

GCSE

DRAMA

8261/X: Non-exam assessment – Texts in practice
Report on the Examination

8261
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Introduction

This series has seen some assured and engaging performance work. This was the second series for Component 3 and centres have overall shown a very good understanding of the requirements.

Students have the opportunity to explore texts and to perform repertoire that suits both their skills and their interests. The specification facilitates students to perform as individuals or as part of pairs or groups. This year has seen a balance of monologues, duologues and group work, with no particular arrangement being more popular than another.

Examiners have reported a full range of texts have been used for the examination and they have seen some very assured and engaging performances.

Administration: Paperwork and Submission of Work

Examiners have reported that for the majority of centres, all the pre-visit administrative tasks needed for the smooth running of the examination were completed in line with the requirements.

In any matters of uncertainty in respect of the administration of this examination, the NEA Adviser should be the centre's first point of contact, in order to be sure all preparations are in place.

For most centres the Play Approval Forms were completed promptly, either by using the standard form or in a few exceptional cases by an authorised email from their NEA Adviser.

Outline Schedule Forms were completed by centres and shared with examiners in order for the examination visit to be planned in a way that supports students, centres and examiners. The time between each performance should be discussed with the examiner prior to the visit, to be sure there is sufficient time for the examiner to complete their marking and ensure that the smooth running of the day will support the students. Where breaks are too short, examiners may feel rushed but where they are too long, students may feel the loss of momentum and energy.

The deadline of four weeks before the date of the visit for the submission of all pre-visit paperwork and associated information was observed by most centres and allowed the examiner to carry out the necessary preparation.

Examiners reported that most centres prepared clear and useful programme notes. Programme notes are very useful to the examiner as a means of identifying students immediately prior to and during the examination itself.

It was very helpful when programme notes clearly identified the play and extract, the students' names and character/s played, student number and photographs with the students in costume and holding their name and student number in front of them.

Less useful programme notes did not identify the play or used photos taken when the students were much younger. In some cases, names were not always clear because abbreviations or 'nicknames' had been used and student numbers were not given. It is worth reminding centres that the recording may be included in examiners' samples to their Team Leaders, may be used at the Awarding of grades meetings and/or be required to support an EAR request for a review of marking; if programme notes do not identify students clearly, these processes may be compromised.

The administrative requirements after the examination visit were mostly adhered to. Examiners reported that most centres sent the recordings promptly after the visit and in a suitable format. In some cases, examiners reported problems with recordings which included poor quality sound and instances where the use of stage lighting meant the performers' faces could not be seen clearly.

Most centres included Candidate Record Forms. Arranging documents in student number order was appreciated when carrying out post-examination checks; in addition, the provision of an attendance register was very helpful. Again, it is suggested that if a centre is unsure of any of the administrative procedures, they should check with their NEA Adviser.

It is very important for centres to check that the recordings of their students' performances are complete and error free before being sent to the examiner; there were some examples where recordings did not include all of the students' performances. There is further guidance on the filming of examination work later in this report.

Examiners valued the preparation centres had undertaken in order to ensure the examination visit was a positive experience. It was very much appreciated that centres, on the whole, were welcoming and hospitable.

Statements of Dramatic Intention

The purpose of the statement of dramatic intention is to provide students with the opportunity to communicate their creative ideas and for examiners to be able to watch the performance in the context a student intends.

This series saw a wide range of responses, from the very brief and generic, to clear and detailed intentions. It is important that students have studied their chosen play text as a whole, and then selected appropriate extracts for performance.

More effective responses demonstrated an implicit appreciation of the text, with intentions fitting the character and overall intentions of the extract. They also went on to state how this would be achieved, for example stating how physical and/or vocal skills would be deployed in order to achieve their intentions.

Less successful responses were simply too brief or only gave very general intentions, for example 'to be my character'. Such responses were often not able to demonstrate an understanding of the text.

Where students had undertaken a genuine exploration of their chosen text and could appreciate the wider context of the repertoire in terms of content and style, they were better prepared to identify clear, focused and relevant statements of dramatic intentions.

Filming Performances

Again, this series most centres managed to record the pieces very clearly and ensured that the identification of students was recorded, that speech was audible and facial expressions were visible.

Centres should be reminded of the requirements for recordings published by AQA, on the GCSE Drama section of the website. Before the piece is filmed, students are required to identify themselves by name and student number, stating their chosen specialism, the title of the extract

chosen and the role(s) they are playing. Centres also need to ensure close ups of students' design skills are recorded as part of this identification process, in addition to being captured during the performance itself.

The performances should be filmed by one camera ideally from a single position. The camera should, as closely as possible, provide the same perspective as the examiner. Stage lighting often affects the focus of the camera being used for filming, so the use of special effects needs to be carefully considered. In a small number of cases the camera did not show the entire acting area so scenes were taking place 'off camera'.

Practice with the camera should form part of the preparation for this exam and a quick check of the equipment before filming starts should allow centres to identify possible issues. The recording must capture everything on the stage that a student would want an examiner to give credit for. Any evidence that is not captured on the recording itself is not eligible for consideration in an appeal or re-mark.

Performance Extracts – Choice of Text

Again, in this series, examiners reported seeing a wide range of texts being performed and felt that the choice of both text and extract played a significant role in the achievement of students.

It was felt that the choice of text could support students, or hinder them, depending on how much they understood the style, genre, themes and overall creative intentions of the work. This is also true of the character/s a student chooses to perform and it is important to consider the role/s a student will play within each extract. Students need to understand the character/s they are playing and be able to use a range of performance skills in order to portray the character/s effectively.

Examiners reported that successful performances were seen across monologues, duologues and group performances.

Some texts were seen a lot, and some were less well-known, again it was how much students could understand the text, rather than how popular it was, that was associated with the level of success. In the most successful performances students were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the texts in their performance work.

Examiners reported the most popular texts again included *Girls Like That*, *Blood Brothers*, *DNA*, *Five Kinds of Silence*, *Be My Baby* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. They also saw an increase in the number of students performing Shakespeare and reported that some of these performances were of a very high standard.

Where students are performing from texts such as *Shakers*, *Bouncers* and *Teechers*, it was observed that students did not always appear to understand the historical or cultural references adequately in order to communicate the text effectively in performance.

Examiners also reported that students should consider their skills in terms of their potential to communicate comedy or tragedy effectively. It was reported that in some cases, students were entertaining their peers, rather than being truthful to the creative intentions of the repertoire. Students should also consider the skills required for effective multi-roling.

Choice of Extract

This series saw a range of approaches to organising the extracts. In some centres all students performed monologues, some centres organised all students into groups and in other centres there was a mix of monologues, duologues and group work. Again, examiners reported that the organisation in terms of group size did not impact on the achievement and that all approaches are acceptable. In a very small number of cases, group performances exceeded the maximum number of students.

In some cases, extracts were chosen which required the use of non-assessed students. The use of non-assessed students is prohibited, unless preapproved by AQA and permission will only be granted if there are extenuating circumstances. Centres are reminded to take this into consideration when initially looking at grouping students and choosing texts and extracts.

The timing requirements were mostly met this series. There were some instances when the minimum time was not met. This was often as a result of students missing out scenes or forgetting large numbers of lines. However, in some cases it was because the extract, usually a monologue, was not of sufficient length. There were also examples reported where a larger group just reached the minimum length. In such cases, it made it very difficult for students to demonstrate a range of skills.

Examiners also reported occasions where the length of performance was self-penalising with centres deciding to perform lengthy group extracts that resulted in some students being unable to sustain the role throughout.

Centres should check the relevant section of the specification if they are unsure of group size and timing requirements.

Extracts generally ensured that all students had significant moments within them. Some less successful performances were seen when very brief moments of text were linked together, which did not afford a coherent realisation of the character/s played.

Facilitating Examination Visits

Examiners reported that in the majority of centres, the day had been organised effectively in order to support students and to facilitate the requirements of the examination. As previously mentioned, the Schedule Outline Form should be prepared with full consideration of the requirements to facilitate the examination and the need to support students, in order for the day to run smoothly for all involved.

It is appreciated that in some centres the examination will need to fit into the constraints of the school day. However, in some centres it was reported that this meant watching several extracts without a break and then having long gaps where both students and the examiner were waiting for the examination to continue.

It was again reported that in some centres students were only permitted to leave lessons immediately before they were due to perform. In such cases, it was observed that students were not fully prepared intellectually, vocally or physically for their performance.

Extracts are assessed separately, so it must be made clear where one extract ends and the next begins. Time must also be allowed in between the extracts for the examiner to carry out their administration. Most centres organised the schedule so that students performed one extract after

another. In some other centres, all students completed their Extract 1 performance before any completed their Extract 2 performance. For some students, this seemed to present no problems, but others experienced difficulty regaining momentum following a long gap between their performances.

Examiners reported centres took a range of approaches to the role of the audience for the examination. A common option was for centres to have an audience of the students' peers. Some centres held an evening examination and a small invited audience was present, usually made up of parents, peers and school staff and governors.

It was noted that having a supportive audience added to the sense of occasion and gave students the responses their performance work merited. Examiners reported that in the majority of cases the audience was understanding and appreciated the performance was an examination. Again, this series, examiners reported the impressive team work that was seen with students operating lighting, sound and recording equipment as well as helping to strike sets.

In most centres teachers briefly explained to the audience, at the start of the examination, that they were welcome to react to the performance repertoire but to be reminded it is an examination. They also informed the audience about breaks between the performances.

In centres where students performed to the examiner and teacher, and did not have an audience, it was observed that this could lead to a less natural atmosphere for the work to be appreciated.

Performance Skill – Performer

The role of a performer was chosen by the vast majority of students again this series.

The work on the whole was well rehearsed, performed with a degree of confidence and was engaging to watch. Examiners saw a range of abilities in terms of the performance skills being applied. Physical, vocal and interpretative skills were all witnessed at an impressive level in some centres.

Most students showed that they were able to memorise text and perform it with accuracy. However, some students performed with the script, or received several prompts from the teacher. In some cases, lines were simply learnt and repeated without any genuine attempt or ability to portray the character or communicate the creative intentions of the text. Where this was the case it was self-limiting in terms of the marks it could access.

A lot of students had a good understanding of the text and were familiar and confident with their lines. In these cases, students more readily realised their dramatic intentions.

Examiners reported seeing some very mature performances, where a wide range of skills were deployed with precision.

Performance Skill – Costume Design

Examiners again reported a variety of findings in terms of students presenting costume design.

It was helpful in appreciating the design ideas when the statement of dramatic intentions was clear and detailed. When this was informed by relevant and focused research it often fully justified the

design ideas, even when the idea was a more straightforward one. This also helped demonstrate an appreciation and understanding of the text.

Whilst it is not a requirement that a costume design student makes an entire costume from scratch, there were still some highly impressive examples of costumes from students who did just that.

Examiners reported seeing some designs that were effective and appropriate costumes for the chosen character. Some students demonstrated skills in sewing, cutting, and adapting existing garments. Successful designs took the wider context of the play into account as well as the extract the costume directly related to.

Less successful examples of costume design were too simplistic, and had not been informed, nor had the student considered alternatives as part of the development of their ideas. These designs were generic and obvious and lacked imagination.

Performance Skill – Lighting Design

Where lighting design was offered as a skill, it was usually where the student had an interest and experience in lighting. Examiners reported some excellent demonstrations of this skill, where students had fully realised a sense of atmosphere appropriate to the text.

More successful responses were not only appropriate for the performance but also enriched it. In such responses there was a sense of genuine collaboration between the performers and the designer.

Less successful responses demonstrated basic lighting plots. These may simply include lighting changes from a full wash to a black out.

Design ideas involving colour, gobos, special effects and side lighting were all reported as being used effectively.

It is fully appreciated that the ability for a centre to accommodate and support technical skills such as lighting will depend on the availability of appropriate resources.

Performance Skill – Sound Design

For a successful response to be achieved, examiners reported on the importance of the chosen text to provide the opportunity for sound.

In the most successful responses students had undertaken relevant research and tested their sound plot in collaboration with the performers. This led to coherent designs adding value to the performance overall. Underscoring was used effectively to create atmosphere.

The most successful designs included a range of live and recorded sound effects, which created a sense of time and place as appropriate to the text.

Less successful responses were basic in their ideas, for example examiners reported some cases of the design simply being to play incidental music in sections of the extract.

Performance Skill – Set Design

Where examiners reported seeing set design, it was usually from a student that had a particular interest in production arts and the response therefore met the requirements of the text and showed a good level of skill.

In some other instances it was simply a rearrangement of furniture and objects that had a feel of instant design, rather than fully thought through ideas.

Performance Skill – Puppet Design

Examiners reported very few instances of puppet design, where it was seen there was a good level of interest in the use of puppets and a good appreciation of how they could be used in performance.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.