



GCSE

Dance

8236/C Performance and Choreography

Report on the examination

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General

This series has produced some truly outstanding work in both performance and choreography. This is testament to those dance teachers whose dedication in nurturing and mentoring their students and fostering a love of dance has resulted in the inspirational and creative work seen this year.

Uploading of media files and supporting documents was completed in a more timely fashion compared to last year with materials clearly labelled using the saving conventions specified by AQA.

Generally the standard of marking this year was good and there were centres whose marking was exceptional. Marking of the set phrases and mental skills was the most accurate. For the duet/trio performance task when marking was lenient this was often across the physical skills criteria. There were some cases where choreography was marked higher due to the quality of the delivery as opposed to the effectiveness of the choreographic content.

When centres favoured an individual student and marked them more generously this potentially had an adverse effect on the whole cohort. It is 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.

Teacher Online Standardisation (T-OLS) is a free resource that comprises a variety of work and mark ranges. T-OLS is updated each year and is available at any time. 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.

The GCSE Dance T-OLS Index is a new resource designed to help teachers navigate T-OLS more easily and help in identifying specific examples.

The index includes for each student:

- the names of the set phrases chosen for the solo performances with a breakdown of the marks and a total set phrase mark
- identification of either a duet or a trio performance with a breakdown of the marks and a total duet/trio mark
- a total mental skills mark
- identification of solo or group choreography, the chosen set stimulus and a breakdown of the marks and a total choreography mark
- an overall total mark out of 80 for each student.

The T-OLS index can be found under the Assessment resources tab on the GCSE Dance page.

Performance

Set phrases

Most students fully attempted two set phrases. Breathe, Shift and Flux continue to be the most common choices with Scoop the least popular. Accuracy has improved however this year some submissions showed an imbalance between the performance level of the two phrases with students often performing one of the phrases more accurately and more confidently. 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. Focussing on one set phrase at a time can support students in achieving balance between their two set phrase performances. There is no requirement to film and assess both set phrases on the same day. Teachers that took the opportunity to count in the phrases with up to 8 counts helped to ensure their students had a more confident start to the solo performances.

Physical skills: demonstration of physical skills was good this year and the more competent students were able to use both phrases to demonstrate the full range of physical skills in performance.

Technical skills: there was an improvement in accuracy with the most successful students demonstrating accurate timing and embracing the fluid dynamics and moments of stillness. However, timing and action inaccuracies were still evident in some submissions. Some centres submitted versions where there were action additions such as a backward roll in Shift. There continues to be a trend towards overarching the high release in Breathe and including overly sharp dynamics which is at odds with the style. Over exaggeration of the gestural content also led to a loss of stylistic integrity. There were also instances where actions were missing or the gestural content was inaccurate.

Expressive skills: demonstration of expressive skills was good, and students were able to access full marks for this criteria even when the phrase(s) were inaccurate. Performances that were energised and fully utilised projection and focus were effective in drawing in the viewer.

To support delivery of the set phrases a new resource which features the set phrase trainer counting over the slow-motion version of each phrase has been made available to all teachers. The trainer uses their voice to also highlight the dynamics changes and moments of hold. This teaching guide can be accessed from the AQA [website](#) and will support the delivery of the set phrases content.

Infringements in set phrase performance

Some centres awarded a mark when a student had only attempted one set phrase. If the student's performance does not contain an attempt to perform both set phrases then the assessor has to award zero. 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 as this is not permitted.

Adapted set phrases

The number of successful applications for a set phrase(s) adaptation has risen again this year with centres working in collaboration with AQA to support their students in accessing the task.

Applying for a set phrase(s) adaptation is straightforward and allows students with special educational needs, disabilities, temporary or ongoing injuries to access the assessment of the set phrases. Each application is considered individually, and the needs of the student and their 'normal way of working' is central to the process. 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 does not affect the integrity of the assessment.

Set phrase adaptations must be approved before internal assessment 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 but when it was lenient this was specifically across the physical and technical skills criteria. A wider variety of dance styles were explored including commercial and jazz and some centres experimented with a fusion of different styles. The most successful duet/trio tasks had clear choreographic intents which were understood and therefore clearly communicated by the students. Some centres chose to link their performance piece to one of Anthology works. This integrated approach can be effective in combining the theoretical and practical aspects of the course and helps embed a deeper understanding of both the choreographic intent and choreographic content of the chosen professional work.

Many pieces were tailor-made and differentiated to highlight the student's strengths and skills. Successful aural settings were those that had a clear structure and climax which in turn provided opportunity for a build-up of speed and a range of dynamic content. When the aural setting did not offer structure and contrast and variety the resulting work often lacked sufficient pace and dynamic range.

Physical skills: choreographic content that provided sufficient challenge and complexity to allow students to access the higher mark bands resulted in performances that were exciting.

More students would have achieved a higher mark 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. Often those centres that did not include enough challenge in the action content or speed and pace overmarked the physical skills criteria.

Technical skills: students that had the opportunity to demonstrate varied dance relationships and a range of dynamic content achieved well in the technical skills criteria. Those that demonstrated an understanding of the timing ensuring the action content was executed correctly also achieved well. When the work included an overuse of unison this often limited the student's ability to demonstrate an understanding of dance relationship thus limiting opportunities for evidencing the full range of technical skills.

Expressive skills: some centres chose a narrative choreographic intent which allowed students to use a range of facial expressions to communicate the dance idea. Tasks that included sophisticated contact work gave students the opportunity to evidence 'sensitivity to other dancers'. Students who understood the rhythmic patterns within the music, including accents and variations achieved well. Some students struggled to access expressive skills marks particularly for musicality when the chosen aural setting lacked contrast and variety.

Mental skills: A single overall mark out of 4 is available for demonstration of each student's mental skills and attributes shown during both the set phrase performances and the duet/trio performance. The majority of centres awarded mental skills correctly and fairly for movement memory, commitment, concentration and confidence, evidenced during both performance tasks. It was clear from comments on the Candidate Record Forms that some centres incorrectly awarded marks for the process, for example for concentrating in lessons or for commitment in rehearsals. Some centres continue to award full marks despite students lacking in confidence and commitment during the performances. Centres are reminded that the mental skills mark is only awarded if a student submits evidence of both set phrases and a duet/trio performance.

Safe practice in performance

Most students demonstrated an understanding of a range of safe working practices. There were occasions where students performed wearing jewellery and socks which did not allow them the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of safe working practice in performance.

Teacher duet/trio programme note

The majority of the duet/trio programme notes were succinct and complied with the requirements of the specification by stating the choreographic intent, citing the two set phrases used in the work and acknowledging the title and musician/artist for the aural setting used. This series saw an increase in the number of programme notes that were overly long and did not adhere to the word count guidance of approximately 150 words. These were often less effective in communicating the choreographic intent.

Some centres did not provide a programme note to support the assessment of the work. If a programme note is not submitted for assessment, the audio-visual recording of the duet/trio performance will still be accepted as assessment evidence. However, the lack of information regarding the choreographic intent will compromise how clearly the evidence supports the mark awarded by the centre, meaning centre marks are more likely to be adjusted at moderation.

Infringements in Performance

Centres continue to ensure that students work meets 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 assessed 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.

Choreography

There was a mix of solo and group choreography, and some work was firmly placed in the exceptional band. Work that was original and inventive demonstrated an understanding that creativity is the driver for this task. Those students that devoted time to researching the stimuli in depth tended to arrive at more creative choreographic intents. In such cases, the choreographic intent emerging from thoughtful engagement with the chosen starting point, resulted in movement choices that were bespoke and creative across action, space, dynamics and/or relationships. In contrast, less successful pieces often relied on generic or overused themes such as friendship or relationships. Some choreographies had very tenuous links to their chosen stimulus or did not relate at all to the original and/or the specific stimulus. Teachers are encouraged to mentor their students in their journey from their chosen stimulus to their final choreographic intent. The teacher's role is crucial in providing guidance on the suitability of a response, particularly if it means the student will not meet the requirements of the marking criteria. Whilst students are wholly responsible for their choreography, it is permissible for teachers to guide them in the process of choosing a choreographic intent. 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. Those students who kept their choreographic intent in mind throughout the choreographic process ensured that the dance idea was fully communicated from the beginning of the dance right through to the end. Successful choreographies were those that selected and packed their dance with original and varied action and dynamic content and where applicable dance relationship content.

There were some instances where an over-reliance on including material drawn from the set phrases or duet/trio performances led to a lack of originality in the action content. Where students had created a spatial design that supported the dance idea the communication of their intent was more effective. 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.

Work that included highlights, contrast and a clear climax were able to access the higher mark bands. The strongest group choreographies displayed a sophisticated use of dance relationships and manipulation of number. Group choreographies that included extended solo content fared less well when assessed on dance relationships and manipulation of number. A well chosen aural setting that was used consistently throughout the dance was key to the success of choreography work. Successful choreographies were frequently enhanced by well-chosen aural settings that provided clear structure, variety and mood, effectively supporting the stated choreographic intent. Those that chose to use a variety of tracks were successful when they selected carefully and limited the number used so that the resulting aural setting was cohesive. Some choices did not fit well together and resulted in a disjointed aural setting that was particularly noticeable when used for solo choreographies of two minutes in length. In some instances when the aural setting was not of the correct length there was little consideration given to when and how the music was stopped or faded which in turn impacted the effectiveness of the ending of the dance. Some carefully chosen songs

were appropriate and did help to realise the choreographic intent. Other song choices tended to have a tenuous link to the dance idea with some students using the lyrics to inspire their movement choices and this was often detrimental to the communication of their choreographic intent.

Choreography Assessment Tasks

a) Three words that describe dynamics

This was the least popular stimulus and was often misinterpreted with students selecting three words that did not describe 'dynamics' and choosing action words / verbs as their starting point instead. Where it was more successful the students linked the three dynamic words to a concept or theme that gave their choreographic intent additional depth.

b) A photograph taken by Danish photographer Karen Vikke

This stimulus was amongst the most popular and a wide range of Karen Vikke photographs were chosen. More creative and challenging choreographies explored the architectural aspects of the photos, not just the people within them. Less successful responses focussed on the lone human figures in the photos and tended to focus on loneliness, grief, loss, abandonment or negative emotions.

c) An item of confectionery

This stimulus was another popular choice with responses that focussed on the physiological effects of sugar on energy levels, the sugar rush and addiction. Some students explored the different textures of confectionary items or the process of creating a sweet. Narrative dances about Halloween and Wonkas Chocolate Factory were also popular.

d) Fossil fuels.

This stimulus was a popular choice and produced a variety of responses from tackling the impact of fossil fuels on the environment resulting in climate change or environmental disasters such as oil spills and forest fires. Those that undertook more thorough research created work that explored more original aspects such as extraction processes and how the pollution entered the atmosphere.

e) An invention of the Victorian Era.

This stimulus produced some original work, for example the invention of dynamite, film, camera, sewing machines and typewriters. Less successful responses focussed on the invention of the telephone and negative emotions related to a phone call or electricity and the lightbulb leading to a lightbulb moment.

Infringements in Choreography

Centres continued to work 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.

It is a requirement that students respond to the choreography stimuli as listed on the externally set task list which is published each year by the 15th of September. The task does not require students to choose their own stimulus, and the students must be given the paper in its entirety.

This year there were centres who misinterpreted the wording of a 'group' choreography. This resulted in the submission of group dances that were not the work of one student but created by a group of students. Centres are reminded that each choreography must be the work of one student, and it is not a collaborative task.

Student choreography programme notes

The majority of programme notes were well presented. The purpose of the choreography programme note is to support the assessment of the work. It is not designed to be a lengthy description of the dance. The assessor is interested in how the choreographic intent was achieved and 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. 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 adhered to the word count of approximately 120-150 words were succinct. Some that were overly long were confusing to read as the choreographic intent wasn't clear because the extended response often lacked clarity and focus.

It is a requirement that the programme note is contextualised correctly and that the specific stimulus the student has chosen after researching the set stimuli is included. The title and musician/artist for the aural setting used must also be cited. This requirement is outlined in the specification but also stated on the Choreography Assessment task paper.

If a programme note is not submitted for assessment, the audio-visual recording of the final performance of choreography will still be accepted as assessment evidence. However, this will compromise how clearly the evidence supports the mark awarded by the centre, meaning centre marks are more likely to be adjusted at moderation.

Administration and presentation of assessment materials

The majority of centres met the submission deadline and materials were tagged and uploaded correctly. Missing files were less of an issue this year as centres have become familiar with the new digital system. Some centres were exceptionally organised, with all sampled students work available and clearly labelled which aided the moderation process. 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.

Centres overall were quick to respond to moderator requests to amend or upload documents on the occasion where they were missing. The main errors included files not being labelled correctly, Candidate Record Forms not signed and/or dated, the incorrect box being ticked for

'additional help' and incorrect additions. Centres should ensure that they double check their Candidate Record Forms before uploading them to avoid administration errors.

Centres that followed the AQA recording guidance and identified students using verbal or visual cues (centre name/number and candidate name/number) aided the moderation process and particularly the assessment of the duet/trio performance 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 again was helpful and aided the moderation process. 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.

It is the teacher's responsibility to check that their assessment videos are appropriate for assessment purposes. After a recording has been made teachers should watch and check that there are no problems with the recording and that all requirements have been met. The quality of filming was not always suitable with some video footage where students' arms, legs and at times whole bodies went out of shot. This was due to the over use of the zoom facility. Centres are reminded that unsatisfactory recordings may adversely affect the moderation process.

The following are examples of filming issues seen during the 2025 series:

- videos that are out of focus making it difficult to assess expressive skills
- filming from a distance which impacted the ability to assess facial expression in the set phrase performances and the duet/trio performance
- filming students wearing black against a black background which makes it difficult to see them clearly
- the use of low lighting or stage lighting which hindered viewing and affected the camera's focus
- footage that cut off the end of the work and when this occurred in choreography it impacted the ability to correctly assess structuring devices and form
- videos that did not have any sound which meant they were unfit for assessment purposes
- duplicate files which meant the moderator had to contact the centre to check which version had been assessed by the teacher
- poor audio quality which made it difficult for moderators to hear students names which in turn made it harder to identify students during the duet/trio performances
- poor audio quality making it difficult to fully appreciate the choice and use of aural setting for choreography

Finally, it is important to acknowledge and thank those centres who worked hard to ensure their assessment materials were fit for purpose and submitted by the deadline. In addition, the moderation team would like to thank those centres who responded swiftly to requests for missing files or incomplete paperwork.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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