



Course Report 2018

Subject	Drama
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

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) and is completed in two hours.

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 choice of question in section 1 provided opportunities for candidates to analyse their chosen text from a range of focussed areas for example, themes and/or issues, impact on an audience, changes in time and place. Care was taken to ensure that the questions were sufficiently challenging to enable candidates to demonstrate their skills as a director, actor or a designer at Higher level, and that there was parity of demand across the three disciplines.

Popular texts analysed in this section continue to be *The Crucible*, *Antigone* (various translations), *The Birthday Party*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Men Should Weep*. Some candidates responded on *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time*, *Blackwatch*, *All My Sons*, and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, among others.

The compulsory question in section 2 required candidates to consider character relationships when analysing the performance they had seen. 'Relationships' was considered in its widest sense when marking the question. For example, a character's relationship with an animal or an object, as well as with another character.

Candidates responded on live performances, live streaming to a cinema and recordings of live performances. The range of productions included *The Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Trainspotting*, *The Kite Runner*, *Hedda Gabler*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Things I Know to be True*, *Yerma*, *Men Should Weep*, *August: Osage County* and *The Steamie* among others.

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 acting or directing or design).

Acting candidates are required to perform two interactive roles. Each role is worth 25 marks. Design candidates are required to demonstrate their overall design concept for their chosen play in a set design and an additional production role. They are required to present their designs in a presentation to the visiting assessor.

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

Visiting assessors reported seeing a wide variety of texts being used by candidates. They reported that almost all centres were able to provide suitable facilities and resources for the performance assessment event.

This component performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper

Section 1 question 1: This was one of the most popular questions. The candidates who did well identified themes and/or issues in their selected text and key moments across the whole text, and when these themes and/or issues were communicated. They consistently used appropriate quotations and/or stage directions to support their thinking. They were able to give an insight into the ways in which the themes and/or issues were communicated. For the second half of the answer many candidates successfully described the ways in which the director would direct the actors to communicate the themes and/or issues at the moments they had identified in terms of voice and movement. The most successful candidates also considered the choice and use of the performance space and the directions of the design team.

Section 1 question 3: This was the most popular question. The candidates who did well understood what 'impact' meant and were able to choose a character who consistently created an impact on the audience across the whole play. These candidates were able to identify five different moments when this impact occurred. They used appropriate quotations and/or stage directions to support their thinking. They were often able to make insightful comments on the impact the character made at these moments, for example how other characters or the plot were being affected and the impact this had on the audience. For the second half of the answer, successful candidates had a good grasp of drama literacy and were able to describe in depth acting concepts linked to the first half of their response.

Section 2 question 7: Candidates who have good drama literacy and had seen quality performances which they clearly enjoyed were able to write a detailed analysis. These candidates were able to analyse performance concepts in detail, as they had the vocabulary and understanding to do so. There was sometimes evidence that candidates had researched productions, read reviews and seen interviews with directors and actors. The productions were live events, or live streaming in a cinema, or quality recordings of live performances.

Component 2: performance

Preparation for performance: Some candidates were very well prepared by their centre for this aspect of the assessment. Many achieved high marks while remaining with the 500-word guideline.

Acting: This was overwhelmingly the most popular choice and there were some outstanding performances reported by visiting assessors. The most successful candidates were cast in

roles to suit their interests and talents and in extracts that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate a range of acting skills. They had been well rehearsed in both roles and were able to engage with and explore the depths of their character, which created credible performances.

Design: Candidates who designed for the whole play, who had an imaginative design concept and a clear idea of how to realise their concept in their set design and additional production role did well. These candidates produced ground plans and elevations for every scene change throughout the play. The elevations gave an impression of the set from an audience's point of view with suggestions for tone, texture and colour. Successful candidates demonstrated skills in their selected production area, often making creative use of technology.

Directing: Directing candidates who knew the whole play, and had a clear directorial concept they wished to explore in rehearsal, did well. Successful directors had the energy and enthusiasm to engage their actors, which inspired their actors. They were good at time-keeping, often using a stop watch to pace the rehearsal, ensuring they engaged their actors in all elements of the directing process.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper

Section 1 question 2: Some candidates confused rehearsal concepts with performance concepts in answering the second half of this question. Some candidates merely listed rehearsal concepts without explaining the ways in which they would help the actor explore a change in status and/or circumstances. For example, "I would use role reversal to help my character", without any attempt to explain the ways in which the activity would help the actor develop the role.

Section 1 questions 5 and 6: On the whole, candidates accessed marks for the first part of these questions using appropriate quotations and/or stage directions to support their thinking. The second part of the question however was often answered poorly, with little explanation of design concepts and tenuous links to the first part of the response. For example, "I would use a blue gel to show a cold relationship" or "I would put the actor in a tatty dress to show she is poor".

Some candidates did not manage their time well, spending too long on their first response and not leaving themselves enough time to complete or, in a few cases, even start their second response.

Section 1 question 7: Some candidates resorted to narrative rather than analysis and told the story of what they'd seen. Some candidates approached the question as if it were a textual analysis and stated what they would have done if they had been acting or directing. Some analysis was generic, for example, "he used open body language", or "the director asked for a yellow gel to show happiness". Often candidates lacked correct drama vocabulary, for example, "he used a soft tone". Some candidates chose the same moment to analyse for the second production role, and the response became repetitive.

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. Some centres did not provide a suitable space for visiting assessors to mark these and some centres did not factor in enough time for this part of the assessment.

Acting: Some centres are still using the same text for all actors in a least one of their roles. This results in the same scene being repeated, often with the same blocking. This disadvantages candidates, as not all the roles suit their aptitude and talent. Some extracts are too short and do not give the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a full range of skills, and some extracts are too long making it difficult for the candidate to sustain the character. The use of ensemble pieces with more than four characters disadvantages the candidates as they do not have enough to do to access the marks. Some candidates were under rehearsed and needed several prompts which impacted on their portrayal of character.

Design: Some candidates are still only designing for one scene or extract rather than for the whole play. A number of candidates put all their efforts into the second production area at the expense of the set design which attracts more marks. Some candidates are not producing ground plans and elevations for every scene and/or change in location.

Directing: Some directors did not manage their time well, spending too long on a 'warm up'. Some directors did not have a clear understanding of the whole play and the context of the pages they had selected. As a result, they did not have a clear concept to communicate to their actors. Some directors concentrated on one aspect of direction, for example voice, to the detriment of the other areas.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: question paper

Section 1: When candidates have been given a sound knowledge of the whole play text, and have been encouraged to learn a range of quotations and/or stage directions, they have a strong basis for success in this part of the assessment. Practitioners are doing well when they give candidates a clear structure for their responses. For example, encouraging them to scaffold their responses to address the first part of the question with relevant quotations and/or stage directions. These points can often be developed with a further relevant quotation. It is good practice for the second part of the question to be addressed at this point in order for it to be linked to the first part of the response. Practitioners should encourage candidates to use sound drama literacy, and correct terminology as either a director, an actor or a designer.

Section 2 (section 3 from 2019): When centres have given candidates the opportunity to experience quality professional productions, it provides candidates with a basis for successful performance analysis. This can be through theatre visits, live streaming in cinemas, free school broadcasts or, if necessary, recordings of live performances that fall within the two-year rule.

When candidates have a sound knowledge of theatrical terminology in all aspects of theatre production, and use this effectively in their analysis, they have a strong basis for success in this part of the course assessment. Practitioners should encourage research in the form of accessing theatre reviews and interviews with actors and directors to extend candidates' knowledge of theatre production. Candidates should be encouraged to state the name of the production and when and where they saw it at the beginning of their response.

Candidates will be helped if they are given the opportunity to practise timed essays to prepare them for the assessment.

Component 2: Performance

When practitioners introduce a wide variety of texts appropriate to Higher level, they give candidates the opportunity to become excited and engage with the work. Candidates respond with enthusiasm and give successful performances.

Preparation for performance: Candidates can access high marks by being succinct in describing the results of their research, and the ways in which it informed their preparation for 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 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 in both roles and completely confident in their lines so they can explore the nuances and subtext of their extract. 'Extras' who are not being assessed should be well rehearsed in order to establish believable interaction and complex

relationships with the candidates being assessed. Suitable audiences must be provided for the content of the texts being performed.

Design: Successful design candidates know and understand the whole text and design for the whole text. Set designs should include ground plans and elevations for every change of scene and location. They should be detailed, and the candidate should understand how the designs could translate into practice.

Designs for the additional production role should be for the whole text and demonstrate skills appropriate for this level. Candidates should produce detailed cue sheets and/or labelled designs related to the text. Some candidates make excellent use of technology. It is good practice for candidates to rehearse their presentation, which should last about 20 minutes .

At Higher level it is not necessarily a good idea for designers to design for one of the acting pieces being assessed, as this could restrict the candidate's creativity and originality.

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

Successful directors are good communicators and inspire their actors. They have good time-keeping skills and pace the rehearsal; maintaining a good balance between explaining and exploring their concept; and directing their actors in terms of voice, movement, and the use of space. They should be encouraged to use theatrical terminology.

It is not a good idea for directors to direct actors in a scene the actors have prepared for their own assessment, as actors will have developed their own acting concepts and the director will not have enough to do. Actors with appropriate skills should be selected.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	2881
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	2946
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	31.8%	31.8%	936	70
B	27.3%	59.1%	805	60
C	23.5%	82.6%	691	50
D	7.6%	90.1%	223	45
No award	9.9%	-	291	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.