



Course report 2023

Advanced Higher Drama

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 622

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 540

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Percentage	146	Cumulative percentage	27	Number of candidates	27	Lowest mark	70
B	Percentage	132	Cumulative percentage	24.4	Number of candidates	51.5	Lowest mark	59
C	Percentage	170	Cumulative percentage	31.5	Number of candidates	83	Lowest mark	49
D	Percentage	76	Cumulative percentage	14.1	Number of candidates	97	Lowest mark	38
No award	Percentage	16	Cumulative percentage	3	Number of candidates	100	Lowest mark	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Project–dissertation

The project–dissertation performed as expected, in the main. Candidates selected both contemporary and historical practitioners and their practice to address their chosen performance issue in their project–dissertations. Many candidates engaged in performance issues related to current social, political and cultural issues explored by practitioners in professional theatre performances, including issues of diversity representation, LGBTQ+ issues and mental health. Many candidates communicated passionate advocacy for themes and issues explored in their dissertations. Some candidates presented a lucid argument and had a confident voice and opinion.

Most candidates submitted a dissertation that fell within the word count requirement. Some dissertations were short and under the minimum word count requirement. In these cases, the dissertations lacked detail and were self-penalising.

Candidates who achieved less well did not have a clearly identified performance issue and presented performance analysis examples not tied to a line of enquiry.

Candidates who achieved less well often presented lengthy historical or social narratives or told the story of the play without explicitly giving theatrical practice and theatre performance examples. Candidates who did not focus on theatre making and theatre practice within performance could not access the full range of marks.

Assignment

The assignment performed as expected, in the main. Most candidates selected contemporary productions and practitioners to answer the assignment, and only a few selected historical productions and practitioners. Many of the assignments were in response to contemporary performances, which had been accessed through online digital theatre platforms, however some assignments were in response to live theatrical performances. Almost all the productions selected for the assignment were appropriate for SCQF level 7.

Candidates attempted both assignment questions, with question 1 being the most popular. A few candidates misinterpreted the ‘authorship’ term in this question and confused the playwright’s text and the theatrical practitioner’s authorship of the production.

In some responses to both questions, candidates wrote a Higher Drama style performance analysis response, and did not root their analysis in an argument related to their knowledge and understanding of the practitioner. Consequently, they failed to engage in the question asked. In a few responses, candidates misinterpreted question 2 and wrote about a newly premiered production, which was not a reimagined production. Some candidates’ responses fell into narrative descriptions and did not give clear and persuasive analysed examples from the performance.

Most candidates completed an extended-response to a chosen question, with a conclusion, within the timed conditions for this assessment task. Most candidates demonstrated a level

of literacy appropriate to the assessment task, and almost all candidates submitted a resource sheet, as required.

Grade boundary decisions acknowledged disruption to teaching and learning this session.

Performance

The performance performed as expected and allowed centres to select play texts and specialisms in acting, directing and design to support candidate personalisation and choice.

Acting remains the most popular choice for the performance assessment with few candidates choosing design and directing.

A range of play texts were used for all sub-components, which were mostly appropriate for this level, with a greater emphasis on contemporary plays this session.

Most centres had a larger audience for the actors' performances than last year, and some centres had audiences that mainly consisted of the remainder of the class. Centres and candidates also returned to using more props and costumes to integrate into the acting performance pieces.

In almost all centres, a sense of occasion was given to the performance and many visiting assessors commented on the privilege of assessing candidates who were passionate about their work and keen to share their performances.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Project–dissertation

Most candidates referenced professional theatre and theatre practitioners in their project–dissertation. When candidates had a clearly identified performance issue that they explored in their dissertation, and carefully selected and analysed performance examples in response to this issue, they did well. Candidates often demonstrated a strong personal engagement with the topics and issues explored and some passionate discussion of topical themes in theatre.

Some candidates engaged in a mature and thoughtful way by referencing challenging performances and theatre practice. Candidates were able to use a range of digital theatre platforms and live streaming of performances, and often analysed these effectively in their writing. Some candidates also engaged with contemporary performances that they had seen live. Candidates who gave comparisons and alternative perspectives within their writing were able to create a well-considered and balanced argument. Candidates who gave detailed examples from features of productions and practitioners' practice relating to making theatre, achieved well. Candidates who were appropriately presented and had the pre-requisite literacy skills required for this assessment were able to present their work coherently. Candidates who presented a well-considered conclusion and evaluated the analysed evidence, and consistently returned to the performance issue that they were addressing, did well.

Candidates who struggled with this task often presented a simplistic comparison of two productions of the same play or, in very few examples, one play. These candidates often did not identify a performance issue and had titles that indicated they were going to compare productions. Candidates who wrote theatrical histories without any performance examples and without a clear issue, did not access the full range of marks. Candidates who presented dissertations about theatrical trends in, for example, acting training, theatre sustainability, theatre pricing, diversity and equality in theatre, and were wholly reliant on statistics and did not reference performances, could not access the full range of marks.

Often in weaker dissertations, candidates were too reliant on opinions in reviews and did not convince in a personal response. Dissertations that were weak were often under the minimum word count and were self-penalising as they were often simplistic and narrative driven in style.

Assignment

Candidates who presented an argument in response to the chosen question and kept the question in focus throughout their assignment, achieved well. Candidates who achieved well had convincing knowledge and understanding of the practitioner, and this was relevant to the production they were analysing and their argument. When performance examples were described and analysed in detail, were carefully selected, and consistently used to build an argument, candidates achieved well. Candidates who expressed and justified their personal response to the theatre making and gave a considered conclusion, achieved well.

There was a strong correlation between well-structured and well-argued responses and succinctly organised resource sheets. Candidates who responded with a personal response to the theatre making, in response to the question chosen, did well.

Candidates sometimes presented a lengthy biography of the practitioner without contextualising their practice and making this relevant to the question. When candidates wrote a Higher Drama performance analysis style response without referencing the question to build an argument, they could not access the full range of marks. A very few candidates did not manage their time effectively and did not write a conclusion, which weakened their through-line of argument. Some candidates gave a description of the story of the play rather than analysing the theatre practice and interpretative performance decisions from the production. When a centre approach had been taken and candidates appeared to have learnt a series of points and presented the same argument, some individual candidate responses tended to be less convincing in terms of their understanding.

Performance

Actors

Many candidates achieved well in the performance, appeared to enjoy the experience of performing, and demonstrated strong stage craft and textual understanding. Candidates used a range of both contemporary texts and older play texts for their performance assessment. Most centres and candidates are using the recommended list of play texts as a guide to inform their choice of appropriately challenging plays and are using both familiar and new scripts in this assessment.

Candidates gave some exceptionally strong performances in both the interactive and the monologue sub-component, which allowed the visiting examining team to use the full range of marks available.

Some candidates did less well if they were less secure in lines and took many prompts. Some appeared less prepared and less confident in the monologue sub-component.

Some candidates did not convince in a full understanding of textual clues in their performance of their monologues.

Some candidates did not have a clear point of focus in their monologue performances, and some monologues were very long, and were often self-penalising as the candidate lost impact in their performance.

There were examples of inappropriate presentation at this level where candidates struggled with the demand of the assessment task. Some candidates performed inappropriate texts for this level, which did not provide appropriate challenge and therefore did not allow candidates to access the full range of marks.

Very few candidates demonstrated anxiety related to their performance by having to restart pieces, stop pieces early or refused to perform the solo monologue sub-component.

Directors

Most directors structured their rehearsal assessment well and presented their directorial concepts coherently. They also motivated their actors confidently and used terminology accurately, in the main. Directors who had a thorough textual knowledge of the whole play and, in addition, had clear concepts relevant to a contemporary audience, achieved well.

Directors who contextualised warm-ups and rehearsal activities and made them relevant to the script extract chosen and their overall concepts, achieved well.

Directors who communicated instruction to actors with clarity and used terminology fluently, achieved well.

Some directors did not make clear their concepts and struggled to convince in a full understanding of the whole play. Some directors did not watch and craft the shaping of stage pictures or character interaction and did not build clear meaning or impact in their direction of the extract.

Designers

Most designers need to be clearer with regards to the performance space that they are designing for. They also need a thorough working knowledge of the whole play and the practical demands of the text. The candidates who did well applied appropriate care and detail to the creation and building of the scale model box, which carries most of the marks in this component. Designers who achieved well demonstrated an understanding of scale and viability in their scale model box.

Some designers used technology effectively to convey their overall concept and to communicate their ideas about set transitions, and to convey more complex stage pictures and imagery.

Some designers appeared to have spent a disproportionate amount of time on the two additional production areas, often making items of costume or props, for example, rather than presenting lists, designs or cue sheets. This was often to the detriment of the scale model box for which they are marked on their application of skills.

Designers who achieved well had a coherence and overall connecting concept for the scale model box and the two additional design areas.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Project–dissertation

- ◆ Centres can support candidates to identify a clear performance issue.
- ◆ Centres can support candidates to identify a range of performances and theatre practice to reference in their project–dissertation.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to present their own opinions in response to their chosen performance issue.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are not writing about film, ballet, musicals or opera in their project–dissertation.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded that the project–dissertation should focus on professional theatre making and should reference theatre productions.

Assignment

- ◆ Centres should offer guidance to candidates about how to select a question for this task.
- ◆ Centres should offer guidance to candidates about the relevance of practitioner study and how this will support their analysis of their selected production.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to present their own opinions and personal argument in response to their chosen question.
- ◆ Centres should highlight the importance of giving a conclusion in the assignment write-up.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates clearly identify the question chosen, submit a flyleaf, and submit a resource sheet for this task.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that the flyleaf is completed and signed.
- ◆ Early engagement in the assignment can support candidates in developing the skills needed to address a question and performance issue and build an argument in the project–dissertation.

Performance

- ◆ Centres should use the recommended list of texts as a guide to support the selection of play texts for both interactive acting and monologue to ensure challenge appropriate to this level. The monologue should be from a full-length play. Candidates should have knowledge of the whole play, and the character arc for their role for both acting pieces.
- ◆ Centres should remind candidates that no other actors should be on stage for the monologue sub-component. If they are addressing their monologue to another character, they should carefully consider their stage positioning to engage the audience and create impact. This could be, for example, over the heads of the audience.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that monologues and interactive pieces are not overly long and should keep within the recommended guidance.
- ◆ Centres should remind directors that all warm-up and introductory rehearsal tasks should support the actors' understanding of the script extract and/or overall directorial concept.
- ◆ Directors should clearly articulate their overall concept within their rehearsal.

- ◆ Design candidates must have a clearly identified performance space for which they are designing.
- ◆ The scale model box demonstrates the application of production skills at this level. It must be the focus of the design performance assessment and be large enough to communicate ideas in a visual way. Designers will not be credited for talking about what they would do without realising it in their presentation. Concepts must be captured in the visual presentation of the scale model box and supporting designs and/or lists and cue sheets for the two additional production areas. Designers are not required to make items or demonstrate application within the two additional production areas.
- ◆ There is no need for designers to present scrap books and numerous design mood boards. They should only present what is necessary to explain their final concept.
- ◆ Designers should adhere to the recommended length for their presentation.

Recent webinars and Understanding Standards materials could be shared with candidates to support their preparation for each component.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).