



A-Level **Drama and Theatre** 7262/C

Report on the examination

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Overview

A range of work was seen this year that included some highly effective pieces of theatre. Much of the work showed students' engagement with the subject. There was also a wide variety of themes and subjects that reflected students' imagination, their engagement with the world, and a pleasing sense that theatre was an arena to express their own individuality and collective interests and concerns.

This was the second year of online submissions for this component. The majority of Centres uploaded their work with no problems. Where any work was missing, most Centres were quick to rectify this.

Some Centres did not upload all the required paperwork, with many neglecting to provide Programme Notes, which are a requirement for all Centres, as listed in the Specification. Further information about effective Programme Notes can be found later in this Report.

There was a slightly higher tendency for Centres to be out of tolerance than in previous series. Many Centres marked accurately and with confidence. A growing proportion of Centres, however, demonstrated a lack of familiarity with the requirements of the task as described in the Specification, and therefore the marks they awarded to their students were not in line with the marks awarded by moderators. In some cases, these discrepancies were significant.

The reason for differences between Centre and moderator marks arose because mistakes had been made in the application of the mark scheme. The most common areas of error were:

- Marking "good" work as "excellent". It is understandable that teachers who know how much hard work students have put in throughout the devising process want to reward this, but it is crucial that Centres familiarise themselves with the common standard across the entire cohort. This can be done through looking at the examples of work available to view on the Teacher Online Standardisation portal, accessed through Centre Services.
- Material in the Working Notebooks being awarded credit by the Centre despite being included in the wrong section. The marks for Section 1 and Section 2 are entirely separate and can only relate to the requirements listed under each Section in the Specification. For example, a student who stated their aims, and then went into precise practical detail about how they had fulfilled their stated aims, within Section 1 of the Working Notebook, could not gain any credit for the latter section as that should have been in Section 2.
- This also sometimes had the subsequent effect that students began Section 2 of their Working Notebook with far less to say about the approach to creating their piece and the choices they had made in developing their piece, as they had already provided much of this information in Section 1, where it had not been able to attract marks.

- This, unfortunately, caused many students to receive moderated marks that were far apart from those awarded by their Centre. It is vital that the separate requirements of each section are made clear to the students before they write their Working Notebooks so that they include the correct material in the appropriate section so that everything that they include will be credit-worthy.
- This has the purpose of encouraging the student to focus on providing as much information as they can in the relevant areas. For example, a student who spent lots of space discussing the practical development of their piece in Section 1 tended to neglect other required areas such as discussing research or live theatre in appropriate depth.

A pleasingly wide range of practitioners were chosen by students, with Frantic Assembly, The Paper Birds, and Theatre Alibi still popular. One of the most frequently selected practitioners was Brecht, although he was also the most misunderstood. It was noticeable that students who gained their knowledge and understanding of Brecht from his own works were much more successful in their own explanations. Misconceptions about Brecht's use of set and costume, or about appropriate stimuli or topics that lend themselves to a Brechtian approach were still common.

Some very good work was seen using practitioners such as Shared Experience, Dario Fo and Franca Rame, and Grotowski.

Centres whose work was accurately marked had clearly made good use of the Teacher Online Standardisation material to ensure that their marking was in line with the national standard. This was evident through their accurate marking of their students' work, both in performance and in the Working Notebooks. The Teacher Online Standardisation portal (T-OLs) contains examples of real students' work, including both Working Notebooks and filmed performance work. Work from the latest series is uploaded each year, reflecting a range of practitioners, of achievement and of specialisms.

There did appear to be underuse of the NEA Adviser to answer queries about this component. Advisers are highly experienced examiners, moderators and teachers who are extremely familiar with the demands of this component as well as of Component 3.

The resources available also include the Centre Feedback form, which is completed by the moderator and emailed to Centres on 'Results day'. Centres are advised to take this feedback on board in preparing the next year's cohort to ensure a closer match between their marks and those of the moderator in subsequent series.

There was a significant number of Centres that appeared to be unaware of the word limit for the Working Notebook. This is 3000 words, regardless of whether the document is entirely written, or written accompanied by annotated photographs, drawings or cue-sheets.

All words present in the document should be included in the word count, with the exception of titles and bibliographies. Annotations, sections of script, quotations, tabled information etc are all included in this word count. The mark awarded to a student should not take into

account any material that appears beyond the limit of 3000 words. Where this had not been appreciated by the Centre, this resulted in a number of students' Section 2 marks being significantly different from those awarded by the Centre.

A few students appeared to have used AI resources to produce some parts of their written work; this was a flawed approach as the Working Notebook requires students to write about their own thoughts, activities, and intentions.

General approaches to the task

Students were provided with a much firmer foundation for their achievement in this component where they had clearly been taught about their chosen practitioner prior to the process beginning.

Many students had been given the opportunity to explore that practitioner's working methods, style, conventions, artistic intentions and theatrical purpose and practice. This resulted in a fundamental understanding of the practitioner's intentions and working methods that then frequently led students to choose a stimulus that was consistent with their practitioner.

The most successful Working Notebooks were clearly written throughout the process, with the first section compiled near the start of the process as the students' choice of stimulus and aims were emerging.

Successful second sections of the Working Notebook were written throughout the practical devising process, allowing students to give precise examples of how they had approached the making process and what they had done collaboratively and individually to develop and refine their piece.

The vast majority of students chose to be assessed as performers. A few directors were seen.

Where students chose a design specialism, there were examples of a dedicated and thoughtful approach to their work. Many students who chose design specialisms adopted the outlook of a designer from the very start of the process, and this was documented clearly in their Working Notebooks. Designers tended to have more scope for their research when they chose a designer as their practitioner.

Amongst the subject matter chosen, there was an increasing use of topical concerns such as female empowerment, transgender rights and the specific challenges posed by mental health problems. Some very successful pieces of work were seen based on specific topics such as nurses' status in the NHS, the life of Priscilla Presley, and the story of Baba Yaga. These pieces were secure in their theatrical intentions, and the methodology applied created effective theatrical meaning.

Common misunderstandings of the overall approach:

A minority of students chose their theme or topic first and then looked around to find a practitioner that fit with this. This was almost always a less effective approach, resulting in separate aspects of a practitioner's style being inserted into the work, or a lower level of engagement with the adopted style.

Some students also showed a lack of ability to focus in on a specific issue, aspect of society or stimulus, choosing very wide-ranging themes such as ‘mental health.’ More specificity might have helped these students focus on their research and their subsequent development of the piece.

Rationale and Research stage

The vast majority of Centres were clearly aware of the necessity to write the Working Notebook in two separate sections.

Most students have clearly been made aware of the required contents of each section as listed in the Specification.

Many students were able to give a succinct and engaged rationale for their choice of stimulus, and indeed practitioner.

Frequently, students were able to articulate their learning about the style and practices of their chosen practitioner in precise detail, explaining the overarching concepts of that practitioner that they would like to explore and emulate in their own devised work. For example, successful students choosing Artaud as their practitioner were fully aware of his rejection of spoken language and traditional narrative forms and they explained how they were going to adopt his intentions as well as his practice.

The most well-researched practitioners tended to be The Paper Birds, Kneehigh, Emma Rice, and Complicité. There was a tendency for a lack of research or a limited view of Brecht, Alecky Blythe, and Frantic Assembly. For example, for the latter there was knowledge of some methods but a lack of recognition of their focus on relationships and their use of naturalistic acting.

Many students undertook thorough research covering a range of methods such as reading literature/factual sources, conducting their own interviews, visits to relevant sites or institutions, viewing live theatre either digitally or in person, watching documentaries, creating online surveys etc.

Some students were able to succinctly summarise this research and provide detailed examples of particular elements they had discovered that they intended to use in their practical work. For example, a set design student using Gecko as their practitioner detailed their research into neurodivergence, its resulting challenges and masking of behaviours. They explained that this had inspired them to represent the functioning of the brain through their set design.

Many Centres had endeavoured to provide their students with the opportunities to watch live theatre that was relevant to their chosen practitioner. Students choosing Brecht, for example, were noticeably clearer in their own intentions, and in their understanding of his practice, when they had viewed a play written by Brecht.

Professionally produced theatre was most effective at inspiring students in their ideas.

Style and contextual factors were a more neglected area. Students who did discuss these tended to have a better awareness of the stylistic qualities of their practitioner that they intended to use in their piece. Some students who set their work in specific historical time periods had useful things to say about the contextual factors they would have to bear in mind.

Many students provided aims and intentions for both their individual work and for the piece that were distinct, clear and in sympathy with the aims of the chosen practitioner.

Common misunderstandings:

On occasion, students were over credited by the Centre's marking where they had not included all the required areas from the Specification. For example, students had omitted to discuss live theatre or neglected to mention any research. Even if one area has been explained in precise detail, all required areas must be covered in that same precise detail for students to achieve the highest marks available.

Students were often prevented from showing engagement with their stimulus when it was indicated that they had been given a stimulus, or prescribed a set task by their teacher, such as adapting a fairy story for example. Centres are reminded that students are required to choose their own stimulus.

There is no requirement to discuss discarded practitioners or rejected ideas for subject matter. Where this was included, it did not attract any marks and often used up words that would have been better spent explaining the dramatic influences the student *did* use.

A few students provided biographical information about their chosen practitioner that was not relevant to the creation of their work.

Some students had misconceptions about their practitioner or relied on selective approaches to that practitioner's work. Sometimes students were over credited for their grasp of a practitioner where they had mentioned or listed a group of recognisable elements but showed no understanding of why or how the practitioner might have used these. Frequently, this type of approach showed that "only some details" (Band 2) had been given, but the Working Notebook had been awarded a mark in Band 3 or 4.

Some students referred to having carried out research but gave no indication of the detail of their findings or what they might have gained that they would then take forward into the practical devising process.

A proportion of students mentioned productions they had watched clips of online. This could have contributed to their research but was not a substitute for viewing whole pieces of live theatre (seen either digitally or in person).

Students who chose to deal with contemporary themes in their piece, for example mental health or the 'MeToo' movement, sometimes neglected to bear in mind the context of their work. On occasion, no research had been done into these particular topics, resulting in an approach that relied on assumptions and in performance showed a lack of sophistication, originality, and depth to the work.

Development stage

Many students were able to outline their approach to creating the devised work, very clearly, explaining how they had moved from their ideas and discussion to practical work. The most successful students were able to mirror the approach of their practitioner. For example, students choosing Frantic Assembly as their practitioner were able to articulate how they had physically used exercises they had read about, filmed these, and selected effective work to look at again with a view to incorporating it into the developing piece.

Some students adopted a thoughtful and self-aware approach to explaining the decisions they made in relation to their individual theatrical skill. Effective explanations gave examples of experimentation, of echoing the work of the practitioner in choices made and the reason behind these choices. For example, a lighting design student detailed how they created the setting of a night club for the piece. Their explanation included the layers they added to this design, including the different types of light and intensities used in specific areas, and analysis of what effect this created. Students choosing design specialisms were often confident in this area.

Students achieving highly were able to constantly analyse what effect they intended their choices to have. For example, a student using *The Paper Birds* as their practitioner had discussed how physical motifs are used by the practitioner in Section 1 of their Working Notebook. The student then explained how they had developed a movement motif involving distributing the weight of the performers in different combinations, to show the emotional weight of the subject they were exploring. This was an effective example of “perceptive connections between theory and practice” (Band 4).

With regard to the development of the piece, many students were able to provide examples of experimenting and refining ideas, as required by the Specification. Accurate marking by Centres paid attention to the criteria in the mark scheme for the Working Notebook that references “creativity.” “Highly creative responses” to the stimuli (Band 4) were seen, although for some Centres this was an area for development that had not been recognised by the Centre.

More effective work gave a clear account of the final ideas for the devised performance and how the elements of the finished piece connected theory and practice.

Many students were able to compare the outcome with their initial aims as stated in Section 1. The more specific these had been in Section 1, the more successful was the revisiting of them at the end of the Working Notebook.

Common misunderstandings

Some students and Centres misunderstood the requirement to write about the approach to devising piece. This means students should explain how they got from research and ideas to practical work in performance. Students often omitted this requirement, or they misinterpreted it as requiring a description of the opening of their piece, or indeed the whole piece.

Some Centres over credited students who explained how they had chosen to use certain methods or techniques within their practical work purely because they were part of their practitioner's repertoire. This was sometimes credited as showing "perceptive" or "considered" connections between dramatic theory and practice. Connections between theory and practice were more successfully illustrated when students had a very clear theatrical sense of *why* they made a choice, which was not only because their practitioner was known for a specific technique, but because they were aware of a theatrical reason for doing it.

Some students used Section 2 to simply describe the piece they had created. The requirement is for students to take an analytical approach to discussing the process of making their work, explaining how and why the piece developed as it did. This frequently led to significant differences between the marks awarded by the Centre and the moderated marks.

Similarly, many students misunderstood the requirement to discuss their individual skill. Many described their finished performance in a scene or section of the piece in great detail but did not explain how they had arrived at this performance through the decisions they had made throughout the process.

As mentioned above, designers often used a higher level of precision to discuss their own skill. There was a tendency amongst performers to vagueness, for example referring to "open body language."

Students who had chosen to be assessed as performers sometimes neglected their own individual skill altogether but talked in great detail about their use of set, costume, or lighting, which meant they had less space to focus on the development of their own individual specialism.

A large number of students included general evaluative statements about the final performance of their work, whether they remembered their lines or got on well with their group for example. This is not asked for in the Specification requirements and used up words that might have been better spent discussing the theatrical effects they managed to create and comparing their final work with the initial aims.

Some students included images within their Working Notebook without these adding anything to the work. Images should only be used to explain a visual element that is otherwise hard to convey, alongside annotations (that are included in the word count). The correct box should then be ticked on the Candidate Record Form to indicate this.

Performance

The majority of performance work seen stayed within the time limits of 30 minutes for a group piece and ten minutes for a group of only two performers. There were some duologues that went over the time limit of ten minutes. It should be noted that moderators are required to watch the entire piece, however over long work tends to become self-penalising as students are less able to sustain their performance for lengthy periods. Some excellent and exceptional work by two performers that came in under ten minutes in length was seen.

There were many examples of excellent or exceptional work by performers. There were also a number of examples where students had not achieved a high level of vocal and physical precision.

Few Directors were seen. Effective directing saw secure evidence of intention and of specific instruction given to the actors, which was then evident in the performances.

There were a few examples of Lighting and Sound Design seen, and some demonstrated a very good technical understanding in the Working Notebooks. In some instances, students choosing design only discussed their own process without making any reference to the over-all development of the piece.

Some Set Designs were seen and these frequently contributed to the overall success of the piece. Set design students had often investigated a practitioner's work thoroughly and showed good practical understanding as well as clear creation of meaning.

There were only a few Costume designs seen and these showed some understanding of the designer's role. Costume designers need to focus on one costume explicitly in the Working Notebook. This does not preclude providing other costumes, but the selected design should evidence their best work and should be presented to camera before the performance.

Although several students used puppets in their performances, no puppet designs were seen.

Statements of Dramatic Intent were often used purposefully by students as an opportunity to summarise their final intentions for their work. Good statements referred to the chosen practitioner's aims and methods and how these would be seen in their work. Many Centres followed the requirement to assess the fulfilment of artistic intention in the fourth section of the Performance mark, and this mark was frequently fairly accurately assessed by Centres.

Marks for theatrical skills were more likely to be marked accurately by Centres than some of the other areas, with a reasonably secure grasp evident of what constitutes "exceptional", "excellent", "good", "reasonable" or "limited" command of skill set.

There were some examples of work that showed high and exceptional levels of inventiveness and originality, and this was linked to students' understanding of their practitioner, the range of their research and the specificity of their chosen stimulus.

Common misunderstandings

It is important to note that many pieces of work would have benefited from editing, even when they were under the maximum time limit. Students often found it difficult to sustain their originality, skills, and engagement with their audience for the duration of longer pieces of theatre. Teachers are permitted to advise students on the pace and effectiveness of their work.

A few Statements of Dramatic Intent were too brief or generalised to be helpful. A few Centres did not understand that the Statement of Dramatic Intent is a completely different thing from the student's discussion of their aims in Section 1 of their Working Notebook. The aims of the Working Notebook should be written at the start of the devising process, but the Statement of

Dramatic Intent should be written right at the end of the process, once the finished piece is ready to perform and students have a clear idea of what effects they are trying to achieve for their audience.

‘Inventiveness and originality’ was overmarked by many Centres, with work that had “many inventive and original qualities or moments” (Band 3) being misidentified as “highly” or “exceptionally” inventive.

The mark for ‘consonance with practitioner’ was the performance element most regularly overmarked by Centres. Work that showed just a few traits of a practitioner’s approach was often marked in Band 3 or 4, when it was more likely to show “some compatibility” (Band 2) or “limited compatibility” (Band 1).

Sometimes, quite general features of a practitioner’s work were cited as evidence of a “high degree of compatibility” (Band 4), when this general theatrical device was one used by many practitioners, and was not accompanied by a more specific, practitioner-focused approach to the creation of theatre. The most common example of this was the use of ‘breaking the fourth wall’, which is a feature common to a large number of practitioners and did not by itself show consonance with a particular practitioner.

Marking and Recording

Helpful conduct of the performance(s) at a Centre included adhering to the recording guidelines available on the AQA website. This included ensuring that the whole performance space was visible on the camera without any zooming or panning.

The recording of work was also supported by Centres having back up recordings and checking recordings before uploading the work. Many Centres planned effectively and had recordings of dress rehearsals.

Where the piece uses promenade or traverse staging, Centres are advised to contact their NEA Adviser for advice on how to record this work effectively.

Students specialising in set or costume design sometimes provided the required video close-up of their design, without any commentary, as required. A very clear and helpful example of a set design video was seen, where the teacher had slowly walked around the whole design so it could be seen from every angle and in close up, then provided an audience-eye view of the entire set as well.

Many students introduced themselves clearly and confidently to camera, detailing their candidate number, practitioner, role in the piece plus any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece.

Most Centres completed the Mark Sheets for their students with detailed commentary on their written and performance work.

Many Centres annotated the Working Notebook in detail and with comments that were relevant to the mark scheme. For example, teachers pinpointed evidence of “precise details of live theatre” or a “considered connection between theory and practice.” This type of

commentary enabled moderators to see how marks had been awarded by the Centre. Annotations can be made digitally or by hand if scanning in the Working Notebooks.

Common misunderstandings

In a few Centres, the camera angle or position did not allow for the entire performance area to be visible, meaning some of the students' work was unseen by the moderator.

Occasionally, Centres had filmed students' identification to the camera out of costume, or individually, which meant these were less useful in identifying the students in the piece.

Many Centres did not annotate the Working Notebook at all. This made it difficult to see how marks had been awarded and was a missed opportunity for marks to be supported. Some Centres used very brief or duplicated comments on the mark sheets. This missed an opportunity to explain how the student had gained marks. The Working Notebook should be annotated throughout, and then a summative comment should be provided on the marksheet that justifies the overall mark given.

Some Centres made accurate comments about their students' work but then awarded marks that did not reflect this, or that were too high in the relevant band. Some Centres underused the mark scheme and its wording, which might have assisted in more accurate marking. For example, a section of the Working Notebook that fits the description of giving only some details, making some useful connections between theory and practice, and showing evidence of creative engagement should receive a mark in Band 2, as these are exactly the criteria of that mark band.

There was frequently a tendency to overmark Working Notebooks where the work was fluent and well-expressed but did not meet all the criteria in the band awarded by the Centre. Conversely, work was seen that used simple language but clearly addressed the criteria and had been undermarked by the Centre.

Administration and submission

Useful Programme Notes provided details of the students in every group in the Centre, regardless of whether they were in the sample or not. For each student, their name, candidate number, specialism and practitioner were clear. A photograph of every student in costume for the piece was included.

The most helpful method was to upload the Programme Notes as a whole to the Centre area, enabling moderators to know exactly which student is in which piece. Programme Notes were also helpfully uploaded to each student in the cohort, so the information is accessible no matter which student is being moderated.

Centres where students had left the course since the filming took place clearly identified these individuals through a covering letter (on headed notepaper) and tagged this to their general Centre area or included this information on the Centre's programme notes.

Common misunderstandings:

Some Centres disregarded the requirement to provide Programme Notes. Others provided only individual photographs of students, meaning it was not clear which students as a whole

were part of the group. Some Centres provided photographs, and even candidate IDs to camera, with students in their own clothes rather than their costume for the piece, making identification much harder for moderators.

A small minority of Centres did not adhere to the deadline for uploading work.

There were more mistakes seen in the accuracy of the marks as totalled on the Candidate Record Form and then entered onto Centre Mark Submissions.

Moderators need to know who all of the students in the piece are, and whether any of them have since left the course or go by a different 'preferred' name, for example.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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