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# A-LEVEL

# DRAMA AND THEATRE

7262/X Making theatre  
Report on the Examination

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7262/X  
June 2023

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## General

- Teachers are to be commended for guiding their students through the final year of their school or college studies to reach A Level standard in Drama and Theatre, following three years of disruption and interruption caused by the global pandemic.
- For many teachers and their students, this has been a challenging experience.
- It has also been difficult for AQA, after a gap of three years with no visiting examinations, to provide a Visiting Examiner for every Centre, particularly during March, when many teachers prefer to hold their examinations. Some Centres were asked to submit their students' examination materials postally, as they did last year, and their students' work was assessed by a senior examiner in each case.
- Whether work was assessed postally or in person, it was vitally important for teachers to ensure that Examiners received all the necessary documentation including 'Play Approval' forms, students' 'Statements of dramatic intention', Candidate Record forms, for each student, signed by both the teacher and the individual student, and students' Reflective reports. Teachers should also have provided 'Programme Notes' for the examiner to help them to identify each student. See below for further details.
- Where teachers were assigned a Visiting Examiner, they were required to provide the examiner with the extracts/texts that the students had chosen a month before the examination date. If the examination was to be assessed postally, these items should have been included in the package sent to the examiner. These requirements were not always met.
- There were several instances of reports exceeding the 'absolute' maximum of 3,000 words. As stipulated in the specification, words beyond the 3,000 maximum were not credited.

## A reminder about the role of the NEA

- Teachers should be aware that there is support available through their AQA designated NEA adviser, for advice on the interpretation and delivery of all aspects of this 7262 X component.
- Social media platforms continue to have a place as a sounding board for Drama teachers, but it is worth reiterating that some of the advice offered by colleagues to one another, though 'well-meant' is not always universally accurate.
- Teachers are advised to contact their AQA- trained NEA advisers with any queries that they may have about the requirements of Components 2 and 3 and not to rely on the advice offered on social media, however authoritative the source appears to be.
- The role of the NEA adviser is to guide teachers, offering accurate information about the requirements of the NEA components and on many occasions their advice has averted potential rubric infringements or misinterpretations of the specification.

## Rubric Infringements

- Unfortunately, Examiners have reported a whole host of rubric infringements that have occurred in this series.
- The most significant of these occurred with centres not following the guidance on what constitutes an extract.
- Several groups, including students performing duologues, performed several scenes/sections from across the whole play and had been allowed to do so or possibly been given 'abridged versions' of the play by their teachers. The latter explanation appeared to be the most likely one when the cohort was quite large and each group in the cohort performed an abridgement of the whole play.
- The specification makes it quite clear that: 'The key extracts chosen must be **continuous** and individually last at least ten minutes in duration if the full extract were to be performed'

additionally, the specification states that ‘Students can perform an abridged version of the key **extract** if needed (to provide a coherent performance within the minimum performance times stated) but the wording itself must not be modified.’ Abridgement of the whole play is not permitted as this goes against the central pillar of the task which is to perform a ‘**continuous extract**’.

- Although examiners are instructed not to penalise students for infringing the rubric, it was inevitable that students who performed an abridgement penalised themselves as they were not able to access the higher mark bands in relation to the criteria strand in Part A ‘Personal interpretation is (exceptionally/entirely) appropriate to the play as a whole’.
- Some infringements, more commonly with duologues, occurred where students had edited out one or more character from the scene. There were frequent instances of lines being cut, and characters being removed, despite having significance in a scene. For example, in a scene where Pip and Fran are arguing in “Things I Know to be True”, Bob and Rosie are both meant to be on stage. They are mainly silent, but they are referenced and spoken to by both Pip and Fran, making their presence important to the interpretation.
- Quite a number of pieces exceeded the ‘recommended’ time for group performances, this was particularly true of small groups where 3 or 4 students were presenting pieces that lasted close to 30 minutes – frequently without the skills to sustain such work. In one instance, a duologue lasted for 36 minutes.
- Other infringements included:
  - the use of non-examinees. The use of non-examinees is not permitted in Component 3 as the minimum number of students is 1.
  - costume designers who produced costumes for more than one performer or produced more than one costume for one performer – neither of these is permitted in the rubric in the specification.
  - non-examinees in the form of ‘voice-overs’ participating in dialogue with a single performer.
  - there were also instances of rubric infringements related to Reflective reports which exceeded the ‘maximum’ of 3,000 words. Some student appeared to believe that the word limit excluded quotations – which is not the case.

## Administration

Responding to initial contact from the allocated examiner.

- Most centres responded to examiner’s contacts promptly and there was clear and useful communication between examiner and the centre.
- Unfortunately, several examiners have commented on the difficulty of establishing contact with some centres, or, where Exams Officers had passed on the Examiner’s details to the relevant teacher, there was frequently a delay in the teacher responding to the requests for the Schedule Outline Form with details of:
  - student numbers and student’ names
  - selected specialisms
  - extracts chosen
  - practitioners chosen.

## The Play Approval Process

- The requirement for including a signed Play Approval Form with the materials sent to the examiner (to be submitted to the NEA for approval at least **six weeks** before the examination) had been overlooked by several Centres.

- The Play Approval system is one of OFQUAL’s requirements of this specification and, therefore, teachers who had forgotten about them had to make later and, in some cases, retrospective submissions for approval.

### **Extracts to be sent to the Examiner**

- Some Centres did not send their examiner copies of the extracts to be performed. Examiners should receive these no less than **four weeks** before the examination date.
- Some Centres did not indicate the beginning/end of the extracts to be performed, nor did they indicate cuts or changes that had been made to the extracts, in contravention of the rubric for this component.

### **Submission of Paperwork to accompany the recordings of the performances**

- Most centres had provided clear ‘Programme Notes’ with clear identification of each performance group, supported by photographs of the students.
- Programme notes should consist of a reasonably sized colour photograph of each student with their name, role and student number clearly visible above, below or by the side of the photograph. Ideally, these photographs will show students who are being assessed as performers in the costume that they wear in the performance. Details of the chosen play, the part they played, if offering performance as their chosen specialism, and their chosen practitioner should also be included.
- Designers also need to be identified in the programme notes with the same details of chosen play and practitioner.
- Some Programme notes that were submitted to examiners marking the students’ work remotely found it very difficult to identify individual students in advance of watching the performances, because the photographs were too small, or they were in ‘black and white’ and/or were taken when the student entered the school in Year 7.
- It was also very difficult to identify individual students in performance, if the photograph showed students with Berkovian white faces, and where the students were dressed identically. In these instances, examiners applauded teachers who had intervened and ensured that each student has a different coloured wristband, sash or socks, so that each student could be clearly identified.
- Some Centres did not include Programme Notes which are a requirement and therefore had to be provided before assessment could take place.
- Some Centres omitted to include hard copies of the students’ Candidate Record Forms, and these also had to be requested by the examiner.
- Some Centres did not include the students’ ‘Statements of Dramatic intentions’, without which, no assessment can be made of how far students have achieved their intentions.

### **Recordings and USBs**

- Most centres submitted work which was filmed appropriately and followed the guidelines set by AQA. Some filming did not follow these guidelines however the best recordings were clear both visually and aurally.
- Other Centres filmed the students’ work from such a distance from the stage that it was impossible to tell one student from another by sight alone, and examiners had to follow the text to identify which student was playing which role - if the recording was audible.
- Teachers are advised to have a technical run though that is recorded and then checked so that problems with clarity of sound and vision could be addressed/eliminated.

- Some filming was problematical, where the students were not all captured throughout the performance. This was usually, but not exclusively, caused by staging choices, for example filming in traverse or the filming of a promenade performance.
- Examiners are not to be expected to watch different recordings of the same piece in order to be able to see a piece from several angles or to catch each performance in full.
- It is advisable to discuss any potential issues with filming the students' performances with the NEA and take advice about how to ensure that each students' work is fully represented.
- It was helpful when students introduced themselves clearly to camera and included any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece or multi-rolling.
- In most cases, design students ensured that their set, costume or puppet design was filmed in close-up, and in silence, in a sequence preceding the recording of the performance.
- It is also worth reminding students that, if they are offering a design skill, they should not attempt to introduce the design to the examiner nor should they prepare a 'design portfolio'.
- Design students, in common with all students for all specialisms, introduce themselves to camera in the line-up or individually; they do not produce a design portfolio, they produce a reflective report like all other students which may include sketches/diagrams photographs to support written evidence that conforms in every other particular to the requirements of the Reflective report that appear in the specification.

## **USBs**

- Most Centres encrypted the USB; the vast majority used the agreed AQA password for this subject.
- Some Centres used their own password, sometimes writing the password on the USB label, somewhat negating the whole purpose of encryption. Others used their own password but did not share it with the examiner, and others weren't password protected at all. These were administrative breaches.
- A few recordings were inaccessible for unknown reasons, but which inevitably meant a disproportionate amount of time was spent contacting the Centre, trying to access the work and/or waiting to receive a replacement USB.
- Some Centres included all the 'paperwork', including Reflective reports, on the USB - without any 'paperwork' at all. This is not in line with the guidance, as Examiners cannot be expected to print out vast quantities of material to mark and annotate.

## **Students' introductions to camera/preliminary line-up**

- When students are filmed introducing themselves the information that they are required to supply includes: their name, their student number, their specialism, the name of the play that they are performing and the role that they are playing, if their specialism is 'Performer'.
- It is also very helpful if the students in the 'line-up' also hold a sheet of A4 paper at chest height that gives the name and student number in bold lettering. This is because student work may be scrutinised several times after the examination has taken place, included, but not restricted to being viewed by the examiner's Team Leader, being viewed as part of the Awarding process, being viewed in the post-result review process, being viewed by the Lead Examiner preparing exemplar work for teacher or examiner training.
- Students should not give a summary of the play that they are performing an extract from as part of the identification process or indeed at any point during the examination.

## **Statements of Dramatic Intention**

- Although the Statements of Dramatic Intention do not attract marks in themselves, they provide important information for the examiner and form a necessary part of the

assessment of the performance. Examiners read these statements in advance of watching the work and, as they say, ‘first impressions count’.

- Bullet point 5 of the criteria banding scheme, (Part A), relates directly to the student’s achievement of their dramatic intentions and students cannot achieve marks for this bullet point if there are no stated ‘intentions’ to measure the performance outcome against.
- Good statements made clear and specific reference to intended effects and often referenced the application of the practitioner’s methodology. Less effective statements were generalised or perfunctory and did not offer the examiner any clearly defined intentions.
- Some students did not offer ‘Justification of theatrical choices’ that appears on the SDI form. Students need to explain why and how they have interpreted the text as they have.
- It is especially important to include justification for any deviations that students have made from the text as it was originally intended to be performed. For example, if performers have chosen to apply a Berkovian style to a play such as *The Importance of being Earnest* or *Private Lives*, they should alert the examiner to their theatrical reason for doing so.

### **Selection of extracts**

- As in previous series, Examiners noted that some students had not been guided appropriately in their choice of texts/extracts, or had not responded receptively to guidance that they had received.
- Rather than ‘I was given the role of ..... to perform for my Extract 3’ or ‘Our teacher gave us *Pygmalion* for our Extract 3’, it would be better if students had some degree of choice of play/role, to enable them to access the most marks.
- It is important to spend time considering the appropriate role and play for a student, to enable them to perform the best they can
- It was unwise, for example:
  - for students with no apparent facility for mastering an accent or dialect that was not their own, to attempt *Blanche* from *Streetcar* or *Minnie Powell* from *The Shadow of a Gunman*, or *Scullery* from *Road* unless they had been born and raised in the respective regional neighbourhoods depicted in these plays.
  - for students lacking in qualities of physical agility to attempt a play such as *Pool (No Water)*
  - for students lacking in clear articulation to attempt Shakespeare
- Nevertheless, there was a range of texts explored and it was exciting to see students actively engaging with a wide spectrum of plays and genres, from recent new plays such as *The Ballad of Maria Marten* or *Father Comes Home from the Wars* to the great classic roles of both Greek and Shakespearean drama such as *Medea* or *Hamlet*. In the majority of cases, the energy and commitment given to the extracts was admirable.
- Examiners noted, however, that many students appeared not to have read the whole play from which the extract was taken, or identified and explored a ten-minute section from which their ‘key extract’ was taken, as explicitly required by the specification.
- Another phenomenon noted this year is that some students appear not to have performed extracts one or two at all. They have taken the word ‘workshop’, or the teacher has taken the word ‘workshop’ simply to mean ‘exploring’ and they outline in the reflective reports that they have explored a text by ‘singing the words for example or ‘swapping characters’ or ‘pretending to be animals’.
- This is not what is meant in the specification by ‘workshopping’. A ‘workshop performance’ is one that may not take place under lights, or with full set and costume, but it is still a performance. Lines have still to be learned and, in many cases where the terms of the specification have been understood, students are working hard to apply a practitioner to extract one and two as well as to Extract 3.

- In the case of mounting a ‘workshop performance’ the whole task is taken seriously, and this enables students to write meaningfully in their Reflective reports about their interpretative work on each of the extracts.
- Where students have not had this this experience and where teachers have allowed students simply to read an extract in class and call that a ‘workshop’ the Reflective reports suffer in direct relation to how much effort has been put into the work they’ve done on the chosen plays for Extracts 1 and 2.
- Some students had chosen monologues from the internet/YouTube or from Monologue/audition collections, and their work sometimes did not reflect accurately the style/period and/or genre of the original full text.
- Others, who had found their extract on YouTube offered as close of a carbon copy of the original performer as they could reasonably achieve, which did not meet the premise that all work on Extract 3 should be inspired by one of the prescribed practitioners.
- Interpretation of the character being performed should be appropriate to the play as a whole. Even where students are working in groups, there should be evidence of a common understanding of the wider play.
- Examiners encountered centres where each group had explored the same play and, in some instances, groups or individual students used the same ‘set’ and ‘costumes’ and presented very similar interpretations of their chosen extracts. This resulted in a complete lack of ‘originality’ in the performances which were often quite mechanical in delivery.
- Where there was a ‘copy-cat’ approach to the extracts, Examiners invariably detected a similar approach to the reflective reports where, in extreme cases, students wrote to a template, and it was not uncommon for phrases and indeed whole sentences to be identical across the cohort. Where cases of this ‘corporate approach’ to writing the report were detected, examiners alerted the AQA’s internal department for Irregularities and Malpractice.
- As was highlighted in the report for the 2022 series, in the majority of cases where students infringed the rubric, in the presentation of inappropriately cut and spliced extracts, for example, the performance criteria relating to ‘appropriateness to the play as a whole’ and ‘sensitivity to context’ were assessed to be in one or other of the bottom two bands.

### **Selection of Practitioner**

- This year, it was encouraging to see students investigating and applying the work of a range of practitioners, generally with confidence and success. Katie Mitchell remained a popular choice, as did Berkoff and Stanislavski, to name a few, but other practitioners gained importance, including Paper Birds, Complicite and Alecky Blyth.
- Although it may be possible to be ‘creative’ and select a practitioner that doesn’t seem to fit comfortably with the selected text(s), the sense that practitioners and texts had been selected together for solid and legitimate theatrical reasons nearly always resulted in more complete, detailed and secure pieces. More successful work showed evidence of the practitioner being selected and researched before being applied to an extract.
- In some instances, the practitioner’s methodology was at odds with the playwright’s intentions. Students need to be aware that they are awarded marks for the appropriacy of the interpretation to the play as a whole.
- Some detailed and intelligent work lost marks because it was a re-imagining of the play as opposed to an interpretation of the play as written. This particularly applied to students applying physical theatre to pieces with paramount focus on text, such works by Oscar Wilde and Noel Coward.
- There were a few examples of less-often selected practitioners such as Grotowski, Peter Brook, Polly Findlay, Declan Donellan and Bruiser Theatre, which was good to see. There was often good evidence of understanding and applied research and methodology.



- There were examples of a misunderstanding of the methods and intentions of some practitioners, with Brecht and Artaud being the most frequent victims. Direct address and a few placards (often around students' necks) don't automatically qualify the piece as being 'Brechtian'.
- As noted in previous reports, students often chose Artaud to "shock" when dealing with difficult or disturbing content in their chosen extracts. The playwright's intentions need to be carefully considered, most notably with works by Sarah Kane where the lyricism and intention behind the text was often missing, or smothered with gratuitous screams or hostile staring at the audience missing the point of Artaud's intentions as well as of Kane's.
- Successful choices were those which linked the extract and the practitioner's methods thoughtfully, considering the creation of meaning and how the practitioner helped express the playwright's intentions.
- It was evident in the Reflective Reports that the students had not only researched the practitioner's work, but had also applied his or her methodology in the rehearsal and devising process.
- This resulted in work which had very evident features of the practitioner's work and was consonant with the interpretation of the text. Equally, there was some good work from design and technical students, demonstrating secure understanding and incorporating key features of a practitioner.
- Successful students showed features of the practitioner's work, for example in terms of the use of design fundamentals such as colour and scale, and the Reflective Reports indicated not only research but how compromises had been made to convey, for example, the scale of Ralph Koltai's work on a student budget.
- Successful design and technical students offered work, which was well integrated into the performances, becoming highly effective in creating the meaning of the piece. Where design and technical students had chosen to work with the same practitioner as the performers, their work showed features which were entirely appropriate to the practitioner's style and the Reflective Reports gave useful illustrations of these key features, often linked to specific productions.
- Less successful were students who had not considered the links between practitioner and extract resulting in inappropriate choices. For example, a pairing between "The Importance of Being Ernest" and Berkoff. The physicality of Berkoff's work was well represented but the importance of the nuanced text was lost. Students should be reminded that one of the marking criteria is that the interpretation is suitable for the "play as a whole".
- Similarly, less successful work showed only a superficial understanding of the practitioner, sometimes without the skills to deliver the work effectively. This was sometimes the case with pieces using Kneehigh or Shared Experience, for example, where one or more of a group was unable to meet the physical demands of the work.
- Weaker work showed an insecure understanding of the practitioner's methodology and intentions, so few features were evident, or these were not well integrated into the performances. For example, there were several pieces which were broadly naturalistic but had a brief section of chair duets or round-by-through which was not integrated and added little to the meaning of the performances.
- Far fewer students have attempted a design skill 'post pandemic' and the design practitioners were rarely chosen.

### **The Reflective Reports**

- Examiners commented on the generally high standards of the practical work, although noted that the Reflective Reports were often not of a similar quality.
- There were few examples of reports that had addressed all of the tasks in a practical and focused way.

- The requirements of the reflective report are clearly set out in specification and many students have had access to the requirements and attempt to meet them.
- However, in other instances it appeared that students had not read the requirements carefully enough.
- Many had not appreciated, for example, that when they're writing about 'challenges and opportunities' they're supposed to be writing about the challenges and opportunities presented by the extract.
- Many students wrote about the challenges posed by their chosen practitioner – this is not the task.
- Some wrote about the challenges that are created by their own physicality, for example, by their gender or their age.
- For example when approaching the role of King Lear as a teenager; simply stating this was a challenge is not enough, more detail is required of the specific challenges this presents, how they can be overcome and why they chose the role.
- Some reports in which the student demonstrated a secure and thorough understanding of their role and the demands of the extract, then wrote about these in general terms, rather than giving specific, practical examples of what was done to achieve their aims.
- Some very thoughtful, intelligent responses did not achieve the higher levels in the mark scheme because they were discursive, rather than practical, and had qualities more applicable to English Literature than the performance focus demanded by the subject of Drama and Theatre.
- A frequent observation was that reports had been produced to a 'house' template, which can help students focus on the set tasks, but can also restrict more able students.
- The tasks were used as some sort of tick list, with opportunities and challenges being listed for each extract, followed by a paragraph on genre and style, one of social, cultural and historical contexts and a list of practitioner features. Quite often this was followed by an assertion of success of the performance, without much sense of a theatrical interpretation, practical development or evaluation.
- This use of headings in the reports, while not inappropriate in itself, did lead to some students repeating information and not demonstrating the practical development of the work. Clearly, the stronger reports linked all of the tasks together and showed how each strand had been used to inform their interpretation.
- Good answers reflected on the development of their personal skill(s) and how the chosen extracts had enabled this development through the challenges and opportunities presented.
- Good reports gave evidence of the application of the practitioner's methods with close reference to the influence on rehearsals and how the applied methodologies had moved the work forward.
- Good reports offered clear reasons for the choice of practitioner, including the skills and theatre experience of the group, and the useful application to the extract.
- Although there is no requirement for each extract to receive equal treatment in number of words written, it was noticeable that weaker answers gave only cursory treatment to Extract One and sometimes Extract Two.
- Students need to be aware that marks are awarded for detail of all three extracts. Better reports demonstrated clear, specific detail of all the extracts explored.
- Some reports exceeded the word limit and students need to be aware that once the 3,000 limit is reached, the work cannot be credited.
- This also applies when students mistakenly present a design portfolio when a Reflective report is required.
- There were, as in previous series, examples of reports where more effort had been put into the artistic presentation of the work rather than its content.

- Reference to audience responses or to the teacher’s feedback might be used to inform the student’s evaluation of their own success but these are not substituting for that evaluation.
- Some good reports commented on the personal progress they students believed that they had made as a result of working on the extracts and applying the rigorous methods of the chosen practitioner.

### **Summary of less good practice**

- No word counts; over-length; poorly structured.
- Acting or directing students offering reports containing largely superfluous photos when for Component 3 an ‘entirely written’ format is required.
- Practitioner not properly researched/studied/understood/applied.
- Challenge/opportunity bandied about in meaningless fashion or in a statement, students claim that all challenges are opportunities.
- Context stated/identified but not explored in terms of how it informed the interpretation – usually because it appeared not to have informed the interpretation.
- Weaker answers listed aspects of a practitioner’s methods, for example Stanislavski’s Emotion Memory and Super-objective, but how these methods were applied was not given or was realised in a perfunctory fashion. There was some evidence of misunderstanding in weaker reports and misuse of terminology. For example, “hot-seating” is not a Stanislavski method, nor is “slap and tickle” one of Brecht’s ‘theories’.
- Some weaker reports gave more attention to aspects of the work which were not linked to their personal skill. For example, for a performer, the selection of costume may be important to the development of the performance of a character, but it needed to be viewed from a performance perspective.
- Several weaker answers spent a considerable proportion of their reports describing the development of set or working space, but to the detriment of focus on their nominated skill as performers.
- Design students tended to have a more secure focus on their nominated skill, with stronger answers demonstrating clearly how they had worked with the group as a whole. Weaker design reports paid limited attention to working with the group, sometimes suggesting that their input was not integrated or was an after-thought in the process.
- Some students gave insufficient consideration to how they had developed their own skill, using the influence of their chosen practitioner.
- Some students wrote about a very narrow range of their chosen practitioner’s methods, for example, choosing Frantic Assembly, but only referencing ‘Chair duets’ or ‘picking oose’.
- Some students revealed a very restricted understanding of their chosen practitioner.
- Some students did not offer an interpretation of their chosen extract or role.

### **Contribution to Performance**

#### **Positive aspects seen:**

- A full range of performances was seen, including some exceptional performances in Band 5. There were few very weak performances seen, with few in Band 1, and only a small minority in Band 2.
- It was encouraging to see so many accomplished and sometimes inspiring performances, many achieving Band 4 and above.
- Students made highly appropriate choices, pairing the chosen practitioner with an eminently suitable text.

- Students gave full attention to detail in all aspects of the staging to create an authentic theatrical event.
- Students uncovered meaning in the text and offered intelligent and nuanced interpretation of the text, as written.
- Students performed the text without cuts or unjustified abridgements or unjustified interpretations.
- Students sometimes communicated complete control of their skills in performance.

### **Less good practice**

- Students adopted a casual approach to the theatricality of the event often characterised by a disorganised approach to the performance space with visible clutter in view of the audience.
- In some performances, the performers dropped out of character before the lights were dimmed.
- Missing or mimed props within naturalistic performances.
- Minimal attention to detail in relation to costume and/or setting.
- Poor attention to period/context within the performances.

### **Skills and specialisms**

- The majority of students opted to be assessed as performers.
- Teachers need to advise design students that their designs are assessed wholly in performance; there is no opportunity to describe or explain the design, to the examiner, in this specification.
- To be successful, any design element should play as effective a role in the success of the performance as the direction (if there is a director) and the performance work; it should certainly enhance and facilitate the action on stage rather than present hurdles for the performers to clear.
- An understanding of the extract, its contexts, and the playwright's intentions, as well as the influence of an appropriate practitioner, should be evident in the performers', director's and/or designers' interpretation – consonance between these different elements is especially important.

### **Monologues**

- Most were actual monologues and not spliced together from bits of text, although Examiners reported seeing a lot of the latter.
- Successful examples included where students had applied an appropriate practitioner and adhered to their methodology.
- It was also very apparent where students had clearly understood the place of the chosen monologue in relation to the character's arc in the whole play, there were some highly nuanced performances that showed a clear range of skills including some extremely effective naturalistic examples.
- In the best of these, students had paid attention to the detail of the work, creating appropriate environments which did more than just serve as a backdrop for the work.
- Interaction with set and props sometimes really helped to lift the work.
- Similarly, where students had considered to whom the monologue was being addressed, and acted upon this in their performance, it generally conveyed a greater understanding of the text.

- In monologues where students had applied less naturalistic practitioners, there were some excellent examples of sustained and convincing vocal and physical work.
- With regard to less successful work, the converse of all the above was evident. Naturalistic pieces, performed on a plastic school chair, straight out to the audience and with little consideration of the characters' age, dynamic, status etc were all to prevalent.
- In the most extreme cases, it felt as though the piece had only just been learned and that there had been very little exploration during the workshopping process.
- Some students used a 'silent partner' but then proceeded to completely ignore them for the majority of the monologue.
- For non-naturalistic practitioners, it often felt as though a movement sequence (Frantic Assembly) or a series of character gestus (Brecht) or a mimed scene setting (Berkoff) were applied to simply demonstrate one aspect of the practitioner and then almost ignored resulting in a performance that neither adequately demonstrated understanding of Part A or Part B.
- There were some very brief monologues – just about hitting the minimum time requirement but generally failing to give the student enough to demonstrate anything more than a 'good' contribution to performance.
- There were some (very) overlong monologues, but for the most part, these were students who had some excellent performance skills and wanted to demonstrate them!
- Dramatic intentions frequently indicated a level of intent that wasn't revealed in performance.

## Duologues

- Duologues were a popular choice this year, with many students drawing from Shakespeare and from classic texts such as "Blithe Spirit", and "Lady Windermere's Fan". "Two" remained a popular choice and, as last year, so did "Things I Know to Be True" and "Punk Rock".
- A few students chose more experimental work, such as Sarah Kane's "Crave" but did not always convey the conviction required to achieve their intended dramatic effects.
- Duologues were often highly successful, allowing students to explore interaction with another performer, and were often detailed showing thorough research, preparation and rehearsal.
- Some examples of excellent work seen included:
  - Hamlet and Ophelia in the 'Get thee to a nunnery' duologue
  - Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in the 'Was the hope drunk?' duologue
  - Vladimir and Estragon in Waiting for Godot
  - Various duologues from Two
  - Konstantin and Nina from The Seagull
  - Masha and Medvedenko from The Seagull
  - Nora and Helmer from A Doll's House
  - Jeffrey Skilling and Claudia Roe from Enron
  - Christopher and Ed from Curious Incident
  - William and Lily in Punk Rock
  - Berkoff duologues various
- Most duologues were well chosen and offered both students ample opportunities to demonstrate their skills. There was generally a clear link to the Reflective Reports where students commented on their joint preparation and rehearsal and how this had benefitted their personal performance.
- Less successful was work which was led by one student with a partner who was clearly less engaged. There were fortunately very few examples of this but these included work

from *A Taste of Honey* and *Antigone* where the energy of one student was not matched by the other.

- It could have been beneficial for the stronger student to work on a monologue as the opportunities for interaction were not there, and the other student's lack of engagement reduced the effectiveness of the performance as a whole.
- This lack of engagement was often evident in the Reflective Report of the other student, which was underdeveloped and offered few specific details. The stronger student's report was often better developed but indicated that one student was doing the majority of the work, and had limited support.
- Some centres offered a series of duologues by different pairings of students. Where these were offering the same extract, more successful students showed a personal interpretation which was both justifiable and developed meaning in the text.
- Less successful students produced work which was an imitation of stronger pairings. Some centres used the same settings for a series of duologues, not only furnishings and layout but also properties. This did not support the individual creativity of the students' work.
- In several instances students had produced duologues using a non-examinee. Where this was because the student's partner had left the course, this was acceptable. AQA do need to be informed in these circumstances and there needs to be evidence of this.
- In some cases, however, students had deliberately paired with a student from their cohort who was being examined on another performance. This is a rubric infringement. In case of doubt, the NEA advisor should be contacted.
- Unfortunately, several duologues had misinterpreted what constitutes an extract and an abridgement and texts were inappropriately cut to create a duologue text. For example, a pair had chosen an extract from "Teechers/Leavers" and had cut the character of Salty, re-assigning his lines. This was inappropriate to the meaning of the text and went counter to the playwright's intentions.

### **Group Pieces**

- Although separate marks are given for the contribution to the performance of the extract and for the application of the chosen practitioner, where logical choices had been made in terms of extract and practitioner 'fit', there was a greater sense of unity and theatrical understanding in the performance. Some combinations didn't make much theatrical sense, for example performing a piece by Godber, but using Brecht or Berkoff as influences.
- Individual opportunity to display a range of skills can be an issue where the section chosen for performance only allows some performers limited exposure, particularly in groups of five or six performers.
- Similarly, a few pieces were dominated by one performer in terms of stage time, but also ideas that had been explored or 'imposed' on the group, with some performers seeming less comfortable in the piece.
- It is important that students select a practitioner who plays to the group's strengths and allows group members to demonstrate their best work.
- There was some excellent work using physicality, for example, but equally work which clearly did not suit the students' abilities, for example some work inspired by *Frantic Assembly*, where the precision of the ensemble was not evident.
- Students should also be aware that higher marks are awarded to frequent evidence of the practitioner's methods, which ideally should permeate the whole performance, and go beyond a few isolated moments.
- Where design students had worked with a group, the best pieces occurred where there had been close collaboration between designer(s) and performers, with a sensitivity shown to each other's needs, particularly where the designer had chosen their own practitioner.

- There were several examples of thoughtful design work which supported and promoted the meaning of the performances, including lighting design inspired by Paule Constable and set by Ralph Koltai.
- Group ensemble pieces, where performers had worked together to produce the final performance frequently achieved a greater sense of theatrical understanding and authenticity, than monologues or duologues, which occasionally felt mechanical and far more like an audition piece than a theatrical event that was focused on audience experience.
- Examples of this in this series included 'The Complete Works of Shakespeare' using Bruiser Theatre as an influence and 'That Face' using Stanislavski.

## **Performer**

### **Positive achievements**

- Extracts were unedited, or appropriately edited, and of the correct length, to enable students to demonstrate performance skills in accordance with the playwright's intention.
- The chosen practitioner was a complete match with the selected extract and actually enabled the student(s) to reveal the playwright's intentions.
- Students displayed precise vocal and physical performance skills that revealed understanding of the demands of both practitioner and text, as well as of the role selected.
- Examiners were delighted to see a good balance of monologues, duologues and group work across the cohort, this series, despite the negative impact on rehearsal- time caused by potential absences, due to Covid 19.

### **Less successful work**

- Some extracts were much longer than the stipulated length for the group size; this often had a reductive effect on the marks awarded when the performance lacked variety – one duologue lasted 36 minutes
- There were also some extremely short monologues seen, in this series, which did not allow the performers to demonstrate either a range of skills or to demonstrate that they could exhibit one or two skills for the duration of a meaningful piece of theatre.
- Occasionally, students chose an extract and role that they had seen (possibly several times) in a streamed performance and, while this experience might have helped less confident students to understand the text, it occasionally tempted students into 'copying' the performance, which inhibited their own creativity.
- While monologue books have their place in the initial stages of finding a suitable extract to perform for a solo performer, they should be approached with caution. It was evident from some of the performances of monologues chosen, perhaps, (out of context) from a monologue book, or from YouTube, that students were unfamiliar with the complete text.
- Monologues were often performed directly to the examiner/camera with no apparent awareness of the context of the speech or any consideration of where any other characters that appear on stage at the same time (if there were any) would be placed.
- Where the monologue chosen was a soliloquy, for example, Lady Macbeth's reading of the letter from Macbeth then this was an acceptable approach, but a monologue spoken during a scene that involves another character or characters needed the performer to show some awareness of the other characters on stage.
- In some pieces, the understanding of the practitioner was so limited that it was impossible to detect their influence in the work.

## **Direction**

- A few students chose this option.
- Better directors achieved a clear style, informed by the chosen practitioner.
- In some cases, the unifying presence of a director was easy to detect, especially in some well-choreographed pieces where Frantic Assembly or DV8 had been nominated.
- Successful direction was frequently evidenced in obviously polished work, where the direction of individual performers was matched by meticulous attention to staging elements.
- Students who had applied distinctive practitioners, such as Punchdrunk, generally fared very well.
- Weaker direction often resulted in a sense of incomplete preparation and performances appeared under-rehearsed or slightly incongruent with the text and/or practitioner chosen.
- Some students revealed limited understanding of the subtlety required to replicate successfully Katie Mitchell's use of 'live-feed'.

### **Lighting design**

- Lighting design practitioners chosen included Paule Constable, Richard Pilbrow and Malcolm Rippeth with other students citing the same practitioner as the actors had chosen.
- There were some excellent examples of lighting design, but most remained fairly functional.
- Lighting designers often chose to operate the lighting themselves.
- There was a good level of understanding of how lighting could contribute to mood and atmosphere and a very good lighting design was seen for a performance of a scene from Enron which features Andy Fastow's lair and the raptors.

### **Sound design**

- There were not enough examples of this skill reported to make any meaningful comment about sound design.

### **Costume design**

- Relatively few costume designs were seen. Where designers considered the effect of their work as shown in performance, under lighting and from a reasonable distance, these were generally successful.
- A few designers had not considered the impact of their costumes for audience members beyond the 'front-row' and their designs included features that were too small to be seen by more than a fraction of the audience.
- Other costumes were not appropriate for the actual extract being performed.
- Good costume designs always showed sensitivity to the context of the play as well as to the character wearing the costume and the action that they are involved in during the extract.
- Successful costume designers used materials creatively and understood the need to create a 'complete' costume with complementary footwear and accessories.
- Some designers mistakenly designed costumes for more than one performer or they designed 2 or more costumes for a single performer. Both of these approaches constitute a rubric infringement.

### **Set design**



- This was a minority choice.
- One design made effective use of a covered mound of 'stuff' to project images on to. However, the group rarely interacted with elements of the set, despite having numerous opportunities to do so.
- In another set design the continuous playing of images and facts on the upstage screen, became rather distracting to the action playing downstage.

### **Puppet design**

No puppet design has been reported to the Lead Examiner at the time of the compilation of this report.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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