
GCSE DRAMA

8261/C NEA - Devising drama
Report on the Examination

8261/C
June 2023

Version: 1.0

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Report on the Examination

It was pleasing to see the component largely back to normal following the disruption of the pandemic and the alternative arrangements permitted in the Summer 2022 series. Moderators were delighted to see full performances and more complete realisations of design work than circumstances might have allowed in the previous series.

As well as reverting to normal ways of working, it was also extremely encouraging to see that many centres had administered the paperwork in a well-organised manner and ensured that the sample was provided in full with all necessary documentation. Similarly, moderators enjoyed watching a range of work in various styles and reported that many centres had chosen inspiring stimuli which had engaged students and allowed them to respond creatively.

Report on Devised Performance (AO2)

Stimuli

The stimuli provided to students were extremely diverse in range, encompassing:

- **Images, artworks, paintings, sculptures, photographs** – these were as popular as ever. There was a mixture of content and media, providing scope for imaginative responses.
- **Music** – often song lyrics provided the spark that students needed to begin creating ideas.
- **Films, video clips, sound recordings, interviews, documentaries** – often these had a socio-political angle which made for some interesting devised work.
- **Quotations or word clouds** – these led to interesting work where the quote was suitably multi-faceted or profound, allowing students to reflect on its meaning or significance.
- **News articles or items related to current affairs** – often verbatim pieces were grounded in this type of stimulus. Some skilled pieces investigating the Grenfell Tower fire were created as a result of news articles on the inquiry and the testimony of survivors.
- **Poems, fairy tales, novels, scripts** – these often sparked interesting ideas for off-text devised work. For example, some centres imagined particular characters from novels in a different time period or speculated on events prior to the those depicted in the stimulus text. When using existing texts as stimuli, centres should ensure that the resulting devised work is truly original and in the spirit of the specification. It should not result in a performance of pre-existing work which is entirely derivative, rather it is a creative response to the original stimulus with largely original text created by the students.
- **Live performances/TIE** – some centres had used a live or recorded performance as a stimulus for devising. The specification permits any type of stimulus and is not prescriptive, but a note of caution is given for centres to ensure that the stimulus is sufficiently rich to generate ideas. This was particularly necessary where centres had used older students performing to the cohort as a stimulus.
- **A series of stimuli in different formats which were linked thematically** – such as women's' rights through history, corruption in sport, racism, inequality etc.
- **Installations/exhibitions in a drama studio or physical objects** – one moderator reported a suitcase filled with artefacts, each one constituting a stimulus, which had clearly engaged the students and led to some very creative work.
- **Workshops** – a notable trend this year was for centres to provide teacher-led workshops for students as a stimulus. This is an acceptable approach and tended to be most successful when it investigated a particular theme/topic/story which students could take in different directions. It was also most effective when the workshops included something concrete for students to write about: an image, some text, an artefact etc. Some students

struggled when this was lacking. For example, several students described how they had produced a series of still images at the start of the process as part of a teacher-led workshop, but were not explicitly clear about what the stimulus actually was.

- Some centres also provided workshops on particular skills/styles/practitioners as the stimulus. Occasionally, these were less successful as, whilst students had clear stylistic ideas, they lacked ideas for the content, themes and settings of the piece. Teachers who take this approach should ensure that the workshops used as stimuli allow students to have a highly developed response relating to what the devised piece will actually be about and not solely its style or the practitioner influencing the performance style.

Moderators reported that stimuli which were more ‘open-ended’ often allowed students to develop a personal response more highly in Section 1 of the Devising Log and led to some very creative performances in the practical work. In Section 1, students should demonstrate an ability to create and develop ideas and to speculate in sufficient detail on the meaning behind their chosen stimulus to produce a ‘highly developed’ response. Occasionally, where the meaning was too obvious or pre-determined, there was limited scope for students to share their own ideas. For example, ‘we were given the phrase ‘don’t judge a book by its cover’, so we decided to make a piece with this message’ or more worryingly, ‘our teacher told us we were going to make a piece about social media’. Centres should ensure that there is sufficient scope for individual creative responses in the stimuli chosen.

Centres are reminded that the specification stipulates that a range of stimuli must be provided and that students have free choice of the stimulus chosen. Some centres provided only one stimulus, which did not meet the requirements of the specification and did not allow students to respond appropriately in Section 1. Moderators appreciate that students do not have sufficient word count to examine multiple stimuli at great length, but it is useful for students to briefly give a flavour of what they were presented with before developing greater depth on the chosen stimulus, justifying their choice.

Styles and Genres

As per the specification, working in a chosen genre or style is not a mandatory requirement of the Devised Performance. However, moderators saw an enormous variety and range of work this year which took influence from many styles, genres and/or theatre practitioners. Often moderators reported that this helped focus students and provided structure or methodology to both the process and performance. Moderators reported:

- **Physical theatre** – this was most successful when it had a clear point/purpose within the overall aims of the piece. For example, one student wrote in her statement of dramatic intentions that she wanted ‘physical theatre sequences to create a tense and foreboding atmosphere within the nightmare scenes’ and was able to achieve this successfully in performance. Students should be discouraged from inserting random movement without considering its purpose within the overall structure, intentions and style of the piece.
- **Epic theatre, political theatre, documentary theatre and verbatim** – some impressive usage was made of verbatim text sourced from interviews and recordings. Students had investigated some interesting current affairs and topical issues, utilising techniques inventively. Some students produced TIE performances for an audience of younger pupils.
- **Physical storytelling**, often linked to folk stories, fairy tales, myths and legends or using puppetry, often with minimal props and set. Some students utilised a Kneehigh or Frantic Assembly style with a sophisticated grasp of how to enrich their own devised work and show real creativity.

- **Ensemble work**, often employing unison and abstract movement or utilising a chorus effectively. This often enabled students to demonstrate a wide or extensive range of skills and to show inventiveness in their individual performance.
- **Naturalism** was often seen with mixed results. Where the work relied too much on clichéd topics and rather bland roleplays and improvisation, it tended to be quite pedestrian and students struggled to show inventiveness. Moderators reported some fantastic examples of naturalistic segments within more stylised pieces (including some very sophisticated naturalistic monologue scenes within larger group pieces), which gave individual performers the opportunity to shine, but also to show a diversity in their individual skillsets, appropriate to a range of different styles elsewhere in the piece. When done successfully, this was certainly one possible way of demonstrating an extensive range of skills.
- **Use of practitioners** was very common to shape the style of the performance/design, provide rehearsal methodology or offer structure to the piece. By far the most commonly used practitioners were Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud, Frantic Assembly and Paper Birds. There is no mandatory requirement to use a practitioner and the success in doing so was mixed. Some of the best work used a practitioner effectively with a clear sense of style. For example, one group had utilised physicality in a truly and unmistakably Berkoffian style, whilst the set and costume designers had clearly been inspired by some research into recordings of Berkoff's early work. However, often the engagement with a practitioner seemed superficial and it was common for students to insert lengthy research and biographical information in the Devising Log without any relevance to their own devised piece. Often this had been copied from the internet without a given source, which raised concerns of plagiarism. Other students tended to scratch the surface of the practitioner's ideas in a reductive way, rather than showing convincing understanding of the methodology and linking it to the requirements of the Devising Log. Where understanding of practitioner ideas was shallow, it added little to the performance and did not aid students in developing their written responses or the piece itself. Where all students in a centre had been instructed to use the same practitioner, this sometimes limited the scope for wider experimentation and led to very similar performances.
- **Comedy, absurdism and spoofs** often involving the parody of a genre and its tropes led to some very clever and engaging work. For example, one group had created a devised piece based on the characters in Cluedo and developed a pastiche of the 'murder mystery' genre which proved very entertaining.
- **Melodrama and commedia** often involving stock characters and plots. This provided structure and coherence for some weaker students, but also allowed some stronger students to layer this with their own inventive ideas and to stretch their performance skills in a more heightened manner.
- **Promenade/immersive theatre** – whilst this was in the minority, moderators reported some memorable performances outdoors or in non-traditional spaces, such as a museum.
- **A blend of different styles and influences** is perfectly acceptable and often produced some very impressive and unique work.

Chosen themes

The stimuli and theatrical styles chosen by students were often considered purposefully in conjunction with their chosen themes for the piece. Some common themes included:

- Mental health, body image, eating disorders, suicide, coercive control, alcohol/drug abuse
- Racism, discrimination, the Black Lives Matter movement
- Women's rights, domestic abuse, suffragettes
- Climate change and the environment
- Politics and the response of governments to a range of contemporary issues

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- Historical events, conflict, war, particularly the role of women in war, PTSD
 - Identity and sexuality
 - Social media and technology, artificial intelligence, dystopian societies
 - Capital punishment: Derek Bentley, Aileen Wuornos, Ruth Ellis
 - School shootings

Specialisms

As ever, the Performer specialism was by far the most common choice. There were a significant number of costume designers and an increase in the number of students opting for lighting design and set design. Sound and puppetry were the least popular options.

Please note that only the specialisms listed in the specification are permitted for Component 2 and any other evidence is unacceptable. For example, moderators reported examples where students had been entered as a 'make-up designer' or 'prop designer'. These are not specialisms offered in the specification (although of course, costume design can include hair and make-up. Set design can include props).

Performer

Some superb performers were seen in this series, with some students demonstrating a high level of skill, which was developed and assured. Whilst performers are marked as individuals, performers were most successful when the piece provided them with enough opportunities to showcase a sufficiently wide or extensive range of skills and allowed them to demonstrate their contribution by giving them their moments to shine – as an individual, within an ensemble or both. Range of skills and level of inventiveness were the most common areas to lose marks.

The most successful performers often:

- Had plenty of rehearsal and participated in a thorough devising process in which the student had been genuinely engaged in the outcome.
- Were the result of a stimulus which was sufficiently rich and thought-provoking to spark creative ideas.
- Understood the need to contribute to the pair/group as appropriate to the style, for example in their timing, unison or ensemble work.
- Created opportunities to showcase an extensive range of skills, appropriate to whichever style(s) the student had chosen to work in, if any.
- Had thought carefully about the bigger picture of the piece, its content, staging and structure, which then allowed the individual to thrive within it, both supporting the group but also having their own moments of focus.
- Were inventive and imaginative, showing originality as an individual.
- Had a clear sense of purpose, evident in the Statement of Dramatic Intentions, and clearly met the precise aims in performance.
- Sustained their performance fully with focus, control and commitment to role, using appropriate energy and precision to demonstrate highly competent skills.
- Had a real sense that this was a performance and a significant event rather than a rehearsal. This was often achieved through the addition of basic costume, stage lighting or the presence of an audience to ensure performers felt invested and 'raised their game'. Basic technical elements are not essential and are not marked (unless there is a design student), but can be one means of giving performers a sense of occasion.

Less successful performers often:

- Tended to be insincere, lacking in energy or without genuine commitment to the piece.
- Lacked engagement in the stimulus, which translated to a lacklustre performance.
- Used ideas which were rather pedestrian, clichéd or derivative.
- Did not demonstrate a good level of performance skills or a wide enough range of skills, being a little monotonous vocally or lacking expression physically.
- Were not rehearsed with sufficient precision or attention to detail.
- Missed opportunities to transition between scenes inventively, instead relying on lengthy blackouts and noisy shifting of furniture.
- Were in performances which were very brief or had limited exposure for individuals. There were examples where a student was off stage for the majority of the piece and only appeared for a couple of minutes towards the end with minimal dialogue or contribution. This inevitably limited what could be achieved.
- Showed little proficiency in their acting and did not rise to the specific challenges of using certain skills, such as mime, multi-role and direct address (when these were attempted).

Designer

Like performers, centres are reminded that designers are assessed on AO2 in the recorded performance of the devised piece. Many centres provided extraneous materials. For example, there is no requirement for students to give a presentation to camera explaining their design (unless this is being entered as an audio/visual Devising Log and is clearly divided into the three sections).

Designers can attach diagrams, sketches, plots or cue sheets to the Candidate Record Form/Statement of Dramatic Intentions if they wish. These are **not** marked, but can be useful in clarifying intentions to the moderator. Otherwise, all design materials should be contained within a specific section of the Devising Log and such logs must be within the word/page/time limits outlined in the specification.

Some centres had provided various additional materials for designers (recorded presentations, PowerPoint slides, sketch books, mood boards etc.) in addition to a Devising Log which was already at the maximum word count. As well as being beyond the accepted word count, these additional materials were often not divided into the three Devising Log sections and did not address the content on page 26 of the specification. It was therefore a great shame that these materials could not attract any credit.

Design students should be reminded that there are only two tasks which are marked: the Devising Log (AO1 and AO4) and the marking of the design in the Devised Performance recording (AO2). It would often be more beneficial to these students to include design materials within the relevant section of the log. Students should ensure that any photographs or diagrams showing their designs are annotated or are alongside text which explains the relevance of what is being shown in relation to the content of the Devising Log, to attract credit.

Lighting designer

There was an increase in the number of students opting for lighting design and moderators saw many examples of sophisticated designs.

The most successful lighting design work:

- Used an extensive range of lighting skills, often including colour, intensity, angle, focus, washes, spots, gobos, moving lights, strobes, projection and other effects, to establish location or to create mood and atmosphere. Snaps and crossfades had been used skilfully within transitions to further embellish the design.
- Had been designed with consideration of the interplay the lighting design would have with performers, set design and sound design where appropriate.
- Involved lighting designers being fundamental contributors to the devising process rather than simply lighting the piece after it had been created. This created opportunities for inventive lighting effects and influenced the development of the piece itself.
- Included a well-developed cue sheet/lighting plot which helped to clarify intentions to the moderator and demonstrated a rigorous approach to this skill.
- Had been carefully designed with precision and attention to detail to support the action.

Less successful lighting design work:

- Deployed a more limited range of skills, often relying on a general stage wash coming on and off, with perhaps one spotlight or colour. This is insufficient to achieve towards the top end of the mark scheme.
- Lacked collaboration with the group, giving a sense that the piece had been lit after it was created rather than the lighting designer being heavily involved in the devising process.
- Lacked attention to detail, meaning some performers were not lit. Some lighting designs were uneven or erratic and appeared messy.
- Was limited by lack of opportunities in the piece itself for inventive lighting effects to be applied. For example, in one brief duologue, there was little scope for the lighting designer to add value and many of the range of skills they may have wished to deploy would not have been appropriate for the fairly short, naturalistic roleplay.
- Had some lighting states in which the intention was unclear, meaning they made little contribution to the piece in communicating meaning or creating a particular effect. This was often reflected in a brief Devising Log or an unclear Statement of Dramatic Intentions.

Sound designer

This was a less popular option in this series and moderators only reported a handful of examples. The biggest issue was often the range of skills on show. In one example, a student had deployed some pre-recorded sound effects and a piece of music. Whilst these were broadly appropriate to the piece, this was insufficient to attract significant credit. Centres are reminded that sound designers should aim to exhibit a far wider range of the skills outlined in the specification.

In one example, a sound designer had explained in their Devising Log how they had positioned speakers within the auditorium and on stage to control the source of sound. The same designer included extensive details of their process of editing and manipulating sound using computer software to add echo and reverb, and to distort the tempo and tone of an existing track. They had also carefully considered how live sound would be heard by the audience, using microphones and adding effects through the sound desk at appropriate points. This showed a greater depth of engagement with the challenge of sound design, leading to a more comprehensively explored Devising Log and a strong outcome in the Devised Performance. As such, sound designers are encouraged to experiment with the range of sound design skills outlined in the specification more ambitiously.

The most successful sound designs often had **some** of the following features:

- An extensive range of skills of the type outlined above were used.
- A range of pre-recorded/live sound effects and music were deployed, within a piece which gave them the opportunity to do so. Again, the designer needs to be part of the process to create such opportunities.
- The technical skill to manipulate pre-recorded sound using computer software, including editing and overlapping of different tracks.
- Had considered positioning of speakers (sometimes in conjunction with the set designer) and were able to use the sound desk to control the output cleverly.
- Showed inventiveness which went beyond simply soundtracking a moment with background ambience or deploying a simple sound effect.
- Utilised both diegetic and non-diegetic sounds/music.
- Used standing microphones or radio mics on performers and were able to manipulate this live feed through the sound desk. For example, one sound designer used mics to add an echo effect to the live dialogue of performers who were pretending to be inside a cave.

Less successful sound designers:

- Simply provided opening/ending music or some basic pre-recorded sound effects.
- Missed opportunities to use sound inventively during transitions between scenes.
- Made no attempt to demonstrate the vast majority of the sound design skills outlined in the specification.
- Made little contribution to the piece during the devising process and thus did not create opportunities for inventive sound design.
- Had very basic aims and lacked ambition in what they were trying to achieve.

Set designer

There was an increase in the number of set designers this year and there seemed to be greater ambition and creativity in some of the designs seen. Successful set designers often demonstrated some of the following:

- Ensured that the design genuinely supported the on-stage action and collaborated effectively with performers in the devising process.
- Showed an extensive range of skills by considering the whole stage picture, using the flooring, backdrops or any available flats as part of their design. Some set designers had created space for video projection within their design, which was often effective when used appropriately.
- Used steel deck or rostra to build levels, where it was appropriate to do so.
- Understood that colour, texture and material are important to create an environment. For example, set designers who had used stage blocks or classroom rostra to create levels often painted them, draped them in material or found ways to add suitable texture rather than just leaving them with the appearance of classroom blocks.
- Chose appropriate furniture and properties, paying attention to detail in set dressing.
- Considered the time period in which the devised piece was set, where appropriate.
- Had produced ground plans, sketches, visualisations and/or box models to plan and develop their set during the process, including images of these to illustrate points made within the Devising Log.

Less successful set designers often:

- Were too frugal in the design which limited the opportunity to credit a range of skills.
- Used only a few pieces of basic furniture and props, missing opportunities to deploy a wider range of skills and leaving parts of the stage picture unintentionally bare or not contributing appropriately to the creation of the desired environment.
- Had used classroom chairs, school tables etc where they were unsuitable for the performance or were insensitive to the period/context in which the piece was set.
- Did not support the stage action, creating obstacles for performers rather than facilitating movement, entrances and exits etc.

Costume designer

This year there was a notable rise in the number of costume design students stating in both their Devising Log and Statement of Dramatic Intentions that they had designed costumes ‘for the whole group’. Centres are reminded that the specification states that costume designers ‘must create **one** costume design for **one** performer’. Whilst it is acceptable for students to design multiple costumes, they **must** identify the one costume on which they are to be assessed. This single design should be the main focus of their Devising Log and must be the sole focus of their Statement of Dramatic Intentions. Where this was not the case, moderators had to select one costume to mark where the teacher had not already done so.

Nonetheless, there were many excellent examples of costume design in this series, in which the designers often:

- Considered the time period in which the devised piece was set, where appropriate.
- Demonstrated an extensive range of skills beyond providing basic garments.
- Considered precise detail and produced highly developed designs. For example, moderators saw intricate hair and make-up designs, the creation of bruises and wounds and the building of elaborate headpieces. Some students had paid real attention to detail, for example in thoroughly considering the specific buttons which a garment would have, adding distress to an item of clothing, applying ornamentations and considering colour and texture in impressive depth.
- Considered how their costume would affect a performer’s freedom of movement.
- Showed a depth of understanding in relation to the character they were costuming and the context of the devised piece.
- Worked collaboratively with the group.

Less successful costume designers often:

- Produced designs which were very basic and lacking in range and inventiveness.
- Assembled some basic garments, but gave no consideration to hair and make-up, footwear and any embellishments which could have enriched the design (where appropriate).
- Settled on a design very quickly and did not elaborate (in their Devising Log) on the process of development and refinement they had gone through.
- Did not collaborate with their group to ensure the piece was rich in opportunity for a costume designer, that the costume was appropriate to the character/period, and that it appropriately enabled the performer’s physicality (for example, in physical theatre).
- Designed the costume at the end, after the piece had already been created.
- Lacked research into the different possibilities for costume design.
- Designed costume for the whole group rather than focussing on one costume design in greater depth (although some more able costume designers did manage this).

Puppet designer

No examples of puppet design were reported to the Principal Moderator in samples received in this series. It may be the case that some students produced puppet designs which did not appear in samples.

Statement of Dramatic Intentions

Many Statements of Dramatic Intention were clear, concise and to the point, creating aims which could be achieved and were appropriately reflected in the Devised Performance. Often these focussed on the desired message of the piece, the impact on the audience, the presentation of a chosen theme, the intended style and genre of the piece or the aims for a particular individual character. Design students should focus their Statement of Dramatic Intentions largely on the chosen design element, but may also refer to their intentions for the piece as a whole. Students who wrote at great length sometimes created a bigger challenge for themselves in meeting their aims, with varying levels of success. Students are encouraged to focus on clear, achievable aims with a focus on what is being communicated to the audience and/or the intended impact or reaction that the individual wishes to elicit. Vague statements should be avoided.

Marking the Devised Performance (AO2)

Level of theatrical skill – the level of skill was often accurately marked by centres. Occasionally four marks were awarded when there was insufficient evidence of highly competent and highly developed skills or where this was inconsistent across the piece. Centres are reminded to use the examples in Teacher Online Standardisation 2024 as benchmarks for the next series. Centres are also reminded that the playing time for each performance should reflect the number of performance students in the group. Some groups with five or six performers who had produced a piece lasting four minutes inevitably lacked sufficient exposure to demonstrate their skills fully.

Range of theatrical skills demonstrated – this was one of the most common areas to lose marks. Centres are reminded to refer to the 'Guidance on Theatrical Skills' in the specification (pages 17-19). It is not expected that students will demonstrate all of the skills listed in the specification, but there must be a sufficient number for the student to be securely described as having a wide or extensive range of skills to achieve three or four marks. Again, Teacher Online Standardisation includes examples of students achieving at all levels of the mark scheme.

Contribution to the effectiveness of the piece – moderators reported a tendency in some centres to set a low bar for this strand of the criteria and/or to award each member of the group the same mark (often full marks). Centres are reminded that this is marked on an individual level and whilst it is certainly possible for students in a group to attain the same mark if their contributions were comparable, often there is a range of achievement within this part of the criteria which should be reflected in the marks awarded. Students whose contribution was significant, stood out or was totally pivotal to the success of the piece should be appropriately rewarded. Equally, the reverse is true for students who made a lesser contribution to the effectiveness of the piece.

Inventiveness of individual's work – along with range of theatrical skills, this was often the lowest marked of the five criteria. Again, there was sometimes a tendency in some centres to award all students in a performance group the same mark. Centres are reminded that it is the

individual's work which is marked and not the piece itself. Of course, some inventive ideas are a collective effort but moderators are looking for the individual's contribution to those inventive moments of the piece and whether their own acting or design had inventive qualities.

Success in realising individual artistic intention – students with clear, concise aims which had been carefully written and reflected their contribution to the piece accurately tended to be more successful here. Some centres had awarded marks for success in meeting intentions where the student had not written a Statement of Dramatic Intentions. Centres are reminded that marks cannot be awarded for this strand of the criteria if the student has provided no explanation of what their dramatic intentions are. Each student on Teacher Online Standardisation includes the Statement of Dramatic Intentions with representation of all levels of achievement.

Report on Devising Log (AO1 and AO4)

Moderators reported many good and excellent examples of Devising Logs in a range of formats in this series. There were many examples of very strong work which had chronicled the devising process in a high level of precise detail and with real depth of explanation. Regardless of the quality of the final outcome of the performance, logs often highlighted the rigour of the process and reflected the hard work that had gone into developing and refining ideas.

There are still a number of centres in which some or all students are not dividing their work into three clear sections. This is an essential requirement of the task. In cases where individual students submit work which is not divided into three sections, the teacher should take a 'best fit' approach. In these instances, a line should be drawn in pencil denoting where the teacher has stopped marking Section 1 and begun marking Section 2, and the same between Section 2 and Section 3. Too often in these instances, moderators were unclear on precisely where the teacher had determined each section to be. Points must be made in the correct section to attract credit. It is **not** acceptable to adopt a 'mix and match' approach in which points are credited wherever they appear in the Devising Log. It is also **not** acceptable for teachers to make any changes where students have denoted the start and finish of each section in work submitted, which would be considered malpractice.

It must be stressed that marking ceases when the upper limit of words/pages/time has been reached. This is the approach taken by moderators and the same approach must be taken in centres. Students producing a written Devising Log **must** provide an accurate word count at the end. All words within the log, including quotations and annotation, are included in the count.

The vast majority of centres provided clear annotations or summative comments on the Candidate Record Form to guide the moderator and justify the marks awarded. This is hugely appreciated and we are well aware of the effort that goes into producing this. In a small minority of centres, there were no annotations, nor a summative comment, which meant it was unclear how marks had been awarded. Please note, annotations and comments must refer only to the content of the task in the specification and the criteria in the mark scheme. Some centre annotations highlighted where a student had referred to something irrelevant to the task (eg reference to a practitioner is not a requirement of the log which attracts credit but appeared in some annotations).

Formats

Whilst the entirely written option remained by far the most popular choice, there was a notable increase in the number of students who opted for the use of writing accompanied by annotated photographs, sketches and/or drawings. As ever, this was particularly beneficial to designers who wished to include a visual illustration of the development of their ideas. Some performers who chose this option did so very successfully. For example, they included photographs from a physical theatre sequence they had produced and were able to annotate it to demonstrate how it had been developed and refined at different points in rehearsal.

Students who opt for the annotated photographs, sketches, drawings and/or cue sheets option **must** be reminded that:

- The materials **must** be annotated – credit is not awarded simply for an image of a design, for example. The task is to explain how ideas were created and developed (Sections 1 and 2) and to analyse and evaluate their own work (Section 3). Photographs, sketches, drawings or cue sheets will not, in isolation, be sufficient to meet the assessment objectives. Presented alongside relevant explanatory annotations and/or sections of text, they can provide a very useful illustration of the points made.
- Further to the above, it is the explanation, analysis and evaluation which is marked. The content of the specification must also be explicitly addressed. Some students produced aesthetically very appealing costume mood boards, for example, but with no accompanying explanation, nor any reference to the content of the Devising Log in the specification.
- The work must still be split into three clear sections, regardless of the format chosen. Any design materials not in the Devising Log can be attached to the Statement of Dramatic Intentions, if desired. These are **not** marked for AO2 but can help to clarify the intentions to the moderator. Any design materials not included within a specific section of the Devising Log are **not** marked for AO1 or AO4.

Once again, audio/visual recorded Devising Logs were very much in the minority this series, but moderators did see a number of examples. Students who were unprepared for this recording tended to skim the surface of each point in the specification, lacking in detail or examples. Many responses were too broad or vague and it would be beneficial for students to prepare more thoroughly for the recording. Those with brief but well-prepared notes to prompt them often fared better. Those students who read a pre-prepared account met with mixed success.

Whilst a student talking directly to camera is an acceptable approach, centres are reminded that this option could involve students editing their own video, in which they use images, photographs or video footage to illustrate their points, alongside a recorded voiceover and/or text to explain, analyse and evaluate their work. Once again, this must be clearly divided into sections and be within the word/time limits outlined in the specification.

Section 1: Response to a Stimulus (AO1)

Moderators are looking for clear evidence that the chosen stimulus has been engaged with, responded to and utilised to create and develop the ideas, themes and settings of a devised piece. The reader should finish Section 1 with a clear sense of the intentions for both the individual and the piece.

Initial response to the stimuli presented by the teacher and the stimulus they chose

As per the specification, the teacher must present a range of stimuli for students to respond to and students must provide evidence of their choice of stimulus. Too often, students alluded to their influences but were not explicitly clear in identifying what the stimuli presented by the teacher

actually was (or what constituted their own research and ideas). Some centres provided only one stimulus, which did not meet the requirements of the specification and created greater difficulty for students in Section 1.

There were some very highly developed responses to stimuli which were sufficiently rich and thought-provoking to generate discussion and ideas. Students should be encouraged to speculate and discuss possibilities at the start of the process. Often students wrote about ideas which were later discarded, but this was nonetheless useful in illustrating how ideas had been created and developed. Moderators are looking for a sense of the journey which the student has been on with their group to reach their initial ideas and intentions. This was often well explained.

Ideas, themes and settings

Students often showed a strong ability to generate ideas, themes and settings from the chosen stimulus. Many students offered convincingly detailed theatrical ideas for how they might bring the stimulus to life, suggesting dramatic techniques which they might deploy and giving precise detail of how they envisioned specific aspects of the devised piece to look. The most successful students identified a range of themes and explored their potential in detail. The setting of the piece must be clearly identified. Sometimes this may be a consistent and specific location, but moderators equally accepted comments such as ‘the piece will be set largely in a newsroom but also branches off to a series of flashbacks leading up to the murder’ where perhaps the piece did not have a constant physical setting.

Less successful students tended to miss out either ideas, themes and/or settings, referring to only one or two of the three required pieces of content. Some weaker students made a simple identification of what the theme or setting was, but did not elaborate sufficiently to make their writing more highly developed.

Research findings

A common issue in Section 1 was to identify lengthy research findings (sometimes copied from the internet without a given source) but giving the reader no sense of the relevance of those findings in the context of the devised piece. Less successful students copied down vast amounts of information about a practitioner or theme, but failed to explain how this allowed them to create and develop ideas in their own work. More successful students tended to quote their sources thoughtfully, often from more than one source, highlighting the influence a specific finding had on their initial ideas for the devised piece. Some students produced highly developed responses by discussing in depth the application of their research findings to their ideas for a specific scene or character, which made the response more purposeful.

Moderators reported that other students skimmed over this section very briefly or missed it out altogether. Students should be reminded of the distinction between the ‘stimuli’ (provided by the teacher) and the ‘research’ (sourced independently by the student). Some less successful students had nothing beyond the stimuli provided, which cannot be credited as research.

Own dramatic aims and intentions and those of the piece as a whole

The most successful students outlined clear aims, ensuring they covered their individual performance and the piece as a whole in sufficient detail. Moderators will accept any valid dramatic aim including (but not limited to) the communication of character, the development of theatrical

skill, the use of theatrical style or techniques, the specific impact on an audience or the precise meaning or message which a student wished to communicate about their chosen theme/content.

Students who communicated a handful of aims with real clarity were most successful. Less successful students tended to be rather broad and vague in their explanation, with comments such as 'I intend to become a better actor' or 'I want the audience to understand the piece' without giving precise detail or elaboration.

Section 2: Development and Collaboration (AO1)

Section 2 tended to be the least well-answered of the three sections. This section requires students to explain the rehearsal process from both an individual and group perspective, highlighting how specific elements of the individual specialism/the piece were developed and refined. The most successful students had a detailed and holistic understanding of how given examples from the rehearsal process illustrated the ideas, use of theatrical skills and use of feedback to develop and refine aspects of the performance. By far the most successful approach was to use precise examples to exemplify all the key points of Section 2. Students who were able to be specific, offering quotations and detail of the practicalities of process and performance were rewarded more highly than those who offered a broad overview of the process without precise detail.

Own ideas and those of the pair/group

Across the examples of development and refinement chosen in Section 2, students needed to ensure that they covered ideas generated by them as an individual and those of the group. Some entirely appropriate comments such as 'I had the idea to...' or 'Jack suggested...' often highlighted how the initial spark of an idea had emerged within the group work. The most successful students were able to pin down the ideas and influences which had brought them to the starting point of a particular scene/character/moment, ensuring the reader could then follow the journey into how this idea was developed and refined. The least successful responses did not give a sense of which ideas had emerged from the group or what the individual student's contribution was.

Development and refinement of the piece

The most successful students chose examples of particular scenes and moments to illustrate their points on how the piece had been developed and refined from one form to another. Often, successful students chose examples which were inherently group-based (for example, the choreography of physical ensemble work which required unison and precision) as this ensured that the discussion focussed on the piece, not simply the student's own individual skills (which is a separate part of Section 2).

The less successful students invested too many words in narrative description, outlining the plot of the piece. This treated the performance as being fixed without giving precise detail of how it was developed and refined, nor of how it existed practically and theatrically. The key to this part of Section 2 is explaining practically how the piece existed in one form, followed by the specific skills, techniques or methodologies which were applied to it in rehearsal which led to a better outcome.

A common issue was for design students to devote the entirety of Section 2 to describing the development and refinement of their own skill (eg costume) and to make virtually no mention of the

piece itself. Centres are reminded that the content on page 26 of the specification must be covered by all students, regardless of chosen specialism.

Development and refinement of own skills

Many students wrote very fluently and convincingly in this section, often showing genuine engagement with the devising process to develop and refine their individual skills. The most successful performers tended to highlight specific roles, skills, aspects of characterisation and/or lines of dialogue which were refined in rehearsal to great effect. Some chose to apply particular rehearsal techniques and methodologies to embellish their work, which often led to good explanation. Students were less successful when this was more superficial. For example, many students insert a token mention of 'hotseating' to develop their character. At the very least, a moderator would expect specific detail of the questions posed in the hotseating and the answers given but, more importantly, how this had a practical impact on the characterisation and the performance.

Designers often saw this section as their moment to shine. Costume and set designers frequently used the option of annotated photographs, sketches and drawings to show how their design had evolved. This was most successful when the materials were properly annotated or presented alongside textual explanation, rather than being in isolation. Similarly, lighting and sound designers often gave detailed explanations of how their design had been developed and refined, accompanied by annotated cue sheets and plots.

Less successful students often described their skills (sometimes in detail), but gave no indication of how these had been developed and refined in rehearsal. The writing in Section 2 must give a sense of how the piece/theatrical skills evolved from one form to another.

Response to feedback

Most successful students were able to integrate this into some of their earlier examples rather than it being shoehorned in rather briefly or superficially at the end. The best feedback tended to be specific, such as 'My teacher suggested that my characterisation was communicating the fear my character would have in this situation but the sadness my character would have felt was not fully coming across', followed by detailed practical explanation of how the feedback was responded to in order to refine the piece and/or theatrical skills.

The less successful responses skimmed over feedback with very broad comments, such as being told to 'learn your lines more', 'project voices more' or 'have better facial expressions'. These often had limited scope for a detailed response and so did not allow students to develop their answer fully. Some students identified feedback given but offered no response to it.

How individuals used their refined theatrical skills and ideas in the final piece

There were various successful approaches to this part of the criteria. Some successful performer students ensured that each of their earlier examples of development and refinement came with a clear explanation of the outcome in the final piece. Others (often designers) dedicated a separate section to showing, for example, their final design for set/costume with annotated explanation of the outcome. Both approaches are equally valid. Centres are reminded that, for all specialisms, there must be a sense of the outcome in the final piece in order to address this strand of the content.

Section 3: Analysis and Evaluation (AO4)

This section has a different assessment objective to the others in that students are being asked to analyse and evaluate their own work (AO4) rather than create and develop ideas. A common issue was for students to address the content of Section 3, but not to write analytically and evaluatively in line with the criteria given in the mark scheme for this piece of work. Centres should remind students to balance the content of the section with the skills of analysis and evaluation.

How far they developed their theatrical skills

This section requires a detailed and clear appraisal of how the theatrical skill was developed through the devising process towards the final outcome in performance. Successful performers often provided an example of how skills had been developed at a specific moment of the piece during the devising process, using the outcome in the final performance to analyse precisely how far the skills had developed. Similarly, strong design students often highlighted how specific aspects of their design had been developed in order to have a specific impact in the final performance. Whilst practical description of the skills is necessary, the most successful students ensured that this was not at the expense of analysis and evaluation, dedicating significant portions of the word count to the success of their approach, making well-reasoned judgments to justify why something was effective. Where the analysis and evaluation were clear and convincing, students were appropriately rewarded.

Less successful students were too descriptive, lacked exemplification or tried to ‘tick the box’ of analysis and evaluation in a brief statement rather than fleshing it out in greater depth.

Benefits brought to the pair/group and the way in which they positively shaped the outcome

A common issue with this section was to lose sight of the theatrical nature of the devising process and the skills/specialism which students had used to complete the process. Less successful students tended to make comments on generic skills or the project management/logistics of the rehearsals rather than the benefits they brought as performers, designers and ‘theatre makers’ within a creative endeavour. Many students made comments which warranted little analysis and evaluation, such as ‘I always turned up to rehearsals’, ‘I learned my lines in advance’ or ‘I always tried to stay positive and keep the group positive’. Similarly, comments such as ‘I booked the drama studio’ or ‘I laminated the placards’ tended to lose sight of the artistic and creative contribution which students are expected to make, and were not sufficient to generate a good level of analysis and evaluation.

The most successful students highlighted the benefits they brought to the group creatively. For example, one student wrote ‘A key benefit I brought to the group was my suggestion of turning the naturalistic dialogue where the two characters declared their love to each other into a wordless sequence of physical theatre. The impact of this on the audience was much more profound and allowed us to sustain our intended use of symbolism and metaphor, allowing the audience to interpret the movement and make up their own minds as to the nature of the relationship’. The student went on to describe the practicalities of how this had been developed in rehearsal, analysing and evaluating how their creative suggestion was of real benefit to the group. Students are therefore urged to focus on their own contributions as theatre makers, creative ideas they suggested and benefits they brought to the group artistically, rather than being too simplistic and leaving too little room for detailed analysis and evaluation.

Overall impact

Responses to this section were often very successful. Successful students often chose specific examples from their performance to highlight the overall impact, with the emphasis on analysing precisely what that personal impact was on the audience, but also the impact they had as individuals on the devised piece. Students who chose specific moments and offered quotations, giving concise description of what they did alongside analysis and evaluation of its overall impact were most successful.

Areas for further development

Students should consider areas for further development. This was more consistently addressed by students in this series and fewer students omitted this part of the task.

Less successful students tended to be rather brutal in their appraisal, making statements such as ‘this moment was unsuccessful as it bored the audience so we should have just cut it’. The demand of this section is to identify areas which could have been developed further in as much analytical and evaluative depth as the earlier sections. More successful students chose areas which had not quite gone as well as they’d hoped but were able to analyse why this might have been and make suggestions for improvement as part of a more thorough evaluation.

For example, one student stated that ‘whilst the fury of my character came across really well at this moment, I felt that I could have used my skills with a bit more subtlety in order to show that despite everything, underneath the anger she does still love and appreciate the other character. Perhaps I could have had a moment of recognition after [quotation] in order to highlight the complexity of this aspect of my character’ and then continued to explain how this might be achieved practically. This sort of analysis and evaluation demonstrated nuance and allowed the student to show more highly developed skills in assessing the merit of different approaches, rather than writing off something completely as ‘unsuccessful’ or ‘rubbish’.

Centre Administration

Please note that submission of paperwork and written Devising Logs should be in hard copy on paper. As per the instructions on the Candidate Record Form, the written work of each student should be stapled to the CRF or contained within a plastic wallet. It is not acceptable to submit documentation electronically on the USB.

The vast majority of centres did meet the deadline for mark submission. There were a small number of centres who had not input their marks online by the submission deadline or did not send their postal sample to the moderator on time. For the avoidance of doubt, students’ samples should be sent as soon as possible, **at the very latest within five days of the submission deadline**. Full guidance on submitting the sample is available [here](#).

A recurring issue reported by moderators is that where centres had lost a student’s coursework, they had not properly followed the procedure to report this in the online submission but had submitted marks. Moderators cannot moderate work where all or part of the work is missing, unless this was due to non-submission and a mark of zero has been recorded. In instances where some work has been lost, centres are urged to follow the correct procedures **before** sending the sample to the moderator. Full details are outlined [here](#).

Where moderators find incorrect addition in the totalling of marks or a disparity between the mark recorded online and the mark recorded on paper, this can cause delays in the moderation process. Please ensure that the intended marks are recorded accurately.

Paperwork Required

We appreciate that submitting the sample to your moderator is a significant administrative task and have listened to feedback requesting a list of all paperwork relating to the component in one place. For future reference, the following should be sent to your Component 2 moderator:

- **Candidate Record Form** for each student in the sample identified online
- **Devising Log** for each student in the sample (attached to the Candidate Record Form)
- **Centre Declaration Sheet** (available to download [here](#))
- **Programme Notes** (organised by performance group, containing a photograph of each student with their student number, name and specialism)
- **USB device** containing the performance of each sampled student, plus any audio/visual Devising Logs if applicable. This should be encrypted in line with the [guidance](#) given and using the encryption password provided by AQA.

Please note: the **Performance Duration Declaration** (available [here](#)) and the **Live Performance Declaration** (available [here](#)) should both be sent to neadeclaration@aqa.org.uk and **not** to your allocated moderator. There was some confusion this year which meant that these forms were mistakenly sent to moderators.

Occasionally, centres contact AQA when special circumstances or issues arise. Please ensure that any relevant correspondence with AQA is included in the sample to the moderator, particularly where special permission has been granted. Some centres wrote a brief note to say that they had discussed an issue with AQA but provided no evidence to the moderator of what had been agreed.

USB Devices and Encryption

The vast majority of centres used the encryption password provided by AQA which ensured the smooth running of the moderation process. Some centres did not use this password and did not communicate the password they had used which meant that moderators could not access the work.

Please note that only BitLocker or 7-Zip are supported. Further guidance is available [here](#). Moderators were often unable to access devices which used a different form of encryption. The password is unique to each series and qualification level, so please ensure the GCSE password is used for the relevant Summer series. For 2024, this will be available soon [here](#) in Centre Services. Once logged in, go to Resources > Administration > Administration Resources.

Occasionally, whilst the USB device was accessible, the files contained on it were corrupted. This often meant that the video recordings would freeze mid-performance or were not viewable at all. Centres are urged to test the device before submitting.

Rubric Infringements

A very small number of centres had submitted monologues for Component 2. Whilst alternative evidence (including monologues) was permitted for students entered in Summer 2022 as a result

of the pandemic, these arrangements did **not** apply to students entered in Summer 2023 and do not apply in any future series. All students must participate in a Devised Performance containing between two and six performers. It must be stressed that monologues will **not** be accepted as evidence of a Devised Performance in any future series under any circumstances. Please be aware that this will be considered a rubric infringement and a form of malpractice in future series. Where students had produced monologues, they were inevitably unable to refer to the ideas of the pair/group or how they collaborated with their group in Section 2. Students were also unable to refer to the benefits they brought to the pair/group in Section 3. These are requirements of the specification and contribute to the assessment of AO1 and AO4.

Centres are reminded that the following constitute rubric infringements:

- Devised Performances which are shorter than the minimum time permitted by the specification. In these instances, a penalty is applied to the mark by AQA. The size of the reduction is proportionate to the severity of the timing infringement.
- Devised Performances which are longer than the maximum time permitted by the specification.
- Devising Logs which exceed the maximum word/page/time limits. In these instances teachers and moderators **must** stop marking at the upper limit. There were many examples where teachers' annotations and crediting of points continued to the end of a document which was very significantly over the word limit. This led to some marks being out of tolerance in moderation. A word count **must** be clearly stated at the end of any written Devising Log.

In addition:

- Performances must not be edited. Each performance must appear in a continuous video file without breaks (though separate performances can be in separate video files).
- Performances must be recorded with a single camera from the audience perspective.
- Performances must contain between two and six performers, and no more than one student for each of the design specialisms.

Recordings of Performances and Audio/Visual Devising Logs

The vast majority of centres followed the guidance on page 28 of the specification. However, some centres had not included a recording of students identifying themselves, stating their name, student number and specialism at the start of the recording. This made it difficult for moderators to identify them. Occasionally, students with similar appearance in identical costumes also made identification difficult for moderators. Some centres had used the advice from the June 2022 report, with students in the same costume having an identifying feature (such as each having a different coloured ribbon, sash or hairband), which moderators reported was very helpful.

There was a slight increase in the number of recordings which had been edited or, more commonly, recordings which were not continuous but were split into two or more video files. This is a rubric infringement. Occasionally, centres had sections of a performance missing between two files or malfunctions with recording equipment, such as missing sound. Centres are urged to test recording equipment in advance of the exam and to report any issues to AQA in advance of the moderation process. Please ensure that, when on stage, students remain in shot as far as possible.

Several centres did not provide close-ups of the work of designers at the start of the recording, which is a requirement for costume, set and puppet design students. This made it particularly difficult to see smaller details. For example, one costume student had described some intricate facial make-up and fine detail on the buttons of a garment, none of which was visible in a wide shot

of the performance. For all specialisms, moderators can only award credit to what they can see evidence of in performance.

Similarly, the detail and nuance of some acting performances was particularly difficult to see when filmed in a very large auditorium where the camera is positioned at the very back of the space and students are visible at considerable distance. Whilst we appreciate that this is sometimes the only possible option to capture the whole stage space, we would encourage centres to film close enough to the performers to capture facial expression and detail in performances. Similarly, whilst stage lighting can be a valuable addition to the performance, centres should aim to ensure that performers' faces are not 'washed out' under very harsh lighting on the recording where possible.

Moderators appreciated the clear labelling of video files, particularly in large centres. Naming files with student numbers/names is perfectly acceptable, as is by group number, provided this clearly corresponds with the group numbers used in the Programme Notes.

Programme Notes

Unfortunately, many centres did not include Programme Notes and this was the most commonly missing piece of paperwork. Please ensure these include the students' name, student number and chosen specialism, organised by group with a photograph of each student. Moderators reported that often photographs were in school uniform and very dated when appearance had changed considerably, which made identification harder if no video identification had been provided. If possible, it is preferable that photographs are taken in costume at the time of the performance. For example, many centres simply screenshotted a still from the line-up at the start of the performance and used this in the Programme Notes, which was very useful and straightforward. Programme Notes are crucial to moderators in identifying which sampled students are in which performance, allowing the moderation process to run more smoothly.

Centre Declaration Sheet

This was another commonly missing piece of paperwork which moderators often needed to chase up. The declarations are a vital part of our quality assurance process and are needed for regulatory compliance. In particular, this confirms that internal standardisation has taken place. There were fewer instances of poor internal standardisation this year, but where it was evident that two or more teachers had applied different standards, this made the moderation process far more problematic.

JCQ Instructions for Conducting Non-Examination Assessments

Centres are reminded that JCQ Instructions relating to the conduct of non-examined assessments must be followed. These are available [here](#) for 2022-23 and will be published shortly for 2023-24.

Whilst it is entirely acceptable in this component to share the specification and mark schemes with students or for students to use the content of each section as subtitles in their work, the regulations do not permit the use of (for example) writing frames, sentence starters or prompt questions in the Devising Log. Where moderators find centres have failed to follow these stipulations, this can result in a malpractice investigation.

Students must ensure they do not plagiarise, particularly from internet sources. Presenting materials copied from other sources without acknowledgement is regarded as deliberate deception. There is space on page 2 of the Candidate Record Form to record any sources used.

Alternatively, moderators will accept any form of referencing or bibliography within the Devising Log which makes the citation of sources clear. Anything which is not the student's own words should be included in quotation marks and the source clearly identified. Failure to ensure proper acknowledgement can result in a malpractice investigation if plagiarism is suspected.

Teacher Online Standardisation

As ever, it is essential for all teachers marking the internally assessed component of the qualification to complete the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) and to standardise internally with colleagues where applicable. Teacher Online Standardisation for the Summer 2024 series will go live on [Centre Services](#) in November 2023 and provides a range of examples of work in various specialisms and formats, alongside the Principal Moderator commentaries on the awarding of marks.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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