

Course report 2026

Higher Drama, SCQF level 6

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: 2,685

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 3,123

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

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,205	38.6	38.6	70
B	885	28.3	66.9	60
C	595	19.1	86.0	50
D	314	10.1	96.0	40
No award	124	4.0	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

Question paper

The question paper was fair and on standard, with candidates selecting all eight of the optional questions and able to access the full range of marks.

There was a significant reduction in the number of candidates offering no response (NR) or not completing the paper in the allotted time. Most candidates gave full responses to both sections of the question paper.

With the holistic marking approach, candidates responded to both sections of the question paper with less rigidity of structure and greater creativity. The revised marking instructions credit quality over quantity. We are publishing further illustrative candidate responses early in session 2026-27, together with a webinar event in the autumn.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected. Candidate performance remains an area of strength despite an incremental drop in the average mark. Most candidates were well prepared and used texts of appropriate textual and sub-textual challenge for Higher level.

We found consistently high standards of performances across centres. The visiting assessment model created a positive, rewarding experience, and a sense of occasion for candidates and centres. We assessed 443 different published plays.

Approximately 9% of the cohort were design candidates, with 1% of these candidates selecting directing. Many achieved an excellent standard. We were impressed by the creativity and technical skills of these candidates, together with the insight they displayed through their concepts and interpretation of the text.

To make best use of the post-results services, many centres filmed their candidates.

How candidates performed

Question paper

Section 1

Candidates used 14 of the 15 texts from the prescribed list effectively. Many candidates answered from the perspective of an actor, with questions 3 and 4 being the most selected. Some candidates answered from the perspective of a director, most commonly selecting question 1. Only a few candidates answered from the perspective of a designer.

Knowledge and understanding

- Many candidates demonstrated strong knowledge and understanding of their selected text from the prescribed list, with accurate quotations and/or textual references. Some candidates also effectively demonstrated the relevance of these quotations and/or textual references in relation to the question asked.

Contextual analysis

- Many candidates offered good and mostly relevant contextual analysis, considering the implications of the question, with some candidates providing detailed analysis, and a few offering insight.
- A few candidates did not fully analyse the identified moments from their selected text, showing only knowledge and understanding.

Acting or design or directing concepts

- Many candidates gave good and justified descriptions of their performance concepts, using mainly accurate terminology, with some candidates providing detailed performance concepts, and a few demonstrating real creativity.

Section 2

Candidates analysed 54 different productions and effectively used live and recorded-live performances. Most candidates chose to answer question 8, though some candidates also effectively responded to question 7.

Some candidates used very limited or no appropriate terminology in their responses, which restricted their ability to access all available marks. A few candidates also inaccurately used adjectives in relation to voice and movement, and design terminology was inaccurate or lacking in sufficient detail.

Identify

- Many candidates effectively identified appropriate examples from a performance they had seen, demonstrating good knowledge and understanding of the production.
- Some candidates also explained the relevance of these examples in relation to the question asked.

Describe

- Many candidates gave good descriptions of how these moments were achieved onstage, using mainly accurate terminology, with some candidates offering more detailed descriptions.

Analyse

- Some candidates effectively analysed moments and considered the implications of the question, with a few also offering insight.
- A few candidates did not analyse the identified moments from their chosen production, offering only a description of the production areas used.

Performance

Candidates who achieved the highest marks performed texts of sufficient length and sub-textual challenge that were well suited to their personalities, interests and range of ability. These texts helped actors achieve depth of characterisation, detailed interaction, and often had a strong impact on the audience. You directed many actors very well, and these candidates achieved high marks, demonstrating a depth of understanding. Candidates were less successful where centres used repeated scenes for multiple candidates or allocated unsuitable roles

The length of some acting pieces varied from the recommended duration. A few pieces were too long. A few pieces were too short and didn't meet the minimum

requirements for Higher level. A few actors performed extracts from texts that were not full-length or published plays and could not access sufficient textual and sub-textual clues in their performance.

A few performances altered the gender of characters or specific location in a published text. To align with our published guidance on casting, candidates can play characters of any gender, but you must not alter the playwright's intentions and/or the published text.

Many designers and directors were technically knowledgeable and executed their role with a good level of skill. They showed a flair for their selected role, creativity, originality, and insight.

A few designers:

- did not place sufficient emphasis on their set design and instead primarily focused on their additional production role
- had not created ground plans and elevations for the whole play or designed for a specified venue
- were not prepared to demonstrate their additional production role to the visiting assessor, or did not cover the minimum requirements for their role

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

We marked candidates' extended responses to each section holistically against three key criteria. To access the full range of marks, candidates must fully address all three areas.

Section 1

Knowledge and understanding

Candidates must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of their selected text from the prescribed list, choosing relevant and accurate quotations and/or textual references in response to the question asked.

Contextual analysis

Candidates must offer detailed contextual analysis of the chosen moments, fully considering the implications of the question.

Acting or design or directing concepts

Candidates must describe and justify their performance concepts for these moments, making accurate use of terminology.

Section 2

Candidates must state the name and venue of their selected production in the introduction to their extended response. They should also reference the director and year of the production.

Identify

Candidates must identify relevant and appropriate moments from their chosen production that address the question asked.

Describe

Candidates must give a detailed description of how these moments were achieved onstage, referring to a minimum of two production areas and with accurate use of terminology.

Analyse

Candidates must analyse these moments in detail according to the implications of the question.

Performance

Centres must select published full-length texts or texts that are of a suitable standard for Higher level. Recommended texts for National 5 and Advanced Higher texts are not suitable for Higher candidates.

We have a list of 30 recommended texts in appendix 4 of the [Higher Drama course specification](#), and we will share a further list of commonly used texts through the Understanding Standards webinar in session 2026-27. However, we encourage centres to choose any text of appropriate depth and challenge for the performance component. Candidates commonly achieve higher marks in performance where the texts are reflective of their own skillset and experience.

Minimum and maximum time limits for acting performances must be adhered to. You must ensure to include the approximate timings of each acting extract on the back of the candidate's mark sheet. You must complete all candidate mark sheets before the visiting assessor arrives.

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.

Candidates can write or type preparation for performance responses that do not exceed 500 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not concise and so cannot access the top range of 9 to 10 marks.

The preparation for performance should be an account of the candidate's preparation for their acting or directing or design role. We assess candidate responses against two criteria: their research into the chosen text or texts and the candidate's process of developing their acting, directing or design concept or concepts.

We are publishing new illustrative directing and design performances and preparation for performance responses early in session 2026-27.