



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Drama
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates, which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The exam performed very well this year. The Question Paper showed a component average increase of 3.3 marks from last year, and the Practical Exam was remarkably steady showing an increase of 0.5 marks.

The upper A grades doubled from 2.8% to 5.6%, and the lower A grades increased by 7.2%. Over 23% of the cohort achieved an A at Advanced Higher, showing the calibre of the candidates. There was a 10.4% increase in those passing the exam, and the No Awards reduced by 7%. This is a very encouraging pattern and centres are congratulated on their commitment to preparing their candidates for both parts of the exam.

An Understanding Standards event for Advanced Higher Drama was held in November 2011, and proved very popular. Exemplars from that day are available on SQA's website.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed exceptionally well in the Practical Exam. A wide range of texts were used and Visiting Assessors commented on the high quality of the work they saw.

Markers commented on a general improvement of understanding in the Question Paper, particularly in Section A.

A large number of candidates who studied Stanislavski, Craig and Brook seemed excited by the work of their chosen practitioner and this came through in their answers, with many scoring well.

It is encouraging to see that an increasing proportion of centres are prepared to take their candidates to see new work performed by the RSC, the National Theatre and the official Festival in Edinburgh. It is obvious when a candidate is enthused by the quality of work they have seen as it comes through in the writing.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Special Study Report should be completed in forty minutes under exam conditions. However, Visiting Assessors have reported that it is regularly typed and often far too long, covering areas that are unnecessary. Candidates should concern themselves with research and practical exploration and how these helped them arrive at their final concept.

Candidates still find Section B of the paper challenging and many find it difficult to analyse a production. A considerable number fail to comment on the productions of their chosen practitioner and instead talk purely about techniques. This seems to particularly apply to those centres studying Brecht. Few seem to get beyond his techniques when the questions quite clearly ask about his practice.

A large number of centres chose to use *Black Watch* as a recent production that they had seen. There are many available options, and to use a show which was performed over a year ago risks the loss of momentum amongst the candidates.

A considerable number of candidates chose to comment on one play and compare it to the same play done by a practitioner of their choice. It is important that candidates have a flavour of the

whole gamut of work done by the practitioner. To comment only on one play is too narrow and loses them marks.

The Question Paper

Section A

The most popular practitioners are Stanislavski, Craig, Brecht, Brook, Artaud and Boal.

Stanislavski: The first question referred to at least two of Stanislavski's productions and asked about his successes and weaknesses. Many responses stayed within the Chekhov period, where it is difficult to get a real contrast in the style of directing. Few spoke of plays beyond *Hamlet*, which was a pity. Many responses concentrated on influences and did not address the question, which was about legacy.

Stanislavski's Legacy was obviously his System, but some candidates still mix up the System with the Method. Many answered this well but seem restricted to the plays Stanislavski directed up until 1911. Stanislavski died in 1937 and directed up until the end of his life. It is important to know how the System evolved by referring to the later plays as well as the earlier ones, and these are well documented.

Craig: The questions on Craig were well attempted. Because the body of work is relatively small it is easy to manage and is well documented.

The two productions offered few problems here as *Bethlehem, Dido and Aeneas, Acis and Galatea, The Masque of Love, The Vikings* and, of course, *Hamlet* are so well documented. His use of screens, light and ubermarionettes produced much debate and these were interesting responses.

With regard to the question on legacy, many were quite clear he was a man ahead of his time and spoke lucidly about his experimentations with staging and light, linking these to dance, abstract movement and symbolism.

No candidates studied Reinhardt, Meyerhold, or Piscator, except in conjunction with other practitioners.

Artaud: Few centres study Artaud. His work is fascinating practically, and very appealing for youngsters, but few really got to grips with how his experiments with light and sound have had such long-lasting effects.

To study Artaud effectively, it is necessary to know something about the Surrealists, Cocteau, the Theatre of Alfred Jarry and how he operated in France at the time. Few seemed to be conversant with this, and points made seem to have been extracted from materials given, rather than properly understood and assimilated.

Artaud's body of work is very narrow and little was delivered as he wanted. Candidates who study Artaud are apt to mention *The Conquest of Mexico* but know very little about it. They refer to the Theatre of Alfred Jarry, but they do not seem to know a great deal about the man or the movement. They find interesting the shocking nature of *Le Cenci* and *The Jet of Blood* but find these plays difficult to discuss and assess.

Brecht: Those who answered on Brecht in Section A fared better than those who answered on him in Section B.

Many of those who answered the first question did not appear to have enough material to talk about productions in depth and the answers were quite superficial.

The second question was by far the most popular and it was very straight forward. Brecht's legacy was considered by most to be Epic Theatre. This was often well argued and much reference was

made to his techniques, little to his practice. Candidates who answer any question about Brecht love to talk about his early life and work in the First World War, but then did not use this material to say how it affected his writing and his legacy.

Brook: Although Brook may seem unwieldy due to the breadth of material, because it is divided into phases it is manageable and it is also very well documented. This makes a difference.

Those who answered the first question generally commented on more than two productions as the body of work is so vast and so well documented, but did not really consider the weaknesses. It is very easy to become wrapped up in the genius of Brook.

Centres studying Brook knew their material and were able to talk in relative detail about his legacy which most considered to be the empty space or eclecticism.

Boal: Those candidates who answered on Boal differed greatly, from scoring 20/20 to barely coping with the question. His legacy is an exciting one and it certainly inspired some candidates to write knowledgeably on the subject.

Few attempted the first question on Boal.

Section B

This is an area which most candidates found challenging.

Question 23 asked candidates to analyse the interpretation and use of the play text made by the director, and comment on how this differed to the approach to the play text by the theatre practitioner they had studied.

Some candidates chose to compare a play they had seen with a play their practitioner had directed.

This did not give the flavour of the work of their practitioner.

Those candidates who studied Brecht were apt to discuss his techniques and not his practice in productions and so lost marks.

Question 24 asked candidates to describe and assess how the use of theatre space contributed to the creation of dramatic meaning. They were then asked to comment on their practitioner's use of playing space.

Many wrote a good performance analysis on this question but did not really address the second part on their chosen practitioner.

Question 25 asked candidates to describe key dramatic scenes that had a powerful impact in a piece of contemporary theatre and analyse how these were created. They were then asked to describe aspects of performances by their chosen practitioner, which had a powerful impact.

Many who chose this question answered on *Black Watch*. There was much description but little analysis. Many of those who chose this question did not answer the second part on their chosen practitioner.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Practical Exam

Special Study Reports: Part A is designed to inform the Visiting Assessor of the candidate's final theatrical concept. These should be done in forty minutes, under exam conditions and should cover research, practical exploration, and how the candidate arrived at their final theatrical concept.

Acting: It is important that supporting actors learn the lines for a candidate being examined. Twelve marks out of thirty are assigned to character interaction and impact on audience, and to score well in this area candidates have to have spent time working together as a team or they are disadvantaged.

Scope of Acting Pieces: It is important that candidates have the scope to show change and development of their character across the chosen extract.

Accents: It is important that acting parts, which demand a difference in status, should be reflected in the use of voice and movement, eg a Miss Julie played in a broad regional accent will find it difficult to communicate the fact she is a lady, and this is essential to her credibility.

Costume: The costume chosen should reflect the nature of the character, eg an Eliza Doolittle played in a short skirt throughout will find it difficult to be convincing.

Audience: It is important that the audience chosen is supportive of the candidates.

Design: When designing a set, the whole play must be taken into consideration before arriving at the concept. Because Shakespearean plays are in five acts, it isn't possible to concentrate on merely one or two of them.

It is also important that the set works. Candidates need to know how to explain scene changes and their entrances and exits.

Many choose *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a design choice and become completely involved in creating beauty and magic but then forget they have mechanicals to deal with. It is necessary to consider all aspects of the play.

The Design concept has to work. Candidates cannot decide on an outrageous concept and then be unable to justify it sufficiently.

Direction: It is a good idea to use actors who have some understanding of the text. To cast S3 pupils in certain texts with which they are unfamiliar, can put a Directing candidate at a distinct disadvantage.

Question Paper

It is important that candidates know the difference between text and pretext.

Candidates need to be reminded to use textual and contextual evidence in their answers.

In Section B, many candidates talk generally about the techniques and theory used by their chosen practitioners instead of referring to specific productions which they directed.

It is essential that candidates have seen the performance that they choose to discuss in the Question Paper.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	327
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	308
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark				
A	23.7%	23.7%	73	68
B	26.6%	50.3%	82	57
C	30.5%	80.8%	94	46
D	9.7%	90.6%	30	40
No award	9.4%	100.0%	29	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.