



Learner and Educator Views on Proposed Changes to the Higher Drama Question Paper

Ayla Rosales and Colin Moore

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The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ

Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, EH22 1FD

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Introduction

Since 2017, the Higher Drama question paper has comprised two essay questions and one set of scaffolded questions that learners completed over two and a half hours. The sections of the question paper are as follows:

Section 1 — theatre production: text in context 20 marks; extended-response questions

Candidates answer from the perspective of an actor or director or designer in preparation for an intended production. Candidates analyse the selected text in the context of theatre production. They demonstrate knowledge of the selected text they have studied in terms of content and context, and show an understanding of how the text could be communicated to an audience through performance. Candidates gain credit for their ability to make use of appropriate quotations and/or textual references.

Section 2 — theatre production: application 10 marks; structured response questions

Candidates answer structured questions on their understanding and application of two production roles for the selected text they have studied. Candidates respond on the ways in which two of the following production roles could be applied to their selected text: actor, director, or designer. To avoid predictability, two of the three production roles will be sampled each year.

Section 3 — performance analysis 20 marks; extended-response questions

Candidates answer one extended-response question from a choice of two on a performance they have seen. The focus of the questions require candidates to respond on two of the following production areas:

- ◆ choice and use of the performance space
- ◆ director's intentions and effectiveness
- ◆ acting and development of characters
- ◆ design concepts and their effectiveness

The performance analysis may be of a live performance, a live-streamed performance or a recorded 'live' theatrical performance. The performance must be a play, not a musical, pantomime or movement piece. A professional performance should be used. Candidates should state the name of the performance in the introduction to their response. They must consider how the chosen production areas impacted on their appreciation of the performance.

By 2025, SQA had evidence from educators and exam results demonstrating some existing problems with the Higher Drama question paper. Notably, educators had flagged problems with the marking criteria through feedback from Understanding Standards events, enquiry emails, and feedback from markers, where educators referred to the marking as 'gatekeeping'. In addition, markers found that learners were skipping over or not finishing section 3 of the question paper, impacting overall scores; for example in 2023, the mean mark for the Higher question paper was 9.9 marks below the mean mark for the National 5 question paper.

As a result of this evidence, Qualifications Development designed a new question paper that would help to address the issues that had been identified. The proposed changes to the question paper are to:

1. reduce the question paper to sections 1 and 3, by removing section 2
2. reduce the overall time of the question paper to 2 hours
3. produce new marking instructions for sections 1 and 3 that would adopt the same marking approach as National 5 Drama and Advanced Higher Drama
4. include a set text list for section 1

The aims of the proposed changes are to:

1. support a more consistent marking approach throughout the levels of Drama (National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher) and maintain hierarchies between grades by changing the marking to a band descriptor and more holistic approach
2. improve standardisation through the implementation of a set text list
3. encourage learners to complete section 3 by removing section 2 and reducing the overall question paper

One plan for the set text list was that it will be reviewed and refreshed after approximately four years to ensure it remains relevant and to allow new texts to be introduced. This still allows teachers and lecturers flexibility to choose the text which reflects the needs of their learners. The drafted set text list was based on the most popular texts used in current question papers.

Table 1: Proposed set text list

Title	Author
<i>A Taste of Honey</i>	Shelagh Delaney
<i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i>	Tony Kushner
<i>Antigone</i>	Sophocles
<i>Black Watch</i>	Gregory Burke
<i>Dracula</i>	Liz Lochhead
<i>Lovers</i>	Brian Friel
<i>Macbeth</i>	William Shakespeare
<i>Men Should Weep</i>	Ena Lamont Stewart
<i>The Birthday Party</i>	Harold Pinter
<i>The Crucible</i>	Arthur Miller
<i>The Duchess (of Malfi)</i>	Zinnie Harris
<i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i>	Federico Garcia Lorca
<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	Oscar Wilde
<i>The Pillowman</i>	Martin McDonagh
<i>Things I Know to be True</i>	Andrew Bovell

The purpose of this research is to find out whether the proposed changes to the Higher Drama question paper would be welcomed by stakeholders. The proposed date to make these changes is August 2025. Qualifications Development wants to know:

- ◆ 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

Stakeholders identified for the purposes of this research are educators and learners. Evidence from educators will help SQA to identify problems with the Higher Drama question paper from their perspective, for example which elements are difficult to teach or to help learners prepare for. Evidence from learners will help identify problems that educators may not be able to identify. In addition, both learners and educators can help identify any unintended effects or challenges that may result from changes to the Higher Drama exam.

Educators

This research surveyed educators between 10 March–28 March 2025. A reminder to complete the survey went out on 24 March. The survey comprised 13 questions. 11 questions were closed answer, with 3 of the closed questions having the option for participants to explain their answer in a free-text box. Another 2 questions were open text. Participants were educators who currently or formerly taught Higher Drama in centres where there was uptake for Higher Drama in 2023–24. Educators were recruited through SQA coordinators. In addition, emails for recruitment went out to the following networks:

- ◆ Colleges Scotland
- ◆ College Development Network
- ◆ Education Scotland, Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)
- ◆ Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA)
- ◆ National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
- ◆ Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)

Ineligible participants were routed to the end of the survey. Overall, there were 283 eligible participants.

The educator survey asked participants to directly rate the extent to which they agreed with the proposed changes to the question paper. There were opportunities to show preferences for alternative changes and to highlight problems that SQA had not identified. Links to the 2024 Higher Drama question paper were included in the survey in order for educators to refamiliarise themselves with elements of the question paper. In addition, the educator survey makes reference to the National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher Drama marking criteria. These criteria were linked in the survey questions, in order to help educators assess differences between the marking criteria.

Although all educators were asked questions about the possibility of including a set text in the course, educators who agreed that any section of the question paper should remain without a set text were routed away from the questions about the draft set text list; this was to ensure that results to questions about the draft set text list were not skewed by participants who did not agree with the inclusion of a set text list in the first place.

A number of qualitative questions were included in the educator surveys. These asked participants to expand on their answers. This allowed us to develop a greater depth of understanding of the views of educators. Qualitative questions were coded using an inductive approach; no coding framework was prepared ahead of analysis so that the coding could explore a breadth of responses. Open questions attracted comments from between 20% and 65% of participants.

Learners

Participants were learners who completed the Higher Drama question paper in 2023–24. This research surveyed learners between 10 March–28 March 2025. A reminder to complete the survey went out on 24 March. The survey comprised 16 questions. 13 questions were closed answer, with 4 of the closed questions having the option for participants to explain their answer in a free-text box. Another 3 questions were open text. Learners were recruited via SQA coordinators. Ineligible participants were routed to the end of the survey. Overall there were 257 eligible participants.

The learner survey was designed to be released before the Easter holidays to boost participant numbers, and before the exam diet began to obtain evidence to revise the 2025–26 question paper. As a result of these time constraints, we determined that learners who were preparing for the 2024–25 Higher Drama question paper would be ineligible for this research for practical and ethical reasons. Learners who completed the exam in 2023–24 would already have experience of the question paper and therefore could comment on elements such as marking.

Learners who completed Higher Drama in 2023–24 may have forgotten the question paper by the time the survey was released, as 10 months had passed from their exam. This survey adapted to this limitation by including the text of the 2023–24 question paper as a reminder. In addition, the learner survey makes reference to the National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher Drama marking criteria. These criteria were linked in the survey questions, in order to help learners answer these questions in case they were not familiar with the marking criteria.

Unlike the educator survey which directly described and asked participants about proposed changes to the question paper, the learner survey took a more exploratory approach in order to determine whether learners also identified the same problems to parts of the question paper as SQA. Learners were asked questions about their views on how each section of the question paper reflected their knowledge, skills, and understanding. This would help us to consider if learners felt that any sections in particular had more validity than others. In addition, learners were asked to say whether section 1, 2, or 3 of the question paper should be modified, removed, or stay the same.

An exception to this exploratory approach was questions about changing the marking criteria to be the same as National 5 or Advanced Higher, and the inclusion of the set text. Questions about the marking criteria asked learners to determine whether the National 5 and

Advanced Higher marking criteria were more suitable than the current Higher marking criteria. Questions about the set text asked learners which of the options they had read before; followed by an open-text question asking them which of those they find unsuitable for a set text list.

Although all learners were asked about the inclusion of a set text list, learners who disagreed that any section of the question paper should have a set text list were routed away from the questions about the draft set text list; this was to ensure that results to those questions were not skewed by participants who did not agree with a set text list in the first place.

A number of qualitative questions were included in the learner surveys. These asked participants to expand on their answers. This allowed us to develop a greater depth of understanding of the views of learners. Qualitative questions were coded using an inductive approach; no coding framework was prepared ahead of analysis so that the coding could explore a breadth of responses. Open questions attracted comments from between 11% and 48% of participants.

Limitations

One limitation to the learner and educator surveys is the representativeness of the sample. It is possible that those who chose to take part in this research may not be entirely representative of learners and educators with experience of taking or delivering Higher Drama. This research did not include data on the geography of participants and so the geographical spread of participants or characteristics of centres is unknown.

Open-question qualitative responses may also not be representative of the entire learner or educator sample. This is because not all participants chose to respond to open questions and in general, the strength of participants' views to open questions cannot be quantified.

Another limitation in the educator survey was an error in one question about the marking criteria. The question asked educators, 'SQA could update the marking criteria to use the same approach as National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama where a range of statements are given in relation to mark allocation. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' Two of the tick-options below this question incorrectly said 'Higher' instead of 'Advanced Higher'. This was fixed on 12 March after it was flagged by an educator. However, results from the survey indicate that educators may have known this was a typo and answered the intended question.

Another limitation to the learner survey was that learners' views on the question paper may have been impacted by how well they did in their qualification. This may have also impacted on learners' likelihood of completing the survey, where learners may be interested in the 2023–24 question paper if they felt they did better or worse than they expected.

Although the learner survey adapted to the limitation of learner memory of the 2023–24 question paper by providing the question paper text ahead of questions, this method could not guarantee a good recollection of the question paper. Additionally, where the National 5 and Advanced Higher marking criteria were linked in the questions about marking, there is no way of knowing to what extent learners engaged with this information.

Ethics

This research was approved by SQA's ethical review process and follows SQA's [Code of Research Practice](#). Although some learners volunteered information in open comments that SQA considers to be sensitive topics from a children and young person's perspective, such as exam results, these sensitive topics were not asked about in the survey and were volunteered by participants. This research also demonstrates alignment with the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Act by including the voices of children and young people in SQA qualification development.

Views on changes to sections

Learner views on sections of the question paper

Figure 1: Learner views on how satisfied they were that the question paper allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge by section

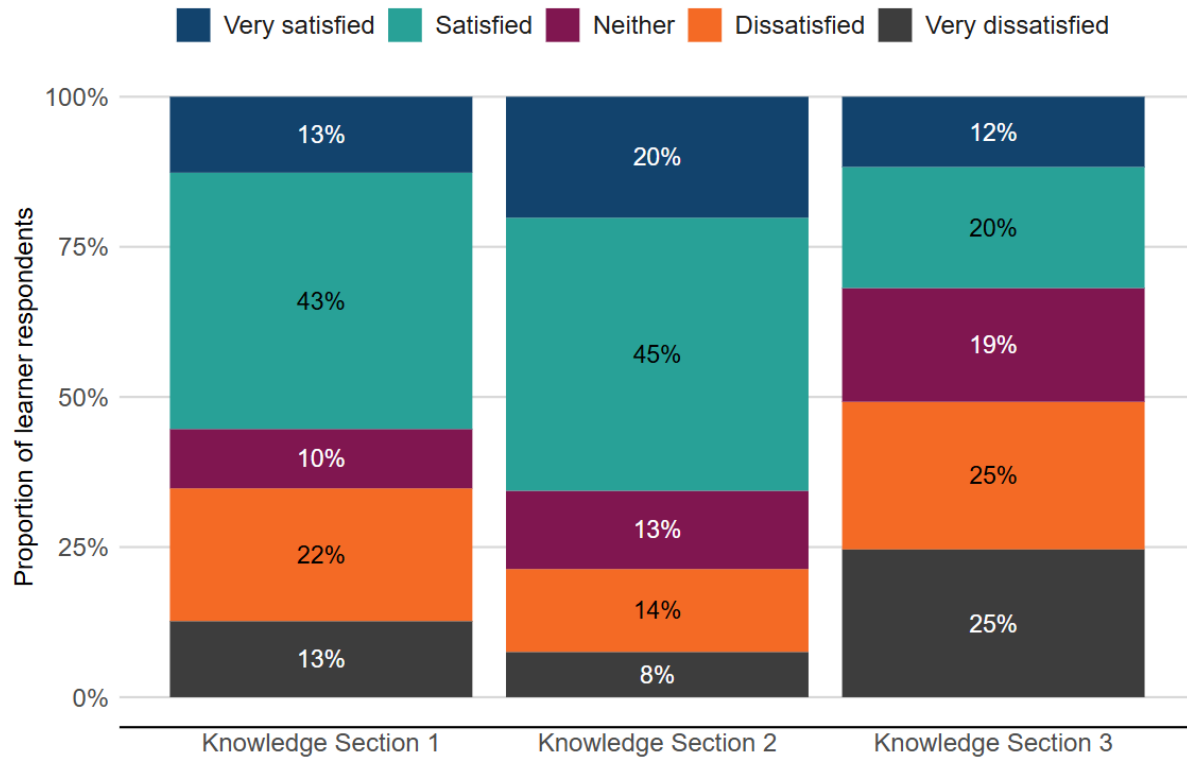


Figure 2: Learner views on how satisfied they were that the question paper allowed them to demonstrate their skills by section

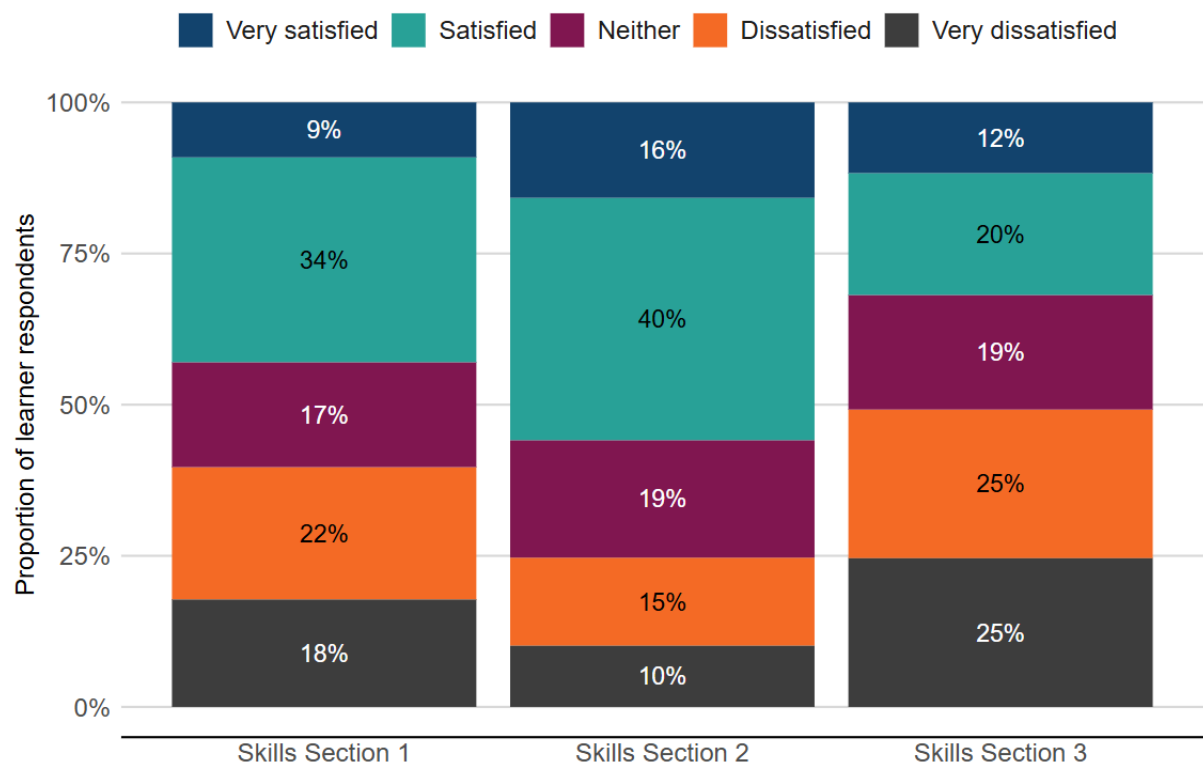
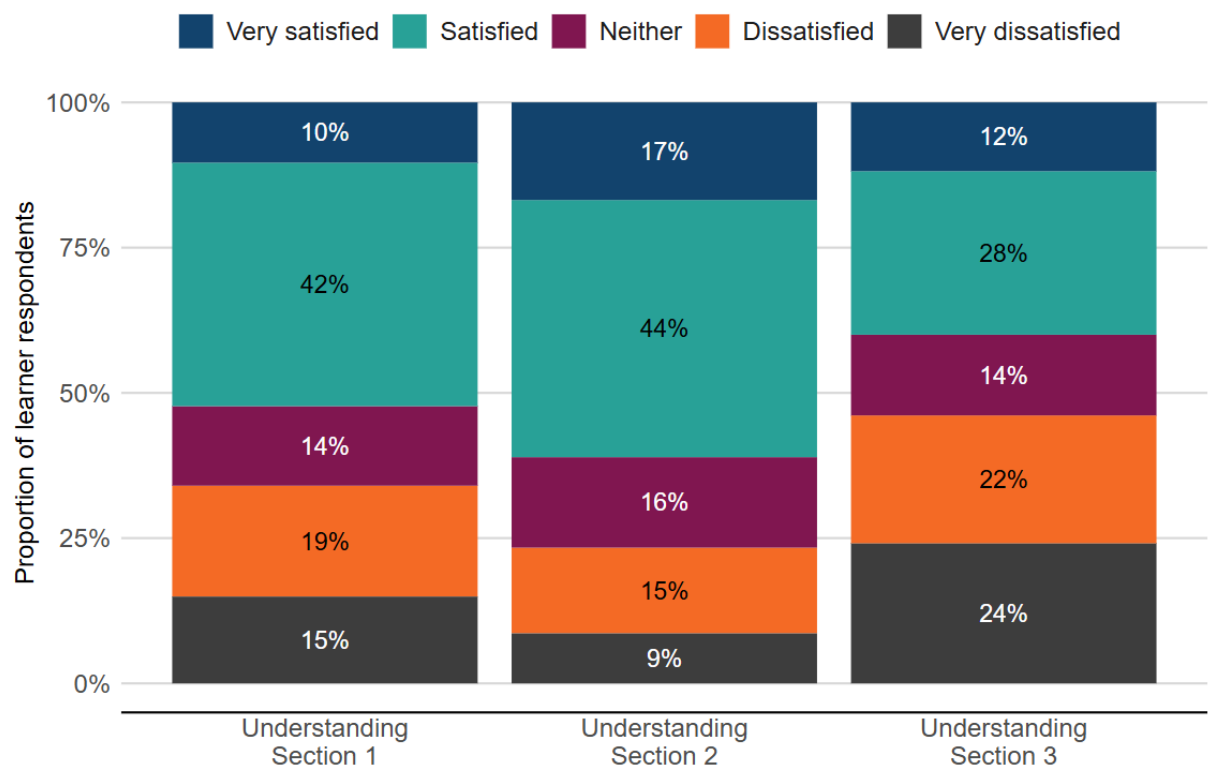


Figure 3: Learner views on how satisfied they were that the question paper allowed them to demonstrate their understanding by section



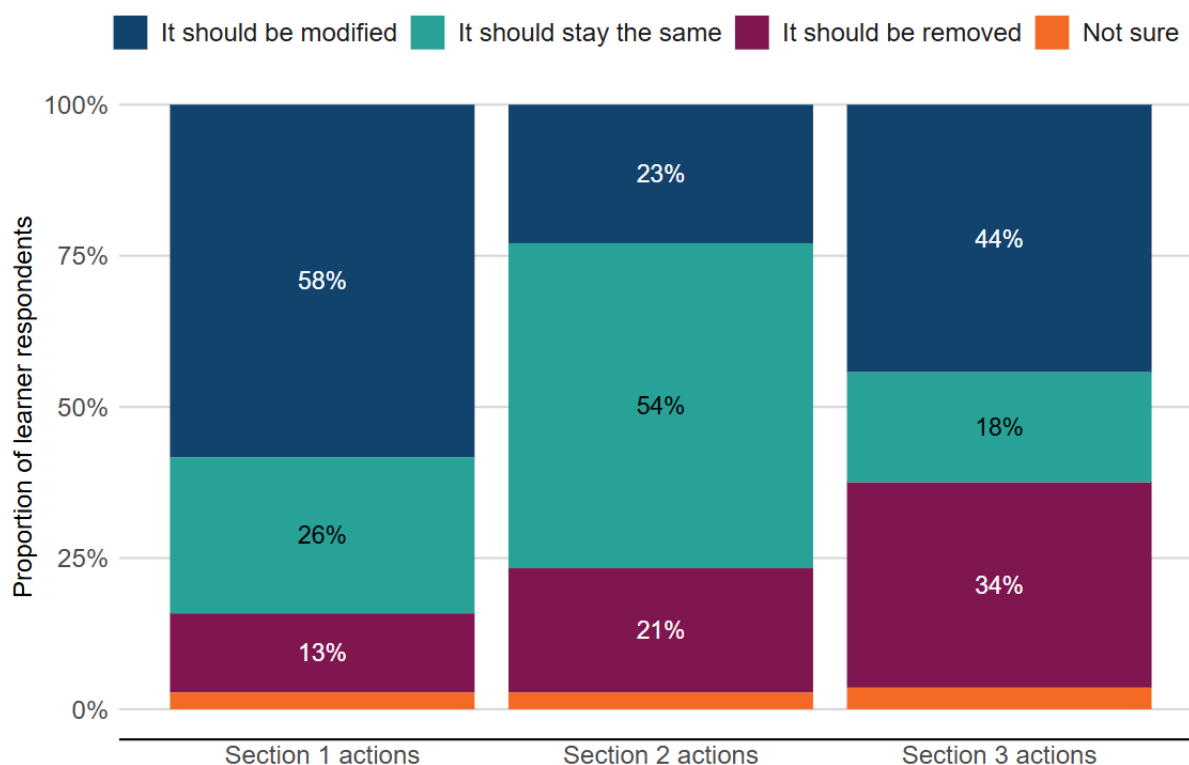
Learners were asked in the survey 'Thinking about your own experience, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you that section [1, 2, and 3] of the question paper allowed you to demonstrate what you learned in Higher Drama?' Between 252 and 254 learners responded, where numbers of participants varied slightly by section.

- ◆ Over half of learners were satisfied that section 1 allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge (56%, Figure 1), and understanding (52%, Figure 3).
- ◆ Learners were split on whether section 1 allowed them to demonstrate their skills, with 40% saying they were dissatisfied and 43% satisfied (Figure 2).
- ◆ Over half of learners were satisfied that section 2 allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge (65%, Figure 1), skills (56%, Figure 2), and understanding (61%, Figure 3).
- ◆ Learners were more dissatisfied than satisfied that section 3 allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge (45% dissatisfied, Figure 1), skills (50% dissatisfied, Figure 2), and understanding (46% dissatisfied, Figure 3).

Learners were the most satisfied with section 2, which had an average of 61% satisfaction across knowledge, skills, and understanding. Learners were the least satisfied with section 3, with an average satisfaction of 37% across knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Across all sections combined, learners were the least satisfied with the ability to demonstrate skills in the question paper (44% satisfied), compared to the demonstration of knowledge (54% satisfied) and understanding (51% satisfied).

Figure 4: Learner views on what they feel should be actioned on each section of the question paper



When asked for their feedback on section actions, 253 learners provided answers (Figure 4). Broadly, the responses indicated some agreement that all three sections of the question

paper should remain, although many learners felt that some changes should be made. Of the three sections, the most learners thought section 3 should be removed.

- ◆ Over half of learners (58%) said that section 1 should be modified. Section 1 was also the section that the fewest learners wanted removed (13%).
- ◆ Over half of learners (54%) wanted section 2 to stay the same. Section 2 was the only section where a majority of learners wanted it to stay the same.
- ◆ Section 3 was the section that the most learners wanted removed (34%); however, a majority of learners still wanted it modified or unchanged (62%).

Overall, across all sections of the question paper, a minority of learners wanted a section to be removed; over 60% of learners wanted every section to remain, and be modified or unchanged.

Comments on section 1

Although half of participants said they were satisfied with section 1, the majority of comments responding to 'Is there anything you would like to add about your answer?' expressed problems with this section (82 out of 94 learners who left comments). Common themes were:

- ◆ There are issues with asking for exact quotes or marking quotes.
- ◆ The essay structure, writing style and writing amount are too demanding and unnecessary for Higher Drama.
- ◆ There is not enough time to complete the question paper.
- ◆ There are problems with the marking.
- ◆ There are progression issues between the question paper and National 5 Drama, Higher prelims, Advanced Higher, and university.
- ◆ It is difficult to understand how to gain marks for the question paper, and how to approach the essay structure.

One learner expressed a number of common themes through one comment:

Section one not only puts more emphasis on remembering points as opposed to using the skills you have learned throughout the course but is also incredibly unnecessary considering section 3 is also a 20 mark essay. This combined with section 2 makes it so most people will not have enough time to finish the paper to the best of their abilities and results in them having to regurgitate as much knowledge and quotes as possible in the time provided as opposed to having the time to think about the question resulting in many candidates not reading it correctly. This can clearly be seen in the 2024 paper where many candidates who picked question 1 did not use rehearsal techniques like the question says, a simple mistake that could cost up to 10 marks. I believe that section 1 goes against any form of understanding of the course in favour of remembering key points and knowledge that may be useful in this essay but is useless in any other areas of the course

Problems with progression

A number of learners remarked that the Higher question paper had progression problems; in particular, that the question paper was 'too big of a jump' between National 5 and Higher:

There is very limited link to the National 5 and Advanced Higher course. The terminology for dramatic techniques are consistent throughout the courses, but otherwise the three courses are not linked at all.

It's quite a big jump from National 5 because we don't study any plays at National 5. It makes no sense to base the assessment solely on studied pieces. They should cover a piece in National 5 in less detail so people don't have the shock of basically a whole different course when transitioning from National 5 to Higher.

The written paper requires such a large amount of writing in 2.5 hours. And only for 40%!!! I had to type the exam just to even finish it on time. It was too big of a jump from National 5, Advanced Higher feels so much better in comparison.

One learner suggested that there may be progression problems between assessments in Higher and university:

Under timed conditions, the structure required to gain marks is extremely challenging – particularly for the fact that Drama is not considered a literary subject for a large amount of universities.

Another learner mentioned how they had achieved full marks for their prelim in Higher, but 'failed' the written element of the exam.

Positive comments about section 1

Although comments about section 1 were mainly focused on problems, a few learners made positive comments, while still offering some suggestions for change:

Section one was good as you could analyse a play you had studied in depth, however you had to write a lot to get each mark and it seemed like you had to repeat yourself multiple times in order to secure your marks.

Section one seems similar to the English exam and isn't too hard to understand in terms of how to answer and structure etc.

Questions are fair and excellent at testing candidate's knowledge and understanding a written play, only small complaint is that marking can often be quite harsh (particularly with the development points).

Section 1 modifications

Some learners suggested modifications to improve this section of the question paper, including:

- ◆ a more open or less demanding essay structure
- ◆ shorter essays
- ◆ more focus on practical elements than essay questions
- ◆ holistic marking, more similar to English
- ◆ a clearer marking structure or updated marking materials
- ◆ the ability to answer for two positions (actor, director, or designer) other than just one
- ◆ having 4 questions to choose from

The structure of the essay is incredibly difficult to understand, hence having to write an essay about different factors of the play under pressure with other difficult sections to complete just doesn't help at all. I would recommend either shortening the essay, or change the structure of it, or allow students to have their own structure but as long as they're doing it correctly (the points and evaluation/analysis of them).

The questions are very difficult as they are very specific so it can be difficult to fully fit it to each text. I think there should be 4 questions to choose from that you can answer from the perspective of the director/actor/designer.

I do not feel that section 1 properly demonstrates the skills required in the field of acting and stage production.

I liked the idea of section 1 and learning about the play, however I felt the way you had to answer the question to get the mark was always strange. It should be clearer what a student should have to do or even have the entire essay marked holistically like the Higher English critical essay

Comments on section 2

74 learners left comments responding to 'Is there anything you would like to add about your answer?' for section 2. The comments were mixed; there were more positive or neutral comments about section 2 compared to sections 1 and 3, which were mostly negative. In addition, while most themes about sections 1 and 3 were consistent, there was a wider range of themes about section 2, some of which contradicted each other, reflecting more variation in views. Common themes:

- ◆ It is a good measure of knowledge, skills, understanding, as well as creativity.
- ◆ It is easy to revise for and understand how to answer.
- ◆ It ensures extra marks.
- ◆ The section progresses well from National 5.
- ◆ There are issues with asking for exact quotes.
- ◆ There is not enough time to complete the question paper.
- ◆ There are problems with the marking.
- ◆ It is difficult to understand how to gain marks for the question paper, and how to approach the structure.
- ◆ It is repetitive in relation to section 1.
- ◆ It is a waste of time.
- ◆ It is not challenging enough.
- ◆ It is not a good demonstration of knowledge, understanding or skills.
- ◆ Educators are not prioritising teaching how to do this section.

Progression from National 5

There were about as many positive themes as negative themes in relation to section 2; some positive themes contradicted some negative themes, or were more prevalent than negative themes. The most common positive theme, however, was that it is good progression from National 5. Although a couple of learners commented that section 2 was too similar to the National 5 question paper, more learners saw this as a positive attribute:

This section was very similar to National 5 which meant marks were easier to secure, especially as you knew the play in a lot of depth.

Section two is quite nice in the sense it's similar to National 5, however I think [the question paper] should be modified so that you don't depend on the A marks to get the follow on, it puts pupils at a disadvantage as they lose following marks as well. I'm not sure why drama chose to mark like this, I did higher physics and we used to get follow on marks there so I don't see why drama doesn't

Repetition with section 1

Although no single theme had an overwhelming number of comments, the most common negative theme was that section 2 is repetitive. Some learners felt that they had already covered everything in section 1, especially since both sections use the same text:

Section 2 is very repetitive and similar to section 1 and therefore not challenging new skills or knowledge. It's a bit of a waste of time.

It's unnecessary, candidates have already provided extensive knowledge on the play in section 1.

Marks for section 2

In addition, some learners' views about section 2 were impacted by how it allows them to progress in the course, or the number of marks awarded for this section:

Again, it was difficult for me to answer this section outside of a small amount of knowledge I retained from National 5. I don't think these questions are bad by any means, but their relevance towards a career in practical acting does not coincide with these questions, since we aren't even answering from an actors' perspective.

Because Section Two awards a comparatively small number of marks, my teacher spent a very small amount of time teaching it. This meant that my understanding of what examiners were looking for was very limited compared to the other two sections.

Section 2 modifications

Suggested changes for section 2 were:

- ◆ The text used for section 2 should be different from section 1.
- ◆ Section 2 should be merged into section 1.
- ◆ Section 2 should be longer, and more marks awarded.
- ◆ The focus of the questions should be more on performance, the play, and expression.
- ◆ The number of 'moments talked about' should be changed.

There should be more questions added in this section, it should be a place where pupils can easily get marks

I feel as if the paper as a whole could be improved if it was split into two papers, paper one containing section 1 and 2 (with section 2 being expanded into 20 marks), and paper 2 containing section 3. Ideally the papers would have a break in-between

them such as with Higher History and Higher English. This would allow the candidate's knowledge to be tested further than was previously allowed.

I believe that section 2 shouldn't be on the same text you read in class, whether its changed to be about the plays you had performed or one that you've made up or even on a play you've seen, I don't think it should be the same.

Comments on section 3

Comments responding to 'Is there anything you would like to add about your answer?' expressed problems with this section. Overall, 88 learners left comments. Some learners left positive comments; however as indicated in the survey, there were more problems or suggestions for change. A number of learners felt the same about section 3 as they did in previous sections, reporting similar problems to section 1; similarities were:

- ◆ The essay structure, writing style and writing amount are too demanding and unnecessary for Higher Drama.
- ◆ There is not enough time to complete the question paper.
- ◆ There are problems with the marking.
- ◆ There are progression issues between the question paper and Higher prelims.
- ◆ It is difficult to understand how to gain marks for the question paper, and how to approach the essay structure.

Unique problems mentioned about section 3 were:

- ◆ There is inconsistency in how section 3 is taught by educators.
- ◆ There are problems with using live versus recorded plays.
- ◆ There is a lack of validity.

Difficulty of essay structure

The majority of comments were about the level of difficulty of the essay structure, writing style, and the amount of writing:

2 essays is a lot in any context but when applying it to two completely differing plays while following different structures for marks is quite difficult.

The topic of what you're writing about in section 3 and discussing live production is important however having it done in an essay format with 6 minutes a paragraph is utterly pointless. The whole point in education is to learn and understand it is not a memory test under a very small amount of time. This paper should be changed into questions where you can be more specific about what you are talking about without stressing and going on a long ramble because you don't have enough time. I also feel there should be a break in between section 1 and 3 as it is a very different topic, just as you do in English, history or modern studies a break should be allowed between. Sitting for 2 and a half or 3 hours for those who get extra time is ridiculous.

I don't get how section three effectively sees how good you are at drama, it's just memorising an essay with minimal description of drama concepts, I don't see how this hasn't been raised as an issue previously.

Live performances

Some learners described the strength of live plays or advocated for live plays being a mandatory part of section 3:

It was really good to go to the theatre and see a play with the whole class and teachers, it created a really good space where we could also help each other with our understanding. Provides a better transition into Advanced Higher.

I think that it was good that we actually got to watch something live as it helped me to visualised what was happening and what I was actually writing about at some points.

However other learners commented that live plays are unfair:

I am advocating that the essay be removed from an expressive art form exam. Higher Drama's section three has multiple flaws, which make it unfair to other pupils. You are to write an essay on either a live or recorded performance. This provides a disadvantage to those who have seen a live performance as they cannot rewatch it to further analyse the performance. Thus, providing an unfair advantage to those whose teachers have picked a recorded performance.

I found Section 3 to be much more difficult than Section 1. It's difficult to complete Section 3 when you have only seen a production once. I struggled recalling design and acting concepts that I'd seen in a play that I had went to see 5-6 months prior. There's very little the SQA can do to stop a candidate from lying and making up aspects of the production in the exam hall on the day. I fabricated the entirety of the production I saw myself, and so it just made this section feel a little redundant. There is never enough time to finish Section 3, unless you start with it, in which case there won't be enough time to finish Section 1. The solution would be to remove Section 2, and even still there isn't much time. In my opinion, Section 3 should perhaps be changed to be more like Section 2, and instead of asking candidates to describe a production they have seen, since the SQA has no way of telling if they have made it up anyway, the paper should ask candidates to detail how they would put on a hypothetical production of said play. It is important that young people are taken to the theatre as it helps improve their engagement with the subject, but not essential. Candidates would still be given equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of the play and they would be answering using the same concepts anyway.

Positive comments about section 3

Despite survey results showing that section 3 was the section where the most learners were in favour of removing, some learners did mention positives about section 3. However it is worth noting that these positive comments did not outweigh negative comments about the section, and sometimes contradicted negative comments:

- ◆ Section 3 is straightforward and it is easy to understand how to get marks in this section.
- ◆ It is a good demonstration of knowledge, skills, and understanding.
- ◆ Completing section 3 requires new skills, and gives learners a sense of accomplishment.
- ◆ Section 3 benefitted learners who went on to Advanced Higher Drama.

I feel this section was the most beneficial for sitting Advanced Higher drama. I feel I still use my knowledge learned here.

Due to the first two sections taking so long to do, this third section rarely gets justice for its nod to the drama course. I feel it is actually the closest and most useful section if you actually like drama (the first section feels like English) yet no one has time to do it in the exam, even leaving it out entirely to make sure the first two sections are good.

Whilst I believe that section 3 suffers from some of the same problems mentioned in section 1, mainly having to cram an arguably unreasonable amount of moments in your head to have enough material to cover all 10 paragraphs of the essay, I feel as if section 3 is better at showing an understanding of the course. Having to write half the essay on acting and half on design is a much better way of going around this issue as it requires candidates to convey their understanding in a variety of different ways. I also feel as though the questions are more broad, this combined with just having to remember moments of the play as opposed to exact quotes means there is a bit more of an emphasis on learning the knowledge provided in the course. Whilst you could argue that writing a full section 3 essay takes up a lot of the time you are provided with in the exam I believe that if section 1 were to be taken out this would be a lot less of a problem.

Section 3 modifications

Learners suggested several areas where section 3 could be improved or modified. Suggestions were:

- ◆ Structure section 3 more like section 1.
- ◆ Section 3 should be shorter.
- ◆ Section 2 should be about performance instead of section 3.
- ◆ Section 3 or section 1 should be removed.
- ◆ It should incorporate script writing.
- ◆ It should remain broad.
- ◆ Questions should be more specific.
- ◆ It should include resources such as pictures of scenes of performances.
- ◆ There should be marking modifications.
- ◆ Make it easier.
- ◆ Marking should take a holistic approach.

It should again be a shorter essay or another set of questions.

Again, this is too long. Having to make ten points about a few key scenes just doesn't seem all that plausible, and leads to lower quality work. It also means that it's very difficult not to repeat yourself for acting/directing/set design skills.

The marking scheme MUST be revisited as it is extremely unfair because if you do not gain the first mark, then you miss out on the next 3. This needs to be marked more holistically and on the understanding of each individual rather than just a test of memory.

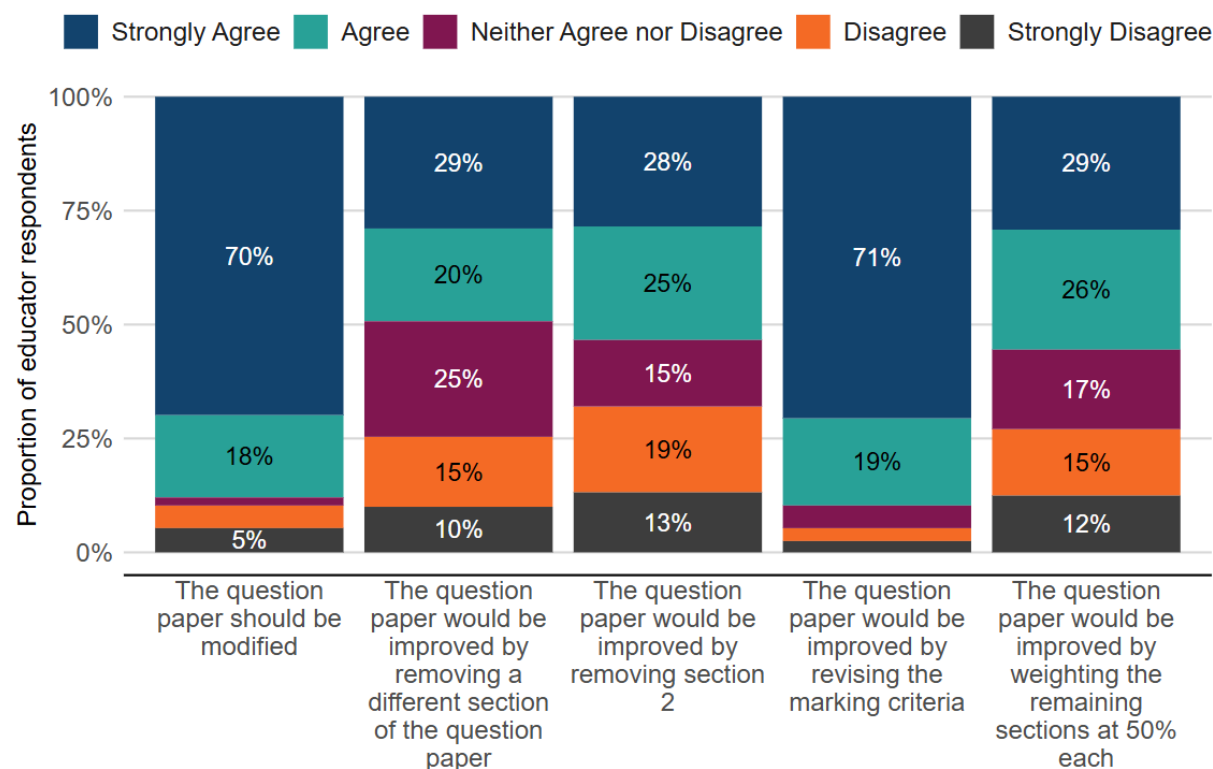
If we didn't have section 3 we could focus more on section 1 and be more in depth about it.

Educator views on proposed changes

Levels of agreement

Proposed changes to the question paper

Figure 5: Educator views on proposed changes to the question paper



Participants were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with several proposed changes to the question paper; 282 provided an answer. When presented with options of potential changes to the question paper, participants presented a range of views.

- ◆ Most of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that that the question paper would be improved by revising the marking criteria (90%) and that the question paper should be modified (88%).
- ◆ More than half of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the question paper would be improved by weighting the remaining sections at 50% each (55%).
- ◆ A little over half of participants thought that the question paper would be improved by removing section 2 (53%).
- ◆ Nearly half of participants agreed with the statement that the question paper would be improved by removing a different section of the question paper (49%).

The question had an open-text box for educators to comment on their answers; 171 educators left comments. Comments about sections of the question paper, including which should be removed were varied. Comments about revising the sections were:

Section 1

- ◆ Change the marking criteria.
- ◆ Provide a resource sheet for learners (open-book).

- ◆ Generally revise section 1.
- ◆ Remove section 1.

Section 2

- ◆ Make section 2 larger.
- ◆ Improve the marking criteria.
- ◆ Remove section 2.

Section 3

- ◆ Reduce section 3.
- ◆ Address the accessibility of live theatre.
- ◆ Generally revise section 3.
- ◆ Remove section 3.

Problems with removing any section

Further comments from educators when they were asked to elaborate on their answers showed why only around half of them agreed with removing a section, including section 2 — some educators suggested splitting the question paper into two parts, rather than removing any one section.

In addition, removing a section of the question paper hinges on the following issues:

- ◆ whether removing a section of the question paper addresses other issues with the question paper, such as marking and difficulty
- ◆ whether the time of the exam will stay 2.5 hours, with educators preferring a longer exam if a section were to be removed due to the number of learners struggling to finish the existing question paper
- ◆ whether removing a section of the question paper will address the lack of consistency between Drama levels, particularly National 5
- ◆ whether removing a section of the question paper will address issues of consistency with other arts or practical subjects

Preferences for keeping section 2

Some comments about section 2 supported its removal. Educators suggested removing section 2 because it ‘adds little value’ or is ‘superfluous’, particularly in its connection to section 1. Other comments supporting the removal of section 2 suggested problems such as teaching section 2, and levels of demand:

The implementation of the Second Section was done very poorly and the inability to produce exemplar answers completely undermined the teachers’ confidence in being able to deliver it.

I believe the gap from National 5 to Higher question papers is vast. It is evident through the national average marks being a fail that the course is too demanding on pupils. I think either removing section 2 or changing the paper entirely to be more in line with National 5 would have a positive impact on our learners.

However, there were more comments asking for section 2 to be kept, modified, or expanded instead of removed. This is in part due to the concern educators raised about Higher Drama

and consistency between Drama levels, as well as comparing Higher Drama to other arts courses; some educators expressed that section 2 is the most accessible to learners arriving from National 5, and the most consistent with how other arts or practical subjects are assessed:

Section 3 needs to be revised. A performance analysis is difficult enough without the amount of information pupils need to access marks. It is nationally very poorly completed. Higher drama is so vastly different from National 5, more than any other expressive art which is a huge disadvantage to our candidates. Section 2 is the most like National 5 QP allowing candidates to build confidence by accessing marks.

I think it's telling that there's very few full mark or close to full mark essay example on the sqa secure site. I can't help but feel the essays are marked unnecessarily harshly as a way of legitimising the subject. I actually think removing one essay and putting more weighting on the P4P should be considered – treat it more like a portfolio (much like Art).

Pupils are asked in 2.5hrs to complete 1 5 paragraph essay, 3 extended questions and 1 10 paragraph essay. This is a massive undertaking in one sitting never mind in just 2.5hrs. For section 3 pupils are required to write a great deal of content/ description to receive any marks. English doesn't even ask them to do this much in one sitting.

There either has to be a split to two papers: paper 1 section 1 & 2 then Paper 2 section 3. I would like to see section 3 as extended response questions rather than the essay format. We do not do essay based work at any other point so we are teaching pupils brand new skills in less than a year and hoping they just get it.

Other participants suggested that section 2 should remain or be expanded, because it is the only section where learners who struggle with essay writing skills can achieve marks.

I feel that section 2 is the section which is most accessible so removing it would not be a positive as far as I can see. Could section 3 be condensed into section 2 so short questions on the performance analysis instead of two essays which is far too much.

Some candidates find shorter questions more accessible. Could it be considered to extend the shorter question in section 2 and do away with the essay? One long message and a larger number of short questions would benefit more pupils.

I think if we reinvent section 1 to become more like section 2 questions, it would allow the students to only learn one essay formula for section 3. This would still give set text an importance but be more achievable and relevant to perhaps prior National 5 knowledge. It could help to bridge the two courses together better.

Removing or revising section 1 or section 3

In addition, the majority of the comments from educators were concerned with revising or removing section 1 or section 3, identifying these sections as the main problem of the question paper:

Section 2 is the least of the issue - you need to revise Section 1 and Section 3 as a matter of priority.

I think the question paper is too much of a jump from NATIONAL 5 and it lacks relevance to the course itself. While I think there is value in the ability to analyse a dramatic text (text in context) and it helps show depth of learning I wonder about the relevance of the performance analysis. I think Section 1 could do with some modifications to assist with teaching and learning (for example the set text list that has been suggested), I think Section 2 could be modified slightly to form a better bridge between National 5 & higher (perhaps also moving to make section 1). I think Section 3 needs an overhaul & rethink. It lacks relevance and there is huge variety across Scotland in regards to which performances are selected and those from rural schools struggle to access top quality performances – especially in the current economic climate. It is difficult to teach, and to study and I think the SQA need to rethink this to offer candidates the best possible change of success.

Educators who suggested removing section 1 or 3 raised similar problems about these sections. Overall, the most prevalent problem raised was that there is too much essay writing in the question paper. Reasons for removing section 1 or 3 were:

- ◆ The question paper should only have one essay.
- ◆ The essays are too difficult.
- ◆ The essay marking is too punitive.
- ◆ Memorising quotes in section 1 is too difficult.
- ◆ Sections 1 and 3 are testing the same analytical skills.
- ◆ Section 3 should be removed because it is the section learners struggle with the most.

Although more comments suggested removing section 3 than section 1, some educators did stress the value of going to see live theatre. However, others raised the issue of accessibility seeing a performance:

Section three has many inherent problems. Ability to get to theatre and then get copy of the show or live stream. Some schools manage this at a distinct advantage to schools that don't. The type and style of show seen can make the unseen question either easier or unfairly difficult depending on both question and show. Maybe a set show sent to schools would solve this.

Alternative suggestions

One caveat educators raised to removing section 2 was the time of the exam. Although the survey did not ask educators about increasing or decreasing the time of the question paper, a number of comments suggested keeping the same 2.5 hour exam time while decreasing the content of the question paper. Educators stressed in comments that there is not enough time to complete the question paper as is, and so reducing the time of the question paper along with reducing the content would not solve the problem of learners not having enough time:

Keep time of the exam the same and remove section 2 will allow more pupils to access the marks rather than running out of time.

The only way this would work and be fair is if section 2 is removed but the 2 hours 30 minutes remains.

Would the timing for paper remain the same? I think it is important that it does. Giving candidates more opportunity for success.

Some educators suggested that if a decision has been made to remove section 1 or 2, these sections could be changed to:

- ◆ an assignment
- ◆ a folio or portfolio
- ◆ bringing back dramatic commentary
- ◆ short performance analysis

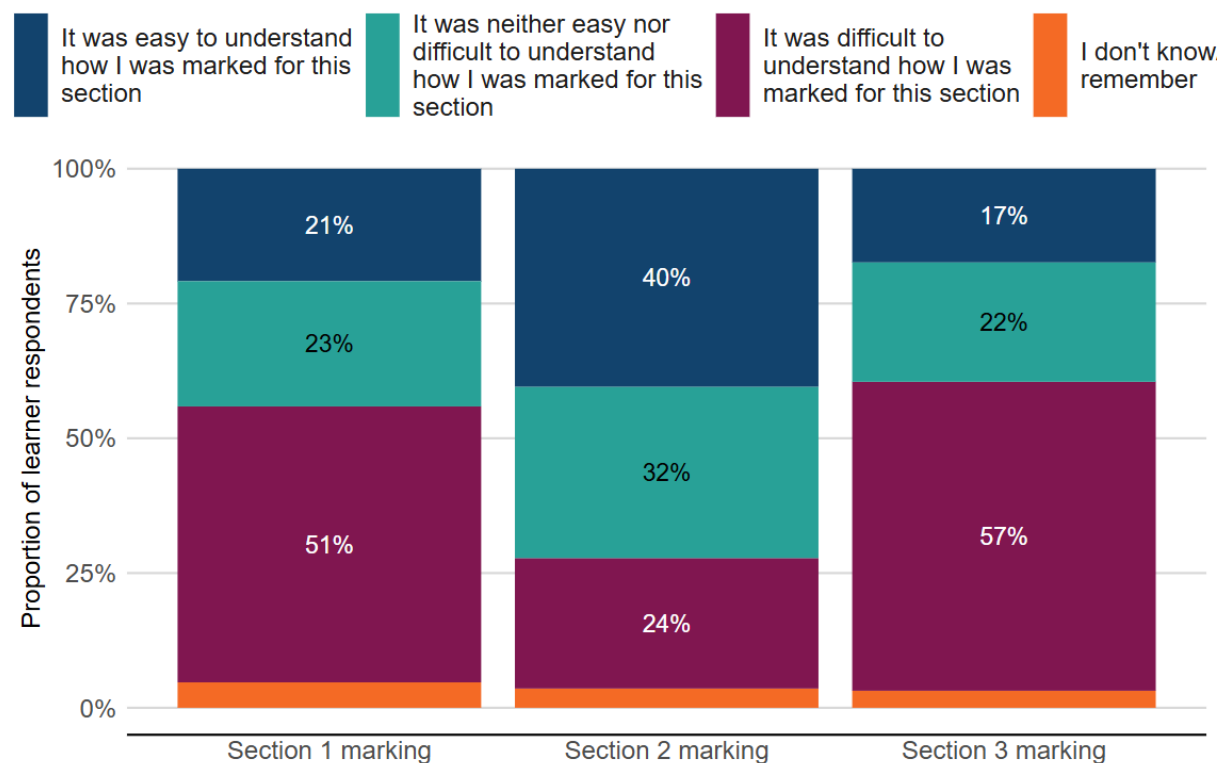
Other suggestions from educators in open comments were:

- ◆ increasing the weighting of the practical element
- ◆ providing Understanding Standards events and ensuring clearer and more consistent resources and materials on the marking criteria and marking standards

Views on updating the marking criteria

Learner views on National 5 and Higher marking criteria

Figure 6: Learner views on the marking by sections of the question paper



Learners were asked 'How easy or difficult was it to understand how you were marked for section [1, 2, and 3]?' (Figure 6) Between 252 and 254 learners responded.

- ◆ Section 2 was the section that the most learners found the marking easy to understand (40%).
- ◆ Half of learners responded that section 1 marking was difficult to understand (51%).
- ◆ Over half of learners responded that section 3 marking was difficult to understand (57%).
- ◆ Less than 5% of learners responded that they didn't know or remember.

Sections 1 and 3 were similar in terms of ease or difficulty understanding the marking. This is likely because both sections are long-form essays, and therefore have similar marking schemes. This was reflected in the comments on the marking for these sections.

Section 1 marking

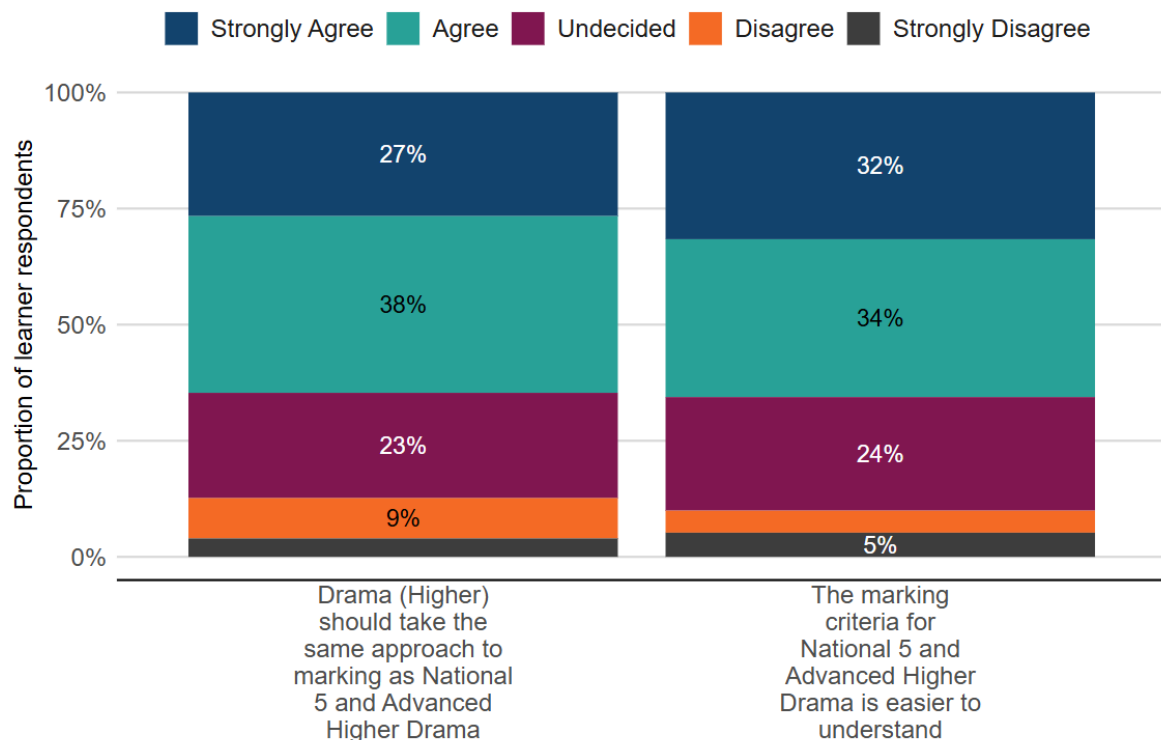
The most common problem expressed in comments about section 1 was the marking. Participants commented that the marking was difficult to understand from a learner and educator perspective; the marking is too harsh; and that a revised or clearer marking scheme would be preferable. Comments about the marking being too harsh were related to the 'unfair' and 'restrictive' nature of the marking system, the difficulty of the marking criteria, and the amount of marks available seeming disproportionate to the amount of work:

The marking system was extremely unfair, since if you lose one mark, you lose all the others.

Questions are fair and excellent at testing candidate's knowledge and understanding a written play, only small complaint is that marking can often be quite harsh (particularly with the development points).

It's a fair type of question however I'm not sure how 'fair' the marking for this question is. I found a lot of our concepts had to be justified to an extremely large extent to remotely even think about getting one mark, let alone 2. I found that because of the formulaic mark scheme it didn't allow an amazing flow of my argument and knowledge as well as my skills and resulted in a formulaic response. This formulaic mark scheme is both good to make it easier to understand yet still was not remotely clear to me.

Figure 7: Learner views on whether to make the Higher question paper marking criteria similar to National 5 or Advanced Higher



Learners were asked 'With support for learners and educators, SQA could update the current marking criteria for Higher Drama to use the same marking as National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' (Figure 7) 252 learners responded.

- ◆ Nearly two thirds of learners agreed that Higher Drama should take the same marking approach as National 5 and Advanced Higher (65%).
- ◆ Two thirds of learners agreed that the marking criteria for National 5 and Advanced Higher were easier to understand (66%).

Learners were asked in an open question if there were any problems with the National 5 and Advanced Higher marking criteria that SQA should know about. Fewer learners (50) left comments on this compared to other open-ended questions. Some positive answers indicated that learners were answering based more on their overall feeling about National 5 or Advanced Higher, rather than the marking criteria specifically. It is worth noting that learners surveyed have likely not taken National 5 courses for two years; although the National 5 marking criteria was provided in the survey, it is unclear how much learners engaged with this:

Whilst I have not taken the Advanced Higher Drama course, I did feel as if the National 5 course is easier to understand and the changes made in higher from National 5 is an unreasonable jump. Higher should be changed to at the very least mimic National 5 even slightly.

Problems with National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria

Few learners raised direct problems with either the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria. One learner suggested that National 5 marking criteria should actually be the same as Higher, not the other way around. Some learners also suggested that the Advanced Higher marking criteria is vague or hard to understand:

Advanced Higher marking is harder to understand than National 5 marking.

The Advanced Higher marking is very vague and lacks specificity it should be more numerical like modern studies and less 'overall'.

Consistency between Drama levels

A number of learner comments expressed the importance of consistency between the three Drama levels. However, learners expressed different views on whether it would be more beneficial to modify National 5 to prepare learners better for Higher, or, to modify Higher to be more in line with National 5 or Advanced Higher:

There is no way that the sections of the courses are transferable as they are in many completely different structures and ways of learning, where they are not transferable year on year.

There is absolutely no skill learned at National 5 that you need at higher - it is a complete different course. This happens again with the shift from higher to Advanced Higher. Why are these three courses all completely different from one another? For example, if National 5's could get even just one small/short play they have to perform as part of their exam then that would help with the continuation into Higher. I would highly suggest altering the structure of these courses as I have found that drama has the weakest application to later courses/real life compared to other subjects. . .

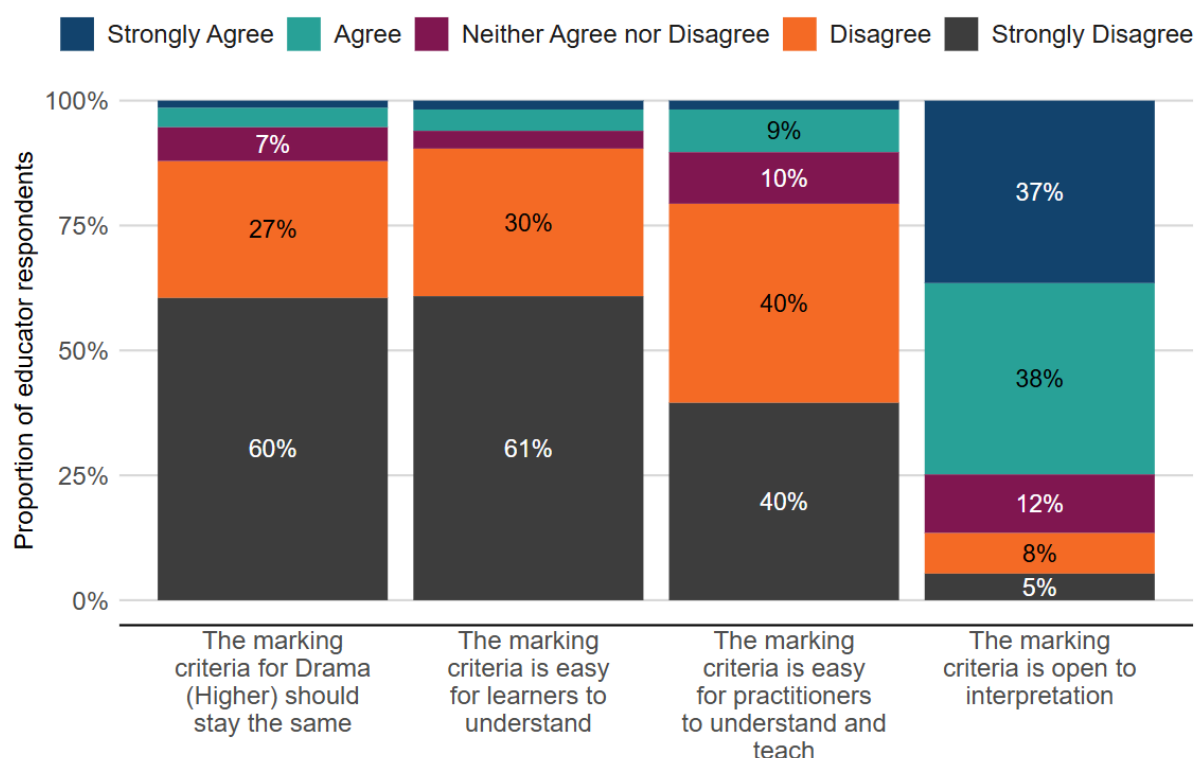
None of the question papers are the same. National 5 and Higher and Advanced Higher papers show no relevance to each other and do not prepare you for the steps needed for the following year. Possibly introducing a slight analysis of a text you've read or watched would be useful in National 5 in order to prepare you for Higher and Advanced Higher Drama.

It is really strange how there are essentially no similarities between National 5 and Advanced Higher written work. The only similarity they have is practical. I really enjoyed the National 5 drama exam where you'd come up with a play.

Educator views on National 5 and Higher marking criteria

Current marking criteria

Figure 8: Educator views on the current marking criteria



When asked for their feedback on the current marking criteria, 282 educators provided answers. Broadly, the responses indicated a high level of dissatisfaction with the current marking criteria (Figure 8).

- ◆ Most participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the marking criteria is easy to understand for learners (91%).
- ◆ Most participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the marking criteria should stay the same (87%).
- ◆ Most participants disagreed or strongly disagreed that the marking criteria is easy for educators to understand and teach (80%).
- ◆ There was a high level of agreement with the statement that the marking criteria is open to interpretation (75%).

Problems with the current marking criteria

Although educators were not asked directly to comment on changes to the marking criteria, it was a consistent theme in comments about 'other changes'. Educators commented on the harshness of the marking, for example, learners need to memorise direct quotations and essay structures to get marks:

Allowing pupils to get concept marks if textual analysis marks are not given. Really creative ideas not awarded marks because of slightly wrong quote etc.

There needs to be a rethink regarding the marking scheme and perhaps question style of the paper. Our kids (at my school, and nationally) are equally struggling to access – and understand – the essay structure, and accessing the marks that are needed to pass the paper.

The removal of the A mark credit needs to be revised. Candidates should be able to still access A1, B and B1 even if they have not accessed the A.

Other educators commented on the subjectivity of the marking.

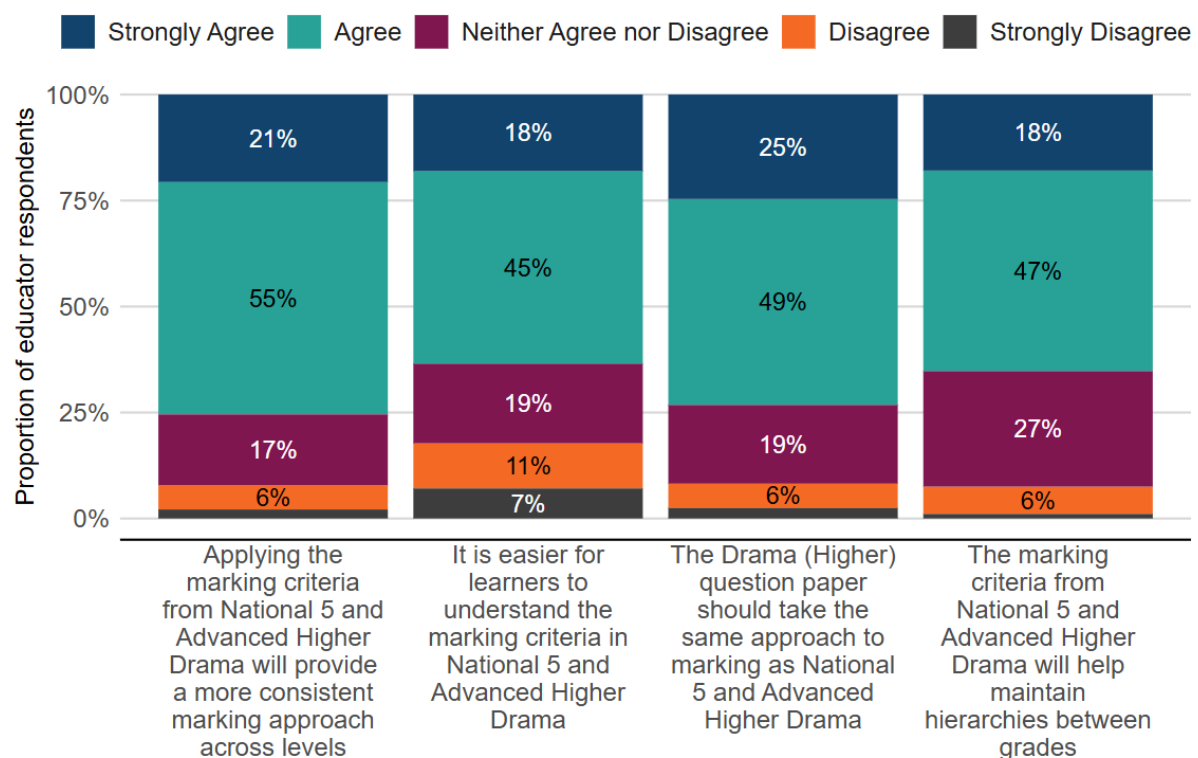
Make the marking criteria more straightforward and less open to interpretation.

In addition, educators also stressed the importance of better communications on the marking and clearer marking schemes.

Having clearer marking schemes with exemplars on Understanding Standards for Section 1 and 3. Potentially removing one of the essay sections, or increasing the time limit for the exam. Having a section with a more direct link to the National 5 exam, as the jump between the two levels is far too large for a number of pupils to attain well at Higher level.

Revising the marking criteria

Figure 9: Educator views on the updating the marking criteria



When asked for their feedback on the current marking criteria, 282 educators provided answers. Broadly, the responses indicated a high level of agreement that applying the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria would be an improvement (Figure 9).

- ◆ Nearly three quarters of participants (74%) agreed that Higher Drama should take the same approach to marking as National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama.
- ◆ Over three quarters of participants (76%) agreed that utilising marking criteria from National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama would provide a more consistent approach to marking across the levels.
- ◆ Over three fifths of participants (63%) agreed or strongly agreed that 'it is easier for learners to understand the marking criteria in National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama'.
- ◆ Over three fifths of participants (64%) agreed 'the marking criteria from National 5 and Advanced Higher Drama will help maintain hierarchies between grades'.

Educators were also asked, 'Are there any problems with the marking criteria for the Drama National 5 and Advanced Higher that we should take into consideration?' 92 participants (33%) left additional comments, indicating that the majority of participants feel there are no problems with the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria.

Preferences for National 5 or Advanced Higher marking

A number of educators noted that the National 5 and Advanced Higher marking criteria are not actually the same, or interchangeable, suggesting one is preferable over another:

Advanced Higher is a better model than National 5 which at times can be vague (full answer / good answer / limited answer). Statements would need to be very clear as to what is required to ensure there is no misunderstanding within the profession.

I feel the marking criteria for National 5 is clear and mostly consistent. However due to the holistic nature of Advanced Higher this can be difficult to decipher especially as a teacher teaching the material for the first time. I think tougher guidelines on what each section looks like in terms [of] strong, weak etc.

I feel these questions contradict each other as National 5 marking instructions are different to Advanced Higher Marking instructions. I feel that Advanced Higher marking for dissertation is still very ambiguous and, when speaking to a lot of people in the industry, it causes more stress than the Higher paper. Whilst National 5 are quite formulaic with how terminology needs to be used. . .

National 5 and Advanced Higher are incomparable. The issue is not in aligning the marking with National 5 or Advanced Higher criteria. The marks awarded for the Higher essays needs to be radically changed to get rid of terms such as "insightful". Candidates are having to jump through too many hoops to attain the marks and are stopping short of attempting the second A1 or B1 marks. Or they are writing too much to try to get the "insightful" extra mark and running out of time to write the full 5 points asked for in the question.

Educator views also varied on which marking criteria needed to change; for example, whether National 5 should be amended to prepare learners more for Higher, or, whether Higher should be amended to be more in line with National 5:

The three levels are assessed completely differently in theory. There is no consistency which leads to the huge gulf from National 5 to Higher, and I believe catches out so many National 5 A pupils who struggle to achieve C's at Higher. National 5 could benefit from looking at the National 5 Dance paper, where a section is dedicated to a small amount of production analysis which helps ensure the building blocks needed for Higher.

Other educators were unsure of how the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria could be applied to Higher, when the content of the exams are so different:

I don't teach Advanced Higher so can't compare the two levels. I don't see how the marking instructions for National 5 can easily adapt to being similar to the Higher marking instructions as at Higher, it is only essays, not shorter questions.

Problems with National 5 and Advanced Higher marking criteria

Table 2: Comments about problems with National 5 and Advanced Higher marking criteria

Level	Comments
National 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Vague, ambiguous, needs clarity, woolly; for example 'any other relevant activity' ◆ Need for exact wording is 'ridiculous' ◆ The range of statements is sometimes difficult for learners to understand ◆ Open to interpretation ◆ Hard for new educators to understand ◆ Inaccessible ◆ Too lenient ◆ It doesn't articulate with Higher or Advanced Higher ◆ Should have descriptions of what a full/good/adequate/and limited answers are
Advanced Higher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ There need to be more Understanding Standards events ◆ Vague, ambiguous, needs clarity, woolly ◆ Broad ◆ Not enough examples to back up statements ◆ Poorly defined ◆ More guidance about the dissertation

Suggestions for good implementation

Other educators suggested tips for good implementation of adapting the Higher marking to that of National 5 or Advanced Higher. The most prevalent of these comments were about communications and resources, where educators suggested better methods for increasing awareness and understanding of the marking criteria, for example, clearer guidance on standards:

Again, because the body of knowledge is no longer used there can be some aspects that are open to interpretation. In order to offer more streamlining, there should be specified information with regards to what is an expected definition of, for example: a

handheld prop. By this, I mean, what it is, and what should be expected to be mentioned at each level to be awarded a mark.

Understanding standards materials sometimes vague and unhelpful. I often find there is no mention of what is required for some marks in any documentation. It is only through speaking to markers or other educators that information comes to light. We need more transparency about exactly what is required and better, clearer examples of written responses.

I feel that clearer commentaries could be provided on Understanding Standards as to why a mark was awarded or not sometimes. Just a more detailed explanation of rationale that doesn't just repeat the wording of the marking criteria but instead details the points raised in the essay that justify a particular mark range.

In addition, a number of educators commented that there should be more Understanding Standards events and more frequent communications with educators about changes:

There are changes each year to terminology which are not always communicated. Clearer communication is needed across all levels and not just for those who attended marking meetings

The language has needed modifications every year, in order to give more scope as well as clarity. The language should be created through focus groups of class teachers across Scotland – not in a small group in the Central Belt. Shared ownership and responsibility is the only way to achieve a parity and equal opportunities across the geography of learners in Drama.

Other educators mentioned that it would be beneficial to balance the subjectivity in the course, and to weight the practical element more:

Essays are more subjective by nature so we still need to be able to credit the variety of responses a candidate may offer without being overly prescriptive.

Positive comments about Higher marking

One educator commented positively on the Higher marking, but also suggested changes:

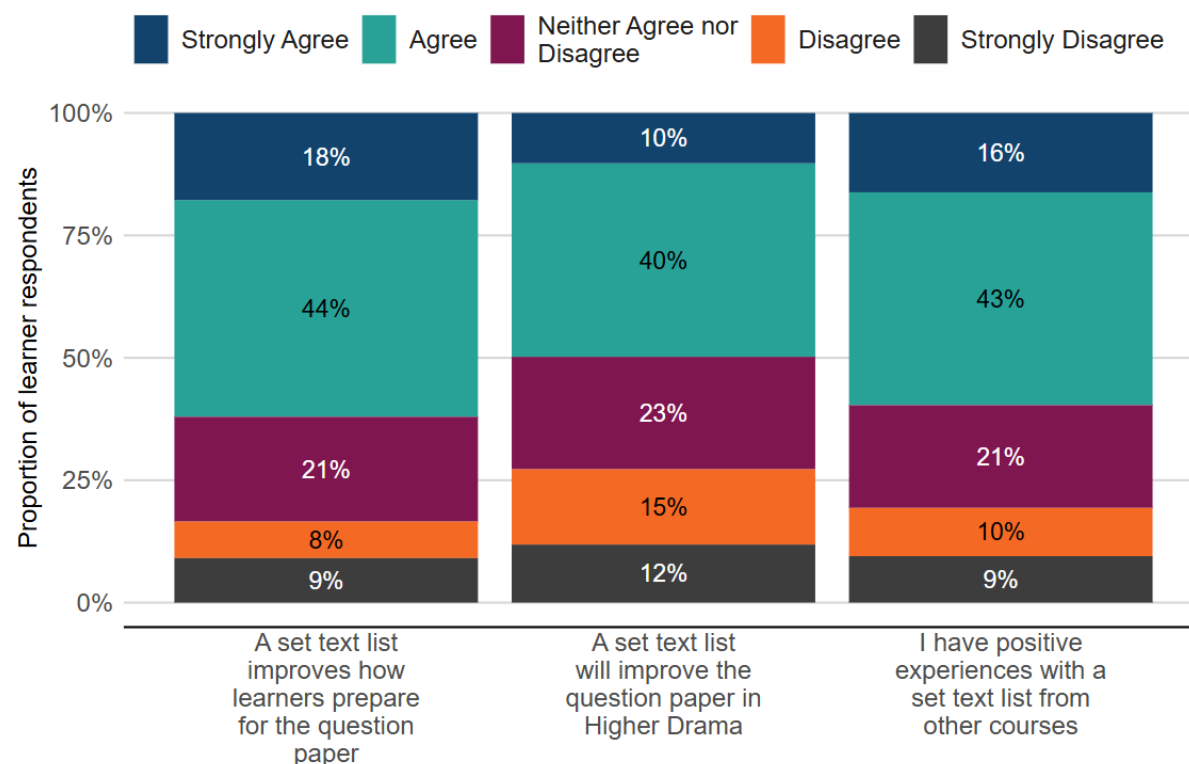
I think the Higher marking structure is effective in the sense that it assesses breadth and depth of understanding. I would like to see that assessment of breadth and depth kept where the range of statements apply to answers regarding an initial understanding of different moments in a production and then the points of development.

Views on a set text list

Learner views on a set text

Levels of agreement

Figure 10: Learner views on incorporating a set text



Learners were asked, 'Section 1 and section 2 of the question paper do not have a set text. A set text is where learners choose from a prescribed list of texts to study, for example in courses like English. Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?' 252 learners provided responses (Figure 10).

- ◆ Nearly three fifths of learners (59%) agreed they had positive experiences of a set text list in other courses.
- ◆ Over three fifths of learners (62%) agreed that incorporating a set text improves how to prepare for the question paper.
- ◆ Half of learners (50%) agreed that a set text list will improve the question paper in Higher Drama, while over a quarter of learners (27%) disagreed.

There was also an open-text option for learners to add to their answer; all learners had the opportunity to answer this question regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed with a set text list.

Positive comments about set text

The most common reason learners gave for positivity towards a set text list was that it makes it easier to study through access to more materials and study resources, and facilitates peer support.

The set text list should be varied and extensive with room for choice. Though, a set text list helps when looking for revision materials/past notes/past papers relevant to your course.

Other positive reasons learners gave for supporting a set text were:

- ◆ It may help learners understand the marking materials and exams better.
- ◆ Exam questions can be more catered towards suitability for a smaller range of texts.
- ◆ A limited range is better than too much freedom.
- ◆ It may help with theoretical aspects of exams.

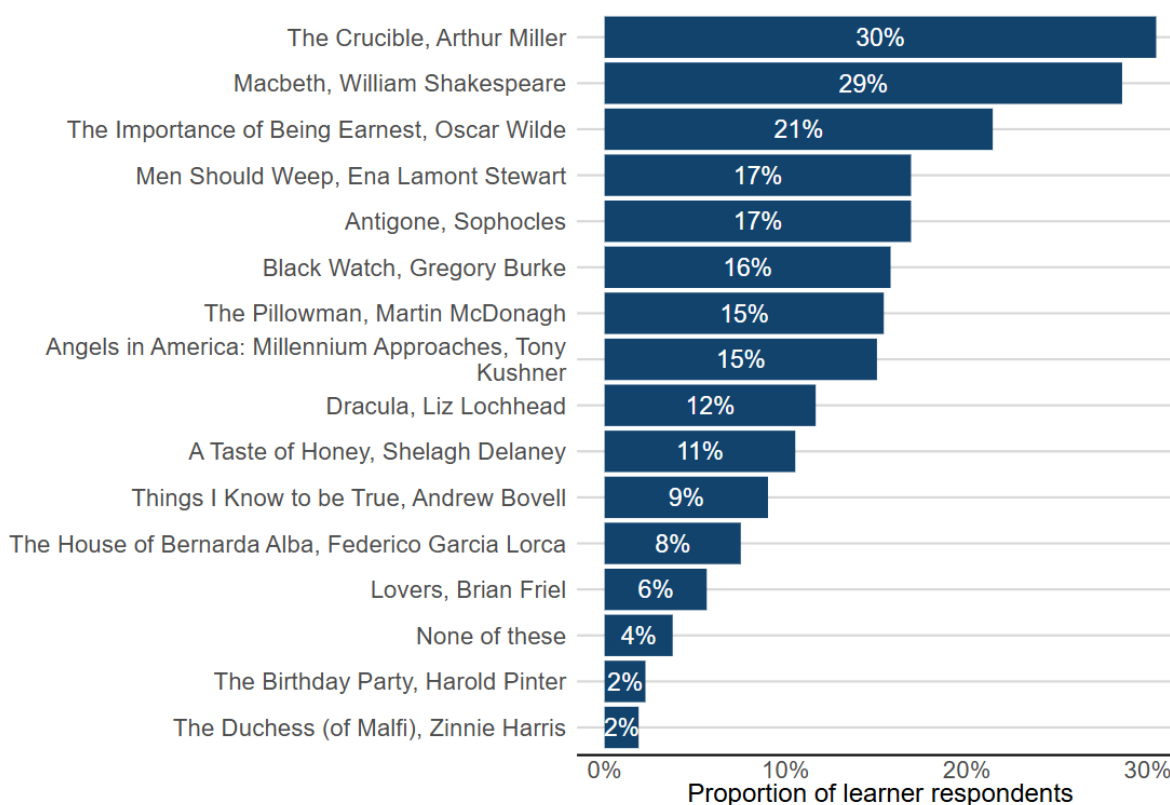
Negative comments about set text

Some comments were negative about the idea of set texts; it is important to note that the 27% of learners who disagreed that a set text will improve the Higher Drama question paper are not necessarily against a set text, but disagree that a set text will solve issues. Reasons for being against a set text were:

- ◆ Introducing a set text does not impact on grades.
- ◆ A set text could be good, but only if the marking criteria accompanying it was good.
- ◆ It is better for teachers to have the freedom to choose texts that are suited to their class.
- ◆ Set texts make the course too much like English, or reduces the 'drama' element of the course.
- ◆ Introducing a set text does not help any of the 'real' problems with the course.

Views on excluding texts from the proposed list

Figure 11: Texts from the proposed set text list that learners have read or studied



Learners who agreed with a set text list were asked which texts in the draft set text list they have already read or studied. Over 1 in 4 participants had read or studied *Macbeth* and *The Crucible* (Figure 11). Only 4% of participants had not read or studied any of these texts.

Learners were asked if there were any texts in the draft set text list they felt were unsuitable. In general, there were not many comments about this. Texts named by learners as unsuitable for the set text list were:

Table 3: Texts learners think are unsuitable for the set text list and reasons

Text	Reasons
<i>Antigone</i>	♦ Too old to perform
<i>Angels in America</i>	♦ Too long and complex ♦ More suitable for Advanced Highers
<i>Black Watch</i>	♦ Might be better suited for performance analysis than text in context
<i>Lovers</i>	♦ Too obscure and difficult to understand the full context of the play ♦ Difficult to memorise
<i>Macbeth</i>	♦ May not be suitable for learners who have not studied Shakespeare before ♦ More suitable for English
<i>The Crucible</i>	♦ Hard to understand, boring, unenjoyable ♦ Not fit for Higher Drama ♦ Is also used in English so 'it gets repetitive'

Some learners also named texts that they felt were unsuitable for a set text even though they were not on the proposed list; these texts were:

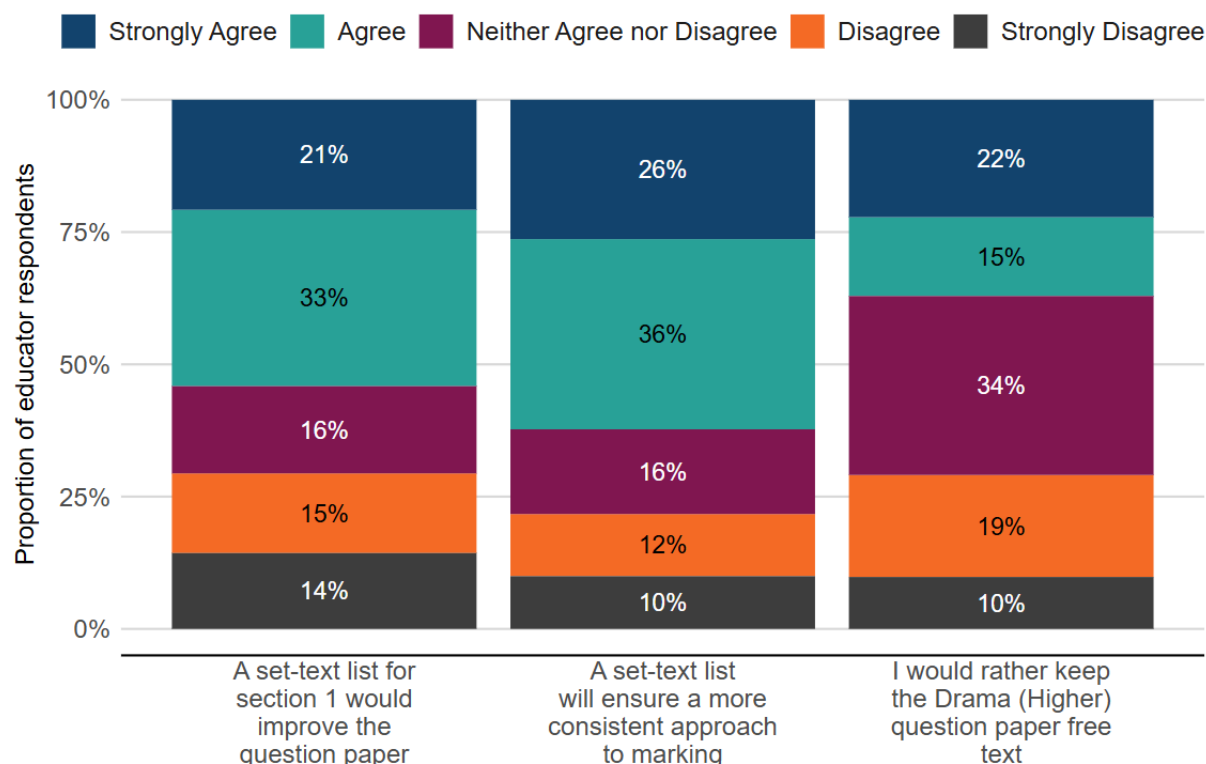
- ♦ *Yerma*, Federico Garcia Lorca
- ♦ *Frankenstein* [author not mentioned]
- ♦ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Simon Stephens
- ♦ *Death of a Salesman*, Arthur Miller
- ♦ *Let the Right One In*, Jack Thorne

Educator views on a set text

Levels of agreement

Introduction of a set text list

Figure 12: Educator views on the introduction of a set text list



When participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with various statements about the introduction of a set text list, 282 responded. Most participants appeared to be in favour of the introduction of a set text list to the question paper (Figure 12).

- ◆ Over half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed that a set text list for section 1 would improve the question paper. However, these results may be impacted by educators who would prefer that section 1 be removed.
- ◆ Three out of five (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that a set text list would ensure a more consistent approach to marking.
- ◆ Participants had the lowest level of agreement and highest level of disagreement with the statement 'I would rather keep the Drama (Higher) question paper free text' (37% and 29% respectively).

Educators were asked to comment on their answer; 118 educators left a comment. Comments were divided largely into 4 groups: positive comments about set text; negative comments about set text; unintended consequences of set text; and suggestions for good implementation.

Positive comments about set text

Educators noted several areas where they felt a set text would make a positive difference; of the positive attributes, the most prevalent was that it would help learners obtain marks or help markers:

I like having free choice but there is no consistency with the marking. Certain markers may not know the texts for Section 1/2 so it is very difficult for them to mark correctly. How can a quote be marked as inaccurate/no mark given if the marker is not knowledgeable in regards to the text chosen by the centre? If having a set text list would improve the understanding of the mark schemes and, therefore the teaching and learning, I am happy to move to a set text list.

I think having a free list would make it harder to mark, markers are reluctant to mark texts they are not familiar with and don't want to then read lots of texts in preparation

As a previous Higher QP marker I feel a set text list would ensure better consistency across marking and also enable educators to share examples of good practise and allow teachers to become more proficient in teaching the written element. It is clear when marking that some texts lend themselves much better to section 1 essays than others. It is unfair that some candidates are disadvantaged because of a teacher's choice of text.

Other positive reasons were:

- ◆ It is better for centres and educators, including new educators, who will be able to provide a more consistent and comprehensive approach to course delivery and help standardise learning.
- ◆ It is more suited to exams, where the texts can align better with what is required to gain marks.
- ◆ It is better for learners, where some text choices by centres may not be suitable to exams or allow candidates to gain marks.
- ◆ It allows sharing of teaching and learning resources.
- ◆ It will help to recruit more markers by allowing them to know which texts to cover.
- ◆ It provides and encourages educators and learners to explore different texts.

One educator mentioned the idea of a set performance for similar reasons, and that a recording could be provided in order for marking in performance sections to be standardised.

Negative comments about set text

Educators noted several areas where they felt a set text would make a negative difference; of the negative attributes, the most prevalent was that it would take away creativity and the freedom educators have to choose a text which is tailored to the needs or interests of their learners:

The lack of a set-text list is not the reason why marking standards have been so inconsistent for years. Teachers need to have full autonomy here, especially when considering the diverse range of pupils who choose to study Higher Drama. One of the best things about the autonomy of this subject is the lack of a set-text list and the freedom to choose a text that excites and inspires a teacher, and therefore their

pupils. (This is from a dual qualified teacher in English who struggled with the set-texts in that subject - it was demoralising and uninspiring and...boring)!!! Teachers need the freedom to try different texts to keep analysis fresh and remain passionate about what they teach.

Set text list are elitist and narrow – I know what a good play is and I don't need that to be specified by the SQA

The set-text list would potentially disrupt personalisation and choice as texts are selected with the young people's interest and ability at heart.

*Set text allows freedom for teachers and new interesting texts to be explored every year if the teacher wishes. The text surely should also suit your learners – unless the set text list is vast and updated yearly, this would just result in every school pulling out their old *Crucible* or *Antigone* notes.*

Another common negative comment was how a set text list might have an impact on the bank of resources that educators have already made for their texts:

There should be clearer and more helpful marking instructions as well as more events to set a standard of the marking for the essays than taking away the option of choosing any play. Also, teachers have put in a lot of work to create a bank of work for the pupils – not fair that it could become obsolete.

*I think as long as the usual plays are on the list for example the *Crucible* then that will be fine. I've been making resources for 4 years and borrowing and editing to try and raise the written marks and if that was taken off now il' be concerned about my work load.*

Set text lists could cause the work to become outdated and stagnant. It could also cause barriers to schools such as mine where resources and budget are tight and we often rely on plays we already have accumulated.

Other negative aspects of a set text mentioned by educators were:

- ◆ It will not necessarily standardise marking or approaches to teaching.
- ◆ A set text is irrelevant to the other problems in Higher Drama.
- ◆ It will create a teach-to-test culture in Drama.
- ◆ Classic texts like *The Crucible*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, and works by Shakespeare overlap with English and limit the ability for learners to be exposed to new texts.
- ◆ It could cause Drama to be outdated or stagnant, by allowing teachers to rely on 'classic' texts that may be irrelevant to current learners.
- ◆ Overreliance on classic texts can be inaccessible for learners.

Unintended consequences of set text

Educators also raised the issue that introducing a set text list could have unintended consequences. These included increase in the workloads of educators as they would need to prepare new resources and materials for texts; centre costs associated with introducing

new texts; and worries that a set text list will not take into account the needs of contemporary learners, such as the perception that learners have short attention spans.

If a teacher currently teaches something not on the set text list, they would have the huge task of creating all new resources. There would also be the cost of getting a class set of a new play. We would have [no] budget for that, I'm sure other schools would be in the same position.

Suggestions for good implementation

A number of educators also commented on a number of conditions that would make the incorporation of a set text list positive. Educators who made suggestions were not necessarily positive about a set text list, but indicated that if certain conditions are met, then the introduction of a set text list could work. The most common suggestion for good implementation was the need for resources to accompany a set text list. This was related to comments from educators who raised the potential issue of their own resources being made obsolete:

Consistency is key to marking, however, it is also important to have enough visual and written resources on text on a set list to enable access for all.

If set texts were provided with resources, then fair enough but if the set text list didn't include your current text but did include someone else's, then an unfair advantage would occur – lack of equity in terms of new resources needed.

It is important the set text list is fairly extensive to provide a range of options. This would also help in being able to provide supporting notes for centres on these texts.

Another common suggestion for good implementation was the range of options available; however educators were varied in what they described as a good range. Although one educator suggested that a narrower set text list would be more effective, a larger number of educators mentioned the need for a wide range of options, and stressed the importance of classic, contemporary, and inclusive texts.

*If there was to be a set-text list, there needs to be more modern plays used that pupils can relate to/engage with as plays such as *The Crucible*, *Tally's Blood*, *Men Should Weep* have been overused. They need to give way to fresh material that engages pupils.*

*If there is a set text list, I would hope that there would be a mixture of contemporary and classic texts. I would also hope that this would be revised every year to keep up with new theatre and writing. I'll be frank. I don't want to teach *The Crucible* every year.*

There could be an updated list of suggested texts but there should be scope for using texts out with this also. If there had to be a set text list, this should offer a variety of texts which are both classic and modern and should be updated regularly to reflect the ever changing and vibrant world of theatre.

A set text list would allow for markers to really know/study the texts used - at the moment candidates could almost make up quotes for some less well known texts. A set text list for Higher should contain classic texts which are complex and be able to give a real depth of analysis for candidates – I do not think that Let The Right One In for example, has this for Higher level. I would also suggest that the list is relatively short and all texts have a similar complexity.

Set texts should be defined by current educators not from top down. Should not be overwhelmingly "Scottish" in nature and be inclusive of current practice.

Maybe a more extensive suggested list would be appropriate. I would worry that a set text list wouldn't fully allow for inclusion, diversity and equity. And wouldn't reflect contemporary theatre practice.

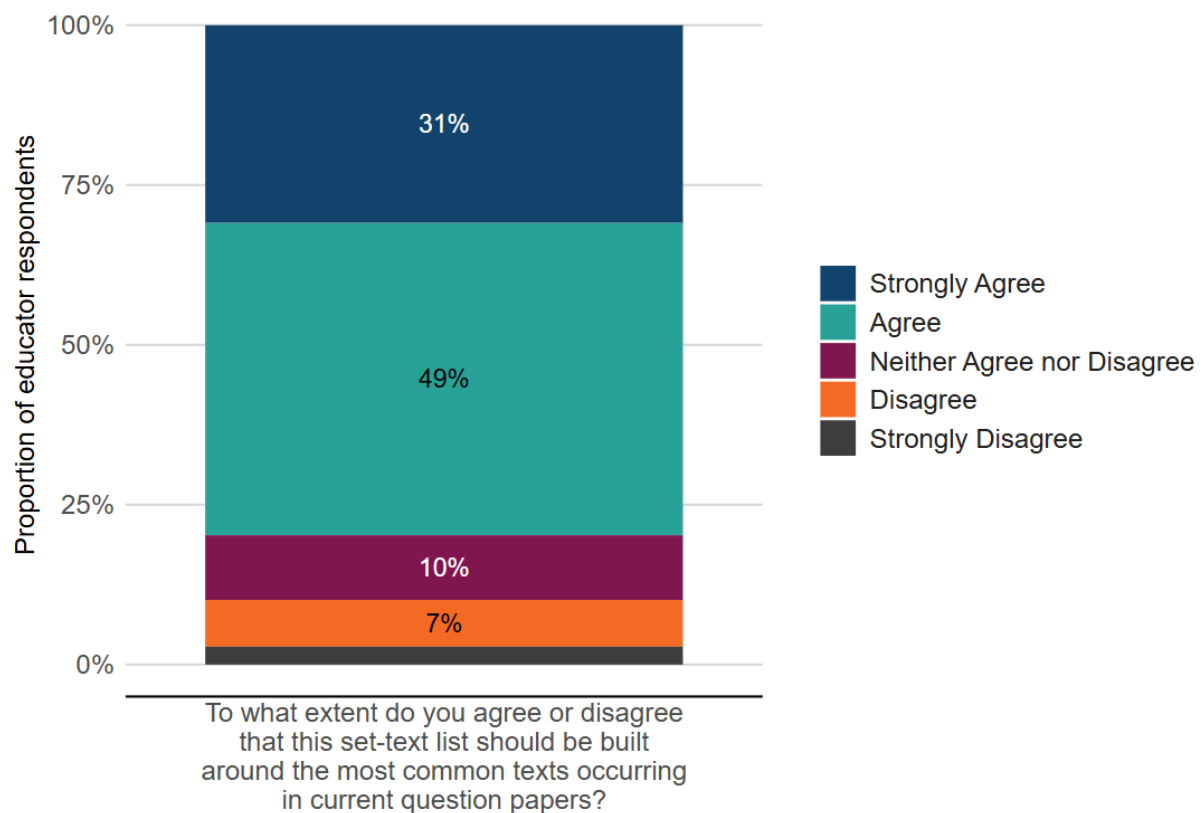
Other suggestions for good implementation made by educators were:

- ◆ The set text needs to be updated regularly.
- ◆ SQA needs to consult with Drama educators on the content of the set text.
- ◆ A set text should not be implemented for the acting portion of the course.
- ◆ A set text would only improve the marking if there was concurrently a more consistent approach to essays or question styles.
- ◆ A set text would be improved if the exam using the set text was open-book, therefore eliminating the memorisation aspect of the question paper.

Views on building a set text list

Texts in the proposed set text list

Figure 13: Educator views on the choice of text in a set text list

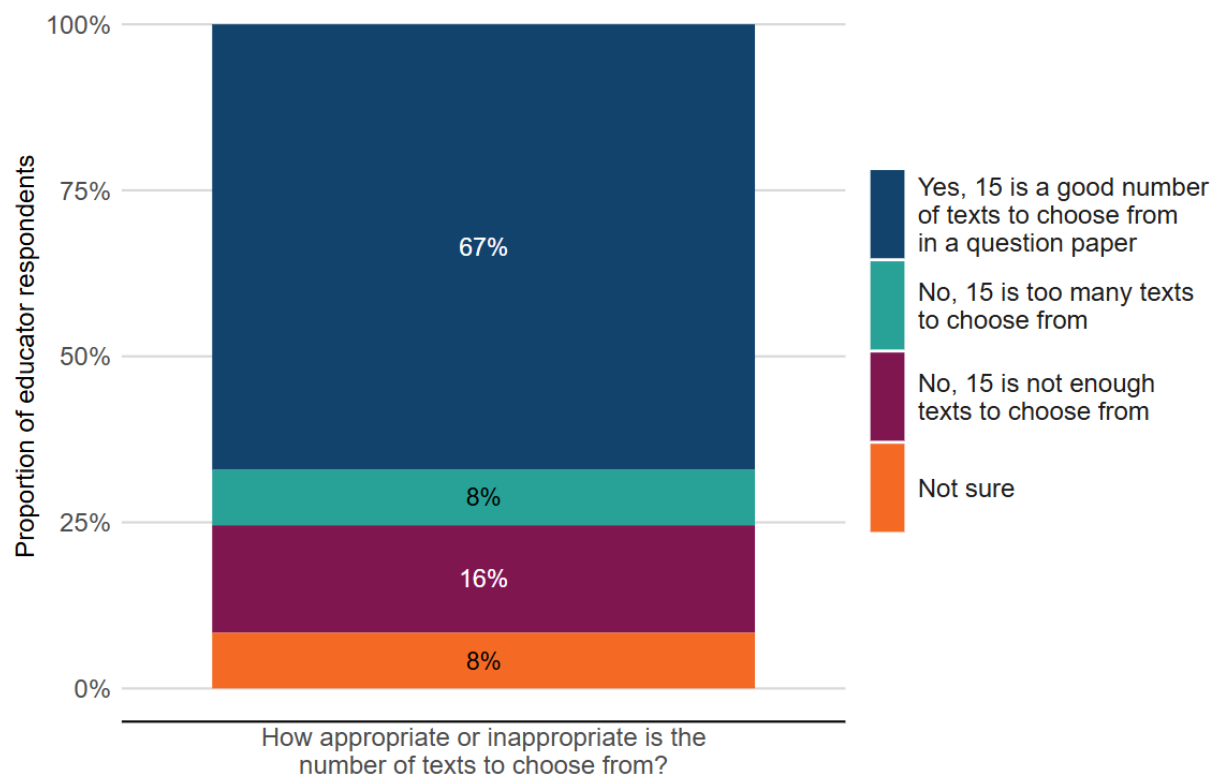


Only educators who disagreed, strongly disagreed, or neither agree nor disagreed that the Higher Drama course should remain without a set text were asked to comment on the draft set text list. This was in order to gather opinions from educators who already indicated they were open to a set text in Higher Drama.

Educators were asked their opinion on whether they agreed or disagreed that the proposed set text list should be developed using the most common texts used in question papers. 178 participants provided an answer (Figure 13).

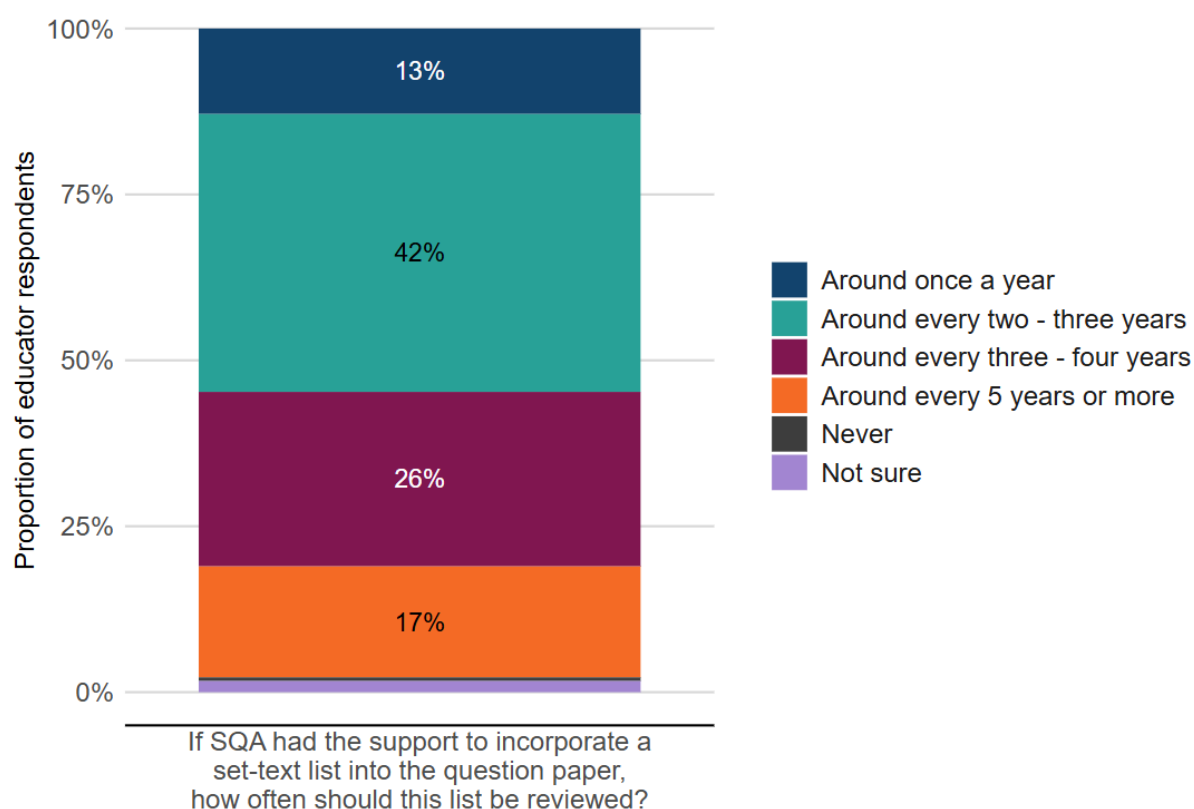
There was a high level of agreement when educators were asked if a proposed set text list should be built around the most commonly occurring texts in current question papers (80%).

Figure 14: Perceived appropriateness of the number of texts



Participants were asked their views on the appropriate number of texts to be included in the question paper, 179 provided answers (Figure 14). More than two thirds of participants (67%) felt that 15 was an appropriate number of texts to choose from in the question paper. However, some felt that 15 was too many texts to choose from (8%) or that 15 was not enough texts to choose from (16%). A further 8% were unsure what the appropriate number of texts were.

Figure 15: Educator views on reviewing set text lists

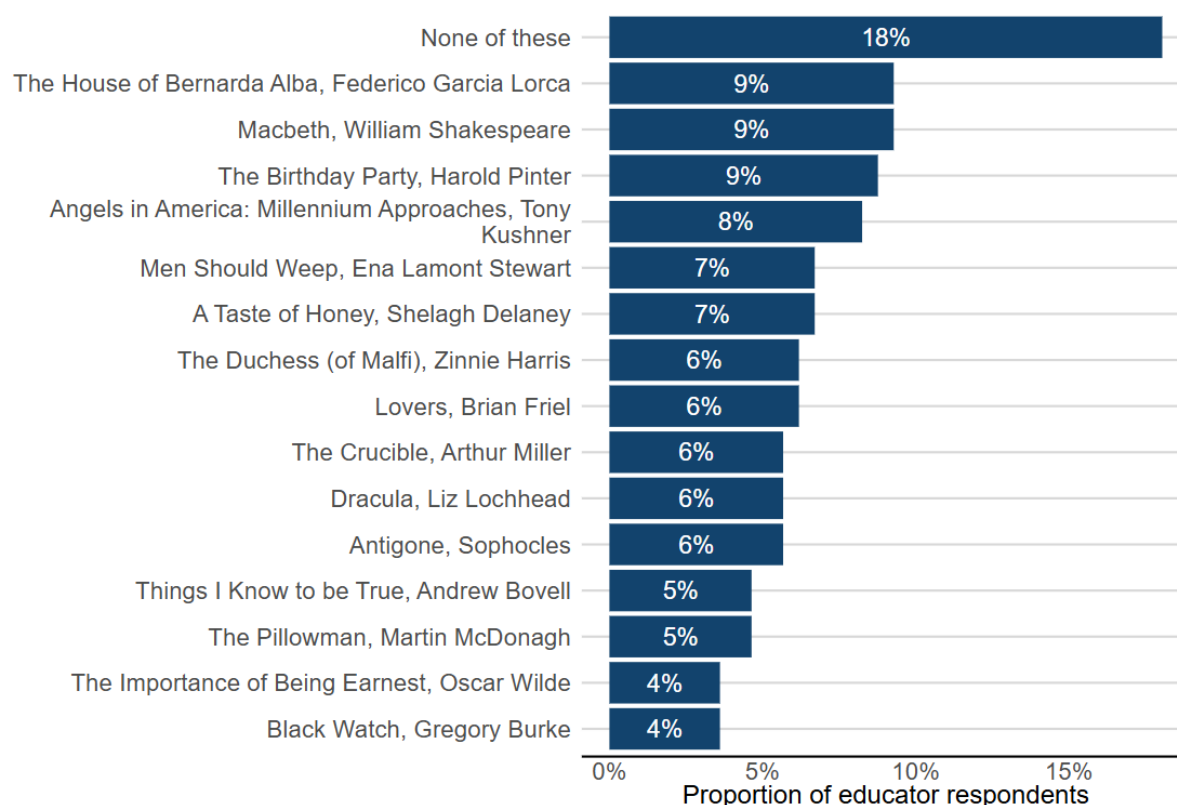


When asked about the frequency that the set text list should be reviewed, 179 participants provided an answer (Figure 15).

- ◆ Many of the participants (42%) were in favour of this occurring around every two to three years.
- ◆ More than a quarter (26%) felt that the set text lists should be reviewed every three to four years.
- ◆ 17% felt it should be reviewed once per year.
- ◆ 13% felt that the lists should be reviewed every 5 years or more, 3% were not sure, and less than 1% said never.

Views on excluding texts in the proposed list

Figure 16: Texts on the proposed set text list that should not be included



Educators were asked whether there were any texts on the proposed set text list they felt should not be on the set text list in Higher Drama; 99 provided a response. There were no texts that participants overwhelmingly felt should be removed; 18% said none of the listed texts should be removed from the set text list (Figure 16). The texts educators most wanted removed were:

- ◆ *The House of Bernarda Alba* by Federico Garcia Lorca (9%)
- ◆ *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter (9%; bars reflect rounding)
- ◆ *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare (9%)

Educators were also provided an open-text box to comment on their answers and give reasons for wanting some of the texts removed.

Table 4: Educator comments on unsuitable texts in the proposed set text list

Text	Reasons
<i>Black Watch</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ More suited for National 5 ◆ Not complex enough
<i>Angels in America</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ More suited for National 5 ◆ More suited for Advanced Higher ◆ Challenging, could create parity in marking expectations ◆ 'Quite spicy'

Text	Reasons
<i>Macbeth</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Not modern enough ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage
<i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Rona Munro's version is more accessible ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage
<i>Men Should Weep</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Very difficult for quotations due to the writing style ◆ Overused ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage
<i>Lovers</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Challenging, could create parity in marking expectations ◆ Overused
<i>The Crucible</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Designer demands can be challenging for some learners ◆ Overused ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage
<i>Antigone</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage
<i>The Birthday Party</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Outdated ◆ Hard for learners to engage

Other suggested texts

Additionally, although a majority of educators did not mention that any specific text should be removed from the draft list, a number of them did leave suggestions for texts to be added, suggesting the potential for expanding the list. Texts suggested by educators that could be added to the list, or replace existing texts, were:

- ◆ *The Last Witch*, Rona Munro
- ◆ *Let The Right One In*, Jack Thorne
- ◆ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Tennessee Williams
- ◆ *Frankenstein*, Nick Dear
- ◆ *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Simon Stephens
- ◆ *The House of Bernarda Alba*, Rona Munro
- ◆ *Things I Know To Be True*, Andrew Bovell
- ◆ *A Doll's House*, Henrik Ibsen
- ◆ *Abigail's Party*, Mike Leigh
- ◆ *Tally's Blood*, Ann Marie DiMambro
- ◆ *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare
- ◆ *Dancing at Lughnasa*, Brian Friel
- ◆ *The Glass Menagerie*, Tennessee Williams
- ◆ *All My Sons*, Arthur Miller
- ◆ *Maggie and Me*, Damian Barr
- ◆ *The James Plays*, Rona Munro
- ◆ Any text by Bertolt Brecht
- ◆ Any text by Anton Chekov

More contemporary texts

Reasons educators had for suggesting these added texts were broad; several educators mentioned the need for more Scottish texts, while other educators suggested more international texts, or texts about race, gender, and equality. The most prevalent comment was that they would like to see more contemporary texts on the list:

Should be 1–2 more contemporary Scottish texts, i.e. James Plays or Maggie and Me. This would not only support local theatres, who could sell the play texts, but there's absolutely fantastic resources on NTS's Education portal to support candidates knowledge and understanding. These plays can also be streamed for free, allow deeper understanding for both centre staff and candidates.

These were taught when I did my Higher Drama, it is hugely outdated and the pupils don't engage with a lot of the texts. There are amazing modern texts out there that we should be tapping into in order to lure the pupils in with an interest in relevant themes/issues that they are interested in. There should be a complete overhaul of this list, not just a re-jig of the old used texts.

While they are good texts they are a little tired and have been on the lists for decades. A couple of newer award winning or critically acclaimed texts maybe a comedy could be included. The demands of design make texts like The Crucible quite challenging for some groups of pupils.

Other suggestions for good implementation

In addition to comments about texts to remove or add, educators also had other suggestions:

- ◆ There should be recordings of the productions for all set texts available, in order to ensure that all centres are able to access performances without having to worry about funding.
- ◆ All texts on the list should be scrutinised for similarity in providing enough depth and challenge for Higher Drama.
- ◆ Texts should not also appear in Higher English; it can be confusing for learners to learn one text with two different marking criteria for assessments.
- ◆ There should be some consideration to ensuring texts are a similar length.
- ◆ Communications about the set text should be available after exams to enable a bank of plays.
- ◆ Make resources available for different texts.

Other changes

Alternative changes to sections

Learner alternative suggestions

The learner survey asked learners directly about potential changes to a set text, and to the marking criteria. The end of the survey also asked learners to suggest any other changes to the question paper. 39% of learners said there were no other changes they would make; however 61% answered 'yes' or 'not sure', and were routed to an open-text box to provide further suggestions. Overall, 123 learners left comments making further suggestions to the question paper. Some suggestions were in line with the changes proposed by SQA to educators, suggesting unprompted that section 2 be removed:

No specific changes other than removal of section 2 and a change in the marking criteria, making it more similar to the way Advanced Higher assignments are marked.

Remove section 1 or section 3

However, these comments were in the minority of 'other' suggested changes; more learners suggested revising or removing section 1 or 3:

For being an English based subject, the Higher Drama exams are far harder than the English exams, not even taking into consideration the practical Drama exam. For Higher English I only had to write two essays, one of them in the exam and one of them in class throughout the year. Two essays in the exam is not required, including the PFP that we had to do during the year as well. The exam should consist of one essay, at most, and a question section on the same play. Reading/watching two plays is a lot of time, that most people don't have.

Maybe reduce the number of essays that are required – change one of the papers (section 1 or 3) into some form of extended answer questions as it may be more achievable for some learners who have less experience academically in essay skills, etc. especially since the written papers make up a relatively smaller part of the overall mark - it would make Higher Drama more accessible to many different kinds of learners as Drama is often taken overwhelmingly by those with neurodivergence (from my own experience).

Other suggested changes

Other changes suggested by learners were:

- ◆ keeping all sections, but splitting the question paper in two
- ◆ making the assessments across Drama levels more consistent with one another
- ◆ making the course more like National 5, for example the ability to make your own play, or a reflection of your own performance
- ◆ making the questions shorter and more purposeful
- ◆ making the exam have less writing, or no writing
- ◆ increasing the time to complete the exam
- ◆ expanding section 2, or making the essays more like section 2
- ◆ making section 2 its own paper

- ◆ more focus on the practical element of the course, rather than the written
- ◆ modifying the marking scheme
- ◆ less subjectivity in the marking
- ◆ including an assignment
- ◆ allowing the exam to be typed

In general, these other changes suggested by learners indicate that while learners have varied views on other ways to improve the question paper, there is some agreement that the question paper needs to change in potentially substantial ways:

I cannot understand the reasoning behind the layout of the Higher Drama exam paper with only section 3 being the hardest (and least answered) section, and yet it is the most accurate to Drama out of all the sections. I feel section 2 is unnecessary and only see section one as useful from a literary standpoint. Please note that I feel a serious shift needs to happen for the NATIONAL 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Drama courses and their approaches to teaching. Because currently, there is a huge amount of disjointedness and contradicts itself often.

There should be a clearer way to answer sections one and three. I tend to do well in essay-based subjects such as English, History and Politics (passing with mainly As and some Bs) in which there is a clear way to structure paragraphs (although politics is marked holistically there it is easy to understand where a candidate is gaining/losing marks). Considering a structure similar to the way that other Humanity subjects are marked could improve the Higher Drama exam – possibly also considering an assignment to complete as part of the course isn't a bad idea.

Educator alternative suggestions

Educators were asked if there were any other changes they would make to the question paper that SQA has not identified. 63% of educators answered yes, suggesting that the proposed changes would not sufficiently improve the question paper; 21% said no; and 16% were not sure. 183 educators left comments to explain their answer.

A number of comments conflicted with the proposed plans to update the question paper. In particular, educators reiterated that:

- ◆ It would be better to reduce the amount of writing or content in the question paper.
- ◆ Section 1 and section 3 need to be amended.
- ◆ Section 1 or section 3 should be removed, as one essay is enough.
- ◆ If section 2 is removed, the time of the question paper should remain 2.5 hours.

Pupils find it incredibly difficult to access the paper due to the time constraints and the different structures for both essays. There needs to be a fairer amount of time for pupils to access marks during the essay portion of the exam. If there is a 50/50 [split] between Section 1 and the current Section 3 then I suggest the pupils are given 1 hour and 15 minutes for each essay, keeping the 2 hour and 30 minute time limit that there currently is.

I feel that keeping sections 1 & 3 still keeps the paper requiring two essay responses which makes the paper unfairly weighted against candidates who struggle to

communicate their understanding in this format. I feel that removing Section 1 but expanding Section 2 to become a 20 mark structured response question (weighted 50% of the QP as proposed) would give candidates more opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the chosen text and the course.

It is a lot of content to cover for the relative value (40%). It is also a long assessment for 40% of the overall grade in a practical subject, for example Higher Music (35%) is only 1 hour and it [is] close response questions. The lengthy exam and volume of course content puts young people off pursuing Higher Drama, even if they are gifted. This is a dreadful shame. It may be worthwhile considering having 1 section in which the pupils respond by writing an essay and another section where they respond in a different way, for example a selection of extended response questions.

Fix section 1 and 3 – [it's] too much to do in an hour and the national results show that it is not accessible by the majority of candidates.

Remove section 1 or section 3

It is worth noting that section 2 of the question paper was the least commented on in this section, and that there were far more comments suggesting the removal and revision of sections 1 and 3 than of section 2. This is likely because in general, educators also commented that there is too much writing to do in the question paper. Some educators recommended that section 2 be expanded instead:

More of the Section 2 style questions about the Section 1 and 3 content would be better. Some very talented performers are hindered by the very difficult written exam.

Other suggested changes

Other comments from educators were:

- ◆ The question paper should be split into two papers instead of removing a section.
- ◆ There needs to be more provision of examples and details on marks.
- ◆ More provision of guidance in general on the marking and the question paper.
- ◆ The marking needs to change and be less punitive.
- ◆ There should be a greater consistency with National 5 and Advanced Higher.
- ◆ Learners should not be required to memorise quotes.
- ◆ Learners might benefit from an open-book question paper, to eliminate the assessing on memorisation skills.
- ◆ Include dramatic commentary.

As stated earlier, the expectation for pupils to complete the paper within the agreed time frame is currently not working and pupils should be provided with more time to complete this. Further to this, the need to memorise quotes is relatively dated model and it would perhaps be more beneficial for candidates to be allowed to have the text there to refer to.

Conclusion and considerations

Comparison of views on changes to sections

Although educators were asked more direct questions about the proposed changes to the question paper, with learners only being asked about the proposed marking criteria and set text, there were still a number of similarities in responses between learners and educators.

Educators and learners both raised similar problems with the question paper and both groups expressed the following:

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ Section 3 is the hardest or least satisfying section for learners.
- ◆ They support revising sections rather than removing them entirely, especially section 2.
- ◆ They raised the possibility of splitting the question paper, rather than removing any section; however this was stressed more by educators than learners.
- ◆ There is too much writing in the question paper for this subject.
- ◆ The marking needs to be modified.
- ◆ They stressed the importance of being able to progress and apply learning from National 5 to Higher, and then to Advanced Higher.
- ◆ There is not enough time to finish the question paper.

Differences in learners and educators were that learners were more in favour of keeping section 2 than removing it, with less than a quarter of learners in favour of removing it, and over half of learners wanting this section to remain the same rather than be modified (Figure 4). On the other hand, half of educators were in favour of removing section 2; however, close to half also suggested removing another section of the question paper (Figure 5).

Comparison of views on National 5 and Higher marking criteria

Both educators and learners were asked directly about updating the marking criteria to be more similar to the criteria used for National 5 and Advanced Higher. Similarities between educators and learners were:

- ◆ Over half of participants in both groups found the marking criteria hard to understand.
- ◆ Over 60% of participants in both groups preferred the National 5 and Advanced Higher marking approach, expressing that it is more consistent and easier to understand.
- ◆ Both groups suggested clearer marking or that changing the marking would be beneficial.

Differences between learners and educators were that some learners expressed more uncertainty about the specifications of the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria; whereas some educators expressed that the National 5 or Advanced Higher marking criteria are incomparable or also have problems with clarity and may need revision.

Comparison of views on set text list

Both learners and educators were asked directly about a potential set text list. In addition, both groups were shown the draft set text list and asked to comment, if they already indicated openness to a set text.

- ◆ A minority of participants in both groups (under 40%) disagreed with the idea of a set text list; 50% of learners and 54% of educators agreed that a set text list would improve the question paper.
- ◆ Both groups felt that a set text list could improve standardisation and preparation.
- ◆ Both groups wondered whether incorporating a set text would solve any existing problems with the question paper.
- ◆ Both groups expressed concerns over potentially unsuitable or outdated texts (for example, *Macbeth*, *The Crucible*).

In addition, although only a minority of educators and learners indicated that a text should be removed from the set text list, there were similarities in texts that learners and educators wanted removed:

- ◆ *Macbeth*: Too difficult or inaccessible for some learners; more suited for English; outdated.
- ◆ *Black Watch*: Might not be suitable for Higher, or sections 1 and 2 of the question paper.
- ◆ *The Crucible*: Hard for learners to understand or engage; boring; unenjoyable; also used in English.
- ◆ *Antigone*: Outdated, hard to engage with, difficult to perform.
- ◆ *Angels in America*: Too complex; too long; potentially better suited to Advanced Higher or National 5.
- ◆ *Lovers*: Obscure, difficult to understand or engage with; hard to memorise; overused; outdated.

Differences between learners and educators were that learners preferred a set text from the perspective of studying, describing the ability to share resources. Educators' concerns were more from a teaching perspective, on whether they would need to build new resources for new texts, or whether old resources would become obsolete.

Considerations

There were a number of overarching themes about the question paper between learners and educators. In general, one key overarching theme was that it may not be sufficient to remove one section of the question paper and change the marking, especially when learners and educators indicated that all three sections of the question paper had problems. Although half of educators agreed that the question paper would be improved by removing section 2, this was also the section that learners most wanted to stay the same.

Comments from both educators and learners indicated that they felt all three sections need some revising; however some of these problems may be solved by improved marking criteria that removes a focus on essay structure, for example. In addition, both learners and educators stressed being able to progress more easily from National 5 to Higher, and then to Advanced Higher, which raises the question if more could be done to create consistency between these levels. However, as indicated by educators, it may be necessary to revisit the

marking criteria in National 5 and Advanced Higher as well, especially as there was a lack of unanimity amongst educators about which level had the clearest marking criteria.

Another overarching theme was the amount of writing involved in the question paper. Learners were concerned about the validity of assessing Drama through long essays, and that it makes the course more comparable to English than other arts subjects. Although educators were somewhat less concerned about essay writing, there was still some indication that more could be done to weight the course towards the practical element.

Overall, this research suggests that changes to the marking criteria and the addition of a set text list would be potentially positive changes to the question paper from both educators' and learners' perspectives. For this to lead to improvements, a set text list and changes to the marking criteria would need to be communicated with educators and learners in a clear and timely way, and resources would need to be provided for learners and educators to understand the changes and not increase workloads. However, there is less support to remove section 2 from the question paper, especially from a learner perspective. Learners were more favourable towards section 2 than other sections, and educators voiced a number of concerns about section 1 and section 3 of the question paper.

Appendix

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Amanda Gracie for her support and knowledge about Higher Drama qualifications.

2024 Higher Drama Question Paper

https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/NH_Drama_QP_2024-DQP.pdf

2024 Higher Drama Marking Criteria

https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/instructions/2024/mi_NH_Drama_mi_2024.pdf

2024 National 5 Drama Marking Criteria

https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/instructions/2024/mi_N5_Drama_mi_2024.pdf

2024 Advanced Higher Drama Marking Criteria

https://www.sqa.org.uk/pastpapers/papers/instructions/2024/mi_NAH_Drama_Assignment_2_024.pdf