Course Report 2018

Subject	Drama
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: performance

This component is worth 60 out of a total of 100 marks.

The performance accounts for 60% of the course assessment — 10% for the preparation for performance and 50% for the practical performance in either acting, directing or design.

In performance, the majority of candidates chose the acting option. This year design was the second preferred option and directing the least preferred option. Candidates and centres selected a range of texts for study. The range of texts chosen were mostly appropriately challenging at this level and centres and candidates are now taking advantage of exploring a greater range of plays. Centres and candidates used a range of national and international contemporary and historic plays and mostly selected text well and cast appropriately. 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 in this sub-section.

Component 2: project–dissertation

This component is worth 40 marks out of a total of 100 marks. This is 40% of the overall marks for the course assessment.

Candidates and centres chose varied topics and performance focuses within the project–dissertations. Often candidate's work reflected topical social and political issues explored in contemporary practitioner work including representation of minority groups in theatre practice and performance. This year more contemporary practitioners were also analysed with regards to the varied performance issues. These included current theatre companies and/or directors and playwrights; including the work of, for example, Frantic Assembly, National Theatre, RSC and Knee High. There were more examples of candidates considering theatre making beyond European practice.

Many 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.

Some candidates and centres used a live theatre performance(s) to inspire a study of, for example, a director/designer/playwright or acting company.

Many of the live-streamed performances were referenced and candidates often benefited from being able to review the performance material as it had been released on DVD. This often led to a retrospective of work and analysis of connecting or contrasting styles and performance ideas or theories.

Another approach had candidates looking at a single practitioner and focusing on different performance issues within their work or looking at a series of linked performances with varied focuses (design, direction, interpretation of the text for example). Some candidates referenced practical experiences and had interviewed contemporary theatre practitioners.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance
Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: performance
The acting event often had an appropriate sense of occasion with candidates and centres well prepared for the assessment event in the main. There were some impressive and assured acting performances in appropriately challenging text and roles. Many acting candidates communicated clear understanding of their roles, had confident stage craft and created good impact in performance — in both the interactive and monologue roles. Actors who demonstrated a clear understanding of their acting monologue role in the context of the whole play convinced in their characterisation and impact.

Designers often demonstrated a passion for their work and presented their concepts through a range of methods. Some candidates communicated original and imaginative concepts. Some candidates demonstrated a high level of skill and expertise in the demonstration of their model making skills in the creation of the set model box and made excellent use of technology to communicate their vision for the text. Designers that had a coherent interpretation for the whole play and had a clear connection between the set and the two other design areas achieved well. Designers who 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 achieved well.

Effective directors knew their text well and had a clear interpretative vision for the whole play and had a desired impact for an audience today. Directors who achieved well 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. Successful directors 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.

Some directors demonstrated strong interpersonal skills and communicated highly effectively. Directors who managed their time and directed the entirety of the extract with consideration to aspects of staging, characterisation/relationships and their desired impact achieved well.

Component 2: project–dissertation
Candidates achieved well if they posed a clear question related to their performance issue that allowed for depth of consideration.

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 their 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 often demonstrated appropriate literacy skills at this level.

The candidates that performed well, when synthesising materials, made links and identified contrasts and returned to an argument expressed in their own voice. These candidates often,

and with confidence, questioned or had alternative perspectives on the issue than those sited by a critic.

Candidates that were clearly enthused and interested in the performance issue communicated this in their writing.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: performance

Acting: some acting candidates had difficulty if the extract was unnecessarily long or too short and consequently did not fully convince with their portrayal and lost overall impact in their role. This was particularly true of the monologues.

Some interactive choices of text were lacking in appropriate challenge at Advanced Higher level.

Some monologue performances did not demonstrate an understanding of the character in the whole context of the play.

Some acting candidates who chose texts set in another regional/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.

In some cases, the candidates appeared to have rehearsed the monologue as an afterthought and were not fully prepared and took many prompts. This had a detrimental impact on credibility and impact.

Design: candidates sometimes appeared under-rehearsed in the presentation of their work, and occasionally they had to be prompted to produce evidence to access marks, for example fully explaining how the 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/cue sheets.

Occasionally, design candidates did not make a 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.

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/staging terminology with confidence. Occasionally a director's work lacked understanding of the text and characters.

Component 2: project–dissertation

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

Candidates sometimes presented an extended performance analysis or 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 their initial intentions given in their introductory paragraphs and their dissertation lacked a through line of argument.

Some candidates included a lot of 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 and often repeated ideas without drilling down and drawing conclusions in their writing.

On occasion, artificial links were made between current and historic theatre practitioners that did not have relevance in the argument given.

A small minority of candidates found expressing their ideas and thinking in a lucid, academic format challenging and did not demonstrate the appropriate literacy skills at this level. In some cases, the referencing was weak and a bibliography was not given.

In some candidates' dissertations they did not convince in their understanding or thinking of a performance or productions and 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 detailing many statistics in presenting the demographics of performers/directors/audiences in theatre but, failed to focus on the performance issue or aspect of theory and rarely referenced theatre practice.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Performance

Acting
- Acting candidates should select their monologue from a full-length play text and be cautious of finding stand-alone 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 characters on stage.
- Candidates and centres should ensure that the monologue performances remain within the recommenced time frame of 2–3 minutes in length.
- Candidates and centres should ensure that the interactive performances remain within the recommended time frame of approximately 15–17 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 — character skirts, fans for example.
- 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 is not merely a linking narrator.
- Candidates should not be repeating roles that they have previously been assessed in for National 5 or Higher level.

Design
- Design candidates must design for the whole play and in their presentation of their model box set must refer to each act/scene and any significant changes to the setting.
- The scale model set should be designed for an identified performance space.
- For the additional design roles candidates must also design for the whole text, and there should be a coherence and link to the set design. Ideas must be supported with evidence — designs/cue-sheets/artefacts etc.
- Design candidates need to rehearse the communication of their work and it may help them if they created cue cards to systematically go through their ideas.
- 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 and the whole text and the director's overall concept.
- Suitable actors should be used who are able to take on complex direction and explore complex issues in the text to allow 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 that the director leads an evaluation with their actors of progress made during the rehearsal, as time allows.

Preparation for performance
♦ Acting candidates should reference interpretative ideas and relevant research for both acting roles.
♦ Design candidates should reference interpretative ideas and relevant research for their over-arching coherent design concept for the whole play and both additional production roles.
♦ Directing candidates should reference interpretative ideas and relevant research for the whole play text and their chosen extract.
♦ The preparation for performance summary should be concise and relevant and communicated within the 700 word recommended length.

Component 2: project–dissertation
♦ 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 rather aim for depth in their topic.
♦ They should regularly review the title over the course of their study and ensure that the topic explored does not change from their stated purpose. If the candidate does change from their initial focus in their final dissertation they should ensure that they have redrafted their title.
♦ 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 not be over reliant on reviews in analysing performance.
♦ The project–dissertation **should not** be on an aspect of ballet, opera, or musicals.
♦ It is not necessary to reference a historic practitioner in the project–dissertation unless it is relevant to the performance topic.
♦ Candidates should ensure that their project–dissertation is proofread and it would be useful to submit the final word processed version in double space format to allow ease of marking.
♦ Candidates should ensure that all sources are referenced.
♦ The Harvard referencing system is a recommended format.
♦ Candidates and centres must ensure that the word count is submitted on the dissertation and that the project does not exceed or fall short of 10% above or below the word count of between 2,500 and 3,000 words. If it exceeds the word count by 10% a penalty is applied.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	592

Number of resulted entries in 2018	509

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	31.2%	31.2%	159	70
B	26.9%	58.2%	137	60
C	25.9%	84.1%	132	50
D	8.6%	92.7%	44	45
No award	7.3%	-	37	-

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 which allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and 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 Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.