DANCE

In 1996, 211 candidates presented for the Higher School Certificate examination in 2 Unit Dance.

Preface

The general comments printed below are based on the 1993, 1994 and 1995 Examination Reports. While significant improvement was noted in the 1996 candidature, the points made in those **General Comments** are still relevant and worth emphasising for both teachers and candidates preparing for the 1997 Higher School Certificate Examination.

General Comment

In the four years in which 2 Unit Dance has been offered as a subject for the Higher School Certificate, significant positive developments have been noted in the way in which students have been prepared and have presented themselves for their practical examinations and accompanying viva voce.

The following points were raised during the marking process and should serve as a useful guide for teachers and future candidates:

• In general candidates conducted themselves well and managed to establish a rapport with the examiners. Students should be aware, however, that the markers, whilst being supportive, must also be pleasantly neutral.

Costumes

• The guidelines for the use of costumes are published in the appropriate Subject Manual and Board Bulletins. Students should be aware that failure to adhere to these guidelines may incur a marking penalty.

• Students should consider that performances for the HSC are performances as such but within a special context, that of the Higher School Certificate Examination, and, consequently, not all the usual *theatricality* associated with costumes and make-up will be appropriate.

- While *costumes* are permitted with some options included in Major Study Performance and Composition, many more candidates opted, where appropriate, to use plain form-fitting dance wear, which enhanced their line and body shape and clarified the style and intent.

Grooming

- Generally this was very good, candidates should be aware, however, of the inappropriateness of wearing jewellery during a performance. Make-up should be minimal and, in this context, not the usual theatre make-up.

Audio Tapes

When audio tapes were used to provide the accompaniment for dances, some students appeared to be unaware of the guidelines for their use:

- **there must be nothing other than the *work* on the tape;**

- **the tape itself should be of good quality;**

- ***silence* when used must be *recorded* on the tape;**

- **tapes should be *cued*, which means not fully rewound, but ready to play within approximately 3 seconds of the *play* button's being pressed;** and

- **each candidate should have his/her own copy of the tape both for security purposes and because frequent playing may diminish the quality of the recording (each candidate is strongly advised to bring 2 tapes to the examination).**

Music editing, when used, was generally of poor quality (see additional note regarding editing music and forming a work).

Time Limits

- Some candidates seemed unaware of the time limits set for each component of the practical examination and of the fact that failure to comply with them might incur a marking penalty.

- The best candidates took the option of using the full time limit and were able to sustain the required energy. Other candidates who used the allocated time to the full were unable to sustain the energy, style and performance quality.

Safe Dance

• **Candidates should be aware that the course components are not treated in isolation. Hence *safe dance practices* need to be applied equally to Core and Major Study Composition as well as to Performance.**

• **Safe dance should not be considered solely as a course component in the viva voce section of Core Performance.**

Safety **is a primary concern in the teaching program for all practical course components, the results of which should be observable in the candidate's work as a whole and not as a token *theoretical* component.**

Viva Voce

• The best candidates took time to consider what was being asked in the question, planned an answer which was both specific and well illustrated in movement. They addressed both parts of the question where appropriate and were able to use correct terminology.

   Less able candidates included in their responses expressions such as: *and things like that, and so on* and *you know.*

• Candidates should be aware that they could be required to demonstrate in response to some viva voce questions.

   Poorer responses were often given as *form answers*. In this category some candidates appeared to believe that if they discussed *everything* they would eventually answer the question.

• Candidates should not assume that the examiners can read into their answers the terms needed to answer the question successfully - use of terminology (see Syllabus p.20) must be explicit.

Core and Major Study Composition

Core Composition

Core Composition is seen as being the realisation, in practical terms, of the study of Dance Composition founded on a sound theoretical base. The theme/intent of the composition is seen as:

• providing a source, focusing and clarifying ideas; and

- generating movements which are structured by the use of motifs and phrases resulting in a personal style.

The source of movement may be kinaesthetically based - such as a response to the selected accompaniment or thematically based movement in response to an idea.

The following responses caused some concern:

Motif

This was, too frequently, not clearly established, was not *personalised* and often consisted of single gestures which seemed irrelevant to the theme or intent.

Manipulation of Phrases

This was not understood as being a component of structuring a dance and, therefore, was absent from some candidates' works.

Cutting and Editing Several Pieces of Music

These were treated as a way of organising sections of the dance rather than as the *forming* of the dance being based on constructional skills.

Choice of Themes

To invent movement and sustain a personal movement style, some candidates chose themes that were seen as being almost too difficult, e.g. suicide, drug abuse, violence, birth/death, personal loss, freedom, conformity, etc. The result, in these cases, was often stereotypical, comprising mimetic movements, dramatic narrative, dance drama and demi-character. Candidates were concerned more with the *narrative* than with being able to show *personalisation* of movements and their construction into phrases.

Understanding the Syllabus Outcomes in Core Composition

Some candidates presented responses which appeared to be based largely on *intuition*. This resulted in a *dance to the music*. In these cases the candidates apparently failed to understand the Syllabus Outcomes and, consequently, produced lower order responses so that the *motif* became an arm gesture, and personal movement style became movements chosen from a set vocabulary identified with training techniques such as: the *splits*, *grand jetJ*, various *attitudes* and *arabesques*, *poses*, etc, and that the *work* became a series of *shapes* which were never intended to convey meaning.

Use of modern expressiveness, that is a dramatisation of themes in place of abstraction and symbolism.

The use of genre-based styles in Core Composition in which the focus should be on the exploration of movement from a personal perspective (personal movement style may not allow candidates to achieve the stated outcomes). This response should not be interpreted as being *technique free* but the *technical foundation* should not impose stylistic considerations on the choreographer. The technical *foundation* for the movement devised for Core Composition would be best described in terms of *modern dance technique* (based on the philosophical premise underlying Core Performance). Modern Dance provides a common technical base and, at the same time, allows for freedom of use or interpretation in a personal style (often expressed as Modern Contemporary Dance Style). It is therefore seen as the most appropriate base for student compositions.

It was further noted that the best candidates:

- demonstrated the ability/skill to create locomotor movement patterns/sequences and/or phrases which were related to the intent/theme;

- demonstrated the ability/skill to organise movement into phrases;

- used *space* not just for the sake of having to use the space but to enhance the theme/intent;

- used a full range of arm/leg/torso combinations to enhance personal style;

- possessed the ability to create motifs, movement, and to use dynamics that showed originality (were unpredictable - *quirky* - idiosyncratic);

- produced works which appeared to be based on improvisation, experimentation and refinement;

- possessed the ability/skill to create transitions, especially in locomotor patterns, that developed from the original movement phrases;

- produced works that were interesting, original, had a clear intent, did not respond with clichJd/stereotypical movements - in other words - a fresh approach;

- developed movement intent through the whole body, not merely by means of arm/leg gesture;

- used the *space* for a purpose closely related to the intent; and

- used their ability or skill to abstract from the literal or representational to create movement material that still clearly expressed the intent of the work.

1996 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Average candidates:

- included in their compositions clear motifs which were repeated or reshaped but with little development into phrases;

- provided *personalised* movement, motif and phrasing but without clear forming and logical development;

- used the *space* but the use was not obviously linked to the intent; and

- sometimes tended to produce more *representational* works.

Poorer candidates:

- often relied on facial expressions to communicate intent;

- presented a series of *dance steps* with little or no reference to the Syllabus study;

- used motifs that were merely modern or contemporary gestures/steps to which were given irrelevant/questionable meaning;

- used inappropriate generic styles, e.g. jazz dance, hip-hop, aerobic dance, neo-classical ballet - instead of personal style;

- *forming* relied on the structure of the accompaniment alone or there was not clear structure at all;

- arm patterns/gestures dominated the work and did not include other body parts or develop into movement sequences/combinations;

- did not use the space effectively;

- devised movements that were questionable in terms of safe dance practices;

- the *climax* of the phrase/work was often a jump, or a walk into a split leap; and

- appeared more intent on displaying *tricks* such as the flexibility of the dancer rather than movements/transitions/sequences related to the theme or intent.

Viva Voce Core Composition

Best candidates:

•   explained and demonstrated how they had developed unity throughout their work;

•   possessed excellent understanding of their work and were able to articulate the process;

•   were able to distinguish between the elements of construction/process/nature of the composition and did not add irrelevant material;

•   included demonstration of material relevant to their answer and were able to articulate their response while demonstrating; and

•   showed understanding of the internal structure of components within the general form of the composition.

Average candidates:

•   often had *rehearsed* answers that did not cover the question fully;

•   answered a part of the question in detail but failed to answer the whole question; and

•   knew the appropriate terminology and attempted to answer but did not apply the response to the work in an appropriate manner.

Poorer candidates:

•   focused on one element of their work and disregarded the question;

•   did not know/understand the term *elements of construction*;

•   produced a *rehearsed answer* irrelevant to the question; and

•   responded in terms of the *nature/process of composition* instead of the *elements of construction.*

Major Study Composition

General Comments

Option 1

• The work presented should reflect the additional 40% of time

• Have a greater sense of being a *work* than an exercise:

Well established	-	personal style
	-	abstraction
Clearly communicated	-	sequencing
	-	transitioning
High order	-	motif and phrase
	-	forming
	-	unity

• the *work* should **not** be seen as another Core level dance.

Option 2

• Re-working the Core dance should reflect the additional 40% of time allocated to this component.

• The performance should possess more of a sense of a *work* (see above).

• New work should be developed but not simply by adding another dancer (or two), performing some sections of the original dance in unison or with elementary forming.

Option 3

The performance

• should have the sense of a *work* (see above);

• should use the *elements* and *devices* for a specific purpose; and

• should focus on *considerations for 2 or 3 dancers* related to the intent.

Best responses (New Work):

• were notable for close contact work in groupings;

- experimented with relationships relevant to the theme or intent and the number of dancers;

- presented interesting groupings;

- partner work was impressive;

- used *devices* for a purpose, e.g. *unison* using spatial relationships in an interesting way; *canon* with the movement's being fragmented, manipulated and developed with moments of stillness, complex timing and complex patterns;

- included closer physical groupings which allowed new shapes, interweaving of bodies, supported and, where appropriate, *lifts*; and

- possessed the sense of *work* rather than a well crafted dance.

Average responses:

- used elements and devices, e.g. groupings, canon, unison, etc, but included less complex sequences, transitions and relationships.

Poorer responses:

- were *dramatic narrative* and *demi-character* in style;

- sometimes funk, jazz, hip-hop and *video-clip* in style;

- some comments were the same as for Core Composition;

- some were under the minimum time limit.

Best responses (Re-worked Dances):

- motifs and movement phrases were re-worked for individuals within the group, taking into account groupings, relationships, use of space and dynamics;

- included new material developed and based on intent.

Major Study Compositions - Viva Voce

Best responses:

• Candidates understood and linked both manipulation of phrases and transitions to intent; and

• demonstrated clearly while linking the demonstration to their response.

Average candidates:

• talked about motif and manipulation, but even though they touched on aspects of the question, they were unable to expand on their ideas or to demonstrate them.

Poorer responses:

• Here candidates frequently disregarded the question and retold their intent;

• did not demonstrate in support of their answer;

• spoke about the Core and even about *unity*;

• spoke about basic or simple motif in relation to intent and manipulation of motif rather than the phrase;

• did not appear to understand the meaning of *phrase*; and

• did not appear to understand the meaning of *transition* or explained it as a *walk/run to a new spot*.

General Comments

Music Selection/Accompaniment

It is important that the music/accompaniment chosen by the candidate:

• provides the stimulus to generate new movement or movement responses in a personal style. Music which is repetitive, minimalist or has monotonous verses and choruses may not assist the candidate to achieve the desired Outcomes;

• should not consist of a series of shorter pieces of music joined together to create an *artificial structure* for the dance; and

- when *live* music or a particular musical instrument provides the stimulus, it is to be pre-recorded on tape and the tape used to accompany performances of the work. Music which is *improvised* cannot be seen as providing structure or assisting in providing structure for the dance.

As stated previously, some styles of dance other than Modern Contemporary dance may not be suitable to achieve the Outcomes expected from the Composition Components of the Syllabus.

Whilst the use of improvisation during the problem-solving process is important, continuing evaluation of the improvisation, selection and refinement of movement is essential to ensure that the motif(s) and phrase(s) communicate the intent of the work. It is important that the candidates show their work during its developmental phases in order to refine communication.

Candidates should not try to communicate or solve the world's problems in a 4-5 minute dance composition. Gestures which symbolise the *meaning of life* and a general *angst* against the world may not be appropriate in achieving the Outcomes of the Course Component. Simple themes, abstracted or symbolised, clearly stated, developed over a period of time with the opportunity for refinement, are more appropriate.

Performance values, i.e. technique and integrity, should be applied to composition as well as safe dance practices. Modern dance technique, modern (contemporary) dance styles, focus, commitment, energy, etc, should be obvious.

The study of dance through Core Appreciation should be used to enhance Composition work - Exemplary works should be studied to see how others communicate intent in a personalised way.

Viva Voce:

The allocated time for response to the Viva Voce questions may be used by the candidate to his/her best advantage - thinking time is at the candidate's discretion - he/she may read and re-read the question as many times as he/she wishes.

If *blanking out* occurs, the candidate is advised to stay in the room and stay calm - nothing is lost by taking time where necessary.

Core Performance

General Comments

Teachers and students should read and become familiar with the terminology and the Outcomes expected for this Course component.

1996 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

Students of Modern Dance technique and Modern Contemporary Dance style should be able to differentiate and understand the stylistic characteristics.

Most candidates seemed to understand and to demonstrate the characteristics of the specific technique and style. The best candidates demonstrated the use of body weight, resistance into and out of the floor, the concept of centre being challenged vertically *off centre* and horizontally *lower centre of gravity* and the response to oppositional forces, e.g. contraction/release, fall/recovery.

Safe dance practices need to be integrated into all practical classes

Students need to be aware of their abilities/limitations and their muscular/skeletal restriction. This awareness should be demonstrated through correct static and dynamic alignment. The principles of Safe Dance need to be applied throughout all movement sequences. Consequently, when a group of students are presenting a *class work*, it is important that the work be adapted to suit the needs and capabilities of all students.

When Core Performance work is being developed, a higher order of difficulty/complexity should be considered in sequences relative to the style - many students performed *safe* dances showing clean, neat lines but with a low order of difficulty in the locomotor sequences. These sequences should involve complex combinations demonstrating balance, strength and travelling elements.

Best candidates:

• demonstrated a high level of technique relative to their anatomical structure;

• demonstrated an extension of line and the ability to control the release of energy (dynamics);

• were committed to the work, performed with a sense of confidence and were able to sustain both their energy and performance quality; and

• challenged their technical abilities in keeping with safe dance practices.

Poorer candidates:

• showed lack of application of safe dance especially hyperextension of any of the joints of the body, e.g. full back arches, full neck rolls, splits (relative to anatomical capabilities), dropping to the knees without control, were a cause for concern. Students must be aware of what is unsafe, or is unsafe execution and, consequently, these must be avoided;

• need to be aware of controlling the landing from any hop/jump sequence. Clear placement of the *supporting* and *working* legs needs to be obvious;

- locomotor transitions need to be developed and, in some cases, movement sequences must be made more complex;

- most low order candidates lacked confidence in terms of the choreography and this affected their performance quality.

The emphasis in Core Performance is on Modern Dance technique and Modern Contemporary Dance style.

Viva Voce

Core Performance

Best candidates:

- named an injury;

- clearly identified possible causes;

- showed a broad understanding of how the body works; and

- explained how Safe Dance practices could be applied in terms of prevention of a specific injury.

Poorer candidates:

- were not specific in terms of their injury selection and failed to answer both parts of the question.

Major Study Performance

General Comments

Major study performance allows students to work on dance technique and style within a thematic context.

A number of candidates seemed unsure about how to select, nominate and describe their style of dance. In terms of the Syllabus *theatrical* is NOT a style of dance. *Theatrical* and *High Art* are both *modes of presentation* which need to be clearly understood by candidates (2 Unit Syllabus, pp.34-35). While the 'mode' of some styles is inherently *theatrical*, such as *tap, jazz dance,*

musical theatre, etc, other styles of dance may be treated in a *theatrical* or *high art* mode of presentation.

Dances presented as *high art* should not have a thematic context. It is movement for movement or skill's sake - a kinaesthetic response with the purpose of a *virtuosic* demonstration of technical skill as well as its inherent performance quality for its own sake. Those who are not of this calibre technically should be advised to select a *theatrical mode of presentation*. This is not to imply that the *theatrical mode of presentation* implies a lesser standard - rather that the movements chosen and their execution seek to realise the thematic *theatrical* purpose.

The candidate's technique and performance quality relevant to the selected style and mode of presentation should reflect the 40% of indicative time allocated to this Course Component.

Better candidates:

•   demonstrated a high level of technical skill, incorporating safe dance practices, within their chosen method of presentation; and

•   were consistent in their interpretation and control of the dynamics/energy and were able to sustain performance quality throughout the work.

Poorer candidates:

•   were unsure of their mode of presentation and were unable to apply the principles of their selected style to the execution of their movements; and

•   failed to sustain energy and their commitment to the performance throughout the work.

When presenting a *class work* for major study performance the choreography should be modified to suit the technical skill and ability of the candidate.

Major Study Performance Viva Voce

Better candidates:

•   explained the most important features of the dance technique of their nominated style;

•   used demonstration to support their responses; and

•   referred to the pioneers who developed their style and the stylistic features of their technique.

Poorer candidates:

•   were not aware of the performance quality on which they had concentrated in their presentation.

Core Appreciation

General Comments

•   If two questions require similar responses, students should not assume that the material presented in the first part of the question is *understood* and automatically transferred to the second part.   Separate questions require separate answers, unless otherwise indicated.

•   Candidates should ensure that the question numbers of the questions they answer are clearly indicated in the margin. It is not the responsibility of the examiners to decipher where responses begin and end.

•   Candidates need to be aware of their responsibility to make their answer accessible to the marker. They must ensure that their handwriting is legible and that **their answer is written in ink or biro, not in pencil**.

•   Students should be able to differentiate between different question types, e.g. an answer which calls upon them to *describe* and an answer which calls upon them to *discuss*.

•   Candidates should present a response which shows logical development and planning.

•   Students should be aware that repeating key words without substantiation does not fulfil the requirement of the question.

•   Students should be reminded of the importance of reading the *Directions to Candidates* in order to fulfil the requirements of the examination.

Part A

Question 1

(a)   (i)   Most candidates seemed to be familiar with the specific works.

         Better candidates:

                 •   identified the requirements of the questions and then proceeded to tailor their answers to those requirements;

    •   developed their responses chronologically or in the sequence of the work, thus providing a framework for their description;

    •   identified movement in terms of the thematic considerations of the work;

    •   used appropriate and descriptive language, citing specific examples from the work to support their views;

    •   accurately identified specific movement components of the work; and

    •   used appropriate terminology.

Average candidates:

    •   responded in a more general way to the question;

    •   offered fewer illustrations to support their views;

    •   presented generalised information that was not always specific to the question;

    •   used appropriate terminology; and

    •   were unable to define the movement content of the work.

Poorer candidates:

    •   produced responses which, mostly, repeated the stem of the question.

(ii)   Not all candidates were able to *discuss* the question. While they could talk about the movement content of **Software Dragon**, they were not able to refer to specific examples within the work. Comments on the ways in which candidates responded to Question 1(a)(i) also relate to Question 1(a)(ii).

The best candidates discussed all aspects of the question, structured their discussions and illustrated them with comments linking content and intent.

Whilst average candidates recognised the choreographer's intent, they often expressed it in terms of costume, set, etc, rather than of movement content, as required by the question.

The poorer candidates often provided irrelevant information. Some mentioned the word *intent* but were unable to discuss it in relation to movement.

(b)   (i)   In general, candidates demonstrated their knowledge of the specific sets, props and lighting in both **Boxes** and **Poppy**; they were, however, unsure of their function in contributing to the atmosphere of the works.

The best candidates were able to use appropriate terminology to discuss how theatrical devices assisted in creating atmosphere in the two specific dances.

Average candidates were less clear of the function of sets, props and lighting. They were also unable to define adequately the term *atmosphere* in relation to the question and often limited their discussion to a description of the sets or lighting or props.

Poorer candidates generally restricted their responses to a repetition of key words in the question without substantiation or explanation.

(ii)   The question produced a range of responses. Some candidates argued the lack of differentiation between the nominated work and others performed by the Sydney Dance Company. Others singled out the salient points and related them to subsequent repertoire. Yet others limited their responses to features of the set works, without reference to any additional works.

Best candidates:

- distinguished features of this work in its historiographic context;
- successfully discussed issues related to theme, choreographer's intent, movement features and production elements of specific works of the same choreographer; and
- successfully compared and contrasted the set works with others.

Average candidates only partially addressed the issues above.

Poorer candidates discussed the set work in general terms, without answering the question.

Part B : Major Study Appreciation

General Comments

Teachers and students should be aware that there is an expectation that the 40% indicative time allocation for this Course Component should be reflected in the depth of understanding which is shown in the quality of the answers.

Question 2

(a)   The majority of those who answered this question selected Doris Humphrey.

The best candidates defined the term *seminal* and proceeded to discuss the artist's contribution to dance. They talked about her impact on the Dance World and substantiated this with facts and references to the life of the artist and works produced by her. Responses were well structured, factually correct and included appropriate dance terminology.

Average candidates provided only limited discussion of the artist's impact on the Dance World and included only a few facts, often irrelevant or incorrect, to back up their cases, tending to concentrate on individual works or peripheral matters.

Poorer candidates avoided any definition of the term *seminal* and provided irrelevant and, too often, incorrect information.

(b)   This question also proved to be a challenge; whilst the majority of candidates partially understood the artist's work, they did not appear to understand the meaning of the word *philosophy*, its basis as well as how it underpinned the artist's approach to making dance works. Consequently, responses were superficial or restricted to a discussion of the dance works themselves.

Question 3

(a)   The majority of those who answered this question selected Bob Fosse. The remainder selected Ruth St Denis, or the St Denis/Shawn partnership.

The majority merely described the content of the photographs rather than using them as a stimulus to discuss the range of the artist's work. This approach contributed to the largely superficial and narrow range of responses.

(b)   Candidates displayed a reasonable knowledge of some of the works of their chosen artists, but failed to place him/her in an era. The majority did not place the artist in either the correct era or in any era at all. In addition, candidates were unable to discuss comprehensively the artist's major achievements. This highlights the necessity for students to examine carefully each specific aspect of a question, at a depth relevant to the expectations of a major study.

Part C

Question 4

(a)   Candidates did not seem able to be able to synthesise the material they had gathered on Kylian to answer this question adequately. They often described the type of movement which characterises Kylian's work rather than what influenced his search for new movement. Many concentrated only on his experiences in Australia.

A number of candidates used quotations, often inappropriately, in response to the question. While it is desirable for students to be as well versed in facts about the set seminal artists as possible, they are well advised to use only material which enhances their answers to the given question.

It is also advisable for students to check the mark value of questions. In this instance, the quality of the responses did not reflect the relative weight accorded this question.

(b)   Candidates appeared to have little more than a superficial knowledge of the Nederlands Dans Theatre and even less knowledge of Kylian's role in shaping the direction of that company. Some of their discussions centred on one or two works and chiefly on *Stamping Ground*, giving, not an overview of Kylian's work, but only a limited view.

(c)   Most candidates seemed aware of Kylian's specific works but were unable either to identify that theme or, if the theme was identified, to link it with the movement.

SECTION III
CORE : PERFORMANCE
PART B : VIVA VOCE
(4 marks)

QUESTION 1

Select a common dance injury and discuss its possible causes.

Explain how safe-dance practice can prevent this injury.

SECTION IV
MAJOR STUDY : PERFORMANCE
PART D : VIVA VOCE
(10 marks)

QUESTION 2

Explain and demonstrate the most important features of the dance technique of your nominated style.

What qualities of performance have you concentrated on in your presentation today?

SECTION V
CORE : COMPOSITION
PART B : VIVA VOCE
(4 marks)

QUESTION 3

Explain and demonstrate how you used the elements of construction to bring unity to your composition.

SECTION VI
MAJOR STUDY : COMPOSITION
PART D : VIVA VOCE
(10 marks)

QUESTION 4

Explain and demonstrate how you have manipulated your movement phrases and transitions to express the intent of your composition.

What other considerations did you take into account in forming your dance composition?