

# Technical summary: Learner and Educator Views on Proposed Changes to the Higher Drama Question Paper

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## Background

SQA had evidence that the Higher Drama question paper needed to be modified. This research was commissioned to understand whether proposed changes to the question paper would be welcomed by learners and educators.

## Research questions

- ◆ To what extent do learners and educators agree with the existing evidence showing problems with the current Higher Drama question paper?
- ◆ To what extent do learners and educators agree with proposed changes to the question paper?
- ◆ Do learners and educators think there are any other problems in the question paper that should be identified for changes?
- ◆ Are there any identifiable risks with the proposed changes?

## Methodology

283 educators and 257 learners took a survey about the Higher Drama question paper. Educators were surveyed directly about the proposed changes to the question paper, including whether section 2 of the question paper should be removed, if the question paper should incorporate a set text list, and if the marking criteria should be similar to National 5 and Advanced Higher. The learner survey asked directly about whether a set text or an updated marking criteria would improve the question paper, but took a more exploratory approach to sections 1, 2, and 3.

## Key findings

- ◆ Over half of participants in both groups found the marking hard to understand.
- ◆ Over 60% of participants in both groups preferred the National 5 and Advanced Higher marking approach, expressing that it was more consistent and easier to understand.
- ◆ A minority of participants in both groups (under 40%) disagreed with the idea of having a set text list; 50% of learners and 54% of practitioners agreed that a set text list would improve the question paper.
- ◆ Participants in both groups expressed that section 1 and section 3 have issues and need revision, particularly with the marking, demands of essay writing, and whether these sections are testing learners' knowledge, skills, and understanding in the course.

- ◆ Participants in both groups expressed that section 3 is the hardest or least satisfying section for learners.
- ◆ Participants in both groups indicated support for revising sections rather than removing them entirely, especially section 2.

## Implications

These findings suggest that some changes to the question paper will be met with support from educators 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 took every educator and learner view into consideration, and also used feedback from the National Qualification Support Teams (NQST) to inform decision making and ensure that a clear hierarchy was maintained across the Drama levels. We identified that removing section 2, revising the questions in section 1 and the new section 2 (formerly section 3), and revising the marking instructions were the most appropriate changes as these 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.

## Next steps

From session 2025–26, SQA is 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. SQA is also introducing a prescribed text list for section 1 — theatre production: text in context. In addition, we are revising the wording of the questions, and we have revised the marking instructions to align with the approach used at National 5 and Advanced Higher.

We have published an Understanding standards audio presentation for educators, which explains the changes ([Higher Drama Audio presentation 2025](#)).

We are also running an Understanding standards event and webinar in October 2025.

## Read the full report

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

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This summary is intended for general audiences and simplifies complex research. Please refer to the full report for detailed methodology, complete findings, and technical discussion.