



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Drama
Level(s)	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

There were 682 candidate entries for 2015 Higher Drama.

The percentage of candidates awarded an A–C pass this year was 92.7%, which is a 3.1% improvement from last year. 4.7% of the group achieved a D pass, which meant that only 2.6% of the cohort received no award.

The question paper responses were better than those of previous years, and candidates performed particularly well in Section A, the Prescribed Text, and Section B, the Dramatic Commentary.

The Crucible is still the most popular text, followed by *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *The Birthday Party*, *Lovers*, *Antigone* and *A Taste of Honey*. Few centres attempted *Twelfth Night* but those who did often attained good marks and showed a real enthusiasm for the text.

There was a wide range of Contemporary Scottish Theatre (CST) texts, but the most popular by far is still *Men Should Weep*, followed by *The Steamie*, *Tally's Blood* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*.

The Acting exams were generally well run and Visiting Assessors (VAs) commented on how well these visiting events were organised.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed exceptionally well in the Acting component of the external assessment. This is due to the continued professional commitment and enthusiasm of both staff and candidates. It is a real pleasure to see work of such a high standard and all the VAs commented on how much they enjoyed the experience.

Section A

Candidates also performed well in Section A of the question paper. There were four questions in this Section, three of which were generally answered well.

Question 1: Identify two characters from your prescribed text that have completely different personalities and analyse what the playwright hopes to achieve in creating these differences. As a director how would you direct your actors ensuring they highlight the differences mentioned?

Most candidates who attempted this question looked at the characters of Elizabeth Proctor and Abigail Williams and had much to discuss. They knew the play well and answers were of a good standard on the whole.

This was a question which suited all the prescribed texts however, and was generally well answered.

Question 2: Choose a character from your prescribed text and analyse his/her weaknesses and/or strengths. As an actor how would you show these weaknesses and/or strengths in a performance?

This question was a popular choice and, as most centres study *The Crucible*, most candidates wanted to talk about the manipulative nature of Abigail Williams. The problem was that they often could not make up their minds whether this was a strength or a weakness, so they didn't always answer the question posed. Those who could analyse Abigail's character in some detail achieved high marks.

Those who chose to write about John Proctor often fared well as his characteristics lent themselves to the question and they had plenty of textual evidence to discuss his strengths and weaknesses.

Question 3: Consider a key scene from your prescribed text. As a director analyse how the dramatic tension builds throughout this scene. How would you direct your actors and your design team to help show the build up of tension in a performance?

This was a straightforward question which candidates answered well. Many chose to write about their acting scene, because they were familiar with every possible aspect within it, and could consider, in depth, the demands of the question. However there was also a sizeable number who only read 'actors' and forgot to mention design elements, and therefore could not access the full range of marks for the question.

Section B - Dramatic Commentary

This was also a category in which candidates performed well showing that they had a good grasp of theatrical concepts.

Section C – Contemporary Scottish Theatre (CST)

Question 6: Explain how contemporary Scottish plays have helped you to think about and understand social and/or political issues.

This was a popular question in which many candidates fared well. They obviously understood what was asked of them and the content of many of the plays studied — *Men Should Weep*, *Tally's Blood*, *Passing Places*, and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* — lent themselves to being able to answer the question in some detail.

The two questions on gender were popular choices.

Question 10: Discuss the extent to which contemporary Scottish playwrights explore conflict between characters in their plays.

This question was generally answered well as it gave candidates wide scope to look at the nature of relationships in their chosen texts; this was a question where everyone had an opinion and, in the main, could argue it.

Question 11: How has CST told the stories of people's lives?

This was another question which gave students the opportunity to show their knowledge of the characters they had studied. Most candidates had something worthwhile to say in this question and achieved well.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Section A

Question 4: You have been asked to direct a production of your prescribed text and your production is to be performed in a school. The choice of space within the school is up to you. It could be the drama studio, the school stage or any other suitable space. Identify your use of performance space. Go on to describe and explain how your design concepts will create impact in your production. Your design concepts must fit in with your chosen space. You should write about two or more scenes from the play.

The few candidates who attempted this question found it challenging. Often the concepts suggested were impractical and seemed to be chosen at random without sufficient thought being used to follow the idea through to a logical conclusion.

Section C

Question 7: 'The Scottish people and Scottish communities have not made much in the way of progress over the past few decades. We still live in a country that has enormous social problems and great poverty.' To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?

The majority of the few candidates who chose this question did not refer to the present day.

The sub section on History, Nostalgia and Popular Tradition is an area studied by very few centres. A small percentage of candidates attempted Question 8 about historical events/social history or Question 9 on the use of nostalgia. These answers were, in the main, not of a high quality as those who attempted them were apt to resort to lists.

The first question, from Current Productions and Issues, was very popular and had mixed responses.

Question 12: Analyse how the design team used design elements to highlight the themes and issues contained in the production that you watched.

Answers varied considerably on this question. Some candidates had an excellent grasp of the play but others found it difficult to be specific about design elements and wrote a basic performance analysis.

Question 13 from Current Productions and Issues, on how Scottish playwrights engage with the issues of life in the modern world, was not a popular choice.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	2856
Number of resulted entries in 2015	683

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	35.1%	35.1%	240	70
B	36.0%	71.2%	246	57
C	20.4%	91.5%	139	45
D	5.1%	96.6%	35	39
No award	3.4%	-	23	-

The intention was to set a similar grade boundary to last year. The Course Assessment functioned as intended therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.