



Common questions about National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Drama

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Unit assessment

National 4 and 5

In the Drama Unit assessment support (UAS) packs for National 4 and National 5 there is a set of stimuli. Are these stimuli suggestions or do they need to be used explicitly?

The Unit assessment support packages 2 and 3 provide specific stimuli. Alternatively, you can use UAS package 1 to work with your own stimuli.

The judging evidence tables for both packs are very similar and it may be useful to refer to UAS pack 2 to see how the specific stimuli are used for evidence. If you are choosing your own stimuli you should use UAS pack 1.

The stimuli in the UAS packs are exemplars and it is acceptable for you to change the context.

If, however, you plan to make considerable changes to the assessment, you would need to enter into the prior verification process. This is only necessary if changes are made to the nature or the level of demand of the task.

Your SQA Co-ordinator will have access to the above mentioned support materials on SQA's secure site.

If you wish to submit a prior verification request, please visit the [prior verification section](#) of SQA's website for more details.

At the end of each Unit assessment, candidates have to complete an evaluation. Does this have to be completed in controlled conditions?

No, if your approach to assessment involves, eg an extended response in the form of an evaluation, this evaluation would not have to be completed in controlled conditions. The gathering of this evidence is very flexible and can come in many forms.

Higher

What are the expectations of 'complex production skills'?

The progression for Production Skills will be through candidate responses; in their exploration of concepts and application of skills to challenging stimuli/play text and contexts for study. It is up to the assessor/teacher to offer increasingly complex materials/stimuli to explore. This could be in terms of thematic content, language, imagery, technical demands of text etc. The descriptive language used in the external performance mark sheets for Acting may be useful to help inform assessment judgments.

For the Unit assessment, however, the director would only be applying their skills to a particular *extract* and may not have knowledge of the whole text to communicate overall concepts. Therefore they would be establishing context of extract/characterisation in extract/concepts for extract in the understanding category.

With Design for Production Skills you would only be looking for concepts/ideas development for one production role, related to an extract. It would be good practice to inform their understanding of overall concepts to get candidates to create a ground plan and elevation to contextualise their ideas. However, this is not required evidence for a Unit pass in one Production Skill.

Advanced Higher

What are the mandatory Units of the Advanced Higher Drama Course?

There are two Units: Drama Skills and Drama: Production Skills. In the Drama Skills Unit the candidate will devise a drama informed by practices and methodologies of one or more practitioners. In the Drama: Production Skills Unit, the candidate will develop and apply selected production skills as an actor or director or designer, informed by research of one or more practitioners.

National 5 Course assessment

Performance

What is the assessment model for the National 5 Drama Performance?

This is a visiting assessment model like Higher and Advanced Higher Drama, but the main difference for National 5 is that the Visiting Assessor (VA) will assess a sample of 12 candidates. In centres where there are less than 12 candidates, the VA will assess all candidates. This is an assessment model where SQA's VA and the centre assessor mark live performances simultaneously and collaboratively. The Drama teacher acts as the centre assessor and it is up to centres to decide on which member of staff carries out this role.

How much time is allocated to this assessment visit and when will it take place?

The National 5 Drama visiting assessment period is from February to May each year and one day is allocated to each centre for the visit. This is a very wide window, allowing you to negotiate your one-day visit with your Visiting Assessor, at a time which best suits you and your candidates.

Who selects the sample of 12 candidates for the visit?

The centre selects the sample. Ideally, the sample would include a range of candidates and a possible range of production roles. Being in control of the sample selection means that you can plan in a practical way and it means that you have up until the day of the visiting assessment to finalise the sample.

How does the process work?

An SQA-appointed Visiting Assessor (VA) will be allocated to your centre for one day, regardless of how many candidates you have. The process starts with an initial phone conversation with your VA to set up the assessment date. You can then discuss the potential sample with the VA and plan the logistics of the day. On the day, the VA and the centre assessor will collaboratively mark the sample of 12 and the VA will guide the centre staff to the national standard. The agreed marks will stand for the sample of 12, and these marks are final.

Please note that the **Preparation for Performance** is also part of the assessment day. Candidates in the sample will complete their Preparation for Performance in advance of the VA visit. The centre assessor must provisionally mark the Preparation for Performance in advance of the visit. The VA will read these on the assessment day and thereafter the VA and the centre assessor will discuss and agree the marks. The National 5 Preparation for Performance summary should be in the region of 400 words.

What happens to the candidates who are not in the sample?

As soon as possible after the Visiting Assessor's visit, the centre assessor will assess all the other candidates in the group according to the national standards endorsed by the VA and in line with the assessment decisions and marks allocated to the sample of 12. The timing of this is up to each centre, but best practice would be to do this as soon as possible after the VA visit and so that no candidate is either advantaged or disadvantaged by time passing. For example, you could choose to assess the rest of the group the following day or within the week. However, all assessments for all candidates must take place within two weeks of the VA visit (and no later than two weeks after the visit).

What if a candidate is absent during that two-week period?

If the candidate has continued to be absent because of, for example, a medical condition and your two-week period for assessment has passed, you would enter into the new Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service. This service runs before results are published and you would be required to submit evidence for that candidate. For full details of this service, please visit the [Results Services section](#) of SQA's website.

Could a script with 11 actors be used?

No, groups should contain a minimum of two and maximum of ten actors. To use this script, the centre could cut one of the characters or cut the play into two performances. Otherwise another script should be chosen.

Can all the candidates do the same technical skill?

No, candidates should work in a group on a chosen text. Technical candidates must work with a group of actors and not in isolation, as the skills need to be examined in performance.

For the visiting assessment of National 5 Drama, what are the requirements for the following areas?

Preparation for performance

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 400 words. These should be written in open-book conditions and must be completed and **marked** by the centre assessor before the Visiting Assessor arrives. A private, quiet space must be provided for the Visiting Assessor to read the preparation for performance responses, and for the Visiting Assessor and centre assessor to discuss national marking standards and decisions. This space should be for the sole use of the Visiting Assessor and centre assessor.

Acting candidates

Candidates should perform as a group with a minimum of two and a maximum of 10 actors in a piece. The minimum time is 10 minutes and the maximum time is 45 minutes, which would be enough to assess up to 10 actors. We advise against using duologues for all candidates in a centre. Acting candidates should be cast in **only** one role.

Technical candidates

Technical candidates must share their folio of work with the Visiting Assessor to allow them to mark cue sheets/designs/lists/charts. Technical candidates must carry out their pre-show checks in front of the Visiting Assessor.

Make-up

Candidates must design for all actors, and apply make-up to all actors. The Visiting Assessor will observe make-up designers applying **one make-up** on the day, but all other actors must have make-up on for the production, as otherwise the assessor cannot mark the effectiveness of the make-up design and its application in performance. There should only be one make-up candidate per performance on the day of assessment.

Costume

Candidates must have a design and a costume for all actors in the piece so that the Visiting Assessor can mark the effectiveness of the costumes in performance. They should also have made or adapted **one costume** in line with their design. There should only be one costume candidate per performance on the day of assessment.

Lighting

Candidates must have **eight lanterns**. A minimum of **seven lighting cues and five states** should be designed. The candidate should produce a detailed lighting plot and create a lighting cue sheet (this includes an annotated script). The candidate should operate the equipment on cue and at the levels specified in the lighting cue sheets during the performance.

Sound

Candidates must have a **minimum of six different sound effects and eight sound cues**. The candidate should source and edit music and effects, and provide a back-up plan. The candidate should produce a sound cue sheet detailing volume, duration and type (this includes an annotated script). The candidate should operate the equipment during the performance in accordance with the sound cue sheet.

Set design

Candidates must have working designs and plans for the set, including an **elevation**. Detailed **ground plans** must be produced. The final set should reflect the candidate's own creative design as well as being functional in performance.

Props

Candidates must have a minimum of eight different props from two of the three areas of personal, pre-set or hand props. **One fully functional prop** should be designed and created for use in the performance. The candidate should produce a master props list. The candidate should label and store props effectively. The candidate should organise the props table for the performance.

Higher Course assessment

Question paper: section 1 — textual analysis

What is the definition of an acting concept?

An acting concept refers to an actor's use of voice and movement to communicate an idea and meaning. At Higher level the description of these concepts should be detailed, coherent and clearly justified.

As detailed in the Specimen Question Paper marking scheme on page 8, it could refer to the following: characterisation, acting techniques, acting style, voice, movement, stage proxemics, interaction between characters and any other relevant features. An example of 'other relevant features' could be how the actor would make use of a prop at a particular moment to communicate an idea.

The acting concepts response is very similar to what was expected previously in the Higher Section A questions. For example, '*As an actor, how would you communicate your complex character in performance?*'

Are candidates able to talk about the same acting concept more than once when writing the section 1 essay?

Yes. If the candidate is describing detailed acting concepts related to their textual analysis points, they will be describing integrated aspects of an actor's use of movement/voice/space etc.

It is likely they will be addressing many aspects of the actor's use of movement and it would be good practice to encourage candidates to vary these aspects that they describe and justify. To communicate a detailed acting concept, it is unlikely that it would be conveyed through, for example, a facial expression alone.

What is meant by the terms 'performance concept' and 'production concept'?

The acting/performance concepts and technical/production concepts are wide and allow for personalisation and choice.

In terms of acting, a performance concept is the overall interpretation of the character/text that the candidate wants to achieve in performance. These may include:

- ◆ social and cultural influences on ideas from the text
- ◆ influence of form, structure, genre on acting style
- ◆ characterisation

- ◆ character relationships
- ◆ actor/audience relationship
- ◆ staging
- ◆ planned use of voice
- ◆ planned use of movement

A production concept is the overall interpretation of the technical skill in relation to the characters/text/other technical areas, to achieve a certain look or feel for the performance. These may include:

- ◆ social and cultural influences on ideas from the text
- ◆ influence of form, structure, genre on design elements
- ◆ staging
- ◆ design concepts
- ◆ theatrical effects

Question paper: section 2 — performance analysis

Are there any plans to increase the two-year limit on productions and the ability to use the National Theatre streaming facility?

There are no immediate plans to review the two-year limit on productions. The intention of this part of the Course is to be engaged in a live theatre experience, its immediacy, power and impact.

Recordings of live streaming of performances, recorded within two years of the start of the academic year in which the assessment takes place, are also acceptable. The National Theatre Live streams current productions to local cinemas and the Royal Shakespeare Company broadcasts current productions free to schools who have registered with them. The RSC also provide extensive educational support including a BSL supported version and live questions and answers sessions with actors from the company.

What aspects might question 7 focus, and what are the possible performance areas to select from?

Candidates may be asked to focus on the following aspects of a recently-seen production:

- ◆ the message and/or purpose of the performance
- ◆ the themes and/or issues of the performance
- ◆ the social, historical and/or cultural context of the performance such as setting/location, time period, cultural references
- ◆ the theatrical context of the performance such as plot, character relationships, character development, tension, mood/atmosphere, contrasts within the performance

- ◆ the genre and/or style of the performance

The focus will change from year to year.

Candidates will be asked to write about the following possible production areas (they will choose two from a list of four):

- ◆ the choice and use of the performance space
- ◆ the director's intentions and effectiveness
- ◆ the acting and development of characters
- ◆ the design concepts and their effectiveness — set, props, costume, make-up and hair, lighting, sound, special effects, media

Again, this will change from year to year.

Are quotes required in the performance analysis essay?

Quotes are not required. Clear reference to the performance text is required, eg what happened on stage. It may be useful to look at a play text, if available, to gain an understanding of directorial decisions made.

What constitutes a suitable amateur production for performance analysis?

A published play text is suitable. This can be presented with production values appropriate at Higher level and gives as much scope for analysis as a professional production.

A good example would be a college HND production with acting students working alongside theatre production students.

Performance

Is there a guide to choosing texts for Higher?

SQA has published a list of recommended texts which offers a great deal of choice, breadth and scope. This list will also serve to reassure Drama teaching staff of the choice of texts that SQA considers to be of Higher level. If teachers have any doubts when it comes to making choices for their pupils, they should use the SQA recommended texts to ensure that candidates meet the standards expected at this level. Please see page 26 of the [Higher Course Support Notes](#), which details the list of recommended texts.

What is the recommended length for Higher acting pieces?

The advice is 7 to 10 minutes to allow for detailed interaction for each candidate. For example, if you have four candidates in a piece that is sustained and has equal weighting of challenge then it is not necessary to go much over that recommendation; certainly no more than 15 minutes for four candidates.

We would advise against lengthy pieces with 10 candidates. This may fail to give each individual candidate the full opportunity to demonstrate detailed interaction at Higher Level. At National 5, part of the marking is the contribution as an ensemble as they get marks for remembering lines and cues; however the allocation of marks is different at Higher level. The performance focus is the credibility of a performance of a character appropriate to Higher level.

What is the weighting of the marking for preparation for performance?

The preparation for performance will be marked holistically out of 10. The two acting roles will not be broken down into 5 and 5 marks. Please note that the Preparation for Performance Summary for Higher Drama should be approximately 500 words.

Are there examples of preparation for performance?

The preparation for performance should be a clear and succinct summary, useful for candidate and Visiting Assessor, detailing key parts of the process and final concepts. Examples of Preparation for Performance can be found on the Understanding Standards pages of SQA's secure website.

What constitutes a full and detailed account of research findings on the chosen text (with thorough insight into the social and historical context)?

For preparation for performance, candidates should give a relevant and concise account of their ideas, development, and research. At Higher level, approximately 250 words are allocated to each role and the three areas are equally weighted.

For example, with *Men Should Weep*, it would be appropriate to give relevant historical research. For *Gilt*, the social context of consumerism or the individual issue relating to the character being portrayed would be relevant.

Should we include techniques used to develop roles such as character cards or hot-seating in the preparation for performance?

There is no requirement for detailing such characterisation techniques.

What are the definitions of a ‘made costume’ and a ‘made prop’?

A ‘made costume’ will be made to meet the demands of the text in terms of practicalities, the interpretation of character, interpretation of key design concepts in terms of style/period etc and made to fit an actor playing the role. It doesn’t necessarily have to be made from templates and sewn together — although it could be. The choice of costume to design should allow opportunity for creative concepts at this level. There are no prescriptive requirements about how the garment is made — it could be held together with fabric glue, but it needs to be modelled on an actor or mannequin to demonstrate its functionality.

A ‘made prop’ will be made to meet the demands of the text in terms of practicalities, the interpretation of key design concepts in terms of style/period etc. It could be created entirely from craft materials or it could be created using other objects. The choice of prop to design should allow opportunity for creative concepts and demonstration of skills at this level and should be fit for purpose/use on stage.

If a candidate selects props, is this set dressing also?

Candidates are designing props for the whole play and should select key props to describe. Their concepts could be demonstrated in pictures/designs/sourced items; this depends on the play chosen. A candidate may find key props are present in one scene that is being performed and they could collate these on a props table (this could include set dressing).

The made prop should allow the candidate to demonstrate creativity at Higher level and should be functional for the purpose.

For sound, can we use a recording app on a smartphone?

If candidates can accurately communicate their sound concepts, this is an acceptable approach.

For the visiting assessment of Higher Drama, what are the requirements for the following areas?

Preparation for performance

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 500 words. These should be written in open-book conditions.

Acting candidates

Candidates are required to perform two interactive roles, each from a different play. Each candidate is required to be involved in an acting contribution of approximately 7–10 minutes for each role. Candidates must complete Sections A and C of the Acting Mark Sheets, detailing the specific roles they will undertake. It is a requirement for Higher acting candidates to be assessed on both acting pieces on the same day.

Design candidates

Candidates are required to demonstrate their overall set design concept for their chosen play and an additional production role. They are required to demonstrate the application of skills in the additional production role. Candidates are required to present their work in a presentation lasting approximately 20 minutes.

Candidates must design set for the whole play text and their presentation must refer to each act/scene and any significant change of setting. All acts or changes of location/setting should have a ground plan and elevation (end-on drawing) and the candidate should create a coherent concept. The set does not need to be realised practically.

For their additional design role candidates must also design for the whole play and there should be coherence with the set design.

Lighting:

The minimum requirement for lighting is five lighting states and seven lighting cues. Candidates could demonstrate what they consider to be key/important moments. These could be the opening/ending of acts or key moments within a scene. To demonstrate their concepts they should also have cue sheets for that part of the text. If the lighting candidate is only able to demonstrate their concepts in a space (without actors), this is permissible. They may demonstrate some cues in a scene that is presented, and describe and demonstrate further key cues in the acting space without actors.

Using LED lighting at Higher level is suitable. In terms of the requirements for lighting, ideally candidates would be able to rig, focus and change gels — but, dependant on the access height of the studio/theatre/classroom space, this may not be possible and is not a requirement.

Sound:

The minimum requirement for sound is six different sound effects and eight sound cues. These could be the opening/ending of acts or key moments within a scene or a recurring 'themed' piece of music. To demonstrate their concepts they should also have cue sheets for that part of the text. The sound candidate may only be able to demonstrate/play their concepts (without the play being performed) — this is permissible. They may demonstrate some cues in a scene that is presented and describe and demonstrate further key sound states/cues.

Make-up/hair:

Concepts for the whole play must be created. A number of designs cannot be prescribed, as characters within a play could vary. For example, you would expect designs for all characters in *A Taste of Honey* (with changes for transitions in characters) but, for *The Crucible* you would expect designs for all the main protagonists (with changes in make-up/hair requirements for these key characters).

Directing candidates

Candidates are required to have prepared approximately eight pages from their chosen text. On the day of the performance, the Visiting Assessor selects approximately two pages for the candidate to direct in a rehearsal lasting 30 minutes. It is not advisable for candidates to direct actors who are performing the same scene for their own assessment.

Advanced Higher Course assessment

Project–dissertation

Can candidates look at musicals or dance as part of their dissertation topic?

No, the project–dissertation should not be about an aspect of ballet, opera, film or musicals. The performance issue identified must be on a professional theatre practitioner; professional theatre practice; or professional theatre theory (contemporary or historic) on which there is an academic discourse.

How long should the project–dissertation be?

The project–dissertation should be 2,500 to 3,000 words in length; acknowledging sources and including visual evidence as appropriate. The word count must be submitted with the project–dissertation.

Do candidates need to reference a historic practitioner in their project–dissertation?

No. It is not necessary to reference a historic practitioner in the project–dissertation unless it is relevant to the performance topic.

Performance

Is there a guide to choosing texts for Advanced Higher?

There is no prescribed list of texts; however we have published a list of recommended texts which offers a great deal of choice, breadth and scope. This list will also serve to reassure Drama teaching staff of the choice of texts that we consider to be of Advanced Higher level. Please see page 31 of the [Advanced Higher Drama Course/Unit Support Notes](#), which details the list of recommended texts.

For the monologue, can other actors be on stage with the candidate?

No, for the monologue the candidate must appear on stage alone.

Can stand-alone audition pieces be used for the monologue?

No, monologues should be taken from full-length play texts. Please also refer to the Marking Instructions where reference is made to the understanding of the character in the context of the play.

For the visiting assessment of Advanced Higher Drama, what are the requirements for the following areas?

Preparation for performance

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 700 words. These should be written in open-book conditions.

Acting

Candidates are required to perform two contrasting acting roles, one of which is interactive and one of which is a monologue. Each candidate will be involved in an acting contribution of approximately 20 minutes in total, with approximately 15–17 minutes for the interactive role and two to three minutes for the monologue.

Design

Candidates are required to produce a set design for a play, which must allow for one significant set change. The design interpretation is to be for an audience of today. Candidates are to prepare and produce a scale model set for the play. The set has to relate to an identified acting space.

In addition, they must create design concepts for two other areas of design chosen from: lighting, sound, multimedia, costume, make-up and hair and props. Ideas must be supported with evidence — designs/cue-sheets/artefacts etc.

On the day of the examination, the designer is required to present their model of the set, ideas and concepts to a Visiting Assessor. The total time for the presentation will be approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

Directing

Candidates should prepare a substantial extract, for example an act, from their chosen text. On the day of the performance the Visiting Assessor will select approximately three pages for the candidate to direct. Each candidate will direct for approximately 40 minutes.

General questions

Can the National 4 Added Value Unit Performance be a scripted play?

The performance content will be agreed between the candidate and the teacher/lecturer and may be devised or scripted. This will continue to offer flexibility; candidates can now do improvisation or work from text.

If halfway through the year it looks like a National 5 candidate is not going to make it at that level, what are the options?

You would track and monitor candidate progress during the National 5 Course. If a candidate is achieving the Units at National 5 level, but if it looks like they are not going to reach the standard required for the National 5 Course assessment, you could then change the entry to the National 4 Added Value Unit (rather than the National 5 external assessment).

The candidate would then achieve the Drama Skills Unit and Drama Production Skills Unit at National 5 and the Added Value Unit at National 4. This results in a Course award at National 4.

What are the implications for a candidate moving from National 4 to National 5?

There is flexibility. Here is an example:

A candidate has been working on the National 4 Units and at a point in the session looks able to achieve National 5 level. You would then change the entry level from National 4 to National 5 for: the Units (Drama Skills and Drama Production Skills); and the external assessment (question paper and performance). The National 5 Unit assessments would also have to be completed in order for the candidate to achieve the National 5 Course.

Is there a glossary of Drama terms available?

The National 5 Drama lexicon can be found in Appendix 2 (pages 43 and 44) of the [National 5 Drama Course and Unit Support Notes](#) on SQA's website.

The Higher Drama lexicon can be found in the [Higher Drama Course and Unit Support Notes](#) (pages 22–24).

In what way can Unit evidence be integrated with preparation for the Higher Course assessment?

Higher Drama offers the opportunity to teach Unit work and integrate study, working towards the Course assessment. Below is an example of the steps which could be taken:

- ◆ Watch a production early in the year and use textual extracts and themes as stimuli for Drama Skills. This in-depth exploration of themes and messages supports candidates' early Performance Analysis essays.
- ◆ Use the play which was studied for Textual Analysis (Section 1) of the paper for both production skills extracts. In Production Skills, there can be a wide range of assessable roles — actors/directors and designers — which prepare candidates for the external assessment.
- ◆ Throughout the production skills process, candidates can create textual analysis essays which are supported by practical work in the Unit.

Another option would be to write essays in timed conditions to target set. As an example, Production Skill 1 could be studied first, followed by the performance Component of Course assessment and Production Skill 2. This allows teachers to revisit the text and explore design, directing and acting practically and link to revision textual analysis essays.

National Qualifications questions and answers can be found on the [frequently asked questions section](#) of SQA's website.