



General Certificate of Secondary Education

English 3702/3712

Specification A

Examiners' Report

2005 examination - June series

- English (3702)
- English Literature (3712)

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General Introduction

There is much in this report which is encouraging.

The vast majority of candidates are able to write with interest and engagement. Basic comprehension levels in the reading of non-fiction, media and poetry texts are satisfactory.

Increasingly few entrants are unable to communicate with sufficient clarity to make their meaning clear.

While right at the bottom end of the mark range there are some candidates who are daunted by the task of such a long examination, these are few in number.

The achievement at the top end of the mark range is stunning – certainly as good as it has ever been.

But there are some matters worth considering, too:

Given that the examination system makes no concessions to IT (except in the collection of marks), is IT helping candidates to write more accurately and more effectively?

Is concentration on content appropriate in a specification where so many poems have to be studied?

How can candidates be helped to transfer their skills from one area to another (they can compare poems effectively but are much less successful when comparing short stories or unseen texts)?

How can candidates be helped to use the full stop effectively?

How can candidates be helped to become more critical and autonomous readers?

Can the shift from content to skills be even greater?

How can coursework be made less of a chore and more a place to experiment and express individuality?

How can candidates be taught to speak and listen more effectively (rather than simply be assessed when talking and listening)?

How can this subject equip candidates most effectively with skills which will help them to live a more fulfilling life?

English (3702)

Paper 1 Foundation Tier

This year the paper was about cars: what people find useful about them and the ways they are used. The candidates were given an advertisement for a Nissan Micra car, which has been designed to particularly attract women drivers, and an extract called ‘Why No One Walks’ from ‘Notes from a Big Country’ by Bill Bryson, in which he comments on American attitudes to driving. There were three short questions on the content and meaning of the texts and one question on the way the texts were presented. Both passages seemed to be accessible to most candidates and showed there is considerable interest both among girls and boys in driving and owning a car.

Although the descriptions of the car’s gadgetry in the Nissan advertisement might have been expected to grab the attention more quickly of the boys than the girls, it turned out that both boys and girls had plenty to say both about the equipment described and about the tone of the advertisement in general. They also produced strong responses to Bill Bryson’s descriptions of the way in which his American neighbours think nothing of getting in their cars to drive as far as the next door house, and although some of them were inclined to be distracted from the questions by their collections of information on pollution, global warming and healthy lifestyles, few of them failed to grasp something of his argument.

Section A Reading

The questions in Section A provided an assessment of reading skills and were tightly focused on specific assessment objectives. Together they make up a test of the ability to read with insight and engagement, follow an argument, select material to answer questions, collate material from different sources (making cross references and comparing) and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices. An increasing number of the candidates have clearly been carefully taught to understand these objectives, to present their answers appropriately and to organise their time effectively. This year there was a significant increase in the number of candidates who answered the right number of questions and clearly numbered their answers. Although there is still some uncertainty about presentational devices, there seemed to be a generally more confident approach to selecting material efficiently and making comparisons. However, there are still too many quite able candidates who seem to regard the questions as an invitation to enthusiastic social chat and launch into extended personal opinion or polemic. Sometimes it can be interesting and diverting to the examiner, but it is hard to find ways of rewarding such answers when answers they only vaguely relate to the question. Such responses take up valuable time and leave the candidate struggling to finish the paper.

Question 1a required the candidates to select and write down four points which support the argument in the advertisement that the Nissan Micra car would particularly suit girls. A large number of candidates presented clear answers and gained the full four marks for this question. A small minority, however, misunderstood the focus of the question and wrote at some length about what was suggested about women as drivers and whether they agreed with it. This approach sometimes meant that candidates did not clearly identify points which supported the argument.

Question 1b Candidates were asked to show they could follow an argument by explaining in their own words what sort of picture the Bill Bryson extract gives of American attitudes to walking and then what he feels about those attitudes. This question worked well in discriminating between levels of ability. Only the best candidates sitting this paper commented on Bryson’s humour and gentle sarcasm. The less able candidates tended to generalise or introduce ideas about pollution and obesity. However, most candidates got the main point of what Bryson was saying and were able to give some explanation of the

way in which the examples he gave of his neighbours' behaviour illustrated different but related attitudes. Explaining Bryson's own attitudes also proved to be a straightforward and accessible task.

Question 1c asked candidates to compare the views about cars in the two items. Many candidates found this task challenging. They wrote about the views in one and then the views in the other but failed to attempt any comparison and were unable to make a valid comment on the purpose of the Bryson piece. The best answers were those which focused clearly on purpose and audience so that they were able to compare styles of expression. This question proved to be a useful discriminator.

Question 2a. This was a question about presentation, about the way the advertisement looked on the page, but many candidates failed to follow the guidance given by the bullets and did not deal with issues of presentation. Many wrote long explanations about what the advertisement said about gadgets for a car and what it said about the sort of lives girls lead, but did not consider the effectiveness of the design or the language. They described the way the page was laid out but did not explain why the layout was arranged in that way or what effect the advertiser was trying to achieve. Similarly, some candidates described the pictures and often gained some marks by commenting on details of colour or the position of the girl and the car, but did not manage to go further and consider what effect these details might have. This year more candidates showed they were able to pick out language details and evaluate them and it was clear that a lot of excellent work has been done in many centres to give students confidence in identifying different registers and language styles. Nevertheless, there are still too many candidates relying on describing aspects of presentation rather than evaluating their effectiveness. Candidates should be helped to understand that purpose and effect are always likely to be the keywords of Question 2. Everything they write should be based on those points.

Section B Writing to Argue, Persuade or Advise

Candidates were asked to choose one of four questions. One tested the skill of arguing, one the art of persuasion and one the ability to give advice. The last question required them to argue and then persuade. A large number of candidates chose to do the task requiring argument about students being taught to drive at school, partly perhaps because an article presenting an argument is straightforward and something on which they have been given clear guidelines. The other popular task was the one in which candidates were asked to write an advertisement persuading young men to buy a car. This task was done by both boys and girls (although more enthusiastically by boys) who often produced sprightly ideas involving fantasy lifestyles and outrageous gimmicks to make their advertising copy entertaining and effective.

Almost all the responses to the task in Section B had some sense of structure, although surprisingly even some of the most able writers didn't organise their work in paragraphs. It was noticeable that answers were, on the whole, shorter and more succinct than in previous years. Far fewer candidates rambled on aimlessly in the belief that the aim was to cover as much paper as time allowed. Spelling was not noticeably either better or worse than in previous years. Many candidates who spell complex words correctly either panic or become careless in examination conditions and misspell more frequently used words. The spelling 'there' was frequently used to cover for 'their' and 'they're'. Otherwise, many of the misspellings were in words such as 'writing' or 'physically' or 'until' where there was uncertainty about whether to double a consonant or not. As a general impression, punctuation was used by many candidates in a correct and useful way, but there seemed to be an increase this year in the number of those quite fluent writers who wrote at length without any punctuation at all – as if it were an affectation which they felt they could usefully ignore.

Question 3

Candidates who responded to this question did so in a conscientious and earnest way, although in most cases there was a limited range of reasons why students at school should be given driving lessons. Only a small proportion of answers showed any real liveliness or originality, although many of them argued the case firmly.

Question 4. The task was to write the text for a car advertisement persuading young men that a particular car would suit them. Many candidates threw themselves into this task with zest, the boys particularly showing an impressive knowledge of motoring vocabulary and technical terms. They also took the opportunity to show a sophisticated understanding of the techniques of salesmanship and the use of gender stereotypes or even mild sexual innuendo to emphasise the need to drive a particular sort of car. Sometimes this outpouring of enthusiasm obscured the structure of the piece which made it a little unstable in its power to persuade, but suiting the needs of purpose and audience was seldom a problem.

Question 5 asked for an advice sheet for young people who are newcomers to a particular area. Some candidates wrote with enough enthusiasm to inject some life into this task but others needed more practice in giving shape to the sort of advice which was required. They could write authoritatively and assemble appropriate details but they only managed to produce lists and found it difficult to vary the sentence structures or to develop their points beyond the obvious practicalities. The structure was often clear but the reader's interest was more difficult to catch and retain.

Question 6. Candidates were asked to write the text for a local radio programme in which they aim to persuade people to get fitter and advise them how to do so. This was not a favourite question although most students at secondary schools are now well drilled in the principles of physical fitness and many feel strongly about it. Only the very best answers acknowledged the task of writing for radio. However, most of the candidates who did choose this task managed both to persuade in general terms and then more specifically to advise, presenting a clearly structured sequence of ideas.

Conclusion

The paper seemed to work well in that it was accessible to candidates across the whole range of ability and also provided opportunities for differentiation. It was apparent that most teachers and students now have a clear understanding of the structure of the paper and the way the questions target the assessment objectives, so that very few candidates felt intimidated by the assessment experience. On the whole the responses in Section B were less vital and less resourceful answers than has sometimes been the case in the past, but it is always a pleasure to read what candidates write and to find moments of insight and eloquence even in the most hesitant of scripts.

Paper 1 Higher Tier

Section A

All senior examiners reported that the exam appeared to have been enjoyed by most candidates. Enjoyment of examinations used to be an alien concept, but it is certainly true that candidates found the experience less daunting. There were very few examples of candidates not finishing (fewer than 1%) and candidates seemed to have entered into the spirit of the whole exercise.

The reading section appeared to be enjoyed and was generally well answered at all levels of ability. The Bryson passage was particularly welcomed while the advertisement offered a familiar format. The reading questions are clearly and firmly predicated upon the Assessment Objectives in the Specification. The first question asked candidates to 'follow an argument' by explaining what Bryson found surprising about the way that Americans live. Candidates might have answered: 'Bryson is surprised that Americans do not walk anywhere.' This appears to be a pretty good summary of his argument, but it ignores AOi (making appropriate references) and AO(iv) (select material appropriate to their purposes). Therefore, we, as teachers, refer to the 'PEE' structure for answering such questions and the vast majority of candidates understood this and complied.

At its simplest level, **Question 1a** was a relatively simple retrieval exercise with candidates noting one or two points. Those judged to be exhibiting higher order reading skills took their responses further, with a fuller absorption of the content points, and a capacity for shaping answers in ways that suggested an assured grasp of the material: the 'absorbed and shaped' mentioned in the mark scheme in the highest band of marks. Some Team Leaders came across centres which had taught candidates to answer in bullet points. This sort of construct made it more difficult to use the afore-mentioned formula (PEE) and it makes it almost impossible for candidates to answer a compare question successfully.

Question 1b Most candidates warmed to Bryson (as most of his readers do) and they found it quite easy to itemise and explain his methods for keeping his readers entertained. Many candidates achieved full marks, having commented on a variety of methods and having been able to give reasons and examples. As with most reading tasks, those candidates who said a lot about a little did themselves most justice. To quote one Team Leader: 'So far into the exam, candidates were fearlessly enjoying themselves.'

Of all the questions in the reading section, 1(c) was least well done. Too many candidates did not focus on comparing the 'views of cars', but compared audience, purpose or even presentation. Others started well, commenting on Bryson's views, but then paraphrased the advert. Others made one clear comparison and then repeated it in slightly different words. The more sophisticated readers reflected with a degree of subtlety about how and why the views about cars in the two texts were different. These readers often argued that it was the lifestyle of the cars' users, not cars per se, that troubled Bryson, and then went on to draw an effective contrast with how the Nissan advert was actually about constructing and selling a lifestyle as much as a car.

There was no comparison question on the replacement paper last summer and it was felt that answers were becoming formulaic in recent years. It was emphasised in standardising meetings that putting 'whereas' and 'however' didn't necessarily mean that candidates were comparing. Very often they were juxtaposing and randomly adding some discourse markers to make it look like a comparison. However, middle range candidates were making one simple comparison and that is what they had been taught to do. Such candidates were rewarded by a mark in the 'clear' band of marks, but very often with a mark of 3 when the total for the question was 6. Students have a lot of comparing to do under examination conditions within the AQA suite of examinations and they appear to be getting better at this higher order reading skill.

The Principal Examiner wishes that the words: ‘**You are now being asked to read this item as a media text**’, could be re-inserted into the rubric of the examination paper before Question 2. Because that is what students are asked to do. There was plenty to say about language in response to Q2 (a) and those candidates who understood what was required easily scored 5+. However, too many candidates wrote about three quarters of a side, but ended up with a relatively low mark because they simply paraphrased or related what the advertisement ‘said’. Able candidates noted that there were eight marks for this question, so wrote in some detail about a number of linguistic features. This, once more, is where those candidates who have been taught Assessment Objectives scored highly because AO(v) states that candidates need to be able to ‘understand and evaluate how writers use linguistic, structural and presentational devices to achieve their effects’. Too many candidates seemed to find it difficult to distinguish between *what* is said and *how* it is said. This is exactly the same reading skill required for coursework, Paper 2 and Literature.

It was exciting to note the degree to which candidates were by and large at ease in locating their responses within a more media text reading orientation. They commented to good effect, for example, about the stereotyping discourse underpinning the use of the word “girlie”. Certainly those candidates who shaped their response around the notion of reading an advertisement text tended to engage more rigorously and analytically. Centres should think well beyond media being a set of terms with which candidates can name features of text. The Mark Scheme for 7-8 marks states that candidates should show evidence of: ‘sophisticated and convincing use of technical terminology to describe media concepts.’ It is the conceptualisation which differentiates the more able candidate.

As with the former question, the weakest students described rather than evaluated in response to Q2 (b); the middle ability described each picture and then repeated the comment that it ‘proved’ what was written in the text; the most able made astute comments using appropriate media terminology. Examiners were prepared to reward those candidates who wrote that the pictures did not support the text at all, or did not do so very well and they were able to discriminate between constructive, exemplified responses and simple, negative comments. Media terminology was not much in evidence, but candidates provided pleasing comment on the ‘lips’ picture and the ‘logo to reassure the buyer’ and the connections between the ‘storyboard’ and lifestyle – some even noted how the pictures played on the fear of women at night, and made reference to the headlights ‘looking after’ her.

Section B

There was a more equal share of candidates per question this summer between Questions 3, 4 and 6, with fewest tackling Question 5. Most candidates performed better on this section than on Section A, with many having a strong sense of audience, an extensive armoury of rhetorical devices, some effective use of minor sentences and a very high level of accuracy. Several Team Leaders noted that more candidates had made good use of plans within their examination writing process. Plans are only ever assessed if the candidate has not completed a piece of writing, but their inclusion invariably helps candidates to address the Assessment Objectives.

Question 3 revealed a range of ideas about the required style for a teenage magazine, with examiners being advised that many candidates have a restricted concept of what a teenage audience is and so should not be ‘marked down’ disproportionately. So long as they were writing *about* teenagers, rather than *at* them, then they tended to succeed. Many put forward very convincing arguments which were totally convincing and presented in coherently linked paragraphs. Too many candidates did not manage to curb their excitement at the prospect of the open road long enough to put an opposing view.

Few candidates who attempted **Question 4** did so with less than whole-hearted and often playful zest. Boys were able to dazzle with their knowledge of cars and this confidence with content seemed to inspire them to use a range of stylistic techniques. Some girls responded by writing beautifully tongue-in-cheek as they had fun with alliteration and satirically exposed their male counterparts’ egos as they wrote the

ultimate car advertisements for lads. Whatever the gender, some of the best writing revealed a fully self-aware grasp of how advertising copy works. This was a piece of text that did not require a lengthy response but privileged crafted and skilful writers.

Question 5 As mentioned earlier in this report, very few candidates attempted this question and those who did tended to inform or describe rather than advise. Examiners were warned that this might be the case, but there were too many tourist guides and too few of the best which were able to anticipate problems newcomers might have and able to offer a variety of options. Too many informed newcomers that there was a health centre in the local area rather than advising them to go there to get their health problems checked out.

Question 6 was a bonus for examiners because it was reasonable to expect that not many candidates would have encountered radio scripts, despite their inclusion within the Literacy Strategy. Candidates took it as an invitation to write engagingly, knowledgably and thoughtfully about how people might become fitter. Many were able to adopt the right vox for a local radio station with its bouncy style of address. There was an equal mix of the sage and the light-hearted, but the best were always those that hit the Mark Scheme descriptors of consistency, control, sustained crafting and coherence. A lot of 'c' words for success in this writing section and they, perhaps, sum up the wonder of examiners who experience what students can write under examination conditions in 45 minutes on an examination desk in a Sports Hall.

The other abiding perception of this year's writing is that candidates are being rewarded for their writing skills and not for the fulfilment of implicit expectations of length or for potentially culturalist notions of what constitutes good writing under examination conditions. A benchmark was set in the standardising scripts and many examiners' perceptions were changed as a result. This was a successful paper for many reasons: maybe most successful for its engagement of candidates and its acceptance as an assessment construct by examiners.

Paper 2 Foundation Tier

Examiners enjoyed reading the responses of candidates to all the questions on a paper which proved to be accessible to candidates of all abilities.

The new feature was the lack of annotation in the Anthologies. This had several effects. There was far less reliance on material irrelevant to the task. Far fewer candidates spent their time giving sequential meaning glosses of the poems. There was better focus on the tasks. There was much less listing of features.

Question 1

Naming *Blessing*, this was the more popular question. Examiners were flexible about what constituted an event but were more likely to award marks when candidates wrote about the ways the events in the two poems were described than when they merely gave an account of the events in the poems. There were some prevalent misunderstandings about *Blessing*. A surprisingly large number of candidates thought that the event in the poem was a sudden downpour of rain. They did not appear to have taken in what was meant by ‘The municipal pipe bursts’. Otherwise there were no particular problems with the basic comprehension of the poem. More able candidates drew attention to the lists, both of items and phrases, and to the very long sentence which occupies the second half of the poem. Some drew attention to structure, to the absence of ‘the’ before ‘echo’, to the lack of commas between ‘man woman/child’, to the adjectives, to the placement of verbs and to the possible meanings of the title itself. Candidates often wrote usefully about onomatopoeia, the use of simile and the sense of pace created by the enjambement in stanza 3. *Island Man* was a popular poem to compare *Blessing* with, as was *Nothing’s Changed* and *Night of the Scorpion*. A minority chose *Vultures* and some, who had ventured into the second cluster, chose *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan* and *Hurricane Hits England*. A number also chose *Limbo* but few of these characterised precisely what they thought the event in the poem was.

Question 2

Question 2 had several layers or stages to it. If candidates followed the bullet points, they were taken from discussion of people and places to the ways the people connect with the places and to the methods used to show the people, the places and the connections. Showing the connections and the methods of connection was, of course, more difficult than comparing the people and the places in *Hurricane Hits England* and another poem, but most tried to do so and were rewarded. In general, however, many answers could have been improved by more frequent and conscious use of the key words of the task and by a somewhat more systematic approach. It was not always clear what the candidates thought the places were in the poems or who exactly the people were. Some underlining work with a pencil might have helped them to make clear identifications of these. It might also have helped many candidates had they taken a moment to think and maybe list what the connections between people and places were. There was useful comment about feelings, prompted by the line ‘fearful and reassuring’ and there was purposeful comment about simile and metaphor. Weaker candidates were sometimes confused by the references to ‘cousins’ and ‘old tongues’, using them to make dubious subject matter comparisons with *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan* and *Search for my Tongue*.

Search for my Tongue was a popular choice of second poem, as was *Not my Business* and *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan*. *Unrelated Incidents* and *Half-Caste* tended to be less successful choices because candidates were rarely clear about who they thought the people were and what they thought the places in the poems were.

Section B provided candidates with a significant amount of choice and most were able to choose something to write about that they could engage with.

Question 3

Question 3 involved writing a letter to the school governors informing them of the changes that candidates would like to see in their school and of the reasons for these changes. There were no problems finding apt material. Candidates had plenty of complaints to make and saw clearly the reasons for the changes. Most popular subjects were the toilets and the eating arrangements. There were also many other topics considered, among them IT arrangements, the length of the school day, school uniform and the double standards applied to teachers and pupils. Organisation was a key factor. Because most candidates found several topics to write about they did not necessarily find it easy to avoid a large list. However, almost all of them attempted a formal register, appropriate for governors to read, and almost all attempted a letter. There was much discussion at standardisation meetings about how much 'letterness' there should be. The minimum should be a salutation and a sign off, but an address is surely also important for a letter. Where candidates knew how to manage to arrange both their own address and the address to which the letter was directed, this could also be beneficial. The real test, however, is whether the governors could manage to send a reply which would arrive, should they decide to write one. If this could be achieved then the letter's mechanics would surely have worked effectively. There was an issue, too, at the higher range of marks about consistency of tone and interest. Many letters were rather too long to sustain interest and some adopted an ineffectively hectoring tone. Some were impertinent and downright rude. It is a really useful life skill for candidates to ask themselves whether the reader would be interested in reading the letter and whether they would be convinced to take its contents seriously.

Question 4

As anticipated, responses to Question 4 were varied and interesting. It was pleasing that so many distinguished carefully between dreams and ambitions (although a significant number appeared to get them the wrong way round). Such a distinction not only made for interesting reading, but it also provided a prompt for paragraphs (as a list structure should have done for candidates attempting Question 3). Of course, it was easier for candidates to explain how their ambitions might be achieved than to explain how their dreams would be. Most of those who thought about the issue quite simply explained that their dreams would probably not be fulfilled precisely because they were dreams. This was, of course, sensible as well as entirely adequate. The explanations allowed many candidates to show off their knowledge of the possible careers that interested them and allowed a minority of more confident writers to explain how they would achieve their ambition of netting their dream man or dream woman. So it was possible to write effectively and play a little at the same time.

Question 5

There were many different approaches to question 5. Perhaps the most predictable was the horror genre. But there were very many candidates who chose to present a nightmare from which the sleeper woke. The best of these gave hints about the links between the dreaming and waking states. A large number, however, saw the nightmare world as consisting of a range of elements from the world in which they actually lived: elements such as poverty, global warming, fascism, dictatorial behaviour. Far fewer, but still a sufficient number for most examiners to have seen some, chose to describe their actual worlds and to describe them in such a way as to reveal their nightmare state – life at home, life at school and life involving sitting examinations were all featured. The test, of course, was the extent to which they could describe and the effectiveness of the description. Examiners were quite willing to accept whatever material they got. The result was that they never quite knew what they were going to read – always a good thing when marking examination papers.

Question 6

The mixed word choice, Question 6, was the least popular on the paper. It was, however, also extremely varied. Candidates were concerned about a very wide range of issues, from the local to the global and most were able to write with a range of apt information. Sometimes they got carried away with the topic and forgot to explain the reasons for their concerns at all or only remembered at the end when they tagged

on a couple of sentences. The best responses showed the reasons as they went along by the ways they wrote about their chosen topics.

As one senior examiner noted at the end of the marking period:

“Ambitions” revealed the prospect of a nation of self-employed Beauty Therapists and school governors should be alarmed at the state of our schools’ toilets. Consoling, students still seem to value the importance of human relationships and a secure society.

As far as the assessment of AO3(iii) is concerned, there were some features which might surprise the general public. This assessment is concerned with sentence structure, spelling and punctuation. By far the strongest of these three features was spelling. There has also been significant rehabilitation for the apostrophe. It was only five or six years ago when some were lamenting its imminent disappearance. It has now had a renaissance, with both sorts – possession and omission – in evidence in a significant majority of scripts. There appeared to be also some small improvement in the frequency and accuracy of inverted commas for speech this year. Sadly the same cannot be said for the health of the comma and the full stop. Commas are frequently used instead of full stops. They are still often used to separate items in lists. But their other functions have become sadly neglected. It is unfortunately becoming increasingly rare that Foundation candidates can write without using commas instead of full stops on several occasions. The last element of the trio is sentence structure. Sentence structures appear to be well understood and varied in their use. Unfortunately they are often not accompanied by appropriate punctuation. So, for example, one can find pieces with a wide variety of sentence structure but very little punctuation at all. The time is rapidly coming to reunite sentence structure with punctuation. Only then will what is written become easier to read. And, while we are considering matters of technical accuracy and effectiveness, it would appear to be very useful in this moment of reflection about reuniting if there were some sustained concentration on the positioning, functions and construction of paragraphs. It would be even better if these paragraphs consisted of a range of sentence structures, accurately punctuated. It is these issues which appear to the Chief Examiner to be far more useful, important and urgent than spelling if increases in literacy levels are to continue.

Paper 2 Higher Tier

The paper was well received by examiners this year with most reporting that candidates found the questions accessible and, particularly in Section B, at times stimulating. This is the second year in which candidates have been required to answer one poetry question only and the pattern of last year has been repeated with candidates appearing to balance their time evenly between the two sections, with very little evidence of candidates running out of time. Occasionally candidates chose to respond to Section B first, though there was no apparent advantage or disadvantage in doing this.

Overall, there were very few rubric infringements. Where these did occur, they were mainly to do with inappropriate poetry choices from the literature section of the Anthology. Centres appear, generally, to have made sound judgements with regard to entries, most candidates being appropriately entered for this tier. There was, however, a significant minority of candidates inappropriately entered for the Higher Tier. Where this occurred, candidates were inevitably disadvantaged by the absence of the bulleted prompts available to them on Foundation Tier.

This is the first year in which candidates were not allowed to take annotated Anthologies into the examination, a factor which had caused anxiety in some centres. Examiners, however, were almost unanimous in applauding this change, one representing many when he said: “The lack of annotation was a godsend, provoking much more original thought and allowing candidates to express their own ideas rather than those of their teachers.” Even where weaker candidates appeared to struggle without the support of annotation, it was reported that: “some slight awareness with some focus on the question was preferable to copied and unassimilated notes”.

There were, however, concerns that pupils in some centres, and possibly whole classes, did not appear to be familiar with the named poems. Their confidence in writing about their chosen poem highlighted their unfamiliarity with the named one and resulted in responses of very uneven qualities. Clearly, candidates in this position were disadvantaged. Centres should be aware that, as a minimum, candidates must study **all** the poems in one cluster. Any of the poems in a given cluster could appear as the named poem and candidates must be appropriately prepared.

With the proviso that candidates are helped to understand, analyse and make cross-reference between the poems in advance of the exam, examiners are confident that they do benefit from the absence of annotation.

Examiners reported increased evidence of planning in both Section A and Section B, and cite this as the factor most likely to help candidates focus on the questions and produce structured and coherent responses. There was also more evidence of editing of writing in Section B. It was evident that skills in planning and editing had been carefully taught in some centres, with the majority of candidates practising them, and to good effect. In other centres, however, there was almost no evidence of either skill having been taught. Proficient planning and editing make a significant difference to candidates' achievements and should be regularly taught and encouraged by centres.

Some concerns were expressed about the approaches to questions in Section A, with a number of examiners feeling that candidates were prevented from a close examination of either poem by a formulaic approach to comparison which led them to focus on relatively minor points, for example: “There is water in *Blessing*. Similarly there is water in *Island Man*...”. This issue was raised in last year's report and centres are reminded that the word “compare” is used to encourage candidates to make cross-reference, which is one aspect of AO2(iv). The need to compare should not override the need to examine technique and to show understanding, and at a higher level exploration, of ideas, feelings and attitudes. Candidates are not required to compare two poems step by step. A response in which the named poem is first explored, followed by an analysis of the second chosen poem with cross-reference made to the first, is equally valid.

Section A: Reading

There was evidence of some centres choosing the first or second cluster *en bloc*, whilst with others there was no apparent policy on choice. Some candidates selected poems from across the clusters, though this was not the norm. Overall, there seemed to be an even distribution of choice between Question 1 and Question 2.

The choice of the second poem was always an important factor in the success of the response. At times, examiners felt that candidates were writing about their favourite poems rather than the ones best suited to the question, although this was less evident than last year, possibly because of the absence of annotation. As with last year, it was noted that candidates rarely chose to write about poems that had not previously appeared in an Anthology and centres are reminded that all poems in a given cluster should be studied.

As mentioned earlier, the responses of some candidates did appear to be hampered by a formulaic approach to comparison, which addressed aspects of the poems such as ideas, language and form in routine order but failed to address the question. At times, examiners reported instances of apparently “learnt” responses, though these were relatively few.

There is a huge amount of information available on these poems, both in text books and on the Internet, much of which offers helpful approaches and insights. Some of this material is, however, at best, misleading and, at worst, incorrect. As with last year, examiners reported an increase in candidates making false assertions about either the poets or the poems, based on misinformation. Where the same assertions appeared several times in individual centres, it could only be assumed that candidates had been taught, or given access, to this incorrect information. For example, in several centres candidates asserted that the event in *Blessing* was a sudden rainfall and that, in *Hurricane Hits England*, the poem’s conclusion indicated the poet’s desire to return to her homeland in the Caribbean.

There was also some concern expressed with regard to the way some candidates wrote about technique or method. Examiners reported figures of speech being identified but not sensibly explained to show a particular significance. For example, there were many candidates who referred to the use of the simile “buzzed like flies” in *Night of the Scorpion* but failed to explore the implications of this. Similarly vague expressions like “it shows negative/positive feelings” and “gives a better picture in your head” occurred frequently, as did references to “strong” and “powerful” words. Candidates need to show awareness that it is the use of a word in a particular context that makes it “powerful” and not the word itself.

Centres should be aware that candidates do best when they have open minds about the poems and the confidence to interpret them in the way that is most appropriate to the question they are answering. Happily many examiners reported clear evidence of excellent teaching which had sought to genuinely explore meaning, examine technique and develop personal response and interpretation. Where this was the case, the responses of the candidates, across the range of ability, were a delight to read.

A simple, time-saving point that centres might like to clarify with candidates is that, where the title of a poem is lengthy, as in *Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful People in a Mercedes* and *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan*, it is wholly acceptable to abbreviate the title, for example to *Scavengers* and *Presents*.

Question 1

Blessing was clearly a popular choice for the named poem and, on the whole, this question was well answered. Candidates’ interpretations of what constituted an “event” were wide-ranging with *Island Man* (the awakening), *Nothing’s Changed* (the re-visiting of a homeland), *Limbo* (the journey) and *Night of the Scorpion* (the stinging of the mother) being the most popular choices. Several candidates made extremely effective comparisons between *Blessing* and the other Imtiaz Dharker poem, *This Room*, though these

were in the minority. Overall, it was the ability to focus on *the ways* the events were described that differentiated between the more and less able candidates.

Question 2

The best responses to this question focused effectively on the connections between people and places and the methods used to explore these. Popular and successful pairings were made with *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan* and *Search For My Tongue*. Several candidates interpreted the word *place* to mean place in society and wrote successfully about *Half-Caste*, with *Not My Business* making an occasional and welcome appearance. Some candidates crossed clusters and successfully paired *Hurricane Hits England* with Grace Nichol's other poem, *Island Man*. There was generally a sound grasp of the concepts of culture and identity though some examiners reported a reluctance, on the part of some candidates, to explore the imagery of the named poem or confusion with regard to the meaning and origins of the references. Many examiners noted the progress centres have made in dealing with these poems and commented on the extensive evidence of teaching that was both sensitive and thought-provoking.

Section B: Writing

Examiners reported favourably on candidates' responses to Section B. There was increased evidence of planning across the candidature though, sadly, a complete absence of it in some centres. Many examiners commented that responses were well focused, and that the conscious imposition of structure was in evidence at different levels across the ability range, with the emphasis being firmly on quality rather than quantity.

There was also clear evidence of engagement with task. The range of questions appeared to appeal to candidates. Far more than in previous years chose to write informatively and, whilst descriptive writing continued to be the most popular choice, Questions 4 and 6 were also widely chosen. Some centres had clearly instructed candidates to opt for Question 5, with almost the entire entry writing to describe. It is not clear why centres would choose to do this and, whilst the candidates had obviously been taught to write descriptively, examiners frequently reported the belief that some of the candidates would have achieved more highly had they chosen a different question. This was particularly true in centres where there was an almost mechanical approach to descriptive writing with candidates following a formulaic approach and ticking off the features, such as similes, as and when they used them. Examiners agree that candidates write best when they are strongly engaged by the task and that flexibility in choice of question should be encouraged.

Question 3

This was a popular choice and candidates had much to say to their governors. Many examiners, who are also teachers, reported being made to feel ashamed by the humble and completely genuine requests for better toilet facilities, locks on doors, adequate text books and access to rooms when it is raining. It soon became clear that to the vast majority of candidates it is the small things that have a significant impact on the quality of their school lives. Throughout, candidates maintained a strong sense of purpose and audience with only a few assuming the role of Head Teacher. They presented a range of information to support their requests and were, on the whole, both thought-provoking and convincing.

Question 4

This question gave candidates the opportunity to write in a more personal way and candidates were enthusiastic in their responses. A high percentage discriminated between fantasy and reality in their dreams and their ambitions, a factor which assisted candidates in the development and structuring of their responses. Some candidates were astonishingly clear on how their futures would develop and had clearly given this a great deal of thought. Many, centres will be relieved to hear, believed that hard work was at the root of success though fewer seemed to acknowledge the importance of ability.

Question 5

Whilst this question remains the most popular choice by candidates it does create the most frustration amongst examiners. Many reported the previously mentioned mechanical approach to description whilst others soon became tired of the repeated “stench of rotten corpses” with which some responses abounded. There were, however, many strong responses, varying from superb descriptions of futuristic landscapes to reasoned and disturbing evaluations of third world poverty, terrorism, injustice and deprivation – “our true nightmare world”.

Occasionally candidates adopted a narrative approach as a medium for description. In many cases this was regarded as a wholly valid response and there was no penalty for such an approach.

Question 6

Whilst this was the least popular question, examiners were agreed that it attracted some of the very best candidates with one reporting: “it was noticeable that serious candidates with a fund of scientific knowledge and a genuine concern about the future of the world were given a chance to shine because of this question”. Certainly, the question appealed strongly to candidates’ personal concerns, usually about the world in which they live, with terrorism and global warming being regarded as central issues, but occasionally they focused on issues specific to young people in Britain, particularly drug abuse and the influence of the media on body-image.

Many examiners reported having learnt much about the nature of the candidature from this year’s writing and, in consequence, about the students who sit in front of them on a daily basis.

As stated earlier, there was welcome evidence of an increase in planning and editing of writing. Examiners repeatedly report these as being major contributors to candidates successfully structuring their writing, demonstrating conscious choices in vocabulary and syntax and achieving a higher level of technical accuracy. Centres that spend time on these areas should feel assured that their efforts are reflected in candidates’ responses and are rewarded with higher marks.

English Literature (3712)

Foundation Tier

This year's examination paper, the second in the current specification, was successful in a number of ways. Centres generally approved of the paper, finding the questions accessible for the Tier, and the demands on candidates fair in their equivalence with the previous year's paper and the specimen material. There were fewer rubric infringements, one exception being candidates who answered both questions on Anthology short stories and a novel, rather mystifyingly – of course they can only be credited with one mark in Section A.

The major change which might have affected candidates' performance this year was the introduction of unannotated texts in the examination. Generally, examiners felt that this improved performance, as responses tended to be more focused and relevant. Prose responses tended to feature fewer quotations, but this did not affect achievement: the assessment criteria include the provision of detail as support, and as the basis for comment, analysis and comparison, but 'detail' does not necessarily mean quotation. Sometimes, however, responses were just generalised, which is clearly not effective in reaching towards good grades. Improvement was more evident in responses to Section B. There were far fewer lists of devices with some illustration and often little understanding, and more comment and exploration of details which had been understood, thus raising achievement in the marking criteria related to Assessment Objective 2.

There were fewer candidates who seemed to mistime the paper this year, by spending too much time on Section A and therefore compromising achievement on Section B, which carries more marks. It was noticeable that candidates who tackled Section B first gave themselves more chance of optimising their marks, on the whole.

Good preparation of candidates was also evident in other ways. There were many examples of good planning, meaning planning which enabled candidates to write successfully in response to the question. This meant, therefore, that they planned to hit all of the targeted Assessment Objectives. Even when there was no written evidence of planning, more candidates this year seemed to be aware of the Assessment Objectives and how to address them.

Finally, a plea to teachers invigilating examinations. It is very helpful to examiners if candidates fill in the question numbers on the front of the examination paper, and vital that they complete the boxes for centre and candidate numbers.

Section A: Post-1914 Prose

AQA Anthology: Prose

Three Assessment Objectives are tested in each of Questions 1-3, and although candidates generally responded more successfully to AO2 than in responding to novels, achievement in AO3 remained a weakness, even when the same candidates compared poems successfully in their Section B response. Comparison was often simple or absent.

In Questions 2 and 3, where the candidates choose a story to compare with a named one, those candidates who considered carefully which stories best fit together in terms of the question tended to score higher marks, unsurprisingly. For example, those candidates who wanted to write about 'Snowdrops' would have been better advised to answer Question 3 than Question 2. They might have then been able to focus on how Leslie Norris presents Miss Webster's unhappiness rather than trying to write about 'the problem' in the relationship between Miss Webster and the narrator/the Meredith boy.

Question 1

This was the most popular of the three questions, but not necessarily the best answered. The focus on feelings was helpful to candidates in responding to ‘Your Shoes’ – many answers demonstrated engagement with the mother’s plight. ‘Growing Up’ seemed to be less well understood, though; the interpretation of the story as being about ‘badly behaved children’ tended to produce simplistic responses.

Question 2

‘Flight’ was a good choice of story here, as the grandfather/child relationship provided a second focus for AO3. ‘The End of Something’ also worked well, as the task allowed candidates to interpret detail.

Question 3

This was probably the best answered question of the three. The choice of ‘Your Shoes’ often allowed candidates to tackle the second prompt about ‘how the writers show these feelings’ very well. The choice of ‘Snowdrops’ produced some perceptive and thoughtful answers on the grief and unhappiness felt by Miss Webster and the grandfather in ‘Flight’.

Examiners commented that the treatment of AO2 was often very thin in responses to all of the novels, even when candidates were producing detailed, engaged and knowledgeable responses to other aspects of the questions. This is clearly an area where candidates’ achievement could be raised.

Question 4

Candidates who did well in responding to this question were those who engaged with the terms ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’, and those who used the bullet points well – examiners felt that the bullet points assisted candidates considerably here.

Question 5

This was the more popular of the two questions, but not always the more successfully answered. Candidates who chose to produce two brief character studies could have used their knowledge more fruitfully by responding directly to the bullet points in the question.

Of Mice and Men: John Steinbeck

There was a marked increase this year in the incidence of candidates copying out sections of the notes from an edition of the text. These are easily recognised by examiners, and copied sections have to be disregarded in awarding marks, which clearly affects many candidates’ grades. Centres should try to ensure that all candidates are aware of this.

Question 6

This was less popular than Question 7. Even the weakest candidates knew about some of the animals in the text and what happened to them, but there was a gap between these candidates and those who engaged clearly with the writer. For those who explained clearly the symbolism of the dog, for instance, this question worked better than Question 7 did for many.

Question 7

This was an overwhelmingly popular question on the text, and the paper. Candidates seemed comfortable with the task, and responded in an engaged way throughout the range. Lower responses lacked detail, but many were very detailed and moved easily into the 13-15 mark band via 'awareness of feelings and attitudes' and 'explained responses'. The bullet points were enabling here, though the final bullet, about Steinbeck's methods, was often the discriminator. Many candidates just chose to repeat earlier material here, without looking at how Steinbeck works.

***I'm the King of the Castle* – Susan Hill**

Question 8

Some engaged responses to Kingshaw produced a number of scripts which easily accessed 'explained responses' (13-15 band) and higher. Some candidates wrote extended narratives in response to the second bullet point 'what happens to him' and got no further.

Question 9

Very few responses to this question were seen by Senior Examiners.

***A Kestrel for a Knave*: Barry Hines**

Question 10

Weaker candidates tended to stop at 'what Billy is good at', but were still able to show engaged responses and detailed knowledge. The last bullet point, 'how the writer shows...' was particularly badly handled here.

Question 11

The question enabled candidates to show their empathy with Billy appropriately, with detail and explanation. The prompt about 'how Barry Hines makes you feel about' was again problematic, though there were some sophisticated responses to the presentation of Billy's mother.

***To Kill a Mockingbird*: Harper Lee**

Question 12

This question was intended to enable candidates to focus on detail and to access AO2 through how the events chosen were 'dramatic'. Unfortunately, for many candidates the question seemed to stop at 'write about two events' without addressing 'dramatic' at all.

Question 13

This was less popular than Question 12, but was well handled by most candidates who tackled it, though again there were a few highly narrative responses.

***The Catcher in the Rye*: J.D. Salinger**

Senior examiners did not see any responses to this text.

Green Days by the River: Michael Anthony

Senior examiners did not see any responses to this text.

Heroes: Robert Cormier

Question 18

Most candidates demonstrated their engagement with the text, but a number wrote about the passage only, which seriously affected their marks. Perhaps they had not been expecting this sort of question, even though it was exemplified in last year’s paper and in specimen material.

Question 19

This question produced enthusiastic, well-informed responses – ‘the high point of the paper’ according to one examiner. Many still stumbled on the last bullet point, however.

Section B: Pre-1914 and Post-1914 Poetry

Examiners felt that there had been a marked improvement in a number of areas this year. As mentioned above, lack of annotation in the exam produced far fewer lists of devices, where candidates never moved beyond ‘simple identification of method’ (9-12), or indeed the kind of bizarre remarks about poetic devices which result from misunderstood notations. Performance in AO2 therefore improved generally, as did comparative skills (AO3), indicating good preparation of candidates. More candidates than previously moved beyond ‘simple links’ (9-12) and ‘some comment on similarity/difference’ (13-16) to ‘structured comments on similarity/difference’ (17-20) – indeed, this was often the strongest strand in responses. Candidates who only compared, though, had clearly forgotten that all three Assessment Objectives need to be addressed in order to maximise marks.

Some examiners commented that questions split into two parts, (a) and (b), were helpful to candidates. This was true, but not when candidates did not move beyond a response to (a). In some cases they may have forgotten or not realised that they had to tackle (b) as well, which is unfortunate. With several of the questions, however, this occurred where section (b) referred to Pre-1914 poems. While it is perhaps natural that candidates on this Tier might find Pre-1914 poems more difficult to deal with, some examiners were dismayed by the extent of this in this year’s candidates. They commented that those poems were often poorly understood, even at the most basic level of content and explicit meaning. Some seemed to have been hardly studied before the exam, so that they were dealt with as an afterthought, resulting in achievement more than a grade below that on the Post-1914 poems. This pattern, where it exists, means that candidates might struggle particularly when responding to a question which asks them to compare directly between post and pre-1914 poems, as in Question 25 this year.

Seamus Heaney and Gillian Clarke

Question 20

This was the most popular question on this pair of poets, and often the best answered, at least in part (a). There were many sensitive responses, and many which successfully hit ‘awareness of feelings and attitudes’ and ‘explained responses’ (17-20), and higher, particularly in responding to the Clarke poems. Section (b) responses were generally weaker, with Blake proving particularly mystifying.

Question 21

This question was occasionally very well done, but generally not. Many candidates struggled with the first person, failing to differentiate between the poet and the persona, and just repeating the same point several times, along the lines of 'it makes it personal'. The focus of this question was AO2, of course, but teachers and candidates can expect any of the three AOs to be targeted as the focus of the question.

Question 22

This was generally well answered. The structure of the question did not seem to be a problem, and many responses were strong in 'awareness of feelings and attitudes'.

Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage

Question 23

As in Question 21, many candidates failed to identify the speaker as anyone other than the poet, with adverse effects on achievement in AO2. Unusually, the poems in List B, which were Pre-1914, seemed the more approachable selection for candidates here.

Question 24

This question produced engaged, interesting responses across the mark range. Comparison was very strong in part (a), with candidates often comparing a range of features across AO1 and AO2. The dual focus of the question did not prove to be a problem.

Question 25

This was not the most successfully answered of the questions, generally. Many candidates struggled to relate the endings to the rest of the poems. *Kid* was the most problematic of the four poems for many candidates, rather surprisingly.

Higher Tier

The new development this year was the absence of annotation in the Anthologies which candidates brought with them into the examination room. This was generally felt to lead to a significant improvement in the work. Gone were the often endless lists of devices unlinked to meaning and gone were the mere summaries of plot and content. In general there was a better focus on the tasks.

On this Tier examiners reported a decline in the number of centres preparing the short stories for Section A of the examination, but no change in the vast numbers offering ‘Of Mice and Men’ as their prose text. There were as last year very few candidates writing on ‘I’m the King of the Castle’ and no Team Leader reported having seen any work on ‘Green Days by the River’ – a great shame.

Most examiners reported that candidates were much more confident about comparing poems in Section B this year, although there were centres who appeared to have prepared candidates by getting them to compare via a formula, regardless of the question (for example comparing, always in the same order, intention then form then structure then language then devices, but with few or no links to meanings). It was often striking, however, that, when candidates were writing about the short stories in Section A and poetry in Section B, they were much stronger comparing the poems than the short stories. Because they are also required to compare poems in Section A of Paper 2, it is a great shame that they had not been able to transfer the skills learned in relation to one aspect of content to a different aspect of content. The skills in planning and developing a comparative response on prose are no different from those needed for comparing poems, and so it was disappointing to see such discrepancies in performance across the two sections of the paper.

Section A: Post-1914 Prose

Anthology Prose

Question 1

Perhaps because the unusual nature of Question 1, asking for a comparison not of content but of responses to the *Short Stories*, this was the least popular of the three questions. Those who thought about different aspects of their responses before they began to write were able to offer a sustained and structured response to the task. It was encouraging that significant numbers of candidates had taken the time to think before they began to write. There were comparisons between characters and between events and, when candidates had thought carefully about the requirements of the second bullet point, between methods. Many thoughtful candidates developed a clear overview based on a qualified comparison, such as the character which drew more sympathy or the method which proved to be the more affective. There were many empathic responses as candidates at times saw their own concerns mirrored in those of the characters in the two stories they were writing about.

Question 2

In response to Question 2 better candidates were able to dispense with narrative detail, taking it for granted that the examiner knew the stories, instead concentrating on tracing images and language patterns. The most popular combinations were ‘Snowdrops’ with ‘Flight’ and ‘Snowdrops’ with ‘The End of Something’. Whilst better candidates saw language as a key to structure, some had difficulty in relating part to whole; this was when they resorted to storytelling.

Question 3

The most popular combinations used for Question 3 were 'Growing Up' paired with either 'Paula Brown's New Snowsuit' or 'Flight'. There was little problem in candidates accessing AO2 here but the ability to link language and devices to purposes was the key factor in candidates being able to access the higher bands of marks. There were some interesting answers when candidates chose unusual characters – usually the adults – as seen to be growing up. It was rather surprising, however, that so few chose to write on the opening of the 'End of Something'.

Lord of the Flies: William Golding**Question 4**

Answers to Question 4 on 'Lord of the Flies' were often most interesting and enjoyable to read. There were some startlingly conceptualised responses about the human race as flies at the mercy of the forces of evil in the world. Such interpretations often presented a conceptualised schematised view of the novel with characters polarised between the divine goodness evident in Simon and Jack's disposition towards evil. There was ample opportunity for less complex responses based on a more literal reading of the text, seeing Simon's confrontation with the Lord of the Flies as pivotal in the text. Weaker candidates tended to restrict themselves to seeing Ralph and Jack as the lords and the other children as the flies. Some wrote about the parts of the novel where the pig's head features, noting how it represented the Devil and relating it to Beelzebub and voodoo, but failed to tie their comments in sufficiently to the suitability of the title. While most candidates dealt with some aspect or aspects of the title, relatively few organised their answer around the idea of its suitability.

Question 5

The more popular Question 5 was often completed well when candidates did restrict themselves to writing about Piggy and Simon. Some could not resist the temptation to write about lots of the characters in the novel, losing sight of the task altogether. Better answers bore in mind what they thought were Golding's purposes throughout the answer rather than just leaving it for consideration until the last couple of sentences. It was interesting that many candidates were aware of a range of different interpretations of this text, one senior examiner noting that some candidates wrote thoughtfully about a Jungian reading of archetypes juxtaposed with a Buddhist reading of Simon, providing a wealth of detail in support of the possible arguments.

Of Mice and Men: John Steinbeck**Question 6**

Question 6 on the ever-popular 'Of Mice and Men' drew answers from the whole of the ability range. One of the keys to success was when candidates thought before they began to write. Those who made a list of relevant characters did better than those who just wrote about George or Lennie or George-and-Lennie. Those who thought about how George and Lennie could be lonely and isolated and yet have each other did better than those who just wrote about them because they were the main characters in the novel. Those who realised that one of Steinbeck's methods of presenting loneliness and isolation is by means of the depiction of setting did better than those who left consideration of settings until the last few lines. Those who distinguished between loneliness and isolation and who characterised each of them did better than those who just lumped them together and used them interchangeably. 'Isolation' was often a way into settings for candidates. They could see that Crooks's room was isolated; the best considered whether the animals did anything to alleviate Crooks's loneliness. This delicate text often seems to evoke delicate responses from the more sensitive candidates. There were sensitive and thoughtful treatments of Slim's and Carlson's loneliness.

Question 7

Perhaps because the angle of Question 6 was so very obvious, there were far fewer takers for Question 7. It suited candidates well who were interested in the patterning of the novel and they could adduce a wide range of apt material to support their case, material about characters, events and authorial techniques. All candidates grasped the idea of ‘inevitable’, with a high proportion of candidates assessing the language, devices and structure which make up the crucial patterns of events. Inevitably the verb ‘foreshadowed’ was part of this type of response in which all the ‘clues’ Steinbeck dropped about the climax were found and labelled. Such candidates began with the description of Lennie at the beginning of the novel, tracing all the steps to his actions at the end. Weaker candidates tended merely to recount events, forgetting about such things as red dresses, mice, puppies and softness.

I’m the King of the Castle: Susan Hill

Question 8 & 9

‘I’m the King of the Castle’ was very much a minority choice. The most able studied the culture of bullying in some depth in response to Question 8. In response to Question 9 Fielding was shown to have an ambivalent role by some candidates.

A Kestrel for a Knave: Barry Hines

Question 10

Question 10 was popular with those having studied ‘A Kestrel for a Knave’, producing some sensitive exploratory responses to Billy’s relationships and Hines’s methods and attitudes. Many showed sensitivity to the inadequacies of Mrs Casper as a mother and to the significance of Billy’s absent father. Many able candidates looked at relationships in relation to the structure of the novel, for example noting how Jud is introduced negatively with his first aggressively uttered statement. Also striking was the placing of Billy in juxtaposition with other characters, and the ways hints are given to indicate that relationships are going to be problematic. Able candidates frequently analysed Mrs Casper’s treatment of Billy, drawing attention to her language and tone, as in her off-hand comment on the death of Kes. Weaker candidates found a problem of focus with the question, writing about Billy’s relationships with the teachers, the newsagent, the milkman and the librarian instead of concentrating just on members of Billy’s family. Where they included Kes in the family they needed to argue for the bird’s inclusion in order to make the material relevant.

Question 11

Question 11 was much less popular and tended to concentrate on the negative aspects of Billy’s relationships. Almost all found general agreement that the story was depressing, though some more qualificatory answers drew attention to the possible positive effects of the author’s presentation of Billy’s imagination, skills and strength of spirit. More successful candidates looked at how the book was depressing through the bleak descriptions used, for example tracing the changes of the use of colour from grey and black to the brightness of the light when Billy is with Kes. They also saw how moments of hope were brought into relief when contrasted by previous events. The symbolism of Kes and the changes in style when Billy was depicted as being at one with the bird were also analysed.

To Kill a Mockingbird: Harper Lee

Question 12

‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ remains a very popular choice. Question 12 was the more popular though not necessarily the more successfully answered. There was often some confusion about families. This came about partly because of a failure to select material before beginning to write and a failure to think first about what exactly needed to be done in order to present a fully focused response. Better candidates concentrated clearly on the influences of families upon their members, although some did choose to

emphasise the importance of certain families within Maycombe society. The strongest candidates offered analytical or conceptualised responses, looking at how various characters see family or how Lee characterises the families through their father figures. This approach tended to lead to a more analytical answer than that which took individual characters and wrote about them in turn. Some candidates seemed to consider the negro community as a 'family'; this did not really work unless they produced some argument to justify their choice. Perhaps they were trying to fit some previously prepared material about different social and racial groups into the question. Really good candidates, trawling wide for significant families, often considered Dill, Dolphus Raymond and Calpurnia and Zeebo.

Question 13

Question 13 was successful in eliciting a wide range of different responses. A few candidates, noting 'educated', wrote only about Miss Caroline. Better were those who saw that various characters – Jem and Scout to begin with – were being educated in the novel. Many saw Atticus as the primary teacher. Others cast their net wider and saw that adults, too, were being educated, writing about the ways Uncle Jack learned about children or the way Miss Maudie learned about kindness. A wider perspective was gained when the citizens of Maycomb or the South were being educated. The more conceptualised organised their answer round the different ways in which Harper Lee educated the reader, or readers of different kinds in different time periods.

The Catcher in the Rye: J.D. Salinger

Question 14

There was a general feeling that 'The Catcher in the Rye' had often been studied by the more – and in many cases – the most able candidates. There were some outstandingly analytical responses to the writer's presentation of Holden's separateness in response to Question 14, especially when the possible meanings of 'separateness' had been unpicked. The best answers were based on a list of the different methods used by Salinger to present different kinds of separateness, rather than on a list of characters from whom Holden could be seen as separate.

Question 15

In response to Question 15 successful answers concentrated on close examination of the details used at the beginning of the novel, so many of which could be used as precursors of behaviour seen later in the novel in relation to other characters and situations. The best answers came from those candidates who were able to relate a range of detail from the opening chapter to specific moments later in the novel and who were also aware of the range of features for which the reader is not prepared by reading the opening chapter.

Heroes: Robert Cormier

There was work throughout the ability range offered on *Heroes*. Candidates with a sound working knowledge of the content of the novel were able to refer to the relevant material about war in response to Question 18. More discerning ones, having picked up the inverted commas in the second bullet, were able to develop their response by considering both literal and metaphorical wars in the novel. Examiners reported some complex and sophisticated definitions of a 'hero' from the most able candidates in response to Question 19.

Section B: Pre-1914 and Post-1914 Poetry

The marked development this year in responses to the poetry lay in four areas: there were far fewer answers which relied on lists of techniques which were then included regardless of the task; there was a much better focus on the question; there was much less mere sequential recounting of the content of the chosen poems; there was a great deal more comparison.

This having been said, however, there was still too much mere sequential recounting of the poems’ content. It was always the case that this came when the poems were being treated one after another and when candidates seemed to feel that they had to write down all they knew rather than select material which would answer the question. It is for this reason that it was very rare that the longest answers were the best. Indeed there were many quite short answers which were extremely well focused and which dealt effectively with all three assessment objectives. It needs also to be said that not all the comparisons were meaningful or particularly useful. The counting of lines and stanzas, the coding of rhyme schemes, the spotting and enumeration of devices were never useful by themselves unless they were linked to meanings.

However, examiners enjoyed marking the poetry answers. There was less evidence of over-teaching and of single readings. Many candidates had been encouraged to make their own links and meanings and to explore possibilities within the poems, citing precise details in support of their interpretations. It was often the case that when candidates were able to select their own poems as part of the question, what they selected was personal and interesting. There were many both successful and unexpected choices of poems. There was also a great deal of engagement not only with the subject matter and ideas of the poems but also with their craft.

The poems of Seamus Heaney and Gillian Clarke were less popular than those of Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage.

Seamus Heaney and Gillian Clarke

Question 20

There were many effective comparisons of *Sonnet* with *Death of a Naturalist* in response to the first part of Question 20 with interesting comment on the effect of the change of scene in the final stanza of the latter. *Cold Knap Lake* proved to be a bit more problematical for candidates because many of them lapsed into a retelling of the situation and meaning of the poem rather than concentrating on comparing the poets’ presentation of places. The emphasis on past and present was often well handled in *At a Potato Digging*, although focus on structure was often less successful with other poems. It was the focus on the task which was the weaker aspect of performance here, rather than the understanding of ideas and techniques.

Question 21

Effective responses to Question 21 analysed and explored the effects of structure on meanings but many candidates resorted either to itemising features without reference to meanings or to giving a sequential account of meanings within stanzas. This was the least popular of the three questions on Clarke and Heaney and the least well done.

Question 22

Most candidates responding to Question 22 were able to explain the writers’ techniques in well-supported responses and also to compare and contrast in a sustained manner. Most discussed techniques rather at the expense of ideas. Only the best could link the techniques to the ideas. When candidates had understood that Clarke was doing more than simply describe harvest time, using the death of a mouse as a metaphor for deaths in war, they were able to make apt comparisons with *Sonnet*, analysing the effects of Clare’s simplicity and Clarke’s symbolism and use of extended metaphor. Many effective answers compared the four chosen poems with regard to the extent of human intervention, seeing Clare’s sonnet as an idealised view of nature with no people in it whereas *The Field Mouse* started out as an idyllic scene but was then seen as spoilt by humans.

Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage**Question 23**

Question 23 was tackled with enthusiasm and understanding, with candidates showing some sensitivity to the problems created by relationships, particularly in *Before You Were Mine* and *Mother any distance....*. The best candidates evaluated the use of language in the poems, for example considering the formality of the word 'Mother' (in *Mother, any distance...*). Others offered a conceptualised response, for example that some poems in the group presented the idea of separateness or a lack of belonging either to society or to those closest to the character concerned. There was a surprising variety of response to the probable meaning and attitude at the end of *My Last Duchess*. While stronger candidates mentioned the character being more at ease with possessions and even the insecurity that this might demonstrate, others interpreted it as a love poem or a situation, rather like that in *On my first Sonne*, where someone had lost someone dear to them.

Question 24

There was no question but that candidates relished comparing the anti-social behaviour in *Education for Leisure* and *Hitcher* in response to the first part of Question 24. The better ones were able to compare the ways in which the anti-social behaviour was presented. The second part of the task proved useful for comparative comment on the psychotic nature of the Browning monologues as well as the more readily accessible attitudes present in *On my first Sonne* and *The Man He Killed*.

Question 25

Question 25, while being the least popular of the three tasks on Duffy and Armitage, was well answered. The narrow focus often led candidates to close and detailed analysis and comparison of language use and meanings. There was much interesting and surprisingly varied writing about *Kid*; *My father thought it...* and *Sonnet 130* were often used successfully.

Finally, a number of different matters were raised by examiners which might be borne in mind while preparing candidates for the next examination:

- There is still some confusion about the gender of Leslie Norris and Joyce Carey.
- It was good that there were so very few rubric infringements. Candidates appeared to be very clear about what they had to do.
- It would be good to see next year a marked decline in the number of candidates who refer to 'flow' or 'flowing' when writing about poetry.
- Short economical well-planned essays were inevitably more successful than long, rambling, discursive ones.
- Large numbers of candidates were unaware that Gillian Clarke links the events of harvest time with war in *The Field Mouse*.
- Candidates were often confused about the difference between the persona and the poet in *The Laboratory*. Many thought that the poem was written by someone called Ancien Regime. There was much lack of clarity about what happens at the end of the poem.
- Not all candidates were clear about what is hinted at in *My Last Duchess*.
- Some candidates appeared to think that *Mother any distance...* was a poem lamenting the poet's mother's death.
- Many thought that *Before You Were Mine* was about a relationship between the poet and her boyfriend.
- A number of centres appeared to have instructed their candidates to answer on the poetry first. This was often beneficial to them.

Coursework

As is usual, moderators have reported that in the vast majority of cases they were able to confirm centres' judgements. Centres have managed the change from the previous syllabus to this new Specification with professionalism.

With all the things that English Departments have to deal with, it is remarkable that so many not only avoid mistakes in the process of administering and moderating coursework, they also manage to develop and improve their practice. Whilst it has to be said that many moderators are seeing responses to the same small range of texts across hundreds of centres and thousands of candidates, there is a feeling that task setting – at the heart of good approaches to coursework – is continuing to improve. The worst kinds of assignment – dubious creative responses masquerading as analysis; multiple pieces of Original Writing; descriptions of why Tom Cruise would be a better Hamlet than Brad Pitt and why he should wear black – have largely disappeared, ending up, thankfully, in the same bin as Eva Smith's Diary. Many moderators reported this year that task setting was improving as centres devise tasks which enable candidates to address key assessment objectives.

Two general issues raised as concerns in last year's report still generate problems for moderators. The least prevalent, but most worrying, concerns plagiarism. There has been considerable publicity about the availability of essays on the Internet, and moderators found some quite serious instances of blatant copying of material from the Internet. Candidates need to fully understand what they are signing on their Candidate Record Forms. Candidates who are found to have cheated will, in every case, be reported to the Awarding Body, and the likely outcome in cases of significant plagiarism will be disqualification. Moderators have expressed some surprise at the more obvious examples they have seen: the style and vocabulary of some pieces of writing have been so markedly different from the rest of the candidate's work that they have wondered how the teacher failed to challenge it, especially as the teacher knows the work of the candidate much better than the moderator. It is a simple task these days to identify where work has been taken from the Internet and when departments find examples of plagiarism they must act decisively.

The Joint Council for Qualifications defines plagiarism as: 'The failure to acknowledge sources properly and/or the submission of another person's work as if it were the candidate's own.' The Council suggests a range of strategies for preventing plagiarism which include:

- a session on plagiarism in the induction process for students embarking on GCSE courses
- reinforcing the meaning of the Declaration signed by students
- establishing clear rules about what is acceptable use of sources
- teaching the conventions of using footnotes and bibliographies
- giving time for sufficient coursework to be undertaken in class under direct supervision to allow the teacher to authenticate each candidate's whole work with confidence
- stressing to parents / carers the importance of candidates producing work which is their own.

Several moderators noted, centres in which they found many candidates responding to a text in such similar ways that it was difficult to differentiate between them. Often moderators would find several paragraphs beginning with exactly the same sentences, and paragraphs would be arranged in identical order. In the most severe cases, moderators found themselves having to make judgements about whether there was so much scaffolding and so little of the candidate's work that it was a kind of mass plagiarism. Usually the scaffolding was less serious than this and the issue for moderators was how to differentiate between candidates. Scaffolding is undoubtedly an effective strategy for helping students to structure writing, but a distinction has to be made between using scaffolding as a teaching tool for individual learners and using it en masse with classes for a single task which is going to be submitted for assessment. Moderators feel that in many cases it does not help candidates; it restricts them.

Task setting in response to literary texts is steadily improving. Tasks which often include the key word 'How?' and guide candidates to engage with a writer at work usually by focusing on sections rather than the whole text are considered to be the most effective. As was reported last year, tasks which invite candidates to assess 'Who was most responsible for?' or 'Who is to blame for?' are ineffective because they rarely allow candidates to focus on those criteria which concern writers' techniques.

When candidates are invited to focus on a section of a text they respond best when they are able to securely place the section in the whole text. How centres read a text with candidates is for the centre to decide and certainly not for the Awarding Body to police, but there was some evidence of able candidates underperforming.

The social, historical and literary contexts are being addressed in exemplary fashion by many centres: candidates select appropriate information and integrate it intelligently into the structure of their response. Analysis of, for example, Shylock's role in 'The Merchant of Venice', is informed by some knowledge of the position of Jews in Shakespeare's England; aspects of Dickens' novels are explored in interesting ways by candidates who are aware of social conditions in Victorian cities. Moderators notice that in centres where the contexts are well handled, references to them tend not to appear at the start of candidates' work; they appear when appropriate and in moderation, in the body of the writing. Far less successful is the approach in which essays begin with lengthy expositions of social or historical contexts which seem to have nothing to do with the task in hand. Moderators have read many quite lengthy biographies of Dickens: when and where he was born; his working career; his reputation; the way his novels were published; and have been unable to understand what the information has to do with the task in hand. Similarly it is often difficult to understand what a page of information about the Globe Theatre has to do with the exploration of a scene from 'Romeo and Juliet'. If there has been concern about the importance of the contexts and the extent to which candidates must cover them, then centres should be reassured that a few judicious and relevant remarks which are integrated with the task in hand are adequate. In some centres there is a considerable focus on the contexts as they are used as a starting point for analysis – using an understanding of 'tragedy' to explore a key scene from 'A View from the Bridge' or some appreciation of McCarthyism in exploring 'The Crucible'.

Moderators have seen a variety of approaches to annotation. Clearly, within a centre, during the course, the candidate is the primary target for annotation and the best practice will provide candidates with precise information about how to move forward. When it comes to the end of the course and a sample of work is being sent, the primary target for the annotation becomes the moderator. Moderators are looking for concise annotation which draws their attention to features of the candidate's work which explain the centre's assessment. This is best done through a mixture of annotation in the margins and a brief summative comment at the end. Where moderators experience problems it is usually because there is no annotation or because there is too much inappropriate comment in the margins. As was mentioned in last year's report, there is a tendency in some centres to sprinkle comments such as 'context' or 'language' next to any mention of a context or any reference to the word language. Such marginalia does not explain the award of a particular mark. Occasionally, moderators come across examples of annotation which are simply copies of phrases from assessment criteria without any form of contextualization. As is the case with teacher summative comments in En1, the practice of simply copying phrases is not considered to be helpful.

En1

In this the second year of the new specifications, the Speaking and Listening component saw centres continuing to develop their ideas about how to work within the three specified contexts: individual extended, group interaction and drama-focused. In addition the three year rolling programme of centre advisory visits continued. In total 1124 visits were made to centres in the academic year 2004-5.

One additional reason for making centre visits was introduced this year. The so-called 'z score', a statistical calculation, can best be explained as a means of highlighting centres whose marks do not fall within the expected national statistical patterns. 132 z score visits were made, roughly half because centre marks seemed high, the other half because they seemed low. In most cases these discrepancies could be explained by the many and various circumstances which affect individual centres, but some centres will require follow-up visits in the coming year.

The obvious point to stress about the introduction of the z score is that centres should monitor their En1 marks, both across teaching groups and within the broader framework of achievement in English as a whole.

Overall although there are still some areas for further development, it is pleasing to note how well the En1 component has operated in 2005.

Advisory Visits/moderation

Advisory visits are usually made as part of a three-yearly cycle but they can also be triggered by concerns over the implementation of En1 in a centre. This concern can be a result of poor or inconsistent completion of candidate record forms, a high or low z score, or concerns held over from a previous visit. Advisory visits serve two main functions – to advise centres on all aspects of En1 and to report to AQA on assessment and standardisation.

Most of the visits completed this year were very positive in atmosphere and showed practice in centres which ranged from the acceptable to the excellent. A number of advisers reported how English teachers were pleased to be given the opportunity, via an 'official visit', to give some time and thought to how En1 works within their centre. Advisers were aware that in a number of centres staffing turnover made the management of En1 quite difficult – but again centres were generally able to maintain acceptable procedures. In nearly all cases the real stars were the candidates themselves. The fact that these candidates are usually selected for their positive qualities does not hide the fact that advisers have a really pleasant experience when meeting these representatives of the centre.

In addition to advisory visits, which normally take place between October to March, moderation visits are made to some centres in April/May. Moderation visits can lead to adjustments to marks in the same way that written coursework marks can be adjusted.

The Three Contexts

The requirement for candidates to perform within three contexts is designed to introduce variety into the curriculum and to stress the fact that effective speaking and listening has a number of different features. Where the best practice was observed, En1 was integrated into full schemes of work, and was taught in much the same way as reading and writing skills were taught. Where practice was less effective, advisers reported that candidates were expected to perform complex spoken tasks without any apparent preparation, or without any understanding of how they were going to be assessed, and against which criteria.

The three contexts for the production of talk, and the three sets of skills triplets together require candidates to show a range of skills for a variety of audiences and purposes. It is also worth pointing out that two of the three contexts – individual extended contribution and drama-focused activity – often involve candidates performing to an audience. This means that candidates are expected to use appropriate spoken language with appropriate performative skills. Candidates inevitably need help with this.

Advisers saw some very varied work within the *Individual extended* component, some of it very impressive, some of it lacking in shape and performance skills. Although there is considerable flexibility around what constitutes an extended contribution, and what the content/context for such a contribution can be, many centres (echoing the exemplar material shown on recent tapes) chose to show advisers candidates who were giving fully-fledged talks to the whole group. Some candidates were helped by being asked questions by teachers and students, which encouraged them to develop their ideas, to extend the range of their vocabulary and to see their audience as something other than just their classmates.

Group interaction is the context which is at the centre of much English teaching. It is worth stressing that this context requires *interaction*, a combination of both speaking and listening, where candidates genuinely engage in explorative talk. In everyday classroom situations, though, it is worth teaching students how collaborative talk really works, and how the different functions of group members are best delivered. It is also worth considering which tasks enable groups of candidates to become fully involved in group talk.

The *Drama-focused* context requires candidates to adopt a role that is different from themselves: to borrow a term from the KS3 strategy, they are required to be someone else in an 'as if' situation.

Drama-focused activities were, for some advisers, the least effective parts of the work they saw. This context essentially works within part iii of AO1 which requires candidates to 'adopt roles and communicate with audiences using a range of techniques'. The plurals in this definition are not necessarily helpful: for the individual candidate it is likely to be a single role, with a single audience. But, and it is a big but, one would expect candidates in the upper mark ranges to be showing a *range of techniques*.

Sometimes advisers saw candidates operating in very restricted and limiting roles, but then being given high marks. Being in role, and then being assessed against English criteria needs preparation. Many centres chose to use literature as a stimulus for these activities, with candidates being asked to assume the role of a character from a novel, play, poem etc. This can sometimes work well, but not always: for example a performance in the role of a minor character is not the best way to allow an able candidate to show all the requisite skills.

Some advisers reported that candidates working in large groups often found it hard to make an impression in a role which offered few chances to show their skills. It is worth repeating here that drama-focused activities can be done as individual or paired work. It is also worth stressing that students need help with performing in role – just because they have studied a text does not necessarily mean they can 'become' the character. Some of the best performances in role involved candidates creating their own complex personae, based upon their observations of social situations with which they are familiar.

It would be helpful if teachers attending Autumn standardisation meetings came prepared to share their experiences of preparing and assessing candidates in this part of the En1 specification.

Record Keeping

Some teachers have told advisers that they would prefer a single method of continuous record keeping, with paperwork for this purpose provided by the board itself. This is resisted by senior moderators because it could shift the burden of responsibility away from the centre and become just another form to complete. Coursework gives centres the flexibility to develop and reflect on their own working practices, and to tailor their teaching towards their own particular circumstances. It does seem in some centres, though, that En1 is given less time and consideration in planning terms than other parts of the course. Where there was best practice, it involved all teachers in a department having a system of recording En1 which was;

- concise and not too labour-intensive
- evaluative of candidate performance, using the criteria as guidance rather than exact wording
- awarding marks for each activity at the time it was produced
- used consistently by all members of the GCSE teaching team
- accessible to candidates so that they could chart their own progress
- updated regularly to allow easy transfer if teachers changed groups

Such systems led, inevitably, to consistency of approach when the final En1 record form was completed for the samples of folders to be sent to the moderator in May.

Summative comments for each candidate form part of the final coursework submission for En1, En2, En3. These summative comments should show how a final mark is arrived at by relating the general criteria to the specific tasks that form the final submission and also to the specific candidate. Merely copying out the criteria is not sufficient.

The following extract from an En1 record form gives a good idea of what is required:

Despite English being X’s second language, or perhaps even because of it and the demand for accuracy he brings to it, he is able to draw on a highly developed vocabulary which he used to good effect when explaining the details of his work experience job and in narrative his experiences. (Assessment One) He responded thoughtfully to questions showing full engagement. During the group activity (Assessment Two) he was able to articulate highly complex analytical ideas, drawing on appropriate critical vocabulary. His close listening to others’ contributions allowed him to synthesise a range of ideas into points of helpful resolution. As Eddie Carbone (Assessment Three) he performed a complex awareness of how the character’s perceptions shift from complacency to growing anger. He conveyed this change through changes of pace in his speech and a gradual shift to more intense physical gestures. Final mark: 46.

Standardisation

The standardisation of En1 across teaching groups in centres clearly requires different procedures from those which operate with the written coursework elements. Ideally there will be some opportunities for teachers to visit each other in classrooms – and where this facility is limited, priority can often be given to teachers who are new to the centre.

There are, though, other methods of internal standardisation:

- team meetings which consider aspects of En1 by using previous training tapes;
- the regular swapping of written records;
- teachers working in pairs with some common activities;
- special attention given to NQTs;
- use of out-of-class speaking opportunities, such as assemblies, for standardisation;
- regular slots for En1 at department meetings;
- production by centres of their own videotapes;
- informal links with other centres.

One final piece of standardisation is, somewhat surprisingly, overlooked in some centres. This involves ensuring that all folders sent to the moderator as a coursework sample have En1 records which are completed with the same degree of accuracy and detail. One teacher taking overall responsibility for checking these records is an obvious way to ensure reasonable uniformity across the centre.

Conclusion

The general impression from the large number of visits made to centres was that En1 is taken seriously in most centres and that its marking and moderation is seen as an important part of the GCSE process. Most candidates seem to enjoy the opportunities offered by speaking and listening, and there were examples of interesting work spread across most ability levels. Now that the new requirements have bedded down, it should be possible to build upon this good start and to give further thought to the best ways to teach, assess and enjoy En1.

The Principal Moderator and the rest of the team are very grateful to teachers for all their hard work in this area and for their help and courtesy when arranging visits.

En2/3 (Reading/Writing) and Literature

Shakespeare

Although 'Romeo and Juliet' is, for a variety of reasons, the dominant text, moderators have reported a quite wide range of texts including 'Titus Andronicus', 'King Lear', 'Hamlet' and other demanding texts. Often the use of a more lightly used text leads to more innovative task-setting. Empathy responses – the Verona Times, Juliet's diary and so forth – have all but disappeared from En2 and there have been fewer instances of the poor kind of task which invites students to treat 'stagecraft' as an exercise in costume design. Some responses are hugely overlong – much longer than would be allowed for AS/A2 Coursework, and often to the detriment of the writing – and it could be argued that centres may wish to impose their own word limits on, usually, high-achieving candidates. Three or four sides of word-processed writing will amount to about 2000 words and is plenty for candidates to address the highest grade criteria. The response to Shakespeare should not reflect the entire study of the text, rather it should be a snapshot of achievement. The best tasks arise out of study of assessment criteria and enable candidates to meet the criteria concisely. Tasks which can be completed concisely should create more time for other aspects of the course.

Prose

The most commonly used texts are 'Great Expectations', 'Pride and Prejudice', 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde', 'The Time Machine' and short stories. Responses to short stories, because of the comparative element of the assignment, sometimes seem to present difficulties for candidates. The best writing seen by moderators tends to be focused on sections of novels and guide the candidate to analysis of the writer's techniques. As with the response to Shakespeare moderators have found some unnecessarily lengthy

writing, usually when candidates are tracking a theme or character through an entire novel. How substantial novels are read with candidates is a matter for centres, but there has been some evidence of candidates seeming to underachieve in the prose response because they are unable to explore the significance of a chapter, for example, in the context of the entire novel. Some candidates are quite frank about how their ‘reading’ of a novel has actually been the watching of a film and the reading of a chapter. The issue is not whether this meets any ‘regulations’, rather it is whether it allows the candidate to achieve appropriately.

Media

Where responses to media texts are good, they are tightly focused with good sense of audience and purpose. Some assignments – usually essays – seem to generate quite flabby responses as candidates plough conscientiously through a list of ‘techniques’ and ‘features’, listing and commenting on several aspects of what seems to be the teacher’s favourite film, or, less frequently, the front page of newspapers. Such responses seem to be still focused on En2 criteria – as was the need in the previous syllabus. Moderators often find examples of assignments in which candidates are asked to write about three film trailers, and wonder why it has to be three rather than one: the focus on one trailer usually leads to better, more concise writing. The best writing seen by moderators has often been review writing: concise and often very entertaining, especially when candidates are writing about films of their own choice. Some excellent work based on writing reviews for three different magazines in different styles was seen. Moving image does seem to generate the most enthusiastic and interesting responses, but some excellent work was seen based on magazines.

Original Writing

Original writing is often lively and engaging, and there is a feeling that task setting may be improving. Moderators encountered, thanks to ‘Teachit’, the same assignment – The Assassin – again and again, but they also found some examples of greater innovation, often based around texts which were being studied by candidates.

There is still a feeling that Original Writing is tackled very early in the course. It is a good idea to integrate it into a GCSE course rather than seeing it as a single, separate assignment to be undertaken for coursework. Centres wanting to improve candidates’ writing will be aware of the generic criteria for assessing writing and will introduce lots of opportunities for candidates to practise and experiment. An approach to Original Writing which sees candidates writing lots of short pieces throughout the course rather than one assignment at the start of Year 10, is more likely to lead to success for candidates in both the coursework and the examinations.

C20th Drama

This is dominated by a few texts: ‘An Inspector Calls’, ‘The Crucible’, ‘A View From the Bridge’ and ‘Our Day Out’, but some interesting work has been seen on texts such as ‘Cream Cracker Under the Settee’ and ‘The Island’. As ever, the best work is produced in response to well-thought out tasks focused on appropriate criteria. The weakest responses are those which focus simply on characters and lead candidates to writing about characters as though they are living people. Variations of this approach which invite candidates to assess ‘who was most responsible for?’ are especially difficult for candidates as they lead them away from assessment criteria. ‘Who or what was responsible for?’ questions are legitimate areas of discussion on a range of drama texts, but they should be avoided when devising tasks to allow candidates to meet assessment criteria.

Administration

Administering GCSE English and Literature folders is a quite demanding task and the vast majority of centres manage it in an exemplary fashion. The following are the two 'problems' which make life difficult for moderators:

- The centre failing to asterisk 'Incomplete Folders' on the Mark List they send off. This leads to problems in calling for a sample, as moderators receive incomplete folders which have to be replaced and consequently delay the moderation process;
- Illegible Mark lists – nearly always caused by the centre seeming not to realise that there are carbon copies underneath the top sheet of the Mark List which, if not treated with care, can become so smudged they cannot be read.

But centres are to be congratulated on the professional way they prepare candidates and manage moderation in ways that mean this complex process dealing with hundreds of thousands of candidates is completed so efficiently and, for moderators, so satisfyingly every year.

Mark Range and Award of Grades

English (3702)

Foundation Tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Paper 1	54	162	69.8	18.9
Paper 2	54	162	67.7	19.0
En1 Speaking and Listening	54	108	57.2	14.4
En2/3 Reading and Writing	108	108	51.1	15.0
Foundation tier overall 3702	--	540	189.1	45.8

		Max. mark	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 1 3702/1F boundary mark	raw	54	30	24	19	14	9
	scaled	162	90	72	57	42	27
Paper 2 3702/2F boundary mark	raw	54	29	24	19	14	9
	scaled	162	87	72	57	42	27
Foundation tier scaled boundary mark		540	286	235	185	135	85

Higher tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Paper 1	54	162	104.9	19.6
Paper 2	54	162	111.4	19.6
En1 Speaking and Listening	54	108	79.8	11.7
En2/3 Reading and Writing	108	108	77.3	13.0
Higher tier overall 3702	--	540	253.3	42.5

		Max. mark	A*	A	B	C	D	allowed E
Paper 1H 3702/1H boundary mark	raw	54	46	41	36	31	23	-
	scaled	162	138	123	108	93	69	-
Paper 2H 3702/2H boundary mark	raw	54	47	41	35	30	23	-
	scaled	162	141	123	105	90	69	-
Higher tier scaled boundary mark		540	453	405	355	306	237	202

Provisional statistics for the award

Foundation tier (196,877 candidates)

	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	24.7	59.1	81.8	92.8	97.4

Higher tier (227,706 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D	allowed E
Cumulative %	7.1	27.7	63.5	91.4	99.2	99.6

Overall (424,583 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	3.8	14.8	34.1	60.5	80.6	91.3	96.4	98.6

English Literature (3712)

Foundation tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Examination	66	140	57.4	16.6
Coursework	57	60	28.8	8.5
Foundation tier overall 3712	--	200	86.2	22.1

		Max. mark	C	D	E	F	G
3712/F boundary mark	raw	66	33	27	22	17	12
	scaled	140	70	57	47	36	25

Higher tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Examination	66	140	93.2	16.8
Coursework	57	60	42.9	7.4
Higher tier overall 3712	--	200	136.1	21.7

		Max. mark	A*	A	B	C	D	allowed E
3712/H boundary mark	raw	66	55	48	41	35	29	-
	scaled	140	117	102	87	74	62	-

Provisional statistics for the award

Foundation tier (144,542 candidates)

	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	25.5	55.4	78.0	90.4	96.1

Higher tier (219,198 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D	allowed E
Cumulative %	6.7	29.0	65.8	91.4	98.1	98.9

Overall (363,740 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	4.0	17.5	39.6	65.2	81.1	90.6	95.5	97.8

Definitions

Boundary Mark: the minimum (scaled) mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade. Although component grade boundaries are provided, these are advisory. Candidates' final grades depend only on their total marks for the subject.

Mean Mark: is the sum of all candidates' marks divided by the number of candidates. In order to compare mean marks for different components, the mean mark (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).

Standard Deviation: a measure of the spread of candidates' marks. In most components, approximately two-thirds of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus one standard deviation from the mean, and approximately 95% of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus two standard deviations from the mean. In order to compare the standard deviations for different components, the standard deviation (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).