

Report on the Units

June 2010

J315/R/10

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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A581 From Page to Stage

The Centres that delivered this Unit for the first time are to be commended for meeting the required deadlines and for sending the required paperwork to enable moderation to be completed. Every Centre is thanked for chaptering their DVD's appropriately.

Generally the quality of the filming of the DVD's allowed moderators to identify the candidates and track them throughout their extracts. Those Centres which encouraged their candidates to speak clearly and slowly giving their name and candidate numbers at the beginning of their extract were much praised by moderators. It is recommended that Centres check the recording equipment, in particular the sound quality, and the positioning and focusing of the camera prior to the final performance. Centres should also give consideration to the use and reflection of the stage lighting and the use of the stage space by the candidates prior to the final performance.

The choice of extracts and size of groups varied throughout the Centres. Moderators watched both monologues and larger group performances. A range of texts was observed from Shakespeare through to Willy Russell. Those Centres which gave due attention to the playwright's intention and appropriate context presented some engaging performances. However, with an ever increasing range of diverse texts available for Key Stage Four, Centres should ensure that the choice of text is appropriate and allows candidates to achieve to the best of their ability. Using texts by the likes of John Godber, Steven Berkoff and other playwrights who form part of the established repertoire for A Level, may not always be the best choice for the full range of candidates at KS4.

Candidates who chose a continuous extract and did not exceed the time limit found it easier to maintain their focus and characterisation than those whose extract was a series of sections from the text or ran on too long.

Whilst performing cross gender can provide a positive challenge for candidates, such a decision should be fully discussed and justified within the notebook. The Centre should be confident that the candidate will achieve to the best of their ability and that the playwright intentions are being fully realised and understood where cross gendering has been encouraged.

Those Centres which had given due regard to the possibilities and dimensions of their 'stage space' before selecting suitable texts facilitated their candidates to achieve. Candidates who had discussed the use of their stage space and the positioning of set and props in their notebooks including a ground plan were both 'at home' in the performance space and confident in its use. Where candidates were performing several scenes, those who had given due consideration to the continuity for an audience achieved more effective outcomes.

The use of sound and stage lighting enhanced the majority of extracts, particularly where it had been chosen with care to create mood and atmosphere and where candidates were able to position themselves and 'find' the light. Many candidates used properties (props) and costumes effectively to enhance communication of the themes of the play. This demonstrated a good understanding of semiotics. Several moderators commented on the effectiveness of the costume.

The most successful Working Records were clearly divided into three sections. The first section to discuss the play in terms of its social, historical and geographical contexts, implications for performance, genre and performance style. It was also important to record why they had chosen the scene and the possibilities for performance and design.

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In the second section some candidates considered where relevant, any preparation processes and any 'off text' exercises they had used. The exploration and building of the character and their relationship and links with other characters were also covered. Further discussion of practical ideas for portraying the character for an audience were also considered. Ideas, decisions and implications of the staging, set and design including sketches and ground plans were also included in the best examples. The best candidates evaluated throughout the Working Record and used the third section to make a final summative evaluation including a variety of feedback and reflection from peers, audience and staff.

Those Centres which were fully conversant with the demands of the Working Record and the marking criteria encouraged their candidates to deliver appropriate and well presented work.

Some DVD's included a short evaluation session with the audience and some Working Records included questionnaires which had been given to the audience. Where writing frames or templates had been used, they appeared to restrict high achieving candidates being a prescriptive format that did not allow for the expansion of individual ideas and reflection.

In conclusion it should be emphasised how many reports of good quality work have been received for the new Unit. This is a tribute to the hard and effective work and understanding of both teachers and candidates.

A582 Drama in the Making

This report relates to a very small initial cohort, a few centres with one of the teaching groups being KS3. Therefore all the comments here relate to a very small sample, but the advice will be pertinent to centres who will be preparing candidates in the new academic year.

This unit is very distinctive to this specification and is the unit that breaks the most new ground in terms of format. The pilot OCR conducted for this unit demonstrated candidates can have great freedom to explore if centres 'let them off the leash' and work to the spirit of the unit – a drama investigation. Candidates are essentially conducting a drama investigation that explores the potential of the chosen stimulus to make a good drama/play.

In this respect the choice of stimulus is very important, something is required that has the potential to engage but is not so definite and prescriptive that the scope for exploration is stifled. The centres taking the unit this session illustrated the choice of stimulus does have an impact. Sampled work displayed varied approaches to the chosen stimulus, there was some imaginative work generated which fulfilled the focus of the Unit. It would be helpful if stimuli could always be clearly identified in the Working Records. At one centre the use of music as a stimulus had generated some interesting responses although the music chosen was not identified in the Working Record. Candidates need to refer back to the stimulus in their Working Record, both to assist their own reflective process and to provide the moderator with a 'trail' charting the progressing investigation/exploration. In another centre the choice of a text as the stimulus, even though working with themes rather than actual text, constrained and limited the nature of any potential investigation. In many ways there was too much that was already 'known' so this limited the scope of the candidates to develop their own ideas.

From the evidence of the DVD's and Working Records the candidates had engaged with the core purpose of the unit and appropriate work across the full range of levels was seen. Item 1 the Group Presentation was generally tackled with confidence by centres. They were varied, often demonstrating in their outcome a clear potential for development into a full and "engaging workable drama".

For one of items 2 and 3 monologues were a popular choice. The best demonstrated interesting potential development of character/role/plot and theme.

Where candidates chose design options such as lighting for one of their Items, responses tended to be rather general and lacking a range of clear subject specific terminology and knowledge. Candidates do not have to choose a Designer option so it is advisable to make sure candidates have had enough specific teaching input to tackle this choice. If working on lighting candidates should have some basic terminology and knowledge. For example different types of lights, profiles, fresnels, par cans, floodlights; the use of general lighting states and specials when planning; using colour filters, gobos, barn doors, timing of changes to create atmosphere and focus; and changing from cue to cue by use of blackout or cross fade. Without such basic understanding they will not be able to coherently articulate ideas. They will respond by making statements such as, 'I'd have a red light on for the scene.' Such responses should be awarded very low marks.

The Working Records did not always fully and effectively chart the candidate's investigation. These are working documents, but they do need to evidence and support the working process, a process that is about devising material that might make a good play. Centres need to remind candidates the focus is not on creating a finished performance as with A581 Page to Stage, but to generate material that would be good to turn into a play. They are focusing on the 'script', being Devisers and Directors as they trial the ideas. Some of this can be tackled by centres/candidates basic organisation:

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- There will be an opening section that gives initial thoughts on the potential of the stimulus – this is produced in the hour allowed before the 10 hour begins
- The three items need to appear in separate clearly headed sections, and for items 2 and 3 it needs to state the context offered i.e. Deviser, Designer, Performer or Director
- There will be a final evaluation/review of the potential of the stimulus to be used for a drama/play – they will have already evaluated their three individual items in the previous sections, but any additional thoughts can be added here. They can also comment on feedback received from the teacher and other candidates
- To meet the requirement of the specification, at least one comment on the work of another candidate/group, evaluating the potential of the idea not the quality of the performance must be included. This too should be written under a separate heading for clarity.

The overall purpose of the Working Record needs to be clear to centres and candidates. These are not the same as the portfolios for the legacy specification or even quite the same as the Working Records for the other units. Candidates tended to give too much focus to performance elements concentrating on how to deliver a role. Now this may well have relevance but the primary focus of this unit is the context of Deviser and Director, consequently this should be reflected in the Working Record. Candidates need to be encouraged to think about such factors as how to structure a play, how to structure a scene, the function of a character and their contribution to the plot/theme, the use of semiotics to convey meaning, how an audience engages with a theme/character which may bring in social/historical/cultural contexts, genre and performance style in relation to scripting. Candidates should make clear why that monologue/scene is in the play and where is it placed in the overall structure? Similarly, when working as a deviser or designer, how the chosen item develops, enhances or informs the piece should be explained.

Teacher feedback to candidates after each Item needs to focus on such factors, the examples seen in this session were too focused on the candidate's delivery i.e. concentrating on the context of Performer. This is something teachers will have to become conscious of as this unit gives the opportunity to reward skills of devising, directing and designing.

Centres also need to be clear with what is being marked and offered for moderation. For instances centres offered monologues as one of the three items, but were they being offered as a Performer Item or a Deviser Item? If as a Performer, the moderator will look at the DVD of the performance, if as a Deviser then a script will be created and that will be judged by the moderator not the quality of any performance, in which case you may not wish to DVD the work, submitting it as a piece of written work only. Therefore as stated above in the Working Record the candidates will clearly head up the item with the context they are being assessed on.

The marking grids facilitate clear differentiation and centres need to use these to discriminate between candidates. Where candidates work in groups there can be a tendency to even out the marks, when moderators could identify clear distinctions between candidates. Centres need to think carefully about group work and being able to clearly identify individual contributions. In this year's submission, some of the design ideas offered as group presentations were not of sufficient detail or quantity to merit the marks awarded to the group. In these cases over a 2 hour time span the individual students would have done better working on their own. As it was, groups of three were sometimes presenting a quantity of material/ideas that would have expected from an individual candidate and it was very difficult to establish each individual contribution. Also in some cases it was questionable if the development of potential script ideas were developed enough to be ready to consider design ideas. It is recommended the three items are not tackled mechanically e.g. 1. Group improvisation 2. Monologue 3. Design idea. Rather let the Items evolve from a genuine investigation.

DVD's were well chaptered and documented which greatly facilitates the moderator's job of validating centre marking. Centres are thanked for this.

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NOTE. It is not necessary to DVD items 2 and 3 if a candidate is including a piece of script as a deviser or a piece of design through plans, drawings and notes etc. However, if explaining their ideas on DVD would enhance their work, centres may choose to record them.

As this was the first moderation of this unit there is a lot of detailed advice to help future teaching and assessment, this should not take away from the fact that it was pleasing to see centres working to the intent of this unit “for candidates to explore and develop understanding of the devising process”. Some engaging work with potential for development into full dramas was seen. The potential and future development of this unit looks very positive. This is a unit where candidates can genuinely explore and centres are encouraged to not be too prescriptive.

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