



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Drama
Level(s)	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

2013 Higher Drama Visiting Assessors were very complimentary about the way the Acting exam was conducted 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 candidates is to be applauded.

Question paper markers reported generally that candidate responses this year were not quite as good as those of 2012. There were a sizable number of candidates who did not appear to take sufficient time to read the Question Paper properly, and marks were lost.

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*. Very few centres attempted *Twelfth Night*.

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*. *Yellow Moon* and *Monster in the Hall* appeared this year, and some centres really stretched their candidates by looking at *Bondagers* and *Mary Queen of Scots got her Head Chopped Off*. Unfortunately, one-act plays are still being taught, and candidates regularly lose marks because they use these as a second CST text, rather than using a full-length play. One-act plays can only be considered as third texts.

A number of centres have asked what now constitutes a one-act play when so many new plays are performed in a single sitting. One-act plays would not be classed as an evening's entertainment at the theatre.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed very well in the Acting exam. The average scaled mark was 35.5/50 — a raw mark of 28/40.

This high level of performance is due to the continued commitment of both centres and candidates. Many Visiting Assessors commented on the pleasure they had visiting centres and seeing work of a high standard. It was obvious that candidates thoroughly enjoyed this experience and approached the task with real enthusiasm. Their teamwork is to be commended; often candidates will learn another role to support their peers, and their level of interaction is commendable.

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. However, unfortunately, many centres still do not consider this question as a viable option.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates can 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. In a number of cases this year, candidates clearly had the potential to answer the questions asked, they just failed to read what was in front of them.

Section A

Question 1

This question offered candidates the opportunity to outline and justify their main design ideas for their prescribed text using a large financial budget and making their own choice of venue for the production.

This question was not popular or particularly well done because the majority gave learned responses on design elements in general, or stated their directorial concept but did not link it in any way to the specifics of the question. There was seldom mention of the chosen venue or the large budget. Those who studied *Lovers* had to state how they were going to cope with the transition from one text — *Winners* — to the other text — *Losers* — and did not seem to realise the question was on the full play and not the first part of it. Some gave no description of set and just concentrated on the set dressing, costume, makeup and lighting.

Question 2

Candidates were asked to workshop the opening scene from their prescribed text, analysing the key features of the scene.

Few candidates attempted this question, but the problem for those who did was that few seemed to understand the concept of a 'workshop', and so the question was generally poorly done.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to describe and analyse the range of emotions that a chosen character in their prescribed text conveys in each scene. The question then asked how, as an actor, you would perform this role, making the audience fully aware of the range of identified emotions.

This question without doubt was the most popular but some candidates listed their characteristics and personality traits rather than their emotions. Again, the main issue was that candidates were repeating learned responses rather than reading the question and applying their knowledge to it.

Question 4

This question asked candidates to choose one or more menacing characters from their prescribed text. They were then asked how, as a director, they would develop these roles in rehearsal for more than one scene in the play.

The first part of this question was generally well done, and many candidates scored 10/10 but then they proceeded to describe how they would direct their actors to bring out the menacing nature of the characters rather than how they would develop the roles in rehearsal.

Section B

Dramatic Commentary — Ground Plans

The Dramatic Commentary is an area where pupils can perform well. However, the quality of Ground Plans can vary considerably, and this year they seemed to be more careless than previously. There are an increasing number of candidates who either do not know, or have forgotten, how to draw a Ground Plan. This is a very accessible 4 marks in the question paper, and every year it is done badly by a number of candidates. Often the Ground Plan bears no relation to Section A of the paper, despite numerous reminders that the two must correlate.

The most common problems:

- ◆ Drawing a ground plan for the wrong scene.
- ◆ Chairs or other items of furniture blocking entrances and exits.
- ◆ Forgetting to state there is an audience.
- ◆ Forgetting to put entrances and exits on the key.
- ◆ Not having the correct number of characters on stage.
- ◆ In the case of *Antigone*, forgetting the Chorus.

Technical Column

Another area where candidates can fail to gain the 2 marks available is in the technical column 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, but a considerable number of candidates do not do so.

Moves and interpretation

The biggest issue here is not using theatrical terminology and so 3 marks are lost.

Paying attention to these 9 marks (ground plan, moves and interpretation and technical column) can boost a candidate's overall mark and potentially make a difference to the overall mark and grade for the examination.

Section C

The most popular Questions were 7 and 11. Questions 8, 9 and 13 were seldom done. More candidates attempted the performance analysis, and did it reasonably well.

Question 6

Here candidates were asked to describe and analyse the representation of community in CST plays.

Many candidates took this as an opportunity to list the social issues that arise in CST texts and did not answer it well. It is important to read the question.

Question 7

This question asked which CST plays made them more socially and politically aware. This question was well done. Candidates were able to make valid points and back them up with appropriate quotes.

Very few candidates approached Question 8 on nostalgia or 9 on the features of comedy, though those who did scored well.

Question 10

This was quite a popular choice — the portrayal of men as unfeeling brutes — and was quite well done. There are enough obvious examples, which can be backed up with appropriate quotes.

Some candidates answered against the question, which was encouraging and showed that they were thinking about it.

Question 11

This was the most popular question, asking the extent to which Scottish playwrights portray women as stronger or weaker in their relationships with men.

A remarkable number of candidates seemed to think that the women mentioned in *Black Watch* were weak. The women in *Black Watch* are off-stage characters, and the main one referred to is a figment of the boys' over-active imagination. They do not know the woman who is going to come to interview them, so are unable to say what she is like. This is conjecture.

Some candidates did not read the question and compared relationships between women rather than the relationships between men and women.

Most candidates, however, answered this reasonably well.

Question 12

The candidates who tackled the performance analysis knew their material well and answered the question asked. Many used the *Black Watch* production at the SECC in Glasgow, which had clearly enthused them, but others had pre-prepared their responses and some came across as stock answers which often read as a list of points.

Question 13

This question was not attempted by any candidates.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General advice on Acting

Use of scripts and prompts

It is advisable to have no scripts on stage. The Acting exam is worth 50% of the total mark, and marks are allocated to candidates showing their ability to interact with others. If others are reading from a script no convincing interaction can occur.

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

Selection of Acting texts

It is important that candidates are cast in parts where they can empathise with the character they play. Sometimes, in an effort to show the full play, certain candidates seem to be allocated parts for which they are unsuited. To cast a girl as Proctor in Scene 4 of *The Crucible* is demanding for the candidate, as is the casting of a girl as Proctor in Act 1 with Abigail.

Use of costume

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

When candidates wear a long dress they need to be taught how to wear it, walk in it and manage it so that it looks a natural item of clothing.

Repetition of scenes

Repetitious scenes directed in the same way do not help candidates perform to their potential

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, as some do in *The House of Bernarda Alba*, they need to be taught how to use it; this also holds for use of a parasol and gloves. All of these items require practice so that it all 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, deals with the mores of upper-class Victorian society and, because of this, it is important that the main characters use RP accents. If they do not, it fails to fulfil the writer's intention — which is to satirise the upper classes.

Antigone, Twelfth Night, Ghosts, Mother Courage, The House of Bernarda Alba are all plays where clear English is acceptable. These plays do not require specific accents, though the difference in status in certain characters has to be obvious.

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, though a Scots accent could also be acceptable.

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 play a different gender in only one of their 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 is being increasingly used, particularly in *Passing Places*. The Higher Drama Acting exam requires that candidates play one CST role. If a range of characters are presented, eg from Binks, to the Lollipop Lady, to the wee boy, the Visiting Assessor will assess and mark the largest role.

Visiting Assessors don't want to have to ask a candidate to perform an acting piece twice because it is not long enough. As a result it is never a good idea to cast Betty in the bed as a character in *The Crucible*, or use Mercy Lewis in Act 1, as neither offers enough scope.

Duration of Acting pieces

Some of these are too short and some are too long. If a piece is too long it can disadvantage a candidate as much as one that is too short. A good indication is that the piece should last about 7–10 minutes for two candidates.

Audience

It is the job of each centre to arrange an appropriate audience for their Acting exam. A 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. Candidates lost marks this year in Section A by not referring to the **venue** or the **budget** in Question 1, by not reading **workshop** in Question 2, and by reading **performance** techniques for **rehearsal** techniques in Question 4.

Numbering the questions

Many candidates did not indicate the question they were answering so it was up to the marker to work out which one the answer applied to.

Technical

Some candidates did not mark the technical requirements on their script and potentially 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 quotations 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 question paper.

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 should only be used in conjunction with two other full texts.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	2601
Number of resulted entries in 2013	2638

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	18.8%	18.8%	495	70
B	37.2%	56.0%	981	57
C	30.0%	85.9%	791	45
D	7.8%	93.7%	206	39
No award	6.3%	100.0%	165	-

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.