



GCSE
Dance

8236/C Performance and Choreography

Report on the Examination

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General

This year saw the introduction of digital submission for GCSE Dance Non-Examined Assessment. Digital submission has transformed the moderation process in ensuring security of students work and providing moderators with immediate access to media files and documentation. There were issues with uploading which is to be expected with a new system however most centres successfully uploaded student's work to each student file and labelled them correctly as outlined in AQA guidance. Centres are to be commended on their ability to adapt so quickly to the new system.

It is inspiring to see such a wide range of work being performed and created by students and it is important to acknowledge the time and care that teachers put into planning and guiding their students through their performance and choreography tasks.

Generally the standard of marking this year was more accurate and there were some centres with exceptional marking standards. Where marking was out of tolerance this was often limited to individual students and not across the whole sample. Some centres had appeared to rank order their cohort but not in relation to the standard which resulted in the work of their highest student not matching the higher mark bands or the AQA standard. When an individual student is not marked correctly this can have an adverse effect on the whole cohort. It is very important for centres to understand how regression works and to appreciate the importance of consistency in marking standards across an entire cohort. Information about moderation of internal assessments and an explanation of how adjustments to marks are made can be found on the AQA website or via this link: <https://store.aqa.org.uk/admin/library/AQA-MODERATION.PDF>. Teachers are strongly advised to review this.

Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) is a free resource that comprises a variety of work and mark ranges. TOLS is available at any time, and it provides the opportunity for teachers to get instant feedback on their marking compared to the AQA standard and should be viewed prior to undertaking assessments. Centres are reminded that internal standardisation is compulsory.

Teachers were pro-active in contacting their NEA Advisers regarding the suitability of work and guidance on digital submission for NEA coursework. All centres are reminded that they have an allocated NEA Adviser who can provide advice and support throughout the academic year on delivering Component 1: Performance and Choreography. To request an adviser please email eos@aqa.org.uk.

Performance

Set Phrases

The marking of the set phrases was mostly accurate. Where marking was lenient this was particularly evident in the awarding of marks for technical and physical skills.

The most popular submissions continue to be Breathe and Shift followed closely by Flux. Scoop was less evident. There were minor inaccuracies across all four phrases predominantly across action, timing and style content. It was clear that centres often had the same common errors or embellishments in the phrases which were unique to the centre. As students are required to demonstrate their ability to accurately reproduce the choreographic content of the set phrases centres are advised to either attend an AQA set phrase training day or revisit the set phrase videos and notes, available on the AQA website.

Most students fully attempted both phrases. This year there was less imbalance between the performance level of the two phrases with students often presenting both phrases confidently.

As moderation is digital each set phrase can be filmed and assessed separately which means once one set phrase has been filmed centres can give their full attention to the second phrase. There is no requirement to film and assess both set phrases on the same day.

Demonstration of **physical skills** was good this year and the more competent students were able to use both phrases to showcase a full range of physical skills in performance.

For **technical skills** there was an improvement in accuracy however timing and action inaccuracies were still evident in some submissions. The moments of hold would benefit from more attention to improve both the timing and style of the phrases. Often the sense of release was missing in Breathe which impacted students ability to capture the style of Breathe. Generally, the spatial content was accurate and when differences occurred this was usually incorrect use of directions.

Demonstration of **expressive skills** was good, and many students were able to access full marks even when the phrase(s) were inaccurate. It was a pleasure to watch those that performed with an understanding of projection, facial expression and focus within an energised performance.

Those teachers that counted the student in with up to 8 counts helped ensure a more confident start to the solo performances.

Infringements in Set Phrase Performance

Some centres awarded a mental skills mark when a student had only attempted one set phrase. This can potentially place the centre out of tolerance even though the marking of the rest of the sample is accurate. The mark for mental skills and attributes should only be awarded if there is creditable evidence for two set phrases and a duet/trio performance.

As the set phrases are solo performances students should be informed that they are not allowed to be unduly prompted, copy someone else off-camera or perform alongside another dancer during the assessed performance.

Adapted set phrases

There continues to be a rise in the number of successful applications for a set phrase(s) adaptation. Each application is considered individually, and the needs of the student and their 'normal way of working' is central to the process. Applying for a set phrase(s) adaptation allows students with special educational needs, disabilities, temporary or ongoing injuries to access the assessment of the set phrases. A reasonable adjustment for a particular student will be unique to that individual and therefore must be reviewed and approved by AQA to ensure that any adaptations to the content of the set phrases do not affect the integrity of the assessment. Please note that set phrase adaptations must be approved before assessment of the set phrase(s) takes place. The set phrase adaptation form can be found under Assessment Resources on the GCSE Dance page.

Duet / Trio Performance

The marking of the duet/trio performance task continues to improve and where it was lenient this was specifically across the physical and technical skills criteria.

Successful duet/trio performance tasks were those that provided sufficient challenge and complexity to allow students to achieve resulting in performances that were exciting and challenging. Some centres had created a framework for the task and then differentiated it resulting in tailor-made work that had clearly been crafted with the students' skills in mind. Some students could have achieved the higher marks if the task had allowed them to demonstrate more physically demanding actions or evidence faster and more complex dynamic variations which were within their capabilities. Students that had the

opportunity to demonstrate varied dance relationships, dynamic contrast and musicality in their performances were able to access the higher mark bands. Tasks that included sophisticated contact work gave students the opportunity to evidence 'sensitivity to other dancers'.

Work that had more specific and inclusive choreographic intents often enabled students to demonstrate more rich and exciting action content for example 'The Suffragette Movement', 'The Hunger Games' and 'The Movement of the Spine'. Less specific but potentially restricting choreographic intents that were less effective in generating interesting and challenging movement content included 'Relationship Breakdowns', 'Toxic Relationships' and 'Mental Health'. Work inspired by Shadows continued to be popular and worked well offering students opportunity to demonstrate an understanding of expressive skills in performance. Some students struggled to access expressive skills marks particularly for musicality when the chosen aural setting lacked contrast and variety. Successful aural settings were those that had a clear structure and climax which in turn provided opportunity for a build-up of speed and dynamic in the movement.

It was pleasing to see a wider variety of dance styles used for the duet/trio performance task including commercial, jazz, street, as well as contemporary with some centres experimenting with a fusion of different styles.

Safe practice in performance

Most students demonstrated a good understanding of a range of safe working practices. There were still occasions where students performed wearing jewellery and socks.

Teacher duet/trio programme note

Teachers generally provided clear and succinct programme notes for the duet/trio performance task which clearly articulated the choreographic intent. Some included detailed descriptions and pictures of the set phrases which made the programme note overly long. There is no requirement to provide this level of detail. There were centres who did not name the two set phrases that had been used in the creation of the piece or cite the title and musician/artist for the aural setting used. Including this information is a requirement of the specification.

Infringements in Performance

Centres took care to ensure that students work met the minimum time duration of three minutes for the duet/trio performance task. In a dance that is three minutes long it is essential that when the work is filmed the student remains in clear view. If a dancer goes out of camera shot this cannot be included in the time as the assessor is not able to see them. If there is insufficient depth of field to keep all students in view for the whole time, the performance would need to be filmed several times following a different student each time. Centres are reminded that if a student does not evidence a duet/trio performance then they cannot award a mental skills mark.

Mental skills

The marking of mental skills was mostly accurate and the majority of teachers correctly awarded the mental skills mark for movement memory, commitment, concentration and confidence, evidenced during performance. Some teachers as indicated by the supporting comments on Candidate Record Forms awarded a mental skills mark for the process. For example, rewarding effort, responding to feedback and dedication to rehearsals. The mental skills mark should be awarded for the demonstration of the four mental skills during performance of the set phrases and duet/trio task. For clarification, see the Mental skills and attributes during performance grid in the specification.

Choreography

There was a wide range of responses to the choreography stimulus paper.

Creating dance work can be a cathartic experience and allows young people the chance to express themselves, deal with issues that relate to them or they are interested in. This year it was encouraging to see students embracing a wider range of choreographic intents including ones that focussed on expressing aspects of joy, celebration and abstract ideas. Broader development of choreographic intentions through detailed research enables students to convey complexity and nuance within a choreography.

In cases where students have researched the stimuli and this has led to exploration of darker themes it is important that centres check on the students' welfare and motivation for choosing these choreographic intents. When researching the stimuli, students may explore challenging sources and material. In relation to safeguarding practice, it is important to remember that centres are responsible for students' choices and welfare when researching and exploring choreography.

This year there was a good mix of solo and group choreography.

It was clear that students engaged with the stimulus paper and the more successful work was the outcome of thorough research. Some choreographies had very tenuous links to their chosen stimulus. Teachers can be instrumental in guiding their students in their journey from their chosen stimulus to their final choreographic intent. Teachers may provide guidance to students on the suitability of the response, particularly if it means they will not meet the requirements of the marking criteria. Whilst a student is responsible for the creation of their choreography, it is perfectly permissible for teachers to steer students towards more innovative and positive dance ideas that are creative and interesting. Those students who were supported in this way often produced work that had a clear and succinct choreographic intent that could be fully realised within the minimum time duration.

Choreography Assessment Tasks

a) a nursery rhyme

The stimulus of nursery rhymes inspired many interesting choreographic intents based on their origins, for example the life and fate of Anne Boleyn (Oranges and Lemons) Arachnophobia (Little Miss Muffet). Those that conducted in depth research provided more context to their choreography for example a historical choreography about Mary Queen of Scots (Mary, Mary quite Contrary). Thorough research and exploration produced more original choreographic intents such as the Black Death and The Seven Deadly Sins – based on the idea that people thought the Black Death had been sent by God because of their sins.

b) an artwork by Frida Kahlo

A wide range of Frida Kahlo paintings were chosen with students exploring both the imagery and aspects of Kahlo's life. Some students had clearly done some careful research into Frida Kahlo and the symbolism in her art work. More creative and challenging choreographies used the idea of the colours, textures and images from her paintings such as a heart, birds, thorns, butterflies and flowers. More sophisticated responses explored her physical limitations. Weaker responses tended to focus on the infidelity of her husband often resulting in a duet choreography about a toxic relationship. The Frida Kahlo stimulus also tended to promote choreographic intentions based on the mental health struggles Frida had endured.

c) a prop, accessory or object that could be used to assist locomotion or movement

This stimulus produced some original work. Interesting work was created, for example, in response to a bicycle, skate board, office chair, hot air balloon, parachute and wheelchair. Students who had been encouraged to fully explore their chosen stimulus through the different choreographic processes were

more likely to select interesting and original choreographic intents and steered away from those that were more predictable. There were a small number of students who misinterpreted the wording of the choreography question. In these cases, they appeared to respond to the word ‘prop’ to use as their starting point rather than ‘a prop, accessory or object that could be used to assist locomotion or movement.’

d) skin

The stimulus ‘skin’ was a popular choice leading to a large number of responses exploring the idea of being ‘trapped in your own skin’ with a choreographic intent about inner turmoil and self-acceptance. Choreographies that had vague choreographic intents such as ‘feeling comfortable in your own skin’, ‘anxiety’ and ‘social pressures of body image’, seemed to lack opportunities for exceptionally creative development and logical progression. These responses on the whole did not provide original movement content. More original responses to the ‘skin’ stimulus explored the structure of skin, the flow of blood vessels and circulation and the idea of the skin follicles, heat and sweat and animal testing.

e) Olympic Games/Paralympics

Students who had selected the Olympics as their stimulus presented a wide range of interesting responses including exploration of various athletes’ careers and experiences, performance enhancing drugs and social or historical issues linked to the Olympics. Some choreographies focussed on sports such as synchronised swimming and gymnastics.

Choreography assessment criteria

Sophisticated use of action and dynamic content could be seen when students had fully explored a range of movement and dynamic content to support their chosen choreographic intent compared to students who had created work that used familiar action and dynamics that didn't consistently reflect their choreographic intention.

Spatial content was used well by the majority of students and those that had thought carefully about how spatial content could support their choreographic intent demonstrated more interesting and creative uses of the space. Those students who understood how to utilise a wide range of dance relationships to realise their stated choreographic intent produced choreographic work that was layered and sophisticated.

Most choreographies had a clear beginning, middle and end but less successful choreographies lacked clear section changes or considered transition material and logical sequence. The importance of a good and considered ending ensured that the work could access the higher mark bands compared to work that finished abruptly or evidenced less consideration to the ending of their dance.

When the full range of choreographic devices was explored it resulted in work that was complex and creative. Many students were not able to access higher marks for choreographic devices when their work did not include contrast, highlights and climax. Climax was the least evident of the choreographic devices which was sometimes not helped by the choice of accompaniment. In group choreography more effective work, used manipulation of number in a sophisticated way, producing work that shifted and changed throughout the dance.

Aural settings were mostly well chosen however they were not always used effectively. Those that used their aural setting exceptionally well from beginning to end identifying and using the accents, highlights or the different layers in the sound could access higher marks for choice and use of aural setting. Those students that used the changes in the aural setting to match sections in their dance demonstrated a clear understanding of how the sound could support the structure of their choreography. Successful choices were those that offered a range of contrasting dynamics that also helped compliment the overall structure of their work. There were some very creative choices where students had created their own music or soundtrack to reflect their choreographic intent. There were some interesting aural settings where text and sound effects had been edited on to existing music to support the dance idea and structure. There were aural settings that used totally contrasting music tracks edited together to reinforce the chosen dance idea. This can be effective however there were occasions where this resulted in a disjointed aural setting that lacked unity. Popular songs and instrumental versions of popular songs did not always provide sufficient contrast, variety and structure. More successful choices were those that contained musical features such as rhythmic interest, accents and a climax that could be used to realise the choreographic intent. When students had used music with lyrics, the movement content tended to reflect the lyrics of the song rather than the stated choreographic intent. Song is listed under aural settings in the specification and can be an appropriate choice if the lyrics support the dance idea consistently and are not a tenuous link.

Infringements in Choreography

Centres worked hard to ensure that submissions met the minimum time durations for both solo and group choreography. It is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students are aware that not meeting the minimum time duration requirements could lead to a time penalty being applied.

Centres should also ensure that there are not more than five dancers in a group choreography.

Student choreography programme note

The most successful programme notes were succinct and within the 120 - 150 word guidance. The choreography programme note is an important document that bridges the gap between the student and the assessor. It is entirely permissible for the teacher to support and guide their students with the content of their choreography programme note so the assessor has an insight into exactly what the student wishes to communicate.

Programme notes that outlined the 'journey' from the chosen stimulus to a specific stimulus and then to the choreographic intent were informative. It was not always made clear in the programme note, how students had arrived at their choreographic intent from the stimulus. Those that provided an insight into how the choreographic intent was realised and highlighted important features within the work aided the assessment of the work. Some programme notes lacked clarity as the choreographic intent was not entirely clear or there were multiple choreographic intents, ideas and themes. Programme notes where the student described their dance with little or no reference to the choreographic intent were not helpful to the assessor.

Choreography programme notes that did not cite the artist/ musician or include aural setting citations or identify the specific stimulus used did not comply with the specification requirements.

Administration and presentation of materials for moderation

Most centres met the submission deadline and materials were tagged and uploaded correctly. The shift to the new online system meant that a number of centres had incorrectly labelled files or uploaded them to the wrong location which is understandable given it is the first year of a new system. Centres who were asked to upload and resubmit missing media or supporting documents generally did this quickly. Where centres had followed the AQA guidelines for digital submission and in particular using the correct the file

naming format it made it much easier to navigate media files. Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to check that the assessment materials they upload are correct and fit for assessment purposes.

It was helpful when centres were diligent in ensuring that all paperwork was fully and accurately completed, and that students marks were totalled correctly on both the Candidate Record Forms and Centre Marks Submission.

The following are examples of common errors seen this series:

- incomplete Candidate Record Forms with missing signatures or incorrect totalling of marks.
- discrepancies between marks recorded on the Candidate Record Form and the marks entered onto the system.
- incomplete evidence or the wrong video for students who had completed all the tasks.
- incorrectly labelled media.

Uploading duplicate tasks complicated and lengthened the moderation process adding extra work for the moderator as they had to contact the centre to clarify which video the centre originally assessed. The moderator must assess the same footage that the centre assessed. Delays were also caused by absence of programme notes, absence of Candidate Record Forms and absence of the Centre Declaration Sheet.

Centres demonstrating good practice identified students using verbal or visual cues (centre name/number and student name/number) which is particularly important for the assessment of the duet/trio task. When students were introduced on camera and then moved to their starting position, it was easy to identify them throughout the performance. In some centres students were given distinctive colours to wear for the duet/trio performance piece which was most helpful to the moderator. For further clarification see the document Notes and Guidance: NEA recording and submitting video evidence which is available on the GCSE Dance page under Assessment resources.

The filming quality was often excellent and of an extremely high quality. Occasionally videos were out of focus and some centres used footage where the lighting was dim. It is important to note that the assessment of expressive skills especially in the set phrases and the duet/trio performance task can be hindered by videos that are out of focus or had used low intensity lighting.

If using stage lighting, centres should be aware that the glare onto the sheets that students hold to identify themselves with their name and student number can make them illegible.

Most centres kept all students in shot and were not filmed from too far away. A few centres filmed against a black background with their students wearing black which made it difficult to see the dancer and their actions clearly.

Finally, a thank you to all teachers and centres that submitted NEA coursework this series and to those who swiftly resolved administration and/or upload issues.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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