



## Course Report 2019

Subject	Drama
Level	Advanced Higher

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

# **Section 1: comments on the assessment**

## **Performance**

For the performance, the majority of candidates chose the acting option. This year, 20 candidates chose design, and five candidates chose directing.

Candidates and centres selected a range of texts for study. The range of texts chosen were, on the whole, appropriately challenging at this level. Centres and candidates explored a greater range of plays this session. Most candidates communicated their research and interpretative ideas for their role(s) with clarity and relevance in their preparation for performance summaries, and achieved good to very good marks.

## **Project–dissertation**

Candidates investigated varied topics and performance issues in the project–dissertation. Candidates' work reflected the topical, social and political issues explored in contemporary practitioner work, including representation of minority groups in theatre practice and performance, community identity, and gender politics. More contemporary practitioners featured in this session's project-dissertations. These included current theatre companies and/or artistic directors and playwrights, for example Frantic Assembly, National Theatre, The Globe, The RSC, and directors Carrie Cracknell, Dominic Hill and playwrights Zinnie Harris and Kieran Hurley.

Some candidates used historical practitioners, to start from or to refer to, when exploring their performance issue. The most common practitioners referenced in this approach were Stanislavski, Boal, Brook and Brecht.

More candidates and centres used live theatre performance(s) to inspire a study of, for example, a director, designer, playwright or acting company. Many candidates referenced live-streamed performances. They often benefitted from being able to review the performance material released on DVD format. This sometimes led candidates to analyse a body of work from one practitioner and explore connecting or contrasting styles, performance ideas, and theories.

Some candidates looked at a single practitioner and focused on different performance issues within their work, or looked at a series of linked performances with varied focuses (for example, technical design innovation, directorial imprints, reworking or reimagining of the text). Some of these candidates referenced practical experiences and interviewed contemporary theatre practitioners.

## Section 2: comments on candidate performance

### Areas that candidates performed well in

#### Performance

Candidates and centres were well prepared for the performance assessment.

There were some impressive and assured acting performances of appropriately challenging text and roles.

Effective actors:

- ◆ communicated clear understanding of their roles
- ◆ had confident stagecraft
- ◆ created good impact in performance — in both the interactive and monologue roles
- ◆ demonstrated a clear understanding of their acting monologue role in the context of the whole play
- ◆ convinced the audience in their characterisation and impact

Effective designers:

- ◆ had a coherent overview of the play and were clear in the themes and ideas that they wanted to communicate
- ◆ had a coherent interpretation for the whole play and had a clear connection between the set and the two other design areas
- ◆ knew the play well and had a clear understanding of the practical demands of the text and the opportunities and constraints of their chosen performance space
- ◆ demonstrated the functionality of their set for all of the play
- ◆ had clear and comprehensive designs and cue sheets

Some candidates communicated original and imaginative concepts. Some candidates demonstrated skill in making their scale model set box and made use of technology to communicate their vision for the text.

Effective directors:

- ◆ knew the play text well and had a clear interpretative vision for the whole play and had a desired impact for an audience today
- ◆ had a clear focus about the concepts they wished to explore in the rehearsal and contextualised their work within their interpretation for the whole play
- ◆ gave clear advice to actors on their characters and the relationships in the text and how these interplayed with the overall themes and issues that they wished to communicate
- ◆ managed their time and directed the entirety of the extract with consideration to aspects of staging, characterisation, or relationships and their desired impact
- ◆ explored the text with their actors, and engaged them in the rehearsal

Some directors demonstrated strong interpersonal skills and communicated highly effectively.

## **Project–dissertation**

Candidates achieved well if they posed a clear question, related to their performance issue that allowed for depth of consideration. They achieved well if the performance issue referenced was on aspects of theatre making.

Candidates achieved well when they held a clear focus in their dissertation exploration and had a clear line of enquiry. In a successful approach, candidates organised analysed materials coherently and brought their analysed evidence back to the issue identified and developed their thinking on the performance issue throughout the dissertation.

Candidates who achieved well demonstrated appropriate literacy skills for this level and articulated their argument with confidence.

The candidates who performed well often, when synthesising materials, made links, identified contrasts, and returned to an argument expressed in their own voice. These candidates often, and with confidence, questioned a critic's perspective, or had alternative perspectives on the issue.

Candidates tended to perform well in their project–dissertation if they were interested in the performance issue and the theatre they analysed.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

### **Performance**

#### **Acting**

Some choices of text lacked appropriate challenge and complexity for Advanced Higher level. In these cases, the text chosen did not have detailed subtext or, the role did not show progression over the course of the interactive piece.

In some cases, candidates were not fully prepared or fully rehearsed for the monologue and required many prompts. This had a detrimental impact on credibility and impact.

Some acting candidates had difficulty if the extract was unnecessarily long or too short. This often meant that they did not fully convince with their portrayal or lost the overall impact in their role. This was particularly true of the monologues. Some monologue performances did not demonstrate an understanding of the character in the context of the whole play.

Some acting candidates, who chose texts set in another regional or historical context, had problems sustaining and convincing with their use of voice, particularly accent.

Some acting candidates found creating convincing relationships challenging if their acting partners were not off script or were under-rehearsed.

## **Design**

Design candidates sometimes appeared under-rehearsed in their presentation of their work, and occasionally had to be prompted to produce evidence to access marks, for example fully explaining how the scale model set box functioned for transitions of the play. Some design candidates tended to talk about their ideas and concepts without producing clear evidence, for example designs or cue sheets.

Occasionally, design candidates did not make a scale model set box that communicated their vision effectively in terms of visual clarity and impact.

Occasionally, design candidates failed to design for the whole play and did not convince with a unifying concept or detailed understanding of the whole play.

Some design candidates' presentations needed to be more organised, as some were repetitive and lengthy.

## **Directors**

Occasionally, directors appeared under-rehearsed and failed to be fully conversant with the whole text. Some warm-up or rehearsal activities lacked relevance, failing to contextualise ideas in the play within their overall directorial concept. Some directors did not manage their time as effectively as they needed to and did not direct the full extract chosen. Some directors found communicating their ideas for characters and relationships challenging, as they did not use voice, movement, or staging terminology with confidence. Occasionally a director's work lacked understanding of the text and characters.

## **Project–dissertation**

This year, more dissertations were very short in length, had not been proof read or spell checked, and lacked a clear referencing system. A small minority of candidates appeared to have not engaged with the assessment task and submitted work that was not of Advanced Higher standard.

Some candidates did not investigate a performance issue and their dissertation was not rooted in analysis of theatre making, theatre practice or theatre theory.

Candidates found the dissertation demanding if their title lacked focus and was too wide in scope. In these cases, the candidates often presented information without analysis and rarely referred back to a performance focus.

Candidates sometimes presented an extended performance analysis or a performance analysis of two approaches to the same play, but did not clearly link to a performance issue. In some cases, the candidates drifted from the intentions they outlined in their introductory paragraphs and their dissertation lacked a through line of argument.

Some candidates included historical and background material on practitioners that did not add substance to their argument.

Some candidates presented lengthy descriptive narratives and found synthesising analysed evidence challenging. They often repeated ideas without drilling down and drawing conclusions.

On occasion, candidates made artificial links between current and historic theatre practitioners that did not have relevance to their argument.

Some candidates found it challenging to express their ideas and thinking in a lucid, academic format. They did not demonstrate the appropriate literacy skills for this level.

In some cases, candidates' referencing was weak and dissertations did not include a bibliography.

Some dissertations were not convincing in their understanding or analysis of a performance or productions. These dissertations relied too heavily on the opinions of theatre critics, without questioning this perspective. This often replaced the candidates' own analysis and thinking.

Some candidates submitted dissertations with many statistics about the demographics of performers, directors and audiences in theatre, but failed to focus on the performance issue or aspect of theory, and rarely referenced theatre practice.

## Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

### Performance

#### Acting

- ◆ Candidates should not repeat roles that they have previously been assessed in for National 5 or Higher level.
- ◆ Centres and candidates should refer to the recommended text list for examples of plays of appropriate challenge for Advanced Higher level.
- ◆ Acting candidates should select their monologue from a full-length play text and be cautious of finding standalone monologues on websites.
- ◆ As in the interactive acting choice, the monologue should be from a full-length play text and not a musical or film script.
- ◆ The monologue should be from one part of the play and there should be no other actors on stage.
- ◆ Candidates and centres should ensure that the monologue performances remain within the recommended time period of 2 to 3 minutes.
- ◆ Candidates and centres should ensure that the interactive performances remain within the recommended time period of approximately 15 to 17 minutes. For example, if an interactive piece has three roles of challenge with equity of stage time, the top range of this time recommendation is entirely appropriate.
- ◆ Lengthy set or costumes changes are not necessary in the acting performances.
- ◆ Elements of costume and key props that aid characterisation are valid, for example character skirts, fans.
- ◆ All actors, including non-assessed performers in supporting roles, should be off script to allow for credible interaction.
- ◆ Candidates and centres should ensure that the interactive role allows full demonstration of relationships and the acting role is not merely a linking narrator.

#### Design

- ◆ Candidates must design for the whole play and their presentation about their scale model set box must reference each act or scene and any significant changes to the setting.
- ◆ Candidates should design the scale model set for an identified performance space.
- ◆ For the additional design roles, candidates must design for the whole text, and there should be a coherence and link to the set design. Candidates must support their ideas with evidence, for example designs, cue sheets, artefacts.
- ◆ Candidates should rehearse their presentations. It may help them to create cue cards to go through their ideas systematically.
- ◆ The recommended time for the presentation is 20 minutes.

## Directing

- ◆ Directors should be encouraged to time the phases of the rehearsal and practice different pages of their chosen extract.
- ◆ Warm-up exercises and rehearsal activities, such as improvisation should be contextualised with regard to the script extract, the whole text and the director's overall concept.
- ◆ Directors should use suitable actors, who are able to take on complex direction and explore complex issues in the text. This allows the director to communicate their concepts confidently and without compromise.
- ◆ Detailed uses of production areas are not necessary for rehearsal, unless they are integral to the directorial concepts.
- ◆ After the final rehearsal, it is appropriate for the director to lead an evaluation with their actors to discuss progress made during the rehearsal.

## Project–dissertation

- ◆ The performance issue explored should be rooted in theatre making, theatre theory and/or theatre practitioners.
- ◆ The performance issue identified must be on a professional theatre practitioner or professional theatre practice or professional theatre theory, contemporary or historic, on which there is an academic discourse.
- ◆ Candidates should choose a dissertation title and issue that allows them to address the topic in depth. They should ensure that the scope of this performance issue is not too vast and aim for depth in their topic.
- ◆ They should regularly review the title to ensure that the topic they are exploring does not change from their stated purpose. If the candidate does change from their initial focus in their final dissertation, they should rethink their title.
- ◆ Candidates should not be over reliant on reviews in analysing performance.
- ◆ The project–dissertation **should not** be on an aspect of ballet, opera, or musicals.
- ◆ Candidates do not need to reference a historic practitioner in the project–dissertation unless it is relevant to the performance issue.
- ◆ Candidates should ensure that their project–dissertation is proof read. It would be useful to submit the final word-processed version in double spaced format.
- ◆ Candidates should ensure that they reference all sources.
- ◆ The Harvard referencing system is a recommended format.
- ◆ Candidates and centres must ensure that the word count is included on the dissertation and that it is within a 10% tolerance of the word count of 2,500 to 3,000 words.



## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	509
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	566
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### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
<b>Maximum mark</b>				
<b>A</b>	22.1%	22.1%	125	70
<b>B</b>	30.2%	52.3%	171	60
<b>C</b>	29.2%	81.4%	165	50
<b>D</b>	8.8%	90.3%	50	45
<b>No award</b>	9.7%	-	55	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards 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 to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.