



Course report 2022

Subject	Drama
Level	Higher

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	2715
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	30.8	Cumulative percentage	30.8	Number of candidates	835	Minimum mark required	65
B	Percentage	30.8	Cumulative percentage	61.6	Number of candidates	835	Minimum mark required	55
C	Percentage	23.2	Cumulative percentage	84.8	Number of candidates	630	Minimum mark required	45
D	Percentage	12.2	Cumulative percentage	97.0	Number of candidates	330	Minimum mark required	35
No award	Percentage	3.0	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	80	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of [SQA's website](https://sqa.my/).

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The choice of questions in section 1 provided opportunities for candidates to analyse their chosen text from a range of focused areas such as message and/or purpose, relationship breakdown, tension, character status, character qualities/characteristics and social and/or historical context. The questions were sufficiently challenging to enable candidates to demonstrate both knowledge of their selected text along with their theoretical skill of either a director, actor, or designer.

The compulsory question in section 2 required candidates to consider the mood and atmosphere in the closing moments of their selected text and how they would, as a designer, use lighting at this moment as well as a director's use of an actor's movement and blocking.

Section 3 required candidates to analyse either important plot developments as well as moments of shock and/or surprise. Candidates responded on live performances as well as recordings of live performances.

Feedback from the marking team and practitioners suggested that the question paper was fair and accessible.

Performance

Feedback from visiting assessors highlighted that candidates performed a wide variety of plays, and that most centres adhered to this year's modifications. Almost all centres were able to provide suitable facilities and resources for the performance assessment.

This component performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Overall, there has been an improvement in the structure that candidates are using for both the extended responses in section 1: theatre production: text in context and in section 3: performance analysis. This allowed markers to easily identify where marks could be given for each response.

Section 1, question 1: this was a popular question. Candidates who could demonstrate their selected text's message and/or purpose and supported it with appropriate textual references as well as highlighting their understanding of the wider context of their play performed well. For the second half of the answer many candidates successfully described the ways in which, as a director, they would highlight their identified message and/or purpose to an audience through effective directing of their actors. The most successful candidates also considered the choice and use of the performance space and the direction of the design team.

Section 1, question 2: this was a popular question. Candidates who described their chosen character's qualities and/or characteristics and supported this with appropriate textual references, as well as drawing on the wider context of their play, performed well. In addition, for the second half of the answer many candidates successfully described the ways in which the director would direct the actors to highlight these qualities through effective voice and movement terminology. The most successful candidates also considered the choice and use of the performance space and the direction of the design team.

Section 1, question 3: this was a popular question. Candidates who understood the reasons behind the breakdown of their chosen character with another character(s), using appropriate quotations and/or stage directions performed well. Candidates who were able to use appropriate and effective rehearsal techniques in the context of the development of their character in rehearsal were also successful.

Section 1, question 4: this was the most popular question in this section. Candidates who demonstrated the importance of their chosen character's status and when that was communicated in the plot performed well. Furthermore, candidates that successfully demonstrated effective voice and movement terminology to demonstrate that importance performed well. The most successful candidates also considered how some production arts would support them, for example with the use of costume and personal props.

Section 3, question 8 and 9: were both equally popular questions. Candidates with good drama literacy and who had seen quality performances were able to write detailed analysis. These candidates were able to analyse performance concepts in detail, as they had the vocabulary and understanding to do so. There was sometimes evidence that candidates had researched productions, read reviews, and seen interviews with directors and actors which supported their overall analysis.

Performance

For most candidates, there was enthusiasm and excitement to be presenting their work in front of a visiting assessor for the first time.

Acting

This was overwhelmingly the most popular choice and there were some outstanding performances which, given the nature of the restrictions imposed due to public health guidance, was most pleasing to see. The most successful candidates were cast in roles to suit their interests and talents as well as texts that met the required challenge of Higher Drama. They had been well rehearsed in both roles and were able to engage with, and explore the depths of, their character creating credible performances.

Directing

Directors who not only had a clear directorial vision or concept, but also knew the whole play and the character trajectory of each character within that play, performed well. Being secure in this knowledge allowed them to justify their directorial vision or concept and the opportunity to have complete ownership of their rehearsal. Similarly, this allowed for directors to display energy and enthusiasm to engage their actors too. They were also good at timekeeping, ensuring they engaged their actors in all elements of the directing process. By doing this they were able to complete the run-through in the designated time.

Design

Candidates who designed for the whole play, who had an imaginative design concept and a clear idea of how to realise their concept in their set design and additional production role, performed well. Similarly, successful candidates also justified their designs with reference to appropriate textual clues. These candidates produced ground plans and elevations for every scene change throughout the play. The elevations gave an impression of the set from an audience's point of view, with suggestions for height, texture and colour. Successful candidates demonstrated skill in their selected production area, often making creative use of technology.

Preparation for performance

Candidates were very well prepared for this section. Many achieved high marks while adhering to the 500-word guideline. Candidates who had clearly researched their play(s), and had used this research to inform their role, performed well.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Overall, many candidates did not read the questions fully and, therefore, did not access the full range of marks.

Section 1, question 3: some candidates confused 'rehearsal techniques' with 'performance concepts' when answering the second half of this question. Some candidates listed rehearsal techniques without explaining the ways in which they would help the actor explore the relationship breakdown with another character. For example, 'I would use hot seating to help deepen my understanding of the character upset with John', without any attempt to

explain the ways that the rehearsal technique would help the actor to develop their understanding of the breakdown in relationship.

Section 1, questions 5 and 6: on the whole, candidates accessed marks for the first part of these questions, using appropriate quotations and/or stage directions to support their thinking. However, candidates often answered the second part of the question poorly, with little explanation of design concepts and weak links to the first part of the response. For example, 'I would use a red gel to show the tension' or 'I would put the actor in an expensive 1960's jacket to show the time of the play'.

Section 2, question 7(a): some candidate did not correctly identify the 'closing moments' of their selected text; instead, they described the last scene or act. A moment happens within the scene or act making it difficult for markers to credit some candidate responses.

Question 7(b): almost all candidates did not know how to describe lighting in the closing moments. Drama literacy was very poor in this response. For example, many candidates talked about 'dim and/or bright lighting'; many referred to a coloured lantern such as a 'yellow fresnel'; some stated that they would use a 'spotlight' without indicating what lanterns they would use. Other candidates just stated that they would use a 'blue gel at 10% intensity'.

Question 7(c): some candidates struggled with basic stage positioning terminology with some stating that they would position characters 'on the upper left stage' or 'bottom right' while others ignored that part of the question and relied on movement terminology. Again, some candidates struggled with accurate movement terminology particularly with the difference between stance and posture. Many opted for 'open or closed body language' but did not describe what that actually meant.

Section 3, questions 8 and 9: many candidates resorted to narrative rather than analysis and told the story of what they had seen. Some candidates approached the question as if it were a text in context essay and stated what they would have done if they had been acting or directing. Some analysis was generic, for example 'the actor used lots of gestures' or, 'the designer used a blue gel for sadness'. Often candidates lacked correct drama vocabulary, for example 'he used a high volume'. Many candidates chose the same moment to analyse for the second production area and the response became repetitive; consequently, limiting their response and the marks awarded.

Some candidates did not manage their time well, spending too long on their first response in section 1. This limited the time left to complete, or, in a few cases, start their performance analysis response in section 3.

Performance

Acting

Candidates performed poorly when the same text was used for all actors. This resulted in the same scene being repeated, often with the same blocking. Some extracts were too short and therefore candidates did not have the opportunity to demonstrate a full range of skills. Some candidates used extracts that were too long, making it difficult for the candidate to sustain the character.

Directing

Some directors did not manage their time well, spending too long on a 'warm up' or rehearsal technique which did not serve the candidate's concept. Some directors did not have a clear understanding of the whole play and the context of the pages they had selected. As a result, they did not have a clear concept to communicate to their actors.

Some directors spent some time describing the play instead of giving direction to their actors, while some relied on the actors to give suggestions on how the scene may be blocked.

Design

Some candidates only designed for one scene or extract, rather than for the whole play. A number of candidates put all their effort into the second production area at the expense of the set design, which attracts more marks. Some candidates are not producing ground plans and elevations for every scene and/or change in location. Some candidates did not use textual references to support their design concept. Some candidates are also exceeding the 30-minute duration for this assessment.

Preparation for performance

Some candidates exceeded the 500-word guideline, which is unnecessary as candidates can gain full marks by using no more than 500 words. Some candidates detailed a wide range of rehearsal techniques that was superfluous to the task and therefore limited the marks awarded.

Some centres photocopied candidate mark sheets from previous years which led candidates to write preparation for performances that did not meet current assessment guidelines. Centres must ensure that they use the candidate mark sheets for the current year that is being assessed.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Section 1

When candidates have a sound knowledge of the whole play, along with an understanding of the social, historical, and theatrical context of the play, and have learned a range of quotations and/or stage directions, they have a strong basis for success in this section of the question paper. Essay-writing skills should be an integral part of teaching and learning, as this helps candidates to answer the question they are asked and not the question they wish they were asked.

Candidates should have a clear structure for their responses. For example, encouraging them to scaffold their responses to address the first part of the question with relevant quotations and/or stage directions. It is good practice for candidates to address the second part of the question at this point, so that they can link it to the first part of the response. It is useful if candidates underline key words in the question they are attempting and then use these words throughout their response to demonstrate that they are clearly answering the question asked.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use drama literacy and the correct terminology associated with the roles of a director, an actor or a designer.

Popular texts in 2022 were *The Crucible*, *Antigone* (various translations), *The Birthday Party*, *The House of Bernarda Alba*, *A Taste of Honey*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Men Should Weep* in Section 1 and 2 of the question paper. In addition, some candidates responded on *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Titus Andronicus*, *My Children, My Africa*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, *All My Sons* and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*.

How directing/acting/design concept marks are awarded:

The 'A' mark is awarded for stating, describing and using textual references (quotes and/or stage directions) from the selected text and how that answers the question. The development mark 'A1' is awarded for a development point that is insightful: this may, for instance, be how the historical context of the play develops the initial point the candidate has made. It may also be a dramatic feature such as dramatic irony or the turning point in the play.

The 'B' mark is given for describing the concept clearly using appropriate drama terminology. There is no rule to how many concepts candidates should give; however, it must be holistic and be clear.

The development mark 'B1' is given for how the concept described answers the focus of the question.

If a candidate cannot be awarded an 'A' mark in their initial point, then they cannot access the 'B' marks because they are closely connected.

Section 2

To access the full range of marks in this section, candidates need to have a good understanding of drama terminology and be able to use the appropriate adjective. Candidates do well when they have a clear understanding of the roles of actor, director and designer. There is established vocabulary associated with these roles and centres should teach this in conjunction with the candidate's selected text.

Section 3

When candidates have the opportunity to experience quality professional productions, it can provide a basis for a successful performance analysis. This can be through theatre visits, live streaming, free school broadcasts or recordings of live performances. When candidates have a sound drama vocabulary, in all aspects of theatre production, and can use this effectively in their analysis, they have a strong basis for success in this section.

Centres should encourage candidates to extend their knowledge of a theatre production by researching theatre reviews and interviews with actors and directors to develop an understanding of the theatre making process.

In section 3 candidates responded on a range of productions, including *The Tempest*, *Small Island*, *Master Harold and the Boys*, *Blackwatch*, *Merchant of Venice*, *The Crucible*, *Antigone*, *A View from the Bridge* and *Frankenstein*.

It is good practice for candidates to state the name of the production and when and where they saw it at the beginning of their response. As the four production areas are now consistent within the two questions, this should enable candidates to engage with the whole production and write about a number of moments instead of using the same moment. This will ensure candidates can access the full range of marks within the section.

Candidates should think about this essay through the following structure: What/How/Why. The marking of responses follows this structure:

The first mark is awarded by the candidate stating:

What: is happening on stage at this moment? (a short description to give the marker a clear visual of that moment in the performance)

and

How: is the 'what' being achieved through the chosen production area? This is where the candidate demonstrates drama vocabulary.

The development mark is awarded by the candidate stating:

Why: why has this been done on stage the way that it has? This is essentially analysis, where the candidate can demonstrate understanding of the theatre making process in relation to the focus of the question.

Candidates should practise timed essays to prepare them for the question paper. The suggested timings for the question paper are:

Section 1: One hour

Section 2: Thirty minutes

Section 3: One hour

Performance

Centres should use the textual clues, for acting, design and directing, to support the candidates understanding of the play(s) that they are using for their performance.

When centres introduce a wide variety of plays that are appropriate for Higher level, they give candidates an opportunity to meaningfully engage with the work. Candidates respond with enthusiasm and give successful performances.

Acting

Successful candidates select plays that interest them, suit their talents and are of the appropriate challenge for Higher. They know and understand the whole text and are cast in roles that give them enough to do. Candidates should be well-rehearsed in both roles and completely confident in their lines so they can explore the nuances and subtext of their extract. Extras who are not being assessed should, as far as possible, be well-rehearsed so that they establish believable interaction and complex relationships with the candidate(s) being assessed.

Centres should ensure that candidates perform the character as the playwright originally intended to ensure the application of the marking criteria will be both fair and consistent.

At SQA, we recognise that no young person should be put in a position where they feel uncomfortable taking on an acting role for their performance assessment, including roles of a particular gender. Therefore, candidates who are assessed for their Drama performances have the option to choose roles that are the same as, or different from, the gender they identify with. This option applies to all acting pieces.

It is important to note, however, that the textual clues that make up the character they want to play (age, personality etc) must be adhered to. The gender and names of the characters within the play must not be changed as it will affect the context and viewing of the play, and what the playwright intended. Centres should support candidates in choosing the most appropriate role for their performance assessment.

Some centres are still using the same text for all actors in at least one of their roles. This results in the same scene being repeated, often with the same blocking. This can disadvantage candidates as not all roles suit their aptitude and talent. Some extracts are too short and do not give the candidate the opportunity to demonstrate a full range of skills. Some extracts are too long, making it difficult for the candidate to sustain the character. Ensemble pieces, with more than four characters, can disadvantage candidates, as they do not have enough individual input to access the marks. The recommended maximum number of actors, as described in the Higher Drama Course Specification and the current modifications, is four.

Directing

Successful directors know and understand the whole text. They understand the characters' motivation, relationships and the themes and issues the text explores. They have a clear directorial concept. Successful directors are good communicators, good managers and leaders and inspire their actors. They have good timekeeping skills and pace the rehearsal, keeping a good balance between explaining and exploring their concept and directing their actors in terms of voice, movement and use of space. They should use drama terminology as far as possible such as areas of the stage as well as voice and movement.

It is not advisable to have directors directing actors who are performing the same scene for their own assessment because the actor will have developed their own acting concepts and the director will not have enough to do, or the actors end up directing the extract instead.

Design

Successful design candidates not only know and understand the whole text, but they also design for the whole text. Set designs should include ground plans and elevations for every change of scene or location. They should be detailed, and the candidate should understand how the designs could translate into practice. Designs for the additional production role should be for the whole text and demonstrate skill appropriate at Higher level.

Candidates should produce detailed cue sheets and/or labelled designs related to the text. Textual references from the play should be used to support design decisions. It is good practice for candidates to rehearse their presentation. The presentation should last approximately 20 to 30 minutes, including 10 minutes for candidates to demonstrate their additional production role.

At Higher level it is not advisable for designers to design for one of the acting pieces being assessed. It could restrict the candidate's creativity and originality.

For design and directing candidates, centres must ensure that it is only the visiting assessor and candidate that is present during the assessment: the teacher, or any other individual, should not be present. Any recording equipment must be set up and started **before** the assessment commences.

Preparation for performance

This is essentially a dramaturgical process at Higher level. Candidates can access high marks by being succinct in describing the results of their research and the ways that it informed their role. This should support their learning with their selected text in section 1 of the question paper. It is good practice for candidates to word-process these and state the word count, as it helps them review the number of words they are using. Centres must ensure that they use the candidate mark sheets for the year that is being assessed.

Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2022 Awarding—Methodology Report](#).