

Principal Examiner's Report

Summer 2017

GCSE Drama (5DR03)
Unit 3: Drama Performance

5DR03 2017

Introduction

This is the final year of the examination of Unit 3.

This report is compiled from the reports written by the complete the examining team.

Overall the standard of the work was in line with that of the 2016 series.

The Performance examination is worth 40% of the total GCSE qualification.

This is an externally examined unit and the assessment objectives and criteria do not change from those printed in the specification. This unit uniquely has elements of both an examined and coursework unit.

In preparing candidates for this unit the specification must be read with close reference to the Administrative Support Guide for the current examination series.

Centres choose the options taken by candidates, the texts or content for devised work and the audience present for the examination performances.

All work presented for examination must meet the requirements of the Assignment Brief for that year.

This unit uniquely has elements of both an examined and coursework unit.

In response to feedback from both the examining team and centres this report will give an overview of the many aspects of this unique performance examination.

Centres may note that much of the information is similar to that in earlier reports. This reflects the reports from the complete examining team that in this final year much is the same as in previous series.

Examiners reported that many of issues they noted that affected student performance would have been avoided if all centres had read and understood the requirements of the unit. The Assessment Support Guide which was updated annually gave detailed information to support the administration of the unit. Both are available on the GCSE Drama homepage

Centres can access previous reports on the homepage for GCSE Drama.

The Assignment Brief

In line with units in other GCSE specifications that have a written examination, a different focus must be set by the awarding body each year.

The Assignment Brief for 2017 was available on the website from the last Monday in October 2016. Centres are reminded that the texts or ideas in the brief are only suggestions and it remains Edexcel policy not to approve or recommend any texts or material for Unit 3.

The Assignment Brief details the options (A-G) available and all the options were seen in 2016.

- The chosen option must be entered on the D3a form Group Performance Sheet. Some centres did not complete this again in 2017.
- There was a correlation between the amount of detail of the written support material as detailed on the D3a form and the achievement in the examination performances.

The Assignment Brief for 2017 was **Looking Back Looking Forward**.

For the final 2017 series this was chosen to give all centres the opportunity to present a broad range of performances that reflected the work completed in all 3 Units over the life of the specification.

The 2016 report detailed several concerns that some of the work did not support candidates in achieving in Unit 3. It is very positive to report that there was very little negative feedback in 2017. It is hoped that this reflects that centres took on board the comments from the 2016 report and ensured these were not repeated.

In all options the majority of centres had enabled their candidates to understand how to create and communicate a real sense of theatre in their performances.

The majority of centres had responded well to the Assignment Brief and there was an increase in students achieved consistently across all the criteria.

This was often evidenced in the supporting written documentation where students made clear reference to the Assignment Brief and how either the devised work or chosen text demonstrated this.

Some centres referred to a target audience for the exam performances but as in previous years the majority were peers, family and friends.

There was a wealth of evidence in 2017 that candidates demonstrated in their exam performances the results of effective and often superb teaching that produced a wide range of drama skills that supported creative, innovative and exciting performance work.

The choice of options in 2017.

It was significant that there was a noticeable change in the number centres that chose Scripted Performance in 2017. Many examiners reported that this was the most popular option and was often a straight performance of an extract or adaptation of a published text. Other examiners reported that centres had 'pulled out all the stops' to produce high level devised performances.

It is not possible to give more than anecdotal evidence or accurate figures but it seemed that there seemed to be a more 50/50 split between devised and scripted performance in 2017.

It was thought this might be in response the requirements of the new specification.

Option A Devised work

- This remained a popular option
- Most centres detailed the stimulus material as required
- This could be the same for all groups or different for some groups. There were no advantages in either choice
- The topic/theme/issue from Unit 1 was used with success in some centres
- Most centres provided details of each performance
- Much of the work seen had serious and often demanding stimulus material

- Many performances demonstrated high levels of research into the source material
- Well chosen initial stimulus material had been provided by many centres
- There was an increase in comedy being used effectively in performances often as a contrast to the more serious issues being explored

Option B Short Published Texts

- Very few centres chose this option
- Some short published comedy 'sketches' were less successful
- Most centres included the texts as performed
- Confusions by Alan Ackbourn was again a popular choice
- Single stories from Grimm's Tales and other Carol Ann Duffy texts were used often very well

Option C Extracts from full length texts

- There was a noticeable increase in the number of these performances
- Overall the choice of extract needed to be chosen with care to make a coherent performance
- More centres sent the examiner the extract as performed by each group
- The same extract for many groups within a centre disadvantaged some students
- Dividing a complete text into sections disadvantaged some students

Option D Adaptations of full length texts

- This was often very successful with skilful and thoughtful adaptations by centres
- The episodic form worked best overall for example choosing scenes from Bouncers/Shakers but maintaining the overall narrative arc of the original text.
- Most successful centres sent the adaptation of text as performed to the examiner
- This was often chosen by centres who had also taught GCE Unit 2
- There was an eclectic and more wide ranging choice of texts in 2017
- Texts by Willy Russell, Mark Wheeler and John Godber remain popular and supported the Assignment Brief
- Texts from the NT Connections series were also seen and were considered very suitable for GCSE performance
- There were examples of very demanding texts being performed with a range of achievement
- There were a considerable number of adaptations of the set texts for the new specification Component 3 the written paper. Most popular were DNA, The Crucible. Inspector Calls and Dr Korzak's Example.

Option E Combination of Devised and Published Text

- This remained a very popular choice
- It supported a flexible and creative approach and gave all candidates an opportunity to make an individual contribution
- More centres sent the script of the performance so examiners could be well prepared. Good practice was indicating the dialogue taken from the original text and the new devised work by highlighting or change of font.
- This often produced very strong work demonstrating the individual candidate's research into the text

Option F Theatre in Education

- There were virtually no examples of this in 2017.
- In previous series the following comments applied
- Strongest work was seen when the target audience was present
- The most successful work demonstrated an understanding of the particular demands of this style of performance
- There were examples of both published texts and devised work
- Devised work addressed relevant social issues such as bullying, peer pressure and body image

- Some performances demonstrated a high level of research into the factual material available

Option G

- This was listed less often but elements of this option were frequently seen in Option A
- The use of poetry and other creative prose writing was seen most
- Successful work demonstrated considerable in depth research and a range of material
- It supported students in showing a wide range of skills
- The most successful sent a copy of the complete text as performed to the examiner

Overall Achievement in Unit 3

- Work was seen by examiners that covered the full mark range.
- Some of the performance work was of a higher standard than in 2016. Some examiners felt the standard was considerably higher. This may reflect the increased understanding of many centres in preparing candidates for the examination performances
- A few candidates were present at the examination but did so little that no marks could be awarded.
- There seemed to be an increase in the number of candidates withdrawn or not present at the exam sessions whose details had been sent to examiners prior to the exam session and had been present for Units 1 and 2.
- The use of non naturalistic stylised and ensemble work was better integrated into the final performances than in previous series.
- Full marks were awarded to some candidates in some criteria
- A few candidates were awarded full marks in all criteria
- A few candidates produced performances that exceeded the GCSE level. This was in line with candidate achievement in previous series.
- Work that was rightly awarded marks in the higher levels was a result of a well-structured preparation and rehearsal period
- Work in the higher levels had built on the skills and understanding gained in the Programme of Study.
- There were examples of a 'house style' in centres that supported the candidates' preparation and final performance.
- There were fewer concerns that tightly structured ensemble work made identification of individual students' achievement very difficult for examiners.
- The ease of candidate identification was much improved this year

Devised Performances Option A

- The content of devised performances was very wide ranging and often thought provoking
- More successful work reflected the research undertaken in the preparation process
- Overall more work was seen that was serious in content and often had a strong didactic focus
- Much work was relevant to the students own experience and engaged an audience of their peers
- Strongest performances demonstrated and confident use of a wide range of skills and strategies chosen carefully to support all criteria in balance
- Contemporary issues remain the most popular and often successful basis for performances
- Simple staging including costumes/set/lighting was most supportive to effective performances
- Less successful work tended not to create a theatre performance but relied on a linear narrative and more realistic approach perhaps influenced by television drama
- Less successful work relied too much on externals such as costume/sound/music/props/blackouts/miming to songs/dance etc that hindered the performance.
- There were a number of centres where the work was strongly influenced by Frantic Assembly and Berkoff. It is positive to report that many examiners thought this work had been better taught and understood by candidates and enhanced many performances.

- Many performances addressed the Assignment Brief by focussing on past historical events and people and how these had impact on life today and possibly the future.
- A very noticeable strand was the impact of technology on life today and in the future
- Contemporary issues and their consequences remained a powerful strand with the rise in those with extreme views and the future of the planet being explored
- Issues in relation to their own personal lives were explored including body image, the need to conform, bullying, gang culture, suicide, gender identity and the many pressures of being a teenager in 2017 were seen a great deal.
- Politics were also addressed with the possible impact of President Trump and Brexit being explored

Again many centres must be highly commended for supporting their students in the creation and realisation of devised performances that demonstrated their passion, conviction and commitment to creating vibrant 21st century theatre. It was clear that many candidates took the opportunity to make theatre that was both challenging and thought provoking for the audiences and examiners.

Scripted Performance (Option B/C/D)

- The majority of performances were well rehearsed and presented.
- Successful performances demonstrated candidates' understanding of the author's intentions.
- Successful performances showed depth of understanding of the characters and situations in the original text
- Candidates were supported where there was a sense of engaging with the full character arc
- Using Unit 2 texts supported many candidates in depth of understanding of the text
- Candidates were supported by the well crafted language of the text
- Candidates had varying degrees of security with the text. This was the basis of an effective group performance
- The proxemics were well rehearsed and effective in most performances
- Simple staging was most effective in supporting the performance
- Less successful work was when candidates did not understand the demands of scripted performance.
- Some candidates in a group lacking security with the lines affected the achievement of all in the group
- Some candidates were so poorly prepared that they had to either read the lines or receive many prompts

Combination of Devised and Scripted Performances (Options E and G)

- Play texts and factual material were the most popular choices of stimulus
- This approach was supportive to all candidates giving them a clear foundation for the performance.
- This approach gave a clear framework to support all criteria
- Centres used effective use of flashback, devised pre or post scenes based on a text with often considerable understanding

Less work was seen on Options E and G but many of the points listed above apply to these performances

Performance Support (Used to support all options)

- Most examiners did not see any Performance support candidates in 2017.
- Some centres had several Performance Support candidates. The majority had only 1 or 2
- Performance Support was most often seen in centres with Performing Arts status or a clear focus on the teaching of these skills
- Most successful work was seen where the teaching of the skill had been part of the Programme of Study
- Most successful work was seen where centres had the facilities and resources to fully support this option
- This remains an option where the full range of marks is often not seen as candidates tend to be polarised at either the higher or lower mark levels
- Most candidates completed the minimum requirements for documentation but many exceeded this with very detailed and creative work
- Less successful candidates had very little or no supporting documentation and often refused to do a presentation or were absent on the day of the exam.
- Very few presentations were pre recorded.
- Successful work clearly enhanced the performances
- Candidates can only offer one skill at GCSE level some offered 2 or more but only one could be awarded any marks
- Many portfolios/documentation were projected.
- More successful candidates then gave a summary of the main points
- Less successful candidates read the projected text verbatim.
- Far too many presentations far exceeded the 5 minute time limit.
- Some candidates supported their presentations with 'visual aids' for example demonstrating lighting cues or having students present in costume.
- Lighting and Costume were the most popular options in 2017 as in previous series
- There was a great diversity in the achievement seen in 2017 and centres need to consider very carefully if they have the resources, facilities, skill and knowledge to support PS candidates to achieve at GCSE level in the new 2018 specification.
- There was evidence of strong support being given by school technicians as well as teachers

Administration of the Examination Performances

Examination Dates and Times

- All examiners were given an allocation that reflected their personal availability and location. Examiners were instructed to contact all centres in their allocation. If the initial examiner was unable to attend the centre for any reason they had to inform Edexcel. All examiners had to confirm with centres that they were unable to attend and a replacement examiner was being sought.
- Most centres were prepared in early February and had agreed possible dates/times with the SLT at the centre so the exam dates/times were confirmed close to the examiner contacting the centre.
- Most centres were prepared with the total number of students entered for the exam. Some were rather vague or estimated a considerably higher number perhaps hoping for more examination sessions than the final numbers allowed.
- Some centres were very tardy in contacting their examiner after the initial contact had been made. Examiners are not required to 'chase' centres for confirmation of dates.
- Centre visits have to be agreed on a first come first served basis
- Very few centres in 2017 were unable or unwilling to negotiate a mutually agreed date(s) and time(s) for the examination sessions. If a centre can only offer a single date and time they were required to make a recording for examination purposes.
- In 2017 there remained a number of centres requesting a last minute change of date and time for the exam sessions. In some cases there was a valid reason for this, 'not being ready' was not. Centres must be prepared to make a recording for examination purposes.
- Examiners are not required to work on Saturday or Sunday
- All Edexcel examiners were required to inform Edexcel of any 'Conflict of Interest' centres. Overall centres understood that all examiners would be located within a reasonable distance from their allocated centres.
- Some examiners were unable to complete their allocations as arranged. This was due to a change in personal circumstances in virtually all cases. Edexcel made every effort to find another examiner but this was not always possible particularly at short notice.

This is a complex examination to administer but overall it worked well in 2017 as it has done throughout the life of the specification. This is due to the goodwill and commitment of the examining team and GCSE centres.

Performance Times

- Examiners must examine at least 20 students in a 3 hour session. In 2017 there were only a few centres expecting examiners to wait for unacceptable amounts of time during the school day. This is an examination and the 3 hour session must be observed.
- Examination conditions must apply to performance exams in line with all other formal external examinations
- In 2017 most examinations were completed well before the 9.00 p.m deadline
- In 2017 most examinations started on time. Centres are reminded that examiners make every effort to arrive promptly and it is unacceptable they should then be kept waiting 'as we are not quite ready'. The 3 hour session begins at the start time agreed with the centre.
- There were cases this year where examiners were unavoidably delayed due to unexpected transport problems. Most centres understood they needed to start the exam and record the performances rather than keep the students and audience waiting. If other monitoring examiners were present the exam performances could start with them.
- If an examiner was unable to attend at all due to unforeseen circumstances then the centre had to record and complete the post exam documentation and send to the original examiner to complete the marking. This examiner had all the original documentation and would have prepared them for the exam.
- A few performances were considerably overtime Examiners stopped marking at the maximum time limit as detailed in the ASG 2017
- Any work outside the maximum time limit was not awarded any marks by examiners

- The majority of groups were between 4 to 6 performance students in 2017
- Groups that tended to the lower end of the time requirement maintained energy and focus
- There was a considerable increase in examination sessions taking place in May, many took place in the last 2 weeks of May in 2017
- Twilight and evening sessions remained popular but centres are reminded that this is an examination and this must be the focus of the session.
- All examination sessions must run on consecutive days to give parity for all students. Some centres requested different sessions where there were candidates from different year groups.

Centre Documentation

- The majority of centres completed this well and met the deadlines both before and after the exam sessions
- Some examiners report having to complete the documentation in the centres themselves but this only applied to a very few centres
- Most centres had attention to detail and had completed all documentation very well. There was a noticeable improvement in the detail provided by the candidates to support the group performances
- The student descriptions on the D3b forms were still frequently left blank. These should be completed by the individual students even if photographs will be available on the day.
- Those centres that failed to provide examiners with the materials in the detail required disadvantaged their students
- Examiners noted there was frequently a correlation between the detail and rigour with which the documentation had been completed and the quality of the examination work
- Poorly completed documentation was often reflected in less well prepared and secure performances

Examination Conditions

- Most centres ensured appropriate and supportive audiences were in place
- There were several examples of very small or no audiences that disadvantaged students
- There were very few reports of large and inappropriate audiences. These less than supportive audiences were usually for twilight or evening performances
- Most centres ensured that audiences remain for the complete 3 hour examination session or left at a suitable break in the sequence of performances.
- Some examiners were not provided with a suitable private and quiet space to consider their marking when in the centre
- Some centres did not allow enough time between performances for examiners to consider their marks. The timetable as agreed prior to the examination should be adhered to by both centre and examiner
- There were also reports of overlong amounts of time between performances which resulted in examiners being present in centres well over the time allowed for the number of students. Examiners are not required to stay in the centre beyond the agreed session time(s)
- Virtually no centres and candidates expected examiners to speak to them either before or after the performances. There was clear understanding that examiners are not permitted to speak to candidates except to clarify identification.
- The most successful centres had prepared candidates for the formality of the examination as well as the excitement of performance.

Identification of Candidates

- This was much improved in 2017 although there were still some candidates all wearing similar costumes most often 'theatre blacks'
- Some candidates had such insignificant identifiers such as coloured ribbons that cannot be seen clearly either in performance or recordings.

- There were a number of candidates having many costume changes that were not detailed prior to the performance and this made it very difficult for examiners to clearly identify them
- Costume details were often not sent to examiners in advance
- There were in some cases many unnecessary costume changes
- Candidates who wore masks for considerable time in performance were disadvantaged
- In this final year it did seem that the majority of centres had understand that if all candidates cannot be easily identified this disadvantages them
- Large clear photographs of each performance group in costume or how they would appear in performance provided on the exam day with names/numbers/roles played greatly supported clear identification
- Wearing of very different coloured tops or tabards is excellent practice for straightforward candidate identification

The importance of the DVD Recordings

- Overall the quality of the recordings was much better than in 2016. There were many exemplary recordings
- The majority of centres had taken on board the importance of the recordings being in fact the 'scripts' for this examination.
- There remained some centres which cannot have checked the quality of the complete recording. There were cases where the recording was incomplete, silent or inaudible or out of focus at times. In the monitoring process it was most frustrating where the recording did not capture the whole performance space so some student's performances could not be seen in full.
- There were also recordings where it was almost and in some cases absolutely impossible to identify individual students
- The introduction of the use of USBs for the recording was welcomed by examiners and centres as being more efficient and user friendly. However just as DVDs must be sent in suitable protective packaging the small USBs must be sent in a suitable case or bag.
- Examiners do not check recordings or request replacements.

Problems with Unit 3 Recordings

This is repeated from previous reports as it is a comprehensive list.

- Never sent to examiner/not sent within 10 working days
- Not finalised so could not be played on any DVD player
- Not recorded so could be played on a DVD player (Examiners will not check on computers)
- Recordings made behind rows of audience
- Recordings where examiner's head obscures the action
- Recordings made at a great distance from the performance space
- Recordings that go in and out of focus
- Recordings that do not capture complete performances
- Recordings where the sound is distorted
- Recordings where the sound is overlaid by comments from the camera operator (s)
- Incomplete recordings
- Recordings that either freeze or jump
- Recordings particularly that are not chapterised
- DVD time sheets not being accurately completed
- DVDs not sent in hard protective cases so become damaged/broken in transit
- USBs not being sent in suitable packaging

However on a more positive note there were many excellent recordings that captured the live experience of the examination with real professionalism.

Accompanied Visits

Edexcel thanks those centres which had an accompanied visit in 2017. These have been an essential part of the monitoring process.

In a few cases this did affect the running time of the examination and Edexcel apologises for this

The Principal Examiner would like to thank all the centres that she visited not only this year but over the life of the series for the professionalism and positive approach they maintained in the light of having a quartet of examiners present. It has been most rewarding part of the role to see the diversity of the live performances presented for the examination.

Post Results Procedures

Centres are reminded that as this is an examined unit any review procedures mean that marks can go down as well as increase. It is important that before requesting this that the permission of the individual students has been given.

This is completed by members of the senior examining team using all the available documentation and examiner comments.

Any DVDs that were not sent securely as detailed in the ASG and became damaged cannot be used for EARs.

Examiners noted that many DVDs were sent in either thin plastic or paper covers that did not provide appropriate protection.

Conclusion

The statistical evidence confirms that at all levels the standard of achievement by students in 2017 was very much in line with that in 2016.

Candidates achieving in the 2 higher levels produced performances that reflected they had clearly been taught the specific skills required throughout the course. It was felt that marks in the lower levels were often symptomatic of students' lack of commitment or even disaffection not lack of centre support. There was an increase in the number of students entered who did not attend for the examination performance but had been present for Units 1 and 2 and in some cases entered for the complete examination.

Unit 3 has been a unique examination that enabled candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of drama by demonstrating it in a performance.

Beyond the requirements of this unit the work done by centres to encourage leadership, working as a member of a group, meeting deadlines, making decisions, and working co-operatively will prove to be of great value to these young people in their future lives. They have understood the value of empathy and gained in confidence in a way few other subjects are able to do. The sheer pleasure and sense of achievement that this exam has given so many students over the years cannot be underestimated and I hope will not be forgotten.

I have had the considerable pleasure in reading the final reports from the whole examining team detailing their thoughts on what has been a unique examination. I quote from just one as representative of the many:

I have examined this unit from the beginning. I have generally been thrilled by the work I have seen by young people. They have been so lucky to have been given this opportunity to be creative through performing and by taking on design and technical challenges. There are so many inspirational teachers who have taught and challenged their students. I have often been fully aware of the amount of stress and hard work it has taken to get the students ready for the exam days. I have met some great teachers and it has been very sad (although understandable) that we examiners cannot thank them in person for all that they have done. It has been interesting that the facilities and location of a centre does not determine the quality and passion for using drama to create theatre. I have seen wonderful work produced with few facilities and less good work in almost professional studios. It has been a real privilege to examine over the years.

This exam has been accessible to the widest range of young people not only in the United Kingdom but across the world. Almost the last word in this final report must go to one of our candidates in the final centre that I was privileged to exam in 2017

Drama has improved my knowledge of world events. I have understood so much more because I have been able to physically explore things. Drama helped me to forget my troubles and challenges because I can become another person in the drama room and then afterwards things don't seem so bad. It has been the best time in my school life.

We end this specification and unit at a time when there remain uncertain days ahead for the appreciation of the value of Drama in the school curriculum. I do see a sign of hope in the recent reports from Ofsted of the understanding that drama (and the creative arts) has an invaluable place in the complete education of young people to prepare them for their future lives in the rapidly changing 21st century

My thanks to all the young people and their teachers who have made Unit 3 such a great experience over the life of this specification.