AQA

GCSE
DANCE

8236/C Performance and choreography
Report on the Examination

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Introduction

In this first year of examination of the new GCSE Dance specification, schools have understandably been concerned about the potential impact on results of the increase in value of the written paper, from 20% to 40%. It would appear that in order to compensate for this change, the focus of teaching and learning in some schools has shifted away from the practical in order to spend more time on the theoretical study of the works in the Anthology. This, along with the non-exam assessment (NEA) requirements of this new specification, appears to have had an effect on the overall standards of the practical work. Although there has been some impressive and exciting work presented this year, there has also been evidence of work in both performance and choreography that has shown a lack of creativity and inspiration. At face value it may seem that the theoretical elements of the written paper are larger, but when the percentage value of each element that makes up the qualification is considered, the choreography task is by far the most heavily weighted and therefore the most important, with the duet/trio coming in second place.

Generally, marking has been lenient across all elements with very few schools being in tolerance. This is not unusual in the first year of a new specification, especially when the provision of work on the teacher online standardisation (TOLS) system was limited because there was no student work to show at that stage. However, teachers are advised to consider the language used in the assessment grids which provides direction on the work suited to that particular band, eg 'exceptional' which means outstanding or extraordinary. This applies at a national standard, not just in relation to the cohort within the school.

Solo set phrases performance

All four phrases were demonstrated fairly equally, but generally student performance was stronger in one set phrase than the other. This disadvantaged some students as marks have to be aggregated across both performances. It is helpful to students if teachers can count them in at the start, particularly in Breathe and Scoop, but it should be noted that counting students in, is only permitted for up to eight counts. Schools are also reminded that this is a solo performance and therefore the student should perform solo, not alongside another dancer.

Demonstration of physical, technical and expressive skills

The three areas are equally weighted in the mark scheme and the best work was evidenced where students had learned and rehearsed the phrases with equal emphasis on all three skills areas. It was clearly apparent where students had been encouraged to focus almost exclusively on technical skills, specifically accuracy, to the detriment of physical and expressive skills. It was also clear that many students had little understanding of the reasons why they were performing to a simple beat and what the point of this would be in terms of the demonstrating performing skills. These factors limited student achievement.

The demonstration of physical skills was often not commensurate with performance in the duet/trio, which suggests a lack of consideration of how specific moments within the phrase can be rehearsed and improved to demonstrate elements of physical skill.

In technical skills, students often missed out on marks due to inaccuracies of content, timing, lack of dynamics and lack of style. It was also clear that some students had not considered the unique phrasing of each of Breathe, Scoop, Shift and Flux. There were similar inaccuracies in set phrases across all students in a school, suggesting that in some cases the notes and video exemplars had not been fully utilised in the teaching and learning.

Many performances were bland in terms **of** expressive skills with students demonstrating poor understanding of how to dance the phrases with fluidity and expression. Many students appeared to be dominated by the metronome and often performances appeared 'wooden' because the sound of the beat became more imperative than just a means to facilitate correct timing.

Infringements in solo phrases performance

A significant number of students did not meet the specification requirements. These included students copying someone else off-camera, copying from a video recording playing off-camera, performing the phrase to a beat faster or slower than 105 BPM, performing the phrases to music, performing alongside another dancer, attempting only one phrase and being prompted by a teacher. Schools are reminded of the need to ensure that all requirements of the specification are fully met, in order to ensure the work is acceptable for assessment. Requirements can be checked in the specification, and in the *Technical Guidance for Component 1* document on the AQA website. Schools are also reminded that they have an allocated NEA adviser who can give general guidance on the suitability of work.

Duet/trio performance

The most successful performances were those where the school had differentiated the content to the abilities and strengths of the individual performers so that students were able to best demonstrate the full range of their own skills. Generally, in these schools the choreographic intent was succinctly articulated and clearly understood by all students and the resulting piece was creative and engaging to watch. Students of all abilities in these schools tended to achieve better, especially in the marks awarded for expressive skills.

In the majority of schools, however, the pieces offered for assessment were lacking in challenge and sophistication and provided limited physical, technical and expressive challenge. The work was often vague, with the choreographic intent poorly articulated both through the performances and in the teacher notes. Opportunities for choreographing expressive content, exploring a range of relationships or contact work had often been missed, thus denying students the possibility of achieving appropriately in all three areas. Many schools chose similar themes that had not been explored creatively, accompanied by an aural setting that was often inappropriate or dull. Few schools chose to use style/style fusion as a choreographic intent, which was a missed opportunity for some very capable dancers who excelled in a particular style, such as ballet, Latin American and Street dance. In some schools all students danced the same piece with no differentiation whatsoever in terms of challenge or demand, which did not allow every student performing in the piece to achieve commensurate with their ability.

The duet/trio should be choreographed by the teacher with input from students where appropriate. Some schools appeared to have provided their students with a theme and then given much of the responsibility for the creation of the piece to the students themselves. This approach was rarely successful as these pieces tended to lack challenge and be uninspiring. Some schools had used one of the professional works from the Anthology as a starting point with varying degrees of success, again, seemingly determined by how much input and guidance had been given to students. Occasionally pieces felt too long and did not sustain interest, even though they fell within the time requirements. This was detrimental to students who were not able to sustain the same level of performance throughout the whole piece. Teachers should use discretion when deciding on the overall length of the piece, which must meet the minimum requirement but need not be the maximum length.

Mental skills

The marks should be awarded using the levels of response mark scheme for demonstration of all four criteria during the final assessment performances of the phrases and the duet/trio. However, it was clear from the comments on the Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) that some teachers had confused this with a process mark and awarded marks for 'trying hard in class' or 'attending rehearsals regularly'.

The teacher's programme note

The best and most helpful programme notes clearly identified a simple, specific choreographic intention and named the two phrases that had been used in the creation of the piece. Some programme notes were unduly long and contained irrelevant information. It can be very difficult for the moderator to identify students when they are all wearing the same colour clothing, so it is really helpful if the teacher can include a brief description of what a student is wearing or draw a diagram to show where the students start in the space.

Safe practice in performance

Demonstration of an understanding of safe practice underpins both the performances of the set phrases and the duet/trio and the vast majority of students were dressed appropriately and were able to execute their performance work safely. However, some students were filmed for assessment when they were wearing socks or jewellery, had their hair down covering the face or were chewing gum. In some cases, there was insufficient challenge in the duet/trio for students to effectively demonstrate safe practice. Students should be made aware that this will adversely affect their achievement in performance.

Infringements in performance

A significant number of students did not meet the specification requirements. These included failing to meet the minimum time requirements for the duet/trio, failing to meet the maximum time requirements for duet/trio, using the same phrases for the duet/trio as for the solo performance, failing to meet the overall time requirements for all performances. Schools are reminded of the need to ensure that all requirements of the specification are fully met, in order to ensure the work is appropriate for assessment. Requirements can be checked in the specification, and in the *Technical Guidance for Component 1* document on the AQA website. Schools are also reminded that they have an allocated NEA adviser who can give general guidance on the suitability of coursework.

Choreography

The stimulus paper published in September of the year of assessment provides a choice of starting points for each student to create their own choreography. A copy of the paper should be provided to every student, although this did not happen in some schools where every student in the school had responded to the same task. There was a fairly even balance between all five starting points this year, with none seeming to be a stand-out popular choice.

The tasks given should provide students with the inspiration for an idea and an opportunity to respond creatively to their choice, but it was clear that many students had just been allowed to retrospectively shoehorn an idea for a dance into one of the starting points. There were endless

choreographies which claimed a tenuous link to one of the starting points through a vague choreographic intent. These were the least successful choreographies and the outcomes tended to be predictable, literal and clichéd, often relating to emotionally driven subject matter, such as being sad, mental health, bullying, relationships, friendship, addiction, etc. These pieces contrasted starkly with the effective and exciting responses from students who had been given guidance, encouraged to research and challenged to find a creative angle for their ideas. Good examples of this included:

a) a zoomed in picture of a grapefruit – the choreographer took the shape of the segments, the idea of the squirting when you squeeze it and the idea of it being bitter and sweet

b) a kettle – using the shape of the heat filament and also the idea of the bubbles forming, getting hotter and rising

c) a duet based on the force of gravity – using heavy and low grounded movements to show the downward force versus lifts / contact to show weightlessness

d) a piece based on three action words (wait, lean and tap) – the choreographer based the dance on waiting in a queue and action ideas came from things that people do while they wait, eg checking their watch, tapping, leaning and changing positions of their legs, etc.

Choice of solo/group

There was a fairly even split of solo and group choreographies with solos favoured by less able students.

Action/dynamics

Where action content was good, it was chosen for purpose, inventive, reflective of the dance idea and creative, but when less successful it either didn't relate to the choreographic intent or was punctuated with meaningless stock dance moves borrowed from YouTube or televised dance programmes. Dynamic content generally needed greater variety and again needed to be chosen to support the choreographic intent in order to be successful.

Space/relationships

The use of space was generally well crafted in relation to the intent, but some students were disadvantaged when they were required to present their work for assessment on a narrow stage which restricted the use of space. Dance relationships often needed further exploration because most did not make use of the full range of the subject content, eg it is rare to see students using counterpoint, complement, contrast and lead and follow in their work.

Structure/form

The use of structure was evident in most choreographies and most work seen had beginnings and endings which had been considered, although many students seemed to have struggled with effective transitions and logical sequence. A significant number of students appeared to be confused about the difference between structure and motif and many described a type of structure in the programme note that was not realised in the choreography.

Choreographic devices

Most students were able to use simple choreographic devices such as repetition and motif and development, but few were able to utilise more complex devices such as contrast, highlights and climax to inform their choreographic intent.

Aural/physical setting

Students usually made good choices of an aural setting to enhance choreographic intent, and some had even created a bespoke accompaniment by cutting and editing tracks or spoken word together. Others had simply chosen music they liked, even though it lacked contrast, contained words that were unrelated to the choreographic intention or was at odds with the structure of the dance. These choices were significantly less successful. The choice of aural setting for the choreography is the student's own but it was noticeable that where the teacher had made a good choice for the duet/trio, students made better choices to support their own choreographies. Chosen aural settings commonly use song, instrumental, orchestral and some spoken word, but the use of silence, body percussion, natural sound and found sound were rarely seen. Some students were disadvantaged because even though they had made a good choice, they didn't utilise the nuances of the accompaniment within the choreography and there were a number of pieces where poor editing meant the accompaniment ended abruptly.

A few students chose to place their work in a site sensitive environment. These pieces were done thoughtfully and creatively, and the resulting work was exciting and innovative to watch.

Programme note

Many students did not clearly explain how they had arrived at their choreographic intent from the stimulus, and many were not specific or clear enough about what this choreographic intent actually was. Some rambled at length and wrote about one idea and then moved onto a completely different unrelated idea which made it difficult to understand what was intended to be communicated. Many programme notes were far too long and included lengthy and unnecessary detail about the research but did not clearly identify the stimulus and dance idea. The most helpful programme notes were clear and succinct and stated what the stimulus was, how they had used this to inform their thinking and what the choreographic intent was, that had finally emerged from the process. It would really assist the moderation process and save a lot of time if schools could ensure that choreography programme notes include any images, poems, etc that have been used, and that they are firmly attached to the CRF. It was particularly helpful when the school had included a copy of the students' programme notes, the duet/trio programme notes and the CRF on the USB in the same folder as the work.

Infringements in choreography

A significant number of students did not meet the specification requirements. These included students not meeting the minimum duration requirements, not meeting the maximum duration requirement, holding a static position for an unduly long period of time to make the piece look longer, cutting and duplicating the film of the student to make the choreography appear longer, having more than five dancers in the choreography, two or more students sharing a choreography, submitting work without a programme note and exceeding the advisory word count in the programme note. Schools are reminded of the need to ensure that all requirements of the specification are fully met, in order to be certain that the work is appropriate for assessment. Requirements can be checked in the specification, and in the *Technical Guidance for Component 1*

document on the AQA website. Schools are also reminded that they have an allocated NEA adviser who can give general guidance on the suitability of work.

Presentation of materials for moderation

Many schools had gone to great trouble to present the paperwork in a neat and well-organised manner which really helped the moderation team. However, there were also schools where there were various issues which unnecessarily delayed the process and added to the moderator's (and teacher's) workload. These included missing work, missing programme notes, unsigned CRFs by the student or the teacher and media that didn't work. Some teachers had helpfully provided a checklist of everything that had been sent, cross referenced against each student. The supporting comments on the CRFs were generally well written but sometimes over-long, and sometimes lacking in objectivity which was unhelpful to the moderator.

The majority of schools sent the work on a USB stick, which was by far the most reliable media. Where the work was provided on DVD there were numerous issues, including discs sticking or freezing, failing to play at all, having to reallocate the whole school to a different moderator where the original moderator did not have access to a DVD player, etc. Where DVDs were submitted they were for the most part not chaptered, making it very difficult for the moderator to find a specific student to mark. Work was sometimes sent on multiple DVDs containing separate assessment items, which was incredibly time consuming to view when a moderator needs to see all the work of one student consecutively. As a result of these issues work will not be able to be accepted on DVD in 2019.

Where schools had followed the AQA guidelines for filming and submitting evidence, the work for each student was quick and easy to access from individual student named folders. However, in some cases it was difficult to identify students even where student photos were provided, which is the reason why AQA expects that students should identify themselves at the start of each video. Some schools did an excellent job with the identification of students for example, by drawing floor plans or using coloured t-shirts. There were a number of instances where students disappeared off-camera and in these cases, schools would need to re-film the piece following each student separately so as to ensure each student meets the time requirements and can be marked appropriately.

Some of the filming was of an extraordinary high-quality which was clear and easy to watch but there was also some very poor filming which hindered clear observation of the work and disadvantaged students. Issues included poor choices of camera angles, fuzzy or blurry recordings, dancers being cut off, filming from too far away or too close so sections are missed, clipping the start/end of dances, strong stage lighting obscuring facial expressions and students wearing black clothes performing against a black background which made it difficult to see movement clearly.

On occasions the accompaniment could barely be heard even with the volume turned up to full, and in a couple of schools other students or members of staff were seen strolling across the back of the space where students were being filmed for assessment.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.