



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Performing Arts

48801

(Specification 4880)

Unit 1: Skills development

Report on the Examination

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Unit 1- 48801: Skills Development

Introduction

Once again, moderators reported that the majority of schools had approached this first Unit of the course in an imaginative and practical manner with students experiencing a range of activities and briefs. It should be noted that although this Unit is evidenced in a written format, all work must be based on *practical* experience, not theoretical research. The main focus of this Unit is to introduce students to the range of skills and approaches necessary to develop themselves as practitioners in the performing arts. It is very encouraging to see the number of schools who are offering a wide range of opportunities across differing art forms and non-performance roles, such as design/technical skills/stage management/marketing and publicity etc.

Work submitted in this series covered the full range of achievement. It was a concern to moderators that some schools did not seem to be aware of the AQA standard set for this Unit. It is essential that all teachers of this specification complete the online moderation exercise on the AQA secure website in the autumn term. Examination officers will be able to advise teachers on how to access this site. Only a minority of teachers attended the two face-to-face standardisation meetings held in the autumn term. Many schools made good use of their Controlled Assessment Advisers however; this service is available to all schools delivering the specification.

Some schools are still neglecting to include the work carried out in preparation for Unit 2 in Unit 1 portfolios. All work should be included.

Administration

Please note that the deadline for the submission of marks is the 7th May. Moderators reported that there were still a significant number of schools who were very late with the submission of marks. Schools which have 20 students or fewer for this Unit must send all portfolios with Centre Mark Forms in the first instance for the 7th May deadline. Moderators also reported that a significant amount of time was taken up with communication difficulties encountered when trying to chase up late marks and/or work from schools. More consideration could be given by some schools to the collation of portfolios. Poorly fastened work will come loose in the post. Ring binders are too bulky and again, will come open in the post. Schools are strongly advised to avoid folders entirely and securely staple or spiral bind the portfolios. Plastic wallets should also be avoided. Some schools use other size formats than A4 for portfolios, but again, these frequently become damaged in transit. Schools are advised to take care when adding up marks to avoid unnecessary errors in addition. Moderators reported that a number of schools did not initially include the Centre Declaration Sheet, which is a requirement for all moderated components.

Centre Marking

It is a requirement that teachers clearly offer evidence with each portfolio of how the assessment criteria have been applied to the marking of the work. An assessment grid (available on the AQA website) must be included with each portfolio, relating the assessment criteria to specific pages of evidence within the portfolio. Many schools annotated the work itself which is extremely helpful for moderators when seeking evidence to support centre marking. Work forwarded for moderation with insufficient evidence of centre marking will be returned to the school for further details of how the marks have been arrived at by the teacher(s).

Organisation of portfolios

Careful structuring of portfolios by the students is necessary so that each assessment objective can be clearly evidenced. The majority of schools adopt a chronological approach, with the work being set out in the order of the briefs/activities undertaken. A minority of schools use the assessment objective as ‘chapters’- Skills Development, Planning and Research etc. This can be problematic as frequently evidence for more than one area of assessment can be found in a single record of work. However the portfolio is structured, it is essential to make it clear that all work relates to the Unit requirements. Some work included in this series did not gain marks because it did not relate to any of the assessment objectives. Whilst it is acceptable to use the GCSE Performing Arts course as a vehicle to explore other subjects, it must be absolutely clear that all work offered in this Unit relates to the assessment objectives and aims of the course. It was noted that a minority of schools failed to include the three observations of each student’s practice with the portfolio. This is a Unit requirement. The observation should be as personal and detailed as possible. Once again, some moderators reported that some students submitted portfolios of immense size - up to 300 pages in length. Frequently these portfolios were ‘padded’ with irrelevant material and the scale of portfolio made moderation very difficult. Students should aim to be as concise as possible - some students achieved full marks for this Unit with portfolios of no more than 50 pages.

The following sections offer an analysis of moderators’ comments on how students performed against each assessment criteria for Unit 1:

Skills Development

Most students included an assessment of their skills base at the start of the portfolio (initial skills audit). This is an essential exercise to help students to understand how specific skills have been improved throughout the Unit. Careful thought should be given to this exercise - some schools make use of proformas, which are very useful but not if they are in the form of a mere ‘tick sheet’ where students are unable to add further comments or evidence. Many schools are to be congratulated on the exciting practical opportunities provided for students during the delivery of this Unit. It is really not possible to fulfil the Unit requirements without extensive practical experience for students. Again, teachers should carefully consider the best ways for students to record and evaluate their skills progression. Some schools make use of lesson diaries which are useful if they are personal and evaluative but are not effective if they are general and narrative. Some schools made very effective use of target setting which made the analysis of any improvements achieved very clear. Other schools made effective use of annotated photographic evidence and/or storyboards, but again, when this kind of evidence became a series of un-annotated images, little credit could be awarded. Students achieving marks in the higher bands (1 and 2) must make continued and knowledgeable use of ‘work-related language’ in relation to their own work. Some students displayed weaknesses in their understanding of key terms and/or concepts and conventions. Some teachers awarded marks for ‘observed’ improvements made by students during practical activities; however, credit cannot be given unless the students offer evidence of their *own* awareness of how their skills have improved. Schools are also reminded that students must focus on their own skills, not the skills of a group. Fewer students really offered strong evidence of their understanding of the appropriate health and safety considerations this year, which is a requirement for this objective.

Planning and research

Students generally offered a very large amount of evidence for this objective, but the purpose and function for the material was not always made clear. All planning and research must relate to specific practical activities. It might be appropriate to research a historical period if a performance is being set in that era. However, material copied from other sources with no clear relevance to the task should not be credited with any marks. Research was handled well when it was closely linked to a specific requirement; for example, how it supported character development. Planning was generally handled more effectively with a range of evidence being offered, such as diagrammatic staging plans, notes on choreography, design sketches etc. It is important for the student to remember to explain the purpose of all evidence presented within the context of the brief or exercise. Copied 'group' evidence is not acceptable. The contribution of each student must be clearly identifiable. It should be noted that evidence for planning and research should be balanced as some portfolios were strong in one aspect but weak in the other.

Practical activities

It is important that students include detailed evidence of the practical activities that have been undertaken in their portfolios. This might include performance-based work but also design and technical experience. This evidence could include: annotated photographs; observations; teacher assessments; reviews; evaluations and evidence from performances such as annotated programs, running orders etc. Please note that it is not a requirement to send DVD evidence for this Unit. Moderators will not view DVDs submitted as evidence for any assessment objective.

Contextual understanding of work related aspects

This continues to be the weakest aspect of many portfolios. Whilst many students are 'exploring' performing arts work in a professional context, they are failing to adequately link this experience and understanding with their own practice. Schools are to be congratulated with the lengths they go to help students gain this experience by organising theatre visits, backstage tours and interviews with practitioners. The strongest work makes direct connections from this kind of experience to the students' own skills development. It should be noted that the most important section of a student's theatre review is the paragraph *explaining how the experience will improve the student's current performance project or help them to achieve a specific skills target*. Marks in band 1 or 2 can only be awarded when this link is made absolutely clear.

Evaluation

Moderators witnessed some effective use of proformas and 'help sheets' for this objective. Evidence of evaluation will gain marks in the higher bands when it is specific and incisive. Again, it is expected that students use the appropriate technical language when evaluating their experiences. It is advisable to offer a range of evaluative evidence by one's self, peers and the group. Many students were able to state 'what had worked/not worked' but not 'how' or 'why', which are the important considerations. Some students tended to offer summative evaluation only at the end of a performance brief. It is good practice to evaluate the rehearsal and creative process so that changes and decisions made during development can be evaluated on an on-going basis. Students should consider how their practice has altered or improved as an outcome of effective evaluation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion