



Course report 2019

Subject	Drama
Level	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

Question paper

The choice of questions in section 1 provided opportunities for candidates to analyse their chosen text from a range of focused areas, for example important scene, complex relationships, different emotions from the audience, changes to a previous production. Care was taken to ensure that the questions were sufficiently challenging to enable candidates to demonstrate their skill as a director, actor, or designer at Higher level and to ensure parity in demand across these three disciplines.

The Crucible, Antigone (various translations), The Birthday Party, The House of Bernarda Alba, A Taste of Honey, The Importance of Being Earnest, and Men Should Weep continue to be popular texts in this section. Some candidates responded on A Streetcar Named Desire, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, Black Watch, All My Sons and The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui.

The new compulsory question in section 2 required candidates to consider the status of a chosen character in the final scene and how, as an actor, they would use voice to communicate this as well as a director's use of the performance space.

Section 3 required candidates to analyse either moods and/or atmospheres as well as character motivation and/or intentions. Candidates responded on live performances, live streaming to a cinema, and recordings of live performances. The range of productions included Cyrano de Bergerac, Dracula, Titus Andronicus, Ballyturk, Macbeth, All My Sons, Romeo and Juliet, War Horse and Julie.

Overall, the question paper performed in line with expectations. Feedback from the marking team and practitioners suggested that it was fair and accessible.

Performance

Candidates performed a wide variety of plays. Almost all centres were able to provide suitable facilities and resources for the performance assessment.

This component performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Section 1, question 2: this was a popular question. Candidates who described the different responses from an audience to their chosen character and supported this with appropriate textual references performed well. Moreover, for the second half of the answer many candidates successfully described the ways in which the director would direct the actors to evoke these responses through effective terms of voice and movement. The most successful candidates also considered the choice and use of the performance space and the direction of the design team.

Section 1, question 3: this was a popular question. Candidates who understood that it was the actions of their chosen character that affected the emotions of other characters, using appropriate quotations and/or stage directions performed well. Candidates who were able to use appropriate and effective voice and movement terms were also successful.

Section 1, question 4: this was the most popular question in this section. Candidates who could describe the complexity of the relationship between one or more characters and explain how their chosen rehearsal techniques developed this relationship performed well.

Section 2, question 7 — theatre production: application: on the whole, this new section of the question paper performed well. Candidates who understood the term 'status' in relation to their chosen character in the final scene, and could use correct drama literacy or terminology, performed well.

Section 3, question 8: this was the most popular question in section 3: performance analysis. Candidates with good drama literacy and who had seen quality performances were able to write detailed analysis. These candidates were able to analyse performance concepts in detail, as they had the vocabulary and understanding to do so. There was sometimes evidence that candidates had researched productions, read reviews and seen interviews with directors and actors.

Performance

Preparation for performance: candidates were very well prepared for this aspect of the assessment. Many achieved high marks while adhering to the 500-word guideline. Candidates who had clearly researched their play(s), and had used this research to inform their role, performed well.

Acting: this was overwhelmingly the most popular choice and there were some outstanding performances. The most successful candidates were cast in roles to suit their interests and talents, and performed extracts that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate a range of acting skills. They had been well rehearsed in both roles and were able to engage with, and explore the depths of their character creating credible performances.

Design: candidates who designed for the whole play, who had an imaginative design concept and a clear idea of how to realise their concept in their set design and additional production role performed well. These candidates produced ground plans and elevations for every scene change throughout the play. The elevations gave an impression of the set from an audience's point of view, with suggestions for height, texture and colour. Successful candidates demonstrated skill in their selected production area, often making creative use of technology.

Directing: directors who knew the whole play, had a clear directorial concept they wished to explore in rehearsal, and had the energy and enthusiasm to engage their actors, performed well. Successful directors inspired their actors. They were good at timekeeping, often using a stopwatch to pace the rehearsal, ensuring they engaged their actors in all elements of the directing process.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 1, question 4: some candidates confused 'rehearsal concepts' with 'performance concepts' when answering the second half of this question. Some candidates listed rehearsal concepts without explaining the ways in which they would help the actor explore a change in status and/or circumstances. For example, 'I would use role reversal to help my character', without any attempt to explain the ways that the activity would help the actor develop the role.

Section 1, questions 5 and 6: on the whole, candidates accessed marks for the first part of these questions, using appropriate quotations and/or stage directions to support their thinking. Candidates often answered the second part of the question poorly, however, with little explanation of design concepts and tenuous links to the first part of the response. For example 'I would use a blue gel to show a cold relationship' or 'I would put the actor in a tatty dress to show she is poor'.

Section 2, question 7: some candidates struggled with the term 'status' in relation to their chosen character. Moreover, some candidates chose a character who was not present in the final scene in their play. Candidates performed poorly if they did not use correct and appropriate drama terminology, for example, stating that a character spoke with low volume is not correct as this adjective relates to pitch.

Section 2, question 7(c): many candidates answered this question poorly, as they merely described how they would block the actors on the stage. There was no reference to areas of the stage, stage type, or venue for the marker to understand how this blocking could reflect the status of their chosen character in the final scene.

Section 3, questions 8 and 9: some candidates resorted to narrative rather than analysis, and told the story of what they had seen. Some candidates approached the question as if it were textual analysis and stated what they would have done if they had been acting or directing. Some analysis was generic, for example in acting, 'he used open body language' or, 'the director asked for a yellow gel to show happiness'. Often candidates lacked correct drama vocabulary, for example 'he used a soft tone'. Some candidates chose the same moment to analyse for the second production area and the response became repetitive. This

limited their response and the marks awarded. Some candidates struggled with what the characters' motivation and/or their intentions were in the performance.

Some candidates did not manage their time well, spending too long on their first response in section 1. This limited the time left to complete, or, in a few cases, start their performance analysis response in section 3.

Performance

Preparation for performance: some candidates exceeded the 500-word guideline, which is unnecessary as candidates can gain full marks by using no more than 500 words.

Acting: some centres are still using the same text for all actors in at least one of their roles. This results in the same scene being repeated, often with the same blocking. This can disadvantage candidates as not all roles suit their aptitude and talent.

Some extracts are too short and do not give the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a full range of skills. Some extracts are too long, making it difficult for the candidate to sustain the character. Ensemble pieces, with more than four characters, can disadvantage candidates, as they do not have enough input to access the marks. The recommended maximum number of actors, as described in the Higher Drama Course Specification, is four. Several candidates were under-rehearsed and needed several prompts, which had an impact on their portrayal of the character.

Design: some candidates only designed for one scene or extract, rather than for the whole play. A number of candidates put all their effort into the second production area at the expense of the set design, which attracts more marks. Some candidates are not producing ground plans and elevations for every scene and/or change in location. Some candidates are exceeding the 30-minute duration for this assessment.

Directing: some directors did not manage their time well, spending too long on a 'warm up'. Some directors did not have a clear understanding of the whole play and the context of the pages they had selected. As a result, they did not have a clear concept to communicate to their actors. Some directors concentrated on one aspect of direction, for example voice, to the detriment of the other areas.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Section 1: when candidates have a sound knowledge of the whole play, along with an understanding of the social, historical and theatrical context of the play, and have learned a range of quotations and/or stage directions, they have a strong basis for success in this section of the question paper. Essay-writing skills should be an integral part of teaching and learning, as this helps candidates to answer the question they are asked and not the question they wish they were asked. Candidates should have a clear structure for their responses. For example, encouraging them to scaffold their responses to address the first part of the question with relevant quotations and/or stage directions. It is good practice for candidates to address the second part of the question at this point, so that they can link it to the first part of the response. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use drama literacy and the correct terminology as a director, an actor or a designer.

Section 2: to do well in this section, candidates need to have a good understanding of drama terminology and be able to use the appropriate adjective. Candidates do well when they have a clear understanding of the roles of actor, director and designer. There is vocabulary associated with these roles and centres should teach this in conjunction with the candidate's selected text.

Section 3: when candidates have the opportunity to experience quality professional productions, it can provide a basis for successful performance analysis. This can be through theatre visits, live streaming, free school broadcasts or, recordings of live performances that fall within the two-year rule.

When candidates have a sound drama vocabulary, in all aspects of theatre production, and can use this effectively in their analysis, they have a strong basis for success in the question paper. Centres should encourage candidates to extend their knowledge of theatre production by researching theatre reviews and interviews with actors and directors. It is good practice for candidates to state the name of the production and when and where they saw it at the beginning of their response. As the four production areas are now consistent within the two questions, this should enable candidates to engage with the whole production and write about a number of moments instead of using the same moment. This will ensure candidates can access the full range of marks within the section.

Candidates should practise timed essays to prepare them for the question paper.

Performance

When centres introduce a wide variety of plays appropriate to Higher level they give candidates an opportunity to engage with the work. Candidates respond with enthusiasm and give successful performances.

Preparation for performance: candidates can access high marks by being succinct in describing the results of their research and the ways that it informed their role. It is good practice for candidates to word-process these and state the word count, as it helps them keep an eye on the number of words they are using.

Acting: successful candidates select plays that interest them and suit their talents. They know and understand the whole text and are cast in roles that give them enough to do. Candidates should be well-rehearsed in both roles and completely confident in their lines so they can explore the nuances and subtext of their extract. Extras who are not being assessed should be well-rehearsed so that they establish believable interaction and complex relationships with the candidate(s) being assessed.

Suitable audiences must be provided for the texts being performed to allow application of the marking criteria. Audiences selected for the performance exam should be age appropriate and behave appropriately during the assessments. This is a national examination and the audience plays a crucial part in this.

Design: successful design candidates know and understand the whole text and they design for the whole text. Set designs should include ground plans and elevations for every change of scene or location. They should be detailed and the candidate should understand how the designs could translate into practice.

Designs for the additional production role should be for the whole text and demonstrate skill appropriate at this level. Candidates should produce detailed cue sheets and/or labelled designs related to the text. Some candidates make excellent use of technology.

It is good practice for candidates to rehearse their presentation. The presentation should last approximately 20 to 30 minutes, including 10 minutes for candidates to demonstrate their additional production role.

At Higher level it is not necessarily a good idea for designers to design for one of the acting pieces being assessed. It could restrict the candidate's creativity and originality.

Directing: successful directors know and understand the whole text. They understand the characters' motivation, relationships and the themes and issues the text explores. They have a clear directorial concept.

Successful directors are good communicators and inspire their actors. They have good timekeeping skills and pace the rehearsal, keeping a good balance between explaining and exploring their concept and directing their actors in terms of voice, movement and use of space. They should use drama terminology.

It is not a good idea to have directors directing actors who are performing the same scene for their own assessment because the actor will have developed their own acting concepts and the director will not have enough to do.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	2946
Number of resulted entries in 2019	2884

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	27.4%	27.4%	790	70
B	26.5%	53.9%	764	60
C	25.4%	79.3%	733	50
D	14.8%	94.1%	426	40
No award	5.9%	-	171	-

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.