



## External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	<b>Drama</b>
Level(s)	<b>Higher</b>

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

Numbers of candidate entries for Higher Drama are up this year by almost 12% which is very encouraging.

Visiting Assessors were very complementary about the way the practical exam performed and the welcome they received from centres. Many mentioned how privileged and uplifted they felt on seeing such a range of work and the very high standard of the acting. The commitment of staff and youngsters is to be applauded.

Question Paper markers reported that, although many responses seemed better, these were offset by a sizable number of candidates who did not take sufficient time to read the Question Paper properly and so lost marks accordingly.

*The Crucible* is still the most popular prescribed text, followed by *Antigone*, *The Birthday Party*, *Lovers*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The House of Bernarda Alba* and *A Taste of Honey*.

A wide range of Contemporary Scottish Theatre (CST) plays are used for the Acting exam. In the Question Paper *Men Should Weep*, *The Steamie* and *Tally's Blood* remain firm favourites, followed by *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *Black Watch*. Some centres really stretch their candidates by looking at *Bondagers*.

Unfortunately, one act plays are still being taught, and candidates regularly lose marks because they choose to talk about a one act play rather than a full-length play.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed very well in the Acting exam. The average scaled mark was 36.4/50, giving a raw mark of 29/40.

This level of excellence is due to the professional commitment of both centres and candidates to the exam. Many Visiting Assessors commented on the pleasure they had visiting centres and seeing work of such a high standard. It was obvious that candidates thoroughly enjoyed this experience and approached the task with real enthusiasm.

Teamwork is to be commended. Often, candidates will learn another role to support their peers, and the level of interaction is to be applauded.

Candidates also scored well in the Dramatic Commentary section of the Question Paper. Many centres had taken the time to teach this aspect of the Course to a very high standard, and candidates demonstrated strong theatrical skills in this area.

Those candidates who chose Question 12, the theatrical review, generally performed very well indeed, though many centres still do not look at this question as a viable option.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates always find Sections A and C of the Question Paper challenging. This is compounded because many do not read the question posed and instead rely on pre-prepared answers. Ironically, in many cases this year, candidates were fully able to answer the questions asked — they just failed to read the question properly.

## Section A

**Question 1:** This question asked candidates to direct a production of their prescribed text in a small intimate space. This question was not well done because the majority wrote about their directorial concept and did not link it in any way to an intimate space. Others who did, and chose Theatre in the Round, drew their Ground Plan in section B as Pros Arch or End On staging. As a result they lost marks.

**Question 2:** Candidates were asked to explain the dramatic impact they wished to create in a key scene from their prescribed text, giving reasons for their choice. They were then asked to explain how their direction of the scene led to this desired impact.

The number of candidates who ignored part one of the question and went straight to part two was surprising. This then made no sense, and they could not be awarded marks for something they had not explained. Often descriptions of dramatic impact were vague and repetitive.

**Question 3:** Asked candidates to identify two characters from their prescribed text and explain why they had different motivation. The question then asked how you, as a director, would prepare your actors to play these roles in the rehearsal process.

The problem with this question was that most read 'rehearsal' as 'performance'. As a result candidates scored well in the first part of the question, but not in part B.

**Question 4:** This question asked candidates about a character who created dramatic tension in their prescribed text. This was generally well done, apart from those candidates who chose to write about their acting piece. The question clearly asked that more than one scene should be discussed.

## Section B

**Dramatic Commentary — Ground Plans:** The Dramatic Commentary is an area where pupils score well, though the quality of Ground Plans varies enormously. There appears to be an increasing number of candidates who do not know how to draw a Ground Plan and are therefore not able to access the four marks available. Every year this part of the paper is done badly by a sizeable number of candidates, and sometimes it is not even attempted. Often the Ground Plan bears no relation to Section A of the paper, despite numerous reminders that the two must correlate.

**Technical Column:** Another area where candidates often fail to gain two marks is in the technical section of the Dramatic Commentary. They are requested to give an opening lighting state which includes the colour and intensity of the light, justify the effect, and mark it on the script. However, a considerable number of candidates do not do so.

## Section C

The most popular questions were 6, 10 and 11. Questions 8 and 9 were seldom done, and few attempted question 13.

**Question 6:** Here candidates were asked which CST plays tend to focus on characters who have to deal with significant social hardship. Many candidates took this as an opportunity to list the social issues that arise in CST texts, but many answered it well.

**Question 7:** This question asked about political and social injustices. Some candidates did not know what social or political injustices were and answered it similarly to question 6.

**Question 10:** This was a very popular choice – the positive portrayal of men and manhood. Many candidates answered against the question, and many discussed the positives and the negatives. On the whole this was well done and candidates had plenty of material to use. Some however presented prepared answers on sexual stereotypes and did not refer to the question.

**Question 11:** This was another very popular question asking about gender inequalities. In some answers, the inequalities became gender issues, but, on the whole, many candidates approached this question well and had plenty of material to use from the texts they had studied.

**Question 12:** The candidates who did the performance analysis knew their material well and answered the question asked. Many used the Lyceum/Dundee Rep production of *Mary Queen of Scots got her Head Chopped Off* and offered detailed answers. A large number also answered on *Black Watch*.

# Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

## General advice on acting

### Use of scripts and prompts

It is preferable to have no scripts on stage. The Acting Exam is worth 50% of the total mark.

Candidates are marked on their ability to interact with others and if others are reading from a script no convincing interaction can occur.

It is important that candidates know their lines. An occasional prompt is understandable but to have successive prompts suggests a lack of preparation and prompts inevitably take candidates out of character.

### Use of costume

It is helpful that, if candidates are not costumed for a period play, they should use blacks and the length of skirts should be in keeping with the period of the play.

### Repetition of scenes

Repetitious scenes directed in the same way do not help candidates perform to the best of their ability.

### Use of props

If candidates are using props it is important they are familiar with them. This particularly pertains to *Comedy of Manners*, where candidates often have to be taught how to hold a cup and saucer. If female candidates use a fan they need to be taught how to use it, and how to walk in a long dress in case they trip over it. The use of a parasol also requires practice so that it appears natural.

### Use of accents

There are certain texts which benefit from use of accents and, normally, centres choose well.

- ◆ *The Importance of Being Earnest*, being a *Comedy of Manners*, requires that the characters use RP accents.
- ◆ *Antigone* requires that the royal characters use accents, which suggest a higher status than the Sentry.
- ◆ *The House of Bernarda Alba* requires the family and Prudencia to be of higher status than the Maid. Poncia has to show difference, which may or may not be suggested through use of accent. Since she has been with the family for so long, she can speak like them, or adopt a regional accent.
- ◆ *A Taste of Honey* benefits from having the accent defined before the performance. It was written in Northern English.
- ◆ *The Birthday Party* lends itself to McCann being Irish because of the way the lines are written.
- ◆ *Lovers* is set in Northern Ireland and the text revolves around that fact. It cannot be set elsewhere because of the strong role of the Catholic Church at that time, so the characters should use Irish accents.

### **Cross-gender roles**

Candidates should only play a different gender in one of the two acting pieces. Some centres have taken to defining McCann and Goldberg as women and whereas this type of casting has been accepted and can work well, it should be remembered that they are men.

### **Use of cameos**

A range of cameo parts are increasingly being used, particularly in *Passing Places*. The Acting exam advises that candidates play one CST role. If a range of characters are presented, eg from Binks, to the Lollipop Lady, to the wee boy, all a Visiting Assessor can do is mark the largest role.

Parts must offer sufficient scope for candidates, eg in *The Crucible*, parts such as Betty or Mercy Lewis in Act 1 do not offer enough scope for the Higher Drama Acting Exam.

### **Length of acting pieces**

Some of acting pieces are too short, and some are too long. If a piece is too long it can disadvantage a candidate as well as one that is too short. A good indication is that the piece should last about ten minutes for two candidates.

### **Audience**

It is the job of each centre to arrange a suitable audience for their Acting exam. It is worth 50% of the total marks awarded, and an appropriate and supportive audience can make all the difference to the way candidates perform.

## **General advice on the Question paper**

### **Reading the question**

It would be helpful if centres advised candidates to underline key words in a question. This ensures they read the whole question. Many lost marks this year by not reading the full question and reading performance techniques for rehearsal techniques in question 3 of Section A.

### **Numbering the questions**

Many candidates did not indicate the question they were answering, meaning that the marker had to guess which one the answer applied to.

### **Technical**

Some candidates did not mark the technical requirements on their script and lost valuable marks.

### **Use of quotation**

Some candidates are getting careless with their use of quotation. Sometimes these are made up, and in some cases they are getting shorter and shorter so that they lack credibility and are barely valid at all. Quotations must be contextualised and should be used to back up points made.

### **Correlation between Sections A and B**

There has to be correlation between Section A and Section B of the paper. For example, you cannot have an end-on stage followed by a theatre in the round set; the two do not make sense.

### **Justification**

It is important to justify why points are being made in an essay. A list of bullet points is not enough.

**Use of one act plays**

One act plays can only be used in conjunction with two other full texts.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	2456
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	2601
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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 100				
A	22.8%	22.8%	593	70
B	39.7%	62.5%	1032	57
C	26.9%	89.4%	699	45
D	5.9%	95.2%	153	39
No award	4.8%	100.0%	124	-

## 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.