



GCSE

Drama

8261/C: Devising Drama

Report on the examination

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Report on the Examination

Moderators were once again delighted to see many innovative performances and a range of design work in this series. Many centres enabled their students to create original devised performances of a high standard which were engaging, entertaining and often thought-provoking. Similarly, many Devising Logs gave real insight into the process undertaken, evidencing the rigour of decision-making and how ideas had been created and developed towards a theatrical performance. Many students reflected thoughtfully on their own work, appraising their effectiveness and putting their work into context of their understanding of how drama impacts an audience.

Where centres had included all necessary paperwork and performance recordings of high quality, uploaded and tagged to the relevant students, this enabled moderators to proceed with the process fairly seamlessly. We appreciate the hard work that goes into marking and preparing the sample of internally assessed work and this does not go unnoticed.

Devised Performance

Stimuli

It was pleasing to see a range of stimuli. There was a diverse mix of established stimuli seen in previous series and materials which were completely new to those moderating. Some centres utilised stimuli which have been shared at AQA training events or sought inspiration from those in the work on TOLS (Teacher Online Standardisation).

Stimuli included:

- Visual images, photography, paintings and drawings. Artworks often enabled interesting responses where there was sufficient scope for student interpretation. Works by Banksy are an increasingly common starting point.
- Video material such as films and documentaries, often examining real life events or true crime.
- Issue-based materials or those relating to current affairs, such as journalism, newspapers and interviews.
- Online sources, web articles and social media posts on particular topics are also a popular source of inspiration.
- Text such as existing novels, poetry, fairytales and folk stories. Classical myths and urban legends saw a resurgence as did quotations from famous people. Words such as 'loneliness' or 'injustice' sometimes gave a thematic starting point.
- Music – some instrumental pieces were used to suggest mood whilst other students chose particular song lyrics which sparked their imagination.

Many trends from previous series continue to be evident. There are a growing number of centres presenting a series of objects or artefacts to students. Often this is done in the format of an immersive installation in a drama studio, with lighting and sound used to create mood. Often a series of displays linked by a particular theme were presented to students.

The use of practical workshops in the early stages is also common and these tend to fall into one of two categories. In some cases, the practical workshop is used to *explore* the stimuli and

in other cases the student states that the practical workshop *is* the stimulus. The latter can be problematic as students often struggled to pin down and define what the stimulus was when referring to something ephemeral and experiential rather than something concrete.

Centres know their cohorts well and many choose stimuli which they know will engage students in their particular context, taking advantage of the free choice available to build engagement. Whichever stimuli are chosen, the most important consideration is to enable students to create and develop ideas for their own original devised piece rather than inhibiting creativity. Stimuli which were less successful tended to have an obvious or pre-determined meaning chosen by the teacher which led all working groups in the same direction. Similarly, a range of stimuli all on the same very specific topic did not enable students in many cases. In some centres with large cohorts, this led to a dozen performance pieces being on exactly the same subject. This did not seem in the spirit of students creating and developing their own ideas in an original devised piece but was perhaps inevitable given that all the stimuli provided were on the same topic.

Another approach seen in this series was for students to devote the entirety of Section 1 to describing practical exploration of all the stimuli, but with the other required content of Section 1 not addressed, lacking a choice of stimulus or any sense of how ideas had been developed towards the chosen devised piece. Students need to give their initial response to the stimuli and explain their choice but must also ensure the other content is covered.

Some centres allowed students to bring in their own stimulus. Centres are reminded that it is a requirement of the specification for teachers to present students with a range of stimuli (i.e. two or more). Students presented with only one stimulus (or who only referred to one stimulus in Section 1 of the Devising Log) were inevitably unable to explain their initial response to the stimuli presented by the teacher and focussed entirely on the one stimulus they had pursued. Similarly, it was very difficult for students to comprehensively explain their choice when they had not evidenced the range they had been presented with.

Styles, Genres and Practitioners

There is no requirement at GCSE to devise in a particular style or genre, nor to use a practitioner. Nonetheless, many centres find this is good practice to give shape and structure to each piece of work.

- **Ensemble work** continued to be evident in some very sophisticated devised pieces. Often these relied on choral precision within a visual and physical style of storytelling. Often such pieces combined a range of **non-naturalistic devices** to great effect.
- Some performers seemed to have great fun with the anarchic spirit of **Kneehigh** or **Splendid**, performing with humour, playfulness and a chorus of storytellers narrating.
- Equally successful were some hard-hitting and powerful ensemble dramas on serious topics: cases of injustice, real-life tragedies and true crime. These were often told chorally with narration, abstract movement and montage. The work of **Brecht** was often alluded to with mixed success, though the style of **Paper Birds** is becoming increasingly popular and moderators reported that students find this very accessible.
- There seemed to be an increase in the number of entirely **naturalistic** performances this year. Many students struggled to move these pieces beyond rather clichéd soap opera style dialogue performed with little inventiveness. There were many pieces

which appeared to be semi-improvised or roleplays which felt repetitive and bland, lacking intrigue, skill or a sense of theatrical performance. Similarly, the intended believability, character and/or emotional depth was often lacking. Often these pieces were unnecessarily lengthy, exceeding the maximum suggested times in the specification without sustaining the engagement of the audience. In these cases, quality over quantity was required.

- More successful naturalistic examples tended to use a more extensive range of skills with greater precision and often balanced naturalistic moments with inventive use of other dramatic techniques. Using a mixture of different devices and theatrical conventions was one way of showing greater inventiveness in individual performances.
- **Verbatim, political theatre and documentary drama** continue to be growing trends in GCSE work. Many students devising in these styles based their pieces on real events and current affairs, which gave them plenty of source material to use from their research. Students are recognising the benefits of collating text from interviews, videos, documentaries and online sources. Such real testimony can bring authenticity to a performance and avoid it becoming too banal.
- There were some examples of **TIE performances** targeted at younger pupils, including centres where students performed their work in primary schools. These often included simple didactic moral messages or original **adaptations** of fairy tales, myths and legends with a contemporary twist.
- **Physical theatre** seems to be in decline, but some fantastic physical work was seen. There continue to be many instances of an inserted chair duet or other movement sequence within every piece in some centres, as if students are following a formulaic checklist of devices to include without clear intent or purposeful decision-making by each group. Students cited influence from **Frantic Assembly** and, occasionally, **Gecko**. Centres are reminded that devised pieces for this component must contain dialogue.
- Occasional examples of **comedy** were seen, and these were often very successful when students had the necessary skillset. Many performers demonstrated heightened comic characters, created parodies and spoofs or showed an ability to devise satirical or irreverent humour, producing genuinely entertaining work. A handful of attempts to imitate the **Mischief Theatre** 'Goes Wrong' style were often unsuccessful as students underestimated the skill and precision needed for farce and slapstick comedy to be effective. Often these pieces lacked momentum and did not have the scale or technical ability required. A few examples of **commedia** and **melodrama** were also seen.
- Some students did benefit from the structure provided by a choice of style. Nonetheless, a **blend of different styles** was often very successful as there was a real sense of performers having ownership of their work and making the best creative decisions to suit the specific challenges of their theme/piece, without necessarily adhering to a prescribed style.

Students do not need to refer to practitioners in their Devising Logs. In some cases, stronger students with a genuine grasp of a practitioner's methodology did make purposeful reference to this in explaining how they developed and refined their skills and the piece. However, in most cases, such references seemed rather superficial and did not attract credit. In some centres, it seems that all students have been advised to refer to practitioners, but these references were routinely unconvincing. Vague references to Stanislavski's system or Brechtian techniques were common, but lacking rigour, precise detail or genuine understanding of what these were or how they had been applied to create and develop ideas.

Themes

These included many frequently used ideas as well as some completely new topics.

- Dystopian worlds, artificial intelligence, robotics, technology
- Social media, particularly algorithms, addiction, effect on body image
- Discrimination relating to race or gender
- Injustice/corruption, such as the Post Office scandal, infected blood, police cover-ups
- Women's rights, suffragettes, women through different periods of history
- Drug/alcohol abuse, domestic violence, grief, mental health, self-image, suicide, consent
- True crime cases, murder mystery, detective stories, police investigations
- War, including many current and historic conflicts
- Andrew Tate, toxic masculinity and misogyny
- Covid pandemic, natural disasters, plane crashes, school shootings

Specialisms

There were fewer design students this year and the vast majority of students were entered as performers. Centres are reminded that each group **must** contain **between two and six performers** and no more than **one** of each of the design specialisms.

There were examples where students had not clearly identified their specialism. In some cases, students had not chosen one of the specialisms offered, identifying themselves as the 'lighting and sound designer' for example, or ticking both the 'performer' and 'designer' boxes on the Candidate Record Form. Centres are reminded that only one specialism can be chosen for each student from those listed in the specification.

Performer

Successful performers often:

- Performed with impressive confidence, being highly skilled, precise and convincing.
- Sustained their performances fully with focus and control, being bold and assured.
- Demonstrated an extensive range of the performance skills listed on page 17 of the specification, which are primarily related to characterisation, vocal and physical skills.
- Had a sense of genuine engagement in their chosen stimulus/theme which shined through in their level of commitment and flair in the performance.
- Were pivotal to the success of their performance, ensuring they had sufficient exposure in the piece and undertook a key role, making an outstanding contribution.
- Demonstrated a high level of inventiveness, showing originality and creativity in their performance.
- Collaborated effectively with the other performers in their group to ensure the success of the piece, evident in (for example) ensemble and choral work, timing or unison.
- Wrote a clear Statement of Dramatic Intentions with achievable aims which entirely reflected what was performed.
- Appeared in sophisticated and highly creative pieces. All students are marked individually but often a stronger piece provides opportunities for each performer to demonstrate their abilities.
- Had committed all dialogue to memory and were clearly very thoroughly rehearsed.
- Maintained a real sense of theatrical performance using style and technique imaginatively.

Moderators reported that some performers rose to the challenge when they had basic technical elements (such as lighting and costume), a suitable performance space and the presence of a supportive audience. These are not compulsory requirements and are not marked but were sometimes used by centres to create a sense of occasion for the practical assessment, which can be beneficial for performers to feel fully invested.

Less successful performers often:

- Lacked energy and expression, deploying a narrow range of vocal and physical skills with a lack of characterisation.
- Lacked inventive moments, often relying on basic roleplays on clichéd topics, without a sense of purpose or momentum.
- Did not have a toolkit of techniques and/or theatrical style(s) which might have been used to construct a more creative performance.
- Did not sustain audience engagement, often in extremely lengthy pieces.
- Had little or no evidence of success in achieving the aims set out in the Statement of Dramatic Intentions (or sometimes no intentions stated at all).
- Lacked a sense of occasion or theatrical performance, with the recording seeming more like a rehearsal or improvisation.
- Had a small role with minimal dialogue or appeared in a very small amount of the piece, making a limited contribution to the group.
- At the lowest end of achievement, had lapses in performance, seeming insincere, corpsing, coming out of role and/or visibly forgetting lines.

Centres are reminded of the minimum and maximum performance times outlined in the specification. It is an increasingly common feature of less successful work to be unnecessarily long in duration, often exceeding the maximum permitted time or being of a length disproportionate to the number of performers in the group. Moderators observed that this creates a more difficult task for less successful performers to sustain their performance over a significantly longer duration than is necessary, which can be self-penalising for those students who struggle to do so. Quality over quantity would be more beneficial in some cases, provided each piece is within the suggested timings in the specification and gives appropriate exposure to each performer in the group. Similarly, where students are off stage for significant periods of time, the piece may well be of increased length to give each individual sufficient opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Where students are on stage performing as an ensemble throughout the piece, they inevitably gain greater exposure in a shorter amount of time. The upper limit is the maximum and not necessarily a target, particularly for smaller groups of performers.

There was an increase in performances with lengthy blackouts between scenes, where it seemed students had given no consideration to how they might transition inventively between each section of the piece. This is often a missed opportunity and performers who transitioned in a slick manner often showed skill, creativity and a successful contribution in doing so. In some lower-attaining performances, repeated blackouts totalled several minutes of the piece, losing momentum, energy and the sense of a complete theatrical performance.

Designer

A decreasing number of students are opting for design specialisms in this component, but some work was seen across all the specialisms encompassing a range of achievement.

Centres are reminded that, like performers, designers are assessed on AO2 entirely from the recording of the Devised Performance itself. There is no need to provide extraneous materials for AO2, such as a recorded presentation to camera. Materials such as lighting/sound plots, cue sheets, model box sets, sketches and mood boards can be attached to the Statement of Dramatic Intentions if desired. Materials attached to the statement are **not** marked for AO2 but can help to clarify intentions to the moderator.

Such materials can also be included in the Devising Log if desired, provided they are within the specified word/page limits. These are **not** marked separately but can be used to illustrate points made. Any materials included in the Devising Log must be inserted within a specific section to be awarded credit and **not** as appendices. Anything not included within one of the three Devising Log sections is not awarded credit for AO1/AO4. Such materials must be alongside text or annotation with relevant explanation, analysis or evaluation linked to the required content of each section to attract credit.

Lighting designer

Successful lighting designers in this series often:

- Used an extensive range of skills. Moderators saw use of gobos, strobes, floodlights, projection and moving lights alongside spots and washes. Consideration was given to intensity, colour, angle and focus as well as the transitions between each state.
- Showed inventiveness through particular effects. One student cleverly lit a gauze screen to create shadows or to give the effect of a translucent frame through which some of the action could be seen. It is increasingly common to see the use of handheld practical lights, torches and various battery-powered LED lights. These can all contribute to the lighting design when used in conjunction with stage lighting.
- Made an excellent contribution to the piece and had clearly collaborated with the group to achieve this.
- Evidenced highly competent lighting skills through their design, paying real attention to detail in each lighting state.
- Had a clear sense of purpose, achieving the effects outlined in their statement, creating mood and atmosphere and setting location or time of day effectively.

Less successful lighting designers:

- Had a rather haphazard design where the intentions behind some lighting states were unclear, did not make a contribution or did not effectively meet the aims outlined in the statement.
- Relied on a fairly narrow range of lighting skills, often full stage washes with perhaps one spotlight. This was not sufficient to access the higher mark bands and often indicated a lack of inventiveness in the design.
- Did not create atmosphere and/or were ineffective in establishing time/location.
- Tended to lack ambition in the design, deploying only a few cues. It was clear in some designs that there had been a lack of collaboration with the group and that the piece lacked opportunities for creative lighting design.

Sound designer

More successful sound designers often had some of the following features:

- Paid attention to detail when selecting pre-recorded sounds and music. This included editing or manipulating sound using computer software, adding echo or reverb.
- Organised their sounds effectively for playback, using software such as QLab to create crossfades and control volume levels.
- Had included many inventive ideas. For example, in one piece about mental health, the sound designer had recorded original voiceovers representing the voices inside the character's head, using software to edit this by adding echo and overlaying the sound of radio static. The track faded in as the character was bombarded by their thoughts with the white noise increasing in volume before cutting out suddenly. This was effective in performance and reflected the student's intentions.
- Used standing/hanging microphones and/or radio mics to manipulate live sound.
- Considered the source of sound in the auditorium and the positioning of speakers.
- Collaborated effectively with others in the group. For example, timing the climax of a piece of music in conjunction with a lighting change and a physical theatre sequence.

Less successful sound designers often:

- Lacked ambition by using only a handful of simple cues, such as music to open or close the piece and cover scene changes or a few basic sound effects. These often seemed rather last-minute additions rather than crucial contributions to the performance.
- Produced a somewhat underdeveloped design, with a sense that it could have been assembled on the performance day rather than something which reflected the same rigour and preparation time the performers had invested in the process.
- Lacked inventive ideas and did not demonstrate many of the skills in the specification.
- Had very basic aims in the Statement of Dramatic Intentions which were not achieved.
- Showed little competency in their design, such as including sombre music from YouTube without editing out the advertisements which played before the clip.

Set designer

Successful set designers:

- Selected appropriate furniture, props and set dressings, ensuring these were suitable to the intended location, style, period, mood and/or atmosphere where relevant.
- Went beyond the selection of basic furniture and props by considering the stage design more holistically. One designer creating a hospital setting had given the stage floor the appearance of linoleum tiles and used flats to create a clinical and sterile environment with white walls.
- Ensured their set could be used inventively to contribute to the piece. One designer used steel decks as a catwalk in a fashion show. These were then rotated to become vertical boards on which the performers pinned photographs. The same design projected images of crowds dancing across the cyclorama to give the effect of a nightclub. Often strong set design was integral to the success of the performance.
- Paid attention to detail for all items in the design, considering colour, material and texture, for example. This was often evident in the Devising Log and Statement of Dramatic Intentions which showed how highly developed the design was.

Less successful set designers often:

- Included only a few items of furniture, such as a table and some chairs, lacking a sufficient range of skills or any inventiveness.
- Had a sense that the design had been thrown together at the last minute using only furniture readily available in a classroom where this was not appropriate to the piece.
- Lacked attention to detail and did not recognise that the set designer is responsible for the whole stage picture. For example, a piece set in a warzone with an unrelated classroom display prominent in the background which could have easily been covered.
- Created a design which contributed little to the piece beyond a backdrop, often seemingly a result of lack of collaboration with performers during the devising process.

Costume designer

Successful costume designers:

- Had comprehensively designed one performer from head to toe.
- Had covered a range of skills by considering all garments, accessories, headgear, masks, footwear, hair and make-up, as appropriate.
- Had considered colour, material, texture, cut, length, embellishments and any ornamentations where necessary.
- Had clearly collaborated with the group and particularly with the performer they were costuming, to ensure comfort, fit and to enable their movement.
- Made an outstanding contribution to establishing character, reflecting the aims outlined in their Statement of Dramatic Intentions.
- Paid attention to detail in the garments chosen or made alterations to achieve the intended design. Costume designers are not assessed on the costume construction but often students with relevant skills made simple adaptations to achieve their intended design in performance.
- Included many inventive ideas in pieces which enabled them to do so. For example, moderators saw examples of prosthetic wounds in war-themed pieces. Another designer creating the character of a China doll had used make-up to cover the face and arms in white and used body paint to give the effect of cracks developing in the porcelain. She had dressed the performer in white tights which also had a matching cracking pattern painted on. These ideas were inventive and highly successful.

Moderators again saw many costume designers who stated in their Devising Log and/or Statement of Dramatic Intentions that they had designed costumes for more than one performer or the whole group. Centres are reminded that costume designers must create **one** costume design for **one** performer. Students can design more than one costume if they wish, **but only one design is assessed**. Often less successful costume designers created unnecessary additional demands for themselves by designing more than one costume, most of which were not given any credit. The **one** costume design presented for assessment should be the main focus of the Devising Log and the sole focus of the Statement of Dramatic Intentions. In cases where designers had not identified a single costume, the moderator had to select one of the designs to mark for AO2. Centres are urged to ensure that costume designers follow this guidance.

Less successful costume designers:

- Focussed on quantity over quality, creating as many as five different costume designs for the final piece. Where these were of lesser quality, it seemed that the student

would have benefitted from focussing on one design in detail rather than attempting to design multiple costumes, most of which had absolutely no bearing on the mark.

- Produced a basic design which seemed to lack attention to detail and made little contribution to the effectiveness of the piece.
- Had not gone through a process of development and refinement, seeing the design as being fixed rather than working on improving and evolving it.
- Lacked range and did not give attention to the variety of possible skills which could be demonstrated in a costume design.
- Had few inventive ideas or seemed to have been insufficiently matched to designing for a performer whose character had extremely minimal costume requirements.

Puppet designer

Although extremely rare, it was pleasing to see some examples of puppet design in moderated samples for the first time in many years. Whilst there were too few to make many generalisations, it was clear that those who had opted for this specialism tended to genuinely engage in the design process. These students had developed and refined the functionality of the puppet, often using rods and simple craft materials to realise the design, considering how the performer(s) would manipulate this in performance.

Statement of Dramatic Intentions

The suggested total length for the statement is approximately 150 words, which tends to give students sufficient scope to establish clear aims for themselves. Students who set too many unrealistic goals inevitably created a difficult task for themselves. Equally, students who wrote a very brief or underdeveloped statement were often very vague and did not give the moderator much to go on when deciding if their performance or design was successful. Centres are reminded that this is an individual statement so should reflect the intentions of the individual in relation to their chosen specialism.

Marking the Devised Performance (AO2)

Level of theatrical skill – this strand reflects how competent, developed and sustained the relevant theatrical skills were in performance. This is often marked accurately by centres, though there is a tendency in some centres to award Band 4 or 3 to those performers who are best described as Band 3 or 2 respectively. Centres are strongly encouraged to benchmark using the work on Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS). This contains representation of all levels of achievement and work in all specialisms.

Range of theatrical skills demonstrated – this refers to the skills listed on pages 17-19 of the specification and was often over awarded in centres whose marks were out of tolerance. It is not an expectation that students will demonstrate all the skills listed but there should be a sufficient number to be characterised as 'extensive' or 'wide'. Again, the examples on TOLS provide useful benchmarks of what is meant by each descriptor. Both performers and designers who were reliant on the same very narrow set of skills were less successful.

Contribution to the effectiveness of the piece – this was often marked accurately in most centres and exists to reward students whose contribution is pivotal to the effectiveness of the piece as a whole. In some centres where this had not been marked accurately, it appeared

that centres had made judgements relative to the cohort or even the performance group rather than the national AQA standard. For example, it is not necessarily the case that the strongest group member is awarded in the top band and the least strong in the bottom. Some levels of contribution are comparable and worthy of the same mark whilst sometimes there is a range of achievement in this strand.

Inventiveness of the individual's work – this is generally the strand marked with the most leniency and often where students achieve the lowest of their AO2 marks. As in previous series, performers who were most theatrical in their realisation of the material tended to be most successful in this strand, deploying a range of techniques and taking an innovative approach to the structure and staging of their piece. Often these students found inventive ways to apply their skills to create characters imaginatively and found inventive moments of ensemble work to which they were key contributors. Designers often contributed to inventive moments in which their design was utilised creatively or ensured it had inventive qualities.

Success in realising individual artistic intention - those students who wrote a clear, concise and achievable statement which accurately summarised their contribution in the performance tended to be most successful. Some students were less successful in meeting their intentions despite a well-written statement, as the statement did not reflect what the student (or their design) did in the performance. Centres are reminded that zero marks are awarded to students who have provided no evidence of their intentions. Many students who had not submitted a statement had still been awarded marks by the centre, with the basis on which these marks were awarded often unclear.

Devising Log

Moderators reported many strong examples of Devising Logs in a range of formats and theatrical specialisms. The most successful students used the available word count to develop the depth of their explanation, analysis and evaluation with significant precise detail. These logs often highlighted the rigour which had gone into the process of developing ideas from stimulus to final performance.

There were fewer centres who did not divide Devising Logs into three clear sections in this series but there were still a minority of students who did not. Centres are reminded that it is compulsory to title each of the three sections so that it is clear to the teacher and moderator where the marking of each section begins and ends. In cases where a student has not titled their sections, teachers should take a 'best fit' approach, deciding where to divide each section and indicating this in their marking. Where teachers had not done so, moderators had to make this decision on their behalf and did so in the best interests of each student. Appendices are not permitted in the Devising Log. All material should be included in one of the three sections to be awarded credit.

Centres are reminded that it is **not** acceptable to adopt a 'mix and match' approach by crediting content in the wrong section. All content **must** appear in the correct section to be given credit. It was surprisingly common in this series for students to include aims and research findings in Section 2 where these were missing from Section 1 or analysing and evaluating their work in Section 2 (which would be better placed in Section 3).

There were fewer breaches of the JCQ instructions on non-examined assessment in this series but some of these infringements do persist. In some centres, there was evidence of whole cohorts following the same highly structured writing frames, sentence starters or prompt questions. This can be frustrating for moderators as often these intended aids created by teachers differ significantly from the required content (on page 26 of the specification) and therefore do not actually aid students in meeting the demands. For example, in one centre it seemed students had been instructed to justify their choice of practitioner, which is not a requirement and attracted no credit. It is strongly advised that centres share the content of each Devising Log section with students exactly as it appears in the specification.

There were also some centres with evidence of students having been given very specific feedback on drafts from teachers essentially instructing the student on what to write. **This is classed as improper assistance and often results in a malpractice investigation.** Teachers are permitted to give general feedback, but this must not extend to giving students creditable material to include in their response. Each Devising Log must be the student's own work. Teachers must not make any edits or corrections, including to spelling or structure.

Most centres had clearly ensured that all students adhered to the maximum word/page/time limits for the Devising Logs and it is the norm in the majority of centres that no student exceeds this. There are still a significant minority of students exceeding the upper limits with moderators reporting some logs up to triple the accepted length. As per the specification, **evidence beyond the maximum must not count towards the mark.** It is extremely rare for teachers to cease marking at the upper limit, but it must be stressed that **this is the approach taken by moderators.** This led to significant mark adjustments in moderation where centres had not taken the same approach in their marking.

All students must state an accurate total word count on the Devising Log. Often this was missing or occasionally the number stated was inaccurate. For the avoidance of doubt, all words are included in the count, such as quotations, handwritten text and student annotations. Bibliography with details of sources referenced can be included in the relevant space on page 2 of the Candidate Record Form or within the Devising Log itself if preferred.

In many centres, the standard of marking is excellent. Devising Logs were annotated or a comment had been provided on the Candidate Record Form to explain the awarding of marks, which is hugely appreciated by moderators. In a minority of centres, there were no annotations or comments to guide the moderator in how marks had been awarded which inevitably made centre-marking harder to follow. There are also centres in which the annotations or comments do not relate to the mark scheme or the content of the Devising Log and therefore do not aid the moderator in understanding the quality of the response.

Annotations/comments should denote:

- the quality of the response using the descriptors in the mark scheme criteria
- the student's coverage of the content for each section (page 26 of the specification)

For example, moderators prefer annotations such as '*highly developed research*' in Section 1 or '*response to feedback very clear and comprehensively explored*' in Section 2 rather than annotations which are irrelevant (e.g. '*practitioner*') or vague and not clearly linked to the

quality of the response (e.g. *'highly developed and refined vocal skills'* is preferable to an annotation of *'voice'*). Some centres use the annotations to denote where the content has been met (e.g. *'research'*, *'feedback'*) and use a summative comment to summarise the quality of the response with criteria from the mark scheme, which is another helpful approach. In some cases, the annotations did not accurately describe the evidence in the work, such as stating *'precise detail'* next to a point which lacked precise detail.

Formats

The entirely written format is used for the vast majority of Devising Logs and there were fewer logs in other formats in this series. Very few audio/video recorded logs were seen but there are a handful of centres where all students use this format. The annotated materials option was used by fewer students but remains popular for designers who wish to visually illustrate their ideas with photographs, sketches, drawings and/or cue sheets.

Students opting for the annotated formats should be reminded that:

- Materials **must** be annotated or alongside text with relevant explanation (Sections 1 and 2) or analysis and evaluation (Section 3) to be awarded credit. Credit is only given when materials are made relevant to the task.
- The content on page 26 of the specification and the mark scheme criteria must be addressed. For example, some design students produce aesthetically pleasing and beautifully presented costume mood boards/scrapbooks, but with very few relevant links to the Devising Log task or the mark scheme criteria.
- All materials must be included in the relevant section of the Devising Log and not as appendices. Any materials not included in the log sections are not marked for AO1 or AO4. Any design materials not in the Devising Log can be attached to the Statement of Dramatic Intentions if desired. These are **not** marked for AO2 but can help to clarify the intentions to the moderator.
- All materials must be legible. There were frequent issues with handwritten materials (such as spider diagrams) being scanned in and appearing pixellated or simply too small to read.

Successful audio/visual Devising Logs came from students who had clearly prepared thoroughly for the recording and often had a genuine understanding of their devised piece which they were able to articulate verbally with fluency and depth of explanation. In less successful audio/video recordings, students tended to seem unprepared and spoke rather vaguely about their work. For students simply reading a pre-prepared script, this could have been submitted as a written Devising Log and therefore the choice of format did not seem particularly beneficial. Some students who used visual aids in a video recording did benefit from the ability to illustrate the points made verbally.

Section 1: Response to a stimulus (AO1)

This continues to be the section which students seem to find the most straightforward, often achieving the highest mark. Similarly, centre marking of Section 1 tends to be the most accurate. Successful responses ensured all parts of each of the five bullet points were fully addressed, explaining their initial ideas in the context of their intended devised piece.

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

Successful responses explained the range of stimuli which the teacher had presented and the student's initial response to these before identifying the chosen stimulus. Strong students often explained the reasons for this choice in detail and their initial ideas were given in depth. These responses also maintained a focus on the dramatic potential of the stimuli and a real sense of how the initial ideas might be created and developed into a devised piece. Many students gave a genuine sense of engagement and interest in their chosen stimulus and went into detail with highly creative ideas.

Less successful responses struggled to go beyond the obvious connotations of each stimulus, making basic or simple deductions. This was particularly true when the chosen stimulus had very obvious meaning which students struggled to develop highly with precise detail. Some students were given only one stimulus or did not refer to the range they had been given in Section 1. Inevitably, this meant they were unable to give their initial response to the stimuli presented by the teacher and focussed only on their chosen stimulus. This also meant the explanation of a choice seemed superficial as there was no sense of what they were choosing from. Some responses at the lowest end of achievement alluded to practical experiences in the initial stages of devising but did not explicitly identify what their stimuli actually were.

Ideas, themes and settings they have considered for the devised piece in response to the stimulus they chose

Successful students ensured that they addressed all three requirements, explaining in detail how their ideas, themes and settings had emerged from the stimulus as the devised piece began to shape up. This gave the moderator a very clear sense of what the piece was about and the setting(s). The strongest 'ideas' had a clear sense of theatrical performance, such as students explaining with precise detail how they intended to use physical theatre sequences or structure the piece using verbatim text, for example.

Less successful responses struggled to give many theatrical ideas beyond the plot of the piece, describing the characters and narrative events rather than giving a sense of initial ideas for the piece practically and theatrically. Some students omitted parts of the task, often forgetting to address the settings considered for the piece. Some students included a photograph of a mind map listing the themes they had brainstormed. Whilst this was useful to some extent in identifying the themes considered, in isolation it did not provide sufficient explanation of how those themes were created and developed to access the higher marks.

Research findings

This was the most frequently omitted part of the task, and many students included research findings briefly or had none whatsoever. There was sometimes overlap with the stimuli or ambiguity relating to which materials were stimuli (provided by the teacher) and which materials were research (conducted by the student). Some less successful students referred to research which they *intended* to complete rather than giving specific findings from research they *had* completed. Similarly, some students referred at length to research conducted by other members of the group, rather than their own individual research findings. Less successful responses were rather vague (e.g. *"I looked on the internet and used the information*

in the piece”) and did not give precise detail of their specific sources, findings or how these were used in the creation of the devised piece.

Successful responses tended to give precise detail, such as citing specific sources and quoting concise findings from their research. By quoting selectively, students were able to focus in on specific findings, which was a more successful approach than copying and pasting vast amounts of information from the internet, using a considerable amount of the available word count. Students must use their findings to create and develop ideas for the devised piece itself. Stronger responses applied the research to their work, explaining with precise detail how findings would impact their initial ideas for specific scenes or characters, for example.

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

Successful responses gave a detailed account of a range of aims for both the individual and the piece as a whole. Individual aims for performers often related to characterisation and their own acting skills, whilst designers should focus on their chosen design specialism. Many students successfully kept focus on the audience, explaining the impact they wished to have or the audience response they wished to achieve. For the aims of the piece as a whole, many students took a broader group perspective, outlining their intended style and the overall messages they wished the audience to take away. The strongest responses gave precise detail with ideas relating to how they intended to achieve these aims in their performance, which was one way of making the response more highly developed.

Less successful responses in this area tended to be rather short, where one aim was stated briefly in a single sentence but was underdeveloped. Some students referred to their own aims but did not cover those of the piece as a whole (or vice versa). Some brief responses were rather vague and lacking specifics, such as *‘I want my character to be good’*, or were not dramatic aims, such as *‘I want to achieve a high mark’*.

Section 2: Development and collaboration (AO2)

More students struggled with Section 2 than in previous series and this was often the most leniently marked section for those centres with marks out of tolerance in moderation.

There are two very common pitfalls. The first is a response which is simply too descriptive, broad and vague, giving a bird’s eye view of the rehearsal process lacking in precise detail of how that process was applied. In the case of performers, for example, too many responses lack quoted lines of dialogue to which skills were applied, specific moments in the piece to exemplify points or detail of specific aspects of skills/characterisation which were developed and refined. Students who ‘zoomed in’ from a broad overview to specific moments (in rehearsal and the final piece) were more successful as this enabled precise detail.

The second pitfall is to omit parts of the task. Most commonly, many performers made little or no reference to their own skills. The opposite is often true of design students. Many designers tend to dedicate the entire response to discussion of their own skills/specialism (such as costume design) but make no reference to the development and refinement of the piece.

There is also a growing tendency for students to refer to rehearsal strategies but to give no precise detail of how these were applied or the specific performance outcomes in terms of skills or the piece. For example, many students made statements such as *'We improvised this scene lots to make it better'* but did not give the specific practical detail of this exercise or the precise outcomes of moments in performance. Similarly, many students state that they used hot-seating or role on the wall to develop character. Often students give no detail of the questions asked during the hot-seating exercise and/or the answers given. Where this information is present, it is sometimes accompanied by a rather vague conclusion such as *'This really helped me develop my character'* rather than explaining the practical impact on refining specific aspects of characterisation/skills in the performance at precise moments. References to Stanislavski's system or Brechtian devices often seemed very superficial, lacking detail and/or not made relevant to the required content of Section 2, though some stronger responses did manage to do so.

Some strong responses progressed systematically through each of the bullet points, writing a paragraph on each. Many other successful students took a holistic approach, synthesising the various points required in Section 2 into detailed examples, taking the reader on the journey from the initial idea for a character/scene/moment through its practical development and refinement, response to feedback and the final outcome. These responses sustained a developmental focus with a sense of how the piece/skills had *evolved* during the devising process, which is crucial to success in Section 2.

Lengthy discussion of writing a script was often a feature of less successful Section 2 responses, with comments such as *'we struggled with this scene, so I went away and wrote a script to bring in and perform'*. This type of explanation tends to lose sight of the practical and collaborative nature of devised drama in which the text is not the main blueprint for performance. Script writing is not one of the skills listed in the specification for any of the specialisms. Indeed, many successful groups do not produce a script at all and there is no requirement to do so.

Own ideas and those of the pair/group

Successful students tended to balance their own ideas and those of the pair/group, clearly identifying who each creative idea had come from before going on to explain how these had been developed and refined. Some students worry about using first names, but it is entirely appropriate and acceptable to state *'Emma suggested that...'* or *'I had the idea of...'* to highlight the initial spark of each scene, moment, character or technique. Less successful responses did not make the source of each idea clear or kept focus entirely on their own ideas at the expense of the ideas of the pair/group (or vice versa).

Development and refinement of the piece

Successful responses often gave a detailed explanation of how particular scenes in the performance had developed in precise detail rather than trying to cover the entire piece. Students often kept focus on practical collaboration in the development and refinement of the piece which distinguished this from the section on individual skills. Many students gave an interesting account of how ensemble scenes had developed, keeping focus on parts of the piece which were inherently group-based. Often a focus on style, staging and the use of particular dramatic techniques aided students in explaining how specific parts of the piece

had been developed. One useful approach was to explain an initial version of a particular scene which was not functioning as intended before explaining in detail how it had been developed and refined towards a more successful outcome.

This part of the task was often omitted by design students who focussed entirely on their own design skills. Some less successful responses focussed entirely on describing ideas for the storyline, without a sense of how the piece developed practically as a theatrical performance. An approach which was too descriptive was very common in this section, describing the stage action but with no sense whatsoever of how it had been developed and refined.

Some students referred to various devices used during the devising process in this section: rehearsal strategies and practitioner methodologies, for example. The application of these techniques was sometimes beneficial but only when precise detail was given and where it was made relevant to the prescribed content of Section 2.

Development and refinement of own skills

This was the most commonly omitted section for performers. There seems to be a reluctance amongst significant numbers of students to discuss the performer skills listed on page 17 of the specification on an individual level, primarily relating to their vocal/physical skills and characterisation. A significant proportion of students use the whole response to discuss the piece, the plot and techniques used as a group, but with very limited or no reference to their own skills as an individual performer. Where this is referenced, it frequently lacks specific moments to exemplify the points made with precise detail.

For example, many successful performers gave specific lines of dialogue spoken by their character, stating how they delivered the line vocally and physically before explaining how this had been developed and refined to improve aspects of their characterisation. Designers were often successful in this section, using annotated photographs to illustrate their design at different stages of development. This was often accompanied by detailed explanation of how they had applied the various design skills (listed on pages 17-19 of the specification) to create a more effective outcome.

Response to feedback

Successful responses gave specific feedback received from peers and/or teachers. Often this was obtained from performances of work in progress or dress rehearsals. Precise feedback relating to the effectiveness of the piece/skills for an audience was often most helpful, particularly in relation to the aims and intentions established by the group. Often rigorous feedback related to individual characterisation, specific aspects of design and the effectiveness of the group at specific moments in the piece.

This is another commonly missing area and the absence of feedback had not always been reflected in centre marking, including students awarded towards the top of Band 4. Students who were less successful often cited feedback which was very broad or too basic to lead to meaningful refinement of any depth, such as being told to *'face the front'* or *'learn your lines'*. Some students explained the feedback given but offered no response to it.

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

This can be addressed fairly succinctly by ensuring each example of development referred to earlier is accompanied by the final outcome, giving a sense of how skills and ideas were used in the final piece after they had been refined. Some designers took a different approach, dedicating the final part of Section 2 to their final design or cue sheet and annotating this with explanation. Both approaches were successful, but students should be reminded that they must have a sense of the outcome of their development and refinement demonstrating how they used their refined skills and ideas in the final piece.

Section 3: Analysis and Evaluation (AO4)

Successful Section 3 responses gave an analytical account of the student's own work, showing a deep understanding of how meaning had been communicated to their audience by their theatrical choices, formulating evaluative judgments on the merits and areas for improvement. The most common approach was to progress systematically through the four required parts of Section 3 with specific examples, which enabled students to meet all the demands. Thorough examples are crucial, and it is often helpful to quote lines of dialogue alongside practical detail to make these examples more precise.

Less successful responses tended to focus on the plot, group work, the piece in general or the performances of peers. Despite there being some analysis and evaluation present, this approach did not focus on the required content of Section 3, which has a largely individual focus on how far the student's theatrical skills developed, the benefits they brought to the pair/group and the overall impact they had as individuals. Students should be reminded this is not a general analysis and evaluation of the piece but must focus on the bullet points in the specification. Nonetheless, it was pleasing to see most students addressed 'areas for further development' and this was not omitted as frequently as in previous series.

Students should be reminded that there is a different assessment objective for this section (AO4) and they are expected to analyse and evaluate their own work. Responses which were too descriptive did not achieve highly. Similarly, many students seem to give a single sentence of analysis or evaluation at the end of each paragraph which was insufficient to access the higher mark bands. Students who punctuated the entirety of their Section 3 response with analytical and evaluative comments tended to be more successful, as did those who developed significant depth, enabling their analysis and evaluation to be characterised as 'highly developed', 'insightful', 'comprehensively explored' and 'thorough'. Students who established their dramatic aims for each example given enabled more purposeful analysis and evaluation by determining the extent to which those aims had been achieved.

How far they developed their theatrical skills

The most successful responses had a clear sense of how the student had developed their theatrical skills as an individual. Performers often illustrated this with successful moments of acting or characterisation, illustrating how particular individual moments had developed from the rehearsal process into the final performance, analysing the effectiveness to illustrate how far they developed their theatrical skills. Designers chose specific aspects of their design, using precise details to evidence how their design skills had developed successfully towards the final performance. As with the writing on skills in Section 2, a focus on the relevant skills for each specialism (pages 17-19 of the specification) is required.

Less successful responses tended to lack precision, such as stating that *'my voice got a lot better during rehearsals and I became stronger at facial expressions'* without examples to demonstrate the points made. Analysis and evaluation in lower-level responses was often vague and underdeveloped, lacking focus on the effect achieved by the student's own skills. There is also a tendency amongst many performers to analyse design and technical elements which has no relevance to their chosen theatrical skill.

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

As in previous series, this is often the least well-answered of the four Section 3 requirements. Less successful responses often focus less on theatrical performance and more on generic administrative, logistical or interpersonal skills. Comments such as *'I was a good listener'*, *'I always gave respect to others'* and *'I scheduled lots of extra rehearsals at lunchtimes'* were characteristic of lower achieving work. Such comments lose sight of the creative contribution students are expected to make in the process of devising an original piece of drama and often warrant little relevant analysis with limited scope for highly developed evaluation.

Work achieving more highly tended to focus on specific artistic contributions and creative suggestions made by each student towards the final piece, such as staging, characterisation, techniques or style. Successful students were then able to follow this idea through the process into final performance, analysing and evaluating how this was beneficial to the group and positively shaped the outcome through its impact on the audience. Some students were clearly instrumental to the devising process and were able to evidence how pivotal their contribution was to particular aspects of the piece in this section.

The overall impact they had as individuals

This was often an area students found fairly straightforward and there were many successful responses. Many students combined this with the points on how far their skills had developed, ensuring each specific example from their own performance or design contained thorough analysis of the overall impact they had on the audience. Students then evaluated the merits of that approach through highlighting its effectiveness and making a judgment on how successful it had been in the final piece. Less successful responses often lacked depth or discussed the impact of the group in general, rather than taking an individual focus.

Areas for further development

It was pleasing to see most students include this, though some students are still under the impression that this requires them to discuss aspects of their performance which were totally ineffectual or *'went wrong'*. Comments such as *'this should have just been cut as it was rubbish'*, *'we were gutted that the wrong piece of music came on'* or *'I accidentally tripped over when I entered the stage'* did not warrant significant analysis. Similarly, discussing the group dynamic (*'We should argue less'*) or time (*'We should rehearse more'*) was worthy of little credit. It is more helpful for students to think of this as areas of their performance which did not quite go as well as they hoped and therefore had room for improvement. In other words, effective to a point but with areas for further development. Giving precise detail on how these areas might have been developed further is good evaluative practice and often shows some critical insight.

Centre Administration

This was the second year of online submission, and the system seemed to run more smoothly this year. The vast majority of centres ensured that their sample was well organised, included all necessary materials and that materials were tagged to the relevant students online.

Moderators appreciate this enormously and do not underestimate the work that goes into marking and uploading the internally assessed work.

Most centres met the deadline for mark submission. **7th May 2026** is the deadline for submission in the Summer 2026 series. After mark submission, centres have **three working days** to upload and submit the sample.

Online submission

Centres seem to be increasingly confident with how to input marks and upload samples on the **Centre Mark Submission (CMS)** system. In many cases, the Exams Officer is responsible for uploading the sample. In some cases, teachers upload the sample but must be given the correct permissions on their Centre Services account by the centre's administrator (typically the Exams Officer). Please ensure you liaise with the Exams Officer to administer the sample upload on time, using the guidance available.

There were a handful of centres who uploaded Component 3 (8261/X) work to the Component 2 (8261/C) sample. Centres are reminded that Component 3 work is currently sent directly to your visiting examiner on USB and not to the Component 2 moderator.

If students in your sample are affected by lost coursework or you are applying for special consideration, please ensure that you have followed the correct procedures in advance **before** submitting your sample. Moderators **do not** apply this; it is administered centrally.

Centre marking

There was an increase in the number of marking errors this year. These include:

- Incorrect addition where marks have been added up incorrectly
- Discrepancies between marks recorded online / marks recorded on the Candidate Record Form / marks recorded on the work itself. This creates ambiguity for the moderator in determining which mark the centre intended to award.
- Incorrect awarding of marks (e.g. awarding 5 marks for one of the AO2 strands where the maximum mark is 4).

When such marking errors are found, these can cause a significant delay to the moderation process. Centres are urged to ensure that all marks are correctly totalled and that all addition has been double checked before submission. Centres must also ensure that all marks recorded for each piece of work are consistent across the online mark, the Candidate Record Form and the work itself.

Centres are also reminded that the Devising Logs have a 'best fit' mark scheme. Where a piece of work meets the criteria of a band, it is placed **in the middle of that band**. Work towards the bottom or top of a band should be showing some features of the band below/above respectively. This approach is explained in greater detail on page 38 of the specification. There

were cases where moderators agreed entirely with the centre comments, but these were not then appropriately reflected in the mark awarded.

Paperwork Required

Please ensure the following materials are uploaded to the **Candidate Files** section in the online sample and tagged to the relevant student(s).

- **Candidate Record Form** for each student in the sample (electronic signatures are acceptable)
- **Devising Log** for each student in the sample
- **Recording(s) of the Devised Performance(s)** for each student in the sample (plus close-ups of the work of any set, costume or puppet designers)
- **Programme Notes** – organised by performance group, containing a photograph of each student with their candidate number, name and specialism.

Please note, it is **no longer a requirement** to upload the **Centre Declaration Sheet** to the online sample. Instead, the form should be completed and retained within your centre.

The forms below should be emailed to neadeclaration@aqa.org.uk by **15th May** in the certificating year. The forms below **do not** need to be uploaded to your sample.

- [Performance Duration Declaration](#)
- [Live Performance Declaration](#)

Occasionally, centres contact AQA when special circumstances or issues arise. Where written permission has been given (such as for the use of non-examinees), centres must provide evidence of this to the moderator. In these cases, please upload a copy of the relevant permission to the **Centre Declarations** section of the online sample. It is also important to make any such arrangements clear to the moderator in the Programme Notes (such as which students are being assessed and which are non-examinees). Please note that non-examinees are not permitted unless permission has been granted by AQA in special circumstances.

Missing paperwork

There were a significant number of centres with missing paperwork. Programme Notes were the most commonly missing item. These are required for the moderator to identify which students are in which performance group and to aid identification. Close-ups of set, costume or puppet design work were often missing, which made it impossible for moderators to credit details only visible in close-up. Centres are urged to ensure all necessary paperwork is included in the sample before submission.

Some work had been scanned in an incorrect order or had pages missing (often work printed double-sided had been scanned single-sided). There were cases of individual pieces of work missing, or entire centres where performances had been uploaded but not Devising Logs (or vice versa). In these instances, moderators typically contacted the Exams Officer to obtain the missing materials, but this often caused a delay to the moderation process. In the case of centres needing to amend marks or samples after submission, centres must contact [Exams Officer Services](#) to unlock the sample and correct any errors.

In some cases, files were uploaded but not tagged to the correct student(s). Please note that moderators can only access files tagged to the students they are sampling. It is possible to

upload a document once (e.g. a performance recording or programme notes) and tag this to multiple students. Please refer to the [guidance on sample submission](#), particularly the [file naming conventions](#) if you are using the auto-tagging feature.

Rubric Infringements

A significant number of rubric infringements were recorded in this series. This includes:

- Devising Logs which exceed the maximum word/page/time limits. In these instances, teachers and moderators **must** stop marking at the upper limit. This was by far the most common rubric infringement and in the vast majority of cases, teachers had not ceased marking at the upper limit. An accurate word count must be stated on any written/annotated Devising Log. All words are included towards the count.
- Devised Performances which are shorter than the minimum time permitted by the specification. In these instances, a penalty is applied to the mark by AQA. The size of the reduction is proportionate to the severity of the timing infringement.
- Devised Performances which are longer than the maximum time permitted by the specification.

In addition:

- Performances must contain between two and six performers and no more than one student for each of the design specialisms. **Monologues are not accepted as evidence of a Devised Performance under any circumstances.**
- It is not acceptable to use non-examined students unless written permission has been obtained from AQA in special circumstances. The exception is where the centre is entering only one student, in which case a non-examinee is permitted to make up the minimum number of two performers.
- Performance must not be edited. Each performance must appear in a continuous video file without breaks (though separate performances can be in separate files).
- Performances must be recorded with a single camera from the audience perspective.

Recording Performances

Most centres had followed the guidance on page 28 of the specification and the [requirements for recording performance evidence](#). It is a requirement for students to state their name, candidate number and specialism at the start of the video recording. They should also hold their name and candidate number on A4 paper. Often where this was missing and students were not entirely audible, the moderator struggled to identify each student. This was particularly problematic where Programme Notes had not been provided to aid identification. It is preferable to avoid students of similar appearance performing in identical costumes, which can make identification difficult. Giving each student a distinguishing feature, such as a coloured wristband, is very helpful and moderators appreciate this enormously.

Please ensure that, as far as possible, the camera is close enough to capture details such as facial expressions. Recordings made from the back of a large auditorium often lose this detail, though we appreciate this is sometimes the only way to capture the entire stage space. Nonetheless, some students appearing very pixellated at considerable distance from the action made the marking very tricky. It is preferable for the camera to be close enough to see the nuances of each performer, if possible. Students must be clearly audible. In some cases, background noise or the poor quality of the recording made dialogue very difficult to hear.

Programme Notes

Programme Notes should be organised by performance group and contain each candidate number, name, specialism and a photograph. Ideally, these photographs should be taken **in the same costume/clothing they appear in during the performance**. Identification was sometimes difficult when appearance had changed considerably, particularly from school photographs taken in uniform many years earlier. Some centres screenshot the line-up from the performance video recording and label this with the details of each student for their programme notes, which is a simple and effective way to produce these.

Malpractice

The misuse of artificial intelligence (AI) continues to be an increasingly prevalent form of malpractice. Moderators reported a significant number of responses which were suspected to be partially or entirely generated by AI. Centres are urged to remind students that plagiarism or misuse of AI typically results in a malpractice investigation and can lead to disqualification. Moderators are increasingly adept at spotting work written by AI, particularly given that each Devising Log should be unique to the performance and the individual. Students and teachers must sign the Candidate Record Form to declare that the work is that of the student. Students must also ensure that any materials they have used are appropriately acknowledged in the relevant space on page 2 of the Candidate Record Form. Presenting materials copied from other sources without acknowledgement is regarded as deliberate deception. Anything which is not the student's own words should be included in quotation marks with the source clearly identified.

JCQ Instructions for Conducting Non-Examination Assessments

It is entirely appropriate to share the content of the Devising Log on page 26 of the specification with students and to ensure they understand the marking criteria. However, centres **must not** provide sentence starters, prompt questions or writing frames specific to the task. In addition, any feedback must be provided at a general level. Where teachers offer very specific feedback which gives a student creditable material to include, this is classed as improper assistance. Please refer to the JCQ instructions for further detail, particularly Section 4. Further guidance is also on page 29 of the specification.

Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS)

As ever, it is essential for all teachers marking the internally assessed component to complete the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) and to standardise internally with colleagues where applicable. Teacher Online Standardisation contains a range of examples of student work in all specialisms and formats, representing all levels of achievement across all tasks. Commentaries on the awarding of marks are also included. The materials for Summer 2026 will go live in Autumn 2025 on Centre Services.

We have recently published a comprehensive index which contains details of all current and archived pieces of work available on TOLS to enable you to locate the examples you need. There is a strong correlation between centres who have logged into TOLS and the accuracy of centre marking in line with the AQA standard. As such, engaging with TOLS is strongly encouraged.

Help and Support

The specification is the definitive source of information on all aspects of the qualification. In addition:

- All centres have an allocated [NEA Adviser](#) who can answer questions on the non-examined components.
- The published [notes and guidance](#) on Component 2 address many frequently asked questions.
- We run regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) courses for GCSE Drama which are usually free to attend. These are available to book on the [Professional Development](#) section of our website.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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