GCE

Edexcel GCE

Performing Arts (8781)

This Examiners' Report relates to
Publication code: UA 018432

Summer 2006

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Chief Examiners Introduction to Report

Despite this being the first year of the specification the great majority of centres were very enthusiastic about the course, confirmed that they had enjoyed delivering it and had every intention of continuing both at A2 and with new cohorts at AS. They welcomed the moderation process as an opportunity to discuss their approach with the external moderator to confirm that their processes and procedures were in line with the nationally agreed standard.

Clearly given the time scale for selecting and training visiting moderators there were some issues relating to the timing of centre visits but these were successfully addressed and all centres received thorough moderation across all three units. For the next series it will be essential for moderator allocation to be determined well in advance of the May/June window in order to ensure that centre preferences for visits can be accommodated.

The documentation developed to record centre and moderator marks was adequate but will require some minor modifications before the next series to ensure that potential awarding materials can be identified earlier in the process.

Moderators reported that they had viewed a vast range and diversity of performance work both through the portfolio evidence and the practical responses to the commission briefs. No style of performance dominated and every conceivable skill appeared to be demonstrated. Similarly the selection of Commission Brief appeared very even with perhaps a slight preference for Commission One [response to a newspaper/magazine article].

In terms of the administration of the specification most centres were clear about procedures and the only difficulties occurred because of changes to instructions about the forwarding of candidate material after the moderation visit and the inevitable clarifications relating to interpretation of the specification requirements.

Too many centres planning to enter candidates had not attended any standardisation event and clearly when this is the case it is essential that the specification, centre guidance and commission brief documents are studied very carefully to ensure that the assessment criteria are being addressed in the correct manner. It is also important that in centres where several teachers are delivering the specification that effective internal standardisation is carried out to ensure a common understanding of the criteria and assessment level.

In most centres moderators were made very welcome and the materials were organised and presented in a clear manner. It is important to stress the importance of effective annotation of candidates' work by the centre assessors as this makes the moderation process much simpler and allows more time for discussion of any issues with the teachers at the centre.

Unit 1: Exploring Skills for Performance (6980)

Developing a framework for delivering this unit caused problems for many centres as they decided to use their normal learning/teaching sessions as a vehicle for candidates to track their individual development. This type of approach often failed to take account of the exploratory nature of the unit and resulted in portfolios that contained accounts of the lessons, often in diary form, with statements to the effect that they had enabled candidates to develop without supporting detail or evidence. Some centres produced full portfolios of a high standard that frequently replicated taught material across the whole group, ignoring the vital need for the learner's voice and for the clear ownership of the material by the learner/artist. This approach often missed some aspects of the criteria as well as the vocational focus of the specification. Many candidates/centres ensured that initial skills audits were carried out but candidates needed to demonstrate how the content of their lessons or training schedule was assisting progress. Similarly audits needed to be regular and linked to practical work undertaken either in class, workshop or private sessions. Candidates employed a range of monitoring sheets to record their progress but not all used these to clearly define the next stage in the process. The inclusion of tutor comment/progress sheets was valuable but only when candidates reflected on tutor feedback in terms of their understanding of progression or the next stage of development.

As with many AS candidates the portfolios were often very attractive but much of the material, whilst useful to their studies, did not focus on skill development. Diaries were often rather generalised and failed to detail what practical work had been undertaken towards individual development.

Some centres adopted the induction process that had been suggested during implementation sessions, exploring a range of art forms and skills before allowing learners to make their own decisions about the area they wanted to progress in. However, in logistical terms, many centres found this approach difficult and made valid decisions about the art-form that was to be pursued and developed. For some centres this meant a fairly rigid delivery of Brecht and Stanislavsky, for instance, in which learners found few opportunities to respond to the demands of the specification in terms of their own exploration and engagement. It is possible to use the work of practitioners if the candidate is clear about what aspects they have explored and applied and for what purpose. Biographical notes and/or dramatic theory alone rarely demonstrated skill development. This approach was sometimes replicated in other art forms such as Dance and Music. The multi-art-form approach was more apparent in centres with a high number of production learners as they could approach lighting, stage management, box office and so forth on a carousel basis before becoming fully focussed on one production area for their presentation. However the disadvantage here was that these centres did not always produce the range and depth of evidence sufficient to meet some of the higher mark bands. Candidates selecting technical or support skills should focus on specific areas that can be developed and evidenced.

A few centres who had transferred directly from the AVCE in Performing Arts found it hard to 'shake off' the standard Skills Development approaches to learner work as well as many of the taught aspects of the portfolios mentioned earlier. However many of the stronger centres fully embraced the new approach offered by the specification with portfolios that had genuine exploration, ownership by learners, re-visited audit plans and a breadth of evaluative opportunities.

Generally there needed to be a stronger focus on specific skills, the methods by which individuals intended to develop them and a series of audit points through which they tracked their progress and defined the next stages. The process must be:

this is where I am at the beginning [clearly evidenced]
    these are the skills I hope to develop
    these are the methods/techniques/people and resources I will use [in detail]
    this is evidence of my application
    this is how I know I am progressing [or not]
    these are the proposed next stages.

The methodology for tracking and ensuring clear evidence to support this programme can be as varied as the number of centres delivering the specification. Similarly the approaches adopted can include normal teaching sessions or entirely individualised processes but whatever format is adopted the individual candidate must ensure that the above content is securely evidenced.

Generally the moderation process went well with respect to the unit, with most centres clearly understanding the sampling process and what was expected of them in terms of the production of evidence and documentation. The clear annotation of assessment evidence was very important to enable moderators to see where marks had been awarded but this was not always structured appropriately. Often moderators had considerable work to do in tracking criteria and evidence and on some occasions this came very close to re-marking. To avoid this in future it is important for centres to note the importance of the requirement to annotate candidate work clearly to clarify where assessment criteria have been addressed. Strengthening of the structures on which evidence is hung, clearer annotation and tracking procedures and a fuller understanding of the exploratory and individual ownership ethos of the unit will ensure efficient moderation.

Generally centres were clear on the need for standardisation and where a number of specialist teachers were involved in delivering the unit it was seen to be axiomatic and implicit in the process. The best centres used standardisation as a pre-requisite to a comprehensive and informed delivery of the course.

Successful portfolios often used photographs and/or video evidence to highlight specific exercises together with centre devised resources such as individual skills audit sheets, linked clearly to the criteria.

The work was often in the form of logbooks or diaries and these were not always the best way to evidence the practical work as candidates tended to describe their sessions, rather than evaluate their skills development.

A few centres attempted to address this unit as a group project rather than letting individuals focus on their individual skills; a strategy that clearly failed to meet the criteria in the specification .

Most centres included authentication documents.

Unit 2: Planning for an Event (6981)

Generally centres managed unit two more successfully than unit one because the format was closer to the corresponding unit in the AVCE specification.

When they were produced the reports were focused and for most candidates reasonably detailed. It was helpful when candidates had organised the document into the three sections of report, action plan and evaluation of the process. Essentially the nature of a report is reflective and the best candidate's accounts reviewed the complete process in an objective and businesslike manner. These reports were often accompanied by supporting evidence in the form of an appendix; though it must be stated that this is not a requirement.

The weighting of assessment objective two was not always recognised, and action plans were consequently not detailed enough and became the weaker section of the reports. Action plans are central to the process and should indicate clearly the roles and responsibilities within the team, realistic timelines and intervals when progress would be assessed. Interim monitoring of the action plan throughout the project should also be an essential part of the process. The format of the report was sometimes too informal and took on the style of a log book; when this happened candidates often included irrelevant information and lost their 'overview' of the planning process. Where reports were presented fit for purpose, they tended to be more closely matched to the requirements of the specification and moderators reported some excellent examples of professional practice such as the details within minutes and team contact information but these can be presented in an appendix.

There was sometimes a tendency to describe the role of planning in general rather than in relation to the chosen event. Where candidates had invested in the initial creative idea, the evaluation was often more thorough. However, some candidates put too much focus on the creative idea, and the creative content of the event was discussed rather than the planning aspects. This was particularly the case with the evaluation where candidates often focused on the success of the event rather than the effectiveness of the teams' organisation. It is also important to ensure that candidates provide individual responses to decisions taken by the group as well as an overview of team performance.

Stronger candidates were able to present their creative idea with clarity. Planning and working to deadlines was evidenced through a series of revised action plans, daily planning sheets and production meeting minutes. They were also able to evaluate the planning process, rather than the experience of being in the event on the day.

Many centres were particularly positive that an event needed to take place, so planning could be practical and real and the nature of the internal brief given to candidates was central to candidate success. The correct 'vehicle' allowed candidates to engage fully with the project and ensure that creative elements within the assessment criteria could be successfully addressed. Whilst some candidates had often worked very effectively as a team to plan and manage a big event, with clear individual roles, this approach often marginalised them from the decision making process or isolated their individual role within the team. In a few centres candidates were involved as performers within a full scale production and had to plan and execute additional supporting roles. Deciding upon a manageable project was clearly the most influential factor in enabling candidates to address all the criteria; it needs

to be real, interesting and challenging but at the same time manageable for the group. Moderators reported that there were some very effective briefs created by centres ranging from creating and managing 'Cabaret' evenings or 'talent shows' to hosting visiting professional work at their centre. These types of project provide opportunities for candidates to engage with every aspect of research, organisation, marketing and dealing with performers, venues and audiences.

In a very few centres candidates had made the unit three performance the focus of their unit two planning despite the fact that this prevented them from assessing the success of the performance [clearly unit two portfolios must be completed and marked prior to the moderation of unit three work {2.3}]. Also it is quite clearly stated in the Commission Brief document for unit three that 'It is not acceptable to use unit 3 to fulfil the requirements of unit 2; the content for the latter must be defined by the centre'.

Not all centres had attended standardisation meetings and this inevitably resulted in some centres not understanding the demands of the unit or the appropriate level. When teacher assessors had annotated the work it was clear why certain marks had been awarded and against which assessment criteria.

Many centres viewed the moderation visit as an opportunity to receive feedback on their course delivery and discuss aspects of the specification that they were unsure of.

Unit 3: Performing to a Commission (6982)

This unit was the most straightforward for centres as it focused essentially on the process of practical performance – the reason why most candidates initially selected the programme of study.

Moderator reports confirmed that the widest possible range of performance styles and abilities had been witnessed and that most candidates had managed to achieve reasonable marks. Performances covered the full range of skills and often reflected the specialisms or house style of the specific centre. All the disciplines were represented with many performances adopting a format that allowed candidates to capitalise on their strengths. Musical theatre and dance productions were as popular as drama work and moderators were clearly excited by much of the work on display. Some moderator reports suggested that many responses to this unit were already at A2 level and their marking reflected the enthusiasm and creativity of these candidates.

Most centres were clear about the procedure for selecting the brief and guiding candidates through the creative process. Only one centre failed to note that the work should be in response to a brief set externally by the board despite the fact that this was clearly explained in the first sentence of the unit introduction within the specification. Similarly moderators reported the high level of agreement between themselves and most of the centre assessors. Again it must be stressed that it is important for centre assessors to attend standardisation meetings prior to the assessment window. It is also important to confirm again that unit three must not be used to deliver unit two [Planning for an Event].

The choice of brief was quite even with perhaps a slight preference demonstrated for the first commission [response to a newspaper or magazine article]. Moderators commented on the inventiveness of many candidate performances and the creativity shown in both developing and performing the work. Responses to commission three [breaking the mould] were often particularly imaginative and offered candidate's scope to explore a wide range of symbolic and often surreal content and performance styles. Commission two [TIE for the Citizenship agenda] was perhaps less popular but when selected often produced some very exciting work, particularly when it was delivered to an appropriate school audience.

Most centres performed the work to the target audience and it must be stressed that this was clearly the most beneficial practice. The work should always be designed with the target audience in mind and performing to that audience confirms the success of the creative process and inevitably creates the 'right' atmosphere that encourages the candidates during their performance. Performances that were for examiner and moderator alone often failed to generate the energy and sense of engagement that having an audience can provide. Moderators also confirmed that the work was presented in a very wide range of spaces and venues depending upon the style or purpose of the work. Venues ranged form centres' own studios to site specific performances; the use of local theatres, performances in primary schools and outdoor spaces were also seen. Similarly every conceivable performance layout from 'promenade' to 'space staging' was experienced by moderators and candidates' creative use of resources was very impressive.

Many centres created work as vehicles for candidates to demonstrate their individual performance abilities and whilst this is perfectly acceptable it should be noted that the final product must be assessed as a 'performance' and audience members should

not have to sit in darkness and wait for the next 'act' to appear or for musicians to tune instruments or deal with amplifier feedback.

Most centres used the pro-forma designed to provide the moderator with the genesis of the piece, identify candidates and roles and confirm the performance style and target audience. Moderators were clear that this document was very helpful when determining the success of the work against the candidates' stated intentions for the piece and it should be stressed that this procedure should be followed by all centres.

The only issue with the moderation of performers was the occasional difficulty of identifying individuals particularly when the work required candidates to be part of a group in physical theatre work, dressed in identical costumes and wearing masks! Whilst it is recognised that the integrity of the performance is important centres must also remember that it is an examination and the moderator must be able to distinguish individuals within the group. It is also essential that candidates are identified clearly at the beginning of the Video/DVD used to record the practical work as required in the specification [page 40 second paragraph]. This identification should state the centre name and number then allow each candidate to introduce themselves in costume, if appropriate, and state their candidate number and role within the piece; this can clearly be done at any time prior to the performance. The video evidence will be used to determine the grade boundaries after the examination window and the performance must be recorded by each centre ensuring the clearest vision and sound possible.

Candidates who offered technical support as their role within the group often demonstrated great creativity and expertise in their technical accomplishments but also often failed to use the ten minute presentation to the examiner and moderator effectively to contextualise their work. When candidates did make good use of this time it enabled moderators to assess the outcomes against the stated aims.

Candidates who elected to work in administrative roles clearly had to use this time to demonstrate to the moderator the range and quality of their input to marketing and promotion or front of house activities. Moderators obviously relied more heavily on the centre assessor's knowledge of the candidates input into these areas and despite the potential difficulties moderators were happy with the reliability of the marks awarded.

With very few exceptions moderators were impressed with the commitment of candidates and the work they produced. They were equally pleased with the professionalism of centre assessors and the ease with which a level of agreement was achieved.

Statistics

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Unit 1: Exploring Skills for Performance

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	55	48	41	34	28
Uniform boundary mark	100	80	70	60	50	40

Unit 2: Planning for an Event

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	54	47	40	33	27
Uniform boundary mark	100	80	70	60	50	40

Unit 3: Performing to a Commission

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	55	48	41	34	28
Uniform boundary mark	100	80	70	60	50	40

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Advanced Subsidiary award (8781)

Provisional statistics for the award (candidates)

	A	B	C	D	E
Cumulative %	9.8	30.0	54.0	72.6	86.6

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