

**GCSE**

**Expressive Arts**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J367**

**OCR Report to Centres June 2014**

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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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# CONTENTS

## General Certificate of Secondary Education

### Expressive Arts (J367)

#### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
A691 and A692	1
A693	6

## **A691 and A692**

### **General comments applicable to both units:**

#### **General administration**

The response from centres to the automated call for samples was generally very good with samples arriving with the apportioned moderator in good time. However centres are reminded of the need for accuracy in completion of the paper work. In a number of cases candidate numbers had been omitted from the coursework forms and this severely hampered the moderation process. Although there has been a significant improvement in the quality and secure enclosure of DVD evidence, too many centres are not following the advice of the Moderators' reports and course guidelines. For the moderation process to be fair the work of each candidate needs to be clearly identified and then securely enclosed with the candidate portfolio. This works best when the DVD is individual for each candidate.

Centres are reminded that it is not the Moderator's responsibility to track down DVDs and identify candidates work when it arrives and that this responsibility lies with the centre. Similarly, accurate transfer of marks between the various forms is the centres responsibility. Centres are strongly advised to ensure all marks and paper work are quality assured by a third party to avoid unnecessary delays in the moderation process caused by portfolios and paper work being returned to centres to ensure that processes have been appropriately applied.

#### **Marking**

Generally, but not exclusively, centres that have attended training and delivered the specification over a period of time reflected a clear understanding in the allocation of marks and provided distinctive and clear evidence for the allocation of marks in all the assessment objectives. However on occasion some centres displayed a lack of understanding of the course and insufficient evidence to support the marks awarded. Where centres had completed the 'additional evidence,' box on the summary forms this proved extremely useful and centres who do complete this section of the form enable Moderators to have a significantly clearer picture of why marks have been awarded.

#### **Evidence**

As might be expected in stronger portfolios, there was ample evidence to demonstrate how marks had been awarded. This included a range of forms of evidence including DVDs, written work, art work, photographs, sketches, plans for stage, plans for dance moves, stage prompts, props lists and so on.

Where candidates' photographs were included either on the cover or at the beginning of DVDs this proved a real asset to the moderation process facilitating easy recognition of the candidate and their contribution to the performance.

A key feature of weaker portfolios was the lack of evidence to support the art forms declared as part of the piece. Centres needed to consider carefully which art forms they are awarding marks for and what evidence in there is in the portfolios to support this.

## Teacher Input

Centres are reminded that the use of writing frames is not permitted. Candidates must not be led to make statements about practitioners and their work but should formulate their own thinking and identification of skills, techniques and ideas. This should then be reflected in the candidates own work.

It is important that candidates are given the opportunity to explore the full range of art forms and are not restricted by teacher preference where ever possible. This enables candidates to develop their own skills and strengths.

Centres should also be aware that spelling, punctuation and grammar are very important, especially the correct spelling and use of technical terms. Centres are advised that they need to make sure that there is evidence that candidates have been given the correct spellings of practitioners names and the names of particular techniques and these are consistently used.

## Practitioners

An increasingly wide range of contemporary and established practitioners is being introduced to candidates by centres. However this is not sufficient to enable candidates with the opportunity to achieve the higher marks. There must be clear evidence of the candidates specifically identifying, exploring and developing the ideas in their own work.

### A691

The work produced by candidates continues to demonstrate a wider understanding of the arts and how they work coherently together. Where group work is well devised each individual candidate is able to clearly demonstrate their contribution to the piece and show they understand the areas of study and the interplay between art forms.

In less well produced work candidates are too reliant on other group members and often simply list what has happened rather than genuinely display developmental skills. They often take direction from others and struggle to contribute on an individual level themselves.

Where candidates' work showed high levels of skill the work had been very thoroughly planned and demonstrated decision making and selection skills before proceeding.

As mentioned an increasingly wide range of practitioners was presented to candidates including, but not exclusively, the following:

- Banksy (graffiti artist, political activist, film director, and painter)
- Dizzee Rascal (grime MC, songwriter and record producer)
- Ted Hughes (poet and children's writer)
- Gill Wearing: Help (Art / photography)
- Denis Calvert: Angel (Art / photography)
- Bob Dylan: Subterranean Homesick Blues (Music)
- Professor Green (rapper and singer-songwriter)
- Shepard Fairey (contemporary street artist, graphic designer activist and illustrator)
- Menhaz Huda (film and television director and producer)
- Simon Armitage: "Hitcher" and "Kid" (creative writing: poems)
- Stanislawski (drama)
- Brecht (drama / creative writing)
- Joan Littlewood: Oh what a lovely war (drama)
- Stomp: Stomp Live (Dance)
- Keith Haring: Free South Africa (posters)

- Edward Brathwaite: Limbo (creative writing: poem)
- Michael Jackson: Beat it (music)
- Caryl Churchill: Top Girls (drama / creative writing)
- Andrew Lloyd Webber: Memory
- Kate Bush: The Man with the Child in his Eyes, Wuthering Heights
- Edward Hopper: Nighthawks, Morning Sun
- Matthew Bourne: The Car-Man
- Some candidates did individual research of relevant practitioners. E.G. Dickens – Christmas Carol, Film - Sliding Doors, Cinderella
- Anne Stokes – artist, playstation games etc.
- Boris Vallejo – Peruvian painter based in America
- Len Wiseman & Mans Marlind, Patrick Tatopoulos, Bjorn Stein - directors/designer, Underworld film
- Jon Kennedy – musician
- P.D White – artist
- L. Frank Baum
- Frido Kahlo
- Leigh Whannel (Saw 1)
- Tiny Tim (Tiptoe through the tulips)
- Salvador Dali
- Leonid Afremov
- Jon Brion – musician
- The Willowz – musicians
- Leonid Afremov
- Claybourne Carson – Autobiography? Martin Luther King
- We Will Rock You - Queen
- Hairspray – Adam Shankman
- Chicago – Bob Fosse
- Theme: Street Life
- The Specials – Ghost Town
- William Hogarth – Four Times of the Day

Although all the art forms were used across the entry the most popular were drama, creative writing and dance.

The Areas of Study were covered thoroughly by most candidates and often these made up a substantial part of the portfolio of evidence. However in some centres this piece of work appeared to have been taught and took the form of a stand-alone addition to the portfolio, detracting from the real meaning of understanding this element of the work.

Evaluations are inconsistent. Where candidates have provided strong evaluations this has been a process throughout the portfolio often culminating in a thorough and descriptive evaluation of how the work could be progressed further. Weaker examples focus on a list of what has been done and a few simple ideas for the future.

## A692

The work in this unit has developed well since last year. A good range of themes were used to inspire candidates and assist them in producing work that show cased their skills and talents.

Examples of the themes used were:

- Fear
- Miscommunication
- Discrimination
- Cycles
- Newspaper article on the power of educational animations
- Urban Life
- Seven

These themes were supported by works by:

- Shakespeare – *All the World's a Stage* from *As You Like It*,
- Gabriele Muccino – *Seven Pounds* (film)
- Sting
- Fernando Traverso – Chile/Argentinian artist
- Christopher Bruce
- Banksy - artist
- Plan B – musicians
- Diversity
- Thousand Foot Krutch – Canadian Christian rock band
- Hieronymous Bosch – Netherlands Artsist. *Garden of Earthly Delights*, painting
- Tim Burton – film director
- Cecelia Aherne – Irish novelist
- Delta Goodram – singer/songwriter
- Heidi Malott – Artist
- *The Diary of Anne Frank*
- *Hear Cry-Drehz*: choreography
- Charlie Chaplin
- Mel Gibson H G Wells
- Spielberg
- Anne Stokes – artist, playstation games etc.
- Boris Vallejo – Peruvian painter based in America
- Len Wiseman & Mans Marlind, Patrick Tatopoulos, Bjorn Stein - directors/designer, *Underworld* film
- Jon Kennedy – musician
- P.D White – artist
- L. Frank Baum
- Frido Kahlo
- Leigh Whannel (*Saw 1*)
- Tiny Tim (*Tiptoe through the tulips*)
- Salvador Dali
- Leonid Afremov
- Jon Brion – musician
- The Willowz – musicians
- Leorid Afremov
- Claybourne Carson – *Autobiography? Martin Luther King*
- Christina Aguilera

- Wilfred Owen
- Tracy Chapman
- Maya Angelou: I know why the caged bird sings (creative writing: autobiography)
- Macklemore: Same Love (Music)
- Art: Eden Camp History Theme Museum (Set design)
- Michael Jackson: Black or White (Dance)
- Melissa G. Nicks: Family Circle (creative writing: poem)
- Coldplay: The Scientist (Music)
- Damien Hirst: Spin, Spot and Kaleidoscope (set of paintings)
- The windmills of your mind (Music: song by Michel Legrand and Alan Bergman)
- Mike Taylor: Thinking about you (creative writing: poem)
- Otmar Gutmann: 6. Poor Pinga (stop motion animation)
- Little Red's Monologue from The Big Benevolent Wolf (sock puppet performance)
- Alan Bennett: A lady of letters
- Edward Brathwaite: Limbo (creative writing: poem)
- DV8: "Enter Achilles" and "Chair Duets" (Dance / physical theatre)
- Edvard Munch: The Scream (art)
- John Willams: Theme from "Jaws" (Music)
- Michael Jackson: Thriller (music)

Many centres gave candidates the opportunity to include their own practitioners. This in turn facilitated the production of work that candidates found truly inspirational.

Areas of Study were addressed inconsistently in this unit. Where candidates addressed them well they were an integral part of the work and candidates demonstrated how they under-pinned a piece of work including their own. Where this was dealt with less well it appeared as a 'bolt on' exercise that needed to be done to meet the specification.

Many of the outcomes produced by candidates were monologues. In the best case scenarios these were delivered without the use of the script and interpreted to give feeling and emotion. Where they were less well delivered candidates read the script they had written without feeling and action. The key to success here was the consideration of the performance skills required to engage the audience and successfully communicate the ideas.

The use of technology, for example to provide moving images or a backdrop, is becoming increasingly successful. Animation is also becoming extremely popular, with candidates making excellent choices in the development of the work. It should be noted however that in successfully communicating ideas candidates and centres are advised that using complicated technology badly is less likely to achieve the higher marks than using simple technology well.

In some cases the use of technology eliminated any creative input from candidates with heavy reliance on the software to do the work.

The use of blogs showed that candidates are fully conversant with modern media and it would be expected that in the future technology is used to enhance candidates' artistic decisions rather than over-ride them.

## A693

### General comments

#### Administration of the examination

The administration of the examination in the most organised Centres was flawless. All materials needed by the examiner were readily available, a timetable drawn up and candidates ready to perform or show their outcomes at the stated times. Large Centres were particularly well organised.

This year many Centres understood the value of completing the additional evidence boxes, thereby helping the examiner to understand why the indicative marks had been suggested, and as a context for the realisations and outcomes.

DVDs need to be sent to the examiner within a week of the visit. As this is an externally set and externally marked examination there must be individual evidence for each candidate. This is why the OCR requirement is for the centre to provide one DVD per candidate.

A few Centres use white boards containing the candidates' details to accompany a presentation, which was very helpful. Also photographs of candidates on the front of portfolios can be very useful but only when the photo of the candidate resembles the candidate as they appear during the presentation.

It could be very helpful if a running order could be emailed to the examiner before the day of the exam; this enables the examiner to prepare documentation for use during the examination – for recording marks and comments, for example – saving time on the day itself. When requested to do so, many Centres are happy to oblige.

In general, Centres provided an appropriate space for the examination to take place and candidates presented their work with the appropriate blend of enthusiasm and serious intent befitting an exam. Spaces included simple classrooms, a large room laid out as a gallery and a theatre space with full black out, lighting and necessary technical facilities manned by students and technicians proficiently with no technical glitches at all.

A few Centres need to be reminded that the area must be treated as an examination space where 'outsiders' are made aware of the examination conditions. On occasion general noise, school bells, and a tannoy interrupted an examination.

Occasionally Centres miscalculate the time required for the whole exam to take place. Examiners need time to record details of group members before a performance and to write notes about each candidate immediately afterwards, while the performance is still fresh in their minds. The running order also needs to allow for all candidates to present their work well within the school day, without creating a sense of panic in the later candidates that their work will not be seen.

Portfolios were usually helpfully presented in a box in candidate order. A reading light is always very helpful and is indispensable when total blackout is used.

Technical support is becoming almost essential to the smooth running of an exam. This year far fewer technical hitches occurred. The use of technology had been planned well and worked effectively in almost all Centres. Many Centres relied heavily on technical platforms for responses.

Many Centres ran their exams like clockwork, despite needing to use complicated technical devices.

It was observed by Examiners that art forms were well spread and that there was rarely a case of the 50% limit being surpassed. There were a few limited cases where only two art forms were presented but the subject leader had indicated this in their assessment of the objectives accordingly.

### **Advance documentation**

Most Centres use email and this made it very easy for the examiner and teacher to maintain contact. It also provides a useful and indisputable record of communication.

### **Audience to watch the performances**

**Intended audience:** Candidates are advised to be careful about choosing inappropriate audiences, or ones that they struggle to meet their needs. An example of this was the selection of school children in an Assembly situation. Whilst there were some excellent examples, others that had excellent resources and content fell down because the candidate became embarrassed when presenting to an imaginary young group of schoolchildren.

**Actual audience:** An audience of candidates (or other students) can be beneficial, helping to generate the atmosphere of an entertainment rather than an examination, providing the pupils are well behaved and respectful of the fact that they are witnessing an exam. They also need to be seated at a distance from the examiner to preserve the confidentiality of the process. Occasionally candidates or centre staff are positioned directly behind the examiner: this must be avoided.

Candidates who don't use performing arts disciplines as the main focus of their work need to think about how they will present their outcome. For example, how do they want their audience to experience their piece? Do they need instructions? Where and how would they set up the presentation or installation to display it to best effect?

### **Spread across disciplines**

Candidates must ensure they have a balance across the chosen minimum of three Art Forms. In many Centres four or even all five are used, which is quite acceptable and helps with balance. Candidates often presented their ideas in role through script or narrative. In several Centres media was linked in with the dramatic performance.

### **Communities**

There were many communities, some often involving social issues, including:

- Homelessness
- Bullying
- Domestic violence
- Drug abuse
- Various charity appeals
- Campaigns
- Rehabilitation Centre for Drink Drivers
- Citizenship, Women's Groups
- Green Peace
- Gay and Lesbians who suffer violence
- Post Natal Depression Surgeries

- Gap Year Students, ME Campaign Group
- Hyde Park
- Recycling Centre
- Aspiring Magicians
- Shopping Mall
- Speed Dating
- Fashion Show
- Airports
- Comic and Super Hero Enthusiast
- Driving Schools
- Cocktail Bar
- Hospitals
- Prison Officers education group
- Fantasy convention
- Thrill seekers

These were often earnest and morally uplifting, sometimes slickly done, but links with the chosen Commission can be rather tenuous. Some candidates gave too little thought to the whole idea of community, using the rather vague terms: “school” or “teenagers”. Some of the most successful presentations took the whole idea of community very seriously indeed and presented inspiring submissions of great artistic merit.

### **Areas of study**

Most portfolios contain a range of references to the areas of study and candidates are much clearer about their significance in their own work and that of practitioners. Symbol and motif seem to be well understood by most candidates, whereas structure and shape were often present and effective in the final presentation, but were not always clearly considered or explored at the planning stage. Perhaps this area of study has become second nature to their work process and candidates forget they need to be explicit in describing them.

Some of the best portfolios considered the areas of study as the concepts arose during their explanation of the development of their work. This was usually incorporated into continuous prose rather than as a note under a sub-heading, which can seem a little contrived. Others made reference to an area of study for a selected practitioner and then explained how it had affected or influenced their work.

Sadly, some candidates produced interesting outcomes that demonstrated clear understanding of the areas of study, and yet they failed to refer to them in their portfolios, thereby failing to attract marks for that section of the exam.

### **Practitioner influence**

Some of the practitioners and works studied were

- Michael Jackson’s “Thriller”
- The Beatles – “Leaving Home”
- Paintings of William Turner
- “Billy Elliot”
- “Blood Brothers”
- “Slave ship”
- Paintings of Lowry
- A.A. Milne: Winnie the Pooh and Christopher Robin
- Jackson Pollock: Autumn Rhythm, Blue Poles
- Brightness for childhood memories, poetry writing

- Robin Williams: Goodwill Hunting
- Bob Fosse
- Sharon Rooney – Rae Earl (E4 TV series)
- Tom Bidwell: Screenwriter - My Mad Fat Diary
- Tyler Joseph: Car Radio, Rap
- Michael Jackson especially Thriller
- Angelin Preljocaj: choreography for British Airways/Air France advert
- Quentin Blake
- Banksy
- Salvador Dali
- Diana Vishneva: Don Quixote & Swan Lake
- Marianela Nunez: Don Quixote & Swan Lake
- Renee Zellweger
- Michael Rosen: poems
- Barbara Sala: Naïve Art, scenes from childhood
- Brecht
- Stanislavski
- DV8
- Gordon Steel
- Joan Littlewood
- Motion House Theatre
- Edward Braithwaite
- Alan Bennett
- Grease
- Steven Spielberg
- Kay Jay Simmons
- Christopher Bruce
- Harry Brown film
- Alfred Hitchcock
- Dennis Oppenheim – Yorkshire Sculpture Park
- Lea Anderson: Cross Channel
- Stomp
- Merce Cunningham: Chance choreography
- John Godber
- Willy Russell
- Christopher Bruce
- Bridget Riley: optical art
- Beryl Cook: themed prints
- Pop Music of the 80's
- Henry Hill – film Goodfellas
- Documentary on serial killer Ed Gein

Whilst the specification requires only one practitioner per candidate for A693, many candidates used more than one, which is quite acceptable and sometimes helped a candidate to cover the areas of study more thoroughly.

The strongest and most interesting realisations often occurred as a result of the candidate becoming fascinated by the work of a practitioner. Where a candidate referred to practitioners in relation to their own work and explained how they had adopted some of the researched techniques and processes, the portfolio made for interesting reading. However, too often candidates simply printed information from the Internet and submitted it as research without any annotation or explanation (or any obvious interest or connection).

It was noticed that where candidates created a play with perhaps an art backdrop, script-writing practitioners were rarely investigated, in comparison with visual artists whose work was often explored in some detail. This is potentially a rich area for candidates to explore.

## **Portfolios**

In the best Centres portfolios were commendably concise and focused, with little or no padding and avoiding considering other commissions. At best the evolution of the created piece was clearly charted, for example by including drafts as well as initial planning. Folders were often attractively presented, with candidates taking pride and pleasure in the tasks. It is important that candidates remember to number their pages and insert their name, especially in loose-leaf portfolios.

Some Centres still encouraged all candidates to look at the areas of study in relation to all commissions before beginning work on the chosen commission. There were times when it was necessary for the examiner to look back at the exploration of other commissions in order to find relevant reference to the work produced. In these Centres candidates are seriously disadvantaged if they are led to believe that their work on the other commissions will count towards their mark, when in fact it will not attract any marks.

It is important to note that prescriptive guidelines are not permitted in this unit, as this is a synoptic examination. The same is true for the use of writing frames.

When candidates work together in a group they must ensure their contribution to their portfolio is individual and not merely common copies of everyone's composite work placed in each portfolio. If a script is placed in a portfolio for example, the candidates should explain individually their own contribution to the script.

One good trend was a decrease in simple cut and paste.

Some Examiners reported a positive feature of a breakdown of what the candidates planned to do hour by hour in the 12-hour preparation period. This helped track the use of skills and art forms and allowed the examiner an insight into how the work was to be structured and shaped. The importance attached to the 12-hour preparation period was high in such Centres and this was reflected in the high standard of the candidates' realisations on the examination day.

One difficulty reported by Examiners was a lack of labelling of which ideas went on to be utilised and which did not. The most significant problem however, was the omission of references to the community anywhere in the portfolio. This may have been included on the WMS but the candidates in too many cases failed to include a personal record of their chosen community. As the examination information points out there are penalties for this omission.

## **Outcomes**

### **Group size and length of pieces**

All Centres used appropriate group sizes and all sizes could work equally successfully, whether individual, pairs or groups. All candidates had at least 2 minutes' exposure.

Some performances could drag a little if candidates improvised but on the whole pieces were of an appropriate length. (It is almost always obvious that a candidate is relying on extemporisation as a substitute for learning the script.)

## Types of outcome

Despite the encouraging hints in some commission titles, there were fewer examples of dance, of live music or of humour in comparison with other outcomes. Given the time constraints on devising meaningful choreography and rehearsal, this is to some extent understandable. Where they were in evidence, however, they were usually very well done.

Of particular impact and conviction were those live presentations performed in front of screen projection (of photographs, film or statistics) where audience eyes, ears and brains were fully engaged and to which they were often appealed.

There were many story-books for children, and these were often very well illustrated and imaginatively scripted. On the other hand, weaker candidates sometime submitted poorly finished booklets. “Small but perfectly formed” is a useful description of what candidates need to aim for when presenting their work for A693.

When submitted also as drama, these were sometimes less successful although the strongest candidates could deliver a story with clarity and expression whether live or as a pre-recorded voice-over.

Although candidates do not have to use a performance as their realisation, many do. If the performance mode is chosen they should be aware of audience needs by

- Facing the front (not turning back to read off the screen)
- Looking up from the printed page
- Articulating clearly
- Pacing the delivery appropriately

Use of accent to convey mood and character could also add depth and raise impact. Recorded voices, too, should not be garbled, rushed or unclear.

Increasingly, candidates are submitting work on film, whether by using actors or creating animation. These were often of very high standard, despite time constraints, and there were many examples of sophisticated techniques such as film noir features, angled shots, split screen and slow motion. Atmospheric music and sound effects were frequently well employed, and editing was stylish and mature. In the creation of trailers and of Charity appeals in particular, slogans and informational snippets were integrated and impactful.

Candidates had prepared well, with live performers knowing lines and moves. Presentations were of appropriate length and were well structured, with (usually) neat conclusions.

A feature of one Centre was the full availability of technicians to ensure candidate live work was seamlessly and efficiently presented. This established a virtuous circle, with candidate confidence boosted by the assurance of professional expertise. As a result, in almost all cases the use of recorded music, film, photographs and projected statistics was commendably prepared and flawlessly executed. In turn, this meant that the tight time schedule of the examination (up to 50 on each day) was adhered to with considerable accuracy.

Some drama presentations were on very serious themes such as terminal illness, domestic violence and bullying and although they often worked well, some of the strongest pieces were humorous and of unusual design and structure.

## **Individual Commissions:**

### **1 SNOWMEN SLAUGHTER**

The link with the Commission was often tenuous, with themes including “Children in Care”, “A parent’s death from cancer”, “Billy Elliot-like ambition to be a ballet dancer”, “Bullying”. Only one presentation, a cartoon film, attempted humour.

One group of three used this commission in a quite literal sense to produce a humorous piece involving outraged residents and school children and hooligan council workers. It featured some skilful tap dancing with Stomp influences and the group managed to play multi parts convincingly with minor costume changes.

In one centre a beautiful contemporary dance integrated with prose based on Afghanistan. The Snowman (single prop on stage-art creation) had no head on it, a gun belt across its shoulders with pellets in it. Very moving!

Many pieces used drama, creative writing and dance. One pair of candidates’ artwork involved snow and a snowman with a Christmas message, which made a refreshing contrast to some more serious dramas.

Some Examiners reported this commission seemed to attract boys who, in one centre, went down the 'slaughter' route. Some less able candidates struggled to get beyond snowmen so produced rather predictable snowmen coming to life. More able candidates used it as a starting point for deeper social comment. One interesting outcome used the snowman as the cause of a road accident.

### **2 ADVERT OR ART?**

Despite the filmed stimulus, only one performer employed dance as one of her art forms. Two presentations had loose links, dealing with social issues (teenage depression) using a parade of information.

An individual candidate used dance to demonstrate this commission, performing to an interesting soundtrack – arranged by herself – and based on a section of Mozart’s Requiem.

One candidate presented a ‘play within a play’ as she presented herself to the examiner in role as a designer promoting her advertising idea. She changed character in a smooth transition to a dancer in the advert.

Charity adverts were quite popular where candidates used PowerPoint adverts, displaying their poster-style artwork on a filmed backdrop.

### **3 FLASH**

This was usually performed in groups (of 2, 3, 4) but with occasional solos. There were a few (welcome) humorous presentations, sometimes with attractive or elaborate costumes and the use of tonal parody in character and language.

A couple of presentations were based on illustrative stories. These were strong on art and creative writing but weaker on drama. One was nicely rounded with reference to a World Book Day introductory talk to pupils at Assembly.

Two individual presentations – each well managed – were of comic Superman-type stories in dual languages (Polish/English, Russian/English)

One, a Green Cross Code address (for primary children) was comically delivered in verse (as aide memoire)

Less successful (yet again) were presentations on subjects such as the AIDS epidemic (death rate statistics). A controlled and light-hearted fight between healthy hero and dastardly cancer villain had more vigour and impact.

Most performances were based around the theme of heroes in general. There were some interesting outcomes where candidates created their own superheroes, often in caricature style. Bullying

#### **4 MAGIC BOX**

There were many examples of children reading stories to other children. This is legitimate, of course, but whether using a screen or a page-turned book, candidates (if using drama as one art form) should be alert to the needs of an audience: look up, face the front, speak up, and slow down. Too often, there was flat, monotonic delivery, with missed opportunities for accent and characterisation. Books were usually very attractively presented, however, using a variety of artistic styles and materials, and stories were well shaped, often with appropriately clear educational purpose.

Box designs were often elaborate, with many having contents taken out and displayed with telling visual effect.

One duologue was on the theme of travel through time and place and enabled the performers to include a song and dance in Egyptian style.

One group of three used the box theme to explore memories of a grandfather as told to his grandchildren.

One well-sustained comic piece had the hero transported between real and pirate worlds. Others were overly serious in topic and in treatment, however, including:

- Talk about health foods (“eat your veg”)
- Saving the planet
- A child’s phobias (psychology)
- A baby’s death from whooping cough
- Dementia charity appeal
- Alzheimer’s
- Social worker monologues

One or two presentations involved memories in the magic box. One successful performance was where a candidate in hospital found the memories in the box when asleep. The concept of the memories being created was most effective. Another successful performance was where the candidates showed how they progressed from primary school to their college years and the characters grew apart from each other. The symbolism was effective. One successful duologue involved a dance drama based around a music box that had been created by the candidates.

In one centre the drama was part of a visual arts photo comic strip where candidates appeared as various characters. One examiner was impressed with a piece based on the Theatre of Cruelty where The Magic Box stimulus was taken to the extreme. The magician’s assistant was on a box and protested that various characters kept on “disappearing” from their imagined world. This resulted in the protagonist killing the assistant and producing a real organ from her body whereupon a secreted cushion of “blood” burst. It really pushed the boundaries and had a profound and appropriate effect on the audience in keeping with the genre chosen. The

integration of creative writing and visual arts made this piece a creative, imaginative and intelligent response completely out of the ordinary and without cliché.

Candidates who responded to the magic box frequently used art and design their responses. Another realisation in the Theatre of Cruelty genre the severed fingers models of a victim were secreted in The Magic Box.

A Theatre of Fear response involving two candidates was based on a serial killer culminating in the removal of the magician assistant's heart. The candidates had considered making the heart in papier-mâché but decided that purchasing a cow's heart from the butchers would be more impactful. It was.

A drama piece in the genre of Theatre of Cruelty and Promenade Theatre for prison officers showed the police highlighting the trauma suffered by victims who are falsely accused. Another example was where all art forms were integrated to create a stylised presentation with music including vocal work, dance, costumes, body art and box, speaking both in individual monologues and choral verse to communicate the idea of qualities for life.

## **5 MAN OF WEEE**

The majority of these dealt with the issue of litter awareness, recycling, pollution and general green topics. These were worthy and informative. A few were illustrated stories, often attractively presented.

Several presentations were on film – including a particularly comic one on the battle between good and bad toys. These films were often of very high standard, given the restricted time available, whether in using live actors or cartoon creations. Messages were frequently powerfully stated through (eg) use of slogans and statistics.

In one school a music practice room had been converted into what the world would feel like in year 3000. Rubbish and graffiti all on the walls and floor: scary piece with a really strong message about looking after the environment.

Rather less successful were those on (yet again) bullying or on human organ donations.

Plus: Sculptures using waste materials.

In one centre the commission inspired a Vlog and live drama with song (creative writing being the third art form) where a young girl sends a post-apocalyptic message to future generations about the necessity to safe guard our planet.

## **6 DON'T YOU WANT ME?**

Topics here included:

- Bullying
- Gay bashing in school
- Drug abuse
- Domestic violence (very common)
- Homelessness
- Alzheimer's disease
- Child helpline
- Healthy eating (spoken by a comically giant vegetable)
- prejudice

- adoption
- fame

These were often earnest and well-meaning in tone, several in the shape of public information films (with atmospheric photographs/action, music and contact information)

One, *Fresher's Video*, was a polished recreation of issues of loneliness (and suicide) faced by students struggling to adapt to University life.

One was an artistic dual-language booklet to help Polish children understand school rituals and practices, although candidates should remember this is an expressive arts examination and not a social studies or sociology project.

Another school had used a bar area behind its theatre. It had been decorated and propped with 1950s memorabilia. It felt real! Fabulous atmosphere.

As the examiner entered the bar the candidate was clearing tables and then went into a really moving monologue as she moved around and interacted with the space and the examiner as a customer. She then played her own creation on guitar

The least successful realisations were where candidates made very little reference to the song and it's context but seemed to simply make use of the phrase in the title. The strongest performance explored the theme of fame and used artwork as a backdrop, which was well-suited to the social, cultural and historical context.

## **7 CROOK, CRANK OR JOKER?**

Links with the Commission were not always strong, particularly with those dealing with

- Lesbian schoolgirl hounded to death by bullies
- Home for disturbed teenagers
- Public information film on drugs education
- Racial prejudice in football

More successful was (eg) a filmed trailer for a heist thriller (with comic climaxes, emotive voiceover, mood music and smart editing). Another, about a President dealing with a national crisis of confidence after a high-profile robbery, was also confidently done.

## **8 MURMURS**

This was one of the less popular commissions. Content included:

- A Dragon's Den address for a new invention
- Mental illness
- Anti-bullying
- Domestic/drug abuse
- Parents seeking to adopt

## **9 WILLIAM TELL**

There were very few responses to this commission. One successful example used a cartoon on a screen, set the piece up as being part of a citizenship lesson, and there was good visual impact.

## **10 MR TOAD**

Another commission that was not too popular with candidates. Examples included an illustrated storybook and a road safety talk to a school assembly wittily done, with attractive visuals, home-made costumes and pithy slogans.

In another centre one candidate created a character who is always getting into trouble like Mr Toad. She produced a monologue, wrote her own lyrics to a modern day piece of music and used her art skills to create wings for the character, all contributing to a nicely integrated piece.

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