
A-LEVEL DANCE

7237/X Performance and Choreography
Report on the Examination

7237/X
June 2018

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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 school/college 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 schools/colleges. It is essential that the Dance teacher liaises with school/college 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 schools/colleges' 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, schools/colleges 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 chosen task, synthesising how they have translated their research and subsequent understanding of the chosen topic 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 2 being the most popular, followed by question 3 and finally question 1. Popularity of individual questions varied in individual centres.

Points relating to the choreography for each question

Question 01

The question provided an opportunity for students to research and analyse Pop Art. The focus of the question was to explore one or more characteristic features of the movement, which included investigating ethos, artistic process and outcome, e.g. the reaction to previous movements, a rejection of 'high art', the use of structuring, the choice and experimentation of materials and the way subject matter was being manipulated and re-presented by artists. Students could also access the work of specific Pop artists as a way into the exploration of the task.

The more successful responses revealed a thorough understanding of the artistic movement, resulting in highly imaginative and inventive responses. An exploration of different types of structures and presentation of ideas became a key element to the performance, e.g. the use of collage, patterning, pointillism. The use of film, slide shows, costumes, props and lighting were also sometimes used to reinforce the acquired understanding of the artistic movement. Some students found it more helpful to explore the characteristics of the movement through the analysis of one specific practitioner, the most popular being Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg. This sometimes led to a more focused and in-depth approach to experimentation and exploration.

The less successful dances sometimes became sidetracked by only the subject matter of the Pop Art movement, e.g. Marilyn Monroe, the role of celebrity or the environment that the movement took place, i.e. the 1960s era/popular culture in the form of social dance. Some performances revealed a very superficial understanding of the characteristic features of the Pop Art movement with tenuous links to 'bold', 'explosive' and 'linear' – either stated in the programme note or presented through the costume.

Most students seemed to enjoy selecting the aural setting for this task, with many choosing popular tracks of the 1960s as a backdrop to the choreography.

Question 02

This was the most popular question, and in some centres, it was the only question attempted. The focus of the question was an exploration of the different stages of sleep. How many stages was not prescribed, but students needed to select more than one stage in order to explore the 'difference' in the stages. Unfortunately, some students used the question as a stimulus and became sidetracked with specific narratives in relation to the concept of sleep, e.g. nightmares, sleepwalking, sleep paralysis, thus deviating from the crux of the task.

The more successful choreographers had obviously researched the different stages and were therefore able to present choreography in an interesting and sophisticated way. For some, this was achieved by taking the viewer through the whole cycle, usually in a chronological way building to a climax in the REM stage. For others, the notion that everyone experiences the different stages of sleep in different ways and even as individuals our sleep cycle can vary during the night informed their exploration. Both approaches were used effectively to inform manipulation and structuring of movement material and the balance between sections of the dance had been carefully considered in relation to sleep patterns over the course of the night. Visual graphs/charts of the brain activity had also been utilised and thought had been given to the choice and use of the aural setting - ranging from the spoken voice describing the different stages to a more soporific atmospheric soundtrack. The programme notes tended to be extremely informative.

The less successful dances tended to present ideas in a very superficial and literal way, e.g. falling asleep, having dreams/nightmares and then waking up. Unison tended to be the only choreographic device of choice and transitions were simple, often having the dancers walk from one image to the next and waiting for the start of the next musical phrase to present any subsequent ideas. Some dances became too preoccupied with what happened before falling asleep which meant there was little time to actually explore the different stages of sleep. At times, the dancers were under rehearsed and therefore could not fully commit to the performance and the enhancement of the choreographic intention.

Question 03

The wording of the question directed the student to explore the physical characteristics of one or more body/bodies of water found on the earth's surface. The majority of students adhered to the task set and researched a variety of bodies of water, ranging from puddles to oceans. Some students decided to concentrate on one body, others on an assortment of contrasting bodies of water. 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. Some students became sidetracked with events which happen on/in a body of a water, so again skill was needed to make sure the 'context' of the piece (the events) did not detract from the exploration of the question. Some students chose specific bodies of water to research, eg the Dead Sea, others chose to explore generic physical characteristics, e.g. size, shape, water flow, tidal patterns of an ocean.

Structure and the use of aural setting had been carefully considered in the more successful dances. When exploring a range of bodies of water, the choreographers were able to layer and counterpoint ideas revealing contrasting characteristics, often accompanied by a complex musical score which had variety and appropriate changes of dynamics. When presenting one body of water, extensive research was in evidence in relation to size, shape, location, the consistency and flow of the water and organisms/wildlife living in and around the water.

As with the other two questions, the less successful dances revealed very little knowledge and understanding of the chosen source and therefore became heavily reliant on preconceived ideas about water and how it flows. Even though many programme notes suggested a continuous and seamless fluidity in relation to the chosen body of water, the choreographed outcomes usually became stilted with sudden stops and awkward transitions. Sometimes choosing more than one body of water meant students chose more than one piece of music, which again caused problems with sectional structuring and transitions. Some presentations had dancers leave the stage for a prolonged amount of time, which did not always contribute to a coherent structure and indeed limited the development of movement material in relation to group choreography.

Section B - Performance

Points relating to Question 04

AO1: 20 marks

As stated in previous years of the legacy specification, 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 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 shows 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.

In this first year of the specification, it was exciting to note that examiners viewed a range of performances 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 schools/colleges 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.

As stated in previous years of the legacy specification, the form of the solos varied, 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 schools/colleges 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.

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**

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, e.g. '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.

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 schools/colleges 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 school/college.
- 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.