



# **Course report 2024**

## **Advanced Higher Drama**

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

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

# Grade boundary and statistical information.

## Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 540

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 494

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade.

<b>A</b>	Number of candidates	144	Percentage	29.1	Cumulative percentage	29.1	Minimum mark required	70
<b>B</b>	Number of candidates	140	Percentage	28.3	Cumulative percentage	57.5	Minimum mark required	60
<b>C</b>	Number of candidates	146	Percentage	29.6	Cumulative percentage	87.0	Minimum mark required	50
<b>D</b>	Number of candidates	42	Percentage	8.5	Cumulative percentage	95.5	Minimum mark required	40
<b>No award</b>	Number of candidates	22	Percentage	4.5	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

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

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

# Section 1: comments on the assessment

## Project-dissertation

The project-dissertation component mainly performed as expected. Candidates selected both contemporary and historical practitioners and their practice to address their chosen performance issue in their project-dissertations.

Many candidates engaged in performance issues related to current social, political, and cultural issues explored by practitioners in professional theatre performances, including issues of diversity representation, LGBTQ+ issues, gender issues and mental health. Many candidates communicated passionate advocacy for themes and issues explored in their dissertations. Some dissertations were strongly supported by a lucid argument and confident candidate voice and opinion.

Most candidates submitted a dissertation that fell within the word count requirement. Some dissertations were short and under the minimum word count requirement. In these cases, the dissertations lacked detail and were self-penalising.

Candidates who achieved less well in this component did not have a clearly identified performance issue and presented performance analysis examples not tied to a line of enquiry.

Candidates who achieved less well often presented lengthy historical or social narratives or told the narrative of the play without explicitly giving exemplification from theatrical practice, theatre theory and theatre performance examples.

Also, candidates who achieved less well often focused on the play text in their analysis and did not focus on theatre making and theatre practice within their chosen performance/s, and consequently could not access the full range of marks.

## Assignment

The assignment component performed as expected. Candidates selected mainly contemporary productions and practitioners to answer the assessment task. A very few selected historical productions and practitioners. Many of the assignments were in response to contemporary performances that had been accessed through online digital theatre platforms and more responses were in response to live theatrical performances this session. Almost all the productions selected for the assignment component were appropriate for SCQF level 7.

Candidates attempted both assignment questions. In some responses to both questions, candidates wrote a Higher Drama-style performance analysis response, and did not base their analysis in an argument related to their knowledge and understanding of the practitioner. Consequently, they failed to engage in the question asked. Some candidates' responses were narrative descriptions and did not give clear and persuasive analysed examples from the performance.

Most candidates completed an extended response to a chosen question, with a conclusion, within the timed conditions for this assessment task. Most candidates demonstrated a level of literacy appropriate to the assessment task. Almost all candidates submitted a resource sheet, as required.

Candidates who achieved less well gave practitioner information that lacked relevancy to the question, or the production they chose.

Candidates who achieved less well did not give clear performance examples from the production. Also, candidates who achieved less well did not give an argument in response to the question they chose.

## **Performance**

The performance component performed as expected and allowed centres and candidates to select play texts and specialisms in acting, directing and design to support personalisation and choice.

Acting remains the most popular choice, with over 90% of the cohort opting for this. Approximately 6% chose the design specialism and 3% the direction option.

A range of play text was used for all sub-components, which were mostly appropriate for this level, with a greater emphasis on contemporary plays this session in the interactive pieces and significantly more classical monologues than last session for monologues.

Most centres had an appropriate audience for the actors' performances, and some centres had audiences which mainly consisted of the remainder of the class.

In almost all centres, a sense of occasion was given to the performance component and many visiting assessors commented on assessing candidates who were clearly passionate about their work and keen to share their performances.

Candidates who achieved less well in this component did not convince assessors of their full understanding of the text, or performed acting pieces that were too short, or were under-prepared.

## **Section 2: comments on candidate performance**

### **Project-dissertation**

Most candidates referenced professional theatre and theatre practitioners in their project-dissertations. Candidates did well when they had a clearly identified performance issue that they explored in their dissertation and carefully selected and analysed performance examples in response to this issue. There was often a strong personal engagement with the topics and issues explored and some passionate discussion of topical themes in theatre. Some candidates engaged in a mature and thoughtful way by referencing challenging performances and theatre practice.

Candidates were able to use a range of digital theatre platforms and live-streaming of performances, and often analysed these effectively in their writing. Some candidates also engaged with contemporary performances that they had seen live. Candidates who gave comparisons and alternative perspectives, using primary and secondary sources effectively in their writing, were able to create a well-considered and balanced argument.

Candidates who gave detailed examples from features of productions and practitioner's practice relating to making theatre achieved well. Candidates who were appropriately presented and had the pre-requisite literacy skills required for this assessment component were able to present their work coherently. Candidates who presented a well-considered conclusion, and evaluated the analysed evidence and consistently returned to the performance issue that they were addressing, did well.

Candidates who struggled with this task often presented a simplistic comparison of two productions of the same play. These candidates often did not identify a performance issue and had titles which stated they would analyse two productions. Candidates who wrote theatrical histories or practitioner histories without any performance examples and without a clear issue did not access the full range of marks.

Candidates who wrote dissertations about plays or playwrights often presented literary analysis rather than theatrical analysis, and achieved poorly. Candidates who presented dissertations about theatrical trends in, for example, acting training; theatre sustainability; theatre pricing; diversity and equality in theatre; and who were wholly reliant on statistics and did not reference performances, could not access the full range of marks. Often, in weaker dissertations, candidates were too reliant on opinions in reviews and were not convincing in their personal response. Dissertations that were weak were often under the minimum word count and were self-penalising, as they were often simplistic, and narrative-driven in style.

### **Assignment**

Candidates who had an argument in response to the question they chose, and kept the question in focus throughout their assignment write-up, achieved well. Candidates who achieved well had convincing knowledge and understanding of the practitioner, and this was relevant to the production they were analysing and their argument. When performance examples were described and analysed in detail, were carefully selected, and consistently used to build an argument, candidates achieved well. Candidates who expressed and

justified their personal response to the theatre making, and gave a considered conclusion, achieved well. There was a strong correlation between well-structured and well-argued responses and succinctly organised resource sheets. Candidates who responded with a personal response to the theatre making, in response to the question they chose, did well.

Candidates sometimes presented a lengthy biography of the practitioner without contextualising their practice and making this relevant to the question. When candidates wrote a Higher Drama performance analysis-style response without referencing the question to build an argument, they could not access the full range of marks. There were very few candidates who did not manage their time effectively and did not write a conclusion, which weakened their through-line of argument. Some candidates gave a description of the narrative of the play rather than analysing the theatre practice and interpretative performance decisions of the chosen practitioner in the production.

When candidates in a centre appeared to have learned a series of points and presented the same argument, some individual candidate responses tended to be less convincing in terms of their understanding.

## **Performance**

### **Actors**

Many candidates achieved well in this component and appeared to enjoy the experience of performing, and demonstrated strong stage craft and textual understanding. Candidates used a range of both contemporary text and older play text for their performance assessment. Most centres and candidates used the recommended list of play texts as a guide to inform their choice of appropriately challenging plays, and used both familiar and new scripts in this assessment component.

Some exceptionally strong performances were seen in both the interactive and the monologue sub-component, and this allowed the visiting examining team to use the full range of marks available.

Some candidates did less well in this component if they were less secure in lines and took many prompts. Some candidates appeared less prepared and less confident in the monologue sub-component.

Some candidates did not convince of a full understanding of textual clues in their performances of their monologues.

Some candidates did not have a clear point of focus in their monologue performances.

Some monologues were very long, and these were often self-penalising, as the candidate lost focus and impact in their performance.

Some monologues were performed without stage lighting as they would be, for example, in an audition, and this approach sometimes did not support the candidates' focus.

There were examples of inappropriate presentation at this level, where candidates struggled with the demand of the assessment task.

There were examples of inappropriate choice of text for this level, which did not allow the candidate to access the subtextual clues and complexity of a play, and consequently the full range of marks for this component.

A very few candidates demonstrated anxiety related to their performance by having to restart pieces or stop pieces early in the solo monologue sub-component.

## **Directors**

Most directors structured their rehearsal assessment well and presented their directorial concepts coherently. They also motivated their actors confidently and used terminology accurately. Directors who had a thorough textual knowledge of the whole play and, in addition, had clear concepts relevant to a contemporary audience, achieved well.

Directors who contextualised concise warm-ups and rehearsal activities and made them relevant to the script extract they chose, and their overall concepts, achieved well.

Directors who communicated instruction to actors with clarity and used terminology fluently achieved well.

Some directors did not make clear their overarching concept, and struggled to convince of a full understanding of the whole play. Some directors did not watch and craft the shaping of stage pictures or character interaction, and did not build clear dramatic meaning or dramatic impact in their direction of the extract. A few directors concluded their rehearsals abruptly or prematurely without fulfilling their rehearsal aims or consolidating their concepts.

## **Designers**

Many designers demonstrated a proficient level of skill regarding model making and communication of visual concepts related to their interpretation of the play text. The candidates who did well applied appropriate care and detail to the creation and building of the scale model box, which carries most of the marks in this component. Designers who achieved well demonstrated an understanding of scale and viability in their scale model box.

Some designers used technology effectively to convey their overall concept and to communicate their ideas about significant set transitions and to convey more complex stage pictures and imagery. Designers who achieved well had a coherent and overarching connecting concept for the scale model box and the two additional design areas.

Sometimes designers appeared to spend a disproportionate amount of time on the two additional production areas, often making items of costume or props, for example, rather than presenting lists, designs, and/or cue sheets. This was often to the detriment of the scale model box, for which they are marked on their application of skills.

## Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

### Project-dissertation

- ◆ Centres can support candidates to identify a clear performance issue for this component.
- ◆ Centres can support candidates to identify a range of performances and theatre practice to reference in their project-dissertation.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to present their own opinions in response to their chosen performance issue.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates are not writing about film, ballet, musicals, or opera in their dissertation.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded that the dissertation should focus on professional theatre making and should reference theatre productions.
- ◆ Recent webinars and materials on the [Understanding Standards website](#) could be shared with candidates to support their preparation for each component.

### Assignment

- ◆ Centres should offer guidance to candidates about the selection of question for this task.
- ◆ Centres should offer guidance to candidates about the relevance of practitioner study and how this will support candidates' analysis of their selected production.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to carefully select knowledge of their practitioner that shows understanding of their practice that is relevant to the question selected.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to present their own opinions and personal argument in response to their chosen question.
- ◆ Centres should highlight the importance of giving a conclusion in the assignment write-up.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that candidates clearly identify the question chosen, and submit a flyleaf and a resource sheet for this task.
- ◆ Centres must ensure that the flyleaf is completed and signed.
- ◆ Candidates' early engagement in this component can support the skills development they need to address a question/performance issue and build an argument in the dissertation component.
- ◆ Centres must not direct candidates to specific resources to be used, provide model answers, or writing frames specific to the task, such as outlines, paragraph headings or section headings
- ◆ Centres must adhere to the conditions for assessment. The assignment must be completed in 1 hour and 30 minutes. This must be done in one sitting. Centres must not provide detailed feedback on drafts, including marking.



## Performance

### Acting

- ◆ Centres should use the recommended list of texts in the [Advanced Higher Drama course specification](#) as a guide to support the selection of play texts for both interactive acting and monologue to ensure challenge appropriate to Advanced Higher level.
- ◆ The monologue should be from a full-length play and candidates should know the whole play and the character arc for their role for both acting pieces.
- ◆ Centres should remind candidates that no other actors should be on stage for the monologue sub-component.
- ◆ If candidates are addressing their monologue to another character, they should carefully consider their stage positioning to engage the audience and create impact. This could be, for example, over the heads of the audience.
- ◆ Centres should ensure that monologues and interactive pieces are not too short or too long, and should keep within the recommended guidance.
- ◆ Centres should consider the placement of the monologues in the assessment day, and allow all candidates appropriate time to focus for this sub-component. Although there is no need to use elaborate set, costumes or props, it is appropriate to use lighting to support the monologue performance that allows the candidate to hold opening and closing stage pictures, enabling the opportunity to sustain impact throughout.

### Directors

- ◆ Centres should remind directors that all warm-up and introductory rehearsal tasks should support the actors' understanding of the script extract and/or overall directorial concept.
- ◆ Directors should clearly articulate their overall directorial concept in their rehearsal.
- ◆ Although there is no requirement to run the directed extract at the end of the rehearsal, directors should be reminded to conclude their assessment with purpose and consider the aims of their rehearsal.

### Designers

- ◆ Design candidates need a thorough working knowledge of the whole play and the practical demands of the text.
- ◆ Design candidates must have a clearly identified performance space for which they are designing.
- ◆ The scale model box demonstrates candidates' application of production skills at Advanced Higher level. It must be the focus of the design performance assessment and be large enough to communicate ideas in a visual way.
- ◆ Designers will not be credited for talking about what they would do without realising it in their presentation.
- ◆ Concepts must be captured in the visual presentation of the scale model box and in the supporting designs/lists and cue sheets for the two additional production areas. Designers are not required to make items or demonstrate application within the two additional production areas.
- ◆ There is no need for designers to present scrap books and numerous design mood boards. They should only present what is necessary to explain their final concept.

- ◆ Designers should adhere to the recommended length for their presentation.

## Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).