

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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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)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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Chief Examiner's Introduction

The work submitted for the three units once again demonstrated the quality of the drama being produced and the wide variety of skills the specification enables candidates to demonstrate. A good number of candidates are taking the opportunity to develop all elements, performance, devising and technical knowledge/skills. An increasing number of candidates are not always taking the 'line of least resistance', but are being adventurous and exploring possibilities, thereby stretching their points of dramatic reference. This was well demonstrated this year in A583 where many candidates embraced the performance possibilities offered by Kabuki and Noh theatre. There were some very high quality outcomes offered as evidence in each unit. It was also pleasing to note the ambition of candidates in the lower assessment bands, who often produced sound and creditable work. The two controlled assessment units have the potential to prepare candidates well for the challenges of the examined unit and this is feeding through into what candidates offer for the examiners.

Working Records (WRs) continue to improve as candidates incorporate them into their working process. However there are still a significant number of candidates who produce very cursory documents, which do not correspond to their achievement on the practical aspects. This obviously impacts on their final grades.

Once again centres are reminded of the inappropriateness of providing writing frames. Moderator's feedback identified that such writing frames do not lead to stronger work in fact the reverse is true. Reference to JCQ regulations make it clear such writing frames are not permissible either for the examination or controlled assessment.

The individual unit reports once again draw attention to the submission of evidence on DVD; centres are asked to assimilate and **act on** this feedback, as this is an integral part of the assessment process. Centres also need to be clear that time allocations for the work should be adhered to and no work should be taken home or completed in unsupervised conditions, as such breeches constitute malpractice. As does candidates handing in the same work for WRs. If groups create any joint sections for the WRs, which can be useful as part of the working process, only one copy should be made and given as an addition for the whole group. It will be for background information only. The teacher should highlight that this work did not form part of the assessment and is not credited as part of the WR mark for any candidate.

Alongside the reports for each of the three units below, each centre receives an individual report for each unit. It is important that these reports reach the staff delivering the specification; once again moderators have expressed a concern that these reports may not be reaching relevant staff in some centres. The same points regarding misconceptions are being repeated for some centres.

Again this year attention is also drawn to the need for rigorous cross-moderation where more than one teacher operates at a centre. The centre must be confident that there is one reliable rank order being sub-mitted for A581 and A582. It would be good practice and helpful to moderators for centres to document these cross-moderations and submit the decisions made with the sample sent to the moderator.

The work seen this session is yet again a strong testament to the value of Drama in the education of young people and a tribute to the excellent work being done by candidates and centres in a wide range of contexts.

A581 From Page to Stage

ADMINISTRATION

Centres who had spent time and effort preparing the sample aided the moderation process. Such centres provided the moderator with all the required paperwork which would seem to have been 'double checked' to ensure that the recording of marks was accurate. Where there was more than one teacher delivering the specification the centre had provided evidence of internal moderation and an apposite rank order. The centre Assessment Forms had been completed with sufficient pertinent detail and that combined with the detailed annotation and comments within the Working Records allowed the moderator to ascertain and understand 'how' and 'why' marks have been awarded.

THE DVD

Those centres which had checked the quality and content of their DVDs to ensure that all the candidates in the sample could be identified and tracked with ease really helped the moderation process. Best practice included placards held up by the candidates with their candidate numbers on, or screen captions against the assessed candidates, such candidates also spoke very slowly and clearly to the camera when reiterating their name and candidate number and the role(s) they were playing. The centre had also ensured that the candidates were well lit during this process, filmed in focus and 'close up' whilst wearing their costume. Particularly helpful were those centres who had clearly checked the formatting and sound quality of their DVD prior to posting and further advised moderators as to the best mode of viewing, whether that was PC or TV. Effective and detailed running orders helped the efficiency of the moderation process.

Centres that produced the best DVDs allowed all the candidates to be clearly seen, in focus and close up, as appropriate throughout the extracts. Centres had also ensured that all candidates knew how to 'find the light'. Where candidates had used light to provide atmosphere and effect centres had ensured that candidates could still be clearly identified. They had also ensured that sound quality was excellent and therefore all candidates could be heard as appropriate throughout the performance.

PERFORMANCE

Moderators felt that the majority of centres had spent time preparing their candidates through tailored workshops on their chosen texts to good effect. However it is not a requirement for candidates to detail the exploration and workshop period within their Working Records.

Moderators were encouraged by the range of diverse texts which centres had chosen including:-

Arturo Ui	Bertolt Brecht
Arabian Nights	Dominic Cooke
DNA	Dennis Kelly
Oedipus	Sophocles
The Last Laugh	Ben Payne
Mugged	Andrew Payne
Romeo & Juliet	Shakespeare
Midsummer Night's Dream	Shakespeare

Extracts had generally been chosen with care to fulfil the candidate's potential and the majority of centres adhered to the specification requirements regarding group size and time allocation. Although some groups did go beyond the ten minute maximum performance time and some monologues were too short being well under three minutes in length.

Moderators noted candidates challenging the use of a range of performance spaces including :- traverse, proscenium arch, in the round, thrust and by far the most popular, studio space. Most candidates had a good understanding of how to use and exploit their chosen space. Groups who chose a simplistic approach made good use of rostra and key pieces of furniture to provide context for an audience. Such groups therefore avoided lengthy scene changes and blackouts which greatly aided the continuity for the audience.

Costume had generally been selected with care to enhance character by many candidates. Sound and music had been thoughtfully chosen by some groups to provide atmosphere and reinforce themes and issues. Most groups had clear intentions for an audience and pointed moments of tension using a combination of semiotics to good effect.

The time spent in dedicated workshops prior to the controlled assessment had enabled candidates to research and develop their understanding of characters, contexts and relationships, such understanding when combined with apt vocal modulation and physicalisation led to well developed and focused characterisations and acting which demanded the audiences' attention.

It should be stressed that it is not a requirement for candidates to study the work of a theatre practitioner as part of the unit. However, those centres who had fully understood and embraced the ideas of theatre practitioners to underpin the genre and style of their extracts whilst staying true to the playwright's intentions were acknowledged positively by moderators. One centre truly exploited the themes of 'Oedipus' using the ideas of Artaud and Berkoff within their performances to very good effect. Much cited was the work of Stanislavski which had helped candidates to fully embrace the demands of their roles and thereby provide 'truthful' performances with candidates clearly 'in the moment'. Less successful was the use of Brecht as a practitioner. In the main candidates struggled and had an underdeveloped understanding of his ideas and how to implement them.

WORKING RECORD

The most successful Working Records continue to be clearly divided into THREE sections. The first section completed in the hour before the start of the 10 hour controlled assessment contained evidence of research into the Social, Cultural and Historical background of the text. There was cognition of the distinction between genre and style. Insightful understanding of the playwright's intentions and the candidate's initial ideas for the development of the extract/role in performance were discussed in full.

The second section of the Working Record which had been completed during the controlled assessment charted the development of the extract and the candidate's chosen role within the performance space. Discussing, justifying, analysing and evaluating the process with reference to the role of the director, designer but most importantly the actor. Candidates who reflected on the work of particular practitioners to underpin their ideas, were most successful when they went beyond reiterating 'well worn theories' to explain exactly 'HOW' they would use such theories to develop their role / extract within the performance space. The 'diary' approach adopted by several centres was only fully effective when candidates avoided the repetition of bland statements about the social health of the group and descriptions of simple working practice and rehearsal. Such approaches lacked the required depth of analysis as to 'why', key decisions had been made and 'how,' they were to be implemented, developed and realised.

The final section of the most successful Working Records were completed after the ten hours controlled assessment and therefore the performance, these contained detailed evaluation of the candidate's own performance and that of another, the performances were thoroughly discussed and analysed with particular regard to acting skills. Due reflection and analysis on the audience response concluded this section.

Those centres who chose to produce the Working Record in one 'sitting' did not fully appreciate the ethos of such a document, the charting of the journey and the progression that the candidate makes through the unit was underdeveloped and not fully explored. Some candidates even failed to mention the character they were playing.

Please be aware that writing frames are **NOT** permissible within any controlled assessment.

Centres that had duly reflected on the demands of the marking criteria and applied the scheme with rigour required little moderation and were to be commended for their realistic upholding of the standard.

In conclusion moderators continue to praise the enthusiasm that centres engender for the subject amongst the candidates.

A582 Drama in the Making

Below are some comments made by moderators in their feedback to the Principal Moderator.

'All in all I really enjoyed looking at the work and it was a privilege to be able to see so much imaginative, inventive and committed drama work being done. A good proportion of the work I saw was genuinely affecting and, after three weeks solid of trawling through video material and reading candidates' accounts of their work, I think that says a lot about the power of the medium.'

'The general standard and organisation of the centres this year has been the best so far. There are still some hiccups with administration, organisation of paperwork and DVDs but generally they are far better and much easier to negotiate.'

'In the main the standard of work was much improved on previous sessions. More centres seemed to have grasped the ethos of the unit and although some of the Item 1s were a little 'over polished' the message does seem to be getting through that the emphasis is on work in progress, a drama investigation.'

These comments reflect well on the quality of the outcomes being achieved by candidates and the care centres take to present the work to its best advantage. Moderators did identify an increasing number of centres embracing the distinctive features of the unit, with most candidates conducting a dramatic investigation. There are still a significant number of centres that appear to think Item 1 has to be a finished polished product rather than an improvised scene that tests some initial ideas. Advice on this issues appears later in this report.

The stimuli used by centres covered a wide variety of themes, formats and mediums. The vast majority of these were totally appropriate; however, a few centres used a play as the stimulus. This is not appropriate as the purpose of the unit is to devise their own work; an already developed script takes away the candidates opportunity to select themes, characters, plot and genre of their own. The type of material that is suitable is as offered to candidates as a **stimulus** on the examination paper, A583.

The presentation of evidence on the DVDs was much improved although there are still a significant number of centres that ignore instructions given in previous reports. These requirements are repeated later under the section on DVDs, please check that your centre is working to these instructions. A moderator's observation on this issue was:

'The best DVDs were shot from a good position and were chaptered. Each group or candidate was clearly identified in the chapter menu at the beginning so you could go to the right candidates, either by group, name/number in the menu or by the accompanying paper running order. There was always an accompanying paper Performance Running Order sheet (PRO/A582). The identifications were best when the candidates held a placard with their name/number on or it was on the computer screen below each candidate as they delivered the information. Unfortunately there are still some centres that put all the work on a un-chaptered disc and you have to scroll through trying to find the right candidate and item. Some centres do not even try to make a Standard DVD, but merely include raw video footage files on a Data DVD, files that not every moderator can read on their computers or they have to spend time searching for players, which will play the files. This is very time consuming and can be a bit hit and miss.'

What are some of the common features seen in the centres that are producing strong work in this unit?

- Item 1 is the start of an investigation into the potential of the stimulus material, rather than concentrating on rehearsing scenes for as fully realised performance as possible - the unit is **not** another version of Page to Stage. The implication is candidates have not worked it all out in the preparation period and with the start of controlled assessment they investigate rather than rehearse and polish an already fixed idea. The candidates are not trying to do the whole unit in one Item.
- There are no stage lights or elaborate semiotics (sound, costume and make-up) used in Item 1. It is an improvisation that concentrates on establishing a strong context, a possible plot line, characters and possible tensions. (Semiotics if relevant can be addressed as part of Items 2 or 3). Stage lights invariably burn out faces, blackouts stop you tracking candidates and necessitate the camera re-focusing, and in virtually all cases seen the lights had not been rigged for the performance so were very random.
- Allowing the candidates the autonomy to conduct their own investigation which evolves as they progress through the items. This contrast with centres where the items are obviously prescribed e.g. every candidate does a monologue for Item 2 and every candidate does Design for Item 3. As part of controlled assessment candidates should make their own choices.
- No writing frames or booklets for the Working Record (WR) – they are not permissible. Candidates need to chart their own individual record of their investigation and come to their own decisions as to what is important. Only in this way can they access the higher mark bands. Answering set questions is classified as prescription (See Footnote). Candidates using such frames are not producing the same quality of WRs as candidates who make their own individual responses. Candidates making an individual response tend to demonstrate the 'journey' they have taken more effectively than those 'shackled' by a pre-set format.
- Ensuring candidates have been giving a minimum 'kit bag' of information during the course to tackle Design Items should they choose to, e.g. ground plans, how design sheets for costume/set/make-up are presented, how lighting and sound cues are set out in a prompt copy.
- Ensuring during the course the candidates are introduced to devising subject knowledge and skills as well as the performance ones.
- If already completed, using the Page to Stage text (and/or others used during the course) to reflect how the playwright structured their work, the scripting conventions used, the function of the characters, the use of language, how tension was created, the exposition, the denouement etc. This prior knowledge is referenced in the WR.
- Presenting the evidence in one **chaptered DVD** (or 3 if using a separate DVD for each Item). **Do not** present it in MPEG, AVI, Quick Time folders or other formats that have not been turned into a DVD. The fact that it is on a disc does not make it a DVD.

What are the common features of strong candidates in the unit?

- In Item 1 giving due emphasis to the context, character and purpose of the scene, shown through one extended scene rather than multiple scenes (ask candidates to limit the work to 2 scenes maximum and no more than 4–5 minutes). This is demonstrated both on DVD and WR. Candidates have not spent all their time 'rehearsing' the same situation over and over again or spent time adding semiotics, but will have spent time considering the potential of the scene to contribute to a fuller play. They will be striving to find an engaging and meaningful context that has some resonance with the stimulus. They often try at minimum two completely different scenes, and select one to film. The WR lists the possibilities considered. Candidates look to find a good context, good characters, and possible tension/exposition. If these factors are sound candidates don't need much rehearsal time to demonstrate strong performance work. It is an improvisation that illustrates the potential of the script.
- The WR charts their journey and struggle to create each Item and you are informed why the candidates selected Item 2 and finally Item 3.

- Good subject vocabulary and knowledge percolate and inform both performance and WR, which includes both **devising** and performance aspects
- The WR is not general and descriptive of what was done, but concentrates on specifics, the intent, what was rejected, what chosen, reasons for decisions and reflects on how and why things work or don't. At each stage i.e. after each Item the candidate evaluates potential.
- Items 2 and 3 show clear development from Item 1 or alternatively try a new line of attack if Item 1 was not satisfactory – they dare to ditch a poor initial idea.
- The WR is an individual interpretation not a set format.
- The Final Evaluation is not a re-cap of the three items but a final assessment of the potential of the stimulus to make an engaging play. It is at this point that candidates can utilise the areas of study, what might be a good genre, performance style, and audience for such a play?

Areas of feedback that could help centres with future cohorts are:

The 3 items are part of an investigative process.

- The emphasis for the Items is workshop mode, i.e. no stage lights and minimum semiotics. Experience for this unit has demonstrated this is the best way to present candidates work. The focus is then totally on the content and the performer.
- Do not try to make Item 1 a complete play in its own right, with multiple scenes. The candidates are not expected to have produced a completely coherent play or idea for a play by the end of the unit. They have tested some ideas and in the Final Evaluation consider the potential of the stimulus to make a play and give their ideas on plot, structure, design, genre, performance style and audience. It will be good preparation for candidates who tackle Performer (Devised) option in A583.
- Items 2 and 3 evolve from the work done in Item 1 taking the investigation further, other potential scenes, script, characters or design ideas.

The Working Record.

- For the WR adopt these **five** headings to store work under. Introduction, Item 1, Item 2, Item 3 and Final Evaluation. Number the pages.
- There is one hour allowed for the Introduction prior to the start of the 10 hours. Not all centres appear to be using this. This should not be an account of what was done in the Preparation time with the teacher. That is not part of controlled assessment and is not assessed, so only selected knowledge for use is relevant. The Introduction is a time for individuals to record their ideas and thoughts on how the stimulus might be turned into a play. For instance a list of some possible scenarios, characters, tensions, themes that could be explored. Useful resource material identified that could be incorporated (possibly encountered during the preparation time). This is not going to be a 'neat' well-developed section, in many ways it is likely to be quite 'unstructured' and lack definition at this stage, as they're only just starting on the investigation. It gives the candidates ideas to take into their Item 1 group. As candidates progress through the 3 items the WR is likely to become more focused and definite.
- Each of the 3 Items has its own section in the WR, and each of these sections has some evaluation. One of these evaluations or the Final Evaluation must have an evaluation of another candidate/or group's idea.
- If candidates are writing a script or designing for one of their Items, the actual scripts and designs are assessed as part of AO2. This does not form part of their WR mark, they will have separate accompanying notes/evaluation on the item in the WR. **For centre and moderator clarity it would help if these items were kept as separate items from the WR.** This would help centre clarity in awarding the mark for the WR.

- There is one hour for Final Evaluations after the completion of the 10 hours. The candidate Final Evaluation is **not a re-cap**. Once candidates have completed their 'research' by completing the 3 Items, they reflect on the potential of the stimulus to make a good play. For instance what are the best audience, genre, and performance style? What strong characters and tensions have been identified that could be included? It is permissible to include the ideas of other candidates that have been observed with source acknowledged. This moves on from what they have done, to how they would develop it and is it worth developing. They will have already evaluated each individual Item as they completed them.
- Any filmed presentations are part of the WR.
- The 'art book' approach, sticking bits here and there creating an artistic look, wastes vital candidate time and is invariably detrimental to the purpose and focus of the WR. There is no credit given for 'artistic presentation' in the mark scheme.

The DVD.

- Prepare the evidence in an efficient user-friendly way for the Moderator. It is in the interests of the candidates to do this well. The DVD is a vital part of this, as well as being **chaptered** each Item needs a candidate **identity parade** with name and candidate number given. It has been established as good practice for each candidate to hold their number in front of them on an A4 card in large letters for the identity parade. Moderators must be able to hear or see a candidate's details; if necessary the teacher must speak them **clearly**. The DVD should be accompanied by a paper running order, available on the OCR website, PRO/A582 (Performance Running Order – for the purpose of recorded evidence).
- Please **do not** put sticky paper labels on DVDs as this can cause damage to devices in which they are played. DVDs should be marked with the correct marker pens.

Note: In future moderators will not spend the time they have been doing trying to rectify/solve the problems created by centres not providing a chaptered DVD, candidate identity parades and PRO/A582. The DVDs will be sent back to centres to be re-presented in an accessible format.

Administration.

- Only one Centre Authentication Form (CCS160) is needed per centre, not one for every candidate.
- The CCS160 and MS1 are sent to your Moderator separately from the sample materials, in most cases before the materials.
- For the WR bulky folders/sketch books should not be used and large items like mood boards, design sheets can be shown on the DVD, zooming in to take a good slow look.
- Please check the DVD plays and is **chaptered** before forwarding it. No files that have to be streamed down please.
- There is a need for rigorous cross-moderation where more than one teacher operates at a centre. The centre must be confident that there is one reliable rank order being sub-mitted for the centre. This should be documented and a copy sent with the sample to the moderator.

Moderators Noted

- Groups of six can make it harder for all candidates to make a full contribution so care is needed.
- Individuals should tackle that Design and Scriptwriting, not in groups.
- That monologues, soliloquys and duologues, generally allowed candidates to demonstrate their ability well.
- That few candidates consider devising Prologues or Epilogues, which is an alternative to monologues/duologues.

- That although there were some very strong design offerings, generally this area was not so consistently well tackled. It was rare for candidates to use standard conventions for presenting such design work, for example ground plans, sound/lighting cue sheets. The candidates that did use them generally stood out. Note candidates needed to be aware a mood board is not a completed design, but part of planning.
- It would be helpful if centres recorded the individual mark for Items 2 and 3 as well as the overall mark.
- The notes on Centre Assessment Forms are helpful when identifying where evidence is to be found, what the candidate is offering e.g. Performer, Deviser or Designer and how the mark scheme has been applied. Other comments are not relevant or helpful e.g. general comments like 'a very talented student', information such as 'A SEN student', 'A year 9 student', 'Attends drama classes outside school' etc.
- That centres should check filming has worked while they are doing the unit.
- All DVDs should be checked to confirm they are working and complete before being forwarded to the moderator. A paper running order PRO/A582 should accompany the DVD.

Moderators Comments.

Best Practice:

'Best moderating experiences came where it was clear that centres had acted on advice regarding the purpose of the unit and had had consciously taught their students with those principles in mind. This was evident in WRs which used expressions like "potential for development," and saw each item as potentially part of a much greater (and yet to be realised) artistic whole.'

'Some of the best Drama work happened where students had undertaken research and were able to use the results of that research in their drama.'

'It was helpful when centres included some information about the stimulus, or the "route" which candidates had taken, as part of the paperwork. Also, detailed filling in of the performance running order sheet, where teachers explained the roles candidates were playing, were a great aid to identification.'

'The stimuli were very varied and some were really exciting, the candidates could grasp ideas quickly and create far more engaging pieces of work. There were still a few centres that used quite safe stimulus, which created quite staid work, but these were the exception. The more successful centres provided engaging stimulus, additional teaching around practitioners and clear structured sessions on general devising to support the candidate's own investigations. On the whole centres grasped the idea of this being an investigation and most of the work was not more than 4–5 minutes long for a large group.'

'Candidates made good use of script writing conventions and context was generally clear. All scripts had either sprung from Item One or further explored the potential of the stimulus. Many were interesting to read and would have worked in the performance space. I really felt this option had improved. However some were still too short and over marked.'

'The best WRs were where candidates had grasped the idea of an investigative 'journey' and charted the exploration, giving their ideas and evaluating the potential for development. There was a real sense of reflection running throughout and an evaluation of their own and one other persons or group's idea was included. These records did not concentrate totally on the acting skills, but considered structure, plot and character.'

'There were some excellent WRs where it was easy to see how the candidates had developed their ideas. Many of the better candidates evaluated with perception throughout the process and it was clear to see how they had linked each of their items to the stimulus. It was also pleasing to see more candidates evaluating the work of another candidate or group. However, this evaluation still tends to concentrate on the performance rather than the potential of the work to be developed further.'

Areas for improvement:

'Use of stage lighting was often a hindrance to identification of candidates. A lot of "white-out" of faces, and a number of scenes filmed in such low light that it was difficult to identify who was doing what. One centre submitted a piece where an entire scene was played in blackout! Similarly, though less frequently, was the use of over-loud recorded sound, which sometimes drowned out what was being said.'

'Though a lot of the work was recorded in good conditions, a number of centres had to record their candidates' work in rooms which were not conducive to good recording: rooms with poor acoustics, such as sports halls, or classrooms next door to very noisy rooms, are not ideal for recording.'

'I felt that centres could benefit from following advice given in reports regarding the organisation of WRs. Some were very well organised, but a fair number were not. Problems included over-lengthy introductions, which recorded a lengthy teacher-led phase of drama lessons around the chosen theme and, more frequently, a failure to evaluate the potential of all three items. Too many Final Evaluations were either summings-up of the work done or a reflection on the student's own performance and what they wished they had done better, rather than evaluating the potential of the stimulus to be developed into a full play.'

'A fair few centres produced Item 1 pieces which were over-long. They tended to be the centres, which then did something very different for items 2 and 3, probably because they had exhausted the possibilities of item 1! It's really important in my view that centres are much more disciplined about this.'

'It is frustrating that some Centres are not taking on board the recommendations from previous Moderator reports or Principal Moderator's report. Looking back at Centre reports I have found myself and my team making the same comments.'

Examples of stimuli used by centres (the prevailing choices tended to shy away from the cheerful!)

Hillsborough Disaster

The Slave Trade – brought up to date with work on 'trafficking'

Match girl strike

Miner's strike

Forced migration of children to Australia from the 1930's

Columbine massacre

'Frankenstein'

Seven Deadly Sins

All the Worlds A Stage

Lyrics 'Beautiful Day' U2

'Leaving Home'

Manipulation

Addiction – focused on 'Nomo phobia' the dependency on social networks or mobile phones

Identity – this led to some very topical work on cyber bullying and Internet chat rooms.

Predictions

Image

Celebrity

Hate crimes

Virtual reality

Schools out for summer

Teenagers

Footnote:

*Joint Council For Qualification - document 'Instructions for conducting controlled assessment'
Page 6 4.5.2.*

*When marking the work tendered assessors must not give credit in regard to any additional assistance given to candidates beyond that which is described in the specification and must give details of any additional assistance on the appropriate record briefs e.g. could include:
(Fourth bullet point)*

- Providing writing frames specific to the task (e.g. outlines, paragraph headings or section headings);*

A583 From Concept to Creation

General

Once again Centres are to be congratulated on the smooth running of the examination. Most Centres visited provided, for examination, the full spectrum of ability for assessment. Examiners were most complimentary about the quality of the work presented for examination. Centres were organised and had prepared well for the examination. Facilities provided mostly allowed for the examination to be conducted under appropriate conditions. There are still some Centres where extraneous noise interferes with the examination. Centres are reminded that the examination should be conducted under examination conditions. It was evident that most candidates were enthusiastic about their work and had found the experience enjoyable and rewarding. Centres commented that the text extract provided an opportunity for candidates to widen their reference points in terms of genre and performance style and this came through both in terms of scripting and semiotics/design in the work. Some rather extra-ordinary work was seen by examiners in Centres where candidates had fully researched and explored the Japanese art forms of Kabuki and Noh.

Centres are coping well with the logistics of organizing the day. With four Briefs, which can involve group and solo Performers, plus Designer and Deviser presentations, this is most commendable. The practice adopted by some centres of using two spaces, one for performance and one for Designer and Deviser presentations, enables the Designer/Deviser candidates the opportunity to display their work should they wish to. The discreet space for the Devisers and Designers enables the timetable to run efficiently with a minimum of delay.

A few Centres did not fully complete the GITA forms. These are an essential aid to identifying candidates and must be completed before the commencement of the examination. The GITA forms should contain an estimation of the mark range the candidate falls into for both their presentation/performance and Working Records. Some Centres are still using “Competent”, “Skilful” etc. Some Centres did not chapter their DVDs – the specification requires this to be done. DVDs should be sent to the examiner within three days of the completion of the examination.

The Briefs

Performer Brief (text extract)

Some highly imaginative and creative performances of excerpts from the script were seen. The most successful candidates were those who had used costume, make-up, masks and a stage space appropriate to the style of the piece created a real sense of theatre and as a result the performances were beautiful to watch. It was clear that candidates who chose this brief did so because they had fully engaged with the genre and style of the text. The most popular section was the first part of the text dealing with the family and the causes of Minamata disease. There were some extremely effective interpretations of the final section of the text where candidates focused on the share-holders’ meeting. There were numerous instances of the script being used to excellent effect demonstrating sensitivity and subtlety to the text. Some excellent staging ideas were seen especially in relation to the use of the screens.

Performer Brief (devised)

Those candidates using the text as a stimulus either improvising around its narrative or exploring its themes produced some interesting results. There were many creative and interesting pieces which explored loss through Ioka's mother and father. Some candidates explored the themes of power, pollution and man-made and natural disasters with great creativity and flair. Many candidates chose to use narration and other elements of Kabuki theatre in their work. Candidates exploring the stimulus item created some exciting and stimulating work exploring the nature of paradise, the destruction of the natural world, Chernobyl, the conflict between indigenous peoples and those looking to make money from the riches of the land. Again most candidates embraced the style of the text using a narrator and ideas from Kabuki theatre even if they chose the stimulus item. 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. Some examiners are still reporting that candidates appeared to be reprising work that they had done earlier in the course or making very tenuous links to the material provided.

Where groups are up to the maximum of 6, candidates need to be sure each will have opportunity to demonstrate their ability. Some candidates preferred to work alone or in pairs and provided some outstanding performances. Candidates choosing to work in smaller groups seemed to focus on the language and setting of their pieces – there was some exceptional work seen here. Monologues tend to be particularly difficult for weaker candidates. Centres should encourage candidates to make choices based on their strengths. Centres are reminded that performances should be a maximum of ten minutes. Again this year examiners are reporting that some performances are extending to fifteen minutes and beyond. Few long performances are of the highest quality. The dress rehearsal should give centres the opportunity to ensure all performances are of the required length. This year saw some candidates produce pieces which required many scene changes punctuated by black-outs. This tends to diminish the flow of the piece and is to be avoided.

Examiners reported an increasing use of technology which, in the main, was used to enhance the performances. Clever and effective use of projection, lighting and sound was integral to many performances.

Deviser Brief

Examiners reported many examples of scripts which were highly imaginative, well written and eminently stageable. The selection and command of appropriate language was frequently impressive. There were very few candidates who did not produce a workable script. Those which were less successful had multiple scenes which were too short to develop character or theme and with rapidly changing locations. The brief asks for a scene to be written. There was a greater understanding of editing and the use of stage directions this year.

Designer Brief.

The most successful Design candidates were those who had a clear design concept. Some candidates had incorporated their designs into a performance of the text extract by another group. This gave the examiners the opportunity to see the designs working in performance. Some candidates found it difficult to move away from the stage directions – coolie hats, water with fish in and yellow sashes. A small number of candidates produced designs which were not unified in any way. Again centres need to consider this when advising candidates. Plans for set designs are increasingly following conventions, marking exits and entrances on detailed ground plans for example. Some candidates who tackled lighting had a reasonable knowledge base on which to offer design ideas. It was good to see the use of cue sheets, lantern hanging plans using the performance area they are used to, and the type of lantern used.

Weaker candidates struggled to cover three areas with any degree of parity – detailed costume and make-up designs coupled with a simple ground plan were quite common. Candidates who choose this brief must use the conventions of lighting, sound and stage design in their submissions.

Presentation

Most candidates this year presented their work enthusiastically to the examiner. Examiners repeatedly reported that candidates seemed very proud of the work they had created and relished the opportunity to share their thought processes. Candidates who had prepared their presentation in advance were generally more confident when talking about their ideas. It would benefit some candidates to present their ideas in a more informal way – sitting with the examiner rather than ‘presenting’ from the front.

Working Records.

There were a variety of styles seen by examiners. The most successful Working Records were those in which the candidates covered all relevant areas of study effectively. There was a tendency for Working Records to be overloaded with material from the preparation period. Some examiners reported that centres are not following the guidance in the examination paper with regards to the length of these documents. Only work generated during the ten hours should be included – apart from the evaluation completed after the dress rehearsal. It is worth reminding centres that candidates have one hour after the dress rehearsal to evaluate the work produced. The most successful Working Records focused on the process, on improvement through the process of rehearsal and used appropriate dramatic terminology and would have included some of the following:

- ‘The reason we have done this is.....’
- ‘We have chosen to include.....’
- ‘We chose to set the scene in....’
- ‘We have included an overseer character to....’
- ‘This had a better outcome because....’
- ‘We added the element of....’

The standard of evaluation is still poor with many candidates making generalised statements. Some centres are using peer feedback during the process which candidates can then use to shape and develop their ideas.

Writing frames should not form part of an examined component. In the Specification – page 41- it states ‘It is not acceptable for centre staff to provide model responses or to work through responses in detail’.

Final Thoughts.

The use of a different style of theatre seems to have engaged the imaginations and creativity of candidates and examiners thoroughly enjoyed the work seen and produced. Centres are to be congratulated for embracing this examination and supporting their candidates to produce such wonderful work.

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