

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

J315/R/11

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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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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Drama (J315)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

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Chief Examiner's Report

The introduction of a new specification will always raise anxieties amongst teachers eager to do the very best for their candidates. Changes to familiar routines can appear onerous. Yet change can also open up new possibilities for learners and teachers. Now we have completed the first cycle of the new specification it is apparent that the range of skills and knowledge demonstrated by candidates has been extended in this new specification. The three distinctive units facilitate this and centres have certainly risen to the new challenges and opportunities involved. Moderators and examiners have all noted and remarked on the wider range of skills being demonstrated and an increased depth of knowledge evident in candidates' responses. This would not have been achieved without centres embracing the changes and possibilities inherent in the new specification.

The biggest challenge for centres appears to be the filming of candidate work. However many centres tackled this with aplomb, testament to good preparation and making sure they had mastered the necessary skills before it came to the controlled assessment. Well made and chaptered DVDs are essential to facilitate moderation, for which there are two absolute priorities. Firstly that centres ensure candidates can be identified by a moderator who has never seen them before and secondly that they can efficiently go to the chapter where the sampled candidate's work can be viewed. Examples of successful ones were characterised by: visual clarity; audibility; a candidate identification parade; and were accompanied by a paper running order. For the examined unit a centre had managed to film, chapter and make the DVD as it was filmed, even with 45 different chapters. Twenty minutes after the filming the DVD was ready. Advice on how they did this will be displayed on the OCR website shortly in order to assist other centres with technical issues.

The following reports on each of the three units, provide advice to help you prepare future cohorts of candidates. They also contains advice that is responsive to questions raised by centres and feedback from moderators and examiners.

A581 From Page to Stage

Page to Stage allows candidates to explore how a published script is animated and brought to life for an audience whilst focusing on the original intentions of the playwright. Candidates have the opportunity to research the historical and cultural context of the text and adopt or adapt the design elements in the script.

The unit requires candidates to rehearse under controlled conditions their chosen extract for a final performance having developed and practised the skills necessary to deliver an effective performance.

The majority of centres had fulfilled all the requirements of this unit with due regard for the assessment criteria.

The texts chosen for performance covered a diverse range of genre and style. Using the text to introduce candidates to a new genre and/or performance style supports the specification's minimum requirement to '*Study, use and explore a minimum of two genres and two performance styles.*'

By far the most popular texts continued to be 'Blood Brothers' and 'Bouncers'. Moderators noted that the most successful performances of these texts were performed as the playwright intended, with not all cross gender casting working to the candidate's advantage. Centres should always consider whether those candidates who perform cross gender are able to fulfil their potential. With that caveat there were some very successful cross-gender performances, for example Journey's End by Sherriff, where if anything a female cast heightened the poignancy of the piece.

Centres are reminded that the sole focus of this unit is on the performance of an extract from a text, which has been specifically rehearsed for the unit under controlled conditions.

Off the text improvisation can form part of the preparation and exploration stage, however the performance presented for assessment must be an extract from the text and not an improvisation based around the key themes and issues or a further devised scene.

Assessed Performances

Moderators reported the following:

Candidates who did not exceed the time limit were more likely to maintain their focus, character and context than those who exceeded the recommended time limit. '*The performance will last a maximum of 10 minutes for groups of 5-6; for smaller groups it should be less eg groups of 2-3, 6 minutes.*' Page 25 of the specification.

Editing scripts into a series of extracts to provide text of appropriate length can work well. However this needs to be done carefully, considering any loss of clarity and author intention. Moderators noted some editing had not provided candidates with easily coherent material to work with.

Most centres ensured candidates had sufficient time in the performance space to fulfil their potential and allow the moderator to fully observe their performances'.

Candidates, who have chosen to use strobe lighting, should inform audience/moderator before commencing the filming of the extract.

It was evident from the Working Records and the performances that where centres had used workshops prior to the controlled assessment to engage students in exploration and background research of the text, stronger outcomes were produced.

The majority of centres had thoroughly rehearsed the text extracts and very few candidates were not totally confident about their lines. In the few examples where candidates had not learned their lines, but instead read from scripts, they could only achieve at best within the Basic mark band for OB1 and OB2. It limited the candidate's ability for '*productive co-operation with others*' '*use of stage space*' and '*meet the demands of the adopted performance style*'.

Moderators noted many Centres were making good use of semiotics. The use of costume, props, lighting and sound was often well integrated into the performance. Other centres successfully stripped the performance down to the core, the actor, the space and the audience, with the only semiotic being the actor. A performance of an extract from '*Anthony and Cleopatra*' worked very well in this style.

Amongst the most successful texts which were offered were:

Hard to Swallow	by Mark Wheeler
Too Much Punch for Judy	Mark Wheeler
The Ash Girl	Timbelake Wertenbaker
DNA	Denis Kelly
Beautiful Burnout	Bryony Lavery
A Raisin in the Sun	Lorraine Hansberry
Sweeney Todd	C.G. Bond
Blue Harvest	Nigel Gray
Kindertransport	Diane Samuels
Hamlet	Shakespeare
Anthony and Cleopatra	Shakespeare
The Caucasian Chalk Circle	Bertolt Brecht
The Good Person of Szechwan	Brecht
He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No	Brecht

Working Record

Moderators reported the following:

The most successful Working Records were well focused working documents, which were clearly divided into three sections,

- Background/Intent
- Development/Rehearsal
- Evaluation.

The Working Record should include an understanding of the genre, style, social, cultural, and historical context of the script. The staging decisions made, an understanding of the playwright's intentions and the implications for performance should inform all decisions made and be evident in the Working Record. Several moderators noted that it is not only the high achieving candidates who are being restricted by the use of writing frames and templates.

Candidates who produced apt designs, sketches and ground plans which followed the standard conventions for such work were commended by moderators.

Centres are reminded that the Evaluation should include '*Review, a reflection and evaluation of the final performance, both the candidate's role(s), that of **one** other candidate and **audience** response must be included. A03*'. Page 26 of the specification. To this end some centres included copies of focused questionnaires completed by the audience. These questionnaires allowed candidates to reflect on a range of detailed and useful feedback.

Candidates who reference and reflect on all the relevant areas of study and use of subject specific vocabulary throughout the majority of Working Records are rewarded by the mark scheme. Where candidates do not do so centres must use the mark scheme accordingly.

Centres where the Working Records were clearly marked and annotated demonstrated how the centre was applying the mark scheme and greatly aided the moderation process.

Moderators reported the following issues regarding DVD evidence:

DVD's needed to be checked before sending to the moderator for both oral and visual clarity.

The camera should be placed in front of the audience in a central position. A tripod should be used to avoid a 'shaky' presentation.

For moderation purposes it is important that centres consider the moderator as the audience, the DVD should be made so that all candidates can be identified, seen and heard throughout the performance.

Candidates should introduce themselves to the camera prior to the extract, giving their name, candidate number and role speaking slowly and clearly.

Centres should ensure that any stage lighting allows all candidates to be recognised and tracked throughout the extract. For the sake of moderation candidates should be careful that atmospheric lighting does not limit the visibility of the candidates. Centres should also note that too much light can also 'burn out' faces thereby losing much facial expression from candidates.

Moderators reported that most accessible DVD's were those that were compatible with 'Windows Media' and clearly chaptered. Moderators found it extremely useful to have a 'paper' running order to accompany the DVD.

Centres should ensure that only the performance of the text extracts is included on the DVD. Any initial exploration/rehearsals should **not** be included on the DVD.

All centres should keep a copy of the DVD.

In conclusion moderators spoke positively about the enthusiasm and engagement that candidates demonstrated both in the performance area and in their working records for their chosen text.

A582 Drama in the Making

This unit is quite distinctive from Page to Stage. This is deliberate and designed to broaden the candidates knowledge and understanding of drama, rather than replicate the performance emphasis of Page to Stage. It provides progression for students moving into KS5, were many examinations place a strong emphasis on devising theatre as well as performing.

So the focus for this unit is not on a final outcome, but the preliminary exploration stages, the generation of quality ideas. It is how many theatre companies work when devising a play with a playwright. They improvise around the theme and the playwright gets ideas, even dialogue from the process. Or for a designer, taking their first ideas to the director, before they start work on the final product. Many centres were embracing this idea and demonstrated candidates engaging with such exploration and enjoying the process. DVD evidence captured many students doing presentations on their design ideas stating "I chose to do this as I've never tried something like this." This is positive but raises implications for centres in planning the course, there is the need to give candidates experience of these areas before they get to the controlled assessment.

The unit is about a genuine investigation of a stimulus and extending the candidates abilities. Those centres who took the opportunity to let the students experiment and take risks, demonstrated that candidates get just as enthused and motivated as they do for the standard rehearsed/performed drama. They can also score at the top levels, picking apart why an idea didn't work and what tweaks might turn it into a potentially good idea. They will be demonstrating their understanding of what makes theatre work and how it can be achieved. They may get so involved they actually want to go on and create a final performance, which is positive and they could subsequently do so in course time (if the teacher so wishes). However that is not assessed. Their controlled assessment for this unit is about the devising stage. It emphasises that question posed by Dorothy Heathcote "What is worth doing a play on?" You have to get this right before you invest time and effort into refining it to performance standard.

This is not to say there are not outcomes, there are three and each is a mini performance or presentation in its own right. Many candidates seen by moderators this session have obviously relished escaping from the particular constraints of group work, creating strong individual items. Here they have total control over the outcome and many have enjoyed this and some achieved beyond what they were doing in group work. This has been true for candidates of all abilities.

The mark scheme is a best fit mark scheme, with six different bullet points. They provide the 'menu' you draw from, selecting those that match the item being tackled. The mark scheme has more bullet points than Page to Stage, because there are a greater variety of potential areas that could be covered. Item 1, the improvisation, obviously uses bullet point one, *'Uses voice and gesture to create a well-crafted characterisation that demands attention.'* Assessment of this item will and should draw on other bullet points. For instance a candidate who has initiated the context for the scene and figured prominently in the devising can be rewarded by using bullet point two, *'Set up an improvisation that enhances and helps actors understand/develop the context of the drama.'* So a candidate who is not so strong on performance but strong on devising could come out with a mark equal to that of a strong performer. The Centre Assessment Sheet will identify this by the teacher highlighting which bullet point the candidate achieved their optimum mark in, for that particular item. There could also be a comment in the box provided on the front cover *'Teacher observation/supporting evidence'*. If the candidate is tackling a Design item then other bullet points are used, for example *'Semiotics: introduce a range of properties or light or sound etc that combine in a unified way to demonstrate a strong understanding of how symbols add meaning and support intent.'*

The biggest issue raised by centres has been regarding organisational arrangements and DVD's. We have learnt some lessons from this first cycle of the specification and will give advice throughout this report on how to reduce the burden. Many centres were 'overdoing' the requirements and turning the outcomes into fully realised polished outcomes. This was particularly true on Item 1, the group improvisation, which many centres presented as if for Page to Stage, with lights, costume and sound. That is not required or the purpose, it is an improvisation arising out of the stimulus, which is searching for a potential script. It begins the investigation. The candidates need to ask questions regarding what characters are worth creating: which are functional; is there a key protagonist; where is the tension; is the context the best one for exploring the issue; is there an issue; is it engaging? The candidates need to slow down and not gallop to a final performance, which is often what they are more familiar with and are already quite adept at. This unit is asking them to develop their devising skills and create a script that could be turned into a worthwhile performance. In some of the work presented this series, the performance standards were so polished, the question was how had there been the time to consider the content? Who had arranged all the lights, costume and sound? The use of stage lights, heavy soundtracks and costume in fact often detracted from the content. In some cases you could not hear the script above the soundtrack, dim lighting prevented moderators seeing what was happening and strong lighting burnt out faces.

This was often reflected in the Working Records where the majority of candidates this session placed the emphasis on performance aspects, which are of course relevant, but struggled to articulate ideas for structuring. The candidates who considered such aspects as: the structure of the piece, the use of language and the particular crafting of words, why a particular character was used/needed, were the exceptions and were invariably higher scoring candidates. It was also noticeable that where such aspects were seen, most candidates at the centre included them, indicating the centre had focused on devising and the 'language of devising' in their preparation for the unit. The subject specific language of the Deviser, eg exposition for a scene that sets the context, rising action as things start to come to a boil, climax when the tension point is reached, denouement as it is all rounded off, functional characters, protagonists etc. There were many many candidates who gave a 'nod' to Brecht, 'doing it in a Brechtian style'. This invariably focused on stylistic performance aspects of Brecht rather than structuring devices he used (many actually were getting the performance aspects wrong, the number of candidates who seem to think Brecht is Grotowski, minimalist, no scenery etc is a bit alarming). Devising structures that Brecht takes from eastern theatre, for example the narrated journey, types rather than 'characters', commentary on the action often in songs are the relevant subject knowledge in this unit. Brecht is used here as an illustration of the division between performance aspects and devising aspects and the differing subject knowledge and language involved.

Moderators reported it would be helpful if all candidates made sure they specified the starting stimulus in the first section of their working record. It would also be helpful for staff to very briefly explain the stimulus used and if possible provide a copy. This would from the outset make it easier for moderators to follow lines of thought.

Many centres used the organisational structure whereby Item 1 establishes the 'play', if the group are happy with this context, then Item 2 and 3 became developments of this. Designing a set for it, costumes, lights, a monologue or duologue for characters in it. When using this approach it seemed to work best leaving the design item to last. Other centres did much the same in terms of areas covered, but without the play being decided after Item 1. Each item was a series of possibilities. This approach is more likely where candidates were not happy with their Item 1 and in essence start afresh with Item 2. Both approaches are perfectly acceptable ways of working.

Design items tended to be the weakest area seen, candidates often didn't have enough background knowledge to start. They need at least the standard formats for setting their work out, so will have to have seen and created ground plans, seen lighting cue sheets, costume and make up sheets as presented by designers (rough sketch formats). Or they acknowledge they

don't have the presentations skills for this and they develop a 'brief' for a lighting designer/set designer/costume designer telling them what they want. With design the advice would be avoid 'blue skies' thinking for putting it on at the London Palladium and instead design for their own studio/hall space or touring to schools. Any designs created need to be included in the Working Record, this includes a print out of power point slides if used. It was also noted by moderators that group presentations of design items did not allow all candidates to produce sufficient material for assessment. Design items should, as for scripts, be an individual item.

Performer Items such as monologues and duologues were generally well tackled, as was script writing, where candidates were generally well versed in the standard conventions for creating a script. Some of these Items were outstanding, both in terms of delivery and the quality of the 'scripts' presented. Generally script items without stage directions for opening and closure should not be rewarded beyond the competent band.

The Working Record, is an ongoing reflection on the potential of the stimulus to be made into a play. In the best works candidates explored the potential of the characters to be developed, considered the type of audience it might best suit, reflected on the best performance style and genre to suit the material. The Working Record should be clearly sectioned, with each of the three items covered. Once the 10 hours practical exploration is over the candidates complete the final evaluation for which they have 1 hour. This covers: what is the potential of the stimulus to be turned into a play; who would be the audience; what genre and performance style suits it best. There will also be included reflection on one other person's work or another group's idea. There were some excellent Working Records and many centres were using DVD presentations to supplement or in some cases replace the written record. However some candidates appeared to have given scant attention to this aspect of the work, which equates to a third of the marks.

There was a wide variety of stimulus material used, the theme of War arose in many centres, using songs, poems, articles, photographs and research. One centre devised some powerful thought provoking possibilities based on the Vietnam conflict. Another centre took the 1984 Miners strike exploring it through agit-prop and satire. People trafficking, societies attitudes to mental disorders, child soldiers, the pilot stimulus Image, stimuli set for the previous specification, Celebrity, Slavery etc.

It is apparent there is a need for some clarification on the organisation of the 10 hours of practical controlled assessment, plus the 1 hour before and 1 hour after to start and complete the Working Record. Controlled assessment can be conducted in normal teaching time. Time out can occur between items, for presentations, filming and organizing the groupings for the next item. Originally in support materials and the support book the format suggested as a guideline was 10-12 hours of preparation and exploration time with the teacher before starting the 10 (+2) hours of controlled assessment. However experience shows that as the actual controlled assessment in this unit is exploratory, you could, if you wish do just a couple of hours preparation and then launch into Item 1. Experimenting and trying ideas is what the unit is about. Also the timings suggested for each Item can be revised, 3-4 hours is plenty for Item 1. If the candidates get longer they start polishing for performance, which leads them away from the focus of the unit. It also gives a little longer for the next two Items.

It has also become apparent there can be logistical problems with filming all the Items. From this first run it is evident that there may not be a need to film all of the Items 2 and 3 if appropriate. If a candidate is writing a script, or designing costumes their evidence can be with their Working Records. However bear in mind presentations have opened up new avenues for learning and achievement, many candidates can enhance their Working Record mark, as they talk better than they write. Centres can decide what is best to suit their situation and candidates. The bottom line is each item has some evidence, filmed, written or a combination. One centre only filmed Item 1, both the other items were with the Working Record and this was acceptable.

NOTE:

For next year centres should submit for moderation a maximum of two filmed items: Item 1 and either Item 2 or 3, plus the Working Record which charts all three items. In some cases where Items 2 and 3 are presented in the Working Record, for example a script(s) and/or designs then there will only be Item 1 filmed. Centres can if they wish continue to film presentations as part of the Working Record, where this benefits candidates. Centres can also film items as part of their own internal assessment. This will decrease the burden of recording and presenting evidence for centres.

A583 From Concept to Creation

In this inaugural year of the examination, in its new format, Centres are to be congratulated on embracing the new challenges with only a few hitches. Examiners were most complimentary about the quality of the work presented for examination. The majority of centres conducted the examination in facilities/conditions that enabled candidates to demonstrate their ability at their optimum level. Centres were generally organised and had prepared well for the examination. There were however centres where conditions/facilities were not conducive to candidates taking an examination, extraneous noise was a particular concern.

It was evident that most candidates were enthusiastic about their work and had found the experience enjoyable and rewarding. Centres commented favourably on the suitability of the text extract and stimulus item. With the introduction of solo work, Centres are advised to consider the implications in relation to the overall time needed to conduct the examination.

Some Centres did not fully complete the GITA forms. These are an essential aid to identifying candidates and must be completed. Also some Centres did not chapter their DVDs – the specification requires this to be done.

The Briefs

Performer Brief (text extract)

Some highly imaginative performances of excerpts from the script were seen. One issue raised by this brief was that some candidates were so pre-occupied with remembering lines that their performance was inhibited preventing them from giving a fluent performance. Some candidates very imaginatively incorporated dance and movement into their pieces; however some overdid this using the text as a framework rather than the actual focus of the work. Many candidates utilised simple costumes, masks and properties to great effect, others used little, putting the focus on the actor and the words alone. Incorporating design elements is commendable; however candidates need to ensure that they do not devote a disproportionate amount of time to these elements. Some excellent staging ideas were seen.

Performer Brief (devised)

Those candidates using the text as a stimulus either improvising around its narrative or exploring its themes produced some interesting results: setting the story in 1920s Chicago, a solo comic retelling the story with a hat, property, mask for each character. The themes of dreams and nightmares also resonated strongly with many candidates. Some of the best candidates created an interesting blend of both ancient and modern styles.

Candidates exploring the Kimberley Mays story fell into two categories: those who used the material fairly faithfully and those who used it as a starting point. Generally, the first tended to adopt a naturalistic style, which took the article literally and tried to create a truthful representation. They chose not to explore beyond the given in any depth, although it was often clear from the Working Records that the candidates understood the inherent dilemmas from different points of view.

Candidates who used the story as a starting point explored themes such as identity, betrayal and mental illness and tended to use a wider variety of styles and conventions. However, centres are advised to ensure that candidates make connections between the work produced and the stimulus material – in some cases the Working Records were unhelpful in this respect. In a few isolated cases examiners reported that candidates appeared to be reprising work that they had done earlier in the course.

Examiners noted that candidates tended to have the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities better when working in smaller groups, it was sometimes hard for groups of six to all have an opportunity to demonstrate their skills fully. Candidates choosing to work in smaller groupings seemed to focus on the language and setting of their pieces – there was some exceptional work seen here. However there were also instances of individual candidates 'under-performing' because they were nervous. Monologues proved to be particularly difficult for some candidates in terms of both too little time on stage and confidence. Centres should encourage candidates to make choices based on their strengths.

Deviser Brief

Those candidates who chose this option generally achieved highly. Examiners reported many examples of scripts, which were highly imaginative, well written and had great potential to be staged. The selection and command of language was frequently impressive.

Less successful candidates tended towards the stereotypical and lacked discrimination regarding what to cut and what to leave in. An understanding of editing and the use of stage directions are key skills for this brief.

Designer Brief

There were some very strong submissions, but unlike the Deviser Brief there was a far wider range of responses, with more candidates scoring in the lower mark bands. A significant number of Candidates failed to develop or communicate a design concept, they designed in a disconnected way. It is vital candidates understand their design ideas are judged in relation to their overall design concept. The presentation of work varied greatly. There were some outstanding notebooks presented. Some candidates had made costumes and properties – this is not a requirement and takes up valuable time, which could be better spent on the Working record and creating the designs – others produced a few pages of rough notes/drawings, which were not unified in any way. The use of computer generated designs were used successfully by some candidates, however candidates must remember at all times they are designing for the stage. Any designs must be practical and fit for purpose.

It was impressive how the best responses covered the three areas, which gave an overall sense of how the production might appear on stage. The most common areas covered were costume, make-up, set and properties. However there were some engaging alternatives for example some candidates with musical skills composed motifs for the Gods or to create a specific atmosphere. Weaker candidates struggled to cover three areas with any degree of parity – detailed costume and make-up designs coupled with a cursory ground plan were quite common.

Presentation

The use of presentations provides a new element within the specification. A number of candidates rose to the challenge of this, working with great skill and using the format to demonstrate their strong subject knowledge. Candidates at such centres had been encouraged to see the presentations as a positive opportunity to take the examiner through their design process. At the other end of the spectrum some candidates approached this aspect as an ordeal rather than an opportunity to explain their work to the examiner.

Working Records

There were a variety of styles seen by examiners. The most successful Working Records were those in which the candidates covered all areas of study effectively. There were some extremes of approach – one Centre had used five hours to write the Working Records, another had used only the hour after the dress rehearsal. There was a tendency for Working Records to be overloaded with material from the preparation period. Only work generated during the

examination should be used. There is one hour prior to the ten hours for candidates to outline their intentions and thoughts and one hour after the ten hours for an evaluation, completed after the dress rehearsal and before the examiner's visit. In total candidates have 12 hours of examination.

It was apparent that a number of Centres had taken advantage of the 1 hour following the dress rehearsal which resulted in candidates producing well thought out evaluations. These included reflection on their own work and audience response to their dress rehearsal. It seemed as if some centres had not provided this opportunity, in such cases evaluation seemed to be neglected being too generalised and lacking specifics.

Some centres did not appear to have used the additional instructions in the brief relating to the Working Records of those candidates choosing the Designer and Deviser Briefs. This pointed out that these candidates need to produce a Working Record separate from their Designs or Script. Please note these specific instructions carefully when you receive next year's paper.

NOTE: the specification states 'Candidates must produce an individual working record...' page 34 of the specification. Centres providing writing frames could be seen to compromise this requirement in an examination context. Also experience shows they do not serve the able candidate well and rely for their success on the skill of the teacher in devising them. Instructions and guidance in the Working Record section of the brief provide appropriate structure for the content of the Working Record.

Despite some teething problems in individual Centres the examination was most successful with candidates having the opportunity to develop their skills in areas other than performance. Centres are to be congratulated on a most successful year.

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