Questions matter

A-Level
Drama and Theatre
7262/W

Report on the examination

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General Comments

- Teachers are to be commended for their role in guiding this 2025 cohort to attain the A- level standard.
- As has been said in previous reports, the most significant factor in any student's success in the written paper lies in first choosing the question option that matches their knowledge, experience and expertise and, second, ensuring that they note the precise demands of their chosen question and focus on those demands consistently throughout their answers.
- Examiners reported that some students underachieved by ignoring the precise demands of a question, offering instead what appeared to be pre-prepared material that was better suited to a different question altogether.
- Students should be reminded that questions on the set texts have very specific demands and that credit is not awarded to any material that is not specifically relevant to the focus of the question. For example, if a question does not specifically ask students to discuss their intended audience response to a character, any such references are unlikely to attract much, if any, credit.
- There were several rubric infringements this series.
  - Some students did not follow the guidance in answers to Section B questions where they sometimes wrote about parts of the printed extract which were not prescribed in the question.
  - In Section C, some students did not comply with the instructions to write about 2 performers only, in answer to Question 26. Material that does not match the demand of the question attracts no credit.
- Examiners noted a marked improvement in the quality of sketches and diagrams offered in support of questions in all three sections as well as a more secure command of technical vocabulary in the discussion of lighting and sound elements.
- Students should be reminded that, in Section B, they must be prepared to answer on any aspect, as well as multiple aspects, of design in Part 3 of the question, and that they will be expected to support their response to questions about set, costumes, make-up, props and/or accessories with clearly drawn and clearly labelled, reasonably sized sketches. Sketches for each element should take up at least, a quarter of a page.
- As in previous series, students' references to 'Social, Cultural and Historical contexts' were varied in quantity as well as in relevance. The majority of students were able to make some pertinent references to context in their answers in Section A. In their Section B answers, as reported last year, examiners noted that many students included an identical generic 'SCH paragraph' at the beginning of each of the three questions – wasting valuable time presenting repeated information, that was invariably irrelevant to the focus of each question and that consequently attracted no credit at all.

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- Students' effective use of quotation consisted of incorporating complete phrases or complete lines into their argument. Page numbers are of no value, as editions differ. Nor do individual words and phrases taken from a speech, and joined together by ellipses, help the examiner to 'hear' the text in action.
- Reference to Total Dramatic Effectiveness for Section C was also inconsistent. Many students omitted to refer to this at all which had a negative effect on their achievement as it is an integral element of the evaluative process.
- Some students persisted in writing the phrase "which contributed to the total dramatic effectiveness of the production", at the end of each section of description or explanation, without elaborating further to explain how this contribution was made.
- In terms of theatrical jargon, students continued to overuse and misuse the terms 'proxemics' and 'gait'. Student regularly and nonsensically referred to 'opening' and 'closing' their proxemics. Others wrote erroneously about, for example, 'standing with a closed gait' which, since 'gait' refers to a style of walking and is completely absent when standing still, makes no sense at all. Consequently, such suggestions received no credit.
- As reported every year, students should be encouraged to acquire a sensible theatrical vocabulary that accurately reflects how performers communicate their feelings, attitudes and character, using their voices, faces and bodies on stage.

Section A

Antigone

Q 01

- This was one of the most frequently attempted questions on the paper with most students opting to direct Creon, although there was also a good number of performer-centred responses.
- Whichever perspective was selected, only those students who noted that the question focus was to 'convey Creon's pride and arrogance to the audience', offered successful responses.
- Some students chose to adopt the term 'hubris', rather than use the terms of the question, all the way through their answers. While 'hubris' is an authentic term from classical Greek drama, and one which implies attitudes of pride or arrogance, there are distinctions between the two qualities used in the question that were not communicated in the answers of those who chose to refer exclusively to 'hubris'.
- In more successful answers, the sections chosen by students included Creon's highhanded treatment of the Sentry, his bullying of Antigone and then of Ismene, his confrontations with Haemon and with Tiresias.
- Less successful choices included Creon's final appearance where he enters with the dead body of Haemon, views the dead body of Eurydice and accepts responsibility for the tragic events of the play; students who wrote about this section were unable to make a convincing case for his display of pride, arrogance or hubris.

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Q 02

- This question attracted very few answers.
- Some students did not pay appropriate attention to the question demand that the design elements were to be applied to alter the atmosphere on stage. In these answers, students occasionally revealed quite detailed knowledge of technical elements but, without focus on altering atmosphere, their ideas attracted little credit.
- In the few focused responses seen, student elected to alter the atmosphere, for example from the 'triumphal' atmosphere of the opening of the play to the 'suspense' created by the Sentry's report about Polyneices' 'unlawful' burial and Creon's angry mood.
- In a handful of answers, students made appropriate selections from the text so that their technical design served some purpose. In less successful answers, students wrote about their chosen design elements without reference to any specific moment from the play.
- Better answers were always supported with specific reference to chosen moments.

Much Ado about Nothing

Q 03

- The most successful responses to this question, irrespective of whether adopting the viewpoint of director or of a designer, were successful because they were focused meticulously on creating an appropriate atmosphere for their chosen sections.
- Of these successful responses, those students who chose sections where they were able to create different atmospheres were able to display more of a range within their chosen skill.
- Most students elected to reveal the light-heartedness that is the prevalent atmosphere of the play. In more sophisticated responses, at least one of the sections was more serious in terms of its atmosphere. These less 'light-hearted' sections included the malevolent plotting between Don John, Borachio and Conrade, the 'shaming' and 'death' of Hero at the altar, and the solemnity, turning to joy, in the second 'wedding' scene.
- More popular sections selected were the two hilarious 'hoodwinking' scenes where, first Benedick, and then, Beatrice, are lured into eavesdropping on their friends' duplicitous conversations about how much they are adored by Beatrice/Benedick.
- Other popular sections included the opening of the play, the masked ball, and any of the scenes that involved Dogberry and members of the 'Watch'.
- Creation of appropriate atmosphere varied in terms of success. Some answers were focused completely on the given task; an appropriate intended atmosphere was explicitly identified and adhered to throughout the answer. Ideas were supported with well-chosen moments from the section and were clearly realised through detailed direction (attached to specific lines of text) or detailed design ideas (attached to specific characters or technical 'states')
- Less successful responses were unable to clarify the atmosphere that was intended and were equally vague about the methods that they intended to employ.

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Q04

- Students appeared to enjoy the challenge of performing Don John and they often exploited his 'villainous qualities', some spending an excessive amount of time and space in detailing his physical appearance and costume choices.
- Occasionally, students took Don John's potential for being almost comedic in his villainy a little too far, and they resorted to slapstick routines which were rarely convincing.
- Most students focused on his resentment of Don Pedro and of Claudio and his mockery of his brother and his wider circle.
- Some inventive interpretations of Don John were seen, with better students not losing sight of the seriousness of the plot against Hero and its potentially fatal consequences.

A Servant to Two Masters

Q05

- The majority of answers to this question showed a secure awareness of the role of the lovers within Comedia conventions without spending too long in tracing the theatrical antecedents of the young 'lovers'.
- A few students spent too much time discussing Goldoni's intentions and the historical background to the text, rather than focusing immediately on the question demands.
- Extensive SCH 'matter' used to display knowledge of conventions and stock characters was often not used to support the question focus and, in many cases, did not support the performance ideas that were offered.
- Only a tiny number of answers were seen written from the perspective of a designer. These answers varied in degrees of sophistication and the sketches that accompanied the written text ranged from the depiction of very rudimentary 'stick people' wearing equally rudimentary breeches/skirts/shirts/blouses/shoes/hats and brandishing appropriately 'stick-like' swords or fans or money-bags, to professionally rendered sketches of the chosen couple, who appeared in full costumes and with appropriate labelling and attention paid both to the chosen period setting, and to the practicality of the attire, given the necessary physicality of the roles.
- Most students who chose this question wrote from a director's perspective and selected the pairing of Silvio and Clarice. There was some excellent detail of their exaggeratedly dramatic relationship, their ridiculous propensity for swooning, Silvio's mad jealousy of 'Federigo' and Clarice's ineffectual attempts to placate Silvio, even in the face of his horrendous treatment of her.
- A few students selected Truffaldino and Smeraldina. When students selected this pairing there was a tendency for less focused students to veer off into a pre-prepared answer on how to create comedy from the role of Truffaldino. In these instances, poor Smeraldina – despite being in possession of 'enormous assets' as one student put it - barely got a 'look-in'.

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- As ever, only students who noted the demand of the question and met that demand precisely in their answer, achieved the higher levels of achievement.
- Most students, enthusiastic about the play in general, achieved some success.

Q.6

- Issues over excessive 'commedia' 'matter', as mentioned above, in relation to Q 05, were, unsurprisingly, also present in many students' answers to Question 06.
- This was the more popular option, however, and some excellent answers were seen where students had noted that the requirement of the question was to provide an interpretation of Silvio's character.
- This was not universally the case and examiners commented that most answers that they saw to this question on Silvio, were slanted towards creating comedy from his character.
- This led to fairly indifferent responses as Silvio marched, fell over, twirled Clarice around, shouted at his father, cursed Pantalone or seethed at Federigo, without a single statement about which aspect of his character he was meant to be demonstrating at these moments.
- Examiners were often compelled to 'infer' characteristics of Silvio's character from the reported antics, but students' achievement was impaired if they persisted in creating comedy without a scintilla of a reference to what was being shown that contributed to their interpretation of the role of Silvio.
- Some students, who did attempt an interpretation, satisfied themselves with the 'hold-all' term – 'brattish' and this word was bandied about throughout their answers with no variations or nuances.
- In less successful answers, not a single line of text was referred to.

Hedda Gabler

Q 07

- This was the more popular option on the play and the vast majority of students adopted the performer's perspective on Thea.
- The question required an interpretation of Thea's character, and most students identified a number of features of her character accurately.
- Most students referred to Thea as a gentle soul, in contrast to Hedda who they recognised had terrorised Thea in the past, and who intimidated her, under the guise of sympathy, in the present.
- Students sometimes used the question to revisit a previous, possibly, teacher-set task that revolved around comparing the characters of Thea and Hedda. Students who offered this approach in answer to this question about Thea invariably included much irrelevant material that examiners were unable to credit.

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- Some students remarked on Thea's bravery in leaving her husband, given the period setting; and they noted her determination to support Loevborg and to try to prevent him from 'lapsing'.
- Most recognised Thea as a positive 'life-force' in the play; a nurturing and caring personality, who, albeit her relatively lowly status in terms of class, is infinitely superior to Hedda as a human being.
- Choice of section often differentiated between students in terms of their depth of understanding of the role with better students including Thea's first and/or last appearance in addition to the section in Act Two, where she appears with Loevborg.
- Some students chose to write as a performer but still included lengthy details about Thea's appearance, noting several changes of costume, which were only relevant if linked explicitly to an aspect of her character.

Q 08

- There were far fewer responses to this question than there were to Q 07.
- This question had the precise demand of requiring the student to identify their preferred audience response to Aunt Juliana – there were quite a number of instances where this requirement was ignored, and achievement was limited accordingly.
- Where students did focus on the question's demand, they tended to suggest that an audience might feel sympathy, empathy, concern, respect, amusement and even irritation towards Aunt Juliana. In better answers, students noted that the performance itself would determine what the audience felt about Tesman's Aunt Juliana, which is open to a variety of interpretations in the written text.
- Students who had seen live or recorded versions of the play – and there are many recorded versions available – were often influenced by the characterisation of Aunt Juliana that they had deemed most appropriate. Some presented her character as saccharine sweet and 'above reproach', some as a fussy and interfering old woman, and some as almost saintly in her patience - both with haughty Hedda and with her impossibly 'stupid' nephew - who is clearly completely oblivious to Hedda's wiles and stratagems.
- There were some finely nuanced performances of Aunt Juliana presented that revealed his different responses and interactions with Berta, with Tesman and with Hedda.

Caucasian Chalk Circle

Q 09

- This question attracted relatively few responses and, in almost every case, students adopted the director's perspective.
- Not very many of the students who chose this option remembered to begin their answer with a clear outline of their 'intended effects for the audience' – the central demand of the question' - and this resulted in a lack of focus for their directorial decisions.

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- In these instances – and they were in the majority – students meandered through a couple of sections of the play offering detailed directorial suggestions that were not developed.
- In better answers, students outlined their intended effects in the first paragraph and offered intentions that included, for example: to instruct or to educate the audience about the inequalities in society, to mock the corruption in society embodied by the 'upper classes', to reveal or o develop individual characters, to entertain the audience and/ or to create comedy or to apply the principles of epic theatre
- There was significant evidence to suggest that some students' grasp of Brechtian theory was not entirely secure.
- A significant number of students appear not to understand the meaning of the term 'V-Effect', had a hazy notion of what Brecht meant by Spass and Gestus and a similarly vague notion of what Brecht's original intentions were.
- Some successful treatments of students' favourite scenes were in evidence. For example, quite a few students wrote about the Governor's Wife and her antics, as she supervised the packing of her trunks while the capital burned in the background. Some wrote about the first scene between Grusha and Simon as she goes for the Easter goose and then the scene of their reunion, where Simon mistakes little Michael for Grusha's own child and there were also some thoughtful attempts at the scene of Grusha's marriage to Yussup and his consequent 'deathbed revival'. While the direction of the scenes was frequently potentially effective, students needed to have identified an intended dramatic effect in each case in order to achieve success.
- Those very few students who attempted to tackle the question as a designer frequently revealed a misunderstanding of Brecht's approach to theatre design, which was mistakenly labelled as 'minimalist'. Some students went so far as to suggest that characters in Brecht's productions wore 'theatre blacks' to perform in and wore placards around their necks to identify their character – both of these notions are nonsense.
- Both photographic and written records about Brecht's practice reveal that, in collaboration with designers such as Caspar Neher, John Heartfield, Karl Von Appen and Teo Otto, Brecht expressed a passion for design that reflected the period and setting of his plays, and an obsession for sourcing authentic props; indeed, most student editions of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* include photographs of the Berliner Ensemble's original production designed elaborately by Karl Von Appen.

Q10

- Some successful answers were seen from well-prepared students with a good understanding of Brecht's purpose in his creation of the role of Azdak.
- In most successful answers, students acknowledged that while Azdak is presented as being largely sympathetic towards the poor, he is nevertheless a morally dubious character corruptible, wily, coarse and lascivious.
- Most students appreciated some contradictions in his character.

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- A minority of students appeared to think that Azdak was at the 'moral centre' of the play, which became difficult for them to defend as they began to deal with each of his appearances as the play proceeds and completely untenable in the 'Chalk Circle' scene, in general and in his dealings with Lodovica, in particular.
- A few students appeared unwilling to see Azdak as a rascal.
- Many students neglected to notice that the question focus is 'to convey your interpretation of Azdak's character to the audience' this led some students to write about his feelings or social attitudes rather than his character.
- There were some very lively and often vivid sections of description of Azdak's performance, but if the sole purpose of the description was to create comedy for the audience, as was sometimes the stated aim of the student, the question focus was missed.
- Less successful answers became side-tracked into a narrative of the plotline.
- Many answers showed limited understanding of context, beyond Brecht's self-imposed exile from Germany which some interpreted as Brecht being a 'refugee like the Grand Duke'.

Accidental Death of an Anarchist

Q11

- This text appears to have suffered a decline in popularity and there were far fewer responses to this text this series.
- However, this appeared to be a question that all the students had wanted and maybe prepared for so there were many responses to Q 11, overwhelmingly the question was answered from the perspective of the director.
- There was a wide range of responses to this question; at the more successful end of the spectrum students focused closely on the wording of the question.

- The question required students to create comedy from two or more sections featuring the Maniac and many students did just that, examiners were often amused by suggestions made, especially when students attached their ideas to specific lines of text.
- Less successful responses tended to depend upon characters 'falling over' or getting their fingers or their ties 'stuck in things' (often unspecified things) of having doors slammed in their faces. While these were not unlikely bits of comic business for this play, they were rarely ties to appropriate moments of action.
- Others depended upon comical pieces of costume and/or the Maniac's use of prosthetic eyes/limbs or false hair/wigs/moustaches. These ideas were also often valid and when supported from the text or linked to specific moments of action they were quite acceptable suggestions for comic business, although this was not always the case.
- The question allowed students to write about two or more separate sections of the play, but some students offered the same basic ideas for however many sections they attempted. Lack of comical variety was evident in a significant number of responses.
- There was a reasonably consistent understanding of the Maniac's role within the play and some students focused exclusively on his performance; the question did not

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require exclusive focus on the Maniac and often answers were more varied in the types of comedy created when focus turned to Bertozzo for example or to the Superintendent in the selected scenes.
- The most successful responses offered clear and precise practical strategies that demonstrated an understanding of Fo's comic purpose.

Q12
- There were insufficient responses to this question to make significant comments about student performance.

Jerusalem

Q 13
- There were some interesting responses to this question and students chose to answer from the perspective of a performer in the majority of answers.
- As always, the more successful answers started with establishing their interpretation of Johnny before going on to illustrate that interpretation through close attention to two or more separate sections of the play.
- In less successful answers, it was impossible to know how the student had interpreted the character as the chosen sections were described with limited indication of what the practical ideas would reveal about Johnny.
- The most frequently chosen sections were the opening of the play and Johnny's 'business' with the loud hailer, his interactions with Dawn and with Markey and his interaction with Phaedra.
- Surprisingly absent from the majority of answers was Ginger. When he did make an appearance, some students mistakenly believed that Johnny considered him to be a good friend.
- Examiners were surprised by students' apparently uncritical opinions of Johnny who was often presented as a 'hero', rather than an 'anti-hero', an admirable 'rebel' rather than a drug-pusher and corrupter of youth, a 'regretful' rather than a 'neglectful' father, a 'charmer' rather than a 'narcissist'.
- Many students developed the mythical analogies between Johnny and 'old England' without getting any closer to interpreting his character.
- In better answers, students saw Johnny as a product of the society that he has turned his back on, and they appreciated that his lifestyle is the product of a string of failures in his life rather than being the successful life of a 'maverick' star.
- Of course, the question asked for the students' interpretations of Johnny and any supported interpretations of the role were credited.

Q14
- There were not many responses to this question.
- As always, with questions that require students to 'discuss the effects' that they wish to create, better answers at least identified the effects that they wished to create.
- In some answers, there were suggested effects such as the creation of a 'pastoral' or ironically pastoral setting or the creation of a May-day morning, or the creation of Johnny's 'domain' and his squalid/anarchic way of living.

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- Some students offered no ideas about intended effects which rendered any design ideas that they had made, fairly irrelevant.
- Less successful answers offered a very narrow range of ideas.

Section B

Yerma

Q15.1

- Most of the students responding to this question were successful in acknowledging that Yerma's state of mind is becoming increasingly troubled in this scene and that she is beginning to despair of ever having a child. However, it was their varied powers of directorial insight that created a range of student responses.
- Yerma was variously presented as feeling bitter at her lack of fertility, resentful of women blessed with children, overcome with a sense of futility in her childless marriage and fiercely resentful of Juan's attitude and of the oppressive presence of his sisters.
- In the most successful answers, students found practical methods for demonstrating some or all of these aspects of Yerma's state of mind through deft directorial ideas.
- Examiners were surprised by the number of students who could not identify the extract correctly and wrote instead as if this was Maria's first visit to Yerma, when she announces her pregnancy and asks Yerma to do some sewing for when the baby arrives. This error was seen on a number of occasions, despite direct references within the extract to the baby itself, who is on stage.
- Another frequently seen error was where students launched into a comparison between Maria and Yerma in terms of their attitude towards having children, a question which had featured in a precious series.
- Where students focused on the correct scenes and the correct lines that were prescribed for this question and when they answered the question on the paper, they fared better, and some sensitive interpretation of Yerma's increasing resentment and overwhelming sense of worthlessness was well explored.

Q15.2

- There were many sensitive and successful responses to this question and many students recognised, in Victor's character, just the qualities that would have made him a perfect match for Yerma. The question asked for an interpretation of Victor's character, so better students went beyond describing Victor's symbolic role as an emblem of virility and wrote about his sensitivity, his honourable nature, his loyalty to his family, his pragmatism and his sympathy for Yerma's plight.
- Better answers provided textual support for each of the qualities that they identified, paired with an appropriate practical expression of each aspect considered.
- In less successful answers, students focused exclusively on Victor as a potential father to Yerma's imagined babies. They often bandied about the term 'fertile' in relation to Victor- which is not an appropriate term to use in relation to a male character - but some students did not appear to consider his character beyond this.
- Where students focused on one or two moments only from Victor's brief appearance in the extract, they were rarely able to express the full range of what is revealed about Victor's character in this scene.

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- A significant number of students neglected to include reference to the section after Juan enters.
- Some students appeared to believe that Victor was just waiting for Yerma to ask him to stay and this would have changed his mind (despite the presence of Juan).
- Overall, there were some sentimental/fantasy-based readings of the extract which were difficult to justify from Lorca's text.

Q15.3

- This question was handled with a degree of assurance when students had clearly been well prepared to consider all design elements (including technical design elements) that contribute to the overall effectiveness of any piece of drama.
- Many answers revealed a deficiency in the students' knowledge of technical elements and in these responses, student tended to rely on different coloured 'washes' and/or 'soundscapes', some of which were fairly improbable in terms of their intended effects.
- Quite a number of students neglected to notice that the question demanded that their suggestions for lighting and/or sound were intended to 'enhance the tension on stage' and they wrote about their own intentions, which could not be credited. For example, more than one student wanted to highlight Yerma's 'longing for a child' and this was to be achieved through, amongst other things, sounds of 'babies crying' another wrote of showing Yerma's maternal feelings with a 'warm amber wash'. Sounds of 'farmyard animals mooing and bleating' were proposed to show Juan's 'interest in money' which was also not relevant to the creation or enhancement of 'tension on stage'.
- Those students who chose moments carefully and who were focused on tension fared best, as one might expect.
- As with directing/performance questions, the more secure a student's use of design vocabulary, the greater their chances of explaining their choices.

The Glass Menagerie

Q 16.1

- The best answers to this question focused specifically on the attitudes of Tom and Jim towards life, which was the focus of the question.
- In stronger answers these were identified as Tom having an unconventional, adventurous and free-spirited approach to life, while Jim is more grounded in his attitude towards life and has his sights set on the corporate ladder, a wife and family.
- Many answers were seen where Tom's attitude toward life was outlined but references to Jim's attitudes were limited to showing his disapproval of Tom's plan to leave his mother and sister 'high and dry', in other words, his attitudes 'towards life' had not been discussed.
- An understanding of Tom's complex feelings of obligation towards his family and his need to escape the claustrophobic and toxic atmosphere created by Amanda at home was often evident in these answers but that often came at the expense of dealing equally with Jim's character and his attitudes towards life, in the shape of home comforts, material success and family.

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Q16.2

- There was a variety of responses to this question, including some very strong answers.
- Most students were able to formulate a fairly clear interpretation of Amanda that included her vanity, her faux youthfulness, her forcefulness, and her fierce love for her children - however perversely demonstrated.
- Some students only explored the façade that she reserves for 'outsiders'; her assumed 'carefree' personality; her exuberance and the cloying attentiveness that she shows towards Jim.
- Some students noted her genuine concern for Laura.
- Only a few students commented on Amanda's physical appearance in the extract and the aspect of her character that allowed her to greet an 'outsider' wearing an outlandish outdated costume, suitable for a much younger woman with extravagant make-up applied to entrance the first 'Gentleman caller' at the apartment.
- Some students referred to her exaggerated 'Southern' style hospitality, her girlish giggles and heavily applied 'charm'.
- Good answers referenced the stage directions and offered performance ideas for Amanda's exuberance and excitement, for her artificial playfulness with Tom and her real worry when she believes that Laura is truly sick.
- Some students lost the performance focus of the question and offered more literary analysis of Amanda's psychology.

Q16.3

- There were some good design ideas, principally for sound, lighting and projections, and most students appeared well-prepared to discuss the given section which involves a transition from the fire-escape to the interior of the apartment.
- The discriminators in this question related, as ever, to whether or not the students focused on the precise demand of the question – in this case to use design elements capable of 'shifting moods within the extract' – and their familiarity with design terminology and the application of design to achieve specific aims.
- Good answers focused on justifying their choices and they kept audience experience of the various moods at the forefront of their answers. Most considered sound and lighting to be key to influencing mood, although some also made some well-focused suggestions for the use of the screens.
- Occasionally, students were a little heavy-handed with the images flashed on the screens, not all of which were directly relevant to the focus of the question.
- Some wrote about the effect on the mood created by Amanda's rather bizarre outfit, and this was an acceptable approach.

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Metamorphosis

Q 17.1

- This play has proved to be very popular, but not all students who tackled this text appeared to have the theatrical experience to be able to bring the text to life through their suggestions.
- The question requires students to create Berkoff's expressionistic style of theatre, so those who ignored this requirement, and there were many in this category, struggled to achieve marks in the higher levels.
- Examiners were also surprised by the number of students who started the scene without the introductory section the Berkoff indicates where the characters established their 'signature' pose.
- Many students offered insufficient detail about how the beetle was formed, for example.
- Some students wrote about lines outside those prescribed.
- Some inventive and detailed responses were seen which met all the requirements of the question.

Q17.2

- Most answers managed some focus on Greta's 'sisterly affection'. Some thought that Gregor was already in his beetle state and this somewhat skewed students' responses.
- Some students wrote about Greta's 'maternal qualities.
- Some answers relied completely on the stage directions and offered no invention of their own.
- Answers focusing on only one part of the section were quite common as were answers that went beyond the specified section.
- Greta was usually presented in a positive way, and her affection was shown effectively through reference to her facial expression as well her vocal qualities.
- There was some assured work on Greta's use of mime.

Q17.3

- Although examiners saw some detailed and well-drawn costume designs, they were sometimes surprised by the number of unsatisfactory sketches. Costume designers may not be great at drawing people, but they should at least be capable of costuming even stick men and women with properly sketched costumes. Some of the sketches that were offered were very childishly drawn cartoon figures.
- Where students elected to design for Mrs Samsa and Greta, their sketches often came out very similarly. The same could be said where they chose Mr Samsa and Gregor. Students who did this, missed opportunities to show some variety.
- There appear to be significant numbers of students who were not prepared to answer on costume design as to be inferred from so many ineffectively conceived and drawn costumes.

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Our Country's Good

Q18.1

- This play remains the most popular Section B text.
- As mentioned in previous reports, some students' responses to this question were outweighed by factual information about the genesis of the play and its historical context. Students sometimes devoted an inordinate amount of time and space discussing Thatcher's views on crime and punishment in addition to the philosophical positions of different officers.
- Students need to be reminded that all SGC references need to be made relevant to the precise focus of the question, often the insertion of chunks of loosely relevant material added little to the student's attainment.
- The most common reason for students' underachievement in Q 1 was their lack of focus on the question which required them to explain and justify their direction of the cast to emphasise the Officers' differences of opinion in relation to 'The Question of Liz'.
- In many cases, students only wrote about the views of two officers, usually Ross and Ralph, but Phillip was occasionally substituted for Ralph.
- A very large number of students read the Insert carelessly and believed that Liz was present from the beginning of the scene. This caused many students to 'use' Liz as a focal point for Ross's sneering or pointing or for Ralph's encouraging looks and smiles. Obviously, these ideas could not be credited, and time was wasted.
- There were some good answers that covered the majority of the Officers in some degree and made for quite a lively scene.

Q18.2

- Some students showed a very good understanding of Liz's character – although not all of them handled the requirement to show how she has been transformed by her experience of being in the play. Students who ignored this aspect of the question rarely made it to the higher levels.
- Good answers recognised the progress that Liz had made from foul-mouthed, aggressive bully to a self-controlled, and somewhat fatalistic person. They included apt treatment of Liz's self-defence, when encouraged to speak up, for 'the good of the play' and almost all made good comments about her final address to Phillip, delivered with poise and respect, many recognised Liz's newly acquired qualities of politeness and civility and her surprising eloquence.
- Overall, although the answers were generally better than answers to Q1, there were many unfocused on the clear demand of the question, with many omitting mention of Liz's former vicious self.

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Q 18. 3

- There were few really excellent answers to this question. It appeared that some students had studied the play without giving the setting of this 'hearing' very much thought.
- Few inventive designs were seen.
- One problem that students created for themselves was that very few of them successfully identified what their intended effects (the focus of the question) were.
- This meant that however many design elements they wrote about, they appeared to be 'pointless' as no effects had been defined.
- Most students reproduced some sort of generic set design. Some included flags, some included gallows, and some included a 'throne-like' chair for Phillip. Some included Aboriginal art, a tree, prison bars (either physical or via a gobo).
  Justification for choices was variable.
- The majority of students attempted some lighting and/or sound ideas with various degrees of success.
- Some students offered costume design for each of the officers and for Liz, however, unless they included details of the effects that they intended to create through these designs, the designs attracted little credit.

Cloud Nine

Q19.

- There were very few answers on this text, and they were generally not especially successful responses. In all three answers there was insecure understanding of the nature of the comedy in the text and of Churchill's intentions.

Q.19.1

- These were brief answers which focused almost entirely on comedy through casting and costume; however, as the question asked for comedy as created through 'the interactions' of Harry with Betty and Joshua, generally 'comic' casting/costume ideas attracted little credit.
- Rather better were suggestions for the comedy resulting from Harry's and Betty's clandestine relationship and/or from Harry's influence over Joshua.

Q.19.2

- A few students recognised that the question required 'an interpretation' of Clive and they offered suggestions for conveying aspects of his character such as his gallantry towards Mrs Saunders, his inflated ego, his fulfilment of the stereotypical 'macho; image that he wishes to project.
- Better answers identified the qualities that they wished to convey and offered the performance strategies that were calculated to achieve their aims.
- In less successful answers, performance ideas were limited.
- A few answers contained neither an interpretation of Clive, nor any clear performance suggestions for his character.

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Q.19.3

- This design question attracted few competent responses. At least two design elements were required; some students struggled to write purposefully about one.
- Set and props were the most popular choices of elements.
- Students who noticed that they must justify their choices, in terms of the suitability of their ideas for a setting, clearly achieved a higher level than those who offered a somewhat crudely drawn sketch.
- Even where sketches appeared to have been practised beforehand, students did not always offer requisite precision or adequately clear labels.
- Some of the relatively few answers seen on this text suggested some insecurity in students' understanding of what a suitable setting for the action might be.

Q.20

Bronte

- This is a text that is growing in popularity. Some very secure and detailed answers were seen as well as some under-develop ones.
- As has been reported previously, there were instances where all of the students in the cohort offered very similar, if not identical, sketches and justifications for their design ideas. It does not help students to discourage their individual design ideas and/or to impose a 'class' response. In some cases, all students from the centre made the same mistakes about the Bronte household.

20.1

- Most students offered reasonable answers to this question, with the best answers from students who noticed that this was a director's question. Some wrote from the perspective of Charlotte and thus missed the opportunities offered to discuss the role of Bertha in conveying Charlotte's troubled state of mind.
- Even amongst students who did adopt a director's perspective there were many who did not exploit Bertha's disturbing presence.
- Most answers focused on Charlotte's increasing self-loathing as her letters do not express what she wants to say to Mr Heger, and as she struggles to suppress her erotic fantasies.
- Occasionally, students' suggestions were of the 'X-rated' variety, but most frequently they were within the bounds of what a director might reasonably expect of a performer of Charlotte at this point in the play.
- There was also some imaginative work on Charlotte's interaction with her image in the mirror.

20.2

- There were some very good answers on the character of Anne Bronte where students frequently offered a positive interpretation of Anne who was seen as the gentlest of the sisters. Some referred to Anne's deference to others, to her kindness and unwillingness to judge others, her consideration of her sisters and her loyalty. Some detected a certain naivete in her character.

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- As always, the best answers used the text and explored Anne's delivery of her lines as well as her facial and physical expression to express the characteristics that they had identified.
- Some students, perhaps prepared to write about audience response to Anne, wrote exclusively about their preferred response to Anne without offering an interpretation for the audience to response to.

20.3

- Some students demonstrated an excellent understanding of the capacity of technical elements to create different effects on stage.
- Not everyone who tackled this question read its demands very carefully, however, and some seemed unable to focus on the terms of the question which was clearly directed at the creation of the various shifts in time and atmosphere that occur in the course of the extract presented.
- There are 4 specific stage directions in the extract that indicate where 'lights change' in the extract and each is associated with a specific 'time lapse'. Very few students dealt with or appeared to recognise the progress through time and the clues in the text, 'some weeks later', 'Spring is coming'/'two months later', 'July 1845' and so forth. Many did not recognise the distinctions between daytime and nighttime scenes, or the potential for sound effects to create rain and thunder.
- Other students were aware of time shifts, but were unable to suggest appropriate shifts in atmosphere and others had a clear agenda for technical elements before they entered the exam all and wrote about its potential to distinguish between naturalistic and expressionistic phases in the extract – rather than answering the question in its own terms.
- There were some useful design ideas for lighting and sound which met the precise demands of the question rather than repeating a question that they had encountered before in 'homework' tasks and/or past paper questions, but these were in the minority.

Q 21 ***Three Sisters***

Very few answers were seen on this new text, and it is difficult to draw meaningful inferences from such a small number of students' work.

- There was evidence that the students who did write about *Three Sisters* had watched and enjoyed the National Theatre production of the play, and this production clearly informed their ideas. This practice is only to be expected; more imaginative answers revealed inspiration rather than slavish imitation of what they had seen.

21.1

- Students generally offered very good understanding of the relationship between Lolo and Abosede and they were fully prepared to focus on the tension that crackles between them.

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- The argument over the role on Nma in the household was generally cited as a friction point and there were some careful renderings of the escalation of bitterness and personal antipathy between the pair as they wrangled about the aged servant and her role in the family.

21.2

- Students wrote about Eze quite well. They often interpreted him as a man who epitomises disappointment in himself and in his achievements.
- Students considered both good and less positive qualities of the character. They wrote about his loyalty to the memory of Dimgba's Mother and Father, his sympathy for Dimgba, presentation as a 'drunk' and his self-pity.

21.3

- Students tended to emulate design ideas that they had seen and noted from the National Theatre production.
- Most answers focused on set and costume; occasionally students considered sound.
- There was very limited reference to design fundamentals when students wrote about visual design elements.
- Sketches, where offered, were often too small to be of much use and/or were not adequately labelled.

Q22 ***The Convert***

Very few students appear to have studied this play, and these comments are based on the work of a very small number of students.

22.1

- Students generally offered very good understanding of the relationship between Chilford and Prudence and they were able to focus on the tension that exists between them based chiefly on Prudence's claims to having a higher intellect than Chilford and on her accusations that he has betrayed his African heritage.
- Less successful answers were descriptive, and did not fully engage with the theatrical opportunities offered by the extract.

22.2

- Answers to this question were reasonably successful with most students able to recognise Ester's changing feelings. Not all students wrote about three separate moments from the extract which understandably had an inhibiting effect of their achievement.

22.3

- Students were generally well-prepared to answer a question on costume design and a handful of answers were seen that highlighted the clash between Mai Tamba's traditional, native costume and Chilford's attempts as Anglicisation in all aspects of his appearance.

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Section C

As in previous series, there were quite a lot of answers where students chose an inappropriate question for the production that they were prepared to write about.

It is a reflection of the times that, in many instances, examiners had the distinct impression that students had only seen a single production, had studied it as a 'streamed' and readily available resource, to return to throughout their revision period and sometimes struggled to make the most of their 'knowledge and understanding' of the production by choosing a question that was not entirely suited to their experience.

Examiners also reported that fewer students, than ever, actually bothered to write specifically about the contribution that was made by their chosen production element(s), or chosen performer(s), to the total dramatic effectiveness of the production.

Q. 23
This was not a popular question, but it attracted some detailed answers.

- The majority of students who responded to this question did so by referring to film/projections and lighting.
- Those who chose to consider scenic devices often did so as an 'afterthought' and without sufficient understanding of what constitutes a 'scenic device'.
- Many students wrote about static sets, props and, in a handful of cases, about puppets; none of which can be considered a 'scenic device', and therefore these answers attracted very little credit.
- Those students who had recognised that scenic devices include methods for changing scenes on stage – as indicated in countless examiners' reports over the past life of this specification, fared better than those who did not.
- A minority of students referred quite confidently, in these instances, to the use of revolves, trucks and 'flown scenery', for example, demonstrating some theatrical awareness. Of course, credit was only given when students focused on the ways in which scenic devices were used to create specific moods or atmospheres.
- Of the hundreds of students who wrote about Danny Boyle's *Frankenstein*, for example, some elected to answer Q 23 and availed themselves of the many opportunities that this production offered them in terms of the focus of this question.
- Film and projections were particularly well considered, especially when these elements made a significant contribution, within the chosen production, to the creation of mood and atmosphere.
- With so many students (across all question in section C) choosing to write about recorded performances, the use of film and projection provided some of the clearest opportunities to describe and analyse. Particularly notable were responses that discussed *Small Island* where there were some excellent explanations about how, for example, the projection of the storm or the departure of Windrush ship contributed to the mood at those moments. Examiners reported seeing some very good responses

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where students had considered the combined impact of the projection with the lighting to create suitable moods and atmospheres and, in the best examples, students commented on how this contributed to the narrative or illuminated specific issues and therefore affected the total dramatic effectiveness of the production.

- Some students, choosing to write about lighting, clearly had some technical knowledge but simply stating that a parcan at 50% created a particular mood was unlikely to provide the examiner with enough detail to be able to visualise the moment being considered. Unlike film and projections and scenic devices, exploring the use of lighting in a filmed production, rarely seemed to offer the students enough understanding of the live experience to be able to fully evoke the atmosphere that was achieved on stage. Answers at the lower end of the achievement spectrum often tended to resort to assertion rather than an explanation of *how* the elements being considered achieved the designers' desired outcomes.

Q24

- Answers to this question revealed a range of responses that were often largely dependent on the students' understanding of naturalism and realism. Although there was clearly no requirement for the production being discussed to be entirely naturalistic, it was important that the answer clearly identified the naturalistic qualities of elements of the set, to be able to then discuss how these qualities contributed to realism.
- As with the previous question, *Small Island* provided some very good opportunities with students being able to discuss in some detail the ways in which the designers had, for example, distressed elements of the interior locations in order to create a naturalistic approach to reveal place and time.
- There were also some less effective answers that were focused on this production where students described the use of projections, which can hardly be a naturalistic approach to set.
- The streamed productions of Simon Stone's *Yerma* and The Young Vic's *A Streetcar Named Desire* were also popular choices for this question. The best responses succinctly considered the use of the set, at particular moments. However, less successful responses lost the focus on design and became preoccupied with descriptions of what the performers were doing on stage.
- Examiners noted that this question attracted a number of very generalised responses. As is the case with all design questions, it is necessary for students to have an understanding of the design fundamentals and to be able to describe and evaluate these using appropriate theatrical terminology.
- There were a number of instances reported of students writing about props rather than set; students with an understanding of design should be able to differentiate between the two elements.

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- Sketches were few and far between in answers to this question, and where they were included, were often of little value. It is possible that when writing about a streamed production, answers lose some of the three-dimensionality of a live performance and this contributed in some way to the generalised nature of the answers.

Q.25

- This was a very popular choice.
- Many students decided to write about moments where a performer or performers amused the audience and then about moments where the same performers created suspense for the audience. While the question had been intended to elicit one or other effect for the audience, as indicated in the question by the emboldened alternatives, it was decided to credit either interpretation of the question, so that no student was disadvantaged by their reading of it.
- While the majority of students selected comedic drama when they were writing about how performers amused the audience, and more serious drama where performers created suspense, there were many quite unconventional choices made, and some students appeared to find quite disturbing moments 'amusing' and some quite comical moments to be full of 'suspense'.
- Students fared best when they read the question carefully and kept their focus on the words used in the question rather than offering inaccurate 'synonyms' of their own.
- Where student opted for the 'amuse the audience' option, they were generally successful if they referred to 'comic' moments from the production, provided they maintained focus on how the performer(s) used their skills to achieve the end result of 'amusement' for the audience.
- Some students did not consider the skills used by the performers. They related comical moments where something 'funny' was said or something 'funny' happened – this might have been a wry remark made by a character or a moment where a character's trousers fell down, for example, but if students did not explain how the remark was said - referring to the actor's vocal/facial or physical expression – the identification of a funny line did not satisfy the demand of the question.
- The same must be said about the creation of suspense. Many students referred to suspenseful moments, but unless these moments were explained in relation to the skills of the actors involved, no credit could be given.
- Many students attempted to write about 'suspense' but actually never used the word from the question. Instead, they substituted the word 'tension' – which is not the same thing as suspense. This often resulted in students completely losing focus on how the performer(s) used their skills to create suspense. Skills were ignored as students wrote about 'tense moments' from a variety of productions including the ubiquitous *Frankenstein,* the ever-popular *Streetcar named Desire* the often chosen 'newcomer' *The Life of Pi*. In *Frankenstein*, students labelled the Monster's murder of Elizabeth as 'a tense moment', then described it, or they labelled Stanley's rape of Blanche, in *Streetcar* as 'a tense moment' and then

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described it. The vast majority did not support their descriptions with even a momentary exploration of the skills used by the performer(s) in these moments to create 'suspense' – the question focus.

- There were answers seen where students did recognise that amusing an audience and/or creating suspense for an audience does require the performer(s) to apply performance skills to achieve their intentions. However, it must be said that such answers were in the minority.
- Many students felt that their work was done if they identified potentially suspenseful moments from their chosen production, such as waiting for Jason to discover the bodies of his little sons in *Medea* or for Rochester's marriage to Bertha to be disclosed at his (attempted) wedding to Jane Eyre. Without an analysis and evaluation of the skills involved, these answers did not attract much credit.

Q.26

This was the most popular choice of question in this section and examiners reported seeing a full range of outcomes.

Most commonly answered on: *Yerma*, *Streetcar*, Frantic Assembly's *Othello*, *View from the Bridge*, and *Jane Eyre*.

- There were many detailed and focused responses that revealed a good understanding of the requirements of the question.
- Some students did not appreciate that the question's demand for a focus on 'how two performers used their skills to create a convincing relationship between characters at particular moments' did not allow for them to write about **different** pairs of characters within one production.
- Where students wrote about more than one relationship within a single production, this was only valid if – in a multi-role style production - the performers in each relationship were the same.
- Because the question referred to 'convincing' relationships, the expectation was that students would select two performers who were successful in their portrayals.
- Students selected some interesting relationships to consider. While most students wrote about romantic relationships or about family relationships, others chose to explore hierarchical relationships or even relationships between colleagues/peers.
- The discriminating factor was always how well students were able to analyse and evaluate the skills used by the chosen performers to create that relationship, convincingly for the audience. In successful answers, students considered such elements as eye-contact, spatial relationships, and physical contact.
- Examiners continue to comment on students' frequent and often inconsequential references to performers' use of 'proxemics' as if this is a term that describes a 'performance skill'. Students should be reminded that it does not.

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Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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