elective

Completion of the remaining Prescribed Works was the first task. This was then followed by two unseen exercises, the Set Pointe/Male Study and Personal Solo.

(i) Steps and Exercises

(ii) **Prescribed Work** (see marking criteria under 2/3 Unit Core Performance)

(iii) Unseens

Two unseen exercises were set. These included pointe work for females and steps of elevation for males. On the whole, this section was well done.

The marking criteria were:

- quickness in responding to instructions
- appropriateness of arms
- technical precision
- response to music
- artistic representation.

(iv) **Set Pointe** – top marks were given to those whose feet were strong on pointe and placed correctly and who had mastered technique to a degree that freed them from strain and allowed expression.

Male Study – control of pirouettes, lightness in elevation, technically strong landings and good use of arms were the distinguishing criteria here.

The marking criteria for this section were:

Set Pointe	Male Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of all as set • footwork and pointe strength • precision and technique • presentation and projection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of all as set • detailed elevation technique • control of pirouettes • interpretation/presentation/projection

(v) Personal Solo

It is recommended that students and teachers choose a composition that will challenge the dancer but enhances the student.

The candidate who received top marks gave a brilliant performance, choosing music, theme and steps that highlighted special talents. All candidates tend to perform with more expression when allowed to select for themselves.

The less satisfactory personal solos included steps which were beyond the capabilities of the dancers and which identified technical inabilities, restricting performance projection.

The marking criteria were:

- interpretation
- appropriateness of the level of difficulty
- suitability of the movements for the dancer
- performance ability.

(b) Major Elective Composition

(i) Composition (video)

Although it is agreed that this section of the syllabus is a valuable component, it was felt that the quality of applications in this section was poor. Students obviously need more assistance in order to be able to coordinate others to perform the composition. Help is needed to make a video that is well lit and has a contrasting background.

Great care needs to be taken in choosing music that is not too complicated for inexperienced composers and which gives some scope for creating interest for the viewer.

It was noted that there was little, if any, close contact work produced and that the effect was rather impersonal, generating very little 'feeling'. Students choosing this section need plenty of practice.

The marking criteria for this section were:

- thematic development
- appropriate choice of movements
- compositional components (clever use of repetition, spatial design, use of time/music, relationships created, flow, use of dynamics, artistic unity)
- performance quality
- arrangement of groupings.

Viva Voce and Diary

Students need to be more articulate about compositional elements and learn to examine their product with an artistic eye. Some revealed much research into their theme and their diaries revealed much of their understanding about composition.

The marking criteria for this section were:

- clarity about purpose of composition
- understanding of compositional elements
- use of composition terminology
- verbal articulation about the process of composing.

2.3 3 UNIT ADDITIONAL PERFORMANCE

(a) 3 Unit Major Elective Performance

(i) Pointe Unseen/Male Unseen

The majority of the candidates in this section were well prepared and coped with the unseens well.

(ii) The marking criteria for this section were:

Pointe Prescribed Work	Male Set Study
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of content as prescribed • technical precision/balance control • stamina and physical readiness • artistic interpretation of the music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • completion of content as prescribed • technical precision/control/elevation • stamina and physical readiness • artistic interpretation of the music.

(iii) 3 Unit Set Repertory Study: Giselle: Peasant Pas de Deux (with the coda for females only)

This was well performed by all and content knowledge was not an issue.

The marking criteria for this section were:

- completion of the repertory piece as set
- technical precision
- interpretation of the character
- expressive quality/artistic projection.

(iv) Personal Solo or another prescribed repertory piece (Female: Coppelia: Dawn/Prayer, Male: Swan Lake/Les Sylphides)

The marking criteria for this section were:

- completion of task as prescribed
- presentation skills
- personal expression
- performance ability
- artistic stage projection.

3 Unit Choreography Major Elective

(i) Choreography (video)

It was felt that applicants were not strong in demonstrating awareness of compositional elements. More practice is needed in this work.

The marking criteria were:

- thematic development: (introduction, development, conclusion)
- compositional design: (unity, variety, contrast, cyclic form, repetition, alliteration, rhyme, spatial floor design, relationship with the music, artistic form and group organisation)
- age related issues (management of level of difficulty, appropriateness of theme for age).

Viva Voce and Diary

Again, students need to be more articulate about compositional elements and to learn to view their product with an artistic eye. The level of discussion of composition was poor, on the whole.

The marking criteria were:

- clarity of expression of ideas
- explanation of motivation/stimulus
- discussion of compositional elements using composition terminology
- diary development
- verbal articulation about the process undertaken.

General Comments and Recommendations

Music:

- It is strongly recommended that students be made aware of the fact that they can use the BOS tape for set studies, if they prefer it.
- A short rehearsal time with the pianist is allowed before dancing.
- For personal solos it is advised that teachers check the time allocation as stated in the KLA handbook.

Costumes:

- Very little time is allowed here for changes of costume and it is important that candidates wear only simple costumes for personal solos.

Examiners

This year the examining body was made up of two female examiners, one of whom was a continuing examiner, and two male examiners both of whom were continuing for the second time.

Two studios were used concurrently, with two examiners in each. The pairing of the examiners was changed each day to ensure that there would be pairing with the continuing examiner and planned control across the board during the examination process. Examiners were moved from one studio to another to experience both environments.

The examiners commented that the promotion of levels that are too high for the technical standard of the dancers is inadvisable. The key to success for applicants is in the choice of their seven elective options.

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