



Course report 2025

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 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 4,741

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 5,078

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	2,722	53.6	53.6	70
B	1,202	23.7	77.3	60
C	781	15.4	92.7	50
D	279	5.5	98.1	40
No award	94	1.9	100%	Not applicable

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 or equal to 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](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, candidate performance in the 2025 question paper was similar to previous years. There was an appropriate balance in the range of questions asked, with questions between 1 and 7 marks.

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

In section 2, all three stimuli were used, with most candidates selecting stimulus B or C. Candidates developed a wide range of dramas in response to their chosen stimulus.

There were an increased number of no responses in section 2 of the question paper this session. However, the marking instructions made all questions accessible, and most candidates still completed the assessment in the allotted time.

Performance

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 continue to be performed, with 257 different published plays used by centres in the assessment of candidates this session, and over 450 different plays having now been identified since 2019. Acting candidates managed to access the full range of marks where appropriate texts had been chosen that reflected the personality and range of ability in the group, and candidates had been suitably cast.

Design candidates were in the minority (with costume and make-up and hair being the most selected design roles), and many of those presented achieved a very good

standard. Visiting assessors were impressed by some of the creativity and technical skills demonstrated.

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

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper

Question 1: Most candidates identified the genre of their drama. Many also offered relevant justification.

Question 2: Some candidates were unable to access the full range of marks, as they gave a basic description of two ways they contributed to the rehearsal process for their drama, instead of giving a full description.

Question 3(a): Most candidates answered well and identified a mood and/or atmosphere in their drama, with justification.

Question 3(b): 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 did not use appropriate terminology in the evaluation of their performance or design concepts, so were unable to access full marks.

Question 4: Some candidates did not access the full range of marks, as they identified the activity with an attempt to justify the ways in which it helped, instead of fully describing the activity as the question asked for.

Question 5: Most candidates answered well and identified an appropriate target audience for their drama, with positive justification.

Question 6: Some candidates didn't achieve marks, as they did not evaluate the effectiveness of the other drama student's final performance, instead only describing their concepts. As with question 3(b), some candidates did not use appropriate theatrical terminology in the evaluation of another candidate's performance or design concepts and were therefore, unable to access the available marks.

In section 2, some candidates did not use the space provided for rough working to note down and develop their ideas.

Many 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.

Some candidates were unable to provide an imaginative response to the stimuli. Many candidates had very simple plots with only two characters that lacked any depth. A few candidates simply continued to answer on the performance they had identified in section 1 or copied stories from television or films — responses such as these are unable to access the full range of marks for section 2.

Question 7(a): Most candidates answered well and were able to identify a moment of purpose for their drama.

Question 7(b): Many candidates adequately described a scene in their drama, highlighting the purpose identified in question 7(a). Some candidates attempted to justify why the scene was important, rather than offering a full description.

Question 8(a): Most candidates identified the time-period of their drama, with a relevant reason, accessing the full range of marks.

Question 8(b): Most candidates did not access the full range of marks as they did not provide a specific description or use accurate theatrical terminology (set and costume). Candidates also sometimes didn't relate their description to the time-period stated in question 8(a), though the marking instructions enabled an implicit link to be credited.

Question 9(a): Most candidates answered well and were able to identify the main theme in their drama, with justification.

Question 9(b): Most candidates did not access the full range of marks because they did not provide a specific description or use accurate theatrical terminology (lighting, sound, props, make-up and hair). Candidates also offered justifications that sometimes did not relate to their description to the theme stated in question 9(a), though the marking instructions enabled an implicit link to be credited.

Question 10(a): Most candidates answered well and identified a character who appears in their drama with the highest status, with justification.

Question 10(b): Some candidates answered well and described the way or ways in which they would direct the actor playing this character to use voice and movement during the important moment, using appropriate adjectives and correct terminology. Many candidates accessed half marks or less because they used inaccurate or incorrect terminology.

Question 11: Some candidates described two rehearsal techniques from the choices given (thought tracking, improvisation, voices in the head) that could be used to help the actors develop their characters, demonstrating an understanding of the technique in practice and with justification that was specifically related to their drama. Most candidates achieved 2 marks or less as they did not fully describe the rehearsal techniques or only offered justification, with no description of the technique.

Question 12: Most candidates were able to state the staging for their drama, achieving 1 mark. Some candidates offered a relevant justification.

Question 13(a): Many candidates fully described a relationship between two characters in their drama, who appear in the same scene. Some candidates only offered a basic description and therefore, achieved 1 mark.

Question 13(b): A few candidates offered a full and detailed description of the ways they would direct the actors to use stage positioning in this scene to clearly communicate the relationship described in question 13(a), with full justification. Many candidates accessed 2 to 3 marks by offering a good or adequate description of their use of stage positioning, mainly justified.

Question 14(a): Many candidates answered well, giving a description of a key moment in their drama with a reason. Some candidates only offered a description of the key moment with no reasons given.

Question 14(b): Many candidates answered well and were able to give a full description of the emotional response that they would want the audience to have during the moment described in question 14(a).

Question 14(c): Some candidates answered well, fully describing the use of one of the listed conventions (voice over, slow motion, mime, monologue) to create the desired emotional response described in question 14(b). Most candidates offered a limited description, offering little or no specific description of the use the chosen convention to create the desired emotional response.

Many candidates justified their responses in both sections of the paper by making specific reference to their own drama, rather than merely generalised responses, indicating that this key message, communicated through a range of Understanding Standards events and resources, was understood by teachers, lecturers and candidates.

Some candidates used very little or no terminology in their answers and therefore, couldn't access marks. Candidates also used inaccurate adjectives in relation to voice and movement. Most commonly, 'open' or 'closed' body language, without further description, cannot access marks, as there are multiple variations of this. Similarly, the use of 'high' or 'low' as a descriptive term for volume can't be credited, as this offers no differentiation from pitch (the most commonly used adjectives for volume are 'loud' or 'quiet').

The use of production terminology was, in some cases, not only poor, but incorrect. Many candidates supplied generic answers with no real understanding of the application of the production role. Candidates should remember that the drama must be suitable for a live performance 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.

Performance

Overall, candidate performance in this component remains an area of strength and was on standard 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.

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. Lines and cues were remembered well, relationships were conveyed through interaction, and characterisation was sustained. Some candidates had a superb impact on the audience. Many candidates achieved high marks, demonstrating a depth of understanding about their character.

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

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

Some texts with larger casts and/or multi role, were challenging to mark as actors with smaller roles or multiple roles were not on stage for the required time and/or lacked adequate character 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 in a published text, going against explicit guidance issued on casting that states candidates can play characters of any gender, but the playwright's intentions and/or the published text should not be altered.

Visiting assessors received requests to consider additional assessment arrangements during the performance assessment. Centres must submit such

requests in advance of the published deadline, and cannot only communicate requests to the visiting assessor 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 chose texts that enabled design candidates to make a significant creative impact, did better than those that chose 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. This does not adhere to explicit guidance in the [National 5 Drama course specification](#) and [Understanding Standards](#) website 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 or sheets 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 or sheets 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 National 5 performance of the text they had designed for. This meant that in some cases, design candidates were designing for a complex Higher text, creating additional demand. Where there was no performance at all, marks were affected as the skills must be applied as part of a live performance.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Many candidates did not understand the command words used in questions, as follows:

- 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 rehearsal 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 in 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 another student's performance or rehearsal process, candidates can choose someone they have worked with in their own group, or someone they have observed in another group. Candidates must be able to evaluate the student's individual contribution and/or final performance. They must also give an explicit

evaluative statement in their response. Candidates must write their responses from an individual, and not from a group perspective.

In section 2, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use the empty box space provided for rough working to note down their ideas in response to their chosen stimuli, for example with mind maps or plot ideas or character information. A basic 'time, place and action' summary for each scene in the candidate's drama makes it clear 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 utilise this, tend to have less detailed or fluid answers in section 2.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to read all parts of each question in section 2 before attempting to respond to the stimulus. Most questions have more than one part and each element will be connected to the previous question. Reading all parts of each question allows candidates to see the through-line of the questions and avoid repetition.

Candidates should explicitly relate every answer to their own response to the stimulus (referencing character and/or plot etc). Candidates who only offer generic justification cannot access the full range of marks.

Candidates should use drama terminology in their answers and would benefit from increased knowledge and understanding of all subject-specific vocabulary. Teacher and lecturers should refer to further specific guidance on accurate adjectives using voice and movement terminology on the [Understanding Standards](#) website.

Candidates should use production terminology in their answers. Teachers and lecturers should refer to guidance on the specific use of design terminology on the [Understanding Standards](#) website.

Performance

The selected text must be published and be of a suitable standard for National 5. Some traditional Higher and Advanced Higher texts were used again this year, 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 are given in appendix 3 of the [National 5 Drama course specification](#) and a further list of commonly used texts has been shared through the [2023 National 5 Drama Webinar presentation](#).

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 are withholding candidates of lower ability from collaborative assessment. Whilst there are often very strong reasons for this, such as the need for additional assessment arrangements or candidate anxiety, where a wider range of candidates are included in the sample, the collaborative discussions are shown to be more coherent and consistent in setting the national marking standards.

Some productions were too short. Centres should make sure minimum and maximum time limits are adhered to.

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. Whilst some texts requiring multi-role performances have been traditionally used at National 5 level, candidates are still expected to play one primary role in 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 and visiting assessors are not obliged to watch any such presentations. This is unnecessary work for design candidates at this level.

The candidate mark sheets, and sample sheet must be completed before the visiting assessor arrives. Centres should have a copy of the mark sheets before the assessment, so that centre staff can complete their own copy.

Centre assessors should have a copy of the detailed marking instructions from the course specification when assessing candidates and should refer to these throughout the live marking alongside the use of the mark sheets.

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 marks). The box on the candidate mark sheet to indicate the word count of the preparation for performance must be used to note the word count. 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. Some centres had failed to mark the preparation for performance before the visiting assessor arrived. These marks must be shared with the visiting assessor at the point of review and not withheld by the centre assessor until the collaborative discussion.

A private, quiet space must be provided 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, not a school room accessed by others during the assessment process. Whilst accommodation in many centres can be challenging, an informal or public space such as this belittles the significance of the assessment event.

Candidates involved in the performance assessment must be present throughout the event and not asked to immediately return to class following their own performance.

Whilst 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. Teachers and lecturers should ask candidates to introduce themselves to the camera immediately before the performance, rather than introducing themselves directly to the visiting assessor. The timing of the assessment should not be 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

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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, we hold 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 our 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. We 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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).