

## Principal Assessor Report 2003

**Assessment Panel:**

Drama, Dance and Theatre

**Qualification area:**

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

Higher Drama

## Statistical information: update

<b>Number of entries in 2002</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	1526

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	
<b>Pre appeal</b>	1666

### General comments re entry numbers

There was a steady increase in numbers this year which continues to be encouraging.

## Grade boundaries at C, B and A for each subject area included in the report

C – 48%,      B – 59%,      A – 71%

### 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 syllabuses evolve and change

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The cut-off scores were slightly down this year, reflecting in part the removal of the Folio as an external component. However, candidate improvement in other areas of the course went a long way to compensate for this. The extra time which resulted from candidates no longer having to produce folio work in such detail probably helped focus their attention on other areas of the course and benefited them in their final result.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

This was a year of structural change with the removal of the folio from the external to the internal part of the assessment procedure. Candidates always scored well in this component and there was a concern that it would impact strongly on the overall candidate performance this year. Fortunately, however, candidates and staff rose to the challenge, and the standard of work continues to improve.

Candidates were well rehearsed for acting and standards continue to rise showing the enthusiasm and commitment of all concerned. The average acting mark this year was almost 71% showing a rise of 2% from last year, reflecting the practical ability of the cohort and their suitability for the course.

Marks for the written paper continue to improve which is most encouraging. Paper 1 showed an improvement of 3% from last year while Paper 2 improved 1%. The main problem with the Scottish section is that candidates still spend too much time telling the story of the plays and not enough time answering the question asked.

The general feeling this year was that both papers were fair and gave candidates the opportunity to achieve the best of their ability.

### Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

#### Paper 1

##### Essays

Question 6, on the social and historical concerns of the time the playwright was writing, was the most popular question and was addressed by many candidates studying 'The Crucible'. It was, on average, attempted quite well, though some confused the time the play was written with the time the play was set. This happens every year regardless of the question asked. Candidates must be encouraged to take the time to read the question asked not the one they have last attempted in class.

Question 2, on the character with a major flaw, was answered well particularly in the first half of the question but many are still let down in the second half where their descriptions of acting concepts are still weak. This seems such a contradiction as so many candidates write about a part they have acted for their acting exam but few seem to be able to talk about acting as well as they can do it.

Question 3, on themes and design, was well done, though was not very popular. The same was true of question 5 on language. When this question was attempted it was done well, in some instances exceptionally well, but was not a popular choice.

Question 4, on genre, was well done by candidates who used Brecht or Sophocles. Candidates who studied 'Antigone' scored particularly well because the play offered tangible concepts which pupils could readily assimilate.

## **The Dramatic Commentaries**

Markers commented on the improved dramatic commentaries emphasising the practical ability of this year's cohort. These were, on the whole, better than in previous years, although the same problems continue to arise.

### **Paper 2**

The feeling was that this year more candidates were trying to answer the questions asked. By far the most popular question was number 1 with many candidates attempting it well. The next most popular questions were number 9, on stereotypes, quickly followed by number 7 on role models and number 8 on destructive relationships. Number 8 was well done and the essay on stereotypes was tackled well. Candidates enjoy answering on social concerns and gender. They do not gravitate to religion or politics very often. Those who attempted question 6, on popular tradition, generally answered it well. Question 3 on bigotry was not attempted very often.

Current productions and issues is still an area which is avoided by most centres though some schools are now homing in on the playwright question. Those who did this question did it reasonably well.

### **Acting**

Candidates were well rehearsed and standards continue to rise. Some examiners felt that candidates scored better in the Scottish acting piece than the set text because they were more suited to the part.

## **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty**

### **Paper 1**

#### **Essays**

Timing is still a problem for this paper. It is clear that the writing at the end of the papers has changed considerably from that at the start, showing the level of stress which some candidates are under to complete it in the time constraints.

Many candidates who study 'The Crucible' still confuse the play with the screenplay of the film. There are some points which are quite different – scenes set on the cliff tops and Abigail saying goodbye to Proctor in jail – and students should be made aware of this.

Question 1, on how a character changes and develops, was not attempted well, especially in the second half, where the question asked about the rehearsal process. Here candidates proceeded to talk about the character in the performance, which was not the question asked.

#### **Dramatic commentaries**

Theatrical terminology, is still often not used in the blocking of characters and technical effects are still not often justified. It is important that teachers remind candidates that they must include voice in their interpretative notes to actors. Often this is an area which is ignored, and it is so important in the advice a director would give an actor.

Some candidates do not number the text in relation to their dramatic commentaries which makes it

impossible to award marks.

Ground plans are a very easy five marks which are not done as well as they could be, perhaps through pressure of time and perhaps through lack of concentration. The technical marks and ground plan are the easiest nine marks in dramatic commentary, but candidates often do not score as well as they should in these areas.

## **Paper 2**

Question 2, though a popular choice was not well done as candidates read the question as being a list of social concerns when in fact it asked for a social or political concern.

Candidates seemed to be managing the time better for the Scottish questions but poorly chosen quotations, inaccurate quotations and sweeping generalisations often mean an essay cannot progress beyond half marks. Often points made are not justified which means that valid points cannot be given credit.

Question 4, on history, was not well done and most candidates turned question 5 into the nostalgia essay. Answers on nostalgia were generally weak with the same repetitive reason for the nostalgia being trotted out again and again.

Question 7 was answered as a strong woman essay by a number of candidates which was unfortunately not the question asked.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

#### Acting

Repetition of the same scene is not helpful to any candidate. It makes it very difficult for the examiner not to compare like for like, or unlike with like. Inevitably it leads to boredom on the part of the candidate and the examiner and this is not the intention of the exercise and has less than positive effect. Sometimes repetition is necessary, but teachers should be reminded that there is a range of set texts available and that it is a good idea to choose what will suit the candidate's acting ability, rather than choose a character they are going to write about in the final exam. Sometimes this works well but when the mark stands at 45% it is sensible to choose wisely.

If a candidate is examined with a candidate who is not being examined this should only happen once except in extreme circumstances as it gravely disadvantages the candidate. Read-ins should be avoided as it is virtually impossible for a candidate to achieve adequate interaction with their partner if the partner does not look them in the eye because they are having to read the lines.

Some examiners commented that the length of the acting piece was confusing as many centres chose pieces which were too long. The suggestion is that every candidate should be on stage for a minimum of five minutes. This does not mean that if three candidates are on stage their piece should last fifteen minutes – a ten minute piece is quite sufficient. Obviously teachers should use their discretion on this and of course many do not want to disadvantage the candidate by not giving them enough to do. In fact they can be given too much to do and the longer they are on stage can actually work against them. It is a difficult science!

Most examiners had at least one centre which did not ask their pupils to fill in the interpretative notes for acting at the back of the acting mark sheet. Filling these in is most helpful to the examiner and it is actually an SQA requirement that all candidates complete these forms.

#### Question Paper 1

Examiners felt that pupils still need to be taught to plan essays which answer the questions asked. This keeps the candidate on track and helps them to be specific in their answers. However, the general feeling was that on the whole questions were well selected and appropriate to the texts studied.

- ◆ Candidates must be reminded to read the paper properly and try to answer the question asked.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded of the importance of ground plans. They should know what to draw and do so accurately.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded to justify all technical effects.
- ◆ The text opposite dramatic commentaries must be numbered.
- ◆ Candidates studying 'The Crucible' should be reminded of the differences between the play text and the Screenplay.

## Question Paper 2

This is still the area of the exam which gives candidates most problems. This year the average mark has increased by 0.5 of a mark or 1%. This could be due to the straightforward nature of the paper, but the standard of Scottish papers has not changed radically for the past four years. Markers feel this is largely due to the fact that centres are not very adventurous in the texts they use. To rely on 'The Steemie', 'Men Should Weep' and 'The Letterbox' as the major texts for this exam is not adequate and greatly disadvantages candidates. They need more depth. Candidates still rely on the prepared answer and often do not read the question asked.

- ◆ Teachers should stretch the range of texts beyond 'The Steemie', 'Men Should Weep' and 'The Letterbox' as this disadvantages candidates and means they do not have enough breadth to answer the questions.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to read the paper thoroughly and make an essay plan to suit the question. This can be done in five minutes and gives the student a through line that they can follow. This helps them not to go off at tangents.