Questions matter

A-level
Drama and Theatre

7262/X Making theatre

Report on the Examination

7262
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General

- Teachers are once again to be commended for guiding their students through the final year of their school or college studies to reach A Level standard in Drama and Theatre as we continue, in all areas of education, to suffer the consequences of the 'Global pandemic'.
- For many teachers and their students, this has been a challenging experience.
- It has also continued to be challenging for all awarding bodies, including AQA, to provide a Visiting Examiner for every Centre, particularly during March, when many teachers prefer to hold their examinations. Some Centres, although much fewer than last year, were asked to submit their students' examination materials postally and their students' work was assessed by a senior examiner in each case.
- Whether work was assessed postally or 'live' in the Centre, it was vitally important for teachers to ensure that Examiners received all the necessary documentation. This included 'Play Approval' forms, students' 'Statements of dramatic intention', Student Record forms, for each student, signed by both the teacher and the individual student, and students' Reflective reports. Teachers should also have provided fully annotated 'Programme Notes' for the examiner to help them to identify each student. See below for further details.
- Where teachers were assigned a Visiting Examiner, they were required to provide the examiner with the extracts/texts that the students had chosen **a month** before the examination date. If the examination was to be assessed postally, these items should have been included in the package sent to the examiner. These requirements were not always met.
- There were several instances of reports exceeding the 'absolute' maximum of 3,000 words. As stipulated in the specification, words beyond the 3,000 maximum were not credited. There is no 'allowance' of 10% extra as appears to have been an erroneous 'fact' circulated on social media, nor are 'quotations' exempt from the word limit. Students penalised themselves if they wrote more than 3,000 words. An accurate word count is also required.

A reminder about the role of the NEA

- As well as referring to their NEA about play approval for Component 3, teachers should be aware that accurate information and support is available through their AQA designated NEA adviser, for advice on the interpretation and delivery of all aspects of this 7262 X component.
- Teachers are advised to contact their AQA - trained NEA advisers with any queries that they may have about the requirements of Components 2 and 3, rather than relying on the plethora of anecdotal advice sometimes offered on social media, however authoritative the source may claim to be. Bona fide AQA examiners/moderators are prohibited from advertising their role on social media and from offering advice 'off-the-record'.
- The role of the NEA adviser is to guide teachers, offering accurate information about the requirements of the NEA components and, on many occasions, their advice has averted potential rubric infringements or misinterpretations of the specification.

Rubric Infringements

- Unfortunately, as in previous years, Examiners have reported a range of rubric infringements that have occurred in this series.
- These include but are not limited to:
    - Group sizes of more than 6 students
    - Over-long or ultra-brief performances
    - Costume designers who produced costumes for more than one performer or produced **more than one** costume for one performer – only **one** design may be credited
    - Use of 'non-examinees' in the form of 'voice-overs' participating in dialogue with a single performer – occasionally, a teacher provided the 'voice-over'
    - Use of non-examinees where none is permitted
    - Choice of a practitioner who is **not** on the AQA prescribed list
    - Creation of an 'extract' through cutting and splicing together different parts of a text
- The most significant and most widespread of these infringements occurred within Centres where students had not been apprised of the written guidance, in the specification, on what constitutes an extract.
- Several 'groups', including students performing monologues or duologues, performed a 'piece' created from different parts of a scene or from several different scenes/sections from across a whole play. This is not an 'extract' as clearly defined in the specification.
- As students are invariably supervised during their work on Component 3, by one or more teachers, this suggests that the students had been allowed to 'create' their own extracts or that they had possibly been given 'abridged versions' of the play to work on by their teachers.
- The specification makes it very clear that: '*The key extracts chosen must be **continuous** and individually last at least ten minutes in duration if the full extract were to be performed*' additionally, the specification states that '*Students can perform an abridged version of the key **extract** if needed (to provide a coherent performance within the minimum performance times stated) but the wording itself must not be modified.*' Abridgement of the whole play is not permitted as this goes against the central pillar of the task which is to perform a '***continuous extract'***.
- Students invariably penalised themselves when performing a piece that was 'created' from, rather than 'extracted' from their chosen play, as they were not able to access the higher mark levels in Part A which includes the strand 'Personal interpretation is (exceptionally/entirely) appropriate to the play as a whole'. Artificially constructed pieces can never meet this requirement, as the fabricated 'piece' performed constitutes a distortion of the playwright's intentions.
- Some infringements that were prevalent when students were performing a monologue, or a duologue, occurred when the student/s in question simply excised one or more character from the scene as written by the playwright. There were numerous instances of significant characters being cut from the 'extract' despite having a crucial role in the selected part of the play. For example, a student performing the role of Nora in *A Dolls' House* simply removed their interlocuter, be it Christine, Dr Rank or Torvald and 'ranted' away with no discernible listener.
- As reported since the beginning of the life of this specification, quite a number of pieces were seen which exceeded the stipulated timings for performances. Often students did themselves no favours by presenting a piece that overran the allotted time, to the detriment of all of their marks.

Administration

Responding to initial contact from the allocated examiner.

- Most centres responded to examiner's contacts promptly and there was clear and useful communication between examiner and the centre.
- Unfortunately, several examiners have commented on the difficulty of establishing contact with centres, or, where Exams Officers had passed on the Examiner's details to the relevant teacher, there was frequently a significant delay in the teacher responding to the requests for the Schedule Outline Form with details of:
    - student numbers and student' names
    - selected specialisms
    - extracts chosen
    - practitioners chosen.

The Play Approval Process

- The requirement for including a signed Play Approval Form with the materials sent to the examiner (to be submitted to the NEA for approval at least **six weeks** before the examination) had been overlooked by several Centres.
- The Play Approval system is one of OFQUAL's requirements of this specification and, therefore, teachers who had forgotten about them had to make later and, in some cases, retrospective, submissions for approval.

Extracts to be sent to the Examiner

- Some Centres did not send their examiner copies of the extracts to be performed. Examiners should receive these no less than **four weeks** before the examination date.
- Some Centres did not indicate the beginning/end of the extracts to be performed, nor did they indicate cuts or changes that had been made to the extracts, in contravention of the rubric for this component.
- Some Centres sent 'typed-up' copies of the extracts selected which, when compared to the full text, were found to be heavily edited and, in some cases, even changed to suit the preferences of the students – this resulted in students self-penalising themselves.

Submission of Paperwork to accompany the recordings of the performances

- Most centres had provided clear 'Programme Notes' with clear identification of each performance group, supported by photographs of the students.
- Programme notes should consist of a reasonably sized colour photograph of each student with their name, role and student number clearly visible above, below or by the side of the photograph. Ideally, these photographs will show students, who are being assessed as performers, in the costume that they wear in the performance. Details of the chosen play, the part they played, if offering performance as their chosen specialism, and their chosen practitioner should also be included.
- Designers also need to be identified in the programme notes with the same details of chosen play and practitioner.

- Some Programme notes, which were submitted to examiners who were marking the students' work remotely, found it very difficult to identify individual students in advance of watching the performances, because the photographs were too small, in monochrome or depicted the student aged 11.
- Some Centres did not include Programme Notes which are a requirement and therefore had to be provided before assessment could take place.
- Some Centres omitted to include hard copies of the students' Student Record Forms, and these also had to be requested by the examiner.
- Some Centres did not include the students' 'Statements of Dramatic Intentions', without which, no assessment can be made of how far students have achieved their intentions.
- Please note that where students' work is being examined postally, all the 'paperwork' **must** be sent to the examiner as 'paper' ie in hardcopy.

Recordings and USBs (Unchanged from previous series)

- Most centres submitted work which was filmed appropriately and followed the guidelines set by AQA. Some filming did not follow these guidelines with some recordings continually zooming in and out of the action. The best recordings were clear both visually and aurally.
- Other Centres filmed the students' work from such a distance from the stage that it was impossible to tell one student from another by sight alone, and examiners (where examination was postal) had to follow the text to identify which student was playing which role - if the recording was audible.
- Teachers are advised to have a technical run-though that is recorded and then checked so that problems with clarity of sound and vision could be addressed/eliminated.
- Teachers are reminded that even where the examination work is presented live to a Visiting Examiner, the USB must contain a perfectly clear representation of what the examiner has seen. Student work is viewed several times in USB format, once the examination has taken place, including, but not limited to: at the Award of Grades, to support the review of students' work during EAR, and/or as part of the collection of suitable material for standardisation of examiners in the following year.
- Some filming was problematical, where the students were not all captured throughout the performance. This was usually, but not exclusively, caused by staging choices, for example filming in traverse or the filming of a promenade performance.
- Examiners are not to be expected to watch different recordings of the same piece in order to be able to see a piece from several angles or to catch each performance in full.
- It is advisable to discuss any potential issues with filming the students' performances with the NEA and take advice about how to ensure that each students' work is fully represented.
- It was helpful when students introduced themselves clearly to camera and included any useful identifying information, such as a change of costume during the piece or multi-roling.
- In most cases, design students ensured that their set, costume or puppet design was filmed in close-up, and in silence, in a sequence preceding the recording of the performance.
- It is also worth reminding students that, if they are offering a design skill, they should **not** attempt to introduce the design to the examiner **nor** should they prepare a 'design portfolio'.
- Design students, in common with all students for all specialisms, introduce themselves to camera in the lineup or individually; they do not produce a design portfolio, they produce a reflective

report like all other students which may include sketches/diagrams photographs to support written evidence that conforms in every other particular to the requirements of the Reflective report that appear in the specification.

USBs

- Most Centres encrypted the USB; the vast majority used the agreed AQA password for this subject.
- Some Centres used their own password, sometimes writing the password on the USB label, somewhat defying the whole purpose of encryption. Others used their own password but did not share it with the examiner, and others were not password protected at all. These were administrative breaches.
- A few recordings were inaccessible for unknown reasons, but which inevitably meant a disproportionate amount of time was spent contacting the Centre, trying to access the work and/or waiting to receive a replacement USB.
- Some Centres included all the 'paperwork', including Reflective reports, on the USB - without any 'paperwork' at all. This is not acceptable, as Examiners cannot be expected to print out vast quantities of material to mark and annotate.

Students' introductions to camera/preliminary line-up

- When students are filmed introducing themselves, the information that they are required to supply includes: their name, their student number, their specialism, the name of the play that they are performing and the role that they are playing, if their specialism is 'Performer'.
- It is also very helpful if the students in the 'line-up' also hold a sheet of A4 paper at chest height that gives the name and student number in bold lettering. This is because student work may be scrutinised several times after the examination has taken place, including, but not restricted to, being viewed by the examiner's Team Leader, being viewed as part of the Awarding process, being viewed in the post-result review process, being viewed by the Lead Examiner preparing exemplar work for teacher or examiner training.
- Students are not required to give a summary of the play that they are performing an extract from as part of the identification process or indeed at any point during the examination.

Statements of Dramatic Intention

- Although the Statements of Dramatic Intention do not attract marks in themselves, they provide important information for the examiner and form a necessary part of the assessment of the performance. Examiners read these statements in advance of watching the work and they use them as a basis for determining how successful (or otherwise) students have been in achieving their dramatic intentions. Bullet point 5 of the criteria mark scheme, (Part A), relates directly to the student's achievement of their dramatic intentions,
- Good statements made clear and specific reference to intended effects and often referenced the application of the practitioner's methodology. Less effective statements were generalised or perfunctory and did not offer the examiner any clearly defined intentions.
- Some students did not offer 'Justification of theatrical choices' that appears on the SDI form. Students need to explain why and how they have interpreted the text as they have.

- It is especially important to include justification for any deviations that students have made from the text as it was originally intended to be performed. For example, if performers have chosen to apply Frantic Assembly's style to a play such as *Oedipus Rex* or *The Rivals,* they should alert the examiner to their rationale for such an approach.

Selection of extracts

- As in previous series, Examiners noted that some students had not been guided appropriately in their choice of texts/extracts or had not responded receptively to guidance that they had received.
- There was a disappointing increase in the number of statements made in the Reflective report where a group of students or a single student from the cohort wrote, 'We were given '*Curious Incident'* for our Extract 3' or 'Our teacher told us to choose '*Things I Know to be True*' for our Extract 3'.
- While examiners appreciate that some students may not feel confident enough to choose extracts for themselves, teachers need to be very careful about imposing plays/roles on their 18-year-old students, especially when a poor choice can and does lead to failure.
- There were numerous very unwise choices made by students and/or by their teachers, on their behalf, in this series, and examiners sometimes bemoaned the fact that an individual or group of students might have achieved much more had their choice of extract been more suitable - either for the whole group or for one or two individual students within the group.
- It was unwise, for example:
    - for students lacking in clear articulation to attempt Coward, Wilde, Webster, Marlowe or Shakespeare (this list is representative and not intended to be exhaustive)
    - for students with no apparent facility for mastering an accent or dialect that was not their own, to attempt Eddie from *View from a Bridge* or Joyce from *Top Girls* or Rita from *Educating Rita*
    - for students lacking in qualities of physical agility to attempt a play dependent upon those qualities, as was the attempt to apply the techniques of physical theatre to any other style of play
- Nevertheless, there was a range of texts explored and it was exciting to see students actively engaging with a wide spectrum of plays and genres, from relatively recent new plays such as *Prima Facie* to the great classic roles of the stage.
- Examiners lamented, however, as in previous series that many students appeared not to have read the whole play from which the extract was taken – some even stated in their reports of having read 'some' or 'most of it'. It is an explicit requirement that students know the whole play from which their 'key extract' was taken. It was frequently fully apparent that many students were completely ignorant of the age/social status and /or relationships that they were supposed to be depicting on stage.
- Another alarming feature noted again in this series is that some students appear not to have performed extracts one or two, at all. They have been allowed to interpret the task of 'workshopping' extracts 1 and 2 as being a wholly theoretical one. This theoretical exploration was then outlined in their reflective reports.

- A ‘workshop performance’ as referred to in the specification is one that may not take place under lights, or with full set and costume, but it is still a performance. Lines have still to be learned and, in many cases where the terms of the specification have been understood, some students are working hard to apply their chosen practitioner to Extract 1 and 2 as well as to Extract 3.
- As reported in this report last year, when participating in an appropriately detailed ‘workshop performance’ students have the experience and detailed working knowledge of their chosen role (director, performer, designer) and/or part played (for performers) to write meaningfully in their Reflective reports about their interpretative work on each of the extracts.
- Where students have not had this this experience and where teachers have allowed students merely to read an extract in class and call that a ‘workshop’, the Reflective reports were clearly weaker.
- There was also some evidence of students using an extract taken from a school production, as their Extract1 or 2, which was inappropriate, and constitutes a rubric infringement. In practice, this limited the students’ ability to evaluate the work as they had been directed by a teacher and not made any personal interpretative choices.
- For Extract 3, some students had evidently chosen monologues from the internet/YouTube or from Monologue/audition collections, and their work sometimes revealed a complete disregard for the style/period and/or genre of the original full text.
- It was disappointing to note that many students relied on digital productions as part of their process of development, often viewing a single professional production as the “right” way to perform a role, rather than relying on their own response to the character played and on their understanding of the play as a whole. Examples of this narrow and inappropriate approach were seen in interpretations of “Blue Remembered Hills” and “A Streetcar Named Desire” to name only two.
- Similarly, where students had watched and attempted to emulate YouTube offerings, examiners reported seeing clearly ‘copied’ interpretations of some of the more popular roles, with students replicating often quite poor interpretations of characters that they had seen their ‘peers’ record and upload for posterity.
- In some cases, interpretation of the character being performed was completely inappropriate to the play as a whole.
- Another recurring problem was the frequency with which examiners encountered centres where each group had explored the same play and, in some instances, groups or individual students used the same ‘set’ and ‘costumes’ and presented very similar interpretations of their chosen extracts.
- This resulted in a complete lack of ‘originality’ in the performances which were often quite mechanical in delivery.
- Where there was a ‘corporate’ approach to the extracts, Examiners sometimes encountered a similarly group-orientated approach to the reflective reports where, in extreme cases, students wrote to a template. Where cases of ‘copycat’ incidents occurred, examiners alerted the AQA’s internal department for Irregularities and Malpractice.

- Many students included extensive research which was not developed into practical outcomes. Some of this research was more applicable to the Section One Working Notebooks of Component Two and had limited stated impact on the development of performance.
- Some students reported participation in 'skills workshops' with commercial practitioners, but the outcomes were often not realised in specific, practical terms nor were they included on the declaration form where any 'professional' help received, other than that provided by their assigned teacher, must be flagged for the examiner.
- Where students have decided to transpose the setting of the extract, this must be robustly justified. For example, a costume suggestion to give Tesman in "Hedda Gabler" a "beanie hat" was not justified by suggesting a "more modern setting".
- Students also need to be sure that the research they are discussing and applying to their performance is accurate. This was not always the case, notably, this year, in a number of Centres with reference to 'roles for women', post WW2.

Selection of Practitioner

- This year, it was encouraging to see students investigating and applying the work of a range of practitioners, generally with confidence and success. Please bear in mind that students are not free to choose, for Extract 3, practitioners who do not appear in the prescribed list in the specification. A number of students penalised themselves by choosing practitioners outside the list. Teachers need to be completely au fait with AQA's specification if they are to guide their students appropriately.
- The most frequently chosen practitioners of 2024 included Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud, Frantic Assembly, Berkoff, Katie Mitchell and Stafford Clark.
- Paper Birds, Complicite, Mike Alfreds, Godber and Alecky Blyth were also frequently seen.
- Mike Leigh is a practitioner whose work on devising has placed him on the 'Practitioner' list and is best used by students preparing for Component 2; students preparing for Component 3 struggled to make best use of his methodology.
- In some instances, it was impossible to detect any evidence whatsoever of the influence of the nominated practitioner in the performance of the extract – effectively resulting in in a very low mark for students for Part B, even where their performances were excellent.
- Unless students have applied the influence of one of the prescribed practitioners to their work in such a way as to manifest that influence, in their performance, their marks for performance part B were significantly depressed.
- Some students took risks this year and selected a practitioner that appeared unsympathetic to the selected text(s), for example Coward's *Private Lives* was paired with Frantic Assembly and *Waiting for Godot* was paired with Katie Mitchell. On paper, it looked like a dubious pairing, but in the hands of dedicated groups of students who had researched, absorbed and mastered the methodologies of these very different practitioners, the results
  were stunning. Rigorous application of practitioner theories had resulted in good theatre. In other instances, and with less rigorous application, results were disastrous.
- As reported previously, the sense that practitioners and texts had been selected together for solid and legitimate theatrical reasons nearly always resulted in more complete, detailed and

secure pieces. More successful work showed evidence of the practitioner being selected and researched before being applied to an extract.

- In some instances, the practitioner's methodology was totally at odds with the playwright's intentions, and nothing could reconcile them. Students need to be aware that they are awarded marks for the appropriacy of the interpretation to the play as a whole.
- There were a few examples of less-often selected practitioners such as Grotowski, Peter Brook, Polly Findlay, Declan Donellan and Bruiser Theatre, which was good to see where choices were appropriate.
- There were examples of a misunderstanding of the methods and intentions of some practitioners; Brecht and Artaud being the most frequently misunderstood.
- Successful choices were those which linked the extract and the practitioner's methods thoughtfully, considering the creation of meaning and how the practitioner helped express the playwright's intentions.
- It was evident in the most successful Reflective Reports that the students had not only researched the practitioner's work but had also applied his or her methodology throughout the rehearsal and devising process.
- Successful design and technical students offered work, which was well integrated into the performances, becoming highly effective in creating or supporting the meaning of the piece.
- Less successful work showed only a superficial understanding of the practitioner, sometimes without the skills to deliver the work effectively. This was sometimes the case where students attempted to replicate the skills of Kneehigh or Shared Experience, but where one or more of the individuals in the performance group was unable to meet the physical demands required.
- Far fewer students have attempted a design skill 'post pandemic' and the design practitioners were rarely chosen, although, Ralph Koltai, Rae Smith, Malcolm Rippeth and Mic Pool continue to be fairly frequently seen.

The Reflective Reports

- Whilst the practical work seen was often of a very high standard, this was not consistently matched in the quality of the students' Reflective Reports.
- The majority of students provided an accurate word count and stayed within the 3,000 words limit.
- Students usually wrote in continuous prose, some using sub-headings to aid in the structure of their reports.
- Although there is no written requirement to write an equal amount on each of the three texts, good reports were not imbalanced, and all texts received adequate attention and treatment.
- Some students structured their reports addressing each text individually and in turn, others used a more holistic approach. Both approaches were valid.
- The requirements of the report are clearly identified in the specification and students must include **all** elements if they are aiming for a mark in the upper levels of the marking criteria.
- Some students had not included all areas required for a reflective report. For example, not including consideration of the text's style/genre or its context as part of the analysis of theatrical interpretation.

- Other students included irrelevant biographical detail, for example, on the playwright's birthplace and/ or sexuality, and often made dubious assertions about the origins of the work.
- Theoretical or literary analysis of text and character sometimes outweighed a practical application so that detail of how understanding could be translated into vocal and physical expression were ignored.
- This year also, in some reports, much space was dedicated to productions seen and how other actors had played the roles. This often took up a lot of space without giving insight into the student's own interpretation.
- A few students this year had gone to some lengths to make unnecessary links and draw out similarities between their extracts in terms of themes, contexts and/or characters. This is not a requirement and is therefore a distraction from the main focus of the work.
- What **is** a requirement is for students to outline the 'Opportunities and Challenges' presented by the extract. Some excellent work was seen in response to this task. However, at the other end of the spectrum, some students seemed unable to distinguish between the two 'abstract' notions and for them, every 'opportunity' became a 'challenge' and vice versa. One way that a teacher might encourage students to 'get this right' would be to ask students what attracted them to the play/role in the first place and what they were initially concerned they might not be able to achieve if they took it on.
- The opportunity/challenge section relates entirely to the extract and is not concerned either with the application of the practitioner's methodology or about playing a part that appears out of reach because of a fundamental hurdle to success, be it of attempting to portray a different gender identity, a different race or a different age.
- A large swathe of students appeared to think that when they are writing about 'theatrical interpretation' they simply need to tell the examiner what they did on stage. This misunderstanding led to many of them filling their reports with descriptions of how they performed each role – for example, 'At the end of the speech, I shouted the line 'Mephistopheles!' then I knelt down and adopted a praying position'. An 'interpretation' occurs when the reason for the actions is first addressed, for example, 'on the brink of death, I interpret Faustus as attempting to redeem himself. To show this on stage, I adopted a classic position of prayer, ……'
- Design students included an annotated sketch or photograph of final designs.
- There also seems to be a growing tendency, for those working in a group, or even as part of a duologue, to write about the 'group experience' and to provide a set of aims and intentions that 'we' - as a group - intend to achieve. This was often, but not limited to, instances where students had chosen practitioners such as Frantic Assembly, Berkoff or Shared Experience.
- It was also apparent, in some reports, that some of the students had 'shared' their ideas and whilst not infringing rubric requirements, in all instances, all reports covered more or less the same ground and in more of less the same way.
- It was also obvious that teachers in some centres had provided what amounted to a template for the students to write to. In some cases, this template bordered on 'malpractice' so rigidly was it adhered to and, even where there was no whiff of malpractice, the rigid framework that students had adopted actually hindered them from providing a personal account, analysis and evaluation of their own work.
- In other cases, the reports were unbalanced, and attention was unevenly distributed between the extracts.

- In excellent reports, students tended to reflect thoughtfully on the development of their personal skill(s) and how the chosen extracts had enabled this development through the challenges and opportunities presented.
- Good reports gave evidence of the application of the practitioner's methods with close reference to the influence on rehearsals and how the applied methodologies had moved the work forward.
- Many students had a theoretical knowledge of their Practitioner but gave very little information on how ideas were applied/explored practically. Lists of Stanislavskian or Brechtian techniques were unhelpful when not applied.
- Some students had applied a practitioner to all 3 extracts and, while this may have given them a stronger experience and understanding, during their study, it made it difficult to cover all 3 within the word limit. In stronger reports, students acknowledged that they had applied the same practitioner to all 3 extracts but explained that, for reasons of economy, they would only be discussing their application of the practitioner's work to their Extract 3 choice.
- Stronger reports offered clear justification for the choice of practitioner, provided evidence of how the practitioner had influenced their rehearsal process and they reflected thoroughly on the development of their personal skill. There were some examples of excellent evaluation of success, where the practitioner had genuinely informed their work.
- Many reports successfully evaluated the effectiveness of the theatrical interpretations in the workshop performances. This included some refreshingly honest accounts of achievements and areas for development the students had identified.
- Some excellent reports were seen in which students explained how the SCH context of the chosen texts, their genre/style of the text and, where appropriate, the practitioner's work had influenced the theatrical interpretation. Some reports also analysed how these three key areas of research informed practical/rehearsal work.
- Successful reports articulated how students had married practitioner methods with specific moments or features of their selected extracts.
- All too frequently, students appeared unable – or had not been trained - to offer objective evaluation of their own achievement and relied either upon assertion (generally, of success) or upon seemingly subjective comments from peers or teachers.
- Examiners reported seeing many reports that were over-length, some had no word count, some had a fictitious or approximate count of 3,000 words - almost daring the examiner to count for themselves. Students should be reminded of the specification statement that 'evidence beyond this (3000 words) will not count towards the mark'.
- Although not in the majority, Examiners did report seeing several Reports that did cover the complete range of requirements, succinctly and with creative understanding, and were a joy to read. These students were able to link knowledge and understanding of text and character with dramatic intention and practical interpretation in a coherent and compelling way.

Summary of less good practice

- No word counts; over-length; poorly structured Reports.
- Students offering acting or directing including 'incidental' photos from rehearsals, when for Component 3 an 'entirely written' format is required.
- Practitioner not properly researched/studied/understood/applied.
- 'Challenge'/'opportunity' bandied about in meaningless way.
- Context stated/identified but not explored in terms of how it informed the interpretation.

- Reductive approach to the methodology of the practitioner.
- Some weaker reports gave more attention to aspects of the work which were not linked to their personal skill. For a performer, the selection of costume may be important to the development of the performance of a character, but it needed to be viewed from that perspective, rather than to dominate the interpretation.
- Several weaker answers spent a considerable proportion of their reports describing the development of the set or working space, but to the detriment of focus on their nominated skill as performers.
- Design students tended to have a more secure focus on their nominated skill, with stronger answers demonstrating clearly how they had worked with the group as a whole. Weaker design reports paid limited attention to working with the group, sometimes suggesting that their input was not integrated or was an after-thought in the process.
- Some students gave insufficient consideration to how they had developed their own skill, using the influence of their chosen practitioner.
- Some students wrote about a very narrow range of their chosen practitioner's methods, for example, choosing Frantic Assembly, but only referencing 'lifts' or 'round by through'.
- Some students revealed a very restricted understanding of their chosen practitioner's intentions.
- Some students failed to offer a purposeful interpretation of their chosen extract or role.

Contribution to Performance

Positive aspects seen:

- A full range of performances was seen, including some exceptional performances in Level 5.
- Many students made highly appropriate choices of extract and maximised its effectiveness by applying the ideas of a suitable practitioner both to the preparation work/rehearsal of the extract and to the performance.
- Students gave full attention to detail in **all** aspects of the staging to create an authentic theatrical event, including incorporating - at least an approximation of - appropriate setting and costume and supported with effective lighting and, sometimes. with sound.
- Students uncovered the meaning in the text and gave as polished a performance as their abilities allowed.
- Students followed the specification requirements and performed the text without cuts or unjustified abridgements or inappropriate/unsustainable 'alternative' interpretations.
- At the top end of Level 5, students communicated complete control of their skills in performance.

Less good practice

- Students appeared to have a cavalier attitude towards the examination, manifested by an apparent disinterest in the whole process, from meeting the examiner in advance of the performance, to dropping any pretence of maintaining a character once the last syllable was uttered and collapsing into fits of giggles or sloping off the 'stage space' with a shrug.
- Insufficient attention to detail in relation to costume and/or setting.
- Inadequate attention to period/context within the performances.
- Miming props where the play and/or practitioner demanded that authentic props would be used and be appropriately handled – this applies as much to a Brechtian performance of *Galileo* as to a

naturalistic performance of Cecily and Gwendolen taking tea together in *The Importance of Being Earnest.*

Skills and specialisms

- The majority of students opted to be assessed as performers.
- Teachers need to explain to 'design' students that their designs are assessed wholly in performance and that there is no opportunity to describe or explain the design, to the examiner, in this specification.
- To be successful, any design element should play as effective a role in the success of the performance as the direction (if there is a director) and the performance work; it should certainly enhance and facilitate the action on stage rather than present the performers with further challenges to meet.
- An understanding of the extract, its context, and the playwright's intentions, as well as the influence of an appropriate practitioner, should be evident in the work of all contributors to the examination piece, whether in the capacity of performer, director, or designer.

Monologues

- Most monologues presented by students were actual monologues taken 'complete' and not spliced together from bits of text, although Examiners reported seeing a lot of the latter.
- Successful examples included where students had applied an appropriate practitioner and adhered to their methodology.
- It was also very apparent where students had clearly understood the place of the chosen monologue in relation to the character's arc in the whole play
- There were some highly nuanced performances that showed a clear range of skills including some extremely effective naturalistic examples.
- In the best of these, students had paid attention to the detail of the work, creating appropriate environments which did more than just serve as a backdrop for the work.
- Interaction with set and props sometimes really helped to lift the work.
- Similarly, where students had considered to whom the monologue was being addressed, and acted upon this in their performance, it generally conveyed a greater understanding of the text.
- In monologues where students had applied less naturalistic practitioners, there were some excellent examples of sustained and convincing vocal and physical work.
- Unfortunately, in some pieces where 'naturalism' was intended, students performed monologues, taken from the classics or from 19th Century writers such as Ibsen and Chekhov, sitting on a plastic school chair, pitched straight out to the audience and with little consideration of the character's age, status, situation or context.
- In the most extreme cases, it felt as though the piece had only just been learned and that there had been very little exploration during the workshopping process.
- Some students used a 'silent partner' but then proceeded to completely ignore them for the majority of the monologue.
- There were some very brief monologues – just about hitting the minimum time requirement but generally failing to give the student enough to demonstrate anything more than a 'good' contribution to performance.

- There were some overlong monologues.
- Stated dramatic intentions were precise but were not in evidence in the performance.

Duologues

- Duologues were again popular this year. *Two* remained a popular choice and a significant number of students chose classic texts. As last year, *Things I Know to Be True* and *Punk Rock* were seen frequently. A few students chose more experimental work, from less frequently seen texts, such as Caryl Churchill's *Love and Information*.
- Duologues were often highly successful, allowing students to explore interaction with another performer, they were frequently detailed, showing thorough research, preparation and rehearsal.
- Most duologues were well chosen and offered each student ample opportunities to demonstrate their skills. There was generally a clear link to the Reflective Reports where students commented on their joint preparation and rehearsal and how this had benefitted their personal performance.
- Less successful was work which was led by one student with a partner who was clearly less engaged.
- Some centres had allowed the whole cohort, split into pairs, to offer identical duologues performed by different pairings of students. Examiners noted that the better performers showed a personal interpretation which revealed some sensitivity to meaning. The weaker duologue performances often appeared to be derivative of the interpretations produced by other students in the cohort.
- In some instances, teachers had appeared to sanction students all using the same set, often wearing the same or similar costumes, and props, handled identically and at the same point in each performance. Such an approach runs counter to the spirit of the examination whereby each student is assessed on their individual performance and has 'ownership' of every aspect of that performance.

Group Pieces

- There were excellent performances which were placed in Level 4 or above, including an impressive performance from *Bronte* and an innovative interpretation of *Alice in Wonderland* which used Kneehigh as the practitioner.
- Some performances had an insecure understanding of the style of the play from which the extract was taken or had not made precise decisions about interpretation. For example, in a performance of *Two*, half the props were actual glasses and bottles, half were mimed.
- There was misunderstanding of period and action. For example, as an Edwardian lady, Gwendolen would not cross her legs – or wear sling-back shoes.
- Some choices of practitioner were inappropriate, for example applying Artaud to a text driven piece such as *The Crucible*. In this case the choice had been driven by the subject matter, but the style of the piece and the playwright's intentions had not been considered.
- Students need to be conscious of the fact that even though they are working in a group and applying the methodology of their chosen practitioner, as a group, separate marks are given to each student, both for their contribution to the performance of the extract and for the application of the chosen practitioner. Examiners felt on some occasion, this series, that some of the less successful performers had not appreciated the fact that if their diction or physical agility

were perceptively less secure than that of the rest of the group, they would achieve marks significantly lower than the others.
- Another aspect of group work for students to consider is whether or not the chosen piece allows them the Individual opportunity to display a range of skills.
- Examiners noted that in some instances where groups had five or six performers, some members of the group had limited exposure and therefore limited opportunities to attract credit.
- A few pieces appeared to act as a 'showcase' for the skills of a single performer or for a duo or trio of exceptionally talented performers who were foregrounded over the efforts of students who were less adept at the particular style chosen.
- It is important that students select both a play and a practitioner that can accommodate every group member allowing each one to demonstrate their best work.
- Students should also be aware that higher marks are awarded for frequent and consistent evidence of the practitioner's methods.
- All that being said, examiners enthused over successful ensemble playing, where performers had worked together tirelessly to achieve a truly authentic piece of theatre playing homage to the style of their chosen text and practitioner

Performer

Positive achievements

- Extracts were unedited, or appropriately edited, and of the correct length, to enable students to demonstrate performance skills in accordance with the playwright's intention.
- The chosen practitioner was a complete match with the selected extract and actually enabled the student(s) to reveal the playwright's intentions.
- Students displayed precise vocal and physical performance skills that revealed understanding of the demands of both practitioner and text, as well as of the role selected.
- Examiners reported seeing very many excellent performances this year covering a range of texts and practitioners.
- Berkoff was one of the most popular practitioners for group work, usually applied to one of his texts. Examiners saw extracts from *Kvetch*, *The Trial*, *House of Usher*, *Dahling*, *East, Decadence* and *Metamorphosis* as well as application of Berkoff's methods to *Monsters*, *pool (no water)*, *Attempts on her Life* and *Pillowman*.
- Stanislavski still the most popular for naturalism closely followed by Katie Mitchell.
- Frantic Assembly remains very popular. Students should be wary of choosing monologues from *Things I know to be True* which has now reached almost epidemic proportions and rivals *4:48 Psychosis* for ubiquity.
- Other popular texts included *Streetcar*, *Prima Facie*, *Memory of Water*, *Two*, *Road*. Of classic texts, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Macbeth* remain popular. Some excellent work was seen using *Medea* as well as *Antigone* (Sophocles, Anouilh, and Brecht versions).
- A few examples of particularly effective pieces of performance work are included below.
- Berkoff-inspired work has been quite prevalent and often very successful, this series where examiners remarked upon the level of detail and precise characterisation involved. Strong

ensemble work reinforced the themes of whatever text was chosen and created strong atmospheres. Examples include a superb *Pillowman* where the action was fully sustained for the duration of the piece demonstrating intense physicality which illuminated and supported the text.

- There were some excellent versions of *pool (no Water)* where students made full use of strong movement skills to extend the moment of impact into the 'pool' using slow motion in completely controlled, ensemble movement.
- Naturalism provided more of a range of achievement, but excellent performances of *Prima Facie* were seen. Two students performing *All the Little Lights* managed to create wholly believable and emotionally vulnerable characterisations using nuanced interplay and a well-developed emotional range.
- Effective use of Katie Mitchell's approach to the live use of camera feeds was seen with one especially effective rendering of *5 Kinds of Silence* utilising a screen and on-stage camera picking up minute physical detail.
- Less Kneehigh inspired work was seen this year, but one examiner reported on an amazingly detailed *Hansel and Gretal* where the detail contained in costume, set and props was only matched by tight and controlled ensemble playing giving the impression of total spontaneity. This group also incorporated live music and puppetry and they interacted with the audience with aplomb.

Less successful work

- Some extracts were much longer than the stipulated length for the group size; this often had a reductive effect on the marks awarded, when the performance lacked appropriate pace and variation.
- Some extremely short monologues were seen where performers penalised themselves by offering a narrow range of skills.
- 'Copycat' monologues. More and more students are relying on third-party renderings of 'contemporary' performances and, rather than 'leaping', examiners' hearts collectively 'sank' when Gillian Anderson's rendering of 'He was just a boy….' introduced Blanche's monologue from *Streetcar*.
- Monologues were often performed directly to the examiner/camera with no apparent awareness of the context of the speech or any consideration of where any other characters that appear on stage at the same time (if there were any) would be placed.
- If the monologue chosen was a soliloquy, for example, from *Hamlet*, this was an acceptable approach, but a monologue spoken during a scene that involves another character or characters needed the performer to show some awareness of the other characters on stage, especially if Stanislavski is the nominated practitioner.

Direction

- This skill is growing in popularity
- Successful application of the skill of direction was almost always characterised by a focused Reflective Report which gave clear points of interpretation and described rehearsal techniques employed, with purpose and focused outcomes.
- Where students had clear intentions for the work and these were made clear in the Statements of Dramatic Intention, the examiners were able to identify the work the director had put in.
- Unfortunately, there was some evidence of weaker direction in the Reflective Reports where students complained, for example, that the cast would not co-operate.
- At their most successful, directors clearly helped performers to achieve a unified approach to their group work. Perhaps not unsurprisingly, it was most easy to detect their contribution in pieces where the practitioner demanded a choreographed or ensemble approach.
- However, there were also reports of some excellent application of Katie Mitchells use of videography that were more subtle than a fixed camera shot on a screen that could barely be viewed by the examiner.
- Examples of direction were also seen where it was obvious that the techniques of the chosen practitioner could have been more successfully interwoven into the work as a whole.
- Successful direction was supported by a real attention to detail that resulted in highly polished work by the performers and complete regard for all staging elements.

Lighting design

- Lighting design practitioners chosen were most frequently, Paule Constable and Malcom Rippeth. However, in several cases, examiners reported seeing application of practitioners that were the same as those chosen by the performers – in these cases they were not always the most successful; examples included: Brook, Shared Experience and Katie Mitchell.
- The most successful lighting designers considered the resources available to them and produced designs that were consistent with both their practitioner's methodology and also met the needs of the group and the text.
- An extensive rig or constant changes is not in itself a guarantee of success. Indeed, there were examples reported of such 'busy' lighting that it did nothing to reveal an understanding of play, practitioner or the needs of the piece.
- Selectivity is all important, as is an awareness of the effect of light, shade and colour.
- Where lighting designers had worked with other designers, particularly for set or sound, there were some excellent examples that contributed to an overall design concept.
- Some inventive and unconventional sources of lighting were used, when appropriate to the piece, for example, light emitting from a prop.
- For naturalistic pieces, use of lamps, torches, phone torches and overhead lighting, were often used as appropriate to the selected piece.
- In the weakest examples the LX designer had appeared to do little more than throw light at the stage with little regard as to how this might illuminate the actors.

Sound design

- Although not a particularly popular choice of skill, examiners reported some highly effective use of sound that was used to enhance the mood/atmosphere or action on stage.

- When sound was being used in tandem and in time with other design elements, eg projection and lighting, it was often highly effective.
- The choice of where to locate the source of the sound was often significant in contributing to success – in one case a very small, wirelessly connected, speaker was placed almost on the examiner's desk – and it was unlikely that the supposedly diegetic sounds would have been heard by any other audience member sitting more than a few metres away.
- In other instances, the excessive volume of a piece of music that was meant to be underscoring a highly tense moment from *Consent* meant that the actors could barely be heard.
- Some inventive processing of sound was heard in the creation of original design work, including the creation of soundscapes, altering frequencies and tempo, adding echo and reverb.
- There was also some subtle application of sound to suggest ambience, location and mood.
- In weaker work, repetitive use of sound which may have been intended to create motif, but instead conveyed a lack of range in design.
- At its best the designer had clearly worked with the performers to achieve the ideal balance. An excellent example heard was in a group, semi-immersive performance of *Two* that moved seamlessly between setting the mood for each section and providing the diegetic sounds of the pub.
- Another good example was a performance of an extract from *Marat Sade* where the sound design underpinned the chaos of the asylum and the horror of Marat's murder.

Costume design

- There was quite a number of costume designs seen this year. It was encouraging to note that greater care and thought had gone into the production of the designs than has been the case in some past series.
- Some excellent detail was seen in some of the costume designs, including thought for choice of fabric, fit and shape, period detail, hair, make-up and accessories.
- There still appears to be some misunderstanding regarding the requirements of a costume designer to create a single costume.
- In a couple of instances, examiners when presented with the SDI which indicated costumes for the whole group, it then had to be determined which single costume would be assessed. This constitutes a rubric infringement (as does the making of more than one costume for one performer).
- At their best, designs revealed complete consonance with either or all of character, style and period.
- A range of styles were seen, including naturalistic costume, caricature and abstract costume design concepts.
- Designers showed greater levels of skill in the making of costumes, and there were more original designs seen this series rather than completely 'found' garments.
- Unfortunately, some designers still created design details which were too small to be read on stage, but which would be more suitable on film.
- The Reflective Reports showed careful consideration of fit and suitability for the performer's actions. This was evident in their successful use in the performances. There was a good level of period detail in some costumes although weaker examples lacked this security in places and research was sketchy.

- At the other end of the spectrum of achievement, there appeared to have been little consideration given to the requirements of the text, or indeed whether there had been any recognition of what the actor was required to do on stage, whilst wearing the costume. In one duologue for *East*, for example, where the performers had adopted an entirely physical and appropriately Berkovian attitude, the costume was so tight and restrictive that during the 'motorcycle' sequence the performer's jacket, which was created by the costume designer, ripped up the back!

Set design

- A number of set designs were seen, some far more successful than others, including some highly creative designs which included, for example, intricate naturalistic set designs as well as some more abstract and conceptual designs.
- Set designs obviously worked best when they complemented the action of the chosen extract as stated in stage directions and/or the group's interpretation of the text.
- A very inventive set design was seen which was intended to immerse the audience with the design work beginning at the auditorium door and leading all the way to the stage.
- One design for *Di, Viv and Rose* successfully created the slightly chaotic interior of the girls' flat with clear awareness of exits and entrances and the different personalities of the characters. There was evidence of decision making in the choices of colour and there were some appropriate details in the set dressing, discarded clothing in one character's area and books in another. Good designs contributed to the meaning and atmosphere of the performances.
- Another highly notable example of success was seen in a performance of *Macbeth*, where a small claustrophobic space had been created with neutral-coloured walls that had been made with a flexible material which allowed not only the lighting designer to project on to them, but which could also be manipulated from the outside to make it appear as though the walls were moving.
- In some cases, the designs themselves were excellent and thoroughly supported the action of the extract and provided clear opportunities for the performers, but unfortunately did not sufficiently convey the methodology of the chosen practitioner.
- Weaker designs demonstrated little evidence of work by the student. Merely placing a couple of school chairs or benches in a space does not demonstrate much more than a narrow range of skills.
- In some instances, the statement of dramatic intentions featured a grand design that then bore no resemblance to what was taking place in the performance.
- Less successful were designs which had received too little thought, for example a set for *Girls Like That* which was intended to represent a teenage girl's bedroom but used school furniture and 'found' props which the character was unlikely to have chosen/displayed.
- One centre used the same elements of set for three different designers to create three settings for "Things I Know to Be True". The painted blocks and chairs were rearranged but there was very limited personal skill and creativity. This approach attracted little credit
- One design for *My Mother Said I Never Should*, applying Katie Mitchell) made effective use of a covered mound of 'stuff' to project images on to. However, the group rarely interacted with elements of the set, despite having numerous opportunities to do so.
- In another set design for *Oleanna* (also Mitchell) the continuous playing of images and facts on the upstage screen, became distracting to the action playing downstage.

Puppet design

Unfortunately, although some students incorporated puppetry into their performances, no puppet design has been reported to the Lead Examiner at the time of the compilation of this report.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.