



External Assessment Report 2013

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

Advanced Higher Drama Practical Exam marks are remarkably stable from one year to the next. In 2013, in the Practical Exam, the average mark increased by 1 mark to 36, which is the highest it has ever been. It is clear that centres have a good understanding of exam requirements and generally prepare their candidates well; centres are to be congratulated on their enthusiasm and commitment to both components of the exam: the practical exam and the question paper.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed exceptionally well in the practical exam. A wide range of texts were used and assessors commented on the high quality of the work. They felt candidates had been well prepared and sufficiently challenged by the length and scope of the acting pieces, and that directing candidates had a detailed knowledge of the plays they had studied. Some pieces were particularly imaginative and interesting to watch, and many assessors commented on what a privilege it is to be involved in visiting assessment in centres.

Markers commented on candidates having a better understanding this year 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 work they have seen personally, as this comes through in their exam responses.

Areas which candidates found demanding

The Special Study Report still seems to confuse some centres despite the advice given.

This should be completed in 40 minutes under exam conditions. It is regularly typed and is often far too long, covering areas which are now unnecessary. Candidates should concern themselves with academic research, practical research, and explaining how these helped the candidate arrive at their final concept.

Generally, the marks for the 2013 question paper were lower than last year.

Candidates still find Section B of the question 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 the practitioner's techniques. This seems to

apply particularly 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 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 essays. There are many available options, and to use a DVD instead of a live event puts candidates at a disadvantage.

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 and can disadvantage them.

The question paper: Section A

This year some candidates answered both questions from the same section, showing unfamiliarity with the format of the paper. Sometimes centres set a prelim question paper which only deals with the practitioner the centre studies, but it is important that candidates see a past question paper in its entirety so that there is no confusion 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. Another issue is that candidates make sweeping generalisations without justifying what they say.

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

Stanislavski

The first question asked candidates to explain how Stanislavski's personal qualities and characteristics affected his theatre making.

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 unfortunate.

It appears that some centres tend to teach to previous questions rather than offering the students a broad knowledge of the practitioner and helping candidates to apply their knowledge to the question asked.

The second question required candidates to explain how Stanislavski used the rehearsal and pre-production process to achieve his personal vision.

Again, this question lent itself to Stanislavski and his evolution as a director, but few candidates referred to plays beyond *Hamlet*. To answer this question well, it is essential to address post-1911 productions. These are now well documented, and there is a considerable amount of material published on *Tartuffe* in particular.

Craig

The questions on Craig were relatively well attempted, probably because his body of work is relatively small and well documented. However, 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 Craig's personal qualities should have been a straightforward question but, like Stanislavski, more candidates tended to concentrate on theatre making in general rather than how Craig's personal characteristics affected his theatre making.

Many confused the detail of *Bethlehem, Dido and Aeneas, Acis and Galatea* and *The Masque of Love*, and reference to *Hamlet* was general. Considering the amount of detail written on these productions it is important to have knowledge of the production elements in each play.

In the question on pre-production and the rehearsal process, many gave general statements on *Hamlet* but tended to try to take rehearsed essays from previous years and shoehorn them into this question.

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

Artaud

Candidates who study Artaud find his work is fascinating practically, but few ever get to grips with what he actually achieved because they seem too absorbed in the shocking nature of his work.

As was stated last year's report, to study Artaud effectively it is necessary to know something about the Surrealists, Cocteau, and the Theatre of Alfred Jarry and how he operated in France at the time. Few candidates are 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 work. Little was mentioned about how his private life influenced his thinking, and the general impression was that students did not have sufficient knowledge to apply it to the questions asked.

As far as the pre-production work and the rehearsal process are concerned, few seemed to have enough knowledge and just describe the outrageous nature of the work.

Artaud's body of work is so narrow and little was presented as he wanted. 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 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 on 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 most cases was that the knowledge was narrow and students were unsure how to manage their material.

The pre-production and rehearsal question was often answered with a list of Brecht's techniques, but few candidates seemed to know how to use the knowledge they had 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 often superficial, consisting of a list of some of the techniques used in Epic Theatre.

Brook

There were some good essays on Brook in Section A. Although he may seem unwieldy because of the breadth of material, it is divided into phases, is manageable, and it is also very well documented. Whether it is because of this or because the variety of Brook's work stimulates students, they generally perform well.

Those who answered the first question and wrote about his personal qualities had plenty of material as his personal life is so varied and interesting and it automatically links into his theatrical work.

In terms of the second question on pre-production and the rehearsal process, the fact that his rehearsal periods were so extended gave candidates ample scope to discuss various productions from Shakespeare at the RSC, to opera, to the complicated international work he accomplished.

In general, the relatively small number of candidates studying Brook knew the material well and were able to adapt it to the question posed.

Boal

Both questions — on Boal's personal qualities, and his pre production and rehearsal techniques — turned into a list of his methodology. Some candidates knew their facts better than others, but there were no essays which came into the excellent category. Few mentioned his theatre and instead listed his techniques and descriptions of his games. This was a marked difference from last year, where some candidates scored full marks for one of the questions.

Section B

There was a greater variety of high quality professional theatre analysed in this section which made the essays much more accessible for the candidates. Those who had watched student productions or DVD presentations were at a disadvantage, and this was reflected in the marks that could be awarded.

Some centres chose to write to a formula where all the candidates from that centre gave the same opening paragraph and the same quotes throughout. This is unhelpful for candidates, who should be taught to think for themselves.

Question 23 asked candidates to discuss how successfully social and political issues were communicated in one or two contemporary performances and assess the techniques used.

This was a question that suited a large number of candidates studying Brecht. However, a common mistake made in Section B was where candidates chose to discuss a production of a Brecht play that they had seen and then compared it with the Brecht original. However, because they did not cover the gamut of his work, they lost marks. Other candidates who studied Brecht tended to discuss his techniques and not his practice in productions and so lost marks.

Question 24 asked candidates to describe and assess the ways in which the performance differed from the pre-text and how that contributed to the creation of dramatic meaning.

This year we were very fortunate in the range of texts available whose directors significantly changed the pre-text. The Alan Cumming one-man performance of *Macbeth* and Matthew Lenton's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performed in the Lyceum Theatre are two such performances, which were ideal to write about. *Great Expectations* was another fascinating show.

Some candidates 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 was a popular choice for many candidates and asked them to analyse how the visual and aural elements created dramatic impact and meaning. It went on to ask how this compared to the use of visual and aural elements in the work of a practitioner they had studied.

A number of candidates who chose this question answered well and chose some beautiful key moments from a wide range of productions which they had seen. Many are still enthused by *Black Watch* and a large number had seen the performance in the SECC in Glasgow this year.

Unfortunately, some candidates wrote about a play they had seen and compared it to a play their chosen practitioner had directed. An obvious example was a comparison of Matthew Lenton's *Midsummer Night's Dream* with that of Brook. This did not answer the question asked, and as a result the full range of marks was not available. The candidate must show a breadth of knowledge of the practitioner they have studied, not just a knowledge of one production.

Many who answered on *Black Watch* gave much description but little analysis and sometimes did not answer the second part on their chosen practitioner. It was unfortunate for those who used a DVD of an earlier production, as this did not answer the question.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The practical exam

Special Study Reports

Part A is designed to inform the assessor of the candidate's final theatrical concept. This report 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

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 with their partner or group; otherwise they become considerably disadvantaged.

It is very difficult to ask a female candidate to fill in for a male part at Advanced Higher. So often the parts are complex and involve deep psychological interaction, and it is virtually impossible to do them credit unless this has been thought through and incorporated as a chosen concept.

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, eg Gertrude would not cross her arms or her legs, and this sort of etiquette has to be embraced to be convincing.

Voices cannot be allowed to go out of control as when a level of shouting/screeching starts to dominate it becomes infectious and it is hard for others on stage to bring it down.

Duration 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 candidates realise 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.

There are a number of texts on the list that 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 broad enough to ensure that a candidate who

cannot cope with an American accent does not use it. To achieve the accent is part of the demanding nature of the part at Advanced Higher level.

Costume

The chosen costume needs to reflect the nature of the character. Whereas it is exciting to see imaginative characterisations, it is important that the costume does not detract from the essence of the play.

Audience

It is important that the audience chosen is appropriate and supportive of the candidates.

Design

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

It is also important that the set works. Candidates need to know how to explain scene changes and entrances and exits. Some candidates choose to use a fixed set, but if this is not properly thought through it can become very cluttered. The importance of entrances and exits cannot be over-emphasised. As there are many candidates who forget about them and about the fact the set has to actually work. 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.

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.

Question paper

It is important that every year candidates are reminded of the difference between the terms *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 also referring to specific productions.

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

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	308
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	312
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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	19.2%	19.2%	60	68
B	28.5%	47.8%	89	57
C	31.7%	79.5%	99	46
D	10.6%	90.1%	33	40
No award	9.9%	100.0%	31	-

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.