

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2014

Pearson Edexcel GCSE
in Drama (5DR03) Drama
Performance

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Summer 2014

Publications Code UG038560

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5DR03 2014 Drama Performance

Introduction

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.

In response to feedback from both the examining team and centres there were concerns that much of the information in previous reports was repeated year on year. This report will focus on significant aspects of the performance and some administrative issues of the 2014 series.

Overwhelmingly examiners reported that many of the issues that they noted affecting student performance would have been avoided if all centres read and understood the requirements of the unit. The Assessment Support Guide which is updated annually gives detailed information to support the administration of the unit. Both are available on the GCSE Drama and Theatre Studies homepage

Centres can access previous reports on the same homepage.

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 2014 was available on the website from the last Monday in October 2013.

Centres are reminded that the texts or ideas in the brief are suggestions only 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 2014.

- The chosen option must be entered on the D3a form Group Performance Sheet.
- Many centres did not complete this in 2014.
- Examiners reported there was a correlation between the amount of detail of the written support material as detailed on the D3a form and the polish and success of the examination performances.

The Assignment Brief for 2014 was 'Contrast(s)'

This enabled flexibility in approach and in general was either content or character based and supported a great deal of imaginative and creative work.

The most successful work was where the requirements of the Assignment Brief had been embedded in the preparation process and was evident in the final performance. Some examiners expressed considerable concern that there were centres which almost seemed to ignore or attempted a 'best fit' approach making very tenuous links to the Assignment Brief. Centres must understand this did affect the marks awarded for Content/Style/Form.

Option A Devised work

- This remained the most 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

Option B Short Published Texts

- This was a less popular option
- The most used text was the individual plays in Confusions by Alan Ackbourn.
- Some short published comedy 'sketches' were less successful
- Most centres included the texts as performed

Option C Extracts from full length texts

- This was seen by few examiners
- Overall the choice of extract needed to be chosen with care to make a coherent performance
- Many centres did not send to the examiner the extract as performed by each group
- The same extract for many groups within a centre did disadvantage some students
- Dividing a complete text into sections disadvantaged some students
- The use of single complete play from texts such as Grimm Tales etc was often very successful particularly with small groups of 3 or 4.

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 also taught GCE Unit 2

Option E Combination of Devised and Published Text

- This was the second most popular choice
- It supported a flexible and creative approach and gave all students an opportunity to make an individual contribution

- Many centres did not send the script of the performance so examiners could not be well prepared. A brief outline was not sufficient

Option F Theatre in Education

- This was seen less in 2014 perhaps because the 2013 AB supported this option more clearly
- Strongest work was seen when the target audience was present
- Most centres included an outline of the performance
- The most successful work demonstrated an understanding of the particular demands of this style of performance

Option G Based on the Assignment Brief, sometimes including devised work plus existing play texts. Poetry, song lyrics and factual material

- This was listed less but elements of this option were frequently seen in Option A
- 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.
- Overall the performance work was of a higher standard than in 2013. This may reflect the increased understanding of many centres in preparing students for the examination performances.
- A few students were present at the examination but did so little that no marks could be awarded.
- Full marks were also awarded to some students in some criteria
- A few students produced performances that exceeded the GCSE level. This was in line with student achievement in previous series
- Work 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 students approach and final performance. This could be limiting for enabling more creative and imaginative performances
- Tightly structured ensemble work could make identification of individual students' achievement very difficult for examiners and disadvantaged some students

Devised Performances Option A

- The content of devised performances was very wide ranging and often thought provoking
- The AB was seen in both the roles/characterisation and Content/Style/Form criteria
- More successful work reflected the research undertaken in the preparation process
- There was an increase in performances with strong comedic elements
- Strongest performances demonstrated a skilful and confident use of a wide range of skills and strategies chosen carefully to support the Content/Style/Form
- 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.

Many centres are commended for enabling their students to produce exciting, engaging and creative original devised theatre performances.

Scripted Performance (Option B/C/D)

- The majority of performances were well rehearsed and presented
- Successful performances demonstrated students' understanding of the author's intentions
- Successful performances showed depth of understanding of the content and style of the original text
- Students 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 students did not understand the demands of scripted performance
- Some students in a group lacking security with the lines affected the achievement of all in the group
- Some students 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 students giving them a clear foundation for the performance
- This approach gave a clear framework in relation to content style and form, defined roles and well-crafted language

- Centres used texts/authors studied for Unit 2 with success as students had prior understanding of the complete text
- Centres used effective use of flashback, devised pre or post scenes based on a text with often considerable understanding

N.B Many of the points listed under Devised and Scripted Performance also apply to the Options E and G.

Performance Support (Used to support all options)

- No performance support students were seen by most examiners in 2014
- Some centres had several PS students, the majority had only 1 or 2
- PS 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 students tend to be polarised at either the higher or lower mark levels
- Most students completed the minimum requirements for documentation but many exceeded this with very detailed and creative work
- Less successful students 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
- Students can only offer one skill at GCSE level. some offered two or more, but only one could be awarded any marks
- Many portfolios/documentation were projected
- More successful students then gave a summary of the main points
- Less successful students read the projected text verbatim.
- Far too many presentations far exceeded the 5 minute time limit. Examiners did not consider anything said after this time
- Some students 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 2014

Administration of the Examination Performances

Examination Dates and Times

- Many centres did not respond to examiners initial phone call promptly
- Centre visits were agreed on a first come first served basis
- Many more centres in 2014 were unable or unwilling to negotiate a mutually agreed date(s) and time(s) for the examination sessions
- Many more centres in 2014 requested a last minute change of date and time for the exam sessions
- Examiners are not required to work on Saturday or Sunday

Edexcel appreciates that many centres are under increasing pressure regarding both timetables and performance spaces but all Edexcel examiners have other commitments and so have demands on their available time as well. Centres must be

prepared to record performances and send these for examination if a date(s) cannot be agreed with the visiting examiner.

All examiners are expected to complete their full allocation of centres and inform Edexcel of all centres where they know there is a possible conflict of interest before allocations are made.

There was an issue in 2014 where some centres contacted Edexcel to say they did not wish to have the allocated examiner. In a few cases an alternative examiner was allocated. This will not happen in future series.

As this is a unique visiting examination, examiners' allocations are based on a set radius from their home address. Centres must appreciate that it is inevitable that examiners will be located in the local area.

There was a problem with the allocations system in 2014 and Edexcel apologises for the late allocation of an examiner to some centres in 2014. There was a further problem in 2014 where more examiners than in any previous series were unable to either complete their whole allocation or complete their examining in some centres or sessions that had been previously agreed.

The examining team made every effort to find alternative examiners to ensure as many centres as possible had a visiting examiner on the dates agreed. In some cases, usually due to either last minute illness or centres refusing to release examiners, no examiner could be found.

Edexcel thanks those centres who in these circumstances had to record their performances and the professional and courteous way in which they managed this process.

Edexcel also thanks those examiners who were prepared and able to travel considerable distances to some centres.

This is a complex examination to administer and it is hoped that both centres and examiners will have the flexibility to ensure this live performance exam works effectively in future series.

Performance Times

- Examiners must examine at least 20 students in a 3 hour session. In 2014 there was a marked increase in those centres expecting examiners to wait for unacceptable amounts of time during the school day. Centres are reminded that this is an examination and the 3 hour maximum time limit per session must be observed
- Examination conditions should apply to Unit 3 as it would to all other formal external examinations
- From 2014 onwards all exam sessions must finish by 9.00 pm. Many examiners report that some centres did not ensure this was put in place for evening sessions. Often this was because the focus was more on a performance evening and not the examination
- In 2014 there was an increase in centres delaying the start time of exam sessions. 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 was a marked increase in very short performances or performances with a large number of very short scenes (often with lengthy blackouts). This disadvantaged students and did not enable them to achieve in the higher mark levels
- Fewer performances were considerably overtime. Examiners stopped marking at the maximum time limit as detailed in the ASG 2014
- 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 2014
- Groups that tended to the lower end of the time requirement maintained energy and focus
- In 2014 there was a marked increase in examination sessions taking place in the last 3 weeks of May
- There was an increase in the number of twilight and evening sessions in 2014
- All examination sessions must run on consecutive days to give parity for all students. Some centres requested different sessions where there were students 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 centres failed to complete the written documentation and this did not support examiners being well prepared for the examination sessions
- Those centres that failed to provide examiners with the materials in the detail required disadvantaged their students
- Overwhelmingly in 2014 centres failed to complete the student description section on the D3b form. This must be completed before it is sent to the examiner
- 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

- The majority of centres ensured appropriate and supportive audiences were in place
- There were several examples of very small or no audiences that disadvantaged students
- There were fewer reports of large and inappropriate audiences in 2014. These less supportive audiences were usually for twilight or evening performances
- Centres must ensure that audiences remain for the complete 3 hour examination session
- Many 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
- Some centres and students expected examiners to speak to them either before or after the performances. Examiners are not permitted to speak to students except to clarify identification
- The most successful centres had prepared students for the formality of the examination

Identification of Students

- There were many students all wearing similar costumes most often 'theatre blacks'
- students having such insignificant identifiers such as coloured ribbons that cannot be seen clearly either in performance or recordings was not helpful
- There were a number of students having many costume changes that were not detailed prior to the performance and this made it very difficult for examiners to clearly identify them
- A number of Costume details were not sent to examiners in advance
- There were in some cases many unnecessary costume changes
- Students who wore masks for considerable time in performance were disadvantaged

This remains the overwhelmingly major concern from examiners yet again in 2014. This has been detailed in every report since the first year of this specification.

Many examiners in 2014 reported feelings of frustration, annoyance and despair that many centres do not support their students in ensuring that all students can be clearly and easily identified throughout the examination performances.

- Centres must understand that if all students cannot be easily identified this disadvantages these students
- Large clear photographs of each performance group in costume provided on the exam day with names/numbers/roles played greatly supported the identification of students
- Wearing of very different coloured tops or tabards is excellent practice for straightforward student identification

The importance of the DVD Recordings

The major concern that was discovered during the monitoring process was the poor quality of many of the recordings. It was clear that many centres did not understand the importance of the recordings as being in effect the 'scripts' for this examination. Centres are reminded that first line examiners do not check the quality of the recordings and it is the centre's responsibility to ensure this is done before sending to the examiner.

It was clear that in many cases recordings could not have checked as there were no centre comments on the quality of the recordings.

Problems with Unit 3 Recordings

- Not 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 that are not chapterised
- DVD time sheets not being accurately completed
- DVDs not sent in hard protective cases becoming damaged/broken in transit

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 2014. This is 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 this year for the professionalism and positive approach they maintained in the light of having a quartet of examiners present. It is a most rewarding part of the role to see the diversity of the live performances presented for the examination.

Blackouts and Black Costumes

This is repeated from previous reports at the request of many examiners as being the major concern in ensuring that an accurate and considered examination can be in place for all students.

Again in 2014 many examiners commented on the increase of centres having numerous blackouts in the performances. Some examiners actually counted them and reported up to 10 being used in performances of around 15 minutes.

The concern was that in the vast majority of cases this was felt to disadvantage the performance students as they tended to lose focus. Often the timing was also far from accurate and either caused the performers to call out for lights or be caught unprepared when the lights came up.

Examiners were also concerned that in some cases the audience behaviour was affected and it resulted in inappropriate laughter and calling out comments that did not enhance the examination conditions.

It can also be very difficult for examiners to maintain focus being plunged into darkness when they do not expect it.

Students wearing all black costumes or near identical costumes make it difficult at best and often impossible to identify individual student's contributions. This is made even more challenging in the monitoring process when work is looked at on the DVD recordings. This point has been made earlier in this report.

As Principal Examiner I am no longer requesting but begging that all centres avoid in future series both too many blackouts and black clothing worn by all students in a performance group in order to support all students and examiners in having successful examination sessions.

It is the responsibility of all examiners and the extensive monitoring process to ensure that all students are awarded the correct marks but centres must understand they have an important role to play in this process.

Summary

The statistical evidence confirms that at all levels the standard of achievement by students in 2014 was higher than in 2013.

Students 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. It was of note that there was an increase in the number of students entered who did not attend for the examination performance.

Unit 3 is a unique examination that enables 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 creativity, confidence, 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 students in their future lives.

It is to the credit of the 2014 cohort of students and committed and professional teachers who have worked with them that this examination has been again a success in 2014.

The quote below from a first line examiner's feedback on the 2014 series was echoed by many examiners in 2014.

"I had a great time examining this year and saw work that was exciting, often funny, highly dramatic, and challenging. The quality and range of drama skills was very high and it was uplifting and a privilege to see such impressive work."

Based on their performance in this Unit, centres and students should:

Centres

- should make the opportunity for every student to realise their full potential in performance
- must ensure all students can be clearly and easily identified in performance
- must understand the importance of the DVD recording
- understand and act upon the information in the Specification and Assessment Support Guide
- meet the deadlines agreed with the examiner prior to the exam sessions

Students

- understand the importance of working as a member of the group in preparing for Unit 3
- make sure they complete detailed group notes on the performance to send to the examiner
- make sure they can be easily identified in the performance by wearing different clothes/costumes
- work with commitment throughout the preparation period

