



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject	Drama
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 for the Advanced Higher were markedly up this year. 358 candidates sat the exam, as opposed to the 304 candidates from last year. There were 29.2% of new or returning centres.

The exam continues to perform consistently well, and marks are stable from one year to the next — particularly remarkable in view of the high percentage of new or returning centres. This year, the performance of candidates was slightly improved from last year.

The stability of the 2014 results shows that centres have a good understanding of the exam and their candidates, and centres are to be congratulated on their enthusiasm and commitment to both components of the exam.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed consistently well in the Practical component of the exam. A wide range of texts was used, and Visiting Assessors (Vas) commented on the high quality of the work. They reported that candidates had been well prepared and sufficiently challenged by the length and scope of the acting pieces, and that directors had a detailed knowledge of the plays they had studied.

Markers commented on candidates having a better understanding of what is expected 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 high marks.

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 productions coming to the Edinburgh International Festival. It is obvious when a candidate is enthused by the quality of the work they have seen, as it comes through in the writing. Quality productions give candidates a better opportunity to discuss the various aspects of the play and offer them more scope in their responses.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Special Study Report should be completed in 40 minutes under exam conditions. However, often it is often far too long, covering areas that are unnecessary. Candidates should concern themselves with academic research, practical research and how these helped the candidate arrive at their final concept.

Generally the marks for the Question Paper were better than last year, and it was not unusual to see an excellent essay in Section A of the paper, which came into the 18–20 category.

Candidates still find Section B of the paper challenging, and many find it quite difficult to analyse a production. This can be compounded by the choice of text. Plays chosen should be challenging to an Advanced Higher candidate, giving them scope to write intelligently about the production. A number of candidates still fail to comment on the productions of their chosen practitioner, and instead talk purely about the practitioner's techniques. This seems to particularly apply to those centres studying Brecht. Few seem to progress beyond his techniques when the questions quite clearly ask about his practice.

It has been noted that some centres choose to use inappropriate productions. It is very obvious when a centre has used a DVD of a performance filmed a number of years ago instead of a live performance, as inevitably the candidates will make reference to this in their responses. Instead of an enthusiastic version of the event, the result can often be full of generalisations.

A considerable number of candidates chose to comment on one play and compare it to the same play staged 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.

The question paper

Section A

The most popular practitioner is Stanislavski, with centres also studying Craig, Brecht, Brook, Artaud and Boal.

This year only a few candidates answered both questions from the same section, showing an increased familiarity with the format of the paper. Sometimes centres set a Prelim Exam Paper which only deals with the practitioner that the centre studies. However, it is important that candidates see the paper in its entirety, so that they are not confused in the actual exam.

Many candidates still write everything they know about their practitioner regardless of the question posed, as they do not seem to understand what was asked of them, or take the time to read the question carefully. As with the Higher, it benefits candidates to underline key words in a question before answering it. Another issue is that candidates can make sweeping generalisations without justifying what they say.

Stanislavski

The first question asked candidates to explain how Stanislavski's ideas of the role of the actor evolved throughout his theatre-making career.

This was an ideal question for Stanislavski, but surprisingly some candidates did not even refer to his personal qualities and just spoke about his theatre making. Many responses stayed within the Chekhovian period, where the comments were general rather than specific. Some centres dwelt on *The Seagull* and one other text. Few spoke of plays staged beyond *Hamlet*, in 1911, which was an opportunity missed.

The second question required candidates to describe and comment on the difficulties and challenges that Stanislavski had to overcome in his professional career to achieve his aims for theatre.

This question lent itself to Stanislavski and his career as a director but, again, few candidates referred to plays beyond *Hamlet*. To answer this question well, it is essential to address post-1911 productions and the influence politics and the Revolutions had on his theatre making as well as his change from dictator to collaborator.

Craig

The questions on Craig were relatively well attempted, probably because his body of work is relatively small and well documented, but some answers were general rather than specific and it seemed candidates were unsure of what was achieved in each production.

It appeared as if a number of candidates did not feel confident referencing specific productions. Referring to Question 3 in the Question Paper, Craig's ideas of how the role of the actor evolved throughout his theatre-making career should have been a straightforward question. Many mentioned the effect of his mother and Irvine but then confused the detail of *Bethlehem*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Acis and Galatea* and *The Masque of Love*. *The Vikings* was occasionally mentioned and, although reference to *Hamlet* was made, it was often general rather than specific. Considering the amount of detail written on these productions, it is important to have knowledge of the production elements in each play to write an informed answer.

With regard to Question 4 on difficulties and challenges, this was an ideal opportunity for students to show their knowledge on Craig as he had so many difficulties and challenges from his youth right through to his career in directing. Again essays were apt to be general rather than specific to instances, which affected his career and the path he chose to take. Some candidates tried to take rehearsed essays from previous years and tried to shoehorn them into this question, which was not successful.

In some instances, the quality of essays on Craig was superb.

No centres study Reinhardt, Meyerhold, or Piscator, except in conjunction with other practitioners.

Artaud

Artaud is a very challenging practitioner to study effectively because candidates are seldom objective in their approach to his work. Those who study Artaud find his work fascinating practically, but few ever get to grips with it academically and are able to objectively assess what he actually achieved, because they are too absorbed in the shocking nature of his work.

In Question 13, few wrote on his idea of how the role of the actor evolved and instead wrote everything they knew about him. Sometimes parts of what they said hit the mark, but at other times it bore no relation to the question at all.

Last year's report stated that, to study Artaud effectively, it is necessary to know something about his background: the Surrealists, Cocteau, the Theatre of Alfred Jarry and how he operated in France at the time. It also helps if there is some understanding of his psychological state. Few candidates seem adequately conversant with this, and the points made seem to have been extracted from materials given, rather than properly understood and assimilated. Most know that he was mentally ill but did not say in any detail how this

affected his ability to relate to others. Little was mentioned about how his private life influenced his thinking and the general impression was that candidates did not have sufficient knowledge to apply it to the questions asked.

As far as Question 14 was concerned, again few seemed to have enough knowledge to answer the question and most just wanted to describe the outrageous nature of the work. Artaud's body of work is so narrow and, because so little of it was presented as he wanted, this Question was very accessible. Some candidates mentioned *The Conquest of Mexico* but knew very little about it. Others referred to *Le Cenci* and *The Jet of Blood* but found these plays difficult to discuss and assess with adequate reference to the question.

Brecht

Those who used Brecht in the first question of Section A seldom referred to his personal qualities other than the fact he was a stretcher bearer in the Great War and the effect that played in his life. The production most commonly referred to was *Mother Courage* and in particular her silent scream. Having mentioned Brecht's involvement in the War, this led on to *Mother Courage*. Sometimes *Drums in the Night*, *Baal*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Mahogany* and *The Jungle of the Cities* were mentioned, but the feeling in some cases was that the knowledge was narrow and candidates were unsure how to manage their material.

His ideas on the role of the actor and the difficulties and challenges he had to overcome to achieve his theatrical aims were often answered with a list of Brecht's techniques and few candidates seemed to know how to use their knowledge to answer the question asked. A significant number of candidates did not appear to have enough material to talk about productions in depth and the answers were at times superficial, consisting of a list of some of the techniques he used in Epic Theatre.

Brook

As always, there were some good essays on Brook in Section A. Although he may seem unwieldy because of the breadth of material, as it is divided into phases it is manageable and it is also very well documented. Whether it is because of this clear structure or because the variety of his work sets students alight, they generally perform well.

Those who answered the first question on how the role of the actor evolved throughout his theatrical career had plenty of material to write about as the three phases of his work are so well documented. Many talked about his close relationship with Schofield, how his work evolved on leaving the RSC, and then spoke about Africa, France and his major latter works.

In terms of the second question on the difficulties and challenges he had to overcome, his early illness, the arguments he had with the establishment, and why he chose to take his own path, gave candidates ample scope to discuss various productions from Shakespeare at the RSC, to opera, to the complicated international work he later accomplished.

Generally speaking, the relatively small number of centres studying Brook knew their material well and were able to adapt it to the questions asked.

Boal

The second question on Boal really suited those who studied him this year and many performed well. They were clearly passionate about the arduous nature of his life and the

difficulties and challenges he had to encounter to achieve his theatrical aims. Some candidates knew their facts better than others and there were some who came into the excellent category.

Section B

Candidates who chose to write about high quality professional theatre generally performed well in this section as they had so much to write about. The thinner the script the more difficult it is to write about. Those who had watched student productions or DVD presentations were at times disadvantaged, as the productions were often not immediate or memorable.

Question 23 asked candidates to analyse the importance of the visual imagery and stage pictures in one or two productions they had seen. They were then asked to compare this to the visual production elements by the practitioner whose work they had studied.

This was a question which suited a large number of candidates and it was done comparatively well. They were able to use the visual hook to structure their answers, and many performed well. Common productions were *Black Watch* shown at the SECC in Glasgow and the NTS production of *Dunsinane* performed on a national tour. There is a tendency for centres to show candidates the original production of *Black Watch* on DVD to jog their memories of the event. However, the stage show is now completely different and acted by a new cast, and the issue is that some candidates can refer to the wrong production. In these cases, the answers were vaguer and lacking in focus.

Question 24 was also well done in general and asked candidates to describe and assess the powerful impact on the audience of a production they had seen. They were then asked to compare this to the powerful impact of productions by their chosen practitioner.

Some wrote good performance analysis on this question but did not really address the second part on their chosen practitioner. It is important that candidates refer to a range of performances by the practitioner to show the range and breadth of his work.

Question 25 on directorial approach confounded some candidates. A large proportion had gone to workshops by directors but could not apply the practice they had experienced to the rigour needed to answer the question and their responses lacked depth. They were apt to become stuck on a specific technique used, and seemed unable to move on from this.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

The Practical Exam

Special Study Reports

Part A is designed to inform the Visiting Assessor (VA) of the candidate's final theatrical concept. These should be completed in 40 minutes under exam conditions and should cover

academic research, practical research and how the candidate arrived at their final theatrical concept.

Acting

This year the quality of some of the Acting was of a remarkably high standard. To regularly see candidates inhabit a range of roles, as well as their own chosen role was a delight, and gave the impression that the group performed as a theatrical company.

It is so important that supporting actors learn the lines for a candidate being examined. 12 marks out of 30 are assigned to character interaction and impact on audience, and, to score well in this area, candidates have to spend time working with their partner or group. If they do not do this they can be at a disadvantage.

It is very difficult to ask a female candidate to fill in for a male part at Advanced Higher. Often the parts are so complex and involve such deep psychological realism and interaction that it is virtually impossible to do them credit unless this has been thought through and incorporated as a chosen concept. Occasionally this will work very well, and, when it does, it is testament to the ability of the actors concerned.

If candidates choose to do Shakespeare, an understanding of the text and the verse is essential to pick up on the acting clues. Sometimes candidates move with no sense of purpose and totally ignore when the text is actually telling them to do something specific.

If candidates are acting high status characters, their movement must be appropriate to the part. Female characters in high status roles in period plays would not cross their arms or legs, and this sort of understanding of the period has to be embraced to be convincing. Many centres use Laura from *The Glass Menagerie* as an acting piece. She really does need to be able to show disability as this helps establish her vulnerability.

Length of Acting pieces

It is important that candidates show change and development of their character across the chosen extract, so to use only one scene from the play will not help the candidate achieve their potential.

Accents

In acting parts which demand a difference in status, this should be reflected in the use of voice and movement. A Miss Julie or a Gertrude played in a broad regional accent will find it difficult to communicate her status, and this is essential to her credibility. Equally a Kristin or a Nurse played with an RP accent is not credible either.

There are a number of texts on the list which are American and demand an American accent. To have Blanche, Stella, Laura and Amanda speaking in Scots accents does not work because of the context. The range of plays is sufficient to ensure that someone who cannot cope with an American accent does not have to use it. However, it should be remembered that to achieve the accent is part of the demanding nature of the role at this level.

Costume

The costume chosen should reflect the nature of the character and the concept of the performance. Whereas it is exciting to see imaginative characterisations, it is important that the costume does not detract from the essence of the play, eg noisy shoes, inappropriate dress and an excess of makeup made some period characters appear unnatural and unconvincing.

Audience

It is important that the audience selected 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, one cannot 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. Some choose to use a fixed set but, if this is not properly thought through, it can get very cluttered. The importance of entrances and exits cannot be over-emphasised. There are many candidates who forget about them and about the fact the set has to be functional. Often, a Spartan set can be the answer, with large pieces of furniture which can be trucked on and off, but wing space must be accounted for.

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 a beautiful or outrageous concept and then be unable to justify it sufficiently. Many candidates put a huge amount of energy into their set model and ignore the two other aspects of design.

Direction

It is a good idea to use actors who have some understanding of the text, eg to cast S3 pupils in certain texts with which they are unfamiliar, and which they have never read before, can put a Directing candidate at a distinct disadvantage. Equally, a cast cannot be expected to deliver without sufficient notice.

It is important that candidates mention what their concepts are and that they use stage terminology.

Question Paper

It is important that every year candidates are reminded to read the question. Certain terms come up year after year and it is important they know the difference between the terms text and pretext and textual and contextual. Candidates need to be reminded to use textual and contextual evidence in their answers and understand each type of evidence.

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

More and more of the Chekhovian plays directed by Stanislavski merge together instead of being seen as separate entities.

It is essential that candidates actually see the performance that they choose to discuss.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	312
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	358
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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	22.1%	22.1%	79	68
B	25.7%	47.8%	92	57
C	33.0%	80.7%	118	46
D	9.8%	90.5%	35	40
No award	9.5%	-	34	-

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.