

A LEVEL

Moderators' report

DRAMA AND THEATRE

H459

For first teaching in 2016

H459/21/22 Summer 2019 series

Version 1

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Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

General overview

General

The examination for Unit 21/22, Exploring and Performing Texts, ran very smoothly this series and examiners reported seeing some very exciting and engaging performances. There was evidence that last year's report had been helpful and acted upon, leading to many improvements. There was also evidence in both the concept pro-forma and in performances that the word *Exploring* in the component title was being taken more seriously

Administration

Examiners reported that most centres provided smooth and efficient administrative arrangements and were pleased to meet any requests by examiners. For example, sometimes it was more appropriate for the examiner to sit behind an audience so some adjustment to location was requested and arranged without problem.

The paperwork required is important and most centres met the deadline of seven days for sending the examiner the required documentation. As a reminder, the items required are as follows.

The concept pro-forma for each candidate as a hard copy. Electronic versions are not acceptable. The pro-forma must be signed by the candidate and centre confirming that the work is that of the individual candidate alone.

The running order is very important for those centres with more than one group and must have candidate names and candidate numbers and be organised in order of performances.

Photographs on the day, of candidates in costume are preferred to school photos in advance.

Details of the centre such as location, availability of parking, and any ID required.

The time the centre wishes the examination to start.

The seven-day deadline is in place to ensure parity for candidates and to give examiners sufficient time to mark the concept pro-formas in advance and to prepare their paperwork for the marking of the performances. It is important for examiners to have an idea of the intention of candidates in their performances, and this aids examiners' understanding of what candidates are doing. In addition, non-receipt by the seven-day deadline puts candidates at risk of receiving zero for that element of the examination.

It is possible an examiner may ask a centre to move part of the audience if it is felt they are too close. Examiners will remain at their desk during the examination, but a room should be made available for their use if they need a break when they may write up notes.

There will be occasions where last minute illness, or someone leaving the course shortly before the performance, leaves the group needing a non-examined person to step in. This must always be approved by OCR in advance, and evidence of this approval should be given to the examiner before the performance taking place. Apart from this, the only time a non-examined candidate may be used is if a particular section requires a sleeping partner and it is impossible or unreasonable to use one of the other candidates. This should be rare. It is important for centres to know that apart from these two examples, the use of non-examined candidates must not occur.

There is no discussion with candidates regarding their performance, although most examiners will want to greet them and perhaps say a few words of supportive encouragement before they start. If a centre has recorded the names and numbers privately before the performance, the examiner will still need to see them so that s/he can identify them during the performance.

It is a requirement that the centre provide an audience for performances. The specification gives details of the nature of audiences permitted. Some audiences, where the entry required more than one performance group, were made up of the actual examination class, taking it in turns to perform and to watch their peers. Some centres also had other classes watching from younger years or potential GCE students. Many centres had invited candidates' parents and friends to watch. Peer audiences were very well-behaved and supportive, as were the invited audiences. Many examiners reported how an audience helped candidates respond and enhance the atmosphere. It is important too to remember that this is a performance and not an audition

A significant and growing number of centres asked for a twilight or evening performance to ensure a quiet environment, and to enable parents and relatives to attend. A small number also asked for a Saturday examination. These are permissible, but if a twilight, evening or weekend examination is requested, centres should make it clear when they complete and submit their VAF forms. It is hoped there will be a revised VAF form for the 2020 series, which can be completed on-line.

A word about filming. It is a requirement of the specification for the performance to be filmed and then chaptered if there is more than one group being examined. The film must be placed on a DVD or memory stick in a format that can be easily viewed on a DVD player or computer. The DVD or memory stick should then be sent to the examiner as soon as possible. Most centres were able to do this within two or three days.

It is important that the camera is located so that it captures all of the area in which candidates are performing, while avoiding also filming the head and shoulders of the examiner. Almost all centres were able to use a performance space that was quiet and without interruption.

Malpractice is difficult in this examination but one area to be aware of is because the concept pro-forma is dealing with a group activity, it is possible candidates will have worked together on research and quite properly, on their directorial intentions. They must remember, however, to make sure their responses to the questions are their own work and not a composite of what their group has done.

Concept Pro Formas

In the 2018's Examiners' Report to Centres for this unit there was extended guidance on how candidates might approach this aspect of the examination.

There was evidence that many centres had heeded this advice although a good number of candidates are still offering material on their individual performance in Question 1 as opposed to indicating that they understand the complete play and how their extract(s) reflect the play as a whole. Few offer any comparative research on other productions, satisfying themselves with a few basic details drawn from on-line information. One even referred to having 'read the synopsis' rather than having studied the play.

Responses to Question 2, were often confused with describing setting and again their individual roles played a big role rather than taking a wider view of the ensemble presentation.

Consequently, when considering their responses to Question 3, candidates find they have often already discussed what should be included in their response to this question and thus resolve into repetition.

On a positive note, more concept pro-forma submissions this year were within the suggested length and centres are reminded that greater length does not necessarily bring greater rewards. Given that the majority are word-processed, the opportunity for the candidate to proof-read their responses before submission, would remedy some of the unfortunate non-sequiturs and spelling and grammatical errors.

The most common issues were:

- A tendency to grapple with the overall vision for the performance but then fall back into either the role played by the individual candidate or a potted history of the social, cultural and historical context of the performance text.
- Approaching the text from the single standpoint of the role they were playing.
- Focusing on the rehearsal process of the extract- or the individual role – in isolation to the performance text as a whole.
- A tendency for candidates to devote too much attention to the start of the document, and subsequently to run out of steam as they moved on.

The following notes were provided last year to aid clarification of the demands and merit repeating:

Responses to **Question 1)** should focus on:

- the demands of the **whole** play – the style, the setting, the characters, the action, the use of language, the period, etc.
- how this has been performed in the past and how others may have performed it for a present day audience (this latter aspect was often completely ignored).
- examples should quote understanding based on practical work on the whole text.

This could include the work done in studying the whole text before selecting the extracts.

In other words, what does the candidate know and understand about performing the play that has been selected, researched studied and practised?

Responses to this first question should neither refer to nor need mention, unless specifically relevant, the role played by the candidate, the extract(s)/sections chosen, nor the way they are to be performed in the examination.

Responses to **Question 2)** should focus on:

- having acquired that knowledge and understanding of the whole play through study, research and practice, in what ways does the candidate intend to project the intentions of the whole play to the audience through the extract(s)/sections being presented?
- how does the candidate's performance encapsulate, take into account, demonstrate, conclude, prefigure, explain, expose the whole play? This could be through character(s) and interactions, action, tension, dialogue, setting, costume, etc.

For example, in playing the opening scene in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the three daughters their father and assorted husbands, courtiers and attendants, must give the audience a notion of the characters that are to unfold to us later in the play.

Responses to **Question 3**) should focus on:

- the role the candidate is to play in the selected extract{s}.

Moments, lines of dialogue, actions should be used to explain those “most important characteristics”.

This is not a blow-by-blow narration of what the cast, as a whole, do or say in the extract, nor is it an analysis of all the characters in the piece.

In fact, unless the comment relates specifically to the role played, there need not be any mention of characters other than the one played by the candidate.

There should be reference made to the ways in which the candidate has approached these characteristics practically in rehearsal and perhaps comment on intention behind the choices they have made, for example, in movement, speech, positioning, costume, etc.

Thus, the intention of the **Concept Pro-Forma** is to demonstrate understanding of the whole text and focus down on what and why selections have been made and the individual response the candidate is making, during the examined performance extract.

Decisions on setting, lighting and sound add to the atmosphere of what was seen, and many candidates do recognise the importance of writing about these elements.

Some good responses reflected practitioners they had studied and how their experiences of their work might influence their own thinking on the way they would interpret the text and perform it. A few candidates applied a scattergun approach, throwing out references to practitioners or drama terminology without really understanding what they were writing. There is no point in making a reference to a practitioner if it has no relevance to the text they are exploring.

Text choices

Most of those seen by examiners offered sufficient challenge, but centres should make sure that all candidates have reasonably equal exposure in order to demonstrate their skills. It is recognised that this can be difficult with a large group, but judicious editing can often give some balance to the role opportunities. Inevitably candidates will suffer if they have not had sufficient exposure to demonstrate a range of skills.

It was very encouraging and entertaining to see some interesting and timely interpretations of plays older than the last 50 years. A production of *Saint Joan* was not content with flame-effect gobo on the cyclorama, but promenaded the audience to a real fire, to emphasise the ending. The outrageous version of *The Bald Prima Donna* owed as much to *Monty Python* and *Fleabag* as it did to the Absurdism of mid-C20th France. More centres are willing to take risks, but only when underpinned by sound drama and theatre thinking. Concept pro-formas will reflect this thinking and examiners can see the journey candidates have been on leading to their final outcome.

A very few candidates played minor roles which were self-penalising as these roles limited the candidates' exposure

It is important that candidates are able to select an extract of appropriate length, which will leave the audience with a sense of power and impact. For some candidates, the starting point appeared to be a desire to perform as much of the play as possible, which sometimes weakened the impact.

A sense of vision of what the overall performance is trying to achieve. This is related to the point about selection of extract, as there was seldom any sense of why the extract had been cut where it had, apart from the fact that the maximum time limit had been reached.

The rationale as to why the parts had been allocated as they had. In the absence of a director, there were sometimes choices that, from an audience perspective, appeared unusual, as if the parts had been allocated without reference to who would be most likely to inhabit a particular role with the greatest conviction.

Performances

Examiners enjoyed a wide range of performance by candidates who clearly understood theatrical demands and how they could manipulate the drama experience with an audience. There were some exceptional performances, and all had been thoroughly learnt, rehearsed and, in the main, thoughtfully self-directed. There were few instances of prompting, awkward silences or under-rehearsed performances.

The use of costume, props, lighting and sound all were used to enhance performances, not only to the benefit of the candidates but also furthering the audience's understanding.

Projection, diction and articulation are still a common problem in both communicating meaning and display of skill. Similarly, profile-to-profile conversations, however impassioned, are not as interesting on stage as they may be in other media. For the audience to see the reactions of a down-stage character, with their back to a prolonged harangue from an up-stage other is far more interesting.

Out of necessity, groups of candidates sometimes require gender-blind casting in order to accommodate both script and the group. There were some very successful instances of this, both male and female, sensitively and wittily-handled without recourse to caricature, unless required. However, this can also be a minefield and candidates should be encouraged to think hard, read thoroughly and test-the-water in practical rehearsal, before determining for definite a piece that may not give them sufficient opportunity. Similarly, while a long theatrical tradition in pantomime of reversed gender roles, the male playing the stereotyped rolling-pin-wielding 'battle-axe', à la Mrs. Brown, is not always appropriate, or even funny, when used in other dramatic genres.

There were more twilight and evening performances with public audiences, which benefited the candidates in terms of their finished performance. Universally, audiences were supportive and set the tone and theatrical discipline for the final presentation of the examination. Centres are encouraged to make sure that wider audiences beyond the teaching group are planned, whether during the day, at twilight or in the evening, as the solo examiner with performance group encourages a going-through-the-motions approach, which is far removed from the dramatic experience.

Some examiners reported that the candidate's artistic intentions for the extracts involved a variety of practitioners' influences and were often clear to see. The most popular of these were mainly from Frantic Assembly, Kneehigh, Stanislavski, Brecht & Godber; less common but still significant influences could be seen in some candidates' work from Berkoff, Artaud and the Verbatim Theatre genre.

Many examiners reported that they had experienced a good sense of ensemble, with individuals taking care to support and nurture other members of the group, especially those who had less developed acting skills. They felt that there had been careful thought as to how the performance should be staged.

What did candidates do badly?

- Generally, Underplaying, poor diction, being self-conscious (often a result of under-rehearsal) and mumbling. Most pieces require good energy, and with some texts it is essential, so if there is a lack of energy the performance is almost bound to fail as an engaging piece of theatre.
- There were a number of areas in which examiners suggested candidates were less secure. These included:
 - pacing of the performance, especially with longer extracts. This is related to the earlier point about selection of extracts of appropriate length.
 - maintaining the role, especially when an individual does not have a speaking part.
 - Relationship to the examiner. There was a higher-than-expected incidence of candidates who came very close to the examiner and attempted to involve them in the performance. This is something that must not happen. Even if the intention of the ensemble is to involve an audience actively, the examiner must not be included as s/he must focus on their own role, that of awarding fair marks.

Most performances kept to the time limit set in the specification. Centres are reminded that pieces should not exceed the maximum recommended and that examiners have the right to stop a performance that exceeds the maximum by a significant amount. Pieces that are too long and too short have a self-penalising effect on candidates. Too long and it is difficult for candidates to sustain and they are not showing anything new; too short, and their exposure is insufficient to demonstrate a breadth of skills. No penalties were applied for pieces that exceeded or failed to reach the maximum and minimum times.

Design

There are still few candidates offering design. As last year, it was encouraging to see that it had not been chosen as a soft option – which it isn't – and in many cases had been chosen because the candidate had aspirations to take it up in higher education or in a career.

There should be an audit trail from the point where discussion starts on an extract and the style the group wants, through to a brief for the designer and frequent communication with group members as to how the response to the brief is working. There could be evidence of planning and for lighting and sound, good evidence of the way the brief will be interpreted.

The advice given last year is still valid and worth repeating:

The best candidates were able to demonstrate some original ideas; the way that such ideas then developed into a brief; research into possible ways of meeting the brief; consideration of what worked and what didn't; the final practical challenges and how they were overcome. In the same way that the actors show a journey through the development and presentation of their character, learn their lines, plot their moves, interact with other characters and their set, so the designer must show the journey they have undertaken to arrive at a final outcome. There are no marks for supporting material, but it plays an essential part in helping the examiner understand fully the demand and the thoughts of the candidate in demonstrating skills.

The design option must be as demanding as and comparable to the acting option, and so the choice of a text with little design demand does not allow a candidate to demonstrate design skills to a high standard.

One examiner reported that for one candidate the lighting design was sufficiently complex, with a wide range of different lanterns in use, a variety of moods and atmospheres created and several cues operated. Rig plans and cue/effects lists were also produced.

Rig plans, health and safety risk assessments and cue/effects lists were produced by the LX designer. The costume designers provided material and fabric scrap books with rationales, initial designs with rationales and in one case, very skilled final designs for all characters in

Centres are advised to read the requirements as listed in the specification for design candidates.

List of Example Texts

The list that follows provides a few examples of the texts used by centres. Providing this list is in no way recommending any of these plays, but rather is an indication of the breadth of selection.

Name of text	Playwright
Wind in the Willows	Alan Bennett
Greek	Steven Berkoff
Agamemnon	Steven Berkoff
Metamorphosis	Steven Berkoff
London Road	Alecky Blythe
Things I know to be true	Bovell
The Good Person of Setzuan	Bertolt Brecht
The Caucasian Chalk Circle	Bertolt Brecht
Fen	Caryl Churchill
Love and Information	Caryl Churchill
Jane Eyre	Adapted by Sally Cookson
Attempts on her Life	Martin Crimp
Playhouse creatures	De Angelis
Positive hour	De Angelis
Medea	Euripides
The Trojan Women	Euripides
Can't Pay, Won't Pay	Dario Fo
Love song	Frantic and Abi Morgan
The Maids	Jean Genet
Bouncers	John Godber
Shakers	John Godber
Animal Farm by George Orwell,	adapted by Peter Hall
Girls	Theresa Ikoko
The Bald Primadonna	Ionesco
My Mother Said I Never Should	Charlotte Keatley
Tristan and Yseult	Kneehigh
Roberto Zucco	Bernard Marie Koltes
Frozen	Lavery
Yerma and Blood Wedding	Lorca
A View from the Bridge	Arthur Miller
Fugee	Abi Morgan
Tissue	Louise Page
<i>Four little girls</i>	Picasso
The effect	Prebble

An Inspector Calls	J B Priestley
As You Like It	Shakespeare
King Lear	Shakespeare
The Good Doctor	Neil Simon
Pornography	Simon Stephens
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime	Haddon/Stephens
Bronte	Polly Teale
Education, Education, Education	The Wardrobe Ensemble
Bazaar and Ramage	Townsend
Marat Sade	Peter Weiss
Ladies Down Under	Amanda Whittington
The Importance of Being Earnest	Oscar Wilde
Lord of the Flies	Williams/Golding

Most common causes of centres not passing

Under-rehearsal; an acting role with insufficient demand; a design role with insufficient information on preparation, design development or design detail.

Common misconceptions

That non-examined candidates can be used without permission or special reason. They cannot unless there is a last minute illness or absence, when a substitution may be made of another student or the teacher, and permission has been sought in advance from OCR.

Avoiding potential malpractice

Make sure that when writing concept pro-formas, that although there may have been group decisions and group research, the writing of the concept pro-forma is an individual activity and must not contain common sections or paragraphs

Helpful resources

Advice is provided in the report and the information in last year's report is still valid. Exemplars of concept pro-formas will be placed on the website in the Autumn.

Additional comments

A new and improved on-line version of the VAF (Visits Arrangement Form) will be available for centres to complete from September.

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