



Course Report 2015

Subject	Drama
Level	New 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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

The two hour question paper accounts for 40% of the Course award.

The question paper has two questions of 20 marks each.

Section 1 has a choice of textual analysis questions and Section 2 has a compulsory performance analysis question.

Component 2: Performance

The Performance accounts for 60% of the Course award — 10% for the Preparation for Performance and 50% for the Practical Performance in either Acting, Directing or Design.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Component 1: Question paper

Most candidates managed to complete two full-extended responses in appropriate essay style format. In terms of question options the actor choice was preferred, followed by direction and then design.

Texts chosen were often old Higher Prescribed Texts or popular Scottish Theatre texts, although there were a range of other texts selected for study of appropriate challenge at this level.

In Section 1, Textual Analysis, many candidates chose question 3, the acting question, and many showed a detailed knowledge of the character in their chosen text. Question 1 was also a popular choice, and allowed candidates to communicate a range of ideas as a director. Few candidates attempted questions 5 and 6 on Design.

For performance analysis most centres chose appropriate professional productions — it was evident that most candidates had seen live theatre or had watched high-quality screening of theatre in cinemas, or had access to the digital theatre resource. Many candidates communicated their enthusiasm for the theatre that they were analysing. Candidates generally performed less well in the Section 2 essay.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates mainly chose the Acting option. Design was the second preferred option, and Direction was chosen by a minority of candidates.

Preparations for Performance summaries were completed, in the main, with a relevant account of ideas/research and concepts. Candidates managed to communicate their preparatory work within the recommended 500 word limit.

Visiting Assessors commented on the range and variety of play texts used for the Performance options. Many centres opted for old Higher prescribed and Scottish texts for performance along with interesting and challenging new texts.

The acting component of the Performance exam was a popular choice. Many candidates achieved well in this component and were very well prepared by centres.

Those candidates who chose the Design option often did so for a text being performed by Acting candidates, or the text they were studying for Textual Analysis.

All second design options were taken up, with costume and sound being popular choices.

Similarly, the Directing candidates' rehearsal was often on the text that the class had been studying for Textual Analysis. This helped support many of the Design and Directing candidates' thorough knowledge of the text.

Many Visiting Assessors (VAs) commented positively on the quality of the performances and the commitment of the candidates and their enjoyment of assessing the practical component.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question paper

Section 1

In Question 3 most candidates knew the character that they were analysing well and used the whole play text to support their analysis. They used appropriate textual exemplification, almost always quotations. In this response many candidates confidently accessed the marks for showing detailed development and understanding. Acting concepts were often described thoroughly with appropriate and varied use of terminology.

In Question 1 many candidates clearly communicated their desired audience response from the perspective of a director, and appropriately used the whole play text in their analysis.

Candidates who did this often accessed additional marks for detailed development and understanding. Many candidates had clear and imaginative directorial concepts that correlated to their desired audience response.

Almost all candidates completed two full responses in an essay style format and managed the assessment in the time given.

Component 2: Performance

In the Preparation for Performance summaries most candidates demonstrated understanding of their selected text(s) and a clear interpretation of their role(s).

Most candidates found the recommended 500-word count an appropriate length to communicate their preparation and to access the range of marks — many attained the higher end of the marks available for this element.

Most acting candidates were prepared appropriately and showed focus and commitment to their roles. The freedom of text allowed staff to select roles to suit the candidates' talent, and many interesting and diverse characters/text were used.

The acting event often had an appropriate sense of occasion.

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 skills and made excellent use of technology.

Effective Directors knew their text well and had a clear idea about the concepts they wished to explore in the rehearsal. Some Directors demonstrated strong interpersonal skills and communicated highly effectively.

Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

The candidates performed the least well in the rehearsal techniques question, failing to read the question and assuming it was asking them to describe acting techniques in performance or listed rehearsal techniques, rather than describing how they would be used. Some candidates were unclear about the genre of the text.

Often in Section 1 candidates found it easier to access the additional marks for detailed development and understanding in the first part of the essay, as compared to the actor/director/designer detailed development of concept in the second part of the essay.

In performance analysis Question 7, the Section 2 compulsory question, candidates found this challenging, and in the lower marks range the candidates defaulted to telling the story of the play.

They particularly found acting problematic to analyse and, instead, described characters. Similarly candidates were too general in their description of direction and did not detail and justify directors' concepts confidently.

Component 2: Performance

Some Acting candidates had difficulty if the extract was unnecessarily long and did not fully convince with their portrayal.

Some Acting candidates who chose texts set in another regional/historical context had problems sustaining and convincing with their use of voice, particularly accent.

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 the ground plan. 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.

Occasionally Directors appeared under-rehearsed and failed to be fully conversant with the assessment criteria and had, for example, to be prompted to run their extract at the end to gain the final 10 marks.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

In Section 1 candidates would benefit with support to communicate their directing/design and acting concepts.

They often tend to describe a single part of an acting concept by giving, for example, a detailed description of voice. To access the additional detailed development of the acting concept, the candidate could then go on to describe a detailed integrated use of movement at that particular moment, or the stage positioning at that moment, or the way the actor interacted with a prop or their costume at that moment to build a holistically detailed acting concept.

Candidates would benefit with more practice in giving examples of rehearsal approaches and describing how these would be used. In Section 2 the candidates should be encouraged not to give prepared answers, but to address the particular challenge of the question — the message and purpose of the performance this year. In analysing a performance, collating preview/review materials and having an idea of the Director's vision would support the analysis — particularly those who chose to analyse direction.

Candidates would benefit with practice in describing acting in more detail and avoiding just describing the character.

Component 2: Performance

Acting candidates need to perform two roles of 7–10 minutes in length in terms of their acting contribution. It is feasible in an extract with, for example, three actors being assessed in roles of comparable challenge, that the extract length could fall within this range.

It is advised that an extract has a maximum of four actors being assessed at any one time, as at Higher level it is the quality of the interaction that is key. Detailed set and other production elements are not necessary, however. Elements of costume and key props aid characterisation — character skirts for example.

Design candidates must design for the whole play and in their presentation of their set concepts must refer to each act/scene and any significant changes to the setting.

For the additional design role 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. It is not expected, for example, that a candidate who chooses props for their additional role sources all the props for the play — but they would be expected to make lists of key props in each act; create, for example, a props table that showed key props that they consider important in the play as well as their made prop.

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.

Directors should be encouraged to time the phases of the rehearsal and practice different pages of their chosen extract. 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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	2425

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	38.6%	38.6%	937	66
B	28.5%	67.1%	691	56
C	21.9%	89.0%	530	46
D	5.4%	94.4%	131	41
No award	5.6%	-	136	0

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional values of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A.

Question 7 in Section 2 of the Question Paper was intended to be accessible to all candidates; however due to the wording of the question it proved more difficult than intended. The grade boundaries were decreased by 4 for Grade A and by 4 for Grade C to reflect this.

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.