

## Principal Assessor Report 2005

**Assessment Panel:**

**Drama, Dance & Media Studies**

**Qualification area**

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

**Drama Higher**

## Statistical information: update

Number of resulted entries in 2004	1,912
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	1,962
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### General comments re resulted entry numbers

There continues to be a slow steady rise in the subject uptake which is very encouraging.

There are no particular trends in entry numbers.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 100	-	-	-	-
A	14.0	14.0	274	71
B	32.4	46.3	635	59
C	34.8	81.1	682	47
D	9.1	90.2	178	41
No award	9.8	100.0	193	-

### 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 any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

In 2005, 90.2% of the cohort passed the exam and 9.8% received no award.

The cohort was similar to that of last year, which was reflected in the grade boundaries set.

#### **The Practical Examination — Acting**

The average acting mark for 2004 was 27.7/40.

The average acting mark for 2005 was 28.7/40.

### **The Question Paper**

The average mark for the Question Paper for 2004 was 27.8/60.

The average mark for the Question Paper for 2005 was 28.8/60.

This shows very little difference between the ability of candidates in both areas of study from 2004 to 2005.

It was expected that because there was only one Contemporary Scottish Theatre essay this year that the average exam mark would be higher. However, this proved not to be the case, which would suggest a slightly less able cohort in this particular area of the syllabus.

This was balanced by marginally better acting marks. In 2005 the percentage change in the weighting of the acting exam from 45% to 40% had little influence on average grades. It does mean, however, that candidates cannot rely only on high acting marks to achieve their grade; they must now also perform well in all sections of the Question Paper.

### **The nature of the Question Paper and its associated Markers' Instructions**

The nature of the Question Paper was fair and both the Question Paper and the Markers' Instructions were predictive of the standards expected of the candidate responses.

## Comments on candidate performance

### General comments

All candidates showed enthusiasm in their responses to both questions answered and texts studied. Some centres and individual candidates provided answers which were interesting, relevant and well justified.

With the changes to the Question Paper, and in 2005 streamlining from two Question Papers to one, candidates had more time to address the challenges of the paper and most completed the paper within the new and more generous time limit of 2 hours and 30 minutes.

It was expected that candidates would perform better this year since they were only tackling one CST question. In practice, it was considered that Dramatic Commentaries were of a higher standard, but the expected improvement in the CST question did not materialise. In fact, there was concern that even the question on prescribed text was not answered as well as in previous years.

Some centres still persist in not studying full length plays for the CST section. As anticipated, the majority of centres opted to study the gender section this year.

A number of candidates did not number the question they were answering; it is crucial that they do so.

A number of candidates also have acquired wrong information about plays and characters. Occasionally candidates supply information which is wildly assumptive and sometimes totally fictional.

*The Crucible* is by far the most popular prescribed text but candidates still fall into the trap of writing pages of irrelevant information just because they like to relate their knowledge of McCarthyism.

Some candidates appear to be taught to answer essays by listing a series of points. More detail and depth of answer is required in this type of extended writing question.

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

#### The Acting Examination

Candidates scored well in the Acting Exam, the average mark being almost 29/40.

Examiners enjoyed their visits on the whole and spoke highly of the commitment of both candidates and staff to this part of the exam.

As always, there are some difficulties and it is worth reminding centres that candidates should not play a member of the opposite sex for both acting pieces.

It benefits the candidates if a reader has learned the lines. This is not always possible, but it does make a huge difference to the general level of performance.

It helps candidates to inhabit the role if they are in costume.

## Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

### The Dramatic Commentary

Dramatic Commentaries were well done with many candidates showing a theatrical understanding of the text and an ability to move characters about the stage.

Most common faults were the omission of any advice on voice, and candidates failing to supply an opening and closing lighting state in the technical column.

Sometimes candidates failed to justify their technical effects, which led to no marks being awarded in that area.

Occasionally candidates did not number or mark up their annotated scripts so Markers found it virtually impossible to know what was happening at given points on stage. This reduces the number of marks available.

Some candidates had no correlation between their ground plan and their set text essay.

### Questions on Prescribed Texts

There were four questions on Prescribed Text.

Occasionally candidates answered this section on *Men Should Weep*, which meant that no marks were awarded. It is important that all candidates are aware that they must answer a question on prescribed text.

Many answers lacked coherent points. Often points lacked good justification and candidates found it difficult to be selective in their knowledge to answer the question asked.

Question 1 — was on the opening scene. This was not done particularly well because candidates did not always identify the opening scene, and instead discussed a large proportion of the play. This was a popular choice of question.

Question 2 — was a character rebelling against, or conforming to, the society in which they live. This question was one in which candidates generally scored well. It was very straightforward, although some candidates merely treated this question as a character analysis and failed to adequately explain why the character of their choice was rebelling against or conforming to the society in which they lived. Some candidates chose inappropriate characters, such as Parris, whom they said was a rebel. They would have scored higher marks had they read the question properly and argued how he conformed to his society.

Question 3 — was about a scene of conflict between two characters and how that would be directed during the rehearsal process. Unfortunately, many candidates concentrated on directing the performance when the question asked about working with actors during the rehearsal process. A considerable number of candidates did not understand what the rehearsal process entailed. Others chose a scene with which they were familiar, possibly the one in which they acted, regardless of whether or not it was a scene of conflict.

Question 4 — was about the creation of visual images to communicate the central themes of the play. A common mistake was that candidates gave lots of visual images, but made little connection to the themes. Others launched into an outline of the plot and described their directorial concept. Others inserted their ideas on sound, showing that they wanted to answer a question on their directorial concept. This was a popular question, but it was not done particularly well because candidates rarely answered the question asked.

### The Set Plan

This is worth four marks, but some candidates were careless and a surprisingly high number scored three marks rather than four.

### **Contemporary Scottish Theatre**

This is still the main area where candidates are either not well enough prepared, or are not confident to answer well.

The most commonly answered questions were those on gender, followed by the question on social issues. A common problem was that candidates did not address the question asked.

Centres are still not ambitious in their choice of plays, which is generally fairly narrow, and this means that candidates are not as well prepared to answer a question in depth. By far the most popular texts are still *The Steamie* and *Men Should Weep*, with many still relying on *The Letterbox*, despite the fact that it is not a full length play. This limited choice disadvantages candidates, since *Men Should Weep* is often the only full length play they have, which has any real depth of character.

Question 6 — Candidates were apt to talk of social issues, but did not relate these to how the characters were used to convey these issues. Many still fall into the trap of answering the question they want to answer, rather than the question they have been asked.

Question 7 — Answers on political issues were badly done, as many candidates cannot differentiate between social and political issues.

Question 8 — This was not a popular choice, but when it was well done, the quality of response was very good. The question asked candidates to draw comparisons between plays set in the past, and modern life. Unfortunately, for many, this turned into a list which often gave little justification for conclusions reached.

Question 9 — This question asked about music, song, dance and character stereotypes. It was a fairly straight-forward question but many candidates provided the standard popular tradition answer, and the question demanded more specific detail.

Question 10 — This question on parents and children was reasonably well done. There was plenty of material for candidates to write about this topic, and some approached the question with real enthusiasm and inventiveness.

### **By Contrast**

Question 11 — frequently became an answer on strong women, which was not the question asked. Candidates often used a prepared answer here, which did not even allude to the question.

Question 12 — where candidates were asked to analyse the work of a playwright, was rarely attempted, as was

Question 13 — which was the critical analysis of a contemporary Scottish play. This was a pity, as there must have been many candidates who would have scored well in this question, considering the number of plays they go to see.

## Recommendations

### Recommendations to Centres

#### Acting Examination

If candidates have to have a person reading in for them, it is to their benefit if that person has learned the lines and brings some interpretation to the character. If this is not the case, the candidate is considerably disadvantaged in the category of relating to other characters on stage.

Candidates should not play two roles of the opposite sex in their acting pieces.

Costume always helps to inhabit a role.

#### Question Paper

Centres should advise candidates to spend at least five minutes on their set plan. Carelessness lost marks this year which could have been avoided. It is also important to remind candidates the difference between stage right and stage left.

Centres should encourage candidates to read the whole Question Paper thoroughly, and not go straight to a certain section. There is now plenty of time to do this and it can be most beneficial.

It is important that candidates write extended essays. Bullet style points cannot convey a detailed knowledge of the text and are often lacking in quotations and justification.

Knowledge of the text is essential. Reliance on video, although it is helpful to a degree, is often at odds with the written text. This is particularly true of *The Crucible*. The film is an excellent resource, but it is different in parts to the play text and this must be taken into account when studying the play.

Centres should consider broadening their choice of plays for Contemporary Scottish Theatre. Many still have a limited range, which does not offer scope to the candidates in their responses. Three plays are essential and all should be full length; one act plays should be a bonus to this.