

# **Research summary: Learner and Practitioner Views on Proposed Changes to the Higher Drama Question Paper**

**Date:** June 2025

## **Why did we do this research?**

We found that the Higher Drama question paper needed some changes to improve it. We had evidence that learners were not completing the question paper, and that there were problems with the marking. We did this research to see if the potential changes to address these issues would make the paper better for both learners and teachers.

## **What are we trying to find out?**

- ◆ Do learners and teachers agree there are problems with the current Higher Drama question paper?
- ◆ Do learners and teachers agree that the planned changes to the question paper will improve it?
- ◆ Do learners and teachers think there are other problems in the question paper that should be addressed?
- ◆ Could changing the question paper cause other problems?

## **How did we do the research?**

283 teachers and 257 learners took a survey about the Higher Drama question paper. Teachers were asked directly what they thought about the planned changes, like whether section 2 should be taken out, if the question paper should include a set text list, and if the marking criteria should be more like National 5 and Advanced Higher. The learner survey also asked directly about having a prescribed set text list and making changes to the marking, but learners were asked more broadly what they thought about all three sections.

## **What did we learn?**

- ◆ Over half of the learners and teachers found the marking hard to understand.
- ◆ Over 60% of learners and teachers preferred the way National 5 and Advanced Higher are marked.
- ◆ Under 40% of learners and teachers disagreed with the idea of having a set text list. Half of the learners and 54% of teachers agreed that a set text list would make the question paper better.
- ◆ Learners and teachers said sections 1 and 3 have problems. They said the marking is confusing, and the essays are difficult.
- ◆ Learners and teachers said section 3 is the hardest or least satisfying section for learners.
- ◆ Some learners and teachers said they would rather change or improve the sections rather than removing them entirely, especially section 2.

## **What will change because of the research?**

These findings suggest that some changes to the question paper will be met with support from teachers and learners. We reviewed the question paper and considered approaches to address the issues identified while maintaining its validity and ensuring fairness to learners.

We considered every teacher and learner view, and used feedback from the National Qualification Support Teams (NQST) to help us make decisions. We identified that the following changes will not have any impact on the skills, knowledge and understanding assessed by the question paper, and will allow more learners to access the full range of marks.

From session 2025–26, we are removing section 2 — theatre production: application — from the Higher Drama question paper. The current section 3 (performance analysis) will become section 2. The revised question paper will be worth 40 marks and will contain two sections of extended-response questions:

- ◆ Section 1 — theatre production: text in context (20 marks)
- ◆ Section 2 — performance analysis (20 marks)

The exam will have a shorter duration of 2 hours. We are also introducing a prescribed set text list for section 1 — theatre production: text in context. In addition, we are revising the wording of the questions, and have revised the marking instructions to align with the way National 5 and Advanced Higher are marked.

## **Read the full report**

You can download the [full research report](#) from our website.