



GCE

Performing Arts

Advanced GCE A2 H546

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H146

Examiners' Reports

January 2011

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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Chief Examiner's Report

January 2011 proved to be a smaller session than in the June 2010 for the majority of the units. There appears to be a preference to submit work in the June session, which is in line with the expectation of the specification. Despite a small cohort there was evidence of good practice in all units and varied work across the spectrum. Candidates are approaching the units with enthusiasm and centres are providing opportunities for candidates to develop greater knowledge and understanding of The Performing Arts Industry. This is encouraging as these opportunities fulfil the vocational aspects of the course.

Examiners and Moderators reported that candidates were generally well prepared and displayed an awareness of the requirements of the specification. Good practice was evident, although lack of refinement was often a barrier to achieving the highest marks in some of the units; G380/4 saw candidates submitting detailed case studies and thorough answers alongside independent research and comparative skills in the study of two organisations and in the selected presentations. In the G381 Skills Development moderators commented on some analysis of skills development and its process through skills development action plans; performance work in G382/6 saw some competent productions with candidates tackling many aspects of performance technique. Portfolio work in many units saw a better use of technical terms and industry conventions supporting the vocational aspects of the specification.

Most Centres ensured that candidates were able to access the assessment criteria for each unit. There is assistance on the OCR website to support teachers with detailed guidance and assignments.

G380 Investigating Performing arts Organisations

G380 is an investigation unit designed to help candidates to understand how 'the business' works and the study of job roles within an organisation. Moderators commented on the number of portfolios presented that reflected research into how businesses operate, generate an income, employ staff and market shows or products. Most Centres had ensured that the candidates selected appropriate venues and undertook appropriate research. However, there were some concerns with candidates all studying the same organisations and presenting on the same job role. Centres must ensure individual responses from candidates. Other concerns were about the selection of suitable organisations to study, as candidates must be able to find relevant information about the organisations

Portfolio work was of a varied standard and presented accordingly with a competent use of terminology and technical terms. Stronger candidates were able to produce case studies that covered the scope of the performing arts industries and the way in which they operate. Good practice saw information sourced, well presented, using graphs, pie charts, data collection charted for comparative analyses and PowerPoint used to deliver the job presentation. More candidates are providing presentations of their job roles on DVD .

Good candidates were able to make perceptive comments on the effectiveness of the organisations. Comments about purpose, structure, operations and markets are essential, alongside a good analysis of the job structure within the organisations. Candidates must also comment on aspects such as pay and conditions, trade unions, the social and cultural dimensions of the organisations as well as the opportunities for progression and development. Candidates need to be able to express opinions and qualify them with reference to measurable outcomes.

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The second aspect of the unit containing the job presentation was, again, less well done. Candidates must understand the 'significance and purpose of the job role, to the organisation'. Candidates must focus on the job and set the role thoroughly, in context of one of the selected organisations.

Filling in the URS sheets correctly is crucial to substantiate the marks awarded. Locating evidence is often difficult for the moderator. Centres must use the location column and ensure that the marking trail is visible. Centres are reminded that annotation of the written work is not just highlighting it with different colours. Candidates must also be encouraged to look beyond the evidence banner to the evidence criteria. Work included should only be what is actually marked; material that is surplus to assessment requirements should be removed.

Unit G381 Skills Development

This unit presented a very small entry as expected, preference to submit work in the summer session clearly gives candidates more time to develop skills. The unit gives the candidates the opportunity to develop professional practice and explore new skills in specialist areas of the performing arts. Many candidates in this session failed to produce a Skills Development Plan (SDP), which is essential to showing development as they progress through the unit. Regular reviews of the plan, feedback and evaluations of development made should then be used to readjust the plan.

The Skills Development Plan (SDP) is the framework for the unit and highlights the developments made. Centres must ensure that all candidates have included their SDP as well as commentaries and observation reports. If candidates do not include this plan, they are unable to comment on the progress and development of skills. The essential part of this unit is to be able to show development of skills. Centres that record this journey from initial readings to the finished piece are able to justify marks awarded and evidence the development made.

In some submissions there was little evidence of how the work had actually progressed, from selection through to either, the finished piece or the work in progress. Centres must follow the unit requirements with candidates selecting only 3 pieces of work. Including extra pieces does not gain more marks. Moderators will only look at 3 pieces of work and make their judgements on this. All aspects of development should be captured on DVD and submitted as evidence.

Centres must distinguish between the finished piece and the works in progress. Only the finished piece needs to be presented to an audience and a 'Skills Performance' where all 3 pieces are finished and presented to an audience should be discouraged.

All centres need to concentrate on the process of acquiring skills through practical involvement in pieces taken from repertoire. There were still too many issues with self-devised work, particularly in dance works, which is not acceptable in this unit. Performance work must be recorded on DVD and accompany the portfolio to support progress made.

Unit G382 and G383 Performance and Production

This session an increased entry for this time of year. Some centres displayed a stronger sense of professional practice in their work with evidence of well-directed performances.

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Selection of material is probably the most important factor for centres. Candidates must be able to access the performance criteria. It was noted that some centres had difficulty selecting material with the appropriate gender balance and this led to some inappropriate choices of material which were limiting and at times inhibiting candidates. Many candidates at this level just do not have enough experience to be able to interpret some of these demanding roles. Songs are often pitched too low for female singers, making them difficult for the candidates to project.

Quality of refinement differentiates the stronger performances. Candidates must be encouraged to embrace all aspects of performance techniques and rehearse their pieces thoroughly. Centres must ensure that candidates are prepared, as there were clearly occasions where candidates needed further guidance for example, singing in the correct key and tonal qualities, as well as basic skills and stylistic demands. Candidates should not be left to produce and direct the pieces. Teachers must take responsibility for these areas.

Many centres considered the professional aspects of performance and were including the use of lighting and sound as well as projections, sets, props and costumes. Centres should also ensure that there is more importance attached to the performance, promoting it as an event with an invited audience. The inclusion of an audience allows candidates to demonstrate communication and engagement, giving the event a real sense of occasion.

Performance Diaries

There was evidence of some excellent portfolio work where centres had ensured that candidates had diary logs, research and health and safety. Good practice was seen where candidates showed clear evidence of planning and target setting, diaries contained reflective comments on progress and clear application of skills and techniques. Health and Safety information showed more detail with many candidates going beyond just warm ups, spills and wires. Candidates were attempting to apply industry practice through detailed logs in rehearsals and in performance.

Whilst there was an improvement from the last session, there was still evidence of poorly produced diaries. Centres must pick up on this as candidates are losing vital marks that will affect their overall grade.

G383 Production Demonstration

Centres are reminded that good practice includes candidates presenting various aspects of their work to cameras creating 'DVD diaries.' This shows the examiner the preparation work that production candidates are involved in as well as what is going on before, during and after a performance. Portfolio work should contain further evidence to support the candidates' work.

Centres still need to provide industry compliant software and process, including industry standard diagrams, scales and terminology. Teaching the G383 unit does need adequate planning and resources. Centres must also ensure that they have the equipment and software that will allow candidates to receive appropriate teaching and exposure to technical tasks, computer programmes and technical tools. These centres should look to provide workshops, visiting speakers or look for specialist courses run by independent providers.

Unit G384 Getting Work

Centres are demonstrating improved awareness about the professional context of getting work. They are responding well to the demands of the unit, which has helped candidates to understand how the industry operates with regard to employment. Candidates are starting to base their research and independent work on what is taking place currently in the industry, displaying how they can survive as a professional in the Performing Arts Industries, in such tough economic times. There was evidence of work where candidates displayed a real sense of the income they could achieve, alongside an understanding of the business and the professional aspects of getting employment. These candidates had a realistic awareness of the professional context of the work. Promotional packs were varied. Some candidates included quality visual work that would attract professional agencies and employers. Candidates should focus on a particular market – agent, music/dance/acting genre.

Centres should read the further guidance available on the OCR website.

Unit G386 and G387 Producing Your Showcase/Production

There was a relatively small entry for this unit, which reflects the fact that many centres would rather wait and give the candidates more time to further their performance skills and confidence in solo performance work, entering in the June session. In this session many candidates did not have the performance techniques to produce a dynamic performance of their Showcase, showing mastery of their selected material. Few candidates were able to shape and mould their material to display a sophisticated understanding of the interpretative skills and personal style required at the top end of the marking band. Many candidates were unable to reflect the professional context of the material selected. Too many candidates were falling short as they are still selecting works that are unsuitable and far too difficult for them to cope with, or pieces that are inappropriate for this examination. Duologues, duets and duos were the weakest performance piece for many candidates.

Candidates though do need the opportunity to showcase their work to an audience; yet, in this session only a few centres had invited an audience. Where there was evidence of teacher guidance candidates were better prepared in both their selection of material and in the performance of the work. Many centres do not recognise that the performance aspect of this unit is essential. Centres must attach more status to the event, ensuring that it is a real sense of occasion. Standards at this level are expected to be significantly higher than the AS performance unit and centres must acknowledge this. Performing in 'poorly lit' studios does not always give the candidate the opportunity to embrace and refine their performance techniques. Many skilful candidates in this session lacked both dynamism and impact.

Preparatory notes were generally competent. Centres need to focus on diaries or logs that document the journey from selection to performance. Social, Historical and cultural research must be included and applied to their chosen pieces. Candidates require guidance on how to complete the preparatory notes, as too many candidates are losing valuable marks in this area. INSET is strongly recommended.

G387 Production Demonstration

Centres are reminded that capturing evidence throughout the process of design and realisation is crucial for the candidate. Centres should refer to teacher guidelines and also read the Principal Examiner's Report for further guidance.

Centres should read the unit reports from the Moderators carefully, to ensure that they too are developing their understanding and subsequent application of the specification. INSET is strongly recommended.

G380 Investigating performing arts organisations

There was a relatively small entry for this unit during this session but many of the candidates had applied individual and personal research to gain a deep understanding of the performing arts industries. Portfolios submitted showed insight into the wide range of organisations that create employment opportunities in a sector that is very important to the economy. There were however some issues:

The vast majority of centres completed the URS forms fully with good use of the comment and location column. This allowed moderators to understand how marks had been arrived at and go straight to the given page to find the key evidence appropriately notated. There were situations where comments failed to describe the evidence that met the criteria and the location was merely given as 'portfolio'. This made moderation extremely difficult and it often proved difficult to confirm marks in these situations.

We expect to see proof of guided but personal research in the work submitted for this unit and candidates are expected to cite the sources used. When all candidates from a centre have studied the same two organisations and present on the same job role it is difficult to verify that the work is individual and independent. Information given to centres has regularly explained that this is not acceptable.

It is recommended that centres look beyond the 'Evidence Banner' when briefing candidates and to consider the 'Evidence Criteria' that they are required to use to marking the work. This should help to guide candidates to suitable subjects for case study. We saw, in the session, some situations where candidates limited their potential to access the higher marking bands by the choice of a subject that did not present opportunity to show any real depth of understanding. Several candidates have chosen the Liverpool Institute of Performing Arts recently. LIPA, while technically a performing arts organisation, is a Higher Education Institution and it is very difficult to penetrate to get the detail of information necessary to gain marks beyond the lowest band. While there is a great deal of information in the public domain about the organisation the key information; how and why the organisation is structured, it is not easily accessed.

We also saw some case studies of small partnerships and these again prevented candidates from exploring and giving reasons for staffing structures. There is advice available on the selection of suitable subjects for this unit .

Similarly some candidates limited themselves in the selection of job role. The evidence criteria requires the marker to assess how the candidate has understood the 'significance and purpose of the job role to the organisation'. The presentation must focus on this and to meet the top band also talk about the job role's effectiveness. Weaker candidates gave us a 'careers talk' that described how the subject got the job or gave a generic talk about the work of 'an actor'. Candidates must focus on a job role and describe its importance to one of the organisations chosen for case study.

It is suspected that some candidates may have undersold themselves in the way they chose to substantiate their presentations. While a PowerPoint printout is the minimum requirement, it usually shows sets of bullet points upon which the candidates expand in their talks. Some hard copies were seen that did not merit the marks awarded until the DVD was viewed. It then became clear that the candidates had described and explained the points on screen and demonstrated a much deeper comprehension than that indicated by the print out. This would have been lost without the recording. It is recommended that a DVD recording, a print out of the slides and a script, are combined to evidence presentations.

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Whilst colour slides may enhance the actual presentation it is rarely necessary to print out full-page slides in colour.

A few candidates tried to bulk their portfolios with superfluous material (programmes etc). This does not help them and should be discouraged.

G381 Professional Practice: Skills Development

Most aspects of the moderation process went well. Centres generally understood the sampling process and enclosed the correct documentation.

DVDs must be sent with the portfolios and centres should not wait for moderators to request recorded evidence. DVDs should be checked and played before they leave the centre. Please make back up copies in case DVDs are damaged in the post or will not play. Please package the DVDs in padded bags to avoid breakage. The moderator must be able to play the DVD on a DVD player. Moderators had problems with DVDs which would not play on any laptop or computer or DVD player. DVDs should be chaptered.

It is very helpful if each candidate has their own DVD of evidence with their portfolio. Each recorded performance should appear in chronological order so that the moderator can assess the development of skills being made by the candidate.

Centres should include a front sheet as page one of the portfolio clearly stating the skills chosen for development and the three pieces of repertoire with details of titles of work and the names of the playwrights, composers and choreographers eg "King Lear" by Shakespeare, "Ghost Dances" by Christopher Bruce (1987).

Candidates should research the repertoire and be able to give detailed notes relating to when the piece was written, who performed it and where. There should be an explanation about which version of the repertoire they are using and how they have adapted it for performance. This is particularly important for dance pieces and physical theatre. Stand up comedy should not be devised. If the work cannot be identified as repertoire then it will be disregarded as evidence.

Centres must identify the candidates on the DVDs. Ideally candidates should introduce themselves to camera by name, number and title of repertoire piece. DVDs should be accompanied by a running order. There should be a recent photograph of the candidate and details concerning their appearance on the DVD such as a brief description of their costume so that the moderator can identify them. DVDs should be chaptered with a clear indication on the running order sheet of where the candidate appears on the DVD for example John Smith 0234 enters stage left at 10 mins 30 seconds. Moderators should not have to search for candidates' performances on the DVD. If the candidate cannot be identified, the evidence will be disregarded.

The position of the camera in relation to the stage needs careful consideration. Sometimes moderators could not see the candidates at close range and could not assess the performances. The most helpful recordings showed work in progress at close range so that the facial expressions and eye focus were obvious to the viewer. For final performances with live audience, the camera is naturally placed further away. Some of the best DVDs showed a development of the piece from first attempt through rehearsal to the final performance. Final performances must take place in front of a live audience in an appropriate venue. Rehearsal rooms and studios are not likely to produce the best type of final performance for the candidate.

Pages in portfolios should be numbered and centres should use these numbers when referring to the location of evidence. Centres should apply the assessment criteria rigorously and provide detailed annotation on the pages of the portfolio and on the URS to justify the marks awarded. Reference should be made to the DVD to help locate the evidence. Please state exactly where on the DVD the evidence is located using minutes and seconds eg John Smith chapter 3, 2 mins 35 secs., Hamlet monologue.

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If the location column is not filled out using page numbers and DVD timings, the moderator will send the portfolio back to the centre for this information to be given on the URS. Most centres are using detailed annotation but some centres are still not filling in the location column with sufficient detail.

Portfolios should be unique to the candidate and art form and relevant to the skills chosen for development. Internet research and studies of practitioners must be relevant to the repertoire chosen for performance and annotation of research should make this clear. Candidates must not include downloads and teacher handouts which have not been annotated by the candidate. Whole scripts should not be included.

The Skills Development Plan (SDP) should be detailed and include a summary of what the candidate has already achieved. This should be a resume of no more than 500 words and can be in the form of a CV or short biography. There were some excellent examples of CVs and biographies this session. The SDP should outline which skills are to be worked on and state the three pieces of repertoire work (two in progress and almost complete and one finished piece performed in front of a live audience.) The SDP should be adjusted as the unit progresses. The SDP is the framework for the unit and should include notes on workshops and lessons. Candidates must refer to the SDP throughout the portfolio and explain how they have adapted it in response to feedback and self-evaluation. Some centres did this in the form of a table and this worked very well.

Commentaries should be in written form or presented on DVD. They need to be detailed and demonstrate candidate ownership. There have been some very informative and detailed commentaries presented on DVD which have provided good evidence.

Tick box approaches and proforma documentation are not conducive to in-depth analysis and they hinder personal engagement. The commentary should be an independent document which explains how the repertoire demonstrates the skills development. The candidate can write notes throughout the portfolio detailing development and then a commentary at the end.

Observation reports must likewise be detailed analyses of the candidates' work and development, written by appropriately skilled observers who use appropriate technical terminology and their experience to make artistic judgements. In order to document the journey made by the candidate throughout the unit, it is helpful to make observations at the beginning and end of the unit and at key points on the way. Some centres did not sign or date these reports rendering them invalid. There should be a minimum of 3 observation reports.

The unit has presented a wide range of work this session. Some centres are stretching their candidates and offering them some challenging texts to work from such as King Lear. Some very mature performances have been presented across the art forms. However, three final performances and a weak portfolio will not gain high marks. The essential part of this unit is to show development of skills. For each piece, there should be recordings of first readings, rehearsals, dress rehearsals and final performance in the case of the finished piece. It is fine to show a candidate marking through a dance and then rehearsing it once the routine has been learned. Music candidates can show how they learned their piece and how it was developed through rehearsal to final performance which could be part of a musical theatre show. It is recommended that centres offer a candidate a variety of pieces so that they are not all in one style or from one era. One piece needs to be a group piece. Where candidates are working in two different art forms, centres must be sure to document progress in each art form.

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Most centres show good awareness of Health and Safety procedures and this is clearly shown in the portfolios. There needs to be a constant update of Health and Safety regulations to encourage candidate awareness. Health and Safety should be embedded in the portfolio not merely added in an appendix. Candidates should be able to show how they have used the information and knowledge in their practice. Dance performances should take place in a room with a sprung floor. The majority of centres chose appropriate spaces for their rehearsals and performances. If possible, try to give candidates a variety of spaces in which to perform.

G382 Professional Practice: Performance

G383 Professional Practice: Production

General administration and organisation

Although this year saw an increase in centres entering the January session this still remains a small minority of the total running the specification.

Administration was generally reported to be good with effective communication between examiners and centres. There were no reports of centres failing to send diaries and portfolios in advance although there were some lapses in the 14 day requirement due to poor weather. Centres are further reminded that DVD evidence should be sent to the examiner within three days of the exam.

Generally the external examination was managed well by centres with appropriate timetables and organisation on the day. Documentation in most centres was used appropriately.

The Examination

Most centres chose Drama or Musical Theatre pieces with one producing music exclusively. There were no major issues with repertoire, however a number of centres still push the limits of adapting pieces to suit candidates' abilities. This is especially true in dance where some extra choreography and some notable omissions from the original were evident.

Candidates who play characters of other genders run the risk of not being able to sustain the necessary physical and emotional aspects required. In some challenging pieces as far as gender is concerned relationships that were crucial amongst the cast were not always established or sustained, with difficult roles that involved homosexuality, cross gender and prostitution portrayed in a less than convincing way. This can also lead to some confused audiences.

Most performances had audiences and good technical support including costume and make-up. In choosing productions centres should think carefully about the balance between a performance being worthy and one being dynamic. Some productions are self-limiting in terms of marks in that candidates are not always given sufficiently ambitious direction. It is also true that 'physical theatre' using no props or set at all can sometimes only further highlight the deficiencies in technique in weaker candidates.

Shows this year were:

Blood Brothers

Rent

Joseph and his Technicolour Dreamcoat

Grimm's Tales

Antigone

Shakers

Return to the Forbidden Planet

Arabian Nights

Music across Cultures

The Interview

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Most of the candidates seen were well prepared and organised for the discussion and were able to talk with confidence and enthusiasm about the work they had undertaken. They were able to discuss how they had made use of the research they had completed and talked about the social and cultural aspects of the play. Good candidates demonstrated an understanding of the themes and background to the work and how they were going to use this information in performance.

The interview with the performance group remains a useful way to become familiar with individual candidates and is the necessary first step in knowing the candidates. There is also some enjoyment and relaxation in the process with candidates, once they understand there are no marks attached, being able to show their preparedness and understanding of the process they are able to embark on. Generally candidates were fluent and articulate.

Portfolios

Portfolios continue to improve with candidates able to respond to some very useful and comprehensive structures from centres. Better candidates are able to augment these with committed and 'owned' responses drawing on practitioners and seen performances. Health and Safety contents have improved greatly with the use of risk assessments, annotated photographs and appropriate warm-up activities all contributing to an enhanced understanding.

Several candidates produced extensive notes on a production role that they were undertaking in addition to their performance role. Whilst this gives candidates a broad understanding of the whole production process it can be difficult to credit these aspects within the marking criteria. The centres should be reminded that candidates can only be awarded marks on either the performance or the production pathway but not both. At present this means that some candidates are spending a lot of time producing work that gets them no marks.

One centre produced very weak portfolios where much of the information for each candidate was exactly the same. Centres are reminded that candidates can only be awarded marks for work which is demonstrably their own. This also applies where a candidate has taken on the responsibility for health and safety and then distributed the work to all of the other candidates in a group.

There were some good examples where candidates had really tried to link health & safety to their own performance and this should be encouraged. Overall, health and safety is improving but generic information and/or a risk assessment *only* are still a major feature of most portfolios.

There were some excellent portfolios where the content was related directly to the performances undertaken. Critical analysis and reflection regarding the production process marked out the better portfolios from those which were, largely descriptive in tone.

G384 Getting Work

General Comments

Administration of the examination

The number of entries for this session remains constant and consistent with last year. Moderation processes ran smoothly with all centres providing appropriate documentation and evidence.

Professional Context

Generally there was a real awareness of the professional context of the work, although the most noticeable hindrance to this remains where candidates relied on their school or college experience to provide all of the details for their pack. There remain portfolios that contain no evidence of having undertaken any interviews with professionals. These interviews are explicitly indicated in the assessment criteria and are not simply added value. There is a real need for portfolios to be based on research into the current demands of the industry, focused to a large extent by the interviews conducted with freelance professionals. In the best work these interviews were explicitly reproduced as appendices and also clearly permeated and informed all of the work.

Promotional pack

The quality of the production of the packs varied significantly. At best, they were attractive, professionally produced with well-crafted text and imagery that drew the reader's attention. These packs had a clear reference to a specific artistic audience. They knew in effect who they were marketing themselves to and what those companies or professional wanted. This is crucial since it indicates current industry conditions, a clear focussed vocational route and contact with working professionals all of which is necessary to address the criteria. At worst, it was difficult to disentangle the promotional materials from the plethora of print-outs of internet pages, photocopied handouts and extraneous working notes, all of which severely reduced the impact of the work, although it is increasingly unusual to find these unstructured portfolios.

Résumés and CVs were not always well thought out and did not demonstrate a good professional progression together with a strong sense of professional aspiration in particular artistic vocational areas. There were often anomalies between what was claimed in the CV and what the plan actually contained. It should be noted that CVs and letters are not compulsory. It entirely depends on the 'audience' for the promotional pack and they should not be included habitually. This also includes letters that are in response to an advertisement, these can sometimes reduce the range of evidence and are not always appropriate. Overall the impact and attractiveness in marketing terms is what candidates should consider when designing the pack. They should be dynamic and lively (as well as informed) in a way that standard CVs and letters are sometimes not. A range of material should therefore be considered including web-based profiles, DVDs, demo CDs and mail-shots.

Candidates should make more use of appendices to include the 'working out' of their promotional pack. In this way centres need not be anxious about editing rigorously to produce the essential, slick pack. It also means that promotional packs do not have to be annotated, the annotated copies can be included as drafts in the appendix. Pro-mo packs should be as they are when they land on the artistic director's (for instance) desk.

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Covering letters were generally of an acceptable standard but there was considerable scope for adopting a more professional – and hence more persuasive – tone. The quality of spelling, punctuation and grammar sometimes undermined the quality of what was being said. It is vital that candidates adopt high professional standards in their use of written English – this is clearly in the assessment criteria. Some letters were not addressed to anyone and therefore their power to influence was severely restricted. What's important is that there is understanding of what is expected in the professional context – are letters and CVs what's expected in the specific job or vocational context? A named professional would add to this evidence.

Plan of first year of work

The Specification allows candidates to build their first year of work around a maximum of 50% contract work. This recognises the reality of the professional situation in providing a sustainable income during a period where getting work is difficult and where reputation is becoming established. It is a prerequisite, however, that such contract work should be in a related professional area. The majority of contracts were in teaching (either privately or in a College) and were appropriate in their scope and projected income.

The plans however are becoming much more credible but some candidates still do not understand the need to get current rates of pay from the relevant organisations and unions to ensure that they come up with realistic earnings. One or two centres continue to 'pack' the plan with over-detailed spreadsheets. The best plans were 'smart' and edited rigorously and provided figures that gave a clear indication of survival without providing multiple tables. Again, draft plans can be included in an appendix. Centres who give a format or specific set of tasks to candidates should note that replications of material such as the same job or interviewee limit the capacity of the candidate to produce individual and owned evidence.

Most candidates related the range of freelance work identified to the research interviews they had conducted. Some centres provided plans for three or even five years – one detailed year is the demand, although it is quite acceptable as part of the analysis to look forward to subsequent years. There was a tendency to change the run of years so that candidates were placed at the end of college/university courses this year, 2011. It is acceptable and perhaps preferable for candidates to project forward so that they place themselves in a position in the future, just about to embark on their first year ie 2014/2015.

Analysis of the plan

Better candidates did more than just provide a SWOT, there were introductions and conclusions that placed it in a much wider context. These candidates took a step back and used their knowledge and understanding of the industry to weigh up their chances of success with clarity and honesty. Most candidates were good at identifying the strengths of their plan since this was often closely related to the skills outlined in the résumé. Weaknesses were more difficult for candidates to identify. In terms of opportunities, the most able candidates could see that the nature of their work could grow in relation to their professional development and this provided a good source of discussion. Threats were more difficult to identify, but the strongest candidates were able to locate the work in a context that did identify such threats. Good candidates placed their analysis into a wider professional context and related it both to a specific professional area and their place in it. Given the current economic climate it should be a given for candidates to mention both their own personal issues and contexts in the SWOT analysis as well as the effect economic downturn has on the industry and audience behaviour.

G386 Producing your own Showcase

General Comments

The January session only saw a small cohort of candidates which reflects the fact that many centres would rather wait and give the candidates more time to further their performance skills and confidence in solo performance work, entering in the June session. Many candidates this session did not have the performance techniques to produce a dynamic performance of their Showcase, showing mastery of their selected material. Few candidates were able to shape and mould their material to display a sophisticated understanding of the interpretative skills and personal style required at the top end of the marking band. Many candidates were unable to reflect the professional context of the material selected. Again, only a few candidates were able to give authoritative and absorbing performances, with many candidates falling short as they are still selecting works that are unsuitable and far too difficult for them to cope with, or pieces that are inappropriate for this examination.

Examiners reports generally commented on a session of variable standards of performance work. Good practice saw candidates tackle the challenge of 'live' performance with increasing enthusiasm and skilled technique. Centres who approached the work as a 'process to performance' encouraging candidates to create 'The Showcase' – provided good platforms for the candidates to work from.

Provision of a suitable performance space is extremely important. Once again, too many centres in this session were not providing a suitable space with candidates performing in poorly-lit studios and classrooms. This does not allow the candidates to maximise the performance aspect.

Centres ensured that candidates fulfilled the specified time requirements of 15 minutes, however, there were a few candidates who thought they could add their times together to produce duologues of 10 – 12 minutes long, this is not advisable.

Centres that demonstrated good practice made every effort to engage fully with the Examiner over all necessary details from pre-examination through to providing a DVD at the conclusion of the examination. Good practice included; details of candidates' showcases highlighting their chosen pieces including copies of scripts, music, lyrics or synopsis of dances, named photographs, running order, programme notes and travel arrangements. This process enabled the session to run smoothly.

Administration in Centres was generally good, despite the weather conditions and postal deliveries. Most centres ensured the paperwork arrived in time, provided a running order and details of candidates' performances. Provision of DVD-recorded evidence of the examination was acceptable during this session.

The Discussion

All centres and candidates were generally well prepared. Most candidates were able to discuss with the examiner the selected pieces detailing how they would be performed and personal interpretation. These candidates showed an understanding of the creative process as well as health and safety and warm-up procedures. Many drama and dance candidates, who are selecting works from the internet, must ensure that they can discuss the social, historical and cultural influences of the pieces.

Dance

Stronger dance candidates had researched their pieces thoroughly and were able to talk about the influences of dance practitioners and performances seen. They had knowledge of both their choreography and performance. Candidates must be able to describe the choreographic process employed to learn their work. They should be aware of stylistic influences and be able to put the dance into context, describing the purpose of the pieces, the intended audience and its impact. More dance candidates provided a copy of their selected dances on DVD in their portfolios and a clear website address for the examiner to be able to watch the selected pieces, particularly, if the selected pieces were by less well known choreographers.

Drama

Drama candidates were generally prepared. Stronger candidates displayed an understanding of their chosen pieces as well as an appreciation of the playwrights' intentions. They were able to discuss their ideas for performance of the pieces, influences, style and context as well as characterisation, period, mood and atmosphere. However, many candidates struggled with a lack of knowledge about the style of their pieces. This meant they were unable to inform the Examiner of their intended interpretation.

Music

Stronger candidates were able to discuss their own interpretations on the style and content of their selected pieces and were also able to relate them to historic and social influences. Most candidates were able to discuss technical competence and how they had considered balance/contrast in their showcase. Some Candidates were 'performing' the pieces and not relying on the sheet music and were able to discuss the advantages of this. Candidates are awarded higher marks for learning the pieces, which also allows for audience interaction and communication; there was good evidence of this from the candidates.

The Performance of the Showcase

Most candidates were sufficiently prepared and had rehearsed their pieces. Successful candidates were able to perform in contrasting styles and showed a good range of skills and techniques. Selection of appropriate material is still an area for development. Overall, performance material was varied and the diversity of the material selected for the showcase was encouraging. However, too many candidates were unable to apply their findings from research into practice as the material was just too demanding for their skills.

Technical support was also evident and enhanced many candidates' performances. Many Centres provided sound and lighting as well as a suitable performance space that was well lit and appropriate. Many performance pieces were presented with full use of costume, stage and lighting which, although, not examined, does add to the spirit and realism of the candidates work. Candidates working at this level deserve the opportunity to perform to a live audience demonstrating the skills learnt and honed over the two-year course, however in this session many centres had not invited an audience.

Dance

The majority of candidates performed choreographed routines taken from repertoire. However, some candidates had not actually learnt the repertoire dance but simply choreographed their own version from a DVD. Weaker candidates had selected movements 'in the style' of a particular dance or choreographer, this is not acceptable. Duets were not always taken from repertoire but performed as solo routines in a side by side performance.

Dancers seen were able to show awareness of Health and Safety issues. They had discussed various aspects of footwear, jewellery, hair and costume in their preparatory notes. Spatial awareness and suitability of the performance space were also highlighted.

Drama

All candidates chose pieces from repertoire during this session. More successful candidates showed how effective research had been used in performances and were always aware of the whole play having read the text. Vocal skills were varied with many candidates needing to focus on effective voice projection and clear diction. Many candidates were unable to vary their pace, pitch and tone, making their characters very 'one-dimensional'. Too many candidates had no real understanding of their characters and were unable to convey meaning and purpose. Candidates had learnt the words but were unable to do anything with them. Shakespeare was evident, but again candidates had little understanding of the iambic pentameter, clear diction and clarity of voice.

Duologues were generally the weakest pieces for most candidates, as many had selected pieces that were too difficult for them. Candidates must also look carefully when selecting pieces that require them to perform as the opposite gender or play an older character. There is a wealth of material to select from, particularly for young people, and it is really unnecessary to be selecting unsuitable pieces.

Good candidates were using costumes and props. This was effective and even simple costumes enabled candidates to really 'get inside the character' which added impact.

Staging of the pieces still needs some attention. Good performances considered the audience and engagement with them was enhanced through consideration of blocking and motivation behind movement. However, there was too much pacing of the stage and overuse of arms and hands in conversation work or to make a point. Good candidates were using a range of skills, techniques and drama conventions.

Music

Choice of material allowed more candidates to display a range of performance and vocal techniques. However, too many candidates failed to capture the essence of Musical Theatre and opted to stand at the front of the stage and sing, particularly in the duets. If candidates select pieces from this genre they must embrace all aspects of it.

Candidates who played musical instruments were well rehearsed. Pieces were taken from the Rock School Syllabus at grade 7 and 8, classical sonatas, jazz, rock, popular and contemporary music. Classical instrumentalists must ensure that they can communicate the selected pieces to an audience. It is not enough to just sit and play, flair and interpretation is crucial.

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Good candidates were able to shape and mould their material, displaying a sophisticated understanding of the interpretative skills required. Candidates at the highest level showed a committed personal style. Good practice saw candidates producing performances that really engaged with the audience. Some music candidates used professional backing tracks. Good candidates had rehearsed with the backing tracks to ensure that they were familiar with the key and style of the song.

Preparatory Notes

Preparatory notes submitted were of a mixed standard. Good candidates had demonstrated a developed and applied awareness of their approach to performance preparation. They were able to demonstrate a detailed understanding of the processes required, with particular reference to social, historical and cultural influences. This was evident for many candidates in the performance of their pieces. There was good evidence of developing skills and techniques through a fluent demand of technical vocabulary. Those candidates who produced thorough preparatory notes were better prepared and this was evident in the Showcase performance. Weaker candidates did not address the demands of the social, historical and cultural aspects and failed to detail how each performance piece had developed through a diary and feedback.

G387 Production Demonstration

There was only a very small entry for this session.

Candidates are starting to understand the processes required to realise their designs. Research was undertaken with consideration of the social, historical and cultural influences on their designs.

Material at the highest mark should be impressively sophisticated. Candidates must display a good command of technical language and conventions as well as complying with industry requirements.

Product demonstrations need to be authoritative and absorbing. Designs must create highly effective engagement for the audience. There should be evidence of technical accuracy. The candidate should be able to demonstrate a personal style in shaping and moulding the designs. Work scoring at the higher end should contain a level of originality in both its conception and realisation.

Candidates must submit both their preparatory notes and their portfolio containing their designs as well as pictures, photographs and DVD evidence of their product demonstration.

Centres are encouraged to support production candidates in recording a DVD diary throughout the process detailing all aspects of the work undertaken. This helps the examiner to see how the candidate has worked and can be a better source of evidence than the portfolio and diary. All centres must ensure that the interview/discussion with the examiner and production candidate is recorded. Evidence is often difficult to provide for the production candidates and every opportunity to capture it should be undertaken.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

14 – 19 Qualifications (General)

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Facsimile: 01223 552553