

Course report 2026

National 5 Drama, SCQF level 5

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: 5,078

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 5,362

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

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	2,613	48.7	48.7	70
B	1,389	25.9	74.6	60
C	873	16.3	90.9	50
D	344	6.4	97.3	40
No award	143	2.7	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 performed as expected.

The marking instructions made all questions accessible, and most candidates completed the assessment in the allotted time.

There was a good balance of questions, with mark allocations ranging from 1 and 10 marks.

Performance

The performance component performed as expected. Most centres prepared candidates well and chose appropriately challenging texts for National 5 level.

Most centres presented a sample of 12 candidates for the visiting assessment, representing the full range of ability across the cohort.

We found consistently high standards of performances across centres. The visiting assessment model created a positive, rewarding experience, and we engaged in professional and constructive dialogue with centre assessors. We assessed approximately 280 published plays this session, bringing the total number of different published plays assessed since 2019 to over 450.

Approximately 15% of the cohort were design candidates; with most selecting make-up and hair, and costume. Many design candidates achieved a very good standard. We were impressed by some of the creativity and technical skills demonstrated.

If the text gave exiting opportunities for the specific production role, design candidates achieved most highly.

If centres suitably cast acting candidates in a performance of the correct length, these candidates achieved most highly.

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

How candidates performed

Question paper

In section 1, candidate responses were for acting and design roles, with most candidates selecting an actor's perspective. Most candidate responses evaluated their own performance and the performance of another candidate.

Many candidates justified their responses in both sections of the paper by making specific reference to their own performance and stimulus-created drama, rather than generalised responses. Understanding Standards events and online materials have helped you develop a clear understanding of this key message.

Section 1

Question 1(a): Most candidates answered this question well. They identified an appropriate main theme or issue from their drama, with relevant reasoning.

Question 1(b): Most candidates gained at least 1 mark. Many candidates gave responses that described how they communicated the theme or issue in their performance. Stronger candidate responses made clear and specific links between creative choices and their intended effect on communicating meaning.

Question 2: Candidates generally answered this question well. Many candidates gained 2 marks by giving clear descriptions of rehearsal activities and the development of their performance or design work.

Question 3: Some candidates gave evaluative comments. Many candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of voice and movement skills, with only minor inaccuracies.

Question 4(a): Many candidates generally responded well, with appropriate identification and justification of mood and atmosphere.

Question 4(b): Most candidates described the ways that another candidate contributed to the creation of mood and atmosphere in performance.

Question 5: Most candidates identified an appropriate audience reaction and provided a relevant reason.

Question 6: Some candidates used appropriate evaluative comments about another candidate's rehearsal process and/or performance across both acting and production roles.

Section 2

Candidates used all three stimuli, with most candidates selecting stimulus A or B. Candidates developed a wide range of dramas in response to their chosen stimulus.

Most candidate responses were entirely suitable for a live theatrical performance and involved two or more characters, adhering to the guidance offered in the question paper.

Some candidates did not use the space provided for rough working to note down and develop their ideas. Some candidates used the space provided for rough working to draw pictorial ideas and some wrote notes or mind maps.

Some candidates did not provide an imaginative response to the stimuli. Many had very simple plots with only two characters that lacked any depth. A few candidates simply continued to answer on the performance they had selected in section 1 or copied stories from television or films. This type of candidate response cannot access the full range of marks.

Some candidates used production terminology inaccurately. In some cases, candidate responses were quite general and did not show a clear understanding of how they would apply production roles in practice.

Question 7: Few candidates correctly stated the form of their drama. Many candidates misunderstood the term 'form'.

Question 8: Most candidates correctly identified the genre of their drama.

Question 9(a): Many candidates successfully identified the time period of their drama. In many cases, candidates demonstrated relevant understanding, although they did not always develop their justification in sufficient detail. Candidate responses can be

strengthened by making clearer and more specific links between identified features and the chosen time period.

Question 9(b): Many candidates explained the way the time period is communicated to the audience in the opening scene. However, many candidates referred generally to the presence of technology to justify a modern-day time period. Stronger candidate responses provided detailed descriptions of the scene, clearly linking these to a justified time period.

Question 10(a): Most candidates identified an important character and provided a valid justification.

Question 10(b): Most candidates selected improvisation, hot seating, or research. However, many candidate responses did not clearly explain the way they would use rehearsal activities and did not demonstrate clear understanding of the rehearsal activity in practice.

Many candidates chose research, and described the topic and findings of research, rather than the method. Stronger candidate responses clearly linked research to character development, to justify its impact.

Question 10(c): Some candidates described a detailed range of appropriate voice and movement choices to develop character effectively.

Question 11(a): Many candidates answered the relationships question well, although some candidates described the relationship from only one character's perspective.

Question 11(b): Many candidates demonstrated good understanding of stage positioning and described appropriate spatial relationships on stage (proxemics, levels, areas of the stage, use of space). However, some responses did not accurately refer to the areas of the stage using correct terminology, limiting access to higher marks.

Question 11(c): Most candidates identified appropriate audience reactions with relevant reasons.

Question 12(a): Most candidates identified the purpose of their drama. Some candidates only stated a message with no clear purpose identified.

Question 12(b): Some candidates successfully demonstrated understanding of conventions in practice. Stronger candidate responses demonstrated clear understanding of how conventions function in performance and described the way they would use these on stage. However, some candidate responses did not describe the use of conventions in performance, and occasionally confused different conventions such as aside, monologue, narration, and voiceover.

Question 13(a): Most candidates identified an appropriate personal prop linked to a character.

Question 13(b): Many candidates described the personal prop successfully in detail. However, some candidates explained the importance of the prop in the drama, rather than describing the prop's physical characteristics. These responses did not answer the question and so did not gain marks.

Question 13(c): Many candidates explained appropriate ways the actor could use the prop to highlight its importance. However, some responses were underdeveloped, offering justification instead of clearly explaining how they would direct the actor to use the prop to highlight its importance to the character.

Question 14(a): Many candidates described the mood and atmosphere of the scene effectively, however some responses lacked sufficient detail to gain full marks.

Question 14(b): Some candidates described the ways set or costume helped create mood and/or atmosphere effectively, using correct terminology and detailed description of their set or costume ideas with justification. However, some candidates described set and costume, instead of selecting one as the question required. We only credited these candidates for the strongest element of their response, discounting the other description.

Question 14(c): Some candidates described the ways lighting or sound helped created mood and/or atmosphere, with justification, using correct technical terminology. However, some candidate responses described lighting and sound,

instead of selecting one as the question required. We only credited these candidates for the strongest element of their response, discounting the other description.

Performance

Acting

Actors who achieved the highest marks performed highly suitable texts that reflected their personalities, interests and range of ability. Candidates cast appropriately in terms of creativity, age appropriateness and challenge, achieved depth and referred to textual clues.

Actors who performed well-chosen and interesting texts that allowed for creativity and appropriate challenge did better than those where centres used repeated scenes for multiple candidates or allocated unsuitable roles. Most actors applied skills with appropriate and effective use of voice and movement. They remembered their lines and cues well, and conveyed relationships through interaction, and sustained characterisation.

Some actors had a superb impact on the audience. Many candidates who you directed very well achieved high marks, demonstrating a depth of understanding about their character.

The length of some acting pieces varied from the recommended duration. Some performances were too short and did not meet the minimum requirement, which disadvantaged candidates.

We found some texts with larger casts and/or multi-role challenging to mark. Actors with smaller roles or multiple roles were not on stage for the required time and/or lacked adequate character interaction with others. This made it difficult for these candidates to access the full range of marks.

A few performances altered the gender of characters 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 gender indicated by the playwright's intentions and/or the published text.

Design

Many designers were technically knowledgeable and executed their role with a good level of skill. Many candidates who used appropriate texts showed a flair for design, creativity, originality, and imagination.

Candidates performed most strongly when selected texts offered meaningful opportunities for creative design input. In some cases, texts chosen primarily to support actors limited design opportunities for designers to demonstrate the level of creativity expected at National 5.

Some designers gave PowerPoint presentations, which is not required. This disadvantaged candidates where they placed greater focus on the presentation than the pre-show checks and the design concepts.

A few centres presented more than one candidate for the same design role in the same production. To support clear assessment of individual contributions, each assessed group must have only one candidate undertaking each design role, adhering to the course specification and Understanding Standards guidance.

A few designers produced work that showed their design skills, but there was no National 5 performance of the text. Where no performance took place, this affected marks, as we must assess the application of skills as part of a live performance. In some cases, candidates designed for a more demanding and complex Higher text, which is not appropriate for this level.

Some designers did not cover the minimum requirements for their role:

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should help candidates understand the command words used in questions, as follows:

- ‘name’, ‘identify’ or ‘state’ questions — offer a brief response
- ‘describe’ questions — respond in some detail
- ‘explain’ — offer the purposes or reasons behind the response
- ‘evaluate’ — offer a judgement and support it with evidence

Candidates must use drama terminology throughout the question paper. You must encourage them to increase their knowledge and understanding of all subject-specific vocabulary. Some candidates used very little or no terminology in their responses and so could not gain marks. Candidates also used inaccurate adjectives in relation to voice and movement. Most commonly, candidate responses such as ‘open’ or ‘closed’ body language, without further description, do not gain marks, as there are multiple variations of this. Similarly, we cannot credit the use of ‘high’ or ‘low’ as descriptive terms for volume, as this offers no differentiation from pitch (the most used adjectives for volume are ‘loud’ or ‘quiet’). We have further specific guidance on accurate adjectives using voice and movement terminology in the [Understanding Standards](#) support materials.

You should make sure candidates are familiar with key production terminology and use it accurately in the context of specific production roles, supporting their responses with relevant examples where appropriate.

Candidates should make sure the drama they create in their responses is suitable for a live performance.

When describing sound, candidate responses should provide sufficient detail to demonstrate how they would use sound in performance. For example, rather than referring simply to sound as ‘wind’ or ‘rain’ or ‘sad music’, candidates should specify whether the sound is live or pre-recorded, indicate the level it is to be played at, and, where relevant, identify the specific piece of music, to access the full range of marks.

When referring to lighting, candidate responses should provide enough detail to clearly communicate how they would use lighting in the performance. Strong responses build on general descriptions such as ‘bright’, ‘dull’ or ‘a spotlight’, and include specific details about the lighting design. For example, candidates who specify the type of lanterns used, specific colour and how they would create the effect (for example, gel or LED), or specific intensity, are likely to access the full range of marks

We have additional specific guidance on the specific use of design terminology in the [Understanding Standards](#) support materials.

You should prepare candidates to respond to questions on any area of knowledge and understanding listed in the course specification.

Section 1

For questions on self and others, you should prepare candidates to evaluate both the rehearsal process and the performance. All candidate responses should use correct drama terminology throughout, and they should justify and make specific reference to their own drama.

When evaluating their own work, candidates must make an evaluative statement in their response. Candidates who do not make an explicit evaluative statement cannot access the full range of marks.

Candidates should refer to the performance or design concepts using appropriate terminology for their own role.

Candidates must evaluate another candidate’s individual contribution in the rehearsal process and/or final performance. They can choose someone they have worked with in their own group, or someone they have observed in another group. Candidates must include an explicit evaluative statement to access the full range of marks. Candidates must write from an individual point of view, and not from a group perspective.

Section 2

You should encourage candidates to use the empty box space provided for rough working to note down their ideas in response to their chosen stimuli; for example with mind maps or plot ideas or character information. A basic ‘time, place and action’ summary for each scene in the candidate’s drama makes it clear they have fully realised how their response to the stimulus would be performed live onstage. This helps them to plan and work through their ideas and transfer this information into their responses. Candidates who do not do this, tend to give less detailed or fluid responses.

You should encourage candidates to read all the questions before attempting to respond to the stimulus. This allows them to see the through-line of the questions and avoids repetition. Most questions have more than one part and each element connects to the previous question. Encourage candidates to read all parts of a question to avoid duplication and fully consider the requirements of the question.

Candidates should explicitly relate every answer to the chosen stimulus (such as referencing character and/or plot). Candidates who only offer generic justification cannot access the full range of marks.

Performance

Centres must select a published text that is of a suitable standard for National 5. Centres should not use recommended texts for Higher and Advanced Higher for National 5 candidates. We have found that candidates do not interpret their role adequately if they use inappropriate texts.

There is a list of recommended texts in appendix 3 of the National 5 Drama Course Specification on [our website](#) . The [2023 National 5 Drama webinar presentation](#) has a further list of commonly used texts.

If centres present more than 12 candidates, the sample selected for collaborative assessment by the visiting and centre assessors should represent the full range of ability across the centre’s cohort. Centres should not withhold candidates of lower ability from collaborative assessment. While there may be reasons for this, such as the need for additional assessment arrangements or candidate anxiety, when centres

include a wider range of candidates in the sample, the collaborative discussions are more coherent and consistent in setting the national marking standards.

Some productions were too short. Centres must make sure the minimum and maximum time limits are adhered to.

Repeating texts, especially duologues, disadvantages candidates, as it does not allow candidates to demonstrate their own creativity and interpretation.

You should cast acting candidates in only one role. While centres have traditionally used some texts requiring multi-role performances at National 5 level, candidates should play one primary role in the performance assessment.

Design candidates do not need to prepare PowerPoints or presentations to share with us. While these were excellent, this is not a requirement of the course assessment at this level, and we will not mark these. We are under no obligation to view PowerPoints or presentations.

Candidates undertaking a production role must produce one of the following:

- **For** costume, candidates must produce detailed costume designs and a costume list for all characters. They must create or adapt one costume according to the size, style, and character. Candidates must label, maintain, and store all costumes effectively and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- **Set design** - candidates must produce working designs and plans for the set, including elevations, which are appropriate to the text. They must also produce detailed ground plans for each scene. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- For lighting, candidates must produce a lighting cue sheet that is accurate in terms of light intensity, cues, duration, and types of lighting changes. They must produce a detailed lighting plot. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor and operate lighting equipment on cue according to levels specified on the cue sheet or sheets during a live performance.
- For sound, candidates must produce a sound cue sheet detailing volume, duration, and type. They must source and edit music and effects and provide a back-up plan. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the

assessor and operate sound equipment on cue according to the sound cue sheet or sheets during a live performance.

- For props, candidates must produce a master props list. They must design and create one fully functional prop to use in the performance. Candidates must label and store all props effectively, organise the props table efficiently, and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- For make-up and hair, candidates must produce designs and charts for all characters. They must select suitable materials and tools and use them safely and hygienically. Candidates must select one character design and apply that make-up and hair design in front of the assessor (candidates can apply other character designs to actors in advance). Candidates should demonstrate the design under theatrical lighting in a live performance.

Centres must complete all marks sheets (including sample sheet and extract timings) and provisionally mark preparation for performance responses before we arrive.

Centre assessors should have a copy of the detailed marking instructions from the course specification when assessing candidates and should refer to these throughout the live marking alongside the use of the mark sheets.

Candidates can write or type preparation for performance responses that do not exceed 400 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not concise and so cannot access the top range of 9 to 10 marks.

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.