

Principal Assessor Report 2004

Assessment Panel:

Drama

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Number of entries in 2003	152
----------------------------------	-----

Number of entries in 2004	164
----------------------------------	-----

General comments re entry numbers

There was a slight increase in the number of candidates in this year's examination with some new centres presenting for the first time. It is encouraging to see new centres attempting the course and to see the number of established centres grow.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards

C – 37.9%
B – 26.7%
A – 18%

Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards

There was a significant drop in the number of candidates achieving an 'A' passes this year, compared to that of last year. This was to do with the ability of the cohort as well as the demands of the Question Paper. Overall the standard was poorer than last year, when a number of outstanding candidates raised the overall standard and there were strong cohorts from established centres.

Grade boundaries for each subject area included in the report

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	17.4%		29	68
B	26.7%		72	58
C	37.9%		133	46
D				
No award	17.4%		29	19%

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

This year all grade boundaries were down from last year because of candidate response to the Question Paper. There are fewer top 'A' candidates, fewer 'A' candidates, more 'C' candidates and more no awards.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

There was some solid work done on all aspects of the course. Most centres study Stanislavski as one of their theatre practitioners, and for a second study the majority of centres choose Craig, Brecht, Artaud, Boal or Brook. The other practitioners are not addressed. Some centres still encourage candidates to sit the exam on the strength of their practical ability which is often considerable but many struggle with the academic rigour of the course. In some instances candidates were out of their depth demonstrating weak language and analysis skills.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Candidates enjoy the practical examination and put enormous effort and preparation into the process. Nearly all centres were well prepared and examiners thoroughly enjoyed the experience of visiting a range of centres. There is a huge commitment shown from both staff and candidates who spend long hours preparing for the practical exams often in very difficult circumstances. Candidates often work in supported situations during the school day, due to the pressures on staff of bi-level teaching.

Acting remains the most straightforward practical option and the one where candidates are most likely to gain most marks.

In the Question Paper, although it is beneficial for candidates to see and debate as much live theatre as possible, they are likely to write stronger answers in the Question Paper if they focus on one production rather than attempt to deal with two or more.

Questions 23 and 25 on Brecht were strong and straightforward choices for candidates.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

It was felt that often the acting reports did not adequately reflect the concepts for acting for the candidate's character. A lot more detail on voice, movement and character relationships would have been helpful. Some centres had actors acting with others who were not being examined which is inevitable but in order to ensure the inter-character relationships are convincing it is important for all actors to know lines and not work from a script.

Candidates choosing Direction or Design as their specialism have a much harder task than those choosing Acting. This is often due to the difficulties in oral communication skills where the verbal communication of concepts can be problematic for some candidates.

Candidates demonstrate an enthusiasm for the academic subject matter but can become very subjective in their tastes. This comes through clearly in section B of the exam where they are frequently seen to write, 'Stanislavski would have approved of this production.' It poses the question – 'How would they know this?'

In the Question Paper there are instances of candidates submitting answers which are prepared and have little or no regard to the question posed. As in the Higher, candidates are over-reliant on prepared NABs or prelim exam questions. Working from prepared answers, can mean that candidates do not think in the exam situation. As a result they do little to shape their responses to the demands of the question. The written exam demands some degree of autonomous thought and the ability to utilise knowledge to respond to a variety of questions and propositions.

At times, candidates demonstrate no real knowledge of primary materials or secondary criticism and this is something which should be a feature of sixth year study. It is crucial that candidates read beyond study packs. Secondary material is important not just in understanding what is said but how it is said.

If offering prepared answers, candidates themselves can limit the choices available to them. Candidates studying Stanislavski predominantly chose question 2, when question 1 afforded a good opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of actual productions.

Those studying Brecht predominantly answered question 15, which was a more demanding question as it was about context, on which no candidate writing on any topic was strong this year. Instead had they chosen question 16 they could have presented an assessment of Brecht's work which they would have found much more accessible.

The underpinning problem is that candidates this year were not skilled at interpretation and analysis – instead, revised facts were offered.

It is a concern that in section B candidates misunderstand the overall concept. To say, 'Stanislavski would not have made this choice,' does not answer the question posed. Instead it would be better for candidates to:

- 1) deal with the contemporary production in relation to the theme of the question;
- 2) compare and contrast choices around the same theme by the selected practitioner.

In question 25 candidates struggled if they were not answering on Brecht. Question 24 was poorly done overall despite being a favoured choice for many candidates. This was unfortunate as there was a rich set of texts on which to draw, but candidates were too general in their answers. A question on playtext must refer to playtext and not merely generalise about the production seen. Question 23 was mixed in terms of quality of response.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Centres are to be congratulated on the enthusiasm and commitment with which they address all parts of the course but the amount of time required to produce the practical options and the enjoyment created whilst doing so is obvious and the dedication of staff is evident.

Centres are still opting for a narrow range of practitioners which is similar to that of the 'A' level in England and Wales. Stanislavski is still the most popular practitioner with some centres looking at Craig and Brecht. Artaud, Brook and Boal are also studied but by fewer centres.

A concern is that centres are teaching to prepared answers and this year there was little individuality apparent in the examination scripts. Many answers were full of irrelevancies the most notable of which was that Stanislavski was born into such wealth. While obviously fascinating to the students, this really does not have a great influence on the plays he chose to direct for the Moscow Art Theatre, although it could have on the way he chose to direct them-but the link must be clearly made otherwise there is no point referring to his background.

In section B of the Question Paper many centres will look for a play by Brecht produced in a Brechtian manner so that they can say Brecht would have approved. They would be better employed to do a production analysis of a production they see and relate it to the question posed in the exam rather than hoping what they write will fit the question.