



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Drama
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. 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 question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Candidate entries for the last year of current Advanced Higher were almost the same as those of 2014; 358 candidates sat the external exam.

This year the academic performance of the cohort was the highest it has been for the past four years. The question paper showed a component average increase of 1.1 marks from last year, and a remarkable 1.3 mark increase in the mark for the Practical exam.

The results show that that centres have a good understanding of the exam requirements and the candidates, and teaching staff should be congratulated on their enthusiasm and commitment to both parts of the exam.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates performed particularly well in the practical part of the exam.

A wide range of texts were used, and Visiting Assessors (VAs) commented on the high standard of the work they had seen. Most candidates chose acting and were generally very well prepared and challenged by the length and scope of their chosen pieces.

Directors and designers showed a detailed knowledge of the plays they had studied, and many pieces were imaginative and interesting to watch.

There are few VAs who do not comment on their delight at seeing such a high range of quality work at this level and that it is such a privilege to be part of the examining process.

Those candidates who study Stanislavski, Craig and Brook are often enthused by the work of the practitioner and perform well in the exam. Craig is manageable as he has such a comparatively small body of work and all of it is accessible. Brook's work can be categorised into three obvious phases but, as well as that, his approach to Shakespeare is so well documented that it makes answering a question relatively straightforward.

Centres who opt to see quality theatre at the Edinburgh Festival, or who are able travel to the National Theatre and the RSC benefit from this, as candidates' appreciation for a production they have seen can be discerned in their writing. They also often have more categories to write about and this offers them more scope in their responses.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Most candidates find Section B of the question paper the most challenging. Many find it difficult to carry out an effective theatrical analysis and often are tempted to talk about two plays when they would be better served concentrating on one since they also have to consider a range of plays or theatrical experiments carried out by their chosen practitioner.

This year, it was more common for candidates to carry out unguided research and a wide range of obscure productions were cited in essays. While this made interesting reading and research for the reader, it is often sensible to guide candidates to research key productions so that they can embed a clear idea of the expertise of the practitioner and then carry out their own research with informed knowledge of the practitioners.

The question paper

The most popular practitioner is still Stanislavski, followed by Brecht, Craig, Brook, Artaud and Boal.

Although understandable, and a valid teaching approach, many candidates are programmed to write about a fixed practitioner for Section A and another for Section B. This means they find it difficult to be flexible and this can work against them depending on the questions posed.

Section A

The first set question in Section A was on Design: *What changes did the practitioner explore in theatre design in relation to his theatre making career?*

Candidates who answered this question on Stanislavski generally did not have enough knowledge of his work on theatre design. Many talked superficially of the 1896 *Othello*, some his work on *The Seagull*, or *The Cherry Orchard*, and tried to pin knowledge of the System to Chekhov's plays, but unless they had firm knowledge of design, they were floundering and information was often not accurate. Some mentioned *Hamlet* but most did not have a detailed knowledge of the design elements in Stanislavski's work.

A number of centres left candidates to do much of their research without adequate advice. As a result, markers were researching many obscure productions. Whereas this was personally interesting, it was unhelpful to candidates who needed to know about seminal productions before they could discuss lesser-known ones.

Candidates who had studied Craig and were flexible in their approach to the exam fared well in this question as so much of Craig's work is about design.

Most answered Question 2: *Describe two or more productions (or theatrical experimentations) that exemplify the chosen practitioner's aims for the theatre and identify the key influences that informed each of these productions.*

This question was reasonably well done by candidates who had been teacher-led. This year it appeared that many students relied on self-directed research without having sufficient knowledge of their practitioners. As a result, they were apt to attribute random facts to practitioners, which were incorrect.

Section B

The majority of candidates attempted this section on Brecht. As has been the case in previous years, few have a detailed enough knowledge of Brecht's productions and talk generally about his techniques with marginal reference to Mother Courage's scream, the

boxing ring set for *The Rise and fall of the city of Mahagonny*, and the gloves in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

The most popular productions were the Lyceum's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* and The SNT's *In Time of Strife*.

Question 23: How central were the actors and their performances in the creation of the theatre experience in one or two contemporary productions? Compare this to the priority given to actors and acting by the practitioner whose work you have studied.

Candidates with the appropriate knowledge wrote very well on this question. Those who had seen performances that enthused them discussed the plays well, and the question lent itself to a detailed performance analysis.

Those who answered this question on Stanislavski fared very well as his work was particularly appropriate to the question.

Question 24: Who do you consider to be the author of one or two contemporary performances that you have seen? Did the practitioner whose work you have studied aspire to the same authorship in his work?

Many candidates who had seen 'The Caucasian Chalk Circle' just wrote about Brecht being the author of the play and did not talk of his own productions.

A number of candidates who answered on 'In Time of Strife' were clearly very engaged with the production and did a good production analysis comparing McLaren's work with that of Brecht.

Question 25: How did the use of the performance space effect the creation of dramatic meaning in one or two contemporary productions? Does this differ from the approach to performance spaces used by the practitioner whose work you have studied?

This was a challenging question if candidates had not seen a production where the production space actually did effect the creation of meaning. Some wrote on work that they had seen some time ago and it was not fresh in their minds. Sometimes candidates struggled to communicate any more than a basic idea of the use and choice of performance space.

Those who answered on *In Time of Strife* made a good attempt at the question as there was so much to write about.

Overall the responses were better than those of last year, which was encouraging to see.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	358
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	359
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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 - 100				
A	28.7%	28.7%	103	68
B	28.4%	57.1%	102	57
C	27.3%	84.4%	98	46
D	8.1%	92.5%	29	40
No award	7.5%	-	27	-

The intention was to set a similar grade boundary to last year. The Course Assessment functioned as intended therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.