



Course report 2025

Higher Drama

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

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 2,678

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 2,685

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,031	38.4	38.4	70
B	719	26.8	65.2	60
C	553	20.6	85.8	50
D	281	10.5	96.2	40
No award	101	3.8	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

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

In this report:

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

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

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, candidate performance in the 2025 question paper reflected an incremental improvement on previous years. The paper was fair and on standard, with candidates able to access the full range of marks.

In section 1, most candidates answered from the perspective of an actor, with 60% of candidates choosing to answer question 3. Of the remaining candidates, some chose to answer from the perspective of a director, with only a few candidates choosing to answer from the perspective of a designer. Many centres continue to use *The Crucible*, *Antigone*, and *Men Should Weep* for this section.

In section 2, most candidates offered strong responses to questions 7(a) and 7(b), with some candidates also answering question 7(c) effectively.

In section 3, many candidates chose to answer question 8, though some candidates also effectively responded to question 9. Centres used a wider range of productions for this section than in section 1, though *Frankenstein* (National Theatre, 2011), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Young Vic, 2014 or Pitlochry Festival Theatre, 2023), and *Yerma* (Young Vic, 2017) accounted for half of all presenting centres.

As with previous years, a few candidates offered no response in sections 2 and/or 3, with many candidates also failing to complete the paper in the allotted time. We will address this through revisions to the structure and marking instructions of this component in session 2025-26.

Performance

Overall, candidate performance in this component remains an area of strength and was on standard to previous years. Visiting assessors commented on the high standard of performances, and that most centres had prepared candidates well and chose texts of appropriate textual and sub-textual challenge for Higher level.

Visiting assessors commented on the high standard of performances and the positive experience they had visiting centres. The visiting marking model was a fulfilling experience and provided a sense of occasion for both candidates and centres.

A wide variety of plays continue to be performed, with 417 different published plays used by centres in the assessment of candidates this session. Where appropriate, centres chose texts that reflected the skillset and personality of the candidates involved, and candidates had been suitably cast. Acting candidates managed to access the full range of marks.

Design and directing candidates were in the minority, but many of those presented achieved an excellent standard. Visiting assessors were impressed by the creativity and technical skills of these candidates, together with the insight they displayed through research on their chosen text.

Many centres took the option to film their candidates to be able to engage fully with the post-results services.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Question 1: Some candidates did not accurately read the wording of this question, interpreting 'Choose a scene which explores the key themes' as 'Choose five scenes which explore the key themes'. Consequently, we issued markers with additional guidance to credit more than one scene if candidates described scenes that could be considered as a continuation of action. This enabled most candidates who had made this error to still access between 8 to 12 marks, as opposed to the maximum of 4 marks that would have been achievable had this additional guidance not been included, without impacting the integrity of the question.

Question 2: Many candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to describe specific moments that highlighted the social and/or historical context of their selected text, using appropriate textual references. Through these moments, candidates explained the ways that they would use directing concepts to highlight the social and/or historical context to an audience in performance.

Question 3: Many candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to describe specific moments from their selected text that highlighted their chosen character's emotions, using appropriate textual references. Through these moments, candidates explained the ways that they would use acting concepts to convey this character's emotions to an audience in performance.

Question 4: Many candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to describe specific moments from their selected text where the actions of their chosen character could be considered to be weak and/or strong, using appropriate textual references. Through these moments, candidates explained the ways that they would use acting concepts to portray the weak and/or strong actions of the character to an audience in performance.

Question 5: Only a few candidates answered this question, and they did not accurately describe five ways the closing scene of their selected text is important or effectively explain the ways that they would use design concepts to highlight the importance of this scene to an audience in performance.

Question 6: Some candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to describe the moods and/or atmospheres of five moments in their selected text, using appropriate textual references. Through these moments, candidates explained the ways that they would use design concepts to help communicate these moods and/or atmospheres to an audience in performance.

Question 7(a): Most candidates effectively chose a moment in their selected text when a character creates tension and were able to fully describe the way or ways that the character creates tension in this moment.

Question 7(b): Many candidates were able to effectively describe the ways that they would use voice and movement to create tension in this moment as an actor, offering a combination of basic and/or detailed and insightful comments.

Question 7(c): Only some candidates answered effectively, describing the ways that they would use lighting and/or sound to help create tension in this moment. Many candidates were unable to access the full range of available marks because they did not use any appropriate theatrical terminology or did not describe the specific use of lighting and/or sound during the moment.

Question 8: Some candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to analyse the ways that their two selected production areas helped to communicate the themes and/or issues and enhanced their appreciation of the performance. However, many candidates did not effectively describe how the moment was achieved in performance and therefore could not access the full range of available marks.

Question 9: Some candidates who selected this question answered effectively and were able to analyse the ways that their two selected production areas helped to communicate the key relationships and enhanced their appreciation of the performance. However, many candidates did not effectively describe how the

moment was achieved in performance and therefore could not access the full range of available marks.

Many candidates also did not complete section 3 of the question paper in the allotted time and only offered a partial response to either question 8 or 9.

Performance

Acting candidates who had been cast in roles reflective of their skillset and personality, and of sufficient length and sub-textual challenge, managed to achieve depth of characterisation, detailed interaction, and often had a strong impact on the audience. Many candidates achieved high marks and had been directed very well by teachers and lecturers, demonstrating a depth of understanding about their character.

The length of some acting pieces varied from the recommended duration. A few pieces were too long. A few were too short and didn't meet the minimum requirement. A few centres selected extracts from texts that were not full-length plays, which did not have sufficient textual and sub-textual clues for candidates to use in their performance.

A few centres continue to alter the gender of characters or the specific location in a published text, contradicting explicit guidance issued on casting.

Many design and directing candidates were technically knowledgeable and executed their role with a good level of skill. Many candidates with appropriately chosen texts showed a flair for their selected role, creativity, originality and insight.

A few design candidates did not place sufficient emphasis on their set design and were instead primarily focused on their additional production role. A small number of design candidates were also not prepared to demonstrate their additional production role to the visiting assessor.

A few design candidates did not cover the minimum requirements for their role.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to carefully read all the questions asked before selecting a question that best allows them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the selected text.

When answering the first part of the question in section 1, candidates must exemplify their knowledge and understanding with accurate textual references, using this to clearly respond to the requirements of the question asked.

When answering the second part of the question in section 1, candidates must explain the directing or, acting or design concepts that would help them to achieve their desired dramatic impact using accurate theatre terminology.

Teachers and lecturers should develop candidates' use of terminology as some candidates used very little or no terminology in their answers and therefore could not access marks. Candidates also used inaccurate adjectives for voice and movement. Most commonly, open or closed body language, without further description, cannot access marks, as there are multiple variations of this. Similarly, the use of high or low as a descriptive term for volume cannot be credited, as this offers no differentiation from pitch (the most commonly used adjectives for volume are loud or quiet).

Teachers and lecturers should also develop candidates' use of design terminology as this was often inaccurate or lacking detail. For example, sound cannot be described as 'wind' or 'rain' or 'sad music'. This cannot be credited as it does not specify whether the sound effect is live or pre-recorded, the level it is to be played at, or the title of the 'sad music'. Similarly, lighting cannot be described as 'bright', 'dull' or 'a spotlight', as this does not indicate how such an effect would be created. For example, the type of lanterns used, specific colour and how this would be achieved (gel or LED), or specific intensity.

For performance analysis, candidates must state the name of the performance in the introduction to their response.

When identifying and describing relevant features of the performance, candidates must use accurate theatre terminology for the description to be fully credited.

When analysing these features of performance, candidates must also relate the dramatic impact achieved to the implications of the question.

In session 2025–26, we are:

- moving to a holistic marking approach for extended responses
- removing the requirement for candidates to offer a quantified five moments in section 1, and 10 examples in section 2 (previously section 3)

This means candidates can respond with less rigidity of structure and greater creativity. The revised marking instructions are designed to credit quality over quantity. Further detail on this revised approach can be found in the [Understanding Standards](#) audio presentation (May 2025) and will be supported by both live and webinar events, together with illustrative candidate responses, in session 2025-26.

Performance

The selected text or texts must be published, of full-length, and be of a suitable standard for Higher level. Some traditional National 5 and Advanced Higher texts are not always appropriate for Higher candidates. Some visiting assessors commented on candidates struggling to interpret their role adequately where these texts had been used. A list of 30 recommended texts is given in appendix 4 of the [Higher Drama course specification](#), and a further list of commonly used texts will be shared through Understanding Standards events in session 2025-26. However, we encourage centres to choose **any** text of appropriate depth and challenge for the performance component. Candidates commonly achieve higher marks in performance where centres have selected appropriate texts that are reflective of their candidates' own skillset and experience.

Centres should make sure minimum and maximum time limits are adhered to.

Centres must select extracts from full-length plays, so that candidates can access sufficient textual and sub-textual clues.

Centres must not alter the gender of characters, or the specific location in a published text. Candidates can play any character, but the playwright's intentions and/or the published text should not be altered as it will affect the context and viewing of the play. Centres should support candidates in choosing the most appropriate role for their performance assessment.

Whilst there are often contributing factors in centres choosing to repeat texts for acting candidates, centres should avoid repeating scenes with similar or identical blocking. This is because it does not allow candidates to demonstrate their own creativity and interpretation.

Acting candidates can be assessed in only two roles. Texts requiring multi-role performances should not be used in the assessment of acting candidates at Higher level.

Whilst teachers and lecturers can be present in the assessment of acting candidates to supervise an appropriate audience and provide technical support, no teacher, lecturer or audience can be present in the assessment of design or directing candidates.

The selection of an audience for the assessment of acting candidates must be age-appropriate and reflective of the significance of a national assessment event.

All design candidates must design a set for their chosen text and choose one other relevant production role. Candidates must design a set for a specified performance space for the whole play text to include each act or scene and any significant change of setting. All acts or changes of location or setting must have a ground plan and elevation (end-on drawing) and they must create a coherent concept. The set does not need to be realised practically.

For their additional production role, candidates must design for the whole play and there must be coherence with the set design.

Requirements for the additional production role are set out in the [Higher Drama course specification](#).

Candidate mark sheets must be completed before the visiting assessor arrives.

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 500 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not considered to be concise and therefore, cannot access the top range of marks (9 to 10 marks). A box is included on the candidate mark sheet to indicate the word count of the preparation for performance. This must be completed in advance of the visiting assessor's arrival. The preparation for performance should be produced in open-book conditions.

The preparation for performance should be an account of the candidate's preparation for their acting, directing or design role. Candidate responses are assessed against two criteria: their research into the chosen texts and the candidate's process (development and progression) of an acting, directing or design concept.

A private, quiet space must be provided for the visiting assessor to read and assess the preparation for performance responses. This space should be for the sole use of the visiting assessor, not a school room accessed by others during the assessment process. Whilst accommodation in many centres can be challenging, an informal or public space belittles the significance of the assessment event.

Candidates involved in the performance assessment should be present throughout the event and not asked to immediately return to class following their own performance.

Whilst centres remain free to film the performance assessment, the presence of the camera should not become a greater source of focus than the live event. The recording should be of the live assessment event and the camera should not be a significant focal point. Teachers and lecturers should ask candidates to introduce themselves to the camera immediately before the performance, rather than to the visiting assessor. The timing of the assessment should not be determined by the functionality of the recording equipment.

Visiting assessors continue to encounter requests for additional Assessment Arrangements to be considered during the performance assessment. Such requests must be submitted to SQA's Assessment Arrangements team (aarequests@sqa.org.uk) by a centre in advance of the published deadline and cannot only be communicated to the visiting assessor on the day of assessment.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).