

Performing Arts

Advanced GCE A2 H546

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H146

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner's Report

June 2011 saw evidence of good practice in all units and varied work across the spectrum. Centres are providing increased opportunities for candidates to develop greater knowledge and understanding of The Performing Arts Industry through increased workshops and performance work. This is encouraging as these opportunities fulfil the vocational aspects of the course.

Examiners and Moderators reported that candidates were better prepared and displayed an awareness of the requirements of the specification. Good practice was evident in all of the units; G380/4 saw good candidates submitting detailed case studies and thorough answers alongside research and comparative skills in the study of two organisations and in the projections for the first year of work; portfolio work saw a better use of technical terms and industry conventions supporting the vocational aspects of the specification. In G381 Skills Development moderators commented on improvements in the analysis of skills development and its process, through detailed skills development action plans; performance work in G382/6 saw some outstanding productions with candidates tackling all aspects of performance technique.

Examiners/Moderators reported that some of the work was of an excellent standard and that centres had raised expectations and developed production values that reflected professional practice.

The weakest units were the production pathway units 383/7. This was mainly because many candidates are still not using industry style conventions when tackling their set briefs.

It was evident that centres were trying to ensure that candidates were able to access the assessment criteria for each unit. Many candidates worked confidently across the units and it was pleasing to see that there was more parity across units so that candidates were able to achieve comparable results as they tackled the various tasks and assessments required.

G380 Investigating performing arts organisations

Portfolios presented this session demonstrated a significant increase in good practice. More centres are making good use of their local venues and ensuring that each candidate complements a group study with a personal investigation of a different organisation. The presentation of the job role was usually a result of deeper and personal research into one of the organisations chosen.

Many candidate portfolios showed that centres had started work for the unit with a visit to their local theatre. As a class group, often led by the 'education officer', they visited all of the main departments often finishing with a discussion with the theatre director.

There was evidence that teachers had often briefed students prior to the visit and candidates were asked to find out how the theatre was operating as a business; how it was creating products (shows), how these were being priced (tickets/seats), how shows were being promoted and importantly what was special about this location (place – catchment area – audience profile). Candidates were able to show that they had learnt how the theatre generated income and how this was being used to hire staff and stage exciting events for the local community. Candidates gained an appreciation that some shows do not make a profit but are subsidised by those that do. Where there was support (grant) by the local council and/or sponsorship by a local company they had a chance to debate this, understand its consequences for programming and its relationship to artistic policy. Finally the staffing of the theatre was described and the way the organisation was structured for maximum efficiency was explained.

Following the visit there was evidence of group discussion and that some had a short input from a business studies teacher who explained the concept of marketing (the interaction of product, price, place and promotion) and types of business organisation (hierarchical, collegiate, tall/flat). The best portfolios clearly discussed how this related to the theatre visited. They also talked about the effectiveness of the organisation and how this was evidenced (long lasting, makes a profit, attracts high profile acts, high ticket sales, standing in the community, makes successful bids for public funding etc). The best portfolios then produced a personal response as a case study. Advice appeared to have been given on what was required and the best structured work was written succinctly, used headings and subheadings; used headers and footers to name, title and number each page and included only those images that would help them gain marks (charts and tables) and was not padded with irrelevant information.

In the best work seen the group looked again at the organisation's structure and the range of job roles employed. Each candidate selected a different job role within the organisation to investigate in more detail and there was evidence of individuals reporting back to the group using PowerPoint. The candidates went away to investigate the job roles using email, telephone and letters to individuals with some making additional visits to interview the member of staff in the role. Once all the information was compiled they prepared a PowerPoint presentation, wrote a hand out and scripted a talk to the rest of the group. The talks were given and recorded using a DVD camcorder, edited, titled and prepared for assessment.

The next task given was to select a different performing arts organisation that they could investigate and write up as a second case study, showing what they had learnt from the first study and could demonstrate independently. There was evidence that groups had brainstormed potential subjects, starting with local arts centres, and other theatres in neighbouring towns, gradually working farther afield to cover more distant organisations which had been visited or with which there was some interest. Very small or very large companies were struck off the list leaving a wide enough range to give everyone a choice. Each student 'signed up' to study a different organisation and it is assumed, discussed their research methods before beginning work. This process resulted in a second personal case study. Each concluded their studies with

an essay which drew out comparisons and discussed the relative effectiveness of each. This approach is highly recommended.

Not all centres were this successful and it may be that candidates were inadequately briefed. There must be evidence of individual investigation and analysis and it is difficult to confirm this when all candidates are studying the same two organisations and reporting on the same job roles. It also defeats one of the superb learning opportunities presented by this unit. As some DVDs showed – it was clearly tedious for those candidates sitting through a series of identical talks and when it came to their turn, their presentation invariably lacked interest or enthusiasm

While there is some merit in researching the first organisation as a group, the second study must reflect personal enquiry and ideally each candidate should seek out a different subject for study. Job roles must come from one or the other organisation but there will be sufficient examples for everyone in each teaching group to talk about a different one. Therefore candidates in the same teaching group do not present on the same job role.

Although the specifications expect that centres will explore the full range of performing arts organisations the mark scheme favours those who have written case studies on medium sized venue-based performance companies. Those who reported on very large (BBC) or very small (owner operator dance school) found difficulty in confirming their understanding of organisational structure in sufficient depth and they clearly disadvantaged themselves.

Some candidates were able to describe organisational structures as pyramidal, hierarchical, collegiate etc and most used organisational charts to explain the interrelationship of job roles. This helped candidates to demonstrate their understanding of organisational structures.

An increasing number of candidates used pie charts, graphs and table to show and explain funding streams, income/expenditure and audience profiles which, when used appropriately, enhanced the quality of the work seen.

It is a requirement of the specification that candidates give an individual presentation on a job role and most centres use programmes such as PowerPoint. When there is no evidence of a presentation no marks can be awarded for this component. A printout of the presentation is the minimum requirement for this, but a DVD recording of the event almost always shows a much greater understanding than the bullet points listed on the slides as with most presentations candidates explain and exemplify the bullet points on the slides. Where only a printout of the slides was supplied it frequently failed to support the marks awarded. As the majority of centres now acknowledge, a DVD, print-out of slides and script of the talk provide evidence of the candidate's achievements and the subsequent marking.

Again in this session a small number of candidates talked at length about the education, qualifications and experience of the chosen job role but very little about the 'significance of the job role to the organisation'. No marks can be awarded for a talk that does not meet the assessment criteria no matter how well presented. Marking was sometimes very generous in this respect. Candidates need to focus on how the role fits into the structure and how its importance is reflected in; the type of contract as well as pay, conditions and benefits.

A few students gave generic talks about 'actors', who had at one time performed for one of the organisations studied. While technically meeting the brief, the link with the studied organisation is tenuous and showing the significance to the organisation in anything but superficial terms proved impossible. This is not in the spirit of the unit and candidates taking this approach did not achieve marks beyond the lower band. It is recommended that centres advise candidates to select a subject from the roles identified and described in one of their case studies. Please note the good practice described above.

Recorded evidence is very important and some candidates may have been disadvantaged by having to present their job role talk while there was excessive extraneous noise. Centres are reminded that all recorded (DVD) evidence must be edited, with chapters, so that moderators can easily find the work of specific students without playing through whole disks. A running order or index is also essential. Most centres are now extremely skilled in this respect. Recordings must be presented as DVDs. Other formats cannot be accepted. This year there were few reported problems in identifying candidates on DVD.

Most centres are now using the URS forms effectively to explain the marking and guide the moderators to the key evidence. The comments column was often well used to explain how the candidate met the assessment criteria but a small number of centres continue to write congratulatory statements addressed to the candidate or just repeat phrases from the criteria. Comments addressed to the moderator explaining how marks have been awarded are required.

The location column must be completed with clear signposts to the key evidence. Most centres achieved this effectively but others needed to be reminded that page numbers at least, are required and these must link with annotations of the scripts. In this respect ticks through the scripts are insufficient – it is important that brief adjacent notes (pencil in the margins) acknowledge and identify what criteria are being met. Where the evidence is on DVDs – some timings or directions are needed. Unfortunately there were some centres who wrote 'portfolio' or 'video' in the location column and there were a few occasions when nothing was written. In these cases work had to be returned for further attention.

The evidence requirement suggests a limit of 3,000 words for the studies submitted. This is to encourage candidates to be focused, succinct and not to pad with superfluous material. This is important and candidates should be encouraged to include a word count.

G381 Professional Practice: Skills Development

Administration

Most aspects of the moderation process went well. Centres generally understood the sampling process and enclosed the correct documentation. It is important that centres send all documentation promptly. Centres must send work on time and not wait to be chased by moderators. Internal assessment should take place in good time before the OCR deadline for submission.

Choosing repertoire

Some candidates entered three pieces of repertoire choosing one from each art form. This does not always succeed in demonstrating the development of skills as too little time is spent in each art form. Candidates must show evidence of leading and supporting roles. One way of achieving this is for a drama candidate to work on a monologue, a duologue and a group piece. Centres must ensure that pieces are sufficient in length to display skills under development.

Recording of rehearsals and performances on DVD

DVDs must be sent with the portfolios and centres should not wait for moderators to request recorded evidence. DVDs should be checked and played before they leave the centre. Centres should make back up copies in case DVDs are damaged in the post or will not play. It is strongly advised that DVDs should be packaged in padded bags to avoid breakage. Some DVDs arrived with their cases broken and this could be harmful to the DVD itself. The moderator must be able to play the DVD on a DVD player. Moderators had problems with DVDs that would not play on any lap top or computer or DVD player.

Some centres produced DVDs that presented the candidates by including a still shot taken from one of the performances and added the name and number of the candidate. This was extremely helpful to the moderator when identifying candidates. DVDs should be chaptered and show the progress made through various rehearsals through to performance.

It is very helpful if each candidate has their own DVD of evidence with their portfolio. Each recorded performance should appear in chronological order so that the moderator can assess the development of skills being made by the candidate. The final performance of one piece of repertoire should be in front of an audience. Centres should not send three final performances as two of the works must be works in progress.

Centres must identify the candidates on the DVDs. Ideally candidates should introduce themselves to camera by name, number and title of repertoire piece. DVDs should be accompanied by a running order. There should be a recent photograph of the candidate and details concerning their appearance on the DVD such as a brief description of their costume so that the moderator can identify them. DVDs should be chaptered with a clear indication on the running order sheet of where the candidate appears on the DVD for example John Smith 0234 enters stage left at 10 mins 30 seconds. Too much time is wasted by moderators' searching for candidates' performances on the DVD. If the candidate cannot be identified, the evidence will be disregarded.

The position of the camera in relation to the stage needs careful consideration. Sometimes moderators could not see the candidates at close range and could not assess the performances. The most helpful recordings showed work in progress at close range so that the facial expressions and eye focus were obvious to the viewer. For final performances with live audience, the camera is naturally placed further away. Some of the best DVDs showed a

development of the piece from first attempt through rehearsal to the final performance. Final performances must take place in front of a live audience in an appropriate venue. Rehearsal rooms and studios are not likely to produce the best type of final performance for the candidate. Camera work has improved and many centres had remembered to ensure that the candidates present themselves to the camera BEFORE the performance and state their name and candidate number.

Candidates must not offer devised work in this unit. Some centres are still offering devised dance instead of repertoire work. **DEvised WORK IS NOT PART OF THIS UNIT.** Moderators cannot credit a devised dance piece as one of the three works, either in progress or final performance. Similarly stand up comedy should not be devised. If any work cannot be identified as repertoire then it will be disregarded as evidence.

Front sheets

Centres should include a front sheet as page one of the portfolio clearly stating the skills chosen for development and the three pieces of repertoire with details of titles of work and the names of the playwrights, composers and choreographers eg "King Lear" by Shakespeare, "Ghost Dances" by Christopher Bruce (1987).

Candidates should have researched the repertoire and be able to give detailed notes relating to when the piece was written, who performed it and where. There should be an explanation about which version of the repertoire they are using and how they have adapted it for performance. This is particularly important for dance pieces and physical theatre.

The location of evidence

The pages in the portfolios should be numbered and centres should use these numbers when referring to the location of evidence. Centres should apply the assessment criteria rigorously and provide detailed annotation on the pages of the portfolio and on the URS to justify the marks awarded. Reference should be made to the DVD to help locate the evidence. Please state exactly where on the DVD the evidence is located using minutes and seconds eg John Smith chapter 3, 2 mins 35 secs., Hamlet monologue. If DVDs are chaptered, a reference to the chapter by title or number is sufficient. If the location column is not filled out using page numbers and DVD timings/chapters, the moderator will send the portfolio back to the centre for this information to be given on the URS. Most centres are using detailed annotation but some centres are still not filling in the location column with sufficient detail.

Research and handouts

Portfolios should be unique to the candidate and art form and relevant to the skills chosen for development. Internet research and studies of practitioners must be relevant to the repertoire chosen for performance and annotation of research should make this clear. Candidates should not include downloads and teacher handouts which have not been annotated by the candidate. Whole scripts should not be included.

The Skills Development Plan

There were some excellent examples of CVs and biographies this session. The Skills Development Plan (SDP) should be detailed and include a summary of what the candidate has already achieved. This should be a resume of no more than 500 words and can be in the form of a CV or short biography. The SDP should outline which skills are to be worked on and state the three pieces of repertoire work (two in progress and almost complete and one finished piece performed in front of a live audience.) The SDP should be adjusted as the unit progresses. The SDP is the framework for the unit and should include notes on workshops and lessons. Candidates must refer to the SDP throughout the portfolio and explain how they have

adapted it in response to feedback and self-evaluation. Some centres did this in the form of a table and this worked very well.

Extraneous material

There were some portfolios containing material which was not directly related to the skills under development and the three pieces of repertoire. Some candidates had included certificates which they had been awarded at festivals and for grade exams. This is not appropriate. Candidates should only mention the highest grades achieved in the relevant discipline on the CV. If the material is not relevant to the three pieces of repertoire and the skills development, it should not be included.

Presentation of portfolios

Portfolios should not be sent in bulky ring binder folders, hard back photograph albums or scrapbooks. As long as the pages are kept together in a slim folder or by treasury tags, the moderator will have no difficulty finding the evidence. However, there must be a contents page and all pages must be numbered.

Commentaries

Commentaries should be in written form or presented on DVD. They need to be detailed and demonstrate candidate ownership. There have been some very informative and detailed commentaries presented on DVD which have provided good evidence.

Tick box approaches and proforma documentation are not conducive to in-depth analysis and they hinder personal engagement. The commentary should be an independent document which explains how the repertoire demonstrates the skills development. The candidate can write notes throughout the portfolio detailing development and then a commentary at the end.

Observation reports

Observation reports must likewise be detailed analyses of the candidates' work and development, written by appropriately skilled observers who use appropriate technical terminology and their experience to make artistic judgements. In order to document the journey made by the candidate throughout the unit, it is helpful to make observations at the beginning and end of the unit and at key points on the way. Some centres did not sign or date these reports rendering them invalid. There should be a minimum of 3 observation reports.

The unit has presented a wide range of work this session. Some centres are stretching their candidates and offering them some challenging texts to work from such as King Lear. Some very mature performances have been presented across the art forms. However, three final performances and a weak portfolio will not gain high marks. The essential part of this unit is to show development of skills. For each piece, there should be recordings of first readings, rehearsals, dress rehearsals and final performance in the case of the finished piece. It is good practice to show a candidate marking through a dance and then rehearsing it once the routine has been learned.

Health and Safety

Most centres show good awareness of Health and Safety procedures and this is clearly shown in the portfolios. There needs to be a constant update of Health and Safety regulations to encourage candidate awareness. Health and Safety should be embedded in the portfolio not merely added in an appendix. Candidates should be able to show how they have used the information and knowledge in their practice.

Performance venues

Dance performances should take place in a room with a sprung floor. The majority of centres chose appropriate spaces for their rehearsals and performances. However, some drama and music performances took place in computer rooms which are not appropriate performance spaces. If possible, try to give candidates a variety of spaces in which to perform.

G382 Professional Practice: Performance

G383 Professional Practice: Production

General Comments

G382

Candidates performed well where they responded effectively to demands of the unit and to the assessment criteria in terms of professional replication, choice of appropriate repertoire and depth of analysis in written evidence. In most centres candidates used their knowledge, skills and understanding to respond appropriately to the demands of the tasks and evidence needs.

The choice of material provided sufficient technical and artistic rigour to produce evidence at an appropriate level with very little devised work apparent during this session. All performances had audiences and good technical support; lighting, sound, costume and make-up was evident, particularly from those centres with G383 candidates.

Generally the external examination was managed well by centres with appropriate timetables and organisation on the day.

Candidates did not do so well where they did not respond to professional production values as outlined above. There are still a small number of centres reproducing dance school or rock school pieces and who still do self-devised dance pieces centres are reminded that this is an infringement of the specification and will be reported as such with the subsequent consequences for candidate results.

Centres also responded poorly generally in the demand for Health and Safety considerations in portfolios.

G383

Centres with G383 candidates have continued to extend the range of evidence recording both the interviews and backstage and other technical operations, this gives a comprehensive range of supporting DVD evidence.

Most G383 students did not have the knowledge and understanding of professional contexts in their chosen technical areas to be able to replicate professional practice, skills and documentation. This remains a major concern in this unit.

Individual tasks of the units

Performance (G382)

Candidates that produced appropriate performances fully understood the vocational and technical demands of the unit and contextualised their preparation with reference to assessment criteria and demands. Consequently candidates that generally achieved well in the task of producing a performance were immersed in professional practice and choose clear repertoire pieces. Within this context there was evidence of a wide range of skills, knowledge and understanding.

A range of approaches is expected given the choices and resources available but centres must give candidates the opportunity to produce evidence that tests their understanding of professional practice against the assessment criteria. In the mark scheme there are clearly significant marks to be gained by engaging with, and understanding the needs of the audience and some confident performances failed to recognise the importance of this.

Some centres continue to produce an evening of short variety pieces, some of which are self-devised and many of which were solos. G382 has criteria demands for group activities; solo performances where the candidate performed just one song/dance/piece of music within a group piece or as part of a band are not fulfilling the unit demands.

Most centres now seem to be fully aware that candidates cannot elect which art form they wish to be assessed on and understand that a candidate is marked on their entire performance.

Most candidates performed with a sense of commitment and worked hard to achieve the best performance that their skills allowed. In the larger groups a few candidates were overshadowed by others and had either not fought for a more prominent role or deliberately hidden (or been hidden) behind others.

Some centres had encouraged the candidates to work as a 'company' and this had successfully engendered supportive working environments and cooperation between students. Less successful was the collaboration between technical/production students and performers.

Written evidence (G382)

Portfolios continue to improve with candidates able to respond to some very useful and comprehensive structures from centres. Better candidates are able to augment these with committed and 'owned' responses drawing on practitioners and seen performances. The best portfolios showed clear evidence of planning, target setting, diary entries that showed progress and an application of techniques.

Health and Safety contents have improved with the use of risk assessments, annotated photographs and appropriate warm-up activities all contributing to an enhanced understanding. However, standards continue to vary considerably. There were some good examples where candidates had really tried to link H & S to their own performance and this should be encouraged but many candidates were still relying on vague comments about wires and spills and keeping the stage area clear without much thought about their own, specific, circumstances.

Realised design/participation in production (G383)

Given the range of technical skills available to candidates evidence was diverse and specific to the technical area. Centres often lacked the resources and expertise to effectively deliver the knowledge and understanding necessary to achieve high marks. Generally therefore as in previous years very few candidates produced evidence against the higher assessment criteria.

Given the low numbers taking the unit it is difficult to draw overall conclusions but very generally candidates performed better in lighting and sound where technical resources are used with some fluency and were less successful in make-up and costume where aspirations and assumed, anecdotal understanding far outstrip professional knowledge and the resources available to candidates.

Design portfolio (G383)

The Production students' true level of technical knowledge and appreciation of their subject was rarely reflected in their portfolios which tended to be very sketchy. Examiners continued to try and address this imbalance by recording interviews with candidates and seeking additional evidence of operations during the performance.

Very few production candidates took an active part in meetings or the pre-performance group interview. This dramatically affected portfolio marks with some candidates also not taking an active role in rehearsals.

Generally candidates in all technical areas have great difficulty in reproducing professional-standard documentation and technical drawings. There were no scaled drawings and models produced by set design candidates.

G384 Getting Work

General comments

Candidates that performed well in the unit produced the self-promotion pack, an outline of the range of work considered possible during the first year and written analysis of the plan and pack (SWOT) including a strategy for future professional development in clear, fluent and well-structured portfolios with appendices. They had evidence that they had understood the need to persuade both verbally and visually within a credible portfolio of experience and a sustainable work plan. Additionally they had thought about and evidenced effective self-promotion that included attitude and survival skills and the management of practical resources.

Candidates accessing the higher levels of the assessment criteria had both implicit and explicit evidence revealing a fluency that integrated their knowledge and understanding to underpin the evidence. They understood the relationship between contract and freelance work and showed evidence of interviews, observations and research with arts professionals and a strategy for future professional development and work.

Some candidates showed less understanding and knowledge of the industry and these portfolios were characterised by much less fluency and depth. Weaker responses failed to project forward effectively or make ambitious and fully aspirational decisions based on best-case scenarios and well researched vocational routes.

Promotional pack

There was a wide range of promotion packs. Some were well produced and effective with a strong sense of what was needed to persuade and sell the candidate in a professional context. These candidates were clearly drawing on their research and experience to be able to speak directly and with focus to those potential employers working in a specific vocational area. Here there was a good underpinning knowledge and understanding. Weaker candidates had little of this underpinning knowledge and were working in a very narrow context, one essentially provided for them by the centre and entirely focused on their own anecdotal or school-based knowledge and not on interviews conducted with freelance professionals. At this level it is essential that candidates talk to working professionals and experience the vocational context in both replicated events or in real visits to professional venues and spaces.

The promotional pack needs to work with the work-plan and some candidates made good links between, for instance, a set of credible qualifications in a resume and what could be reasonably expected in the first year of work. Some candidates had very modest CVs based on what they had actually done and wildly ambitious plans for their first year. Candidates can have fictitious resumes and qualifications: they just need to be *credible* and *sustainable* and working in a well-informed professional context.

Plan of first year of work

Again, a wide range of responses here with a variation in the number of years forming the basis of projections, some very ambitious earnings and some unrealistic ideas of what work might be available in the first year. Most candidates however kept to the prerequisite for 50% contract and 50% freelance although some didn't always understand that the contract work should be in a related area rather than any part-time casual work. Most candidates chose teaching or workshop leading in this area but there were also examples of setting up companies and writing.

The use of 'strands' of work proved mostly useful providing structure and focus to the material. As previously indicated the best candidates linked the plan very closely to the promotional pack giving the overall evidence credibility and coherence.

Analysis of the plan

Those candidates that provided coherent packs and plans knew clearly where the strengths and weaknesses of the market and professional area were and used this to contextualise their own personal analysis. Weaker candidates tended to restrict their analysis just to their strengths and weakness and even here not very effectively.

Much of the weaker work was in response to a misunderstanding of the purposes and intention of a SWOT analysis. The best portfolios had very succinct analyses because they had looked at their overall plan and projections and done a focused SWOT analysis of the market and where relevant and appropriate of their own abilities and personal characteristics. A few candidates analysed current economic circumstances of the industry.

G385 Exploring Repertoire

Introduction

Moderators reported having seen good examples of Dance, Drama and Music from across a wide range of genre and period in which there was considerable variety in the scope and quality of the work. Centres generally made suitable choices for their candidates and presented opportunities for both individual and ensemble work.

The choice of musicals was a popular one. However, this needs to be considered carefully since few candidates possess all of the vocal, movement and acting skills necessary to access the full range of practical marks. Musical theatre artistes need to be 'all rounders' even when performance skills *per se* are not the central tenet of assessment (see below).

There was a marked increase in the use of 'showcase' performances. The idea of a showcase whilst appropriate for unit G386 is not suitable for unit G385 and 'party-piece' solos should be discouraged as they do not allow students to explore the essentially collaborative process of theatrical performance and candidates only exceptionally have the individual strengths to carry off complex roles. This applies equally to musicians.

Characterisation was often under represented in Drama in both performance and the written work. Candidates would discuss methodology without linking examples clearly to the text or focussing on the characterisation of their specific character.

Some candidates submitted pages and pages of research, rehearsal schedules and photos of the performances, lengthy synopses and biographies of practitioners. A few centres submitted thick tomes which, on inspection, contained tickets, posters, budgets, seating plans and other marketing material, all of which was completely redundant and therefore disregarded by the moderator. With the exception of the Production Pathway all that is required of candidates are the two essays and a DVD, nothing more.

Administration

Most work arrived on time. Administration was much improved on last year with paperwork (with the exception of identification photographs – see below) generally completed correctly.

Photos of candidates should be current and in costume (where appropriate) to aid identification. The inclusion of a few still photos of the production assists greatly in identification of members of larger groups. One centre provided an excellent portfolio of such photos with the candidates names included. The use of digital software makes this a relatively simple process.

Essays

Essays were generally well written. It was clear that centres had grasped the requirements of the specification though it was not always apparent that they had likewise grasped the standard required (see below).

Quality of language was, generally, very good and highly accessible and (most) candidate's work was informed. However, a number of commentaries contained material such as "role on the wall" diagrams, downloaded research and plans of work etc. The essays are an academic discussion and as such all other material is completely surplus to requirement and is disregarded by the moderator.

There were a number of commentaries containing generalised background research not linking sufficiently with text or performance. This is often the result of a Google search after which candidates inserted material indiscriminately. Biography or period background is only of value where it applies directly to the performance style or conventions inherent therein.

It was indeed rare for essays to actually identify stylistic convention. Centres with insight not only encouraged candidates to highlight such convention but also ensured that examples of it were included at both academic and practical levels.

Another issue was the comprehension of 'adapting for a contemporary audience'. In a number of cases it can be deduced that this had been interpreted as 'to change it to what we normally do because the audience will understand it better'. The point of adaptation is to align with contemporary professional practice whereby texts are adapted by means of both artistic interpretation and the staging process to communicate with a targeted contemporary audience. It implies extension, not reaffirmation of the tried and trusted norm.

Whilst demonstrating good examples of technical language candidates did not always exhibit in-depth evaluation when discussing how they applied the research and WHAT they did practically within their own performance interpretation. This was often implied rather than stated. Nevertheless, many candidates managed successfully to contextualise the work historically and socially.

A considerable number of essays greatly exceeded the stipulated 1500 word length. Though there is a 10% leeway incorporated into the permitted word count centres which submit candidate essays exceeding 2000 words are in serious breach of the specification rubric.

A novel and interesting phenomenon has emerged whereby some candidates have opted to impersonate the style of noted contemporary performers whereby, most notably, there is a veritable proliferation of exact replicas of Johnny Depp's characterization of Capt Jack Sparrow in *The Pirates of The Caribbean* Films (complete with slurred speech, wobbly gait and identical hand mannerisms). Some might consider this a tribute whereas others may see it as a new form of plagiarism but even so, centres are urged to encourage their performers to consider how they might approach characterisation in an original way before falling back on celebrity icons, regardless of their perceived abilities.

A number of candidates gave long but not necessarily productive accounts of general rehearsal process. The rehearsal process itself is the sort of work that any performing arts company would do in the course of mounting any production. What is important for candidates to remember is that what is being assessed is application of research *into* style, genre and performance convention and hence any discussion of the rehearsal process needs to focus on this aspect. Moderators have, in a number of cases recommended that candidates research past productions and look into directors'/choreographers'/MDs' notes as well as other production related archive material such as reviews etc.

Academic Standards

There has been a considerable blossoming of **www.** references in relation to research but in very many cases there was a consensus amongst moderators that these were selected via a search engine and used often indiscriminately so that many didn't really relate to the performance pieces. Though centres have begun to engage with the challenge of getting their candidates to anticipate the demands of higher education there is still some way to go. Research was often weak in the area of interpretation, particularly in placing the work in context, consisting only of historical narrative or biography. Often *Wikipedia* was the only source of information interrogated. Material was often 'lifted' verbatim without accreditation or else re-worked throughout the essay in the candidates' own words (again without accreditation). Additionally, if candidates had done a workshop or watched a video of another performance of

the text they did not credit it despite the fact it was valid, relevant research. There were many examples of work that did not include bibliographies or citation of any kind.

Centres are urged to ensure that the research material is fully attributed by the candidates with footnotes and a full bibliography of both websites and printed material consulted. Candidates could be pointed towards the use of a hand-book such as that produced by the MHRA to provide a style guide (<http://www.mhra.org.uk/Publications/Books/StyleGuide/download.shtml>). This could of course be daunting for candidates hitherto unfamiliar with academic writing and teachers may find it beneficial to produce a digest appropriate for use in essay writing.

Inaccurate information in the essays was often accredited by the assessor. Though this is likely to happen occasionally in less familiar fields there can be little reason to accept for example, more than one candidate's assertion that the current Globe Theatre on the South Bank is in fact the heavily restored original. There are undoubted instances extant of plagiarism, again unchallenged by the assessor, despite the fact that the stylistic contrast between the 'stolen' passage and the candidate's own literary manner was very distinct. Moderators have instructions to treat such obvious cases as malpractice.

Practical Work

All Centres had created a suitable performing environment for the candidates and in almost every case the production was a public performance. There were excellent examples of a variety of staging methods including theatre in the round; proscenium; cabaret style and promenade and almost all centres had considered space, text, meaning etc in relation to the audience. There were some residual examples of the 'classroom' production with plastic chairs and no discernible audience and it is sincerely hoped that this will no longer feature in future sessions. Production values have also increased and centres have shown themselves willing to attempt a balance of resources between the historical and contemporary performances instead of the 'big' production and the afore-mentioned 'classroom' production of former years.

Some centres had taken on the challenge of performing the complete text which, considering the hard work involved, is most gratifying to report.

Ensemble work was strong from centres with larger groups. Understandably, smaller centres find it a challenge selecting appropriate material for a few candidates where there is a necessity to make radical excisions to accommodate the limited numbers.

A few centres had disregarded the five minute minimum performance exposure time per candidate. This not only seems unfair when seen alongside centres who had made a real effort but it also disadvantages the individual candidates concerned.

DVD's

Once again centres are urged most strongly to re-evaluate the quality of DVD evidence supplied to moderators. Assessors are reminded that the video material is the only evidence of practical work the moderator has to go on and therefore it is essential that it is fit for purpose.

Though there are some exemplary examples of well produced and clearly chaptered DVDs the recording of performance work is still too often marred by the poor positioning of cameras making it difficult to identify individual candidates and in particular to judge their facial expression in performance. Dance pieces in particular are a challenge for the moderator, especially when there are numerous performers on stage. These recordings often require repeated viewing simply to identify the candidates since lighting is often poor and costumes remarkably similar. Centres are requested to place the cameras front centre, even if this requires the loss of a few audience seats. The aim is to give the moderator a 'front row seat' so that nothing is missed. The recording is an examination document not an artistic exercise its own right.

Lighting is also an aspect which centres need to be aware of. No matter how atmospheric the demands of the performance the recording is of little value to the moderator if impenetrable gloom pervades the performance space and the performance evidence amounts to a few indistinguishable, dimly lit figures flitting too and fro. Similarly, sound quality is frequently overlooked and centres are requested to strive towards the improvement in quality and volume of audio recording.

Moderators reported the lack of suitable identification evidence. Often, the proscribed two photographs of the candidate in costume is lacking and very frequently the 'identity parade' to camera prior to the performance is either unclear, truncated or lacking entirely, leaving the moderator to spend, in some cases, hours conducting a Holmesian process of deduction by elimination.

The use of 'tagging' (as on Facebook photos) of students is encouraged. One centre 'tagged' candidates on their initial entrance on the DVD of the performance and this made identification simple.

There were issues with DVDs that would not play. Moderators persevered; often attempting to play DVDs on several machines but if, after the third or fourth attempt they still did not play moderators were forced to assume that something went wrong when the recording was being formatted at centre and took action accordingly.

Marking application

There were some good examples of fair marking for the essays with over marking occurring most often where practical work did not meet the standard required for G385/A2. In these cases it appeared that the assessor themselves did not appreciate fully what is required by the criteria.

Assessment of written work was, overall, too generous however. In a few centres top band marks were awarded for practical work where candidates did not demonstrate expert handling and complete confidence in the application of stylistic conventions. This is often the result of the "halo" effect where assessors mark not according to evidence against criteria but according to expectation. It must be remembered that assessment of practical work in G385 is different than for any other unit in the specification. Performance skills *per se* are not of paramount concern; it is the way candidates demonstrate application of research into conventions, style and techniques that is being assessed. In such a case the best 'natural' performer within the context of other units, may not necessarily be the candidate who scores most highly. A performer with otherwise modest skills may, very successfully assimilate and demonstrate skills that are most appropriate to the style or genre being researched. Having said this it is likely that natural talent and the ability to perform in harmony with a given style will often go hand in hand but it must not be assumed that the 'best performer' is necessarily the most skilled observer of stylistic convention.

Teacher annotations were greatly improved on previous sessions and it was possible to see the assessor's train of thought. This helped moderation enormously. However, there were a few cases where the assessor simply did not supply annotation.

Conclusion

Overall, this session has seen a great leap forward in both the overall standard and the way in which centres are approaching the unit. With the central issue of academic standards and the application of research our greatest challenge there is most assuredly every reason for optimism. The comments made herein are intended to assist centres to fine tune their future submissions and to maximise the potential of their candidates.

G386 Producing your own Showcase

General Comments

June 2011 saw evidence of good practice and varied work across the centres. The holistic approach suggested appeared to have been heeded and candidates did seem to be better equipped to tackle this unit. Most centres had invited an audience and were attempting to make the examination more of an occasion which helped candidates to consider audience awareness and communication. Many candidates were able to perform pieces that were in context and well presented in terms of skills and techniques.

Centres are reminded that candidates do need guidance and support and should not be left to select, rehearse and perform without their teacher's input. There were still many candidates however, who had selected works that were unsuitable and far too difficult for them to cope with. This often meant that the candidates did not show any real understanding of what they were doing resulting in a lack of mastery of the material and dynamic performances. Many centres realised the importance of selecting the right material, including suitable material as well as balance and contrast. Fewer centres seemed to be encouraging candidates to perform in more than one disciplines as a means of achieving contrast, although several still appear to be insisting on at least one historical piece.

Despite the wealth of material available there were still a number of candidates that chose gender opposite pieces. Equally there were some instances of candidates choosing extracts from films. Whilst there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this these choices can make demonstration of the requisite skills very challenging for candidates at this level, both instances highlight the need for centres to direct their candidates into choosing appropriate pieces.

Occasionally, some uncertainty was evident about the definition of solo and duo performances, particularly among musicians, where the line between providing accompaniment for a soloist and performing as a duo or a group is one that requires careful thought, particularly where both performers are being examined; each candidate needs an equal opportunity to display his or her skills and abilities.

The majority of centres appeared to understand the performance process of 15-minute showcases trying where possible to work back-to-back with their performance partner. However, in a few centres candidates did run over the allocated time and in other centres candidates were selecting pieces of under two minutes each resulting in a very short showcase that did not show skill development or a range of techniques.

Examiners reports again commented on a session of variable standards of performance work but of a higher standard. Selection of material was based more on candidate strengths rather than likes and dislikes which meant stronger performance work. Examiners commented on the adventurous and challenging pieces seen and although outcomes were variable it was encouraging to see this taking place. Many Centres had moved away from 'trying something new' and focused on material that matched their candidates' skills and abilities with a more holistic approach.

The administration in centres was generally good. With the convenience of email, communications were significantly better and there appeared to be more contact between the centre and the examiner with regard to the details of the examination. Good practice was seen in centres that ensured the paperwork arrived in plenty of time, provided a running order and details of candidates' performances. Examiners reported that many centres did not adhere to the request for work to arrive 14 days before the examination. This meant that the examiner had less time to mark the preparatory notes.

All performance work was on DVD with some very impressive DVDs submitted; some centres produced excellent DVD material with clear chapter labels and candidate identification. This is very useful and helpful for the examiner.

Many centres had full audiences, which really helped the candidates to 'rise to the occasion'. Centres had considered programmes, refreshments and incidental music or PowerPoint presentations between pieces to keep the audience focused. Some centres provided musical interludes between pieces and others showed rehearsal footage of the candidates' showcases. All of these ideas helped the audience and improved the feel of the 'waiting time' between pieces.

Performance spaces were much better during this session. Centres moved away from the classroom/rehearsal performance and ensured that a performance space with technical aspects was available. Candidates who performed in studio/theatre spaces were able to consider the theatrical elements that would enhance their performance. Many centres used lighting and sound amplification, which enhanced the performance aspects of the work considerably.

Many examiners commented on the lack of refreshments and provision of adequate breaks in long programmes. Examiners should not be left to 'fend for themselves'. Centres must also remember that positioning of the examiner is crucial. Seating an examiner at the back of the auditorium may infringe their ability to see facial expression and body language as well as not being able to actually see through the audience. Centres must remember that this is still an examination and not just focus on the 'public performance aspects.'

The Discussion

The discussions gave candidates a chance to talk about their showcases and gave the examiners an insight into what candidates were trying to achieve. Many candidates used the discussion as a valuable opportunity to take ownership of their work, talking about their vision and interpretation of the selected pieces. Many candidates showed a good understanding of the creative process as well as Health and Safety and warm-up procedures. Fewer candidates were interviewed alone; many choose to discuss their programme with their performance partner. This provided detailed discussions and gave many candidates confidence.

During this session many dance candidates were able to indicate where they had taken the work from and discuss the issues that arose in taking a dance from DVD or paper and creating it in its repertoire form. Good candidates had researched their pieces thoroughly and could talk about influences of dance practitioners and performances seen. They described the choreographic process employed to learn their work. They were aware of stylistic influences and able to put the dance into context, describing the purpose of the pieces, the intended audience and its impact. There were still a small number of dance candidates who did not select a 'particular work' from repertoire. Therefore, they were unable to discuss any of the above. Other candidates had used repertoire as a stimulus and then created their own response. This is in breach of the specification and centres must ensure that all selected dance pieces are taken from repertoire. Personal adaptation of the works is allowed to reflect candidate skill levels but selected pieces should exist in repertoire form and not be a group dance converted to a solo or a solo piece choreographed into a duo.

Many drama candidates displayed an understanding of the process, but failed to really understand their chosen pieces with little appreciation of the playwrights' intentions or the context of the work. Good candidates were able to discuss their ideas for performance of the pieces, influences, style and context as well as characterisation, period, mood and atmosphere. They had excellent knowledge about the style of their pieces, as well as detailed character analyses. This enabled them to inform the Examiner of their intended interpretation.

Music candidates, particularly instrumentalists, were very well prepared. They gave an understanding of style, genre, musical awareness, how the composer communicated the work, technical language and influences. Good candidates were able to discuss their own interpretations on style and content and relate them to historic and social influences. Candidates need to be able to discuss technical competence and how they have achieved balance/contrast in their showcase. Candidates are awarded higher marks for learning the pieces, which also allows for audience interaction and communication. Centres should check that the selected pieces are appropriate for an advanced level examination as low graded pieces and set studies do not always fulfill the assessment requirements.

Singers must ensure that they select songs that are suited to their vocal ability. Too many singers were choosing pieces without looking at key signatures and the range of notes covered. This meant the pieces were not suited to the vocal range and caused difficulties with breath control, pitch and tuning. It is not acceptable to select a song and then change the note structure because it is not suitable for the vocal. Candidates will require teacher input to ensure that they are selecting songs that complement their singing ability and still provide good balance and contrast.

The Performance of the Showcase

There were some outstanding performances, which were the result of centres giving good advice over the choice of material, strong direction and matching pieces to student ability. Performances spanned a wide range of genre, art forms and styles. Successful candidates were able to perform in contrasting styles and showed a good range of skills and techniques. Overall, performance material was varied and the diversity of material selected for the showcase was very encouraging.

Technical support in many centres made a real difference to the quality of the performances. Good centres had provided sound and lighting as well as a suitable performance space that was well lit and appropriate. Many were able to provide projections and media coverage that enhanced the overall look of the performance. It was particularly effective for the dance candidates giving visual depth and meaning to their performance work.

However, Examiners also reported that too many candidates attempted pieces that they clearly did not understand, while others chose pieces that were unsuitable for relatively inexperienced young people. There were noticeable differences in the standards from one centre to another. Some centres encouraged their candidates to produce stylistically impressive, dynamic and absorbing performance work, while others allowed candidates to be under rehearsed, unimaginative and tentative. Most candidates made an attempt to consider ways in which technical aspects such as set, props, costume and lighting could be used to enhance their performances, but others used the adoption of a 'minimalist' approach as an excuse for doing very little.

Dance

Dance repertoire was much more in evidence. There were occasional 'in the style of' and fewer self devised performances. Good candidates were performing impressive dance routines from repertoire. They were able to show understanding of the stylistic elements and display a good technical ability.

Good dance centres were able to provide the candidates with material from choreographers and a wealth of material to select from. This gave the candidates the opportunity to perform works that provided the correct standard and access to the assessment criteria in the higher bands. Many dance candidates had considered balance and contrast selecting pieces from different genres, in order to show a range of dance skills and techniques.

Dancers seen were able to show awareness of Health and Safety issues. They had discussed various aspects of footwear, jewellery, hair and costume in their preparatory notes. Spatial awareness and the performance space were also highlighted. There was also evidence of costume and appropriate setting and style. Dancers must ensure that their choice of costume is appropriate as too many dancers were adjusting their costumes during the performance.

Drama

Examiners felt that too many candidates selected pieces that they did not really understand and this resulted in some weaker performance work. Some candidates selected very challenging and demanding pieces, which posed questions as to whether candidates should select difficult pieces or 'play safe' and select simple pieces. Candidates should be reassured that the assessment criteria used does take this into consideration.

Stronger candidates displayed good acting skills with emphasis on both physical and vocal techniques. A number of drama candidates tended to rush monologues slightly or lack adequate variety of pace. Articulation also needed greater attention as many 'moments were lost through candidates 'swallowing' their lines. Accents tended to be left out and candidates must consider whether they should take on a piece of repertoire if they are unable to tackle the accent. Good Shakespeare was evident where candidates had an understanding of iambic pentameter, clear diction and clarity of voice. However, some candidates performing Shakespeare pieces did not have a secure understanding about the structure of the language and its performance aspects.

Many candidates had really worked hard to ensure that they captured the time, period and stylistic elements of the pieces through costume and props. This was effective and even simple costumes enabled candidates to really 'get inside the character' which added impact.

The best performances had considered the audience and how to engage with them. In these candidates were using a range of skills, techniques and drama conventions. Material selected in the session covered a range of genre including contemporary drama, Greek Theatre, Classical Speeches, Shakespeare, Ibsen, Churchill, Berkoff, Pinter, Sarah Kane and Victoria Wood.

Music

Singing on the whole tended to be the weakest area due to selection of material. Musical Theatre continued to be popular as candidates were able to demonstrate techniques across a range of singing, dancing and acting. It is however important to ensure that candidates are able to cope with all of the aspects of musical theatre, if the piece requires all art forms it is important that candidates have the necessary skills to deliver the piece. Examiners noted that some centres had just selected aspects that suited the candidates, missing out for example, acting, as the group were all dancers or just combining dance and music, but ignoring the acting scenes. If candidates present the material in the form of musical theatre then it is essential that they are competent in all three aspects. Most of the pieces were performed with backing tracks a few centres worked with live music.

Many candidates scoring in the upper marking bands were able to produce dynamic performances of their Showcase showing complete mastery of their selected material. They were able to shape and mould their material, displaying a sophisticated understanding of the interpretative skills required. Candidates at the highest level showed a committed personal style. Best practice saw a number of candidates producing authoritative and absorbing performances, which really engaged with the audience.

Preparatory Notes

The quality of the preparatory notes varied considerably with some very detailed examples and work of a very poor quality for this level. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on recording each stage of the process. Many continued to describe, rather than explain and evaluate the decision-making process, and most appeared to think that decision-making stopped once they had selected their pieces. Few candidates gave a sophisticated account of the process by which they took their pieces from page to stage. The best candidates exercised initiative by applying relevant social, cultural and historical research and appropriate, professional rehearsal techniques to their own practice. It is a matter of some concern that some candidates had selected monologues and duologues from compilations and moved to performance without having read the whole script and with only a hazy notion of the characters involved and the context of the extract. Furthermore, while it is pleasing to see so many candidates tackling classic pieces, it is impossible for them to make appropriate stylistic choices without looking into the performance history and the work of the great practitioners associated with them.

Some candidates still laboured under the impression that social, historical and cultural contexts could be covered by providing brief details on when the piece was created and by whom, followed by an internet synopsis rather than linking the pieces to the wider contexts within which they were written or of the time when they are set. This seemed to be particularly the case with more recent pieces. In some cases this had an impact upon the delivery of the pieces as stylistic and genre awareness was lacking. Few candidates understood the importance of applying social, cultural and historical research and using a range of rehearsal techniques to develop and improve the quality of their own performances.

Some centres appeared to have developed templates for students to use in producing their written work, but this led to a lack of personal engagement with the process. Candidates must be encouraged to produce individual responses that bring out the salient messages from within the body of their discussion rather than producing responses for specific sections. Application of research and the exercise of initiative tended to be confined to peripheral considerations such as costume. In some centres, the interview, which provides no additional marks, revealed far greater understanding of the context of the pieces and the application of quite sophisticated rehearsal techniques than was apparent in the preparatory notes.

However, there were some examples of very high quality written work, and it is surely no coincidence that the same candidates often produced the best performances. The best examples displayed a professional approach to planning for performance, with their research into potential pieces and selection procedure explained rather than merely described, with relevant research into the social, historical and cultural context of the pieces actually applied to the final performance. More dance candidates were submitting DVD evidence of the dances that they were going to perform. This was very helpful as it provided undisputed evidence that the pieces were repertoire.

Unfortunately, for some candidates submissions were little more than basic descriptive logs, with limited Internet research that was not applied and little evidence of the use of action planning and feedback to develop the final showcase. Those candidates who did not produce and submit any working notes were disadvantaged and unable to access the higher marks. The preparatory notes are worth 20% of the final grade and both centres and candidates must be aware of this. Many candidates who produced impressive performance work were unable to achieve a grade that supported this due to poor quality submissions!

G387 Production Demonstration

Candidates working in production do need to be far more aware of meeting professional standards in their work. A lot of the work seen was vague and poorly researched. Candidates need to be aware that a few rough sketches and pages off the Internet and poorly presented presentations do not equate to the standards required from this A2 unit.

The work for this unit needs to be in two distinct parts: the portfolio of work and the product demonstration.

Evidence recorded onto the DVD as part of the process is very helpful in understanding what the candidates have achieved. Candidates must respond to a set brief as designated by centre staff. This needs to be realistic and where possible linked to the work of performance candidates.

Too many candidates selected technical skills yet failed to really implement what the industry requires in practice. Design work was not evident in many portfolios. Hand drawn diagrams and lack of technical terms impeded many candidates. Standards in this unit must match those on the performance pathway and in this session too many candidates produced poor quality work.

Less successful candidates need to improve the research, detail and presentation of their work. There must be evidence of industry standards, scaled drawings and construction techniques. Drawings and designs of period sets and costumes must be historically accurate and candidates must ensure that any accessories/props are to scale. Buying the dressings for a set box or props from retailers is not what the unit is about.

Candidates must submit both their preparatory notes and their portfolio containing their designs as well as pictures, photographs, DVD, or video evidence of their product demonstration.

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