



## Course Report 2017

Subject	Drama
Level	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It 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.

# 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.

**Acting** candidates were required to perform two contrasting acting roles, one of which was interactive and one a monologue. Each candidate was required to 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.

**Directing** candidates were required to have prepared a substantial extract, for example an act, from their chosen text. On the day of the performance the visiting assessor selected approximately three pages for the candidate to direct. Each candidate was required to be involved in a total time of 40 minutes of directing.

**Design** candidates were required to produce a set design for a play, which must allow for one significant set change. The design interpretation was to be for an audience of today. Candidates were to prepare and produce a scale model set for the play. The set had to relate to an identified acting space. In addition, they were required to create design concepts for two other areas of design chosen from lighting, sound, multimedia, costume, make-up and hair and props. On the day of the examination the designer was required to present their model of the set, ideas and concepts to an examiner. The total time for the presentation was approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

In performance, the majority of candidates chose the acting option. Direction was the second preferred option and design 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 to cast appropriately.

Most candidates communicated their research and interpretative ideas for their roles with clarity and relevance in their preparation for performance summaries and achieved good to very good marks in this sub-component.

### 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.

In the project, the candidate is asked to identify a performance issue, carry out appropriate research, and communicate their findings in the form of a dissertation: word processed; 2,500 to 3,000 words in length; acknowledging sources; and including visual evidence as appropriate.

This project was set by centres within SQA guidelines and conducted under some supervision and control. The evidence for assessment is produced independently and submitted to SQA for external marking.

Evidence that meets the requirements of this component of course assessment will be 2,500 to 3,000 words. The word count should have been submitted with the project. If the word count is exceeded by 10%, a penalty was applied. Most candidates produced a word-processed document and referenced project-dissertation that was within the given word count.

Candidates and centres chose varied topics and performance focuses in the project-dissertations. Many candidates used the key practitioners studied in the old Advanced Higher question paper, to start from or to refer to, when exploring their performance issue. The most common practitioners referenced in this approach were Stanislavski, Craig, Brook and Brecht. This session, more contemporary practitioners were analysed with regards to the varied performance issues.

Some candidates and centres used live theatre performances 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 benefitted from being able to review the performance material as it had been released on DVD format. 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 in 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 production skills and made excellent use of technology to communicate their vision for the text. Designers who 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 achieved well.

Effective directors knew their text well and had a clear interpretative vision and a clear focus on the concepts they wished to explore in the rehearsal. 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 when they held a clear focus in their dissertation exploration and had a clear line of enquiry. They organised their analysed materials coherently and demonstrated appropriate literacy skills. The candidates who did this well brought their analysed evidence back to the issue identified and developed their thinking on the performance issue throughout the dissertation. The candidates who performed well often, when synthesising materials, made links and identified contrasts and returned to an argument expressed in their own voice. Candidates who were clearly enthused and interested in the performance issue communicated this in their writing.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Component 1: performance**

Some Acting candidates had difficulty if the extract was unnecessarily long or too short, and did not fully convince with their portrayal and lost overall impact in the role. This was particularly true of the monologues. Some monologue performances did not demonstrate an understanding of the character in the 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.

Design candidates sometimes appeared under-rehearsed in their presentation of their work, and occasionally had to be prompted to produce evidence to access marks, eg 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, eg designs/cue sheets. 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.

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 and their overall directorial concept.

### **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 referring back to their performance issue focus.

In some cases, the candidates drifted from the initial intentions given in their introductory paragraphs and their dissertation lacked a thorough 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, often repeating 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 to the argument.

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.

Some candidates' dissertations did not convince in their understanding or thinking of a performance or productions and relied too heavily on the opinions of reviewers 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.

## **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 recommended length of 2–3 minutes.
- ◆ 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 costume changes are not necessary in the acting performances.
- ◆ Elements of costume and key props that aid characterisation are valid — character skirts 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.

### **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 practise 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 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 overarching 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 words 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 historical 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 double spaced 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 2500 and 3000 words.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met



## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	537
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	592
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	32.3%	32.3%	191	70
B	29.1%	61.3%	172	60
C	21.1%	82.4%	125	50
D	9.1%	91.6%	54	45
No award	8.4%	-	50	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will 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.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings 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.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ 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.