



Course report 2024

National 5 Drama

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 4,623

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 4,741

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	2,663	Percentage	56.2	Cumulative percentage	56.2	Minimum mark required	70
B	Number of candidates	1,123	Percentage	23.7	Cumulative percentage	79.9	Minimum mark required	60
C	Number of candidates	629	Percentage	13.3	Cumulative percentage	93.1	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	227	Percentage	4.8	Cumulative percentage	97.9	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Number of candidates	99	Percentage	2.1	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](https://sqa.my/) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, candidate performance in the 2024 question paper was similar to previous years. There was an appropriate balance in the range of questions asked, with most questions answered accurately.

Candidates identified a mixture of acting and design roles for section 1 responses, with the majority writing from the perspective of an actor.

In section 2, candidates used all three stimuli, with most candidates selecting stimulus B or C. Candidates developed a wide range of dramas in response to their chosen stimulus. Some candidates did not use the space provided for rough working to note down and develop their ideas.

Most candidate responses to section 2 were entirely suitable for a live theatrical performance and involved two or more characters, following the guidance offered within the paper.

Many candidates justified their responses in both sections of the paper by making more explicit reference to their own drama, indicating that key messages from Understanding Standards events and resources are reaching teachers/lecturers and their candidates.

Some candidates used very little or no terminology in their answers and therefore couldn't access marks. The use of production terminology was, in some cases, incorrect, and candidates used inaccurate adjectives in relation to voice and movement. Many candidates supplied generic answers without demonstrating understanding of the application of the production role.

There was an increased number of no responses (NRs) in the question paper this session, with the timing of the exam acknowledged as a factor in potential candidate fatigue. However, most candidates still completed the assessment in the allotted time.

Performance

Overall, candidate performance within this component remains an area of strength and was similar to previous years. Most centres prepared candidates well and chose appropriately challenging texts. Most centres presented candidates that represented the full range of ability across the cohort from the sample of 12 jointly assessed by the visiting and centre assessor.

Visiting assessors commented on the high standard of performances and the positive experience they had visiting centres, engaging in professional and constructive dialogue with centre assessors. The collaborative marking model continues to be a very positive experience for both markers and centres.

A wide variety of plays were performed; centres used 245 different published plays in the assessment of candidates this session, and over 450 different plays have now been used in the Performance component since 2019. Acting candidates managed to access the full

range of marks when they were suitably cast in appropriate texts that reflected the personality and range of ability within the group.

Some traditional Higher and Advanced Higher texts were used, and this was not always appropriate for National 5 candidates. Some visiting assessors commented on candidates struggling to interpret their role adequately where these texts had been used. A list of recommended texts is given in Appendix 3 of the [course specification](#), and there is a further list of commonly used texts in the 2023 [National 5 Drama webinar presentation](#). Some productions were too short.

Many centres didn't mark the preparation for performance before the visiting assessor arrived.

Design candidates were in the minority — approximately 14%, with costume (3%) and make-up and hair (3%) being the most selected roles — but many of those presented achieved an excellent standard. Visiting assessors were impressed by not only the creativity and technical skills in their chosen area, but the knowledge these candidates displayed through research on their text.

Many centres took advantage of the option to film their sample of candidates to be able to fully engage with the post-results services.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Question 1(a): Most candidates were able to identify the purpose of their drama, with many candidates also able to offer relevant justification.

Question 1(b): Some candidates were unable to access the full range of marks for this question, as they identified a key scene in their drama and justified the ways in which it communicated the purpose, instead of fully describing the scene.

Question 1(c): Most candidates were able to identify an audience response, though the reason candidates gave for this response did not always make reference to their drama.

Question 2: Some candidates didn't achieve marks, as they did not evaluate the effectiveness of their own final performance, instead only describing their concepts. Some candidates also didn't use appropriate theatrical terminology in the evaluation of their performance/design concepts, and were therefore unable to access the available marks.

Question 3: Many candidates were able to fully describe another drama student's contribution to the rehearsal process. All forms of contribution accessed marks.

Question 4(a): Most candidates answered this question well and were able to identify a moment of tension in this student's drama, with justification.

Question 4(b): Many candidates offered a basic description of one way in which this student helped to create tension in their final performance, using accurate terminology, therefore accessing one of the two available marks.

Question 5: Again, some candidates didn't achieve marks as they did not evaluate the effectiveness of this other drama student's final performance, instead only describing their concepts. As with question 2, some candidates also didn't use appropriate theatrical terminology in the evaluation of another candidate's performance/design concepts and were therefore unable to access the available marks.

Question 6(a): Many candidates didn't access the mark for this question because they misinterpreted style with dramatic form and/or genre.

Question 6(b): Most candidates were able to accurately identify the structure of their drama.

Question 6(c): Some candidates did not follow the command word of this question ('describe'), instead only naming a convention and attempting to justify why it would highlight the style or structure, with no description of the way in which it would be used in their drama.

Question 7(a): Most candidates answered this question well and were able to identify an important theme in their drama, with justification.

Question 7(b): Some candidates described two rehearsal activities that could be used to help the actors understand the important theme, demonstrating an understanding of the

activity in practice and with justification that was specifically related to their drama. Some candidates only achieved 2 marks, as they did not fully describe the rehearsal activities or only justified the ways in which they would help the actors understand the theme.

Question 8(a): Most candidates answered this question well and identified a character who appeared in their drama who they considered to be important, with a reason.

Question 8(b): Many candidates fully described an important moment in their drama involving the character identified in question 8(a). However, some candidates attempted to justify why the moment was important, rather than offering a full description.

Question 8(c): Many candidates answered this question well and described the way(s) in which they would direct the actor playing this character to use voice and movement during the important moment, using appropriate adjectives.

Question 9(a): Most candidates answered this question well and were able to identify the genre of their drama, with justification.

Question 9(b): Many candidates fully described a scene in their drama in which the genre was highlighted. As with question 8(b), however, some candidates only identified the scene, instead attempting to justify why it highlighted the genre and therefore not offering a full description.

Questions 9(c): Many candidates were unable to access the available marks for this question due to not using any appropriate theatrical terminology and/or not describing the specific use of sound during the scene.

Questions 9(d): Many candidates were again unable to access the available marks for this question due to not using any appropriate lighting terminology.

Question 10(a): Most candidates answered this question well and were able to state the time period in which they would set their drama, with justification.

Question 10(b): Some candidates did not access the full range of marks for this question due to a lack of accurate theatrical terminology in their response (set, props, costume or make-up and hair design). Candidates also sometimes didn't relate their description to the time period stated in question 10(a), though the marking instructions enabled access to marks for an implicit link.

Question 11(a): Most candidates answered this question well and identified an appropriate target audience for their drama, with positive justification.

Question 11(b): Most candidates answered this question well and identified a character in their drama the target audience would relate to, with a reason.

Question 11(c): Most candidates answered this question well and fully described one way in which the audience would respond to this character at the end of their drama.

Performance

Acting

Candidates who had been cast appropriately, in terms of creativity, age appropriateness and challenge, managed to achieve depth and reference textual clues. Most candidates applied skills with appropriate and effective use of voice and movement. Candidates remembered lines and cues well, conveyed relationships through interaction, and sustained characterisation. Some candidates had a superb impact on the audience. Many candidates achieved high marks and were directed very well by teachers and lecturers, demonstrating a depth of understanding about their character.

Centres that chose appropriate and interesting texts specifically for their candidates, which allowed for creativity and challenge, did better than centres where scenes were repeated by a number of candidates, or where candidates had been allocated unsuitable roles.

The length of some acting pieces varied from the recommended duration. A few pieces were too long. A few were too short, and didn't meet the minimum requirement.

Some texts with larger casts were challenging to mark, as actors with smaller roles were not on stage for the required time and/or lacked adequate interaction with others, making it difficult for such candidates to access the full range of marks.

A few centres continue to alter the gender of characters within a published text, contradicting explicit guidance issued on casting which states that candidates can play characters of any gender, but the playwright's intentions and/or the published text should not be altered.

Visiting assessors are also encountering an increased number of requests for additional assessment arrangements to be considered during the performance assessment. Centres must submit requests to SQA's Assessment Arrangements team (aarequests@sqa.org.uk) in advance of the published deadline, and cannot only be communicated to the visiting assessor during the phone call to set a date or on the day of assessment.

Design

Many design candidates were technically knowledgeable and executed their role with a good level of skill. Many candidates with appropriately chosen texts showed a flair for design, creativity, originality, and imagination.

Centres that had chosen texts that enabled design candidates to make a significant creative impact did better than those that had chosen scenes specifically for the acting candidates, with limited opportunity for input by designers, as they did not always allow for an appropriate level of creativity for this level.

A few centres presented multiple candidates in the same design role for the same production, failing to adhere to the explicit guidance in the course specifications and Understanding Standards materials on the specific requirements of each design role.

Some design candidates did not cover the minimum requirements for their role:

- ◆ For costume, candidates must produce detailed costume designs and a costume list for all characters. They must create or adapt one costume according to the size, style, and character. Candidates must label, maintain, and store all costumes effectively and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- ◆ For set design, candidates must produce working designs and plans for the set, including elevations, that are appropriate to the text. They must also produce detailed ground plans for each scene. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- ◆ For lighting, candidates must produce a lighting cue sheet that is accurate in terms of light intensity, cues, duration, and types of lighting changes. They must produce a detailed lighting plot. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor and operate lighting equipment on cue according to levels specified on the cue sheet(s) during a live performance.
- ◆ For sound, candidates must produce a sound cue sheet detailing volume, duration, and type. They must source and edit music and effects and provide a back-up plan. Candidates must carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor and operate sound equipment on cue according to the sound cue sheet(s) during a live performance.
- ◆ For props, candidates must produce a master props list. They must design and create one fully functional prop to use in the performance. Candidates must label and store all props effectively, organise the props table efficiently, and carry out pre-show checks in front of the assessor.
- ◆ For make-up and hair, candidates must produce designs and charts for all characters. They must select suitable materials and tools and use them safely and hygienically. Candidates must select one character design and apply that make-up and hair design in front of the assessor (other character designs can be applied to actors in advance). Candidates should demonstrate the design under theatrical lighting in a live performance.

A few design candidates were prepared to demonstrate their skills, but there was no performance of the text they had designed for. This meant marks were affected, as the skills must be applied as part of a live performance.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should spend time developing understanding of the command words and practising questions.

- ◆ A question asking the candidate to 'name', 'identify' or 'state' requires them to offer a brief response.
- ◆ A question asking the candidate to 'describe' requires them to respond in some detail.
- ◆ A question asking the candidate to 'explain' requires them to offer the purposes or reasons behind the response.
- ◆ A question asking the candidate to 'evaluate' requires them to offer a judgement and support it with evidence.

In section 1, for questions on self and others, candidates should be prepared to evaluate both the process and the performance. All answers are expected to use correct drama terminology throughout, and justification should make specific reference to the candidate's own drama.

When evaluating their own work, candidates must make an evaluative statement within their response. Candidates who do not make an evaluative statement will not be able to access the full range of marks.

When commenting on performance, candidates should refer to their performance or design concepts using appropriate terminology for their role.

When evaluating someone else, candidates can choose another candidate they have worked with in their own group, or a candidate they have observed within another group. Candidates must be able to evaluate the student's individual contribution and/or final performance (again, with an explicit evaluative statement within their response).

Responses should always be written from an individual perspective, and not from a group perspective.

In section 2, candidates should be encouraged to use the space provided for rough working to note down their ideas in response to their chosen stimuli, for example with mind maps, plot ideas or character information. A basic 'time, place and action' summary for each scene in the candidate's drama makes it clear that they have fully realised how their response to the stimulus would be performed live onstage. This enables them to formulate and work through their ideas and transfer this information into their answers. Candidates who do not use this tend to have less-detailed or fluid answers in section 2.

Candidates should be encouraged to read all the questions in section 2 before attempting to respond to the stimulus. This allows them to see the through-line of the questions and avoid repetition. Most questions have more than one part and each element will be connected to

the previous question. Candidates should be encouraged to read all parts of a question to avoid duplication and consider the question as a whole.

Again, candidates should explicitly relate every answer to their own response to the stimulus (referencing characters, plot, and the like). Candidates who only offer generic justification cannot access the full range of marks.

Candidates are expected to use drama terminology throughout, and would benefit from increased knowledge and understanding of all subject-specific vocabulary. Common mistakes include:

- ◆ 'open' or 'closed' body language, without further description. This cannot access marks, as there are multiple variations of this
- ◆ 'high' or 'low' as descriptive terms for volume cannot be credited, as this offers no differentiation from pitch — the most commonly used adjectives for volume are 'loud' or 'quiet'

Further specific guidance on accurate adjectives using voice and movement terminology can be found within the support materials on the [Understanding Standards website](#).

Candidates should remember that the drama must be suitable for a live theatrical performance, and therefore their ideas must be able to be realised. For example, sound cannot be described as 'wind' or 'rain' or 'sad music'; this achieves no marks, as the answer does not specify whether the sound effect is live or pre-recorded, the level it is to be played at, or the title of the 'sad music'. Similarly, lighting cannot be described as 'bright', 'dull' or 'a spotlight', as this does not indicate how such an effect would be created, for example the type of lanterns used, specific colour and how this would be achieved (gel or LED), or specific intensity. Additional guidance on the specific use of design terminology can be found within the support materials on the [Understanding Standards website](#).

Candidates should have knowledge (theoretical and practical application) of all production areas as outlined in the [course specification](#).

Performance

The selected text must be published and be of a suitable standard for National 5.

In centres where more than 12 candidates are being presented, the sample selected for collaborative assessment by the visiting and centre assessors should represent the full range of ability across the centre's cohort. Statistical analysis of candidate marksheets indicates that centre assessor marking is, on average, lower than that of visiting assessors. While this reflects centres adhering to the standard set by the visiting assessor on the day of assessment, it does also suggest centres commonly withholding candidates of lower ability from collaborative assessment. While there are often very strong reasons for this, such as the need for additional assessment arrangements or candidate anxiety, the wider the range of candidates that can be included within the sample, the more beneficial the collaborative discussions will be in setting marking standards.

Centres should make sure performances adhere to the minimum and maximum time limits.

Some centres chose to repeat texts, especially duologues. Repetition of scenes with similar or identical blocking is disadvantageous to candidates in demonstrating their own creativity and interpretation.

Acting candidates should be cast in only one role. While some texts requiring multi-role performances have been traditionally used at National 5 level, candidates are still expected to play one primary role within the performance assessment, upon which their preparation for performance can be rooted.

Some design candidates had prepared PowerPoints or presentations to share with the visiting assessor. While these were excellent, this is not a requirement of the course assessment at this level. Design candidates can share this with the visiting assessor at the start of the day, but time should not and cannot be allocated for presentations at this level.

The candidate mark sheets and sample sheet should be completed before the visiting assessor arrives. It is useful to a copy of the mark sheets before the assessment so centre staff can complete their own copy.

Centre assessors must have a copy of the detailed marking instructions from the course specification when assessing candidates.

Preparation for performance responses can be written or typed and should not exceed 400 words. A review that significantly exceeds this recommended length is not considered to be concise and therefore cannot access the top range of marks (9 to 10). A box has been added to the candidate mark sheet to indicate the word count of the preparation for performance. This must be completed in advance of the visiting assessor's arrival. The preparation for performance should be produced in open-book conditions and must be completed and marked by the centre assessor before the visiting assessor arrives. The centre assessor must share these marks with the visiting assessor at the point of review, not withholding them until the collaborative discussion.

Centres must provide a private, quiet space for the visiting assessor to read the preparation for performance responses, and for the visiting assessor and centre assessor to discuss national marking standards and decisions. This space should be for the sole use of the visiting assessor and centre assessor, for example, not a school room accessed by others during the assessment process. While accommodation in many centres can be challenging, an informal or public space must not be used for the assessment event.

It is good practice for the candidates involved in the performance assessment to be present throughout the event and not asked to immediately return to class following their own performance. This supports section 1 of the question paper, where candidates are asked to comment on another candidate's performance.

While centres remain free to film the performance assessment, the presence of the camera should not become a greater source of focus than the live event — for example teachers and lecturers directing candidates to introduce themselves to the camera immediately before the performance, rather than to the visiting assessor, or the timing of the assessment being determined by the functionality of the recording equipment. The recording should be of the live assessment event and the camera should not be a significant focal point.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).