GCSE Drama
Exploring Summer 2026

Lucy Clark and Michael Walker

Autumn 2026

A few ‘housekeeping’ points…

Materials from today:

Don’t worry about scribbling everything down - all session materials will be available afterwards. Some slides are included for reference only and may not be discussed in detail. Please feel free to review these in your own time.

To access the resources:

1. Sign in to your MyAQA account. This would be the same account that you originally booked the session with.
2. Navigate to 'My Bookings’.
3. Under the 'completed' tab, locate the meeting of the resources you would like and select the download option.

Recording:

This session is being recorded, but just to reassure you - it’s purely for our internal compliance and quality assurance. It won’t be shared externally.

Assessment Content:

And finally, just a quick reminder that we won’t be discussing or referring to any future ‘live’ question papers during today’s session.

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Creative Arts: Meet the team



David Amos
Subject Lead



Samantha Duddy
Subject Support Manager



Lucy Clark
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Jo Alton
Subject Support Manager



Lora Maiden
Subject Support Manager



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Subject Support Manager

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Session structure

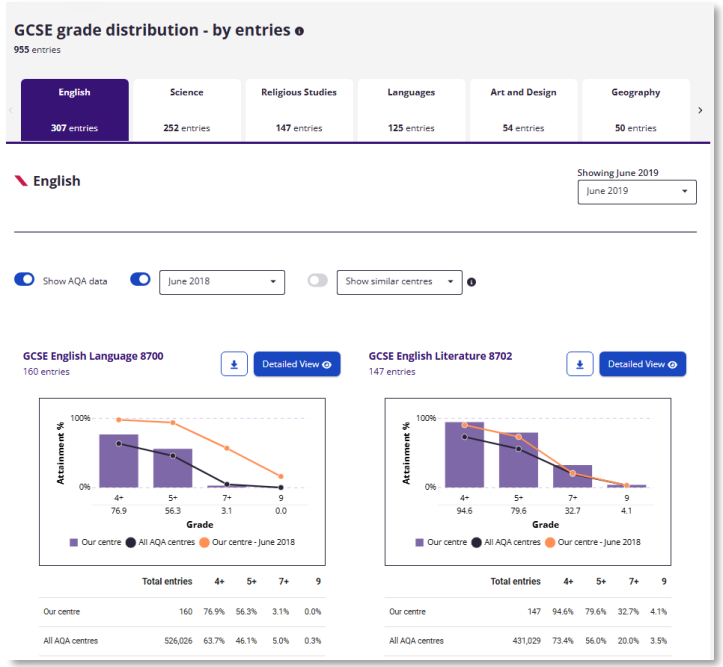
- Data insights
- Grade boundaries and outcomes
- Reports on the examination highlights
- Q&A
- Events and resources
- Curriculum Connect feedback form

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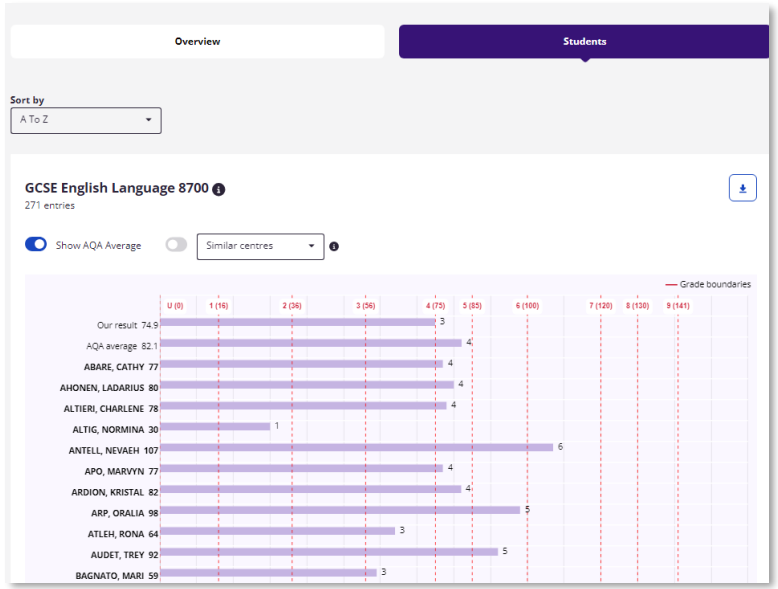
Data Insights

Data insights: to dig deeper into your exam results

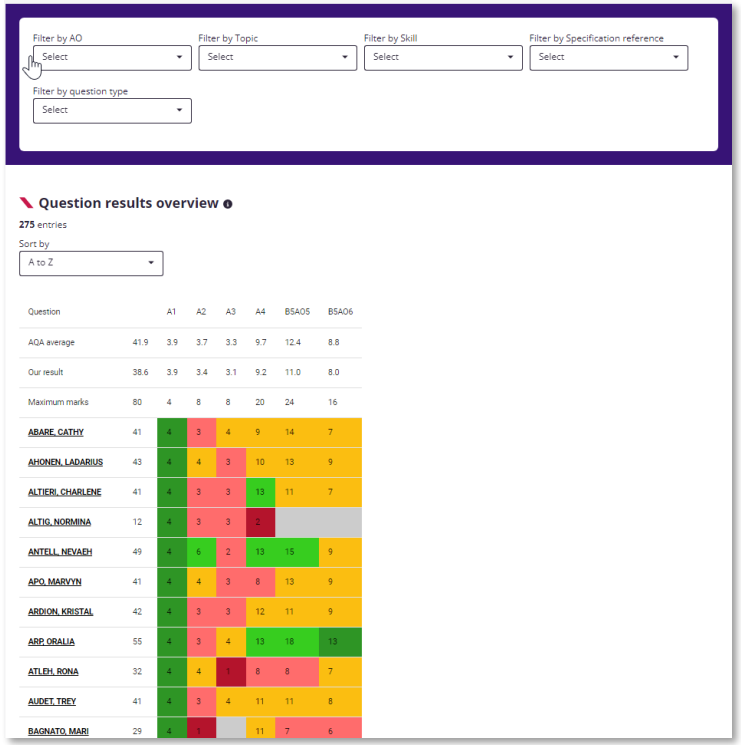
MAT and centre overview



Student marks performance



Question results heatmap

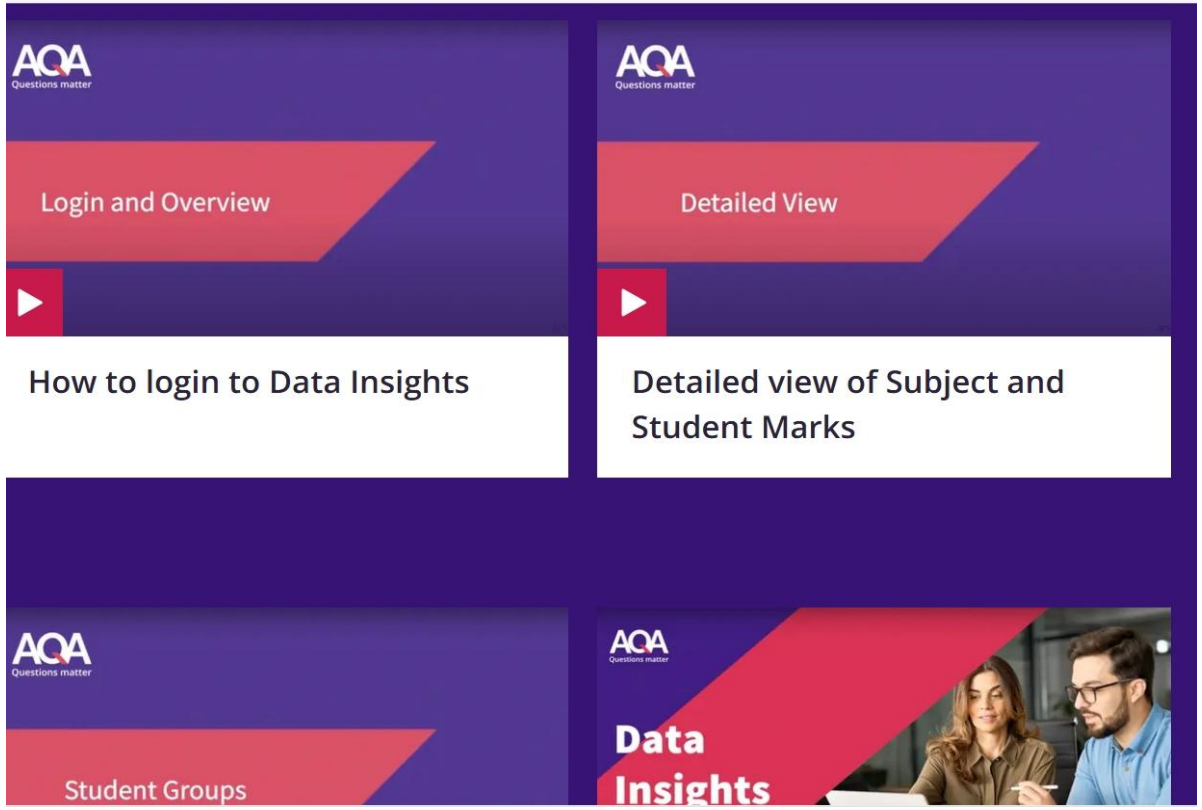


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How to use data insights

Located on our main AQA website is further support:

- Videos
- Step-by-step user guide
- Quick reference guide



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Grade boundaries and outcomes

Grade boundaries – Awarding mini guide
Setting the grade boundaries

1. Once the exam scripts and NEA have been marked, we set the grade boundaries for each individual exam.
2. The process for deciding grade boundaries is called awarding, and its overall aim is to ensure that standards are maintained from one year to the next.
3. Awarding is carried out by senior examiners who are experts in a particular subject and the process is overseen by the qualification's regulator.
4. Once the exam scripts and NEA have been marked a group of senior examiners meet to set the grade boundaries. They look at scripts and work on the grade boundary from last year and a range of scripts from the current year.
5. Those awarding committees are guided by the principle of comparable outcomes and that’s the principle that the student should get the same grade this year that they would have got if they’d sat last year’s paper and NEA.

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Grade boundaries – Awarding mini guide
Setting the grade boundaries

6. They then compare the scripts and NEA to decide the mark for this year's boundary, which represents the same standard as last year.
7. They also use statistics to guide their judgment. These statistics look at how students performed in previous tests; we use Key Stage 2 data for GCSE awarding or GCSE data for A-level awarding.
8. This means that while we're looking to carry over the standard from last year, if we have a slightly more able cohort than last year then there will be slightly more top grades available. After careful consideration, the senior examiners decide what the minimum mark for each grade should be.
9. The result is that a student who performed at the same level should get the same grade whether they sat the exam this year or last year. As well as being fair to students this means the qualification will continue to be valued by potential employers, colleges and universities**.**

On results day, you can find grade boundaries for your subject here:

AQA | Exams admin | Results days | Grade boundaries

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Grade boundaries: GCSE Drama

Grade	2026	2025
9	167	167
8	156	156
7	145	145
6	130	129
5	115	113
4	100	97
3	74	72
2	49	47
1	24	23

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Notional grade boundaries for components

Students are given a single overall grade for a subject, which is based on a single overall subject mark and the subject grade boundaries.

However, we're able to provide 'notional grade boundaries' for individual components of the qualification (for example, a question paper), for illustrative purposes only. Although there are no official grades for individual components in linear qualifications, notional grade boundaries can be useful for students and teachers to see how the overall subject grade was achieved.

Download the guide located on the web page below for more information on this.

AQA | Exams admin | Results days | Grade boundaries

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Outcomes

AQA GCSE statistics 2026 with data from 2025 for comparison. The table shows the cumulative percentages at each grade. These are AQA only data: AQA outcomes are very similar to the national outcomes published by JCQ for all GCSE Drama in England.

	Year	Total entries	Grade 9	Grade 8	Grade 7	Grade 6	Grade 5	Grade 4	Grade 3	Grade 2	Grade 1	Grade U
GCSE	2026	18629	6.9	16.5	29.5	48.6	66.3	79.6	92.3	97.6	99.4	100
	2025	19256	6.6	15.7	27.9	47.4	65.4	78.7	91.3	97.3	99.4	100

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Reports on the examination highlights

Overall highlights

- Students have a greater understanding of their set text
- A real passion and enthusiasm for writing about theatre – Section A and B
- Creativity seen within all components
- Performances that show a strong sense of theatricality
- Slight increase in grade boundaries reflect all the above points
- Decrease in design throughout all components.

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Component 1: Understanding Drama

Areas of strength seen in this component

- Insightful and sensitive responses
- More papers with responses for all questions
- Knowledge and understanding of the set texts is clear
- A wide variety of acting skills which were supported with developed and detailed justification
- Enthusiasm for live theatre, whether seen live or streamed
- Highly detailed responses – with a range of specifics.

Areas of development seen in this component

- Section A not being completed
- Wider context for the 20-mark question was omitted
- Some candidates misunderstood the extract, e.g., placement within the play, character involved, and its meaning
- Some candidates who answered via the design route for live theatre, lacked specifics and therefore did not have the detail required.

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Section A: Theatre roles and terminology (multiple choice)

Areas of strength seen in this question	Areas of development seen in this question
• Students who did attempt this section answered all the questions • Increase in accuracy • Letter response given.	• Some candidates did not attempt (5%) • Some completed in full sentences or wrote out all the possible options and then circled • Some misunderstanding on theatre roles (director).

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Section B: Study of set text: 4 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question	Areas of development seen in this question
• Concise and precise description given, that reflected the socio-historical contexts of the play and the demands of the extract • Not including any superfluous, e.g., justification • Top to toe approach • Hair and make-up assisted when describing costume • Flats and trunking referred to when describing set.	• Focused on justification • Limited description • Design contradicted the extract (e.g., hair from Things I know to be True) • When talking about set, just referring to the room and no description of what is in it (top to toe approach needed) • Spending time working with other elements (not creditable) • Working class assumptions, e.g., working class individuals will be dirty and have no care over their appearance.

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Section B: Study of set text: 8 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question	Areas of development seen in this question
• Breaking the line into different sections – allowed for more precision and nuances in the delivery of the line • Spending time on each part of the broken-up line (all parts were discussed) • Brief context given at the beginning, which was accompanied by outlining the relevant effects • Combining effects together in each point • Wide range of acting skills given (vocal, physical, facial, proxemics, interaction, etc.) • Vocal skills were varied, e.g., pitch, emphasis, diction, volume, tone, pace, stutter, etc.	• Time mismanagement – spent too long on the first part of the line • Not breaking up the line into different parts – not specific • Discreet paragraphs on vocal, physical, and facial skills – not combined • Vocals, when used, were just referenced by one skill: volume • Just listing skills and giving limited justification • Referring to dramatic techniques, e.g., Lecoq's states of tension, but then not referring to how these will be realised practically.

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Section B: Study of set text: 12 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question

- Increase in candidates acknowledging the specific focus of the question, either directly or suggested
- All acting skills are combined in paragraphs, which are all appropriate to achieving the stated focus
- A range of interactions given; vocal, reactions, gaze, touch, and proximity
- Adverbs applied when referencing the use of space, e.g., AGGRESSIVELY walking from U.S.L to D.S.R, so that I am 10cm in front of X
- Three-four lines selected.

Areas of development seen in this question

- Interaction just focusing on physical – vocal is needed
- Limited lines referenced, e.g., throughout this extract I would…
- Only referring to one line and breaking it up
- When writing about use of the space, candidates just stated their position, e.g., C.S, and not stating how it can be used
- Not supporting acting skills with their impact/effects
- Directing other characters in the extract – this is not credible.

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Section B: Study of set text: 20 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question

ACTING

- Interpretation is clear, stated, and added depth, and secure understanding of the character, e.g., my interpretation is to show the character as a deeply flawed individual, who wants to do good, but unfortunately is unable to control his impulses and low self-esteem
- A variety of lines from inside and outside of the extract
- A wide variety of acting skills
- Moments from elsewhere in the play referred to, which offered different aspects and/or journey.

Areas of development seen in this question

ACTING

- Interpretations were basic, e.g., they are a good person
- Not referring to specific lines in and outside of the extract
- Interpretation was given, but there was no performance skills given (just character analysis)
- Communicating a theme or theatrical experience instead of interpretation.

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Section B: Study of set text: 20 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question	Areas of development seen in this question
DESIGN • A wide range of specifics and terminology given • Designs were linked specifically to the extract.	DESIGN • Not supporting how set would be used to support the action on stage • Simple descriptions of locations given, without practical realisation, e.g., box-set, flats, trunking, flying, revolve, etc. • Pre-learnt sets or states, which were not adapted to the extract given.

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Section C: Live theatre production: 32 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question

ACTING

- Breadth on lines and acting skills
- All areas of the response was relevant to the focus of the question
- Analysis and evaluation were naturally flowing and linked to the description and focus of the question
- Not just stating what it achieved, but why.

Areas of development seen in this question

ACTING

- Pre-learnt material which was not applied to the focus of the question
- Listing acting skills with no analysis and evaluation
- Analysis and evaluation added on as an extra at the end of the paragraph, which meant that they were under-developed
- Not focusing on the demands of the questions; the focus
- Not referring to a piece of live theatre.

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Section C: Live theatre production: 32 marker

Areas of strength seen in this question	Areas of development seen in this question
DESIGN • Referring to specific terminology • Focused on the demands of the question • Description was detailed and could be pictured by the examiner.	DESIGN • Just listed items or sounds, lighting, set or costume elements • Not expanding upon the demands of the question, e.g., just saying: this engaged the audience, but not stating why it was engaging • Responses lacked in detail, e.g., just about a blackout or a single light • Not referring to design terminology.

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Component 2: Devising drama: Performance – acting

Areas of strength seen in acting	Areas of development seen in acting
• Strong sense of theatrical performance • A wide range of acting skills applied, which were applied confidently and sustained • Emotions and motivations of their character(s) performed were clear throughout • Intentions fully achieved • Attention to detail at all moments whilst on stage.	• Narrow range of skills • Lacked energy • Little or no dialogue • Standing still and not utilising the space • Little inventive; becoming very cliched • Long blackouts and/or scene changes without any theatricality • Performances that went over the upper time limit were self-penalising • Intentions not achieved or reflective of the performance.

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Component 2: Devising drama: Performance – design

Areas of strength seen in design	Areas of development seen in design
Lighting and sound: • Engaged in a collaborative process • Extensive range of skills applied • Using technology effectively • Secured understanding of how these designs skills work. **Set:** • Highly detailed • Utilised many aspects • Whole stage picture considered. **Costume:** • Head to toe approach • Covered a range of skills: clothing, accessories, hair and make-up • Material, colour and fit considered.	**Lighting and sound:** • A few repetitive states • Only a few changes • Did not add anything relevant to the performance. **Set:** • Few props used • Classroom based set applied • Not utilised by the performers. **Costume:** • Few basic garments • Minimal contribution to the performance and/or enhancing the character • Multiple costumes made for different characters.

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Component 2: Devising drama: Devising log

Areas of strength seen in the devising log	Areas of development seen in the devising log
• All bullet points from the specification are explored • Specific and detailed points throughout • Applied research • Underpinning the development with description and impact • Zooming in on specific points and then exploring development and/or evaluation • Offering a clear journey of development – what they originally did, feedback/issue, what they changed, and then stating further feedback to support changes.	• Vague responses • Not all points are covered • Some going over the time limit • Did not include any feedback on their work • Refinement was not fully documented • Lacking specifics, e.g., I practiced this in the mirror each day until it got better. • Benefit brought to the group which they positively shaped the outcome of; focusing on admin instead of staging, stylistic choices, implementation of technique or rehearsal workshop.

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Component 3: Texts in practice overview

- Well-suited extracts for students
- Students understood the text and extract
- Style understanding was secure
- Groupings had been thought about
- Timings were mostly adhered to.

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Component 3: Texts in practice - acting

Areas of strength seen acting	Areas of development seen in acting
• Understanding of the text and extract • Lines were delivered with confidence • Varied and appropriate acting skills were deployed throughout • Space used effectively and interaction • Motivation and emotions of characters were established, sustained and communicated throughout.	• Lines were learnt; however, they lacked emotion and motivation • Hesitation is some performances – lines not learnt or rehearsed ready for the exam • Extract selection may not have suited the candidate.

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Component 3: Texts in practice - design

Areas of strength seen in design	Areas of development seen in design
• Wider context had been understood • Design had an impact in enhancing the extract/character • Design was woven into the performance • Different designs for each extract • Secure knowledge in the design skill • Style was embraced.	• Used the same set/costumes for both extracts • Lack of cue changes • Only one lighting or sound state; selection of extract and/or lack of variance • Underdeveloped and did not enhance the extract • Design was not appropriate for the style.

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Q&A

Events

Curriculum Connects

We host termly Curriculum Connect sessions and sometimes live Q&A, where I am joined by an AQA Drama senior associate. These sessions are an excellent opportunity for us to provide updates but also give teachers the opportunity to ask questions, network and share best practice.

Please click **this link** to book onto a **Curriculum Connect**.

This term:

- GCSE Drama: NEA Planning Component 2 and 3

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Events: Autumn 2026

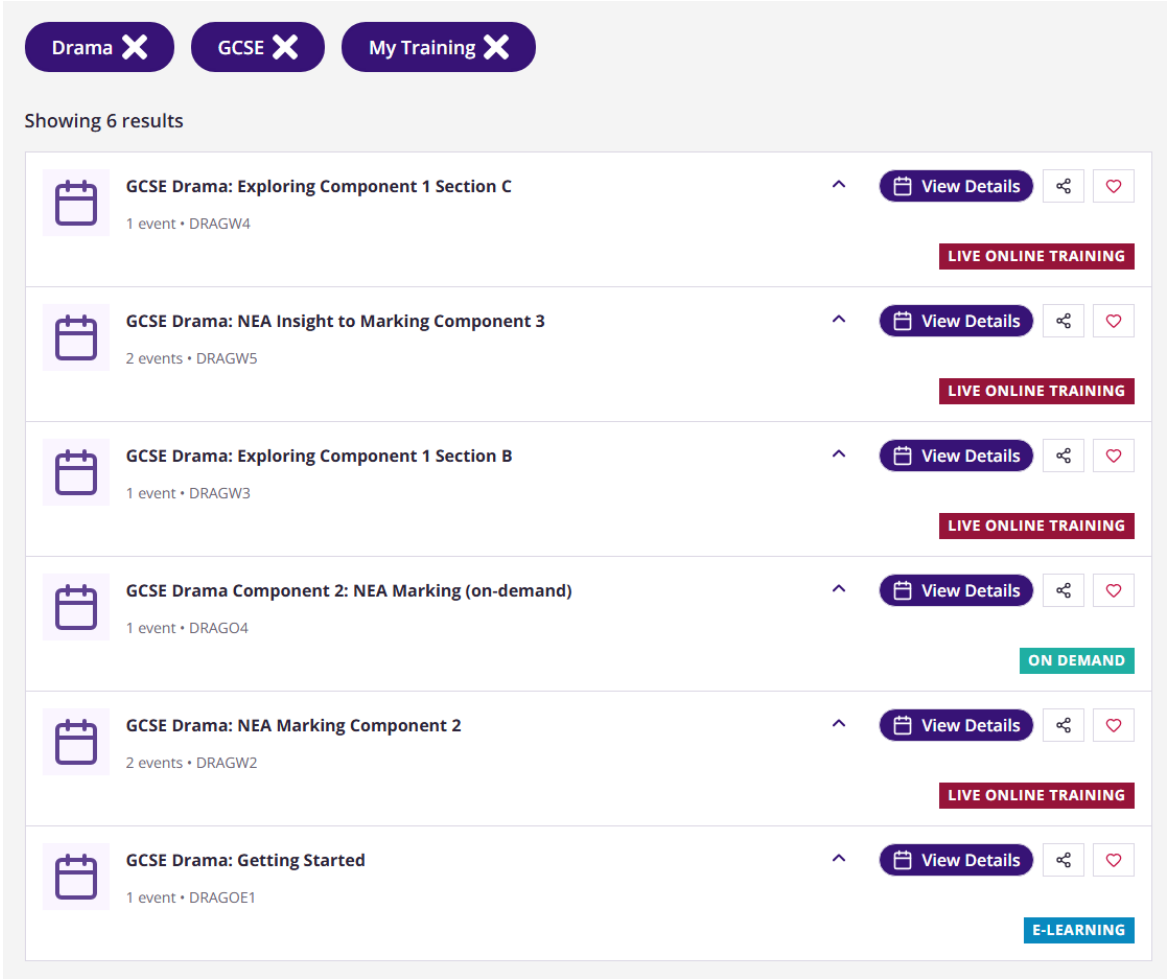
Courses:

- GCSE Drama: Exploring Component 1 Section C **(2 Dec 16:00 – 18:00)**
- GCSE Drama: NEA Insight to Marking Component 3 **(23 and 30 Nov 16:00 – 18:00)**
- GCSE Drama: Exploring Component 1 Section B **(18 Nov 16:00 – 18:00)**
- GCSE Drama: NEA Marking Component 2 **(8 and 11 Nov 16:00 – 18:00)**

E-learning module (available until 31 Dec 2026)

- GCSE Drama: Getting started

Book on our professional development website



Visit AQA at the Music & Drama Education Expo 2027

Europe's leading free event for Music and Drama educators, bringing together over 2,000 teachers and sector leaders for **two days of CPD, networking and industry insights**.

Attending the Music & Drama Education Expo?

Make sure you visit the AQA stand and join our reform seminar!

- Meet the Music, Drama and Dance team
- Discuss curriculum and assessment review reform
- Share your views and insights
- Explore the latest updates and support available

Come and talk to us! Visit the AQA stand (B9) throughout the event to:

- Ask questions about reform
- Share feedback and experiences
- Connect with subject specialists

Come and talk to us if you are thinking of teaching one of our AQA qualifications!

🗓️ 11-12 February 2027

📍 Business Design Centre, London

🤝 Visit the AQA on stand **B9**

🎤 **AQA reimagining GCSE Music & Drama: Understanding the reform journey**

Join Sandra Allan, Creative Arts Sector Lead, at 3:15pm on Thursday in the seminar room to discuss the evolving GCSE Music and Drama reform landscape.

Find out more here

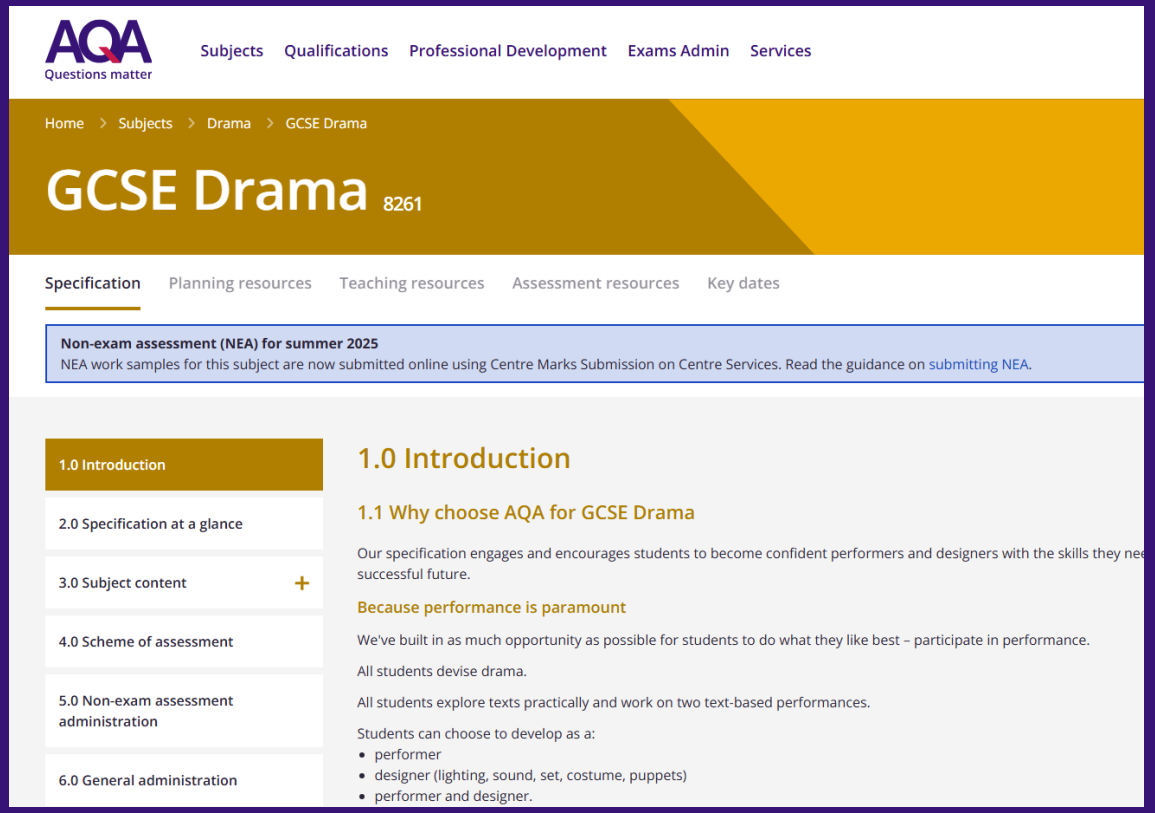
Register your attendance here

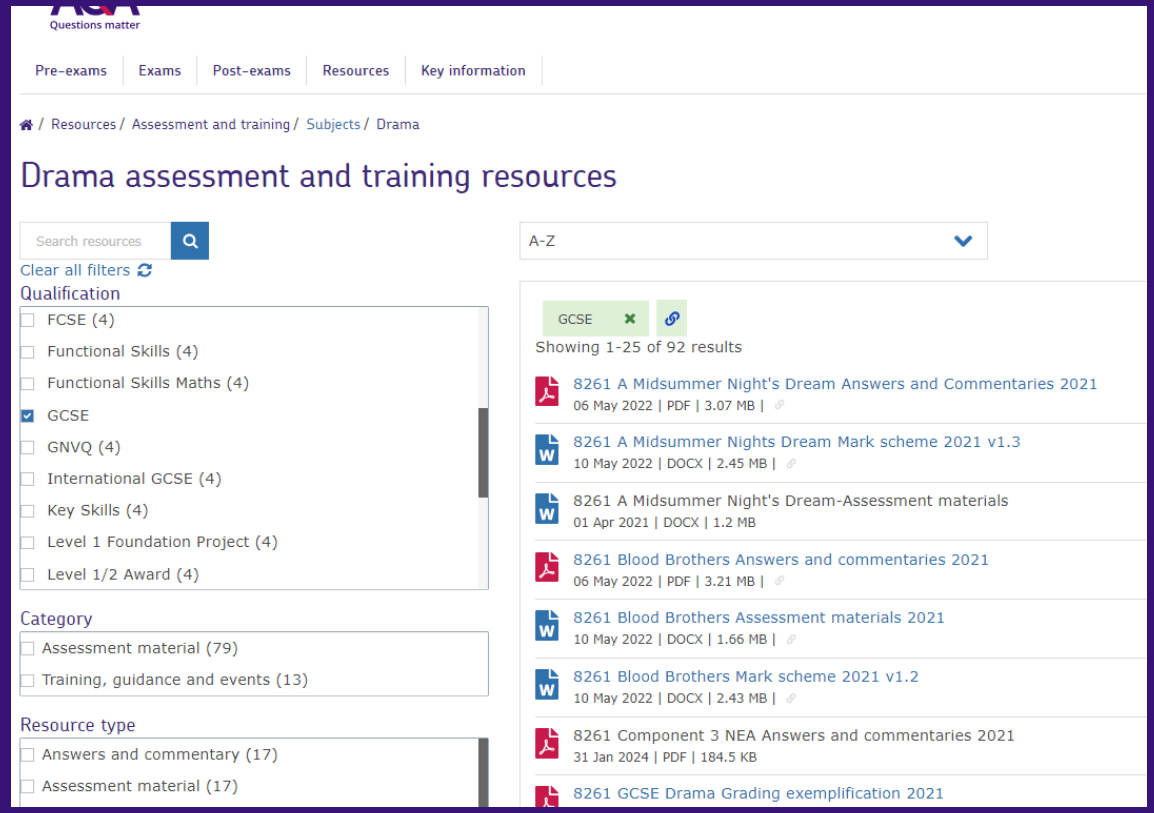
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Resources

Resources: two areas

myresources



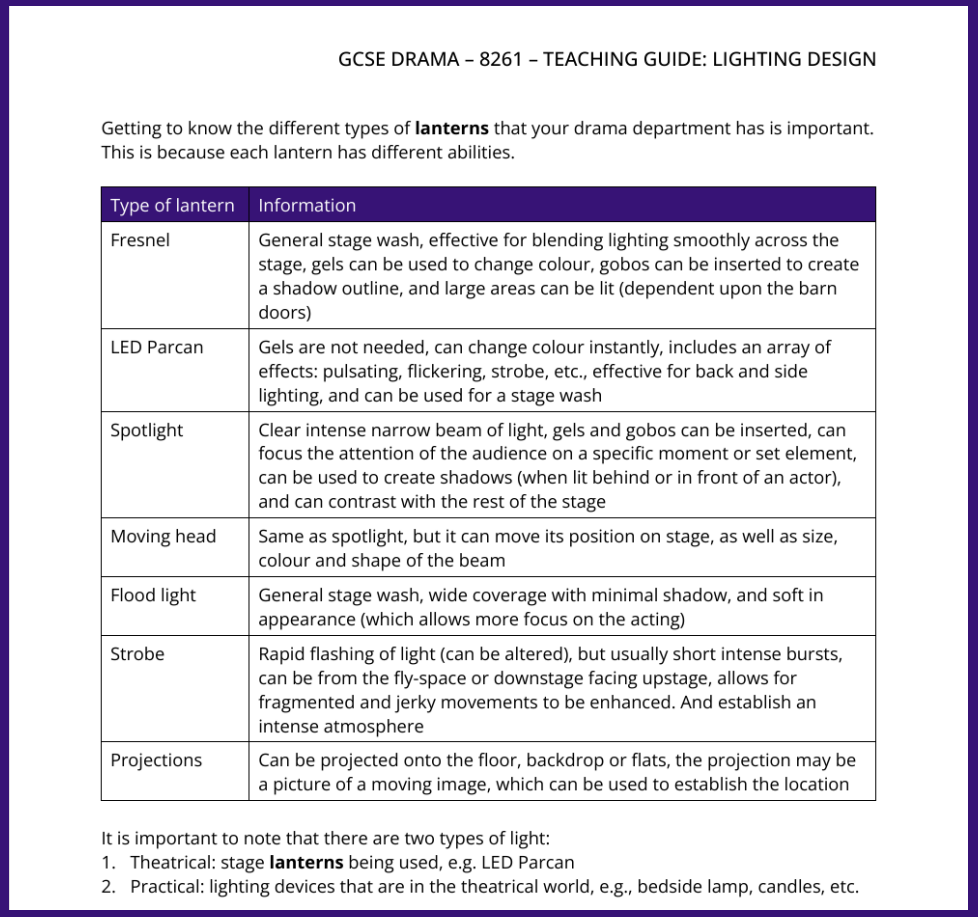


To access the resources, visit the plan, teach and assess pages on our website for **GCSE Drama**.

More resources are available on our **Centre Services** page including teacher online standardisation material.

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Key resources

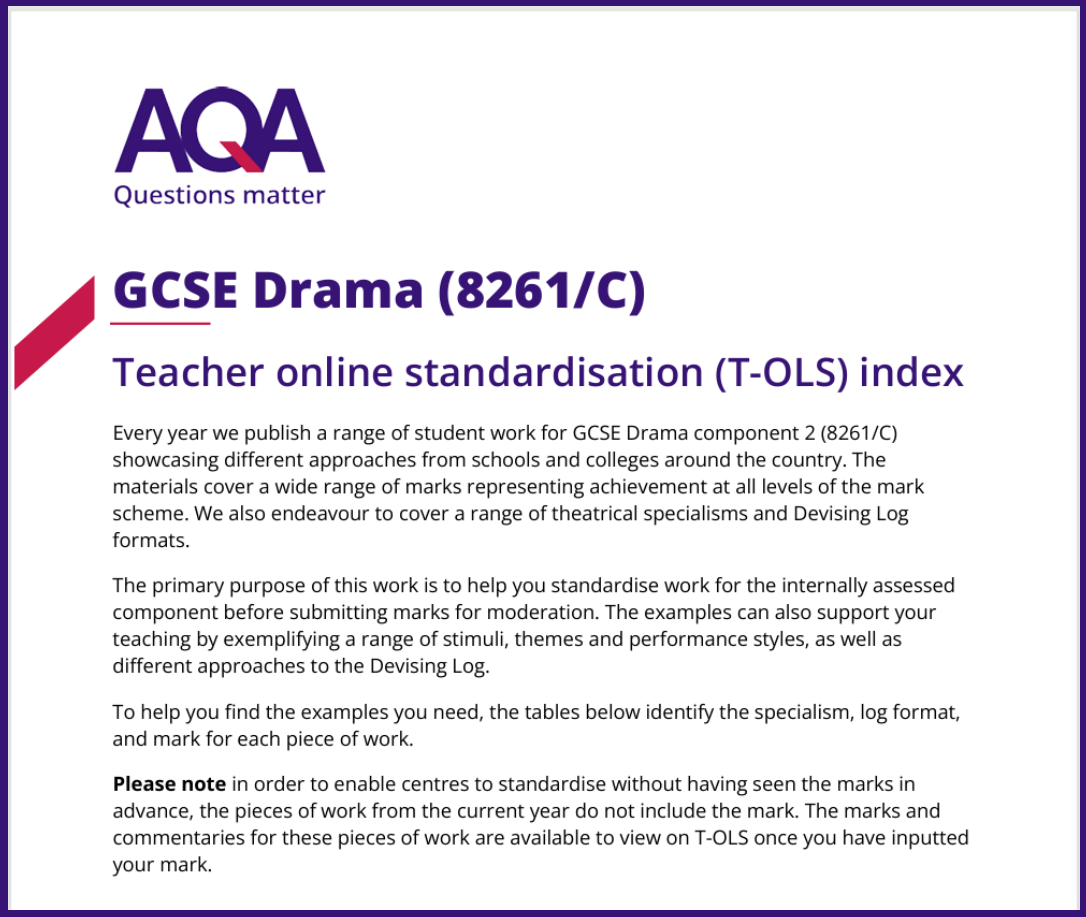


GCSE DRAMA – 8261 – TEACHING GUIDE: LIGHTING DESIGN

Getting to know the different types of **lanterns** that your drama department has is important. This is because each lantern has different abilities.

Type of lantern	Information
Fresnel	General stage wash, effective for blending lighting smoothly across the stage, gels can be used to change colour, gobos can be inserted to create a shadow outline, and large areas can be lit (dependent upon the barn doors)
LED Parcan	Gels are not needed, can change colour instantly, includes an array of effects: pulsating, flickering, strobe, etc., effective for back and side lighting, and can be used for a stage wash
Spotlight	Clear intense narrow beam of light, gels and gobos can be inserted, can focus the attention of the audience on a specific moment or set element, can be used to create shadows (when lit behind or in front of an actor), and can contrast with the rest of the stage
Moving head	Same as spotlight, but it can move its position on stage, as well as size, colour and shape of the beam
Flood light	General stage wash, wide coverage with minimal shadow, and soft in appearance (which allows more focus on the acting)
Strobe	Rapid flashing of light (can be altered), but usually short intense bursts, can be from the fly-space or downstage facing upstage, allows for fragmented and jerky movements to be enhanced. And establish an intense atmosphere
Projections	Can be projected onto the floor, backdrop or flats, the projection may be a picture of a moving image, which can be used to establish the location

It is important to note that there are two types of light:
1. Theatrical: stage **lanterns** being used, e.g. LED Parcan
2. Practical: lighting devices that are in the theatrical world, e.g., bedside lamp, candles, etc.



AQA
Questions matter

GCSE Drama (8261/C)

Teacher online standardisation (T-OLS) index

Every year we publish a range of student work for GCSE Drama component 2 (8261/C) showcasing different approaches from schools and colleges around the country. The materials cover a wide range of marks representing achievement at all levels of the mark scheme. We also endeavour to cover a range of theatrical specialisms and Devising Log formats.

The primary purpose of this work is to help you standardise work for the internally assessed component before submitting marks for moderation. The examples can also support your teaching by exemplifying a range of stimuli, themes and performance styles, as well as different approaches to the Devising Log.

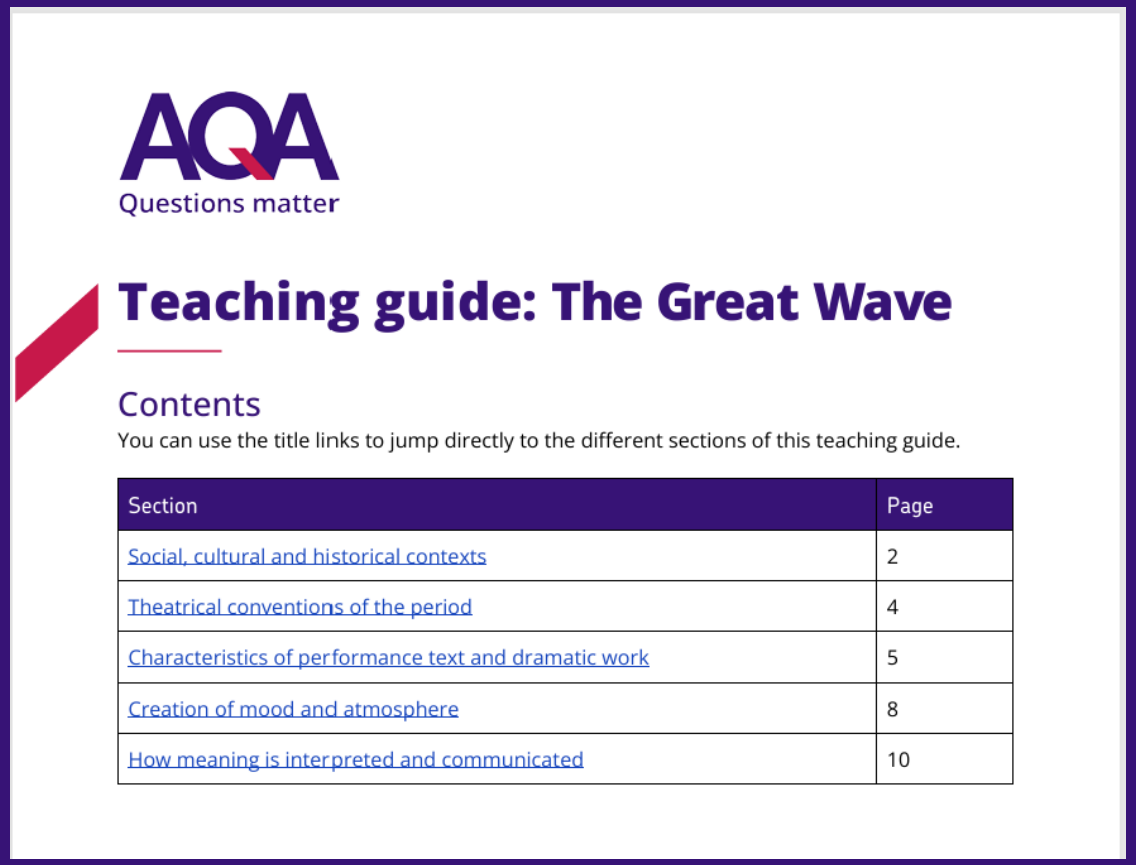
To help you find the examples you need, the tables below identify the specialism, log format, and mark for each piece of work.

Please note in order to enable centres to standardise without having seen the marks in advance, the pieces of work from the current year do not include the mark. The marks and commentaries for these pieces of work are available to view on T-OLS once you have inputted your mark.

GCSE Drama 8261 | Specification | AQA

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Key resources



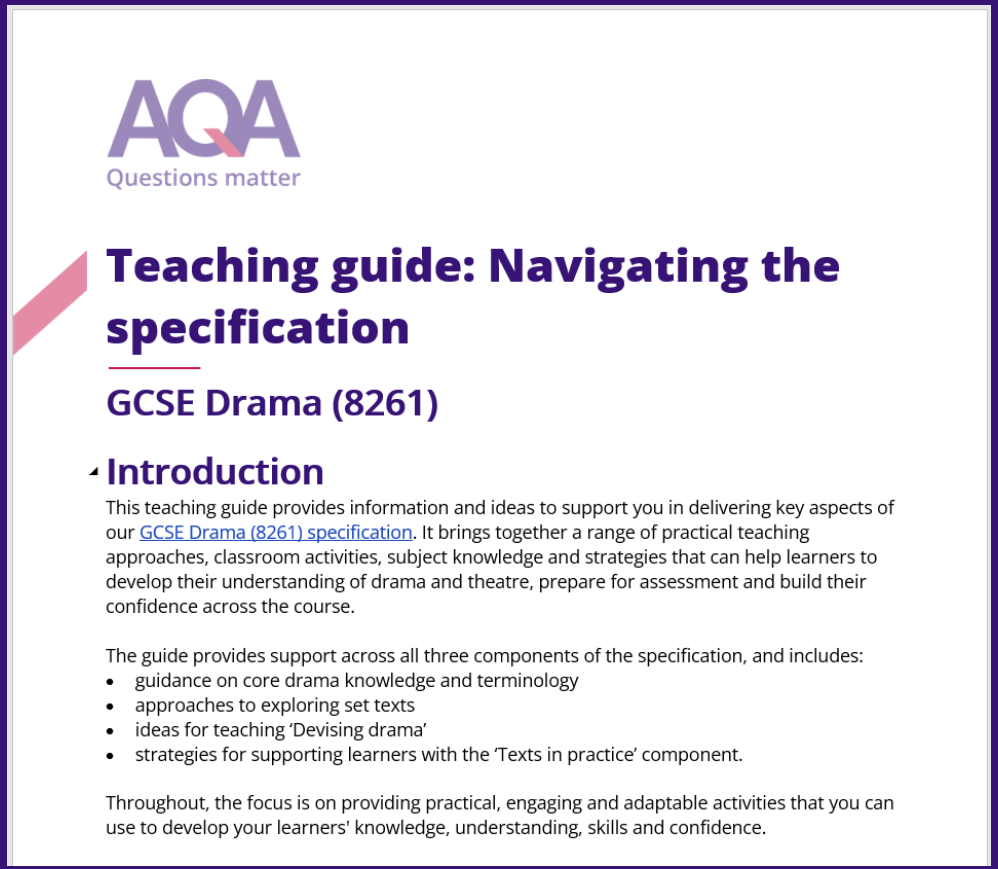
Questions matter

Teaching guide: The Great Wave

Contents

You can use the title links to jump directly to the different sections of this teaching guide.

Section	Page
Social, cultural and historical contexts	2
Theatrical conventions of the period	4
Characteristics of performance text and dramatic work	5
Creation of mood and atmosphere	8
How meaning is interpreted and communicated	10



Questions matter

Teaching guide: Navigating the specification

GCSE Drama (8261)

Introduction

This teaching guide provides information and ideas to support you in delivering key aspects of our GCSE Drama (8261) specification. It brings together a range of practical teaching approaches, classroom activities, subject knowledge and strategies that can help learners to develop their understanding of drama and theatre, prepare for assessment and build their confidence across the course.

The guide provides support across all three components of the specification, and includes:

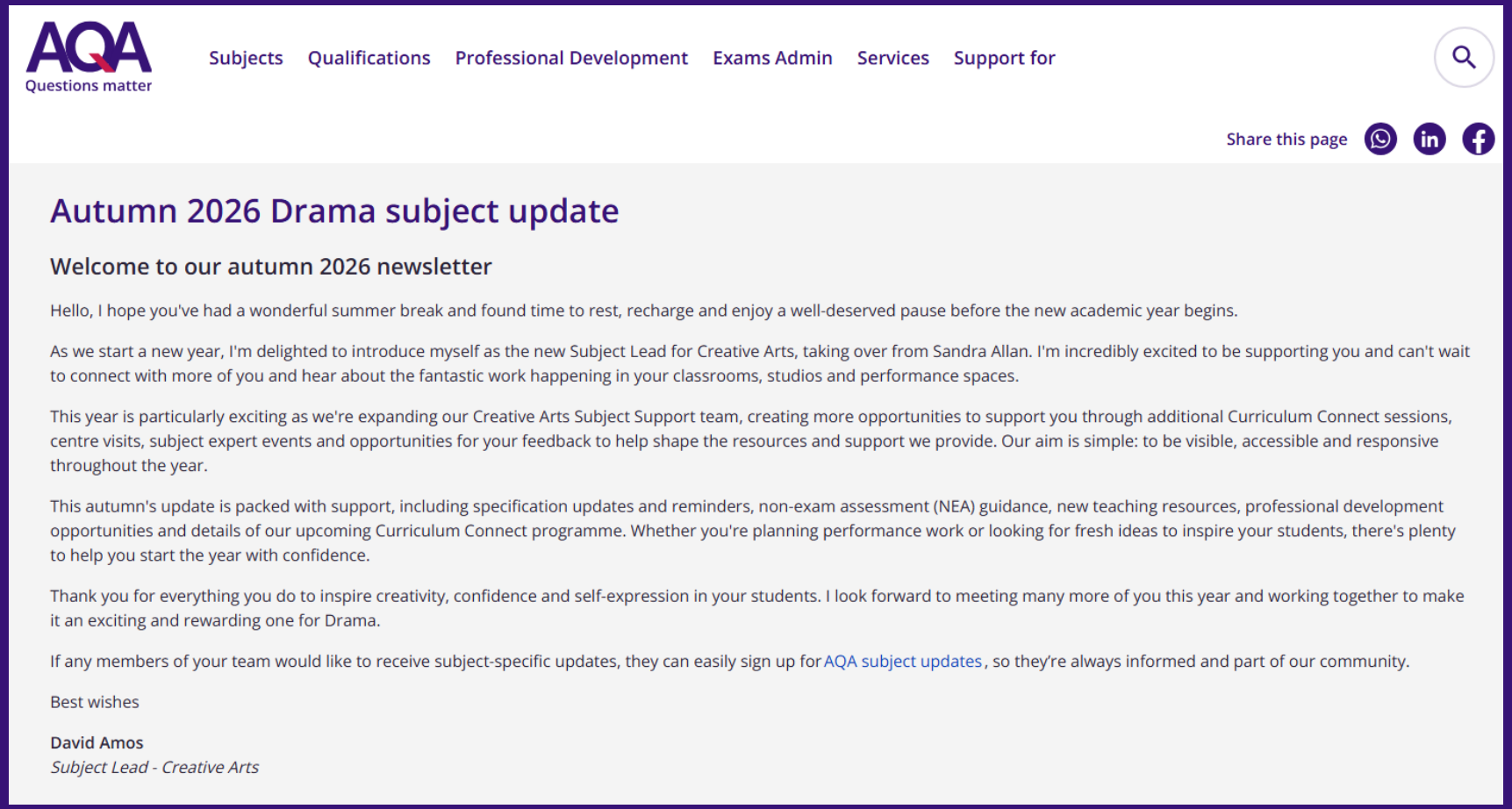
- guidance on core drama knowledge and terminology
- approaches to exploring set texts
- ideas for teaching 'Devising drama'
- strategies for supporting learners with the 'Texts in practice' component.

Throughout, the focus is on providing practical, engaging and adaptable activities that you can use to develop your learners' knowledge, understanding, skills and confidence.

GCSE Drama 8261 | Specification | AQA

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New web-first newsletters!



AQA Questions matter

Subjects Qualifications Professional Development Exams Admin Services Support for

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Autumn 2026 Drama subject update

Welcome to our autumn 2026 newsletter

Hello, I hope you've had a wonderful summer break and found time to rest, recharge and enjoy a well-deserved pause before the new academic year begins.

As we start a new year, I'm delighted to introduce myself as the new Subject Lead for Creative Arts, taking over from Sandra Allan. I'm incredibly excited to be supporting you and can't wait to connect with more of you and hear about the fantastic work happening in your classrooms, studios and performance spaces.

This year is particularly exciting as we're expanding our Creative Arts Subject Support team, creating more opportunities to support you through additional Curriculum Connect sessions, centre visits, subject expert events and opportunities for your feedback to help shape the resources and support we provide. Our aim is simple: to be visible, accessible and responsive throughout the year.

This autumn's update is packed with support, including specification updates and reminders, non-exam assessment (NEA) guidance, new teaching resources, professional development opportunities and details of our upcoming Curriculum Connect programme. Whether you're planning performance work or looking for fresh ideas to inspire your students, there's plenty to help you start the year with confidence.

Thank you for everything you do to inspire creativity, confidence and self-expression in your students. I look forward to meeting many more of you this year and working together to make it an exciting and rewarding one for Drama.

If any members of your team would like to receive subject-specific updates, they can easily sign up for AQA subject updates, so they're always informed and part of our community.

Best wishes

David Amos
Subject Lead - Creative Arts

my network

my training

my resources

my support

my AQA

Our newsletter updates are moving online!

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NEA Adviser service

Each school or college has a dedicated adviser. Our advisers are experienced teachers and moderators who can offer guidance and support throughout the school year on delivering NEA.

They're there to answer your questions, explain specification requirements, share teaching ideas and discuss general processes, planning and approaches to NEA tasks.

We send NEA Adviser contact details to exams officers from mid-September at the start of each academic year. Please check with them for details for your subject.

If you don't have an assigned adviser, please contact eos@aqa.org.uk.

Alternatively, you can find out your adviser's details from **Centre Services** in the **pre-exams** tab.

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Component 2: GCSE Drama teacher online standardisation (T-OLS)

T-OLS is available at any time and can be accessed by all teachers in a department. You can see sample work that's been marked by the lead moderator, then mark it yourself to get instant feedback on how you compare to the standard.

Log in to Centre Services (if you don't have a login, see our Centre Services help page).

Select Pre-exams tab, then Teacher Online Standardisation from the list of services.

Select Level > Subject > Component in the online standardisation system, then familiarise yourself with the information.

Select View Assessment Criteria to study the assessment criteria, then move on to view examples and moderator's comments explaining each one (where available).

Mark a sample piece of work – recording your marks and notes on the mark sheet as you go – and then submit for instant feedback.

Study your feedback and compare your marks to the lead moderator's. Repeat for all the available pieces of work.

You can then share and discuss the feedback with your department.

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Next steps

Your year with AQA

Year view of key activities for the subject

Autumn 2026

- Exploring 2026 Curriculum Connect
- NEA Planning sessions for Comp 2 and Comp 3
- Reports on the examination
- Data Insights
- GCSE Drama teacher online standardisation (T-OLS) Comp 2 devising – new work available in December plus update of T-OLS index

Spring 2027

- 13 January visiting window opens for Comp 3 scripted
- GCSE Drama teacher online standardisation (T-OLS) Comp 2 devising
- Curriculum Connects

Summer 2027

- 7 May – NEA submission of marks deadline
- Exams
- GCSE: 19 August results day

Events 2026/2027

- Curriculum Connects
- GCSE teacher online standardisation – Comp 2 (T-OLS)
- GCSE Drama (Comp 2): NEA marking
- Getting started (eLearning module)
- GCSE Drama: Exploring Component 1 Section C
- GCSE Drama: NEA Insight to Marking Component 3
- GCSE Drama: NEA Marking Component 2

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See your impact

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AQA

Sandra Allan
Creative Arts Sector Lead



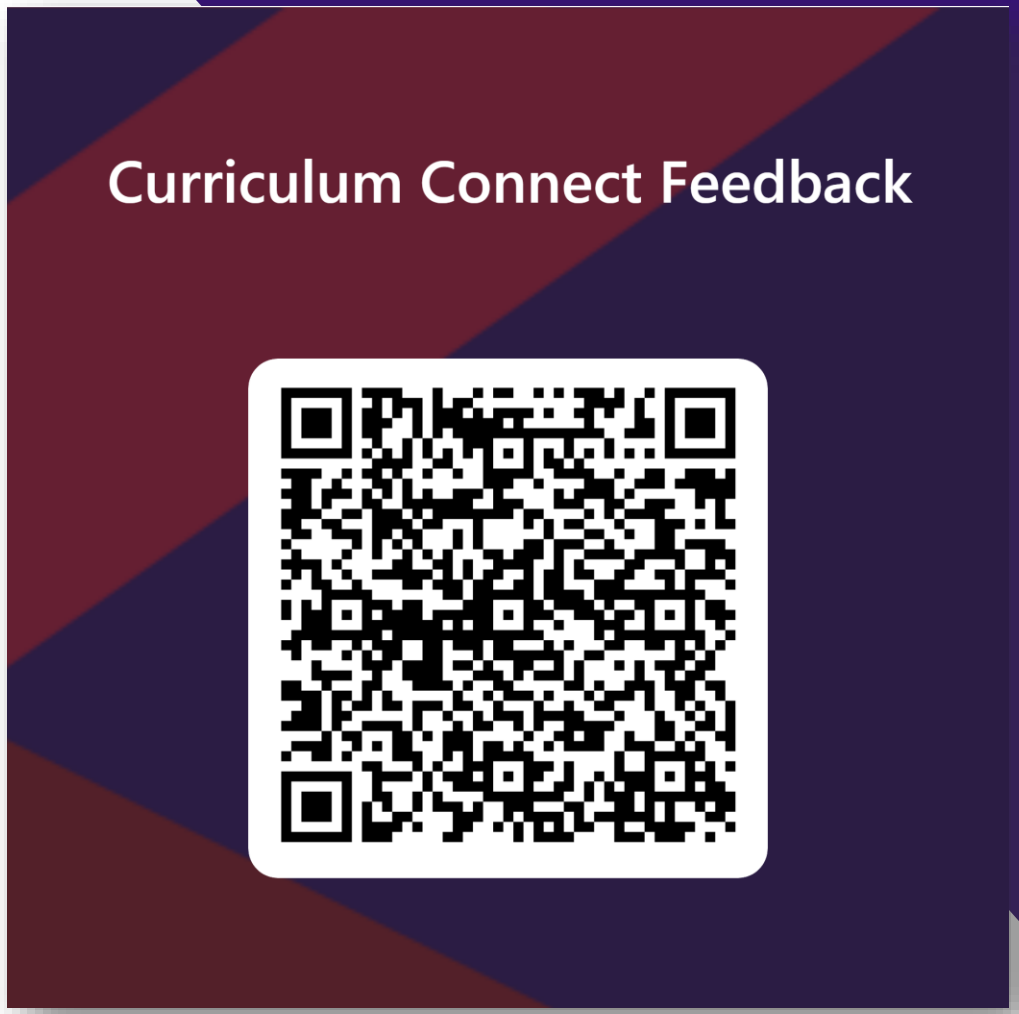
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Curriculum Connect feedback



Our Curriculum Connect sessions are a space where you and our subject specialists can collaborate. In order to help meet your needs and expectations, we kindly ask you to complete the below.

Click here: Curriculum Connect Feedback Form

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Thank you!