

## **Examiners' Reports**

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**June 2011**

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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#### Expressive Arts (J367)

#### EXAMINERS' REPORTS

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# **Chief Examiner's Report**

## **General**

The new specification seems to have met with approval by centres. It is acknowledged that it is more demanding than the legacy specification, 1917, but the more defined content and clearer and more focused structure has enabled candidates to access the essence of the qualification more easily. There is also better differentiation between the units, the coursework units having a different approach, and both of these then being reflected in the examined unit.

Candidates who did the examined unit before the coursework units appeared to be at a disadvantage as they were not able to use skills they had developed – because they hadn't developed them yet! It is recommended strongly that the examined unit follows the two coursework units.

Across all units the provision of evidence was improved, albeit with some significant exceptions. Centres were most cooperative with the requirement to provide individual DVDs for the examined unit for each candidate where there was a performance, and this helps examiners in identifying precisely what happened for each candidate, and will enable awarders to be certain about the evidence of achievement in outcome.

A number of centres are using this specification with younger candidates. Generally speaking the observation appears to be that younger candidates lack the maturity to fully understand certain aspects of the requirements and often find it difficult to record effectively some of their thoughts and ideas.

Overall the impression is that centres have adapted to the new specification well and candidates continue to have a valuable experience of the arts by following this course.

## **A691 and A692**

Centres have adapted to the new specification reasonably well.

The marking and submission of marks need to be carefully monitored to avoid last minute marking.

Labelling of DVDs and individual copies of DVDs with candidate's work is essential

Centres generally provided adequate evidence in the portfolios for all the marking criteria (see comments on individual components). However, centres do need to be aware of the demands that require the provision of adequate evidence for all four assessment objectives for A691 and A692.

The balance in assessment criteria should inform the balance of time spent on different aspects of the units. If considerable time is spent on outcome with little on exploring and developing, then low overall marks are going to be awarded.

### **Art Forms**

Most candidates used Drama and Creative Writing followed by Dance and Art. Music continues to be the least well used art form.

There was a good balance between the use of the various art forms, often influenced by the particular specialism of the teachers delivering the course.

Many candidates now work in three or more art forms, although this is not a requirement for A691 or A692.

In stronger pieces of work, the art forms were well integrated and produced a holistic and complete piece of work. However, weaker pieces worked in the discreet art forms with little understanding of the possibilities for interaction and the structure of a holistic piece.

### **Use made of practitioners**

There was a great deal of strong evidence to show how the practitioners studied influence the final outcomes of candidates' work. Often this was biographical evidence and not enough emphasis was given to the understanding of skills and techniques used by the practitioners to create pieces and encourage audience response.

In some centres multi-cultural contexts were used very successfully to provide interesting frameworks.

The strongest results came from centres where practitioners had been studied and the teacher had directed the candidates through these studies. In weaker work it appeared as though candidates had found music or film retrospectively and tried to make it fit their intended outcomes.

### **Outcomes**

Drama performances dominated. These were often written by candidates then performed or improvised using various stimuli. Although still relatively rare, candidates using dance produced some outstanding examples, both individually and in groups. These narratives showed a genuine understanding of the processes required to produce high quality work.

Other outcomes that were particularly well presented were those that used art to illustrate a poem or story. Many of these were imaginative and in particular audience appropriate. This is an emerging strength of candidates' work.

### **Portfolios**

In the main, these showed a deep understanding of evaluating and analysing work in order to develop a piece or transfer skills and techniques. Particularly impressive is the development of technical and subject specific language amongst candidates, giving them the opportunity to record their processes in a developed and intellectual way.

The use of photography continues to be valuable for a range of reasons, including demonstration of how a piece develops, an individual's contribution to a piece and the recording of large scale work.

### **DVD evidence**

Whilst this is a very valuable source of evidence for awarding marks, centres should be aware that the quality of recording, lighting and sound needs to demonstrate clearly what the candidates have achieved. Similarly it is very important to clearly identify who each candidate is and what their contribution to the piece is.

### **Assessment**

The mark scheme for assessing these units worked well, with centres generally able to be accurate in their assessment of candidates' work. The criteria were used effectively and applied well.

### **A691**

Candidates worked in a range of group sizes and centres ensured that individuals had the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge. Where candidate had the benefit of collaborating with at least one other candidate, the outcomes tended to be better than when candidates worked individually in this component.

A wide range of practitioners were used:

Metamorphosis: Philip Glass, Esher, Kafka etc.

Comics and Animation: Spider man, Chicken Run, Simpsons, Phil Park etc,

Computer animation: Rodrigo Blas

Interpretations of classics such as Charles Dickens – 'Oliver' (Lionel Bart)

Dance influences; Lea Anderson, Ballet Rambert, Merce Cunningham, Stomp

Drama including Caryl Churchill, John Godber, Alan Bennett,

Art: Van Gogh, Munch, Hopper, Warhol, Picasso

War Poetry: Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brook, Wilfred Owen.

### **Stimuli/Themes**

These included:

Contained spaces

Change

Dreams

Barriers

Black and White.

## A692

Most centres provided a range of experiences that allowed candidates to explore artworks and artists in an appropriate way.

Again, a wide range of practitioners and works was used, including songs, such as Bob Dylan's, 'Blowing in the Wind,' and Don McLean's 'Vincent', art works by Van Gogh and Ai Wei Wei, various works by Alan Bennett and Sylvia Plath and Wilfred Owen's poems.

Themes were well pitched and included: families, Culture Clash, Theatre with a message, alone, loss, no way out, horror and domestic violence.

In the better examples of work, candidates had used a range of practitioners to support and inform their work. Candidates showed a clear capacity to develop their own skills, moving from the more teacher led experience of A691 to the development of skills and techniques in their own style taking further ownership of their creativity. Contemporary film and stage work inspired candidates and inspiration came from a range of sources from 'Banksy,' to 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas.'

Contemporary twists on graffiti and street art featured in a number of candidates' work. Symbol was more prevalent in this unit with religious symbols, symbols of wealth and prosperity, flowers, and antiestablishment images all appearing.

Monologues predominated in the final outcomes and these excelled when candidates had learnt their monologue and delivered the content with passion and in role. Where they were less well delivered, candidates read from written scripts without emotion or drama.

Portfolio evidence varied and centres should resist the tendency to focus on AO3, possibly as preparation for A693. This tendency resulted in some lack of evidence for other criteria for some candidates.

Further work presented for this unit was 'non performance,' and came in the form of children's books, art work and creative writing.

### Areas of Studies

Undeniably these are being explored and where this is done well it is part of an integrated approach to the teaching of the work of the practitioners and the processes behind the outcomes. Where it is done less well is when it is approached as a tick list task that must be done to comply with the exam board regulations. The use of writing frames sometimes inhibits candidates from getting a real feel for what the areas of study are all about and consequently what Expressive Arts is all about.

However there were some very imaginative and creative ways in which the areas of studies were explored, sometimes cross referencing skills and techniques from other curriculum areas. Shape and structure saw the use of block colour, repeated musical ideas and music set to lyrics to facilitate dramatic choreography, to name but a few.

One of the most developed areas is the sense of audience and candidates appear to be much more focussed on the purpose of audience in creating a piece and what response they may want.

Possibly the weakest area is 'genre', particularly the subsections of a particular genre, such as the various types of drama, or the rich wealth of variety in dance and music.

## A693

The general consensus was that the new style of examination paper based on a commission and with the weighting set firmly towards the practical, was a big improvement on the old specification. Centres said it gave better focus, enabled more in-depth research, used what had been learnt about practitioners more effectively, and built more successfully on the previous units. It was felt it was truly a synoptic unit.

It follows that examiners reported that where centres had entered this unit before doing both of the coursework units, candidates did not seem anything like as well prepared and it is recommended strongly that centres attempt this unit after completing the other two.

The mark scheme gave rise to some concerns. Whilst the aspects of the assessment criteria were fine, the way marks had to be allocated caused some consternation. Several centres failed to highlight the assessment criteria they felt applied, thus potentially disadvantaging their candidates. Centres are reminded this is a requirement not an optional activity.

The examination paper contains 10 commissions. Candidates should have the opportunity of accessing any one of these. It is not for the centre to restrict their choice. Several centres directed large numbers of candidates towards a single commission, thus stifling originality. In another example, whole class work into a single practitioner was carried out extensively, and this too can stifle creativity and a variety of outcomes.

The major change in the new specification is the move from starting points to commissions. Some centres failed to realise this and there were several consequences:

- Candidates using just the words of the title and carrying out no research or exploration into the work, practitioner, picture or event depicted. This makes for a very narrow response and candidates will lose marks.
- Communities are an important aspect and give direction to the pieces devised – unfortunately too often it was tagged on as an afterthought.
- The intended audience may sometimes be the same as the community, but often is not. Too often candidates give a very generic intended audience that helps them little. 'Young people', as a generic title, is not helpful, nor is choosing year groups at school unless the topic is very specific to a particular age. Work that uses simplistic communities and audiences often remains uninspiring and lack creativity.

### Portfolios

The standard of the portfolio varied considerably. It should reflect the research into the commission, with the initial ideas and direction of devising mapped out. The areas of study should be clearly identified in their work, as should where practitioners have had an influence. There should be a sense of purpose and direction leading to the final realisation, with some exploration of their community, and their intended audience. It is the portfolio that brings everything together, the research, exploration and development, who it is for, how it works and what is the audience likely to experience.

### Commissions:

#### 1 King of the Toilets

This was the third most popular commission and was received well with a very wide range of responses. Some candidates found other poetry that had either a similar topic or took inspiration from things that happened at school. Examples of outcomes included:

- Comic presentation – caretaker as grumpy old man complaining about toilet smells, vandalism and youthful high spirits
- There were lots of bullying stories, some done well, some very banal and of poor quality. Where they were poor quality the candidate tended to rely on the narrative within the poem rather than looking for exciting and imaginative alternatives inspired by the poem and other research
- In one realisation that had 5 different characters in a toilet block, the art and design was the set showing the different characters
- Use of movement/dance really worked to improve the narrative in several examples
- I did witness site specific pieces of work in an old toilet block as part of a disused storage room in one of the schools. This was really interesting as the examiner was often the "victim" placed in the toilet with lots of role play going on around her!

## 2 The Wall

This was the second most popular commission.

There was some very good work linked to segregation/contrast/racism. Candidates in several centres were inspired to create some outstanding work linked to this commission – very deep and meaningful. Some good visual images created through performance including building walls and creating walls through movement. Weaker candidates relied too heavily on factual details presented in power points with limited drama work. Other outcomes included:

- Husband and wife not communicate meaningfully over dining table
- Class issues (conflict over attitudes)
- Personal monologue (Polish boy with experience of Communism)
- Age gap – mother's problems with child ("Kevin" influence)
- Good dance exhibitions – conflict/fight ("West Side Story" and modern dance influences)
- Some well disciplined stylised movements/mirror actions to suggest tension and dispute
- Some examples of striking visuals in the set (for example, graffiti projections, shifting displays, dramatic breaking of wall)
- Inclusion of comic details
- Political emphasis
- Used for KS4 History and PSHE.

There were some quite moving performances. A few were pure storytelling with little imaginative interpretation and were overlong.

## 3 The Fear

This was the most popular commission.

Unfortunately this commission was sometimes used in a very simplistic, shallow way by candidates, and this led to predictable and uninspiring work.

For many it was as a 'too obvious' choice and was therefore picked regularly by weaker candidates. Better candidates produced some interesting and meaningful work around fears and insecurities. For the better candidates the commission seemed to encourage a strong integration of artforms eg dance, art and drama or creative writing as well as the music.

Some had tenuous link with song

- Several focused on performer or group who had doubts/misgivings about success or who had (inner) conflict contrasting with public performance
- Weaker candidates did (often simple) dance along to recorded song
- A few nervous candidates turned their symptoms (shaking or quiet voice, hesitations, awkward movements trembling etc) to advantage – in role!
- Issues included fear of unemployment, of breast cancer, nightmares, of imminent examination, of heights, of vandalism
- One imaginative exploration of fear of Fire, expressed through Dance, Art and Music
- One examiner reported seeing pieces that had lots of quoting the lyrics
- Being famous people.

#### **4 Sword in the Stone**

This was the sixth most popular commission. It provided some excellent work – candidates had delved quite deeply into the storyline. Some well researched work. There was some mundane retelling of part of the story without much originality. Some interesting costumes created.

- “Magical” music (composed) with appropriately dreamy/mystical dance
- “Pantomime” style story
- One poor interaction with pre-recorded tape.

#### **5 Still Breathing**

This was the seventh most popular. It is the first time a purely dance based commission has been used, and the response was very mixed. The focus was often on the athletic style of the dance, and few candidates researched and explored sufficiently to discover and use what underpinned the dance shown, hinted at within the caption to the commission. Often realizations focused heavily on dance and candidates were in danger of breaking the rules of balancing the art forms.

- Examiners reported that they often saw some of the best dance examples in response to this commission with a variety of styles and attitudes
- Often in pairs
- Several skilled and athletic presentations
- One good performance concerned with class conflict (popular street dance v ballet and more formal training, with accent and attitude in support).

#### **6 Country Wedding**

This was the ninth most popular commission. The danger here was that candidates would go off at a tangent and not make use of the picture, its content, and the artist. This was just what happened in one centre, where the focus was on wedding planners and the only tenuous reference to the picture was that the planned wedding was in the country.

In another very successful realisation there was a simple recounting of traditional wedding ideas.

#### **7 Zadok**

This was the least popular commission

## 8 Live Like Pigs

This was the fifth most popular commission. It was used very well generally – links to *Shameless* were popular and led to some creative drama work.

- High quality – one candidate wrote a later monologue for Mrs. Jackson, reliving her experience
- Several pieces were well delivered and paced, with real comic impact
- One piece made good use of accent, set and clothes
- There were several examples of funny storytelling and a pig sculpture!

## 9 Hello, 'ello, 'ello

This was the fourth most popular.

There were many superficial responses linked to the police and being caught. Candidates also seemed bound to the idea of the 50s. Candidates, surprisingly, seemed to struggle finding practitioners' work to explore.

- One of the best seen was a silent film complete with live piano accompaniment.
- Others often unimaginative, and of low impact
- There were some good stylistic performances, where students looked at photos and films of the time, producing some comedic ideas
- A funny piece had schoolboys peeping under the tent whilst truanting looking at a strip show, all carried out with taste and a good sense of young devilment and mystery.

## 10 I've got friend

This was the eighth most popular commission, and was a favourite with teachers. It produced the least amount of poor quality work, almost everything seen being of good quality and imaginative.

There were some very creative ideas here, using live art, music and dance.

Some dog-as-a-friend ideas!

In one imaginative example, the candidate linked dance, music and art as she danced whilst painting with her hands on a canvas on the floor, integrating herself with the art and dance work – very cleverly done.

### Communities

- School assemblies still very popular
- Health Centre waiting-room
- Unemployment Office
- Railway Station platform
- Moral message
- Music festivals
- Night club
- Shopping Centre
- An age range and places of education – and this provided the most examples of work that was poorly done.

In some cases the needs of the audience/community were neglected. Where the community was a little different and thought out the piece was stronger.

### **Practitioners and Works**

Most candidates made clear and telling use of practitioners and works studied in earlier modules. Others used practitioners directly linked to the commissions. In some cases, practitioners emerged from individual candidates' own research or from prior interest. This is a distinct advance on previous sessions under the old specification.

### **Good Practice**

The following represents comments and examples from examiners.

- Good practice stemmed from making use of good research and developing creative ideas from the original commission
- Many candidates were fully familiar with lines and movements. They were well rehearsed, with a majority of candidate not requiring to read the script or needing prompting
- Good integration of art forms in balanced presentations
- 3 of the 4 Centres had candidates introduce work by answering pertinent questions from the teacher or – most successfully – discussing and illustrating sections of work created by individuals within the group
- Presentations were of appropriate length and were usually well structured, with neat endings
- Dance was particularly well documented in the planning, usually with photographs or clear notation
- There were several confident uses of mime, pauses and silence
- Stagecraft was often of a high order – in use of stage and of floor levels, for example
- 'a cappella' singing was often dramatically moving
- Technical problems were few and slight
- Sets were usually simple and effective
- Fine teamwork was in evidence, with trust and confidence in others
- Folder research was usually focused and relevant, with little fat
- The realisations were strong and some of the evidence for the new criteria was obvious in the performed/presented work
- Physical theatre was usually most successful in high attaining students.

### **Room for Improvement**

This section has comments and advice 'straight from the horse's mouth', as written by examiners.

- Read the exam instructions clearly
- Encourage candidates to consider all commissions carefully and steer candidates away from making a quick, knee-jerk reaction as to the commission they will select. Often a more considered approach, with a little research, will lead to a more thought-out and more highly developed outcome
- Ensure that candidates have had practice integrating art forms before the final examination and that they understand how to link fully to the community and the original commission
- Remind candidates about the value of looking at the work of practitioners
- Remind candidates about the importance of the areas of study through all stages of the work
- Keep to time guidance

- Don't let candidates get carried away with lots of written evidence in their portfolio during the 12 hours. The 12 hours really should be used very practically
- There were occasional issues with vocal projection (indistinct pre-recorded tape instead of live delivery, masks blocking delivery, back to the audience or delivered from back of stage)
- Within some group presentations, there was imbalance in contribution, with some receiving fuller exposure than others
- When Drama and Creative Writing were the principle art forms, Art as the third art form was generally tokenistic
- At some centres individual candidates had not learnt their scripts and either disguised the fact or read without "performing" their monologue
- At one centre three art forms were used with no attempt at integration. For example, a poem was written on the subject of "The Wall" (but not performed), music was composed (on the same theme) and a painting was also created. Each piece provided a satisfactory response to the commission but there was little appeal to the audience. The piece could have been very powerful indeed if the painting had been projected with the poem voiced over and the music played simultaneously
- Lack of preparation of technology: at one centre, waiting for technology issues to be resolved ruined the atmosphere in the performance room and students lost focus. At this centre the delays caused the exam to continue well after school, eventually finishing around 5pm (hours later than planned)
- Some centres still use a poorly appointed performance space for the exam. Every effort should be made to improve the conditions under which the candidates deliver their performances on the day of the exam, in order to give the occasion the status it deserves. For example, in one centre an ordinary classroom was used, with no thought given to which part would be used as the "stage". Candidates had clearly not rehearsed with this in mind and had to negotiate desks and chairs redundant to their performances.

### **How to Improve**

- For all centres it would be constructive if, at the beginning of the course, thought could be given to what constitutes an effective Expressive Arts realisation. This needs to be a collaborative process between candidates and staff. If the expectation is that, from the outset, students (with less and less staff input as the course progresses, in common with every other aspect of the syllabus), need to take responsibility for their space, their resources and the perfecting and integration of the components they have created, many of the above issues, referred to in the previous section, would be addressed
- In some cases, a live audience can help candidates to raise their game
- Prepare candidates to think about the structure of the work and remind them that monologue must be carefully thought out. When candidates use PowerPoint as individuals, remind them that they only have 2 minutes
- Occasionally a centre produces candidates not prepared/trained to perform live, even though this would be far preferable to the standard of DVD produced
- Some centres do not train their candidates to learn their scripts or deliver their monologues in a confident fashion. These candidates are severely disadvantaged.

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