



## Course Report 2017

Subject	Drama
Level	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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

# **Section 1: Comments on the assessment**

## **Summary of the course assessment**

### **Component 1: question paper**

The question paper consists of two sections totalling 40 marks (40% of the overall course award).

Section 1 has a choice of textual analysis questions from the perspective of a director, an actor, or a designer, each worth 20 marks. Candidates choose one question from this section.

Section 2 has a compulsory performance analysis question worth 20 marks.

The question paper performed in line with expectations, and feedback from the marking team and practitioners suggested that it was fair and accessible.

### **Component 2: performance**

The performance consists of a practical assessment worth 60 marks (60% of the overall course award — 10% for the preparation for performance and 50% for the performance in directing, acting or design).

Acting candidates are required to perform two interactive roles, from different plays. Each candidate is required to be involved in an acting contribution of approximately 7–10 minutes for each role. Each role is worth 25 marks.

Design candidates are required to demonstrate their overall design concept for their chosen play and an additional production role. They are required to demonstrate the application of skills in the additional production role. They are required to present their work in a presentation lasting approximately 20 minutes.

Directing candidates are required to have prepared approximately eight pages from their chosen text. On the day of the performance, the visiting assessor selects approximately two pages for the candidate to direct in a rehearsal lasting 30 minutes.

Feedback from the visiting assessors suggested that almost all centres were able to provide suitable facilities and resources for the performance assessment event.

## Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

### Areas in which candidates performed well

#### Component 1: question paper

**Section 1 Question 4:** This was the most popular question in Section 1. The majority of candidates attempting this question knew their character and their character's journey through the play well. They were able to analyse the ways in which their chosen character communicated themes and issues. They structured their responses clearly to support their thinking, using quotations and/or stage directions as textual references to underpin this thinking. Many candidates gained marks for showing detailed development of understanding. Acting concepts were often described in detail with appropriate and varied use of terminology.

**Section 1 Question 2:** This was also a popular question, and successful candidates understood the drama terminology and were able to apply this to the whole text. Successful candidates went on to describe imaginative directorial concepts, often describing the ways in which they would direct their actors but frequently supplementing these with ideas for the use of other production areas. This gave them the opportunity to gain marks for detailed development of understanding.

**Section 2 Question 7:** It was clear to markers when candidates had been engaged and enthused by the production they had experienced. This could have been either in a theatre or at a live streaming event, or when they had access to quality digital theatre recordings. Successful candidates had a sound grasp of drama literacy and were able to identify the genre and/or style of the production they had enjoyed. They consistently gave insightful and detailed analysis into the ways in which their chosen production areas communicated the genre and/or style.

#### Component 2: Performance

**Preparation for performance:** Many candidates demonstrated understanding of their selected text and a clear interpretation of their role. Many candidates were able to gain high marks while remaining within the 500-word guideline.

**Acting:** This was overwhelmingly the most popular choice, and the majority of candidates were well prepared and committed to their roles. Candidates who performed in small groups (no more than four) and were given enough to do to demonstrate their skill had the opportunity to do well. The freedom to select texts to suit candidates' talents undoubtedly afforded them the opportunity to gain high marks. Candidates who were well rehearsed and knew their lines were able to explore the depths of their character and give credible performances.

**Design:** Candidates who were passionate about design and had selected a text that engaged their imagination did well. These candidates had a clear concept for their set design. They produced ground plans for all the scene changes within the play. The elevations for all the scene changes gave an impression of the set from an audience's point

of view with suggestions for tone, texture and colour. Successful candidates demonstrated skill in their selected production area.

**Directing:** Directing candidates who knew the whole text (not just the pages they had prepared) and who had a clear directorial concept they wished to explore in rehearsal did well. Successful directors inspired their actors, encouraging them in their roles. They managed their time, ensuring they engaged their actors in all the directing elements being assessed during the 30-minute rehearsal.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Component 1: question paper

**Section 1 Question 3:** Some candidates misinterpreted 'attitude' and wrote about 'action' instead. Some candidates reversed the question and wrote about their chosen character influencing others.

**Section 1 Questions 5 and 6:** Some candidates did not write in enough detail on the first part of the question. They did not use textual references to identify when and why they would apply their design concepts. Instead they focused on the second part of the question, often describing in some detail their ideas for design but not answering the question.

**Section 2 Question 7:** Some candidates simply told the story of the production they had seen, rather than analysing how their chosen production area had communicated the genre and/or style of the play. Some candidates interpreted genre and/or style as themes and issues, or tried to shoehorn a learned essay into their response to the question. A few candidates responded on inappropriate productions such as musicals, pantomimes or short one-act plays. These did not give them enough scope to answer the question in depth, and consequently candidates were disadvantaged.

Some candidates spent too long on their first essay and did not leave themselves enough time to complete their second essay.

### Component 2: Performance

**Preparation for performance:** Some of these were well over the 500-word guideline, which is unnecessary as candidates can gain full marks by using no more than 500 words.

**Acting:** Candidates who, along with the rest of the candidates in their centre, were cast in roles from the selected text for Section 1 of the question paper were often disadvantaged, as these roles did not suit their talents. Ensemble pieces requiring several actors disadvantaged some candidates as they did not have enough to do.

**Design:** Some candidates did not apply their design concepts to a whole text. They applied them only to an extract (as per the National 5 model). Some candidates put all their efforts into the second production area at the expense of the set design which attracts more marks.

**Directing:** Some directors did not manage their time to their advantage and spent too long on a 'warm up'. They sometimes neglected to use correct terminology for voice, movement

and stage directions. Sometimes they concentrated on one of these areas to the detriment of the others. Occasionally the actors were not chosen appropriately and did not engage in the event.

## **Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: question paper**

**Section 1:** It is evident that many candidates have been excellently prepared in terms of having a clear structure for their essays. They scaffold their responses to address the first part of the question with relevant textual references, consisting of quotations and stage directions. This approach helps them to clearly express their thinking. They often develop their point by a further relevant quotation. They then refer to their first point in a further paragraph to address the second part of the question, either as a director, an actor or a designer. Candidates would be advised to follow this structure and know a range of quotations/stage directions and drama terminology to help them frame their responses.

**Section 2:** When centres have given candidates the opportunity to experience quality professional productions, this is the basis of successful performance analysis. This experience can be at the theatre, or through quality screenings in the cinema, through free school broadcasts or digital resources that fall within the two-year ruling.

The 'focus' for the question changes from year to year, and a list of possible focus areas is available in 'Common questions about National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Drama' and in the October 2016 subject update in the Higher Drama section of the SQA website. Practitioners would be advised, when preparing candidates for this section, to give them experience in discussing and/or writing about each of these areas.

Likewise, the production areas change from year to year, and candidates should be prepared for this. Candidates should be encouraged to identify, in their introduction, the title of the performance, the date they attended and the venue.

### **Component 2: Performance**

When centres use a wide variety of texts, it interests and engages the candidates, and their enthusiasm is evident in performance.

**Preparation for performance:** Candidates can access high marks by being succinct in describing their research and the ways in which this informed the process towards performance. It is good practice for candidates to word-process these — it helps them keep an eye on the number of words they are using and assists the visiting assessor on the day of the performance assessment.

**Acting:** Successful candidates select texts that interest them and roles to suit their talents. They know and understand the whole text, and are cast in roles that give them enough to do. Candidates should be well rehearsed and confident in their lines so they can explore the nuances and subtext of their extract.

The extracts should be long enough (7–10 minutes) to enable them to demonstrate their skills. Any 'extras' performing in a scene should be 'off the book' to enable candidates to demonstrate complex relationships.

**Design:** Successful design candidates know and understand the whole text. Set designs should be for the whole text, and designs for the second production area should be for the whole text. Candidates should pay attention to detail in set design and understand how their designs would translate into practice.

Similarly, with their chosen production area, they should demonstrate a level of skill appropriate to this level. They should produce detailed cue sheets and/or labelled designs all related to the text. Some candidates find PowerPoint or a similar presentation tool useful as prompts for their presentation. It is always good practice to rehearse the presentation, which should be approximately 20 minutes long.

**Directing:** Successful directors know and understand the whole text. They understand the characters' motivation, relationships and the themes and issues being explored. They have a clear directorial concept.

Directors should be encouraged to time their rehearsal. They should be encouraged to have a balance between explaining/exploring their concept and directing their actors in terms of voice and movement including the use of space. They should consistently use drama terminology. Sufficient time should be left for the final run through. Some directors find it useful to use a stop watch to help with timing and this is to be encouraged.

It is not a good idea for directors to direct actors in a scene the actors have prepared for their own assessment. The director ends up not having enough to do. Actors with appropriate skills should be selected.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	3117
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	2881
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### Statistical information: Performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	29.7%	29.7%	857	70
B	28.3%	58.0%	814	60
C	22.8%	80.8%	658	50
D	8.4%	89.2%	241	45
No award	10.8%	-	311	-

## 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.