

# **Course report 2026**

## **Advanced Higher Drama, SCQF level 7**

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

# Statistical and grade boundary information

## Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 567

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 624

## Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

| Course award | Number of candidates | Percentage | Cumulative percentage | Minimum mark required |
|--------------|----------------------|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| A            | 146                  | 23.4       | 23.4                  | 70                    |
| B            | 169                  | 27.1       | 50.5                  | 60                    |
| C            | 169                  | 27.1       | 77.6                  | 50                    |
| D            | 93                   | 14.9       | 92.5                  | 40                    |
| No award     | 47                   | 7.5        | 100                   | Not applicable        |

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

## **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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

# **How the course assessment performed**

## **Project-dissertation**

The project-dissertation performed as intended. Candidates demonstrated personalisation and choice in selecting performance issues and topics.

## **Assignment**

The assignment performed as intended. Candidates attempted both questions and analysed a range of performances and practitioners. Question 1 was the most popular choice.

## **Performance**

The performance component performed as intended. A significant majority of candidates chose acting as their specialism. Approximately 5% of candidates chose either design or directing as their specialism.

# **How candidates performed**

## **Areas where candidates performed well**

### **Project-dissertation**

Most candidates:

- submitted a project-dissertation of appropriate length, with appropriate use of references and bibliography
- selected contemporary practitioners and their practices to address their chosen performance issue

Many candidates engaged with contemporary social, political, and cultural issues that were presented in their chosen professional theatre productions. They examined themes such as gender representation, masculinity and gender-based violence. They also explored politics and immigration, and mental health.

Some candidates communicated passionate advocacy for themes and issues they explored in their project-dissertations.

Candidates performed well when they:

- critically engaged with and analysed professional theatre performances
- considered how relevant practitioners had approached the performance issue and critically compared these approaches
- had a clear argument and a confident learner voice

### **Assignment**

There was a strong correlation between well-structured and well-argued responses and succinctly organised resource sheets.

Candidates achieved well when they:

- developed a clear argument in response to the question and maintained focus throughout their assignment write-up

- demonstrated relevant and convincing knowledge and understanding of the practitioner, which linked effectively to their argument and the production they were analysing
- used carefully selected quotes from the practitioner or practitioners in their responses
- described and analysed performance examples in detail; which they carefully selected, and consistently used to build an argument
- expressed and justified their personal response to the theatre-making and gave a considered conclusion

## **Performance**

### **Actors**

Candidates used a range of contemporary text and older play text for their performance assessment.

Many actors who performed well appeared to enjoy the experience and demonstrated strong stagecraft and textual understanding.

Actors who were confident in their understanding of their roles and performance achieved well.

Most centres and actors used familiar and new scripts from the recommended list of play texts to inform their choice of appropriately challenging plays.

We saw some exceptionally strong performances in the interactive and monologue sub-components, which meant actors could access the full range of available marks.

### **Directors**

Candidates achieved well when they:

- had thorough textual knowledge of the whole play and had clear directorial concepts relevant to a contemporary audience
- had a good understanding of characters and their relationships
- coherently structured their rehearsal assessment and presented their directorial concepts

- confidently motivated their actors and ensured they understood the directors' instructions
- contextualised concise warm-ups and rehearsal activities and made them relevant to the chosen script extract and their overall concepts
- communicated instructions to actors with clarity and used terminology fluently

## **Designers**

Candidates achieved well when they:

- demonstrated thorough textual knowledge of the whole play; and developed coherent design concepts suited to a contemporary audience and the identified performance space
- demonstrated a proficient level of skill in model making and in communicating visual concepts related to their interpretation of the play text
- applied appropriate care and attention to detail when creating and building the scale model box, which accounts for most of the marks in this component
- demonstrated an understanding of scale and viability in their scale model boxes
- communicated their concepts effectively, including their overall concept, significant set transitions, and more complex stage pictures and imagery
- developed a coherent, overarching connecting concept for the scale model box and the two additional design areas, while taking into consideration their chosen performance space

## **Areas where candidates did not perform well**

### **Project-dissertation**

Some candidates did not perform well when they:

- gave artificial and unsubstantiated connections between contemporary theatre and historical theatre practitioners, weakening their arguments
- gave lengthy contextual and historical information and did not focus on performance analysis and theatre practice
- focused on analysing the text or discussed a non-performance issue in theatre without analysing productions and theatre practice and did not give evidence from performances

- did not use a range of primary and secondary sources, had limited citations and references in their bibliographies, and did not conduct appropriate research
- were overly reliant on others' opinions from reviews or academic writing and did not provide a personal response
- analysed two performances and practitioner approaches to consider their performance issues, which often lacked an in-depth understanding of the topic

A few candidates did not reference appropriately.

## **Assignment**

Candidates sometimes presented a lengthy biography of the practitioner without contextualising their practice and making this relevant to the question.

When candidates gave 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 give a conclusion, which weakened their through-line of argument and prevented them from accessing the full range of marks.

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

Candidate responses were less convincing if they repeated the same argument across multiple points.

## **Performance**

### **Actors**

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.

Some actors performed less well when they:

- were less secure in lines and/or blocking and took many prompts
- appeared less prepared and less confident in the monologue sub-component

- did not demonstrate a full understanding of textual clues in their monologues
- lacked a clear focus in their monologue performances
- had very long monologues, which were often self-penalising because they lost focus and impact in their performance
- performed monologues without stage lighting, as they would in an audition, as this approach did not always support the candidates' focus or the overall impact

A few actors demonstrated anxiety about their performance and had to restart or stop pieces early in the monologue sub-component.

We found examples of inappropriate:

- presentation at this level where candidates struggled with the demands of the assessment task
- choice of text for this level, which did not allow the actor to access the subtextual clues and complexity of a play, and consequently, the full range of marks for this component.

## **Directors**

Some directors performed less well when they:

- did not make their overarching concept clear and struggled to convince a full understanding of the play as a whole
- 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 without fulfilling their rehearsal aims or consolidating their concepts.

## **Designers**

Most designers need to be clearer about the performance space they are designing.

They also need a thorough working knowledge of the whole play and the practical demands of the text.

Some designers spent a disproportionate amount of time on the two additional production areas, often making costume or prop items, rather than presenting lists, designs and/or cue sheets. This often limited the quality of their scale model box, which is where we assess their application of technical skills.

## Preparing candidates for assessment

You can share recent webinars and [materials](#) on understanding standards with candidates to support their preparation for each component.

### Project-dissertation

You can support candidates:

- to identify a clear performance issue
- by encouraging their engagement in live and digital theatre
- to identify a range of performances and theatre practices to reference
- to present their own opinions in response to their chosen performance issue
- in collating primary and secondary sources, as well as alternative opinions, to synthesise their argument
- by giving incremental deadlines throughout the year and checking the candidates' understanding of the task and the validity of their work
- by ensuring candidates do not write about film, ballet, musicals, or opera
- by reminding them that their project-dissertation should focus on professional theatre-making and reference professional theatre productions
- by encouraging them to reframe their project-dissertation title and performance issue if required as their work develops
- by ensuring candidates declare an accurate word count

### Assignment

You should support candidates by:

- giving guidance on selecting questions for this task, considering the questions and the performances they are interested in writing about
- giving guidance about the relevance of practitioner study and how this supports their analysis of their selected production
- encouraging them to carefully select knowledge and references from their practitioners that demonstrate an understanding of their practice as it relates to the selected question

- encouraging them to present their own opinions and personal arguments in response to the question they have chosen
- highlighting the importance of giving a conclusion in the assignment write-up
- ensuring they identify their chosen question; and submit a flyleaf and a resource sheet
- ensuring they complete and sign the flyleaf
- encouraging them to engage early with this component to support the necessary skills development to address a performance issue and to build an argument in the project-dissertation component

You should not take a centre approach giving candidates a series of points and arguments to learn about a production. Candidates should work independently to research and develop understanding of their chosen question, practitioner and performance.

## **Performance**

### **Acting**

Centres should use the recommended list of texts as a guide to support the selection of play texts for both interactive acting and monologue, ensuring challenge is appropriate to this level. The recommended texts for National 5 and Higher are unsuitable for Advanced Higher candidates.

### **Monologues**

Monologues should be from a full-length published play, and candidates should know the entire play and the character arc of their role in both acting pieces.

If they are addressing their monologue to another character, candidates should carefully consider their stage positioning to engage the audience and create impact. For example, over the audience's heads.

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

You should support actors by:

- ensuring no other actors are on stage for the monologue
- ensuring that monologues and interactive pieces are not too short or overly long, adhering to the recommended guidance
- considering the running order of the monologues on the assessment day and allowing all candidates appropriate time to focus on this sub-component

## **Directors**

You should support directors to:

- ensure all warm-up and introductory rehearsal tasks support the actors' understanding of the script extract and/or overall directorial concept
- clearly articulate their overall directorial concept during their rehearsal
- communicate clear concepts for voice and movement characterisation and concepts for the visual communication of dramatic meaning
- conclude their assessment purposefully and to consider the aims of their rehearsal

## **Designers**

The scale model box demonstrates designers' application of production skills at this level. It must be the focus of the design performance assessment and large enough, with an appropriate scale to communicate ideas visually.

Designers can use models made on 3D printers if they are to scale and created by them.

You should support designers to ensure they:

- have a clearly identified performance space for which they are designing
- know we will not award marks if they give details about what they would do without realising it in their presentation
- capture concepts in the visual presentation of the scale model box, as well as in supporting designs, lists and/or cue sheets for the two additional production areas

- know they **are not required** to make items or demonstrate how they would apply these in the two additional production areas
- refer to the Advanced Higher Drama course specification on [our website](#)
- know that additional design areas do not require made items
- know they do not need to present scrapbooks and numerous design mood boards
- only present what is necessary to explain their final concept
- adhere to the recommended length for their presentation

Please contact your centre co-ordinator for detailed information about visiting assessment. We send this information out yearly and share this with your centre co-ordinator.