

OCR Report to Centres

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J315/R/12J

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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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A581 From Page to Stage

Administration

Most centres met the required deadline and sent the relevant paperwork and evidence required for moderation.

The majority of Centres supplied DVD's which not only were compatible with 'Windows Media' but had been clearly chaptered and supplemented with the new completed running order. These Centres had further checked their DVD's to ensure that they had been correctly 'burnt' or formatted for ease of viewing. Several Centres which supplied DVD's which were not compatible with 'Windows Media' aided moderation by advising moderators which programme would allow access to the DVD's .

Where centres had encouraged candidates to speak slowly and clearly when giving their name, candidate number and character name/s to camera immediately prior to their performance this aided the identification process, as did the wearing of appropriate costume rather than school uniform. Clear chaptering of groups on the DVD was also very helpful.

The most successful DVDs were achieved by those Centres who had placed the camera in a static position in front of the audience. These Centres had checked that the stage lighting was used to good effect not only enhancing the work but allowing all candidates to be observed clearly throughout the extract. Further attention had also been given to the audibility of all the candidates for moderation. This attention to detail enabled moderators to identify, observe and track candidates throughout their chosen extracts.

Those candidates who did not exceed the time limit consistently were more able to maintain their focus, character and context than those who exceeded the stipulated time limit of ten minutes maximum.

Performance outcomes

Centres continued to offer a wide range of challenging and engaging texts. Moderators observed some mature performances of 'The Crucible' by Arthur Miller, imaginative performances of 'The Arabian Nights' adapted by Dominic Cooke and a compelling approach to 'Find Me' by Olwen Wymark. Where centres had chosen the text with care to suit the candidate's age, ability and the Centre's performance space and technical facilities, some excellent performances were observed. Those Centres who had entered candidates for the past two years were mindful of changing the text they offered as stipulated in the specification. Those centres who were entering candidates for a re-sit were also mindful of offering a new text for the moderation of the re-sit.

Moderators observed that in the main candidates had a good grasp of their chosen genre and style. In many Centres the preparation time had been used to good effect to explore the author's intentions and the overall context of the script. Many candidates continued to compliment their extracts with a pertinent use of props, costumes, lighting and sound. These design decisions not only helped to reinforce the context and in some cases the author's intentions but they also provided strong semiotics for the audience.

Whilst it is appreciated that Centres where two or more Drama teachers are delivering the course undertake internal standardisation, moderators found it very helpful to have the evidence and outcome of such standardisation as part of the provided evidence.

Working Records

The most successful records were those that were clearly divided into three sections. This clear division allowed moderators to understand ‘the journey’ that the candidates had taken to put the text into the performance space. Moderators observed that some Centres continued to use writing frames, this not only restricted the high achieving candidates but it is a regulatory requirement (across all examination boards) that writing frames may not be used for controlled assessments.

Moderators observed that the first section of the Working Records generally showed that candidates had a clear understanding of the author’s intention and the themes, issues and context of the script. However, whilst candidates may choose to copy and repeat information found during their research on the internet or in books, moderators are interested in the candidate’s own response, thought’s and understanding of the text. With reference to the role of the actor, director and designer,

The second section of the Working Record was used by many candidates to discuss the key decisions made by the group and themselves during the rehearsal period/controlled assessment. Candidates discussed the use and direction of their performance skills in relation to building their character and context and putting the role successfully in the performance space. Some candidates referenced various theatrical practitioners in their pursuit of their role. Where candidates clearly understood the work and ideas of the practitioner and were able to write with clarity, this evidence helped to enhance the candidate’s understanding of the dramatic process and product. Moderators observed that those candidates who adopted ‘a diary’ approach to this section of the Working Record tended to be side tracked into focusing on the group dynamics and working ethos rather than the demands of the text.

Candidates approach to the final evaluation section saw them reviewing their own work and that of another whilst acknowledging the audiences’ response. However moderators commented that candidates struggled to find the appropriate terminology or language to express themselves with clarity when evaluating and reviewing. Centres may wish to consider how to incorporate the skills of reflection, reviewing and evaluation into their schemes of work or preparation time prior to the controlled assessment to help candidates to express themselves with greater clarity and understanding.

Moderators commented that the majority of candidates had been well prepared for the demands of this unit. Candidate’s confident, enthusiastic and imaginative approach was all credit to the professionalism of the Centres.

A582 Drama in the Making

Only a small number of centres submitted work for this series. There was generally an increased engagement with the distinctive features of the unit, with most candidates conducting a dramatic investigation. A wider variety of approaches were evident and there were some strong improvised ideas tested. There is still a tendency not to give full reign to the exploratory aspects that the unit seeks to facilitate. Some candidates appear to have the mindset that they need to create a finished polished product rather than test ideas. This is noticeable in the Working Records where the majority of candidates focus very exclusively on how a scene was performed and not on the potential qualities it has as a script. Of course performance aspects are relevant, but they are not the complete story in this unit. The Area of Study Improvisation is very much to the fore in this unit.

In relation to performance aspects, it might help candidates if in this unit they reflect on how the improvisation works for the actor. How do the words 'flow' from the mouth? Does the situation engage you/create tension and give a 'buzz' when you perform it? How interesting is the character to play? What has the scenario got going for it? Candidates will also reflect on how the audience might receive the material, not in terms of how well they acted it (the ideas/script could be given to professional actors who would act it very well), but in terms of is that an interesting situation? Does that performance style showcase the material/theme to best effect?

Most of the feedback seen in this series was almost exclusively focused on how candidates acted the scenes. This was particularly the case when fellow students gave feedback after a performance. Centres perhaps need to provide candidates with broader set of reflective references to use for this unit.

There is a specific set of subject knowledge and terminology that is needed 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.

Some candidates tend to rely too much on an uncritical use of the drama conventions and seem to think that putting a convention in a scene is automatically a positive. The fact that some of the drama conventions aren't theatre conventions is not recognised by candidates. This leads to interpretations, which are not strictly applicable to a performed play. For example a candidate stated, "*We are going to put a conscience alley in our scene*". Whilst 'conscience alley' is a useful drama teaching strategy, what the candidate was actually edging towards was using the established theatre convention of Good Angel, Bad Angel. This can be as in Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, where it is a metaphysical scenario; the script has actual devils and angels making appearances. Or if it is to be a naturalistic scene then the deviser has to create a scenario whereby two characters, giving alternative views, 'counsel' the protagonist. In terms of this unit creating such a single scene and creating believable, engaging solutions for all the possibilities it throws up is enough to cover for Item 1.

Many Item 1s were attempts at a complete play, with several scenes, an extended plot, set, costume and lights. It is almost as if candidates are doing a cut down version of Concept to Creation. This is not to say the work was not of a good standard, it often was, but it meant candidates did not give enough focus to the potential of the material to make a play. If candidates are not pulled back from this, they don't give themselves the opportunities to reflect on the quality of the actual content and the focus can be totally on polishing an idea. It can at its best become a triumph of style over substance. In this unit the aim is to develop their devising skills to complement performance skills emphasised in Page to Stage.

Moderators noted that groups of six make it harder for all candidates to make a full contribution; invariably candidates did better when in smaller groups of no more than four.

OCR is in the process of completing a new DVD for centres showing this unit being delivered (it compliments the already existing OCR DVD) and for Item 1 candidates had to try out practically at least two different ideas. This stopped them fixing straight away on one idea and then spending all their time polishing it and failing to give enough consideration to whether the material justified being polished. Or whether there was a better alternative.

This having been said it was apparent a number of centres were becoming more relaxed about presenting an improvisation and using the Working Record to reflect on the potential of the idea(s). The Working Record is a key element in the candidates thinking process, complementing each Item as well as being marked in its own right. Again in the new OCR DVD of this unit, it is worth noting how the workspace is set out. There are work stations set out around the studio (desks, paper, pens, glue etc) and as the students work on the items they move between time in the space and time at the work station as needed. In terms of semiotics, the work stations give a signal to the students about the requirements of the unit.

Working Records showed a marked improvement from the earlier sessions. However advice from previous sessions is reiterated. Moderators reported it would be helpful if all candidates made sure they acknowledged what the starting stimulus was in the first section of their working record. It would also be helpful if the teacher very briefly explain the stimulus used and if practical provide a copy. This would from the outset make it easier for moderators to follow a candidate's lines of thought.

The Working Record is an ongoing reflection on the potential of the stimulus to be made into a play. Candidates have an hour before they start the 10 hours to outline any background and what potential ideas they have before they start the investigation, this can be headed Introduction. There were some excellent Introductions, but some centres missed this section. There then follows 3 clearly separated sections one for each Item. It was rare that centres did this. Each item is evaluated individually in these sections. 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 this 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. Very few candidates fully developed this final evaluation neglecting to consider the potential of the stimulus to be turned into a play. Perhaps many thought they had already done this, for reasons given earlier. There is no need to repeat the evaluations of the individual items. Many candidates comment in general terms 'I've worked hard and improved' and have little real 'hard' reflection. This of course is a key discriminator singling out candidates in the top two bands, Accomplished and Skilful.

Please note, in accordance with controlled assessment regulations across all examination boards, the use of writing frames (eg defined questions and spaces for responses) are not permitted and should not be used. Centres are reminded that any DVD presentations by candidates, are credited as Working Records, everything does not have to be written.

Moderators, as in previous sessions, commented on the quality of monologues, soliloquys and duologues, which generally allowed candidates to demonstrate their ability well. (One point, many candidates do not appear to know the distinction between a monologue and a soliloquy.) There were some very strong design offerings, but generally this area was not so consistently well tackled. Moderators noted it was rare for candidates to use standard conventions for presenting such design work, for example ground plans, sound cue sheets. The candidates that did use them generally stood out.

Stimulus material used by centres was largely based on social issues:

- racism, bullying, mental health
- a photograph of young people with flowers gathered around the spot where a friend was killed
- song lyrics were used, the Elvis Costello song ‘Let Him Dangle’ miscarriages of justice and the death penalty; The Clash’s ‘London Calling’ taking the theme of the social strife at the time
- paintings by Dali and Magritte
- groups selecting their own theme , each working group had their own topic
- scripts and films.

Where centres chose a script or film to use as a stimulus there is a problem in that the script has already been crafted and so in many ways it takes away the chance from them to create their own contexts. The point of this unit is to move a step back to the point where there is no script, just an area/a theme/account that could be turned into a play. The unit investigates whether the stimulus has good potential or not. If the play is already in existence then the question is answered before you start.

The DVD evidence was much improved as centres are obviously becoming conversant with efficient ways of doing this. There are ways of chaptering as you film and advice on this can be sought, it saves a lot of work. The paper running orders were very much appreciated by moderators and this made the whole process of identifying candidates much easier. However, candidates still need to identify themselves at the start of each item. This must be done slowly and clearly, take a long time doing it, big pauses. If candidates can't do this clearly then the teacher can call out the names and numbers. Basically centres need to put themselves into the moderators shoes, what would I need if I didn't know any of these candidates and what is the easiest way to navigate to the sampled candidates?

It is helpful to have as few discs as possible, three; one for each item is a very clear way of organising it for the moderators. And each needs to be clearly marked. Lots of Quick Time files leads to a long process of opening up a large number of files, which adds a considerable time element to the process. Discs are certainly the most efficient format for the moderators. However it was obvious that many centres had gone to a lot of effort to present the evidence thoroughly and efficiently.

Where there is more than one teacher delivering the unit at a centre, moderators emphasised the importance of internal moderation. The centre rank order needs to have been rigorously cross-checked by the teachers involved.

Finally moderators observed there was a sense candidates were using the unit to broaden their drama knowledge and skills. Also there was evidence of more candidates going out of their comfort zone and embracing the concept that when creating not everything is perfect and polished. The artistic process is messy and full of ideas that fail, or are put aside. This unit is about stirring ideas around and getting as far as you get in the time. After the three experiments you are in a position to move forward and create a play or decide that the stimulus needs change/adaptation.

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