



## External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	<b>Drama</b>
Level	<b>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 considerable increase of 16% of candidates opting for the Higher Drama Course in 2010, which was very encouraging. Marks were very much in line with those of last year, with the average mark for the Question Paper being 22.8 out of 50, and the Acting Examination average mark being 35.5 out of 50.

*The Crucible* still remains the most popular prescribed text, although *Antigone*, *Twelfth Night*, *Ghosts*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Mother Courage*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Birthday Party* and *Lovers* are also widely taught, which is most encouraging.

Few centres use the Contemporary Scottish Theatre (CST) text for Dramatic Commentary.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

### Acting Examination

Candidates scored well in the Acting exam, with the average mark being 35.5 out of 50.

The assessment procedures worked well in nearly all instances, and Visiting Assessors commented on the quality of the acting and said that candidates who chose fresh, new, interesting texts, with characters who suited them, benefited in their marks.

Areas where candidate performance in the acting exam could be improved:

- ◆ It is helpful for candidates to use appropriate props and costume.
- ◆ In some instances, use of costume was inappropriate this year, with some characters being costumed in short skirts for period plays. Unless the concept is explained in the actor's notes, this is not helpful for the performance as it often goes against the genre of the play. When in doubt, practice skirts and blacks are always acceptable.
- ◆ Centres should try to avoid candidates reading in for one another. In the Acting exam, which contributes 50% of the final mark, it is helpful if class members learn lines to support each other to ensure character interaction.
- ◆ It is not helpful for centres to repeat the same scenes. Visiting Assessors commented that some centres repeated the same scene up to four or five times. This did not help the candidates involved and can put a great strain on, for example, a solo male character who has to repeat the same scene on numerous occasions.
- ◆ It is helpful for candidates to perform characters that suit their abilities. We now have a wide range of prescribed texts from which to choose, and it should not be necessary for candidates to be given pieces where they are clearly uncomfortable. Playing a piece of opposite gender should now be a matter of choice; with the range of texts available, it should not be necessary for this to occur unless a candidate desires to do so.
- ◆ It is important that candidates perform pieces of sufficient length to give them the opportunity to explore the characters effectively. No Visiting Assessor wants to ask a

candidate to perform a piece twice, as it may throw their confidence even if it is sensitively approached. The part of Mercy Lewis in Act 1 (pages 14-16) of *The Crucible* does not offer enough scope for the candidate to acquit herself well, and this has been stated in previous reports.

- ◆ Audiences are essential for the Acting exam. This is not a request: it is a requirement. Whereas Visiting Assessors (VAs) would not upset candidates on the day by demanding an audience, they could refuse to proceed until they have one. This requirement has been in place and unchanged for many years.

## Accents

Use of accents seems to be an ongoing issue on which some VAs commented. There are certain plays which require a certain accent, but there are many which do not fall into this category, so use of accents should not be an issue. If a candidate cannot cope with a specific accent, they choose to perform from a different play.

*The Importance of Being Earnest* deals with the mores of upper class Victorian society. As a result, the main characters must use RP accents. If they do not, the play ceases to fulfil the writer's intention which is to satirise upper class Victorian society.

*Lovers* is set in Northern Ireland in the 1960s. There is nowhere else in the country that experienced the same problems as Northern Ireland did at that time. As a result it is essential to use Irish accents for these plays. It does not work to relocate the play to Scotland. Scotland did not experience the same problems.

*Antigone*, *Twelfth Night*, *Ghosts*, *Mother Courage*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *The Crucible* and *Waiting for Godot* are plays where clear English is acceptable. There is no need to have a specific accent, though some centres may choose to use RP accents for some characters in *Antigone* or *Twelfth Night*. Some centres choose to play McCann in *The Birthday Party* with an Irish accent, though others could argue a Scots accent is acceptable. Some may choose to play *A Taste of Honey* with northern English accents; others would say this is not necessary. If, however, the accent affects the playwright's intention, it is essential to make the appropriate choice.

Some centres with large presentation numbers have chosen to perform all set text pieces one day and all CST pieces the following day. A VA needs to see contrast, and if this problem occurs it is preferable for the centre to halve the number of candidates and show one half one day and the other half the next.

*Antigone* is a text which originally would have been performed in a declamatory manner. For candidates to be directed to do that now is actually disadvantageous as it means that they show no character interaction. It is also difficult for candidates if they choose to use the Niobe speech from *Antigone*, as the piece will be performed to chorus and then to audience, so again we see very little character interaction.

## Question Paper, Section B

Candidates performed well in the Dramatic Commentary part of the Question Paper exam, where they showed a sound knowledge of stagecraft.

## Areas where Section B could be improved

A large number of candidates still lose marks through careless ground plans. This could be easily rectified if candidates followed the anagram ACE OK.

Audience, clear – for example, it is not appropriate to include enormous tables in the middle of a bedroom beside a tiny bed – entrances and exits, opening positions and a key.

Candidates studying *Antigone* should know to add a chorus. Candidates studying *Winners* should know to have two commentators on set.

A large number of candidates lose marks in the technical effects column and, again, this could be easily rectified. An opening and closing lighting state is required, which means that unless we have the opening scene of a play we start with lights up. This needs to have the intensity of the light on a range of 1-10, the colour of the light, and justification of why it is as described.

The other requirement is a closing state, which is seldom the end of a scene, so usually the lights are still on. Some candidates also give a sound cue and justify it. This is a straightforward two marks.

In the Dramatic Commentary, it is essential to use stage terminology. Many candidates only scored out of four in the first column because of this.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

On the whole, prescribed text essays score better than those of CST, but they are still prepared and often do not answer the question posed.

Introductions are often long and have no relevance to the question asked. Too many candidates are still not using the language of the question to help focus their minds on what is being asked.

A large number of candidates answer questions by being anecdotal and use no quotations. These are essential for a good answer. Candidates need to **make** a point, **explain** the point and **give** a quote to justify the point made – (MEG).

Far too many candidates resort to storytelling. This does not address the question asked and does not show an in-depth knowledge of the play.

## Question Paper, Section A

### Question 1

*Choose a character from your prescribed text and describe their qualities and characteristics. As an actor how would you perform this role?*

This was a very popular question, with a huge number of candidates attempting it – many of whom answered well. Acting is what candidates do well, but a surprisingly large number of the cohort found it difficult to explain *what* they do so well.

All should have described the qualities and characteristics of a character they played on numerous occasions. We ask them how they are going to play the character they played on the back of their candidate acting mark sheets, but it was still surprisingly badly done – particularly the second half of the question.

Some centres do not seem to realise the importance of using quotations, which is essential to good essay writing. Others simply used their acting piece, so only scored on the proportion of the play they discussed.

## **Question 2**

*As a director of your prescribed text, to what extent would you keep the original setting, staging and design concepts in your production? Explain and justify your choices.*

This question was badly done. It was ideal for any candidate who knew about the original staging of their production, but many candidates went off on imaginative flights of fancy and made no reference at all to the original staging. If this happened, the question was marked out of five. This question was very suitable for those studying *Antigone* or *Twelfth Night* where the original setting was so interesting, but few picked up on this and a question which could have been so well done was poorly answered.

## **Question 3**

*Identify two characters from your prescribed text that could be described as having conflicting personalities. Give reasons for your choice. As a director, how would you help your actors to develop these two roles in rehearsal?*

This was a very popular question, but candidates did not address the rehearsal part of the question and went on to talk about how they would direct actors to perform the role instead, thus gaining no marks for that part of the question.

## **Question 4**

*Describe the significant features of the language of your prescribed text. As a director, explain how you would highlight these features in performance.*

This question was either done exceptionally well, or very badly. It was a question which lent itself to older texts, such as Sophocles and Shakespeare, but equally *The Crucible* and *Lovers* would have been excellent choices to use. Those who understood the question answered it very well indeed. Others, who did not understand what was being asked, floundered. The candidate had to comment on the significant features of language, and many who attempted it did not do that.

## **Question Paper, Section C**

### **Contemporary Scottish Theatre**

The most popular texts are now *Men Should Weep* and *Tally's Blood*. Other centres look at *Passing Places*, *Britannia Rules*, *Perfect Days*, *The Steamie*, *The Last Witch*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *Black Watch*, *Sunset Song*, *Bondagers*, *When I was a Girl I Used to Scream and Shout*, *Dead Dad Dog*, *The Slab Boys*, *Medea*, *Yellow Moon*, *Gagarin Way*, *The Cheviot*

*and the Stag, Damascus and The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.* Unfortunately, some centres still persist in using *The Letterbox*, which means that year after year candidates use this monologue as one of their main texts.

### **Question 6**

*Contemporary Scottish plays highlight the intolerable living and working conditions that people have to endure. With reference to two or more plays you have seen or read discuss the social conditions Scottish playwrights want us to consider.*

A large number of candidates attempted this question and many approached it well, but some centres did not seem to think it necessary to make use of quotations and thus scored badly. Some candidates tried to make the question fit into what they wanted to say. It is essential to answer the question posed, not what the candidate has prepared to say. Unfortunately some candidates merely made a list of points.

### **Question 7**

*Identify the political and/or social issues that have been raised in two or more contemporary Scottish plays that you have seen or read and discuss their impact on a contemporary audience.*

This question was relatively well answered though some candidates made no reference to the impact on the audience.

### **Question 8**

*Describe and comment on the episodes in Scottish history – past or recent – that interest contemporary Scottish playwrights. You should illustrate your answer with reference to two or more plays that you have seen or read.*

Some candidates confused nostalgia with history, showing that they had pre-prepared their answers. Few candidates answered this question.

### **Question 9**

*Contemporary Scottish playwrights use popular tradition techniques as a way of engaging audiences of all ages.*

*Do you agree with this view? You should illustrate your answer with reference to two or more plays you have seen or read.*

This question was not at all popular, but some candidates who tackled it confused popular tradition techniques with what is traditional in terms of history.

### **Question 10**

*Discuss the relationships between men in contemporary Scottish plays. You should illustrate your answer with reference to two or more plays you have seen or read.*

This question was very poorly answered. Some candidates read up to the word 'men', and supplied the rest of the question themselves. Many talked about the relationship between men and women, which meant they scored no marks.

### **Question 11**

*'The women in contemporary Scottish plays are portrayed as the stronger sex'.*

*Discuss this statement with reference to two or more plays that you have seen or read.*

This was one of the most popular questions and in many cases it was well done. Some responses, which did not make use of quotations, scored badly. A number of candidates tried to answer this question on the portrayal of weak men, which was not the question asked. Some candidates chose to use *Black Watch*, when if they had chosen this for Question 10 they would have scored marks.

### **Question 12**

*Describe and analyse one performance that you have seen performed by a contemporary Scottish theatre company.*

Few candidates answered this question, but those who did answered it very well indeed.

### **Question 13**

*Consider the work of a contemporary Scottish playwright. Describe and analyse the range of characters that they have created in their plays. You should illustrate your answer with reference to two or more plays that you have seen or read.*

This was a question with a great deal of scope, which many candidates could have answered well, but few approached it.

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

- ◆ It is important that candidates write the number of the question they are answering at the top of their answer.
- ◆ It is unnecessary for candidates to write out the question in full, as this wastes valuable time.
- ◆ Candidates should learn to read the question properly and underline the key words in the question.
- ◆ Far too many candidates like to tell the story of their prescribed text, some spending over four pages before they even began to address the question asked.
- ◆ Some centres show the films of texts, which is leading to confusion when candidates are answering questions, as the chronology, set and additional characters do not always link to the play text.
- ◆ Many candidates showed little in-depth analysis in their answers. Essay writing is a skill which needs to be taught.
- ◆ Pre-prepared answers do not work. Candidates must learn to answer the question asked.
- ◆ *The Letterbox* is not an appropriate text to use for the second CST text.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	2301
Number of resulted entries in 2010	2446

## 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	16.6%	16.6%	407	70
B	38.7%	55.4%	947	57
C	31.4%	86.7%	767	45
D	7.3%	94.0%	179	39
No award	6.0%	100.0%	146	—

### 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.