

**Celebrating experience –
memories from long-serving
RAD examiners**

The view from an examiner –
disabled students

The new repertoire syllabus



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Welcome to *Focus on Exams*, the RAD publication dedicated to all things exam-related!

The Genée International Ballet Competition took place in London in September. Congratulations to all those involved – we look forward to seeing what the future holds for you. Remember, if you want to enter for the Genée, you will need to have a Distinction at Advanced 2.

Following the launch of the new Advanced 1 and 2 male syllabi and the completion of an 11-year project to revise the graded and vocational graded syllabi, the Artistic team have taken on a new challenge: creating a new repertoire-based syllabus. See the article on page 4, and keep your eyes on RAD communications channels for further updates!

We are lucky to have a dedicated and knowledgeable international panel of examiners. In this issue of *Focus on Exams*, three of our longest serving examiners share with us some of their memories and experiences, and give us their perspective on the continually evolving world of RAD exams.

Please do let us know how we are doing via exams@rad.org.uk – we're always pleased to receive feedback about any aspect of RAD exams!

Dr Andrew McBirnie
Director of Examinations



Solo Seal Examination

The Examinations Board is pleased to announce that the Solo Seal is now recognised by Ofqual on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The new qualification is worth 24 credits at Level 5 and is on the Register of Regulated Qualifications under the following title and qualification number:

601/6060/3 RAD Level 5 Certificate in Vocational Graded Examination in Dance: Solo Seal (QCF)

The operational start date was 1 July and therefore Solo Seals from this date are awarded as the regulated version of the qualification. The new certificate design corresponds more closely to the other vocational graded examinations and includes the regulators' logos.

This completes our project to place all qualifications offered by the exams board, which Ofqual would consider to be regulated qualifications, on the Register. The project has seen formal recognition obtained for the Primary in Dance Examination, Solo Performance Awards at Grades 1–5, and the Solo Seal.

Like Grade 8, we will no longer be able to refer to Solo Seal as an 'Award', as this conflicts with the titling terminology of the QCF. Moving forward it will be called the Solo Seal Examination, or just the Solo Seal.



Photo: Graham Read



Photo: Elliott Franks

Music in exams – additional guidelines

Now that recorded music can be used in examinations up to and including Grade 8, it is particularly important that the following advice is taken into consideration. We have received feedback from examiners advising that where these guidelines have not been followed, candidates' performances have been negatively impacted as they have become distracted.

We strongly advise that teachers DO NOT act as the CD operator or pianist in exams. However, as per *Examinations Information, Rules and Regulations*, section 4.7.9:

When teachers are not able to provide another person to perform either of these functions, in order not to distract the candidates, the following guidelines are suggested:

- a screen placed between the performing space and the sound system operator
- the teacher should sit with their back towards the examination area and make no eye contact with the candidates
- candidates should understand before they go into the examination that the examiner will conduct the examination and that the teacher will not assist at any point.

Please note that these are suggested guidelines and not requirements. However, in practice we have found that where such guidelines are not followed, candidates' performance can be negatively impacted.

Where music playback equipment such as CD players, MP3 players, or speakers are used in examinations, they should be tested for volume and sound quality before the examination starts.

The person acting as the music operator should be aware of how the equipment works, and the correct track numbers for the candidates' music choices. This includes vocational graded examinations, where the pianist will move from playing the piano to operating the CD for the variations.

In AECs where one teacher is hosting other teachers, there should be five minutes' time scheduled between the examination sets of each teacher and another, so that both the examiner and the music operator can ensure that everything is prepared for the next set of candidates.

Where a mixture of live and recorded music is used, the pianist should operate the CD – it is not permissible for any other individual to enter the examination room to undertake this role.

CDs for Grades 6–8

After careful review and consideration of feedback received from teachers, and in order to align with the new syllabus up to Grade 5, we are now offering candidates entering for Grade 6, 7 and 8 examinations and presentation classes the option of using a CD instead of live piano accompaniment.

As with all examination levels, a pianist can still be used if teachers and candidates prefer. We would encourage this option wherever possible, as we would suggest it is beneficial to candidates to experience dance with live music, and particularly at this level the interaction of dancer and musician can lead to enhanced artistic results. Nonetheless we understand that in certain circumstances the practicalities of providing this resource are essentially insurmountable, and therefore we are now offering the option, in order to maximise access to examinations for as many candidates as possible.

Minimum ages

The new policy on minimum ages is now well established and we are extremely grateful to all teachers who have made the necessary changes to their teaching and examination entries in order to comply with it.

While this continues to be a source of contention for some, we are also starting to see the benefits. Candidates who are prepared for, and entered for, examinations at the appropriate developmental stage are far more likely to do well. On the rare occasions where candidates are still entered too young, examiners report serious concerns about the physical and emotional damage which can be done by teaching work which is unsuitable, as well as their sadness about the low marks which inevitably need to be awarded.



Photo: Elliott Franks

We recognise that there will always be exceptions to what must by necessity be a 'broad brush' rule which is applied fairly and consistently across the board, and we will consider requests for exemptions when made. However, all teachers should now be planning their teaching and examination schedules according to the current policy, which is laid out in *Examinations Information, Rules and Regulations*, Section 4.1.

Preparing sets of three and four candidates

We would like to clarify the procedure in graded examinations and class awards when there are three or four candidates in a set and the exercise requires candidates to dance 'two at a time'.

Examiners have been advised to accept the settings prepared by the teacher, as we are aware that for three and four candidate sets many teachers organise their students very carefully.

Examiners will say the name of the exercise and candidates should run to their starting positions so that examiners can clearly see who is dancing with whom. When this happens, the examination runs seamlessly as the candidates usually get ready very quickly and this makes it easier for examiners to keep to schedule.

To avoid any misunderstanding, examiners may check with teachers before the day starts, to see if she/he has prepared who will dance together and, for groups of three, who will dance alone.

Teachers may prepare clear and concise notes for the examiner to advise which candidates are dancing together or on their own. The examiner will refer to these notes during the exam if candidates have difficulty remembering who should be dancing together. If the groupings have not been prepared in advance the examiners are more than happy to organise the groups.

For vocational graded examinations the examiner always organises which candidates dance together (where the syllabus indicates).

Delivery of exams

The new examinations delivery model has been in operation since January. Teachers now have the flexibility to enter candidates for any level of examination (either graded or vocational graded) at any venue either their own studio (AEC) or a venue provided by the RAD (RAV). We hope that teachers are beginning to appreciate these additional options.

Where teachers do not have enough candidates to fulfil the minimum time requirement, have difficulty in finding a pianist, or have problems with studio availability, they have the option to enter their candidates in an RAV.

Repertoire syllabus

Having completed the final planned revision to the RAD's graded and vocational graded syllabi with the recent launch of Advanced 1 & 2 male, you may be pleased to know that we are taking a breath, as far as syllabus updates are concerned.

As a worldwide leader in dance education and training, however, we can never afford to stand still and so we have turned our attention to a new project. Dance has undergone a huge resurgence over the last few years and in particular adult dance classes, whether ballet, contemporary or jazz are ever more popular and in demand. We feel that the time is right for the RAD to create a range of products that will appeal to the diverse needs of this market, from teenagers, all the way through to the most mature adults; from absolute beginners to those returning to dance after many years and everything in between.

We have begun work on one such project – a new syllabus based on known and loved classical ballet repertoire – and we hope to start trialling this work with RAD registered teachers around the world shortly.

New Advanced 1 and 2 male syllabus

The new syllabus, which was launched in May, will be examined from January 2016. The old male Advanced 1 and 2 work will cease to be examined from this time.

Please also note that the new markscheme is in line with the new female syllabus, with each individual component requiring a minimum of 4 for the exam to be passed.

Syllabus publications

We would like to remind you that a summary of amendments to the syllabus and sheet music publications can be found on our website:

www.rad.org.uk/achieve/exams/what-we-do/syllabus-updates



Photo: courtesy of Paula Hunt

Awards for Paula Hunt and Lynn Wallis

We are delighted to announce that Paula Hunt (pictured below left), Chair of the Panel of Examiners and Head of Syllabus Development, is now a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, as announced recently in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. Many congratulations to Paula on this very well-deserved achievement.

Lynn Wallis (pictured below), Artistic Director of the RAD, was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for services to dance in the Queen's honours list on 13 June 2015. On receiving this award, Lynn said: 'I am hugely humbled and extremely thrilled'.



Photo: David Tett

Celebrating experience

We talked to three of our longest serving examiners, **June Christian**, **Yvonne Oldaker** and **Joy Ransley** and asked them to share some of their experiences. Both June and Joy recently celebrated an extraordinary 50 years on the panel, while Yvonne will do so next year.

Has the role of an RAD examiner changed since you started examining? Can you describe some of the changes?

June: The quick response to this is – No! As an examiner, you are still looking for the same things – putting candidates at their ease and ensuring the smooth running of the exams.

Examiners used to have to wear a hat and gloves on their examination tours – I remember being told that even the way you put your handbag down on the table should be done in an ‘appropriate’ manner! We weren’t allowed to wear trousers until the 1970s – which was a wonderful relaxing of the rules, as when you are travelling it is a lot more practical to wear trousers.

There have been plenty of administrative changes, but the heart of the role remains the same.

Yvonne: The role has not changed that much, in that we’re still trying to put the candidates at ease so that they can show us their very best. The syllabi have changed three times during my time – each an improvement on the last! When I started examining we only saw one candidate at a time, then two and now up to four.



Left to right: June Christian, Yvonne Oldaker and Joy Ransley

Joy: Inevitably we are all governed by the changes occurring in the world around us, but at the same time, our role is still one of an ‘assessor’, marking the work presented. That will never change. Things are certainly more relaxed than they were 50 years ago, but there is still that aura of ‘this is important to us!’ (for both candidate and examiner!) surrounding all examinations.

Did you take RAD exams yourself? Can you describe your own experiences?

June: I did. I took Grades 1–4. I remember dressing up in a white tunic, and my American ballet teacher telling us that sweets would be forthcoming if we did well – it was during the war, and rationing was in force, so this was a real incentive! I don’t remember much of the actual examinations though.

Yvonne: Yes, I took RAD exams at the Hammond School with Betty Hassall. If it hadn’t been for her I would not be here today. An inspirational teacher is everything.

What is your most memorable experience as an RAD examiner?

Yvonne: I’ve had many memorable days over the years, but this a small part of the craziest – one day after a complicated journey I arrived at a small house and was led into a tiny basement where the young teacher gave me a long list of the absentees, all with broken bones. I was obviously surprised and commented on this. The teacher responded with ‘it happened when we threw them out of the window’.

Seeing my aghast face she said ‘didn’t they tell you? There was a fire at the studio – that’s why we are here.’ The students, along with the pianist, had had to escape out of the window!

Adding to the difficulties, the pianist broke her collar bone so the school had to call their 90-year-old pianist out of retirement – the lady had never seen the syllabus or played an electric piano! Needless to say the examination day was quite unusual... nobody back at the hotel believed my story until that evening when the story was reported on TV with an arsonist lighting a fire as the children were practising their battements glissés!

Joy: On my first day of examining I was sick in the middle of a Grade 2 exam! I unceremoniously made use of the ‘fire bucket’ on hand (full of sand in case of fire), whilst the pianist, very politely, asked the candidates to leave. They remained frozen to the spot, looking dismayed, until she simply screamed, ‘Get out!’ They ran!

The memory is definitely etched in my mind – I was simply horrified! When I returned to the same school a few years later, there was an inquiry as to whether the fire bucket would be needed!

However, in spite of this, (and I must say, it seriously did enter my mind, that this was not my vocation in life!) starting as an examiner is my most memorable experience because of the amazing journey I was about to undertake.

Can you describe your most and least favourite parts of being an RAD examiner?

Yvonne: My least favourite part of examining is when I stay in a highway hotel – I like to be able to take a walk outside!

Meeting teachers and candidates all over the world is definitely my favourite part of being an examiner – dance teachers are a great group of people. I am still very much enjoying the job even after so many years!



Photo: David Tett

June: My least favourite memories of examining are of very cold studios! Often exams were in church halls or other buildings with no heating. Now we see far more candidates in conditions which are much more comfortable, and teachers are very kind and look after us very well.

Examining for a worldwide organisation means that you can have some very exciting and slightly nerve-wracking experiences. I travelled to Israel just after the Six Day War in 1967, which meant that there was lots of security and increased vigilance from all the authorities – although of course ballet exams still went ahead. I also travelled in Zimbabwe during the 1964–79 civil war – the organiser driving our car told me ‘I hope you’re not nervous because I’ve got my gun with me.’ Needless to say, I had been less concerned before they told me this!

My favourite part of being an examiner is putting a candidate at their ease, and allowing them to enjoy their examination experience – I once had a little girl who was supposed to be taking her Primary examination. She was screaming blue murder outside the examination room and her mother was contributing to the noise as she tried to get the little girl to enter the room! In the end I went out and had a chat to them, brought the little girl into the exam room and talked to her to calm her down. She did end up taking the exam, and left the exam room with a big smile on her face.

Examining is very much the same worldwide. You get different scenery and different languages, but watching the students, interacting with them, and seeing the joy they feel in their dancing is very much the same whatever country you are working in!

Joy: I've always enjoyed the interaction with the candidates, in particular, the seemingly nervous ones. It's a challenge to endeavour to put them at their ease in order for them all to achieve at their best level.

I don't always enjoy the lengthy periods away from home and family! But I've enjoyed every country I've ever visited and can't thank teachers and organisers enough for their kindness, care and attention to every small detail. They have all helped to make mine such an enjoyable and incredible examining career.



Photo: David Tett

The view from an examiner – disabled students

Recent articles in *Dance Gazette* and *The Daily Telegraph* prompted this thoughtful response to a sensitive issue by RAD examiner Vanessa Rendell.

Not long ago I examined at a school that had quite a few candidates for whom reasonable adjustments, due to a physical condition, had been requested. Of course, no adjustment was to be made to my marking. The teacher spoke to me afterwards and said that one particular candidate struggled with her use of turnout. She felt such candidates should be given an allowance in the marking, and it was 'disgusting' that the RAD was discriminating against such candidates.

I was quite shocked by this accusation, and felt quite angry that she had come to this conclusion. I explained to the teacher that reasonable adjustments were in place so that the examiner could be made aware of any problems beforehand, and to ensure that if there was anything we could do to help make the experience a better one and help put the candidate at ease so that he/she could perform to the best of his/her ability, this could be done. I said that I felt the RAD's approach was the opposite of discrimination, in that it has a marking system where every candidate from all over the world – no matter who they were, where they came from, or how many classes they did a week – was marked to the same criteria, equally and fairly.

I also explained that turnout is a very small percentage of the marking criteria and although a candidate may struggle with turnout, there are so many other criteria, meaning that a student can be encouraged to make up marks that may not be gained from the use of the turnout, e.g. beautiful arm lines, excellent leg extensions, expression and communication – the list is endless.

I came away feeling very sad, as I sensed that when the results came, the candidates would blame me as the examiner for discriminating against them, but this really was not the case. This particular candidate actually had more control over her turnout than many candidates without reasonable adjustments submitted.

When reading the article about Pollyanna¹ and in particular the caption that stated that Pollyanna had been marked down because of her disability, it saddened me to think that her teacher may have told Pollyanna this was the reason. Pollyanna hadn't been marked down; she had been recognised for what she could do.

Personally I feel that 99% of dancers are born with some kind of 'disability'. The 1% that aren't are the Darcey Bussells of this world! However, some of the 99% go on to have fantastic dance careers, as they are trained to work with their body's strengths and limitations, and they tailor their career to suit them.

I went to a dance teacher's psychology lecture once and the lecturer asked us what we all wanted as dance teachers, and everyone (apart from me) wanted to find the next Darcey Bussell. I couldn't quite believe it. Those dancers are born with an amazing natural talent and as my former dance teacher said, 'teaching is all about helping those further down the ladder to climb up and reach the others. The talented ones will all but train themselves with the right guidance.'

For me, it's all about encouraging a sense of enjoyment and fun, enriching my students' lives, and helping them to be the best dancer they can be, with the physical strengths and limitations they have. It's not all about getting 100%, it's about achieving your personal best and enjoying that achievement. Pollyanna had clearly done exceptionally well with her limitations and should have been praised for her achievement.

Who would a 'para-dance' system cater for? There are so many types of disabilities – surely it's best if we encourage teachers to work with each individual, cater towards their needs, and praise students for their strengths and achievements, rather than make them feel inferior about their faults and weaknesses. The RAD does offer class awards, which are there for any candidate who the teacher feels the examination system is not suitable for. This may be a disabled child, but from my experience this is often not the case. They appear mainly to be those who simply cannot commit the time required to get up to what their teacher feels is the examination standard.

I had the most wonderful experience last year, when I examined seven candidates for the Grade 1 class award, all of whom had behavioural issues. I will be honest and admit that I was slightly dubious about what to expect, but it was one of the most wonderful experiences in my examining career. These children had clearly been encouraged to enjoy dancing and taught that it didn't matter if it wasn't technically perfect, as long as they were enjoying it. The atmosphere in the room was electric and I think the teacher almost felt she needed to apologise for them, but this was not the case – she needed to be praised for the work she had done.

I think the majority of disabled people would feel patronised if they weren't marked in the same way as everyone else. Someone with a disability can be capable of achieving a higher standard than a fully able-bodied person who isn't working to their maximum capability.

My heart goes out to anyone that feels they have a disability that prevents them from following their dream, but I do feel that teachers need encouragement and advice in how to mentor children with special needs – not look for excuses and allowances, but help children and young adults enjoy dance and work with what they have to achieve their personal best – and most importantly not to compare themselves to fellow classmates. It's down to us as teachers to steer our students in directions which suit them, encouraging their strengths without condemning their faults.

I teach some lovely dancers who struggle with pointe work, so could never become a ballerina. I would not tell them this outright, I would encourage them to continue with pointe, but if they wanted to follow a dance career I would steer them in the direction of a style of dance that suits their body – there are so many options out there. Children are not stupid, they don't need telling what they already know, but being praised for what they are good at will help them make the right choice in the end. In the meantime it is the responsibility of the teacher to encourage students to enjoy and be proud of what they achieve.

March to July 2015

Australia

Paige Rochester

Canada

Isabella Cowles

Savannah Watson

UK

Natasha Watson

Joseph Edy

USA

Genevieve Waldorf



Photo: Graham Read

In memoriam

It is with great sadness that we write of the passing of Malaysian examiner Priscilla Teoh, in June this year. Priscilla had been an examiner for 24 years and possessed an elegance and professional serenity which was an exceptional example of the RAD examiner's ambassadorial role.

Welcome

A warm welcome to the eight new examiners who have completed their training and recently joined the worldwide Panel of Examiners:

Julia Barry (Australia)

Helen Cooper (Australia)

Jane Keen (Australia)

Lucinde Lane (China)

Adeline Leong (Malaysia)

Kristie Smee (Australia)

Kerrie-Ann Smith (Australia)

Kate Swainston (UK)

Examinations department at RAD HQ

Since June 2015, the Examinations Operations Manager role has been filled by **Elizabeth Hudson** while Examinations Operations and Communications Manager, **Harriet Grant**, is on maternity leave.

Examinations Business and Customer Service Manager, **Louise Marshall**, started her maternity leave in September 2015 and we are delighted to welcome **Zoë Black**, who is undertaking the role of Examinations Customer Service Manager, during Louise's absence.

Kirsty Yeung, Examinations Officer (International), left the RAD in September 2015 to move to Glasgow. More information on this role will follow soon.

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