Course report 2025

Advanced Higher Drama

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024:   494

Number of resulted entries in 2025:   567

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade.

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	176	31.0	31.0	70
B	159	28.0	59.1	60
C	124	21.9	81.0	50
D	82	14.5	95.4	40
No award	26	4.6	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- 'most' means greater than or equal to 70%
- 'many' means 50% to 69%
- 'some' means 25% to 49%
- 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the statistics and information page of our website.

Comments on the assessment.

Project-dissertation

Overall, the project-dissertation component performed as expected. Candidates selected both contemporary and historical practitioners and their practices to address their chosen performance issue in their dissertations.

Many candidates engaged in performance issues related to current social, political, and cultural issues explored by practitioners in professional theatre performances. These included issues of diversity representation and LGBTQ+, gender, and mental health issues.

Many learners communicated passionate advocacy for themes and issues explored in their dissertations. A lucid argument and a confident learner voice and opinion strongly supported some dissertations.

Most candidates explored performance issues related to contemporary theatre practice.

Most candidates submitted a dissertation that fell within the word count requirement.

Assignment

The assignment component performed as expected. Candidates selected mainly contemporary productions and practitioners to answer the assessment task. Very few candidates selected historical productions and practitioners. Many of the assignments were in response to contemporary performances accessed through online digital theatre platforms. This session, more responses related to live theatrical performances. Almost all productions selected for the assignment component were appropriate for SCQF level 7.

Candidates attempted both assignment questions.

Most candidates completed an extended response to a chosen question, with a conclusion, within the timed conditions for this assessment task. Most candidates demonstrated a level of literacy appropriate to the assessment task. Almost all candidates submitted a resource sheet, as required.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected. Centres and candidates selected play texts and specialisms in acting, directing, and design to support personalisation and choice. Acting remains the most popular choice, with over 88% of the cohort opting for this. Approximately 8% chose the design specialism, and 4% chose the direction option.

A range of play texts were used for all sub-components, which were mostly appropriate for this level, with a greater emphasis on contemporary plays in the interactive pieces and significantly more classical monologues than last session.

Most centres had an appropriate audience for the actors' performances, and some centres had audiences that mainly consisted of the remainder of the class.

In almost all centres, a sense of occasion was given to the performance and visiting assessors commented on assessing candidates who were clearly passionate about their work and keen to share their performances.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Project-dissertation

Most candidates referenced professional theatre and theatre practitioners in their project-dissertations. Candidates did well when they had a clearly identified performance issue that they explored in their dissertation and carefully selected and analysed performance examples in response to this issue. There was often a strong personal engagement with the topics and issues explored, and some passionate discussion of topical themes in theatre. Some candidates engaged maturely and thoughtfully by referencing challenging performances and theatre practice.

Candidates used a range of digital theatre platforms and live streaming of performances and often analysed these effectively in their writing. Some candidates also engaged with contemporary performances that they had seen live. Candidates who gave comparisons and alternative perspectives, using primary and secondary sources effectively, were able to create a well-considered and balanced argument.

Candidates who gave detailed examples from features of productions and practitioners' practice relating to making theatre achieved high marks. Candidates who were appropriately presented and had the pre-requisite literacy skills required for this assessment component, presented their work coherently. Candidates did well when they presented a well-considered conclusion, evaluated the analysed evidence, and consistently returned to the performance issue that they were addressing.

Assignment

Candidates who had an argument in response to the question chosen and kept the question in focus throughout their assignment write-up achieved high marks.

Candidates who performed well demonstrated a convincing knowledge and understanding of the practitioner, which was relevant to the production they were analysing and their argument. When performance examples were described and analysed in detail, carefully selected, and consistently used to build an argument, candidates achieved high marks. Candidates who expressed and justified their personal response to the theatre making and gave a considered conclusion did well. There was a strong correlation between well-structured and well-argued responses and succinctly organised resource sheets. Candidates who responded with a personal response to the theatre making, in response to the question chosen, did well.

Performance

Actors

Many candidates achieved high marks and demonstrated strong stagecraft and textual understanding. Candidates used a range of both contemporary text and older play text for their performance assessment. Most centres and candidates are using the recommended list of play texts as a guide to inform their choice of appropriately challenging plays and used both familiar and new scripts.

Some exceptionally strong performances were seen in the interactive and the monologue sub-components, allowing candidates to access the full range of marks available.

Directors

Most directors structured their rehearsal assessment well and presented their directorial concepts coherently. In the main, they also motivated their actors confidently and used terminology accurately. Directors who had a thorough textual knowledge of the whole play and had clear concepts relevant to a contemporary audience did well.

Directors who contextualised concise warm-ups and rehearsal activities and made them relevant to the script extract chosen and their overall concepts achieved high marks.

Directors who communicated instruction to actors with clarity and used terminology fluently did well.

Designers

Many designers demonstrated a proficient level of skill regarding model making and communication of visual concepts related to their interpretation of the play text. Designers who applied appropriate care and detail to the creation and building of the scale model box (which carries most of the marks in this component) did well. Designers who demonstrated scale and viability in their scale model box achieved better marks.

Some designers used technology effectively to convey their overall concept and to communicate their ideas about significant set transitions and more complex stage pictures and imagery. Designers did well when they had a coherent and overarching connecting concept for the scale model box and the two additional design areas, and considered their chosen performance space.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Project-dissertation

Candidates who struggled with this task often presented a simplistic comparison of two productions of the same play. These candidates usually did not identify a performance issue and had titles that stated they would analyse two productions. Candidates who wrote theatrical histories or practitioner histories without any performance examples and without a clear issue did not access the full range of marks.

Candidates who wrote dissertations about plays or playwrights often presented literary analysis rather than theatrical analysis and performed poorly.

Candidates who presented dissertations about theatrical trends in, for example, acting training; theatre sustainability; theatre pricing; diversity and equality in theatre; and were reliant on statistics and did not reference performances, could not access the full range of marks. Often, in weaker dissertations, candidates were too reliant on opinions in reviews and did not provide a personal response.

Candidates who used lengthy sources (sometimes without acknowledgement), which were not synthesied into their writing, or interpreted in their own voice, did not show their understanding or give a personalised argument.

Weak dissertations were often under the minimum word count and self-penalising as they were often simplistic and narrative-driven in style.

Candidates who performed less well in this component did not identify a performance issue and presented performance analysis examples not tied to a line of enquiry.

Candidates who performed less well often presented lengthy historical or social narratives or told the narrative of the play without explicitly giving exemplification from theatrical practice, theatre theory, and theatre performance examples.

Candidates who achieved less well often focused on the play text in their analysis and did not focus on theatre making and theatre practice in performance. Consequently, they could not access the full range of marks.

Assignment

Candidates sometimes presented a lengthy biography of the practitioner without contextualising their practice and making this relevant to the question. When candidates wrote a Higher Drama performance analysis style-response without referencing the question to build an argument, they could not access the full range of marks. A few candidates did not manage their time effectively and did not write a conclusion, which weakened their through-line of argument and did not allow them to access the full range of marks.

Some candidates described the narrative of the play rather than analysing the theatre practice and interpretative performance decisions of the chosen practitioner in the production.

When candidates in a single centre appeared to have learnt a series of points and presented the same argument, some individual candidate responses tended to be less convincing in terms of their understanding.

In some responses to both questions, candidates wrote a Higher Drama style performance analysis-response and did not root their analysis in an argument related to their knowledge and understanding of the practitioner. Consequently, they did not engage with the question posed. Some candidates' responses fell into narrative descriptions and did not give clear and persuasive analytical examples from the performance.

Candidates who performed less well:

- gave practitioner information that lacked relevancy to the question, or the production chosen
- did not give clear performance examples from the production
- did not give an argument in response to the question chosen
- did not present a convincing conclusion

Performance

Acting candidates who performed less well:

- did not demonstrate a full understanding of the text or performed acting pieces that were too short or were underprepared
- were less secure in lines and took many prompts. Some candidates appeared less prepared and less confident in the monologue sub-component.
- did not demonstrate a full understanding of textual clues in their performance of their monologues
- did not have a clear point of focus in their monologue performances
- performed monologues that were very long. As a result, some candidates lost focus and impact in their performance.

- performed monologues without stage lighting, as they would for an audition, for example. This approach did not always support the candidates' focus or the overall impact created.
- struggled with the demands of the assessment task
- chose inappropriate texts for this level, which did not allow them to access the subtextual clues and complexity of a play. Consequently, they could not access the full range of marks for this component.
- demonstrated anxiety related to their performance by having to restart pieces or stop pieces early in the solo monologue sub-component

Directing candidates who performed less well:

- did not make clear their overarching concept and struggled to convince a full understanding of the whole play, when directing. Some directors did not watch and craft the shaping of stage pictures or character interaction and did not build clear dramatic meaning or dramatic impact in their direction of the extract. A few directors concluded their rehearsals abruptly or prematurely without fulfilling their rehearsal aims or consolidating their concepts.

Design candidates who performed less well:

- did not make clear the performance space they were designing for. They also did not have a thorough working knowledge of the whole play and the practical demands of the text.
- spent a disproportionate amount of time on the two additional production roles, often making items of costume or props, for example, rather than presenting lists, designs and/or cue sheets. This was often to the detriment of the scale model box for which they are marked on their application of skills.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Project-dissertation

Teachers and lecturers:

- can support candidates to identify a clear performance issue for this component
- can support candidates to identify a range of performances and theatre practice to reference in their dissertations
- should encourage candidates to present their own opinions in response to their chosen performance issue
- should support candidates to collate sources, both primary and secondary, as well as alternative opinions to synthesise their argument
- could support candidates by giving incremental deadlines throughout the year and checking their understanding of the task and the validity of their work
- should ensure that candidates do not write about film, ballet, musicals, or opera in their dissertations
- should remind candidates that the dissertation should focus on professional theatre-making and reference professional theatre productions
- should encourage candidates to reframe their dissertation title and performance issues as the work develops
- could share recent webinars and understanding standards materials with candidates to support their preparation for each component

Assignment

Teachers and lecturers:

- should offer candidates guidance on selecting questions for this task, and consider the questions and the performances candidates are interested in writing about
- should offer candidates guidance about the relevance of practitioner study and how this will support their analysis of their selected production

- should encourage candidates to carefully select knowledge of their practitioners that shows an understanding of their practice relevant to the question selected
- should encourage candidates to present their own opinions and personal arguments in response to the question they have chosen
- should highlight the importance of giving a conclusion in the assignment write-up
- should ensure that candidates identify the question chosen, submit a flyleaf and a resource sheet for this task
- should ensure that the flyleaf is completed and signed
- should encourage candidates to engage early with the assignment, as this can support the necessary skills development to address a question and/or performance issue and build an argument in the dissertation component

Performance

Acting

Teachers and lecturers:

- should use the recommended list of texts in the [Advanced Higher Drama course specification](#) as a guide to help acting candidates select play texts for interactive acting and monologue, and ensure the texts are providing appropriate challenge at this level
- should ensure the monologue is from a full-length play and encourage acting candidates to know the whole play and the character arc for their role for both acting pieces
- should remind acting candidates that no other actors should be on stage for the monologue sub-component
- should encourage acting candidates to carefully consider their stage positioning if they are addressing their monologue to another character to engage the audience and create impact. This could be, for example, over the audience's heads.
- should ensure that monologues and interactive pieces are not too short or overly long and keep within the recommended guidance
- should consider the running order of the monologues on the assessment day and allow all acting candidates appropriate time to focus on this sub-component.

Although elaborate sets, costumes, or props are not necessary, lighting is appropriate to support the monologue performance. This allows the acting candidate to hold opening and closing stage pictures, having the opportunity to sustain impact throughout.

Directors

Teachers and lecturers:

- should remind directors that all warm-up and introductory rehearsal tasks support the actors' understanding of the script extract and/or overall directorial concept
- encourage directors to clearly articulate their overall directorial concept during their rehearsal
- should remind directors to conclude their assessment with purpose and consider the aims of their rehearsal; although they do not need to run the directed extract at the end of the rehearsal

Designers

- Centres must ensure that design candidates have a clearly identified performance space to produce a set design for.
- Candidates must ensure their scale model box demonstrates the application of production skills at this level. It must be the focus of the design performance assessment and large enough to communicate ideas visually.
- Designers will not be credited for talking about what they would do without realising it in their presentation.
- Candidates must capture their concepts in the visual presentation of the scale model box and provide supporting designs/lists and cue sheets for the two additional production areas.
- Teachers and lecturers should remind design candidates that the additional production roles do not require made items or to demonstrate application. For more guidance, please refer to the course specification.

- Designers do not need to present scrapbooks and numerous design mood boards. They should only present what is necessary to explain their final concept.
- Designers should adhere to the recommended length for their presentation.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

Our main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, we aim to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).