

## Free enchaînements

Preparing candidates for exams

Social media

Exams promotional video





## Focus on Exams Issue 3 2016

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Welcome to *Focus on Exams*.

Our mid-year exam sessions are now over for 2016 – this is our busiest period in terms of sheer numbers, with around half of our planned yearly exam days worldwide occurring in May, June, July and August. However, there isn't really a rest in the examination calendar, with teachers, candidates, examiners, pianists and organisers busily starting preparations for sessions later in the year.

In this issue of *Focus on Exams*, as well as our usual reminders and updates, we also take a look at the all-important issue of exam preparation and its significance for candidates and examiners alike.

In other examinations news:

- The Syllabus Development Group continues to work on our new 'Repertoire Syllabus'...
- The RAD opens up applications for the second round of the Fiona Campbell Examinations Bursary...
- We've created a promotional film to help spread the message about the excitement and value of RAD exams...

Read on for more information!

Thank you for your continued support for RAD exams. Read on for more information.

**Dr Andrew McBirnie**  
Director of Examinations

If you have any questions about anything in this issue of *Focus on Exams*, contact us at [exams@rad.org.uk](mailto:exams@rad.org.uk)

Let us know about your exams experience via our online survey at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/examsfeedback](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/examsfeedback)



Photo: Elliott Franks

### Music for vocational graded exams

Please remember that live piano accompaniment remains a requirement for all levels of vocational graded exams, whether taking in place in an AEC or RAV. In the event that a pianist is suddenly unavailable to play in an AEC, every effort should be made to find a replacement. Teachers can apply for special consideration for candidates in these circumstances. If it is not possible to find a replacement, teachers should contact their local organiser for further instructions.

### Repertoire syllabus

We are starting to hold some trial examinations for our new 'repertoire syllabus' (working title). The feedback we receive from the teachers and examiners involved will help us refine the content and procedure, ready for the launch, which we are hoping will be some time in 2017 – watch this space for more news!

### Syllabus amendments

**Advanced 1 music book – A1-16: Allegro 3 (page 23)** – the instruction *slower for male version* is incorrect and should be ignored. The piece should be played at the same speed for all candidates.

A summary of amendments to the syllabus and sheet music publications can be found at [www.rad.org.uk/syllabus-updates](http://www.rad.org.uk/syllabus-updates)



Photo: Elliott Franks

## Fiona Campbell Examinations Bursary

The Fiona Campbell Examinations Bursary has once again been opened to applicants worldwide. The closing date for the most recent round was 30 September, and we are currently reviewing the applications.

This bursary was made possible as a result of a generous legacy left by Fiona Campbell, RAD teacher, examiner, Trustee and lifelong friend to the Academy.

RAD Registered teachers can apply for a grant on behalf of deserving candidates, to the value of their next exam. The process is very simple – you have 150 words to explain why your candidate is deserving of a bursary. Apart from the Solo Seal, all exams are eligible.

Successful candidates have 12 months to use the bursary from the date of being informed of their award.

Watch out for the next round of applications!

## Promotional film

We have created a short film capturing some of the events of a typical exam day and the associated emotions. In it, we speak teachers, candidates and examiners in order to get a sense of the excitement of exam day.

Although the film is intended for everyone who is interested in RAD exams, we hope in particular that it will help teachers to explain to students and their parents their significance – as a culmination of the work and dedication over many months of all concerned. We hope it also shows the thrill and enjoyment of performance, and the sense of achievement and elation after completing an exam.

Please visit [www.rad.org.uk/achieve/exams](http://www.rad.org.uk/achieve/exams) to have a look.

## Give us your thoughts...

As some of you may be aware, we now have an online customer feedback survey, where teachers can let us know about their experiences of RAD exams.

To date, we have received around 200 responses from over 20 countries. A few key points are listed below:

- Over 92% of teachers strongly agree, or agree to some extent, that the syllabus is relevant to and meets the needs of their students across all levels (responses vary from 85% for Advanced 2 to 100% for Dance to Your Own Tune).
- 72% of teachers are very satisfied, or satisfied to some extent, with time taken to receive results, certificates and medals.
- When asked whether they feel exam results are fair, accurate and reliable, 16% of teachers say 'always', 57% 'usually', 26% 'sometimes', and 1% 'never'.
- Over 90% of teachers are satisfied with the exams service provided by the RAD.
- Over 96% of teachers are very satisfied, or satisfied to some extent, with the quality of communications about exams.
- Over 94% of teachers are very satisfied, or satisfied to some extent, with the exams service provided by the RAD.

Some key quotes:

- *'The organisation is of extreme care – programmes, articles in the Gazette, the information that arrives by email. Congratulations on your incredible work!'* (teacher from Portugal).
- *'The solo performance award has seen students excited about ballet at a time when they ordinarily start to give up'* (teacher from South Africa).

- *'[It] was my first time working with the RAD, and was very happy overall, and looking to keep on this relation with this company'* (teacher from Malta).

Teacher feedback is hugely important to us. Let us know what we are getting right (or wrong!) at:

[www.surveymonkey.com/r/examsfeedback](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/examsfeedback)



Photo: Elliott Franks



## Social Media Fridays

The dedicated monthly exams day on social media has gained momentum in recent months. We cover issues that are of interest to everyone who engages with RAD exams. We try to keep the content relevant, by addressing issues that link in with wider RAD interests and initiatives, such as students taking exams (to link with the Silver Swans training and the idea of lifelong learning in dance) or a focus on male candidates, syllabi and examiners – as well as other topics that we think you will find informative.

Our exams presence on Facebook is showing an average reach of 220,000 in 2016. The March Exams Friday, on male students taking RAD exams, saw our most successful response on Twitter so far, with over 17,000 impressions and an engagement rate of 4.42% (against an industry standard of 1.5%).

We can also use social media to respond to specific issues or queries, for example, the reliability and accuracy of exam results, which stemmed from a thread on a Facebook discussion group about results moderation. Although we were slightly nervous about addressing this controversial and sensitive topic via social media, our audience for this piece had a Facebook reach of 343,100 – our highest ever – and the vast majority of responses were positive..

If you have any ideas for topics you would like to see discussed or presented on our Social Media Fridays, please do let us know!  
[exams@rad.org.uk](mailto:exams@rad.org.uk)



## Free enchaînements

by Paula Hunt, Chair of the Panel of Examiners and Head of Syllabus Development

At Intermediate Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced Foundation levels, the free enchaînements are a significant part of the examination – 10 marks for the technique, as well as a percentage of the generic music and performance marks. The good news is that examiners are increasingly finding that candidates have a more in-depth understanding of the focal steps, but there is still some room for improvement. Often candidates who are achieving good marks (e.g. 7 and upwards) in other technique sections are still receiving much lower marks for the free enchaînement.



Photo: Elliott Franks

Some helpful hints for teachers to improve these statistics:

- Ensure that students understand the technical requirements for each focal step. These should be trained initially with development movements that enhance the understanding – avoiding the temptation to teach the step without a secure build-up.
- Once the students can competently perform the step with accurate technique, the focal step should be used in a series, instead of launching into complicated settings.
  - For example: Seven jetés ordinaires devant followed by a petit assemblé devant and repeat with seven jetés ordinaires derrière followed by a petit assemblé derrière.

Gradually reduce the number of repetitions once the students have managed to maintain the appropriate technique.

- Generally the free enchaînement will include two versions of the selected focal step along with a selection of linking steps.
  - Example 1 – a jeté ordinaire focal step enchaînement will always include some devant and some derrière
  - Example 2 – a pas de basque sauté enchaînement will always include en avant and en arrière

Focal steps that have multiple versions, such as assemblés, will still use only two versions.

- When preparing students for the exam, the free enchaînement should be kept simple to give them an opportunity to show the focal step with technical accuracy, remembering that there are repetitions of the same step in many of the enchaînements.

...continued overleaf

- The linking steps also require technical understanding and should be trained the same way as explained above.
- Be sure to use a variety of ports de bras for the various movements and steps. Candidates often get very confused if the examiner sets a movement of the arms that is different from the arm movements teachers may always use for a particular step.
- Encourage a musical approach by using the voice to establish the rhythm rather than pedantic counting.
- When the examiner is setting the enchaînement the candidates should show the step correctly applying all the necessary technical criteria.
- Candidates are always asked to mark the enchaînement FOUR times through – the students should have been trained to mark efficiently to save energy for the performance which is also seen FOUR times through.
- When marking the enchaînement candidates should use 100% of arms/upper body/head movement and approximately 50% of lower body/legs/feet.
- The performance of the enchaînement is often compromised, many candidates stop after only two repeats. Candidates then find it extremely difficult to pick it up again. Often it is only possible to give half the mark they should have received as the enchaînement was only performed with any recognition of technical accuracy twice through.
- Finally, invest time to give students the confidence to embrace and succeed in the free enchaînement section of the exam by slowly developing the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding.

## Preparing candidates for exams

by Harriet Grant, *Examinations Operations and Communications Manager*

As teachers are more than aware, even the best prepared candidates can suffer from nerves on exam day. This can result in momentary forgetfulness in the exam room, a little anxiety as the exam begins, or in extreme cases tears or even sickness. Thankfully these kinds of nerves are very rare, and teachers, parents, examiners and exam attendants work hard to ensure candidates can relax and perform to their full potential.

If the candidate is well prepared then an attack of nerves will be manageable, and with the help of those organising the exam, they will enjoy the experience. Sometimes the 'performance' aspect of an exam draws out greater levels of expression and communication than is usually seen in class!

Examiners work hard to put candidates at their ease, creating a positive atmosphere to help them perform to the best of their ability. They follow the format information published in the Specifications, and if candidates seem unsure of what to do, they may provide gentle prompts. If necessary, teachers are welcome to provide brief notes for the examiner indicating the settings and pairings they have prepared when there are three candidates.

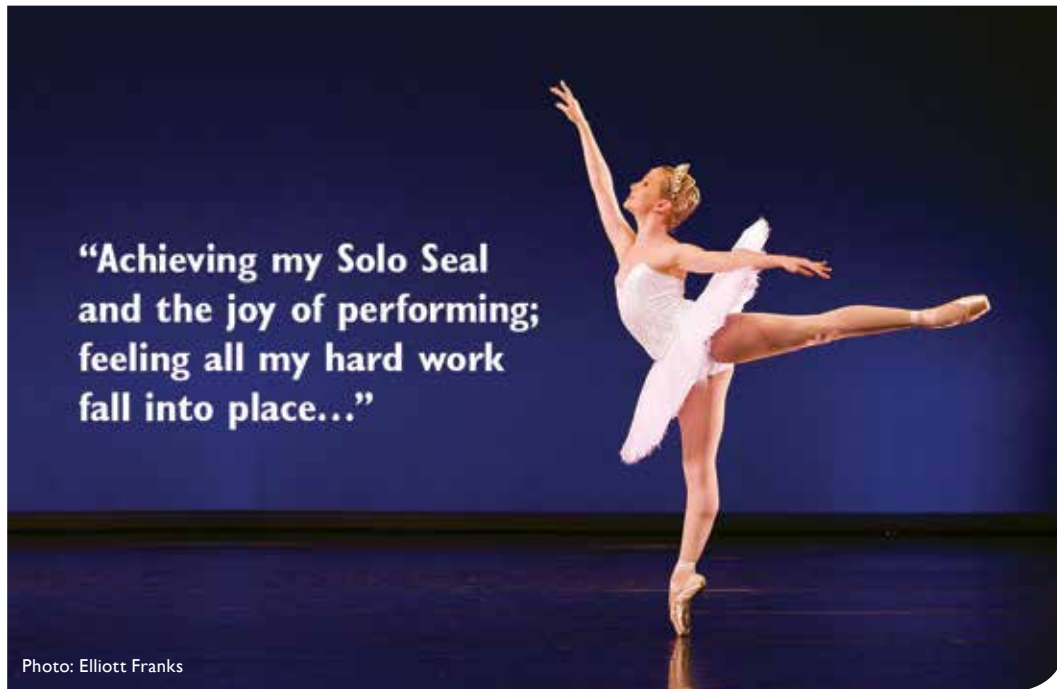
Feedback, however, from examiners indicates that, nerves aside, some candidates seem poorly prepared, particularly in Primary in Dance to Grade 3 examinations. 'Unprepared' doesn't mean the candidate has a 'moment' of forgetfulness, or makes small mistakes. It means that they don't know large portions of the work, or seem unsure of how an examination is run.



Photo: Elliott Franks

Another concern raised is candidate behaviour in exams, with reports of chatting, noise, moving round and distracting other candidates, again, substantially in the Primary in Dance to Grade 3 range. We are aware that teachers are not in the examination room and therefore this is difficult to monitor, and that some students can be challenging in attention and focus. But, if candidates can practise where to stand in an exam, and know that they should be still and quiet while others are performing, it helps exams run more smoothly, and allows all candidates to perform without distraction.

Examiners want the best from candidates, whatever their technical ability and, more than anything, they want them to enjoy their exam. It's very disheartening for examiners when candidates are clearly unfamiliar with the requirements, not least because this impacts on the smooth running of an exam. Therefore, we would strongly advise teachers to ensure that candidates are confident about what to do in the exam and are familiar with the requirements. This way, all candidates will enjoy their exam experience, and teachers have one less thing to worry about on exam day.



### Successful Solo Seal candidates

The Solo Seal is the highest level of examination offered by the RAD. Candidates perform three solo variations, requiring a high degree of technical and expressive artistry, in front of an audience. They must achieve a minimum of 8 marks (out of 10) in every examination component in order to pass. In a typical year, no more than 20–30 candidates around the world achieve this prestigious award.

Above: A post from Exams Social Media Day, May 2016

Congratulations to the following:

#### Australia

Liam John Green (July 2015)  
Mischa Hall (July 2015)  
Heather Maclaughlan (July 2015)

#### Canada

Leah Jane Terry (May 2016)

#### UK

Abigail Jane Baker (June 2016)  
Uyu Hiromoto (June 2016)  
Antonia Johnson (June 2016)  
Sara Nativi (June 2016)

### Examiners' Seminar 2017

The worldwide panel of RAD examiners will convene in London in January 2017 for a week-long seminar. Our examiners are key to the Examinations Board's delivery of high-quality assessments and examinations, and this event will draw together 200 examiners from 25 countries around the world to meet and work together on a detailed review of RAD syllabi (old and new), quality assurance and standardisation processes, and examination administration and procedures.

### Farewell

Sincere thanks and good wishes to the three examiners who submitted their retirements or resignations during 2016:

Sandy Anderton (UK)  
Lynnette Kelley (CAN)  
Susan Tyne (UK)

### Examinations department at RAD HQ

We say a fond farewell to Examinations Business and Customer Services Manager, Louise Marshall, who has been with the Academy for 7 years. We are very sorry to see her leave, and wish her (and baby Ethan) the very best for the future! We are delighted that Zoë Black, Louise's maternity cover, will be continuing in her role in a permanent capacity.

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Photo: Elliott Franks



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