



## External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	<b>Drama</b>
Level	<b>Advanced 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

There was a substantial increase in candidature this year of 33%, which had a marked effect on how the exam performed. There were almost 16% of new centres and 13.9% of returning centres (ie centres that did not present candidates last year). The grade boundary marks remained the same as those for the past three years, as the notional difficulty of the written paper was unchanged.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The Practical Examination performed well, with the average mark totalling 33.5 out of 50.

Visiting Assessors (VAs) enjoyed seeing the variety of a wide range of texts, and appreciated the enthusiasm and professionalism of staff and pupils.

Acting is the most popular specialism, and VAs commented on the range of ability this year, where they saw some superb work showing real character development over a range of scenes.

Design is the next most popular specialism, and a great degree of the work shown was both imaginative and workable, with some fascinating work being done on sound and costume.

Many candidates chose the directing option this year, and some showed a good understanding of the text, which they directed in an imaginative manner, often linking their work to that of their practitioner. Whereas this can be beneficial, it can also tie candidates, and it is important that we see their own directorial concepts and not just a carbon copy of their practitioner.

## Areas for improvement in the Practical Exam

### Acting

It is important that candidates choose acting pieces which give them enough to do to show character development, but not so long that it disadvantages them.

Difficulties occur when students read in for another character, as this does not offer enough opportunity for character interaction.

### Design

It is important that set models deal with all the requests of the text. In the area of costume it is important to address all characters and not just the most interesting ones.

## **Specialist Study Report**

This is a requirement, so that VAs can have a clear idea of the performance concept of the candidate. This year, the report was inconsistently done.

Some centres still regard this as an exercise which can be done by the candidate at home. It is a NAB and should be completed under exam conditions. It should contain academic research (and this should not be addressed as a class exercise where everyone writes the same information, often downloaded from the internet). This should be practical research that is pertinent to the candidate, to what he/she is studying, and to the performance concept they have reached from their previous research.

If centres do not follow this advice, the piece of work is not useful to the VA. It is also important that these reports arrive in time for the VA to read them before visiting the centre.

## **Acting**

In some instances work was lacking — often because candidates did not show the full range of the character. At Advanced Higher level, candidates should work to show the many facets of the character they choose to play. Candidates do not benefit from fellow actors who read in parts.

At this level, in order to give the candidate the best possible chance, it is important that they can show good character interaction, and this requires all actors to know their lines. At this level it should be unusual for a candidate to ask for a prompt, and we should not see supporting actors on the book unless there are extreme mitigating circumstances.

## **Design**

It is important that candidates are very familiar with the written text and do not take off into flights of fancy with no grounding in practicalities. Whereas it is exciting to see new imaginative ideas, these must be tied to the text, and due importance must be given to the location of entrances and exits. Stairs have to have means to exit, and high entrances cannot lead into blank spaces – all must be logical.

Costume has to be designed for the play, not for the sex of the characters, and whereas it can often be prettier to design for the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the mechanicals are as big a part of the plot. It is seldom a good idea to design a full costume for one character in a play, as it is important to see the bigger picture.

## **Direction**

Candidates must be familiar with the entire play before concentrating on the act they propose to study. They should ensure that opening games or ice breakers relate to the text and their direction of it. Stage terminology is required and it is important to delineate the playing space, giving entrances and exits. Candidates should be familiar with the way they are going to be marked before the exam so that they are knowledgeable about the areas they need to address. They must have a clear directorial concept before embarking on direction.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates found the written Question Paper demanding. There were a sizeable number of candidates who scored low marks in this part of the exam.

In general, candidates are not answering the question asked. Instead, they write down everything they know about the practitioner.

### Section A

#### Stanislavski

Most candidates study Stanislavski, and most answered Question 1 which asked whether he was a collaborator or a director dictator.

Many candidates think that any question on Stanislavski constitutes an explanation of his system with no reference to the plays he directed except perhaps *Othello*. *Othello* was directed in 1896. Stanislavski died in 1938 and covered a vast range of material. It is essential that the candidate refers to this practice — the plays he directed, when and how he directed them, and how this refers to the question.

A number of candidates who did address the question seemed to think that Stanislavski fell into the category of dictator or of collaborator and tried to argue this, but their argument invariably stopped at 1904 with Chekhov. It is after that date that Stanislavski's work became really fascinating because it was so varied, but so often candidates address none of these 32 years.

Those who did go beyond 1904 or 1906 generally answered the question well and used their material in a pertinent way to construct a well structured argument.

In Question 2, which asked candidates to describe and analyse the choices Stanislavski made throughout his career with regards to repertoire, staging and performance spaces, many again described the system, which is not relevant to the question. The knowledge of many regarding his repertoire seemed to stop at the Chekhov plays, and there was little detail of the use of mise-en-scene or performance spaces, which was so necessary to this question. Most addressed the performance space part of the question by referring to the fourth wall, and some did not understand the concept.

Those who knew the repertoire answered this question well, as the staging and performance space are linked. It was refreshing to see essays where candidates knew the material and could write about it with enthusiasm.

#### Craig

Most candidates answering on Craig answered Question 3, which asked whether he was a collaborator or a director dictator. Many became tied up in his life with Ellen Terry and Henry Irving, and few productions were actually mentioned other than *Dido and Aeneas* and occasionally *Hamlet*.

The second question seemed an obvious one for Craig but this was seldom attempted and candidates really need to become more familiar with the repertoire of the practitioner they study.

\*No candidates answered the questions on Reinhardt, Meyerhold, Copeau, or Piscator.

### **Artaud**

Those who answered questions on Artaud were apt to answer the first question, and those who did it well took the material and successfully argued that he was, in the main, a dictator.

The majority of those who answered Question 14 mostly wrote down everything they knew about Artaud without specifically referring to the question asked.

### **Brecht**

A large number of candidates answered on Brecht, but most chose to answer on him in Section B of the paper.

Most answered on Question 15, which asked whether he was a collaborator or a director dictator.

The same problem exists with Brecht as with Stanislavski. Too many candidates want to describe the theatrical devices Brecht used without linking them to his practice. Candidates are as fascinated by Brecht's time in the First World War as they are by Stanislavski's father being rich, and this is only relevant if it is linked to his anti-war feelings and how this reflects itself in his work. Many candidates had thin information which they did not develop sufficiently, as is necessary for the question.

Those candidates who answered on Brecht's repertoire, staging and performance spaces had to know the repertoire and, for many, repertoire read as techniques. Candidates must be familiar with the practice in order to discuss the theory effectively.

### **Brook**

Some candidates who answered on Brook in this section wrote well though others, particularly those who studied Brecht, seemed to ignore the first phase of his work and went straight to his second phase. They then spent too much time on it, linked it to Brecht and then went on multiculturalism. This did not answer the question properly, as the first phase of Brook's work was so important in terms of this particular question.

The majority of candidates who used Brook did not answer the second question, which is understandable considering the wealth of material they would have to address with reference to staging alone.

### **Boal**

Those answering on Boal floundered, as they found it very difficult to address the question. Many fell into the trap of describing the techniques instead of talking of the body of work, and in the case of Boal this should not be a problem.

Few addressed the second question.

\*No candidates answered the questions on Grotowski.

## **Section B**

Question 23 asked candidates to describe the dramatic impact and audience response in one or two contemporary performances and analyse how this impact was created. They were then asked to compare this with the dramatic impact and audience response created or aspired to by the practitioner whose work they have studied.

Candidates often ignore a question on audience response because they do not know how to word it; effectively this is a performance analysis. This is what they have been doing since studying their practitioner. What is it that makes the work of this man so noteworthy? What play have you seen which has had a big impact or alternatively which did not work, and say why?

Many candidates who did this question answered on Brecht, made some comments on the performance, and said what aspects Brecht would have liked or disliked about the performance they have seen. This is not what the question is asking candidates to do.

Those who did the first part of the question as a performance analysis were on their way to scoring a reasonable mark. To do the second part of the question, candidates had to be familiar with the practitioner's body of work. It is not sufficient to say that a certain director used montage and Brecht would have liked this, or to say a certain director used song and Brecht would have liked that. The candidate must say what Brecht did as a theatrical practitioner.

Question 24 asked candidates to comment on the dominant theatrical style evident in one or two contemporary performances, and went on to ask if this differed from the conception of theatre aspired to by a practitioner they studied. This was an ideal question for those answering on Brecht or Stanislavski, as the theatrical style of both these practitioners is so obvious to categorise. In order to answer it effectively, however, candidates had to talk of the work of the practitioner whose work they studied, and not just comment on the devices used.

Many centres had gone to the trouble of working with directors in workshops or going online to look at interviews and internet clips of the director talking about his concept. This helped candidates write some interesting responses.

It is essential, however, that candidates address both parts of the question and that they are familiar with the body of work of the practitioner.

The last question, Question 25, asked candidates to analyse a production they thought was innovative, and then asked what elements of the theory and practice of the practitioner whose work they have studied were a challenge to their contemporaries.

The first part of the question was a straightforward analysis, and many did that without referring at all to the second part of the question, which naturally affected their mark.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Practical Exam**

It is important that candidates choose the specialism because they have a particular interest in that area and a commitment to self-supported study.

It is important that staff help to guide candidates in their choice of text so that the part they play suits them well. Some candidates were out of their depth in the pieces they had chosen.

Candidates must know their texts well. It is very distracting for their concentration if they require prompts.

Only in extraordinary circumstances should candidates work with a partner who is reading in. If there is no character interaction it reflects badly on the truth of the piece.

Teachers should not act with candidates or be directed by them, except in extreme circumstances, as this does not help the candidate. Often, when directing, a candidate will look to the teacher for affirmation or prompts during the exercise, and this takes their focus away from the task in hand. On other occasions they will spend too much time working with the teacher to the detriment of the other actors. In acting, it is unusual for a candidate to perform to their best if they are working with a member of staff. The teacher has more experience and this will show in performance.

It is important that the audience chosen is suitable for the content shown, as this can have a detrimental effect on the candidates.

It is also important that directors are given a cast to work with who are up to the challenge of the piece they are directing. An S3 group, even an enthusiastic one, will find it very hard to act an Advanced Higher script effectively.

It should not be necessary for candidates to repeat scenes when there is a choice of so many available texts.

### **Written Exam**

Candidates need to go into the exam feeling confident that they know their material. This requires a regular pattern of study and regular essay practice.

It is not sufficient that candidates know the techniques of the practitioner. They must be familiar with his full body of work.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	286
Number of resulted entries in 2010	376

## 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	14.4%	14.4%	54	68
B	17.3%	31.6%	65	57
C	33.8%	65.4%	127	46
D	14.4%	79.8%	54	40
No award	20.2%	100.0%	76	—

### 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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.