



A-Level Drama and Theatre

7262/X

Report on the examination

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General

Unlike a written paper, where questions are different from series to series, while general demands remain the same, this externally examined practical component asks the same of every cohort that takes the examination.

This component asks students to make a contribution, as performer, director or designer, to the practical exploration and interpretation of three extracts, taken from different plays and to present Extract 3 to an audience, and to the visiting examiner for assessment.

It asks students to apply the work and methodology of one of the prescribed theatre practitioners in their interpretation and presentation of that extract and to produce an individual Reflective report, analysing and evaluating their theatrical interpretation of all three extracts studied.

The fact that the demands are identical, series on series, means that any report on an individual series, although it can record trends and comment briefly on good and less good achievement, will tend to make many of the same points from the first to the last series of the specification.

The role of the NEA Adviser and the play approval process

The role of the Non- Exam Assessment (NEA) Adviser is three-fold:

- to support teachers in their interpretation and thus delivery of the specification
- to uphold the integrity of the specification in accordance with OFQUAL requirements
- to implement the play approval process.

Who are the advisers?

- NEA advisers are a team of highly experienced A and AS Level teachers, selected by AQA to offer advice and guidance to teachers of the AQA specification.
- they are not AQA staff.

What advice may NEA advisers give to teachers?

- advice on the administration of the practical components of the course (Components 2 and 3)
- advice related to play combination choices (Comp 3)
- advice related to the requirements of the specification where teachers require **clarification** of points made in the published specification.

What advice falls outside the remit of NEA advisers?

- recommendation of plays, although advisers may be able to suggest possible avenues for teachers/students to explore for themselves.
- choice of practitioners; although they may offer advice on which plays may be appropriate for the application of the selected practitioner's methodology

The Play Approval Process

- some centres seemed to have missed the requirement that the play approval form(s) must be submitted for approval **at least six weeks** before the examination is to take place
- there were still instances of late submission of forms; the specification states '... centres... are urged to seek approval as early as possible' and all advisers would strongly concur with this advice
- it is an Ofqual requirement that no examination takes place unless the signed PAF has been received by the examiner
- advisers were always looking for reasons to approve combinations and the majority of PAFs were approved at their first submission
- where combinations were not approved it was, as in previous years, for the following reasons:
 - very obscure plays which had been downloaded from the internet and had not been professionally commissioned or produced but had been self-published online
 - plays which would not last more than 35 minutes if performed in full
 - plays not offering an appropriate level of theatrical challenge to students at A Level
 - plays that were too similar to each other in terms of social, cultural **and** historical context 'as depicted in the plays'
 - plays that were the same genre as one of the set texts chosen for Component 1; the most common were those plays that were historicised drama if studying *Our Country's Good*, 20th century expressionist plays combined with the study of *Metamorphosis* and 19th century naturalistic plays where *Hedda Gabler* was a set text selected.

Administration

Pre-exam Arrangements and Paperwork

Most centres responded to initial contacts promptly, and mutually convenient dates and times were arranged. As in previous years, a few centres did not realise the urgency of responding or the initial contact with the centre was not forwarded to the appropriate person. Most centres were, however, very helpful and flexible with their arrangements.

Although the majority of centres dispatched all paperwork promptly, some centres did not include all the necessary paperwork in the first batch to examiners, which must be sent **at least** four weeks before the examination. The documentation should include:

- the examination Schedule.
- play Approval Forms (signed).
- selected texts with the extract and any abridgements clearly marked.

Some centres sent just the extract of the (texts) studied, which was acceptable **only** if **pre-agreed** with the examiner prior to sending the marks to him/her.

Exam Day Arrangements

- most centres arranged for a parking space to be available and reserved for the visiting examiner, which was much appreciated.
- almost all centres had also arranged for a private marking space to be made available to the examiner, away from the performance space; this was a much-appreciated courtesy, although it was not always necessary. For example, if the centre's cohort were all performing monologues and it was more convenient for all parties for the examiner to remain in situ during the usually brief changeovers of student.
- most centres provided running orders, programme notes and statements of dramatic intentions at the start of the session.
- some programme notes included very small photographs that were unhelpful; ideally, the photographs should be taken *specifically* for the purpose of identification in this exam, with students wearing the costumes and hairstyles that they are to wear in the performance; teachers are reminded that the recording may be included in examiners' samples to their Team Leaders, may be used at the Awarding of grades meetings and/or be required to support an EAR request for a review of marking; if programme notes do not identify students clearly, these processes may be compromised.

- for the pre-performance student 'identification line-up' some centres had to be reminded of the requirement for students to state their name, number, specialism and role(s) played, if performing.
- the vast majority of exam performances ran smoothly and on or ahead of the running order timings.
- some centres had pieces that were slightly over-long for the number of students in the group which was frequently self-penalising.
- some centres were able to provide recordings and Reflective Reports on the exam day, and almost all ensured that materials, not taken away by the examiner, reached them within the ten-day period stipulated in the specification.

Extracts to be sent to the Examiner

- Some Centres did not send their examiner copies of the extracts to be performed. Examiners should receive these no less than **four weeks** before the examination date.
- Some Centres did not indicate the beginning/end of the extracts to be performed, nor did they indicate cuts or changes that had been made to the extracts, in contravention of the rubric for this component.
- Some Centres sent 'typed-up' copies of the extracts selected which, when compared to the full text, were found to be heavily edited and, in some cases, even changed to suit the preferences of the students – this resulted in students self-penalising themselves.

Submission of Paperwork to accompany the recordings of the performances

- Most centres had provided clear 'Programme Notes' with clear identification of each performance group, supported by photographs of the students.
- Programme notes should consist of a reasonably sized colour photograph of each student with their name, role and student number clearly visible above, below or by the side of the photograph. Ideally, these photographs will show students, who are being assessed as performers, in the costume that they wear in the performance. Details of the chosen play, the part they played, if offering performance as their chosen specialism, and their chosen practitioner should also be included.
- Designers also need to be identified in the programme notes with the same details of the chosen play and practitioner.
- Some Programme notes that were submitted to examiners marking the students' work remotely found it very difficult to identify individual students in

advance of watching the performances, because the photographs were too small, in monochrome or depicted the student, aged 11.

- Some Centres did not include Programme Notes which are a requirement and therefore had to be provided before assessment could take place.
- Some Centres omitted to include hard copies of the students' Student Record Forms, and these also had to be requested by the examiner.
- Some Centres did not include the students' 'Statements of Dramatic intentions', without which, no assessment can be made of how far students have achieved their intentions.
- Please note that where students' work is being examined postally, all the 'paperwork' **must** be sent to the examiner as 'paper' i.e. in hardcopy.

Recordings and USBs (Unchanged from previous series)

- Most centres submitted work which was filmed appropriately and followed the guidelines set by AQA. Some filming did not follow these guidelines with some recordings including zooming in and out of the action. The best recordings were clear both visually and aurally.
- Other Centres filmed the students' work from such a distance from the stage that it was impossible to tell one student from another by sight alone, and examiners (where examination was postal) had to follow the text to identify which student was playing which role - if the recording was audible.
- Teachers are advised to have a technical run-through that is recorded and then checked so that problems with clarity of sound and vision could be addressed/eliminated.
- Teachers are reminded that even where the examination work is presented live to a Visiting Examiner, the USB must contain a perfectly clear representation of what the examiner has seen. Student work is viewed several times in USB format, once the examination has taken place including, but not limited to: at the Award of Grades, to support the review of students' work during EAR, and/or as part of the collection of suitable material for standardisation of examiners in the following year.
- Some filming was problematical, where the students were not all captured throughout the performance. This was usually, but not exclusively, caused by staging choices, for example filming in traverse or the filming of a promenade performance.
- Examiners are not to be expected to watch different recordings of the same piece in order to be able to see a piece from several angles or to catch each performance in full.

- It is advisable to discuss any potential issues with filming the students' performances with the NEA and take advice about how to ensure that each students' work is fully represented.
- It was helpful when students introduced themselves clearly to camera and included any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece or multi-roling.
- In most cases, design students ensured that their set, costume or puppet design was filmed in close-up, and in silence, in a sequence preceding the recording of the performance.
- It is also worth reminding students that, if they are offering a design skill, they should **not** attempt to introduce the design to the examiner **nor** should they prepare a 'design portfolio'.
- Design students, in common with all students for all specialisms, introduce themselves to camera in the lineup or individually; they do not produce a design portfolio, they produce a reflective report like all other students. Sketches/diagrams and/or photographs that support the designer's work should be appended to the Statement of Dramatic intention as part of the CRF. In all other ways, design students' written evidence should conform to the requirements of the Reflective report that appear in the specification.
- Some Centres did not comply with these requirements.

USBs

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

Students' introductions to camera/preliminary line-up

- When students are filmed introducing themselves, the information that they are required to supply includes: their name, their student number, their specialism,

the name of the play that they are performing and the role that they are playing, if their specialism is 'Performer'.

- Many students this year neglected to supply the name of the play or the name of the role being performed, which can cause difficulties for viewings of the materials in later stages of the administration of this component.
- It is very helpful if the students in the 'line-up' also hold a sheet of A4 paper at chest height that gives the name and student number in bold lettering. This is because student work may be scrutinised several times after the examination has taken place, including, but not restricted to, being viewed by the examiner's Team Leader, being viewed as part of the Awarding process, being viewed in the post-result review process, being viewed by the Lead Examiner preparing exemplar work for teacher or examiner training.
- Students should not give a summary of the play that they are performing an extract from as part of the identification process or indeed at any point during the examination.

Rubric Infringements

- As in previous years, Examiners have reported a range of rubric infringements that have occurred in this series.
- These include but are not limited to:
 - Group sizes of more than 6 students
 - Over-long or ultra-brief performances
 - Costume designers who produced costumes for more than one performer or produced **more than one** costume for one performer – only **one** design may be credited
 - Use of 'non-examinees' in the form of 'voice-overs' participating in dialogue with a single performer – occasionally, a teacher provided the 'voice-over'
 - Use of non-examinees where none is permitted
 - Choice of a practitioner who is **not** on the AQA prescribed list
 - Creation of an 'extract' through cutting and splicing together different parts of a text.
- The most significant and most widespread of these infringements occurred within Centres where students had not been apprised of the written guidance, in the specification, on what constitutes an extract.
- Several 'groups', including students performing monologues or duologues, performed a 'piece' created from different parts of a scene or from several different scenes/sections from across a whole play. This is not an 'extract' as clearly defined in the specification.

- As students are invariably supervised during their work on Component 3, by one or more teachers, this suggests that the students had been allowed to 'create' their own extracts or that they had possibly been given 'abridged versions' of the play to work on by their teachers.
- The specification makes it quite clear that: 'The key extracts chosen must be **continuous** and individually last at least ten minutes in duration if the full extract were to be performed' additionally, the specification states that 'Students can perform an abridged version of the key **extract** if needed (to provide a coherent performance within the minimum performance times stated) but the wording itself must not be modified.' Abridgement of the whole play is not permitted as this goes against the central pillar of the task which is to perform a '**continuous extract**'.
- Students invariably penalised themselves when performing a piece that was 'created' from rather than 'extracted' from their chosen play as they were not able to access the higher mark levels in Part A which include the strand 'Personal interpretation is (exceptionally/entirely) appropriate to the play as a whole'. Artificially constructed pieces can never meet this requirement as the fabricated 'piece' performed constitutes a distortion of the playwright's intentions.
- Some infringements that were prevalent when students were performing a monologue, or a duologue occurred when the student/s in question simply excised one or more character from the scene as written by the playwright. There were numerous instances of significant characters being cut from the 'extract' despite having a crucial role in the selected part of the play.
- As reported since the beginning of the life of this specification, quite a number of pieces were seen which exceeded the stipulated timings for performances. Often students did themselves no favours by presenting a piece that overran the allotted time, to the detriment of all of their marks.

Statements of Dramatic Intentions

- although these statements do not attract any marks in themselves, they are crucial to the exam as they enable the examiner to see what each student is trying to achieve through their interpretation of the text and the application of their chosen practitioner's methodologies.
- this document gives the student the opportunity to say a little bit about why and how they have interpreted the text as they have and could include, for example, references to changes of location, updating or an unorthodox approach that requires justification.
- many of the statements seen this series were either so generalised that they could have applied to almost any play, or all students in the group had the same dramatic intentions.

Selection of the extracts

- many students had selected their texts and their extracts with care and allowed themselves maximum opportunity to demonstrate their strengths as performers, directors or designers.
- some students appear to have been told by their teachers what they would be performing and, while it is inevitable that some teacher guidance is offered, especially as extracts and practitioners need to be so harmoniously matched, it was also noticeable that students tended to fare better where they were performing in a piece that either they had selected for themselves or that had great appeal to them, if selected by another.
- several centres had misunderstood the term “abridgement” in the specification and offered an edited version of the entire script, sometimes taking ‘extracts’ from the whole, sometimes taking individual lines from sections, with no consideration of the playwright’s intentions; this is a rubric infringement.
- other centres had permitted their students to perform a number of separate extracts taken from very different parts of the play but presented as a single entity. In many of these cases this decision negatively impacted upon the mark for ‘appropriateness’.
- some groups omitted characters without considering how this might distort the meaning of the extract.
- some teachers/students chose a broad range of extracts and practitioners across the cohort and where these practitioners had been thoroughly researched and applied to an appropriate text, students benefitted from being exposed to a range of work.
- students need to be advised of how many marks are allocated, in both Part B of the Performance mark and in the mark for the Reflective report, to the successful application of features of their chosen practitioner’s methodology; if students do not understand this, or if, understanding it, they do not act upon it, they jeopardise their achievement in this examination.
- some teachers misunderstood the regulations regarding non-examinees in this specification where they are only permitted to ‘*make the group size up to the minimum of performers*’; as students, at A level, may perform a monologue for each of their extracts, there is no occasion where any individual A Level student requires the support of a non-examinee; students should be encouraged to select extracts that suit the group size that they are working in.
- in a very few cases, it appeared that teachers had offered too much direction of the work in contravention of the rubric in the specification.

Practitioners

- both in performance and in the reflective reports it was clear that some students had only a very limited understanding of the working methods of their chosen practitioner.
- sometimes this was restricted to having seen just one production, for example the Frantic Assembly's 'Things I Know to Be True', without any idea of the vast range of their techniques.
- some thought that if they had a projection on stage that was sufficient proof of the influence of Katie Mitchell. Indeed, there was much evidence of a lack of understanding of how and why Mitchell uses multi-media in many pieces seen.
- occasionally, students who chose non-performance specialisms struggled to access enough material from their chosen practitioner on which to base their own work.
- the specification offers students the opportunity to choose from a very wide range of practitioners but unless students undertake the requisite amount of research into their selected practitioner, they cannot hope to achieve a finished product which will convince an examiner of 'wholly', 'highly' or even much consistency with the practitioner's dramatic intentions and methods.
- it is particularly difficult for a performer working alone to demonstrate frequent and effective evidence of a practitioner's influence in a piece lasting only between 2 and 5 minutes.
- students who chose and researched and applied the methodologies of practitioners with a very distinctive style fared best.
- students who choose practitioners who are also playwrights such as Berkoff, Brecht and Godber are advised to focus only on their practitioner techniques, i.e. as a director and not on the features of their playwriting.
- some students appeared to think that adopting the ideas of a practitioner who would not normally be associated with the style and genre of their selected text would demonstrate some creativity; in fact, such an approach is to be discouraged as it inevitably resulted in a performance that jarred because of the incompatibility of the methodology of the practitioner with the intentions of the playwright. For example, Artaud would never have worked on a play such as *A Streetcar Named Desire*, nor is *Measure for Measure* best served by the application of Frantic Assembly tropes.
- in a very few cases, students chose practitioners who do not appear on the prescribed list in the specification. For example, some students nominated Jaques Lecoq. This mistake impacted negatively on both Part B of students' performance marks and on their marks awarded for the Reflective report.

The Reflective Reports

- While some centres have clearly acted upon the advice given routinely in previous years' Report on the examination, in terms of the Reflective report, it appears that many teachers had not.
- It should be noted that, just as in a written examination, no credit is awarded to irrelevant material.
- Many students included some of the following irrelevant material in their reports which meant that both their time and valuable 'words' (from the allocated 3,000 word maximum) had been wasted in the place of aspects that might have attracted credit.

Irrelevant to the Reflective report:

- biographies of the chosen practitioner.
- references to the methodologies of additional practitioners (i.e. not nominated as practitioners for any of the 3 extracts).
- photographs of practitioners or of productions that they have been involved in – the Reflective report is a completely written document and students offering acting or directing as a specialism should not be including any images or photographs in their reports.
- comparisons or contrasts between the chosen extracts, unless to make specific points about how skills were applied similarly or contrastingly.
- texts rejected.
- the plot of the play from which the extract has been taken.
- character sketches of the role(s) played.
- rehearsal techniques that are not part of the chosen practitioner's practices
- evaluation of the final production (i.e. written after the examination has taken place).

Positive aspects seen

- students used a variety of structures within their Reflective Reports, which is entirely acceptable where the structures were clear and focused; **word counts** are **essential** for this externally marked coursework.
- there were fewer instances of students believing that they must compare and/or contrast their chosen extracts in their reports – this is **not** a requirement.
- good reports had taken into consideration the demands of the task, as outlined in the specification.
- in the majority of reports, students gave reasons for their choices and showed a secure understanding of the social, cultural and historical context of their chosen extracts which was reflected in students' approaches to their extracts.

- good reports showed how all aspects of their research and development had impacted on their interpretation and development of their three extracts.
- the best answers gave clear, detailed and specific illustrations of the practical development of the piece with reference to moments of preparation and performance.
- good reports showed detail of the development of all of the extracts and evaluated both the development of the student's interpretation and the development of their personal skill/specialism.
- good reports used the practitioners' methodologies to develop their work, particularly, but not exclusively, in relations to Extract 3.
- some students made useful reference to productions that they had seen and how these had influenced their own work – this was only relevant where the productions were in the style of the chosen practitioner.
- students discussed the positive effect that research and experience had had on their exploration.
- good reports referred to specific key moments in the extracts, often linked to succinct reference to text; clear illustration of the piece 'in performance' allowed examiners to visualise the interpretative process with more clarity and understanding.
- good design reports were supported with a relevant selection of annotated photographs and/or diagrams which were attached to the students' statements of dramatic intentions, including cue sheets and design sketches, as appropriate.

Less good practice

- despite what has been said in the report on this component in successive years, some students appeared to think that they had to adopt a comparative approach to the extracts leading to a loss of focus on the actual requirements of the report.
- however, presenting the report as three *entirely* separate documents, each covering work on a different extract is not in the spirit of the report which should indicate that the student's approach to component 3 had been a 'holistic' learning experience.
- some students appeared to believe that had to evaluate the final performance in their Reflective report which is not the case and is clearly indicated in the specification.
- in less successful reports, students often made very generalised comments about their discoveries during the process, revealing limited application of nominated practitioners; these documents tended to be descriptive and narrative rather than analytical and evaluative.

- less successful reports omitted to mention opportunities or challenges or if they did consider challenges, they did not explain how these were met.
- self-imposed challenges, for example playing a much older or younger character, choosing a character traditionally played by an actor of the opposite gender, or choosing a role that required the adoption of a specific national or regional accent that students claimed they were unable to 'do' – were self-evidently likely not be overcome.
- some students did not realise that the marking criteria refer to detail in "all three" extracts and offered considerably more detail about Extract 3 with only perfunctory detail of Extracts 1 and 2; this was self-limiting.
- a worrying feature of the post-pandemic approach to learning has been the occasional discovery that students' exploration of Extracts 1 and 2 has been entirely theoretical – this is self-penalising when students betray this fact, wittingly or unwittingly, in their reflective reports.
- occasionally a practitioner had been listed on the Student Record Form for either Extract 1 or 2, but the student has omitted to refer to that practitioner, at all, in the Reflective report.
- some students gave insufficient consideration to the development of their own skill; better reports offered good detail of how exploration of each extract had contributed to their personal development.
- many students referred to several practitioners' work for Extract 3 which contravened the rubric, resulting in a confused focus in the report and a less than clear application of the work of a single practitioner in performance.
- others cited one practitioner, but gave more detail of the work of another, sometimes one which does not appear on the list of practitioners in the specification, for example, Laban.
- some students wrote about a very narrow range of their chosen practitioner's methods, for example, only referencing 'emotion memory' for Stanislavski.
- some students continue to reveal a restricted or distorted understanding of their chosen practitioner; as in previous series, the least understood practitioner continued to be Brecht, although Artaud was frequently applied to inappropriate texts, which were heavily reliant on text/spoken words suggesting a lack of understanding of his dramatic intentions and methods.
- many students' achievements were significantly compromised where they had only an imperfect grasp of the actual practice of their chosen practitioner as opposed to the bowdlerised versions that are occasionally promulgated by TIE educators or Trainers.

- some students did not appear to understand the meaning of the term 'interpretation' which resulted in much generality being included in their discussion of their chosen extract or role.
- some reports revealed that the teacher had intervened in their work in ways that contravene the spirit of the specification.
- students sometimes neglected to include word counts or they labelled the word count at 2,999 when the work was clearly closer to 4,000 words. Examiners only credit the first 3,000 words of the report, so this sort of attempt to 'hoodwink' the examiner is rarely successful and often results in student's work on Extract 3 ends up being assessed on the basis of incomplete work, sometimes on only a handful of lines of text.

Contribution to Performance

- students' understanding of the extract performed as Extract 3, including its context, and the playwright's intentions, should be evident in the performance, irrespective of the specialism(s) being demonstrated in the performance – sometimes this was not the case, and pieces appeared to be being performed with scant regard for the playwright's intentions.
- the best performances were characterised by attention to detail, a recognition that the performance is also an examination - and a significant "event" for those involved.
- while there is no requirement for groups to provide full costume and set, unless these skills are offered by a group member, good performers made sure the performance space was prepared appropriately and most performed under stage lights and in appropriate costumes and make-up.
- less successful performances were frequently characterised by a haphazard approach to presentation, with no sense of the occasion being acknowledged by the students or their peers, resulting in A Level students being examined in a heftily weighted part of their qualification against a backdrop of a pile of discarded coats and bags and/or the detritus of previous 'shows'.
- it is important that designers realise that their designs will be marked in terms of their contribution to the performance as a whole rather than as a simple artefact and they should ensure that their designs are assessable from the vantage point of the examiner, wherever in the 'space' that happens to be.

Skills and specialisms

Performer

Positive achievements:

- performances of sections, of an appropriate length, and unedited, (or edited in line with specification requirements) allowing students to demonstrate performance skills in accordance with the playwright's intentions.
- entirely harmonious choice of practitioner for the selected text, and one which actually helped the student(s) to convey the playwright's original intentions to the audience.
- perfectly executed and appropriately applied regional/national accents to suit the piece.
- clarity of diction, good projection, irrespective of accent/dialect.
- precise vocal and physical performance skills that revealed in depth understanding of the demands of the text and the practitioner, as well as of the role selected.
- careful attention to period setting (or transposed period setting, if justified) and to the social milieu of the character(s) being performed.
- careful attention to production details in relation to creating a meaningful theatrical experience for the audience - even where all group members were performers.
- examiners reported seeing some extremely successful performances, demonstrating completely secure command of skills precisely meeting students' nominated dramatic intentions.

Less successful work:

- examiners sometimes reported pieces that were far too long, either exceeding specification limits or in exposing less successful performers for longer than is strictly necessary to fulfil the requirements of the specification.
- unsuitably chosen monologues that denied students adequate opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills or understanding required to access the highest bands.
- examiners noted a 'post-pandemic' trend of seeing performances where it appeared that students had attempted to replicate a performance that they had accessed via YouTube.
- in these instances, it was sometimes evident that students were 'copying' a performer who had not understood the play or the role that they were attempting .
- recourse to 'monologue' books as sources of inspiration tended to backfire when the student did not read the whole play from which their monologues was taken,

and the result was often a very long way from an acceptable interpretation of the role as written by the playwright.

- some monologues were performed directly to the examiner with no apparent awareness of the context of the speech or any consideration of other characters who would have appeared on stage in a full performance of the play and who were the intended recipients of the student's chosen speech. This was especially inappropriate where students had nominated Stanislavski as their practitioner.
- as reported in successive years, occasionally students chose a text that they had seen in live or streamed performance; and, while this could help develop their ideas and creativity, it more frequently led them into copying the performance, which restricted their own interpretative approach. In the age of streamed theatre this has led to a positive rash of performances of Blanche du Bois, delivered 'Gillian Anderson style', which reveals limited inventiveness on the part of the performers who have chosen to attempt to emulate this fine - but not definitive- professional performance.
- completely inappropriate choice of practitioner or understanding of practitioner so limited that it was impossible to detect their influence in the work.
- merging of practitioners' ideas, for example a piece of Artaudian theatre where 'chair duets' were incongruously performed.
- over-ambitious attempts at physical theatre within a group of unevenly matched students with varying and variable physical dexterity/control.

Direction

- there were not many student directors this year but when this skill was chosen, some impressive work was seen; a memorable rendering of Pinter's *Betrayal* was notable for excellent pacing and use of pause, Katie Mitchell was the practitioner, and the integration of live feed images was especially effective.
- there were some very good pieces seen, generally when students had selected a practitioner who was or is a director.
- the most successful were those who communicated clear directorial intention and showed clear influence of the practitioner's style; the hand of the director was evident throughout the piece.
- good work showed consistent evidence of the practitioner's methods throughout
- the focus and security (or otherwise) of the performances often indicated thorough (or less thorough) use of rehearsal time.
- less successful performances suggested that the director had either over-reached themselves in their choice of piece and/or actors or struggled to capture the confidence of the performers.

Lighting design

- there was some very good work seen indeed for this specialism where in some cases, inventive students often made a virtue of a limited range of specialist equipment.
- others may have had more sophisticated equipment but did not always take advantage of this or demonstrate complete command of what they chose to use
- the most successful students had chosen a practitioner with a very specific style so that examiners knew immediately where inspiration was taken from.
- one very effective lighting design was for an extract from 'Hamlet' involving the Ghost of Old Hamlet, using practitioner Paule Constable, and the design totally supported the work of the performers and the sound designer.
- there was evidence of generally good, and some exceptional, understanding of how lighting could contribute to mood and atmosphere in addition to simply illuminating the stage.

Successful lighting designers:

- had made the decision to work with a different, but appropriate, practitioner from the performers.
- used colour appropriately to support the action on stage.
- understood the need to light from all angles.
- refrained from 'excess' unless the practitioner demanded it.

Less successful lighting designers:

- lacked understanding of how to use the equipment.
- struggled to understand the height required to adequately light from above.
- lacked awareness of use of side lights.
- designed states which were incongruous with the style of the piece.
- were over reliant on 'intelligent' moving lights to change colour in an almost random way.

Sound design

- this has always been a 'minority skill' and is becoming rarer, but there was a handful of sound designers in the 2025 series.
- some students were using fairly rudimentary equipment with intelligence and imagination, for example using live percussion during the opening scene of the storm from *The Tempest*.
- the best work created sound which was significant within the performance and added meaning.

Successful sound designers:

- understood the scope of a sound designer's role.
- manipulated sound to create effects and understood the technical aspects of the equipment they were working with.
- created and worked with both recorded and live sound.

Less successful sound designers:

- created designs incongruous with style of the piece.
- offered a series of music tracks, which were generally unedited and not always appropriate to the mood/practitioner chosen.
- lacked creative awareness of the scope of sound design.
- revealed an apparent lack of rehearsal with the performers.

Costume design

- relatively few costume designs were seen in this series, but there were some very effective responses.
- where designers were intent on creating specific effects, in line with the intentions of their chosen practitioner, they were generally successful.
- too many costume designers neglected to appreciate that they are assessed on a **single** costume and that costume has to be very effective and entirely appropriate to the role, to the play and to the practitioner, to achieve higher band marks.
- a few designers had not considered the impact of their costumes in performance, or how the performers might use them.
- there were designs which showed understanding of the practitioner but needed to further consider the effect of the costumes when on stage.

Successful costume designers:

- understood the brief to design **one** costume.
- revealed skills that were consonant with the demands of the piece and the practitioner.
- used materials creatively, understanding the potential effects of design fundamentals, colour, shape, fabric, ornamentation, style, fit, condition, headgear, footwear, accessories.
- understood the importance of creating a wearable costume.

Less successful costume designers:

- neglected to recognise the requirement of the specification – generally resulting in a number of costumes being ‘created’ for the ‘ensemble’ but with little focused detail for any of them.
- consisted of contemporary teenage girls’ ‘daywear’, for example, a costume designed for Rosie in *Things I Know to be True* which was comprised cotton top and pair of jeans that looked as if they had just been brought in from the student’s own wardrobe that morning.

Set design

- only a few set designs were seen but of those that were, there was occasionally some imaginative and creative application of set design skills.
- designs frequently demonstrated how an effective design may be achieved on a budget, without sacrificing effectiveness.
- good designs often showed clear evidence of inspiration, often from a practitioner’s key works; one example was a set for *pool no water* which capitalized on creating the stark effect of a wall of ‘white tiles’ on which projections could be shown.
- as with other design skills, the successful designs showed understanding of the demands of the performance of the extract and the needs of the performers
- some set designers created more challenges for the performers to contend with, rather than enhancing their work.
- some designs claimed the influence of a practitioner, but this was sometimes insufficiently evident in the final performance.

Successful set designers:

- understood the brief.
- revealed skills that were consonant with the demands of the piece and the practitioner.
- used materials creatively.
- understanding the potential effects of design fundamentals, use of space, scale, use of levels, perspective, relationship with the audience.
- chose appropriate materials with which to construct the set.
- accommodated the action of the extract perfectly, including positioning of entrances and exits and/or projection screens, if used.
- understood the importance of creating a **useable** setting.

Less successful set designers:

- assembled a collection of items from 'stock' and rearranged them to vaguely approximate the requirements of the setting.
- included one designer who designed a setting for *Pillowman* that consisted solely of a dirty- looking duvet, thrown on top of a standard black rostrum.

Puppet design

- A puppet design and a costume design appeared together, acting in perfect harmony, although created individually by different students, in a fun-filled extract from 'The Amazing Mr Fox', much to the delight of an invited audience of small children. Otherwise, no puppet design skills have been reported by examiners at the time of the composition of this report.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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