

Analysis of Responses to our Consultation on Conditions and Guidance for GCSE Drama and AS and A Level Drama and Theatre



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Executive summary

Our consultation about the Conditions and guidance for GCSE drama and AS and A level drama and theatre took place between 27th March 2015 and 24th April 2015.

The consultation questions were available to either complete online or to download. A copy of the consultation is available at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-as-and-a-level-reform-regulations-for-dramadrama-and-theatre.

There were 53 responses to the consultation – 41 from individuals and 12 from organisations. All responses were in a form that matched or broadly followed the layout of the online consultation.

Respondents raised a number of concerns about our proposed approach to non-exam assessment. Respondents were particularly concerned about the length of performances, the use of tasks set by exam boards for devised performances, and the use of external marking at AS and A level.

Respondents also felt that our proposed definitions of “complete and substantial performance texts” and “key extracts” could exclude a number of important works.

A number of respondents also commented on issues outside the scope of the consultation, including the subject content requirements, the use of written exams and the weighting of non-exam assessment.

1. Introduction

This report is a summary of the views expressed by those who responded to our consultation on the Conditions and guidance for GCSE drama and AS and A level drama and theatre which took place 27th March 2015 and 24th April 2015.

Background

Reformed GCSE, AS and A level qualifications are being introduced in England.

Following earlier consultations, we have already taken decisions on:

- the general design of reformed qualifications;
- our policy and technical arrangements relating to those subjects that will be taught in schools from September 2015;¹
- the design of the reformed GCSE drama and AS and A level drama and theatre qualifications that are to be introduced for first teaching in 2016.²

This consultation focused on more technical matters – that is, on the regulatory arrangements that we must put in place to make sure that exam boards design, deliver and award the new GCSE drama and AS and A level drama and theatre qualifications in line with our policy decisions.

¹ Reformed GCSEs in English language, English literature and mathematics will be taught from September 2015. Reformed AS and A levels in art and design, biology, business, chemistry, computer science, economics, English language, English language and literature, English literature, history, physics, psychology and sociology will be taught from September 2015.

² www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-subjects-to-be-taught-in-2016

2. Who responded?

We received a total of 53 responses to our consultation.³ Forty-one responses were from individuals and 12 were from organisations. We had one response from an individual from a non-EU country. All other responses were from individuals or organisations based in England or Wales.

Table 1: Breakdown of consultation responses

Personal / Organisation response	Respondent type	Number
Personal	Teacher	37
Personal	Educational specialist	4
Organisation	School or college	11
Organisation	Exam board	1

³ Where responses were received in hard copy we entered them into the online platform.

3. Approach to analysis

We published the consultation on our website. Respondents could choose to respond using an online form, by email or by posting their answers to the consultation questions to us. The consultation included nine questions.

This was a consultation on the views of those who wished to participate and while we tried to ensure that as many respondents as possible had the opportunity to reply, it cannot be considered as a representative sample of the general public or of any specific group.

Data presentation

We present the responses to the consultation questions in the order in which they were asked.

The consultation asked nine questions and each had a different focus. Respondents could choose to answer all or just some of the questions.

During the analysis phase we reviewed every response to each question.

4. Views expressed – consultation response outcomes

In this section we report the views, in broad terms, of those who responded to the consultation document. We have structured this around the questions covered in the consultation document and provide analysis of the data broken down by stakeholder.

A consultation is not the same as a survey and the responses only reflect the views of those who chose to respond. Typically these will be those with strong views and/or particular experience or interest in a topic. What follows is a fair reflection of the views expressed by respondents to the consultation.

A list of the organisations that responded to the consultation is included in Appendix A.

Question 1 – Do you have any comments on the draft Condition and guidance on subject content for new drama GCSEs?
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We proposed to introduce a Condition that would require exam boards to:

- comply with the Department for Education’s subject content requirements for new GCSEs in drama,⁴ and with our published assessment objectives; and
- interpret the subject content requirements in line with any requirements and guidance that we publish.

We also proposed to publish guidance clarifying that:

- the term “complete and substantial performance text” should be interpreted as meaning a text of at least 60 minutes in length when performed and including at least two characters; and
- a “key extract” from any such text should last at least 10 minutes when performed.

Fifteen respondents (ten individuals, five organisations) did not answer this question.

None of those who answered the question commented on our proposed Condition.

Three respondents (two individuals, one organisation) commented that defining a “complete and substantial performance text” as one that lasts 60 minutes would exclude a range of important works that would be appropriate for GCSE. They were

⁴ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-drama

also concerned that defining “complete and substantial performance texts” and “key extracts” in terms of length was not meaningful.

The remaining answers to this question focused on other issues, which we have analysed under other questions or ‘Other issues’ below.

Question 2 – Do you have any comments on the draft assessment Condition, assessment requirements and guidance on assessment for new drama GCSEs?

In line with our previous decisions, we proposed to introduce a Condition that would require exam boards to allocate 60 per cent of marks to non-exam assessment and 40 per cent to written exams. This proposed Condition also required exam boards to comply with our rules and guidance on assessment.

Our proposed assessment rules specified that exam boards must:

- set and publish a list of performance texts and key extracts on which exam questions will be based;
- ensure that students do not receive credit for questions in the exam on a piece they have performed for the non-exam assessment;
- require students to participate in at least two performances (both of which test students’ performance and devising skills) – one devised piece in response to a task set by the exam board and one performance text;
- ensure that students do not fulfil their performance requirements by performing two monologues;
- require evidence of both students’ performance and their contribution to the devising of that performance; and
- either mark the non-exam assessment themselves, or moderate teachers’ marking.

Our proposed guidance clarified expected group sizes for performances and how students should be allocated to the different design roles.

Nineteen respondents (14 individuals, five organisations) did not answer this question.

One respondent (an individual) supported external marking of non-exam assessment. However, seven respondents (five individuals, two organisations) did not. Respondents were concerned that external examiners would not be able to assess how well a student had contributed to the development of a performance.

Respondents also questioned whether external marking would necessarily be more reliable than well-moderated teacher marking.

Five respondents (two individuals, three organisations) commented that the specified minimum performance times seemed too short.

Six (four individuals, two organisations) commented that exam boards were unlikely to be able to set tasks for the devised performance effectively. They were concerned that this could limit students' opportunities to demonstrate their skills. Five (four individuals, one organisation) commented that the proposed release date for the task was too late in the course.

Five (four individuals, one organisation) commented that it was not clear what type of evidence would be needed to demonstrate students' contribution to the development of a performance. Three individuals commented that some written work would be necessary, and one individual suggested that requiring a portfolio of evidence could diminish the role of practical learning.

Three (all individuals) questioned whether monologues or duologues were appropriate for the qualification.

Two (one individual, one organisation) questioned whether it was necessary to assess devising and performing together.

Two (both organisations) commented that it was not clear whether students could attempt multiple performances and then choose which to submit.

<p>Question 3 – Do you have any comments on the draft Guidance on assessment objectives for new drama GCSEs?</p>

This question referred to the draft guidance on assessment objectives which outlines how we expect exam boards to interpret the assessment objectives in terms of discrete 'strands' and 'elements' within each assessment objective, coverage expectations and key areas of emphasis in each assessment objective.

Thirty-seven respondents (29 individuals, eight organisations) did not answer this question.

Seven respondents (five individuals, two organisations) commented on issues other than our proposed guidance. We have analysed their comments under other questions or 'Other issues' below.

One respondent (an individual) commented that the phrase "communicate meaning" was ambiguous.

One (an individual) welcomed the increased focus on process and its impact on performance.

One (an individual) commented that our guidance appeared to draw an artificial distinction between development and understanding of how drama and theatre is performed.

One (an individual) commented that the subject appeared to be aimed at higher-ability students.

One (an organisation) commented that it seemed unnecessary to restrict students' analysis of others' work to performance, and that analysis and evaluation could be applied to staging or other aspects of the work.

Question 4 – Do you have any comments on the draft Condition and guidance on subject content for new drama and theatre AS and A levels?

We proposed to introduce a Condition that required exam boards to:

- comply with the Department for Education's subject content requirements for new AS and A levels in drama and theatre,⁵ and with our published assessment objectives; and
- interpret the subject content requirements in line with any requirements and guidance that we publish.

We also proposed to publish guidance clarifying that:

- the term "complete and substantial performance text" should be interpreted as meaning a text of at least 60 minutes in length when performed and including at least two characters; and
- a "key extract" from any such text should last at least 15 minutes when performed.

Thirty-one respondents (26 individuals, five organisations) did not answer this question.

Two respondents (both individuals) commented that defining a "complete and substantial performance text" as one that lasts 60 minutes could exclude a range of important works. They were also concerned that defining "complete and substantial performance texts" and "key extracts" in terms of length was not meaningful.

⁵ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-as-and-a-level-drama-and-theatre

The remaining answers to this question focused on other issues, which we have analysed under other questions or 'Other issues' below.

Question 5 – Do you have any comments on the draft assessment Condition, assessment requirements and guidance on assessment for new drama and theatre AS and A levels?

In line with our previous decisions, we proposed to introduce a Condition that would require exam boards to allocate 60 per cent of marks to non-exam assessment and 40 per cent to written exams. This proposed Condition also required exam boards to comply with our rules and guidance on assessment.

For AS, our proposed rules required exam boards to:

- set and publish a list of performance texts and key extracts on which exam questions will be based;
- ensure that students do not receive credit for questions in the exam on a piece they have performed for the non-exam assessment;
- require students to participate in at least one performance (which tests students' performance and devising skills) based on a performance text;
- require evidence of both students' performance and their contribution to the devising of that performance; and
- mark the non-exam assessment themselves.

For A level, our proposed rules required exam boards to:

- set and publish a list of performance texts and key extracts on which exam questions will be based;
- ensure that students do not receive credit for questions in the exam on a piece they have performed for the non-exam assessment;
- require students to participate in at least two performances (both of which test students' performance and devising skills) – one devised piece in response to a task set by the exam board and one performance text;
- require evidence of both students' performance and their contribution to the devising of that performance; and
- mark the non-exam assessment themselves.

Our proposed guidance clarified expected group sizes for performances and how students should be allocated to the different design roles.

Thirty respondents (28 individuals, two organisations) did not answer this question.

One respondent (an individual) supported our proposal that non-exam assessment should be externally marked. However, seven (five individuals, two organisations) did not. Respondents were concerned that the number of students taking AS and A level drama and theatre would make this difficult for exam boards to manage, and that exam board marking would not be able to assess how well a student had contributed to the development of a performance. Respondents also questioned whether external marking would necessarily be more reliable than well-moderated teacher marking.

Four respondents (one individual, three organisations) commented that the specified minimum performance times seemed too short.

Two (both individuals) commented that there seemed to be little progression from GCSE.

Five (three individuals, two organisations) commented that exam boards were unlikely to be able to set tasks for the devised performance effectively. They were concerned that this could be too restrictive for students. One (an organisation) also commented that the proposed release date for the task was too late in the course.

Two (one individual, one organisation) commented that it was not clear what type of evidence would be needed to demonstrate students' contribution to the development of a performance.

One (an individual) commented that requiring a portfolio of evidence could diminish the role of practical learning.

One (an individual) questioned whether monologues or duologues were appropriate for the qualification.

Question 6 – Do you have any comments on the draft Guidance on assessment objectives in new drama and theatre AS and A levels?

This question referred to the draft guidance on assessment objectives which outlines how we expect exam boards to interpret the assessment objectives in terms of discrete 'strands' and 'elements' within each assessment objective, coverage expectations and key areas of emphasis in each assessment objective.

Forty-eight respondents (37 individuals, 11 organisations) did not answer this question.

Two respondents (both individuals) commented that there appeared to be little difference from existing qualifications.

One (an individual) suggested that there needed to be clarity about how students could be assessed in a combination of different roles.

One (an individual) commented that the subject appeared to be aimed at higher-ability students.

One (an organisation) commented that it seemed unnecessary to restrict students' analysis of others' work to performance, and that analysis and evaluation could be applied to staging or other aspects of the work.

Question 7 – We have not identified any ways in which the proposed requirements for new drama GCSEs and drama and theatre AS and A levels would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified? If so what are they?

Forty respondents (28 individuals, 12 organisations) did not answer this question.

Three respondents (all individuals) commented on issues outside the scope of the consultation, which we have analysed under 'Other issues' below.

Four respondents (all individuals) commented that the range of texts used in exams needed to be sufficiently inclusive, and that a narrow range of set texts could disadvantage students with protected characteristics.

Two (both individuals) commented that the use of monologues and duologues could disadvantage students with special educational needs, or students whose first language was not English.

One (an individual) commented that mark schemes for non-exam assessment needed to take account of the limitations faced by students with physical disabilities.

One (an individual) commented that if non-exam assessment is externally marked, this could create problems for some students.

One (an individual) commented that the use of portfolio-based assessment could advantage female students over male students.

One (an individual) commented that the emphasis on text-based study could disadvantage students with low levels of literacy.

Question 8 – Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic? If so, please comment on the additional steps we could take to mitigate negative impacts.

Thirty-eight respondents (27 individuals, 11 organisations) did not answer this question.

Five respondents (all individuals) suggested that there should be a range of options available for performance texts.

Two (both individuals) suggested that there should be alternatives to producing written evidence of students' intentions.

Two (both individuals) suggested that there should be an option for 100 per cent non-exam assessment.

One (an individual) suggested that all performances at GCSE should be ensemble performances.

One (an organisation) suggested that there should be less emphasis on text-based work.

One (an individual) suggested that students could be assessed in their first language using a translator.

One (an individual) suggested that non-exam assessment should be marked by teachers and moderated by exam boards.

One (an individual) suggested that there should be scope for special consideration for candidates with disabilities.

Question 9 – Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

Fifty-one respondents (39 individuals, 12 organisations) did not answer this question.

The two respondents (both individuals) who did answer raised issues outside the scope of the consultation. We have analysed these under 'Other issues' below.

Other issues

Respondents also commented on two issues that were outside the scope of the consultation:

- the Department for Education's subject content requirements; and
- the relative weighting of exams and non-exam assessment – respondents felt that a higher weighting for non-exam assessment would be more appropriate for a practical subject, with several commenting that there should be no written exams at all.

The subject content requirements are a matter for the Department for Education, which has carried out its own consultation.⁶

We have already considered the concerns raised about the use of written exams and the balance between exams and non-exam assessment in response to our earlier consultation.⁷ None of the responses to this consultation raised new issues. Our view remains that the most appropriate way to assess theoretical content in this subject is through written exams, and that our proposed assessment arrangements reflect the balance between theoretical and practical aspects of the subject content.

⁶ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-and-a-level-reform--2

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcses-as-and-a-levels-new-subjects-to-be-taught-in-2016

Appendix A: List of organisational consultation respondents

When completing the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate whether they were responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Below we list those organisations that submitted a response to the consultation. We have not included a list of those responding as an individual. However, all responses were given equal status in the analysis.

Bilborough College, Nottingham

Chase Community School, Enfield

Collyers Sixth Form College, Sussex

Guildford High School

Gumley House School, Isleworth

Sherborne Girls School

Smithdon High School, Norfolk

Steyning Grammar School, West Sussex

St Mary's Catholic High School, Croydon

The Weald School, West Sussex

Wensleydale School, North Yorkshire

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