GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

WJEC EDUQAS ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

SUMMER 2016

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

AS

Summer 2016

COMPONENT 1: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CREATIVE WRITING

This was the first time that Component 1 had been sat by candidates as part of the new AS specification in England. Whilst examiners expected to see some issues related to timing, exam strategy and new assessment objectives, on the whole, candidates responded well to these new challenges; most centres had taken on board advice from previous specifications, and in particular the legacy AS unit LL1, as well as from CPD training and had prepared candidates well for Component 1.

Effective planning of time is essential in Component 1, where candidates have two questions to answer: comparative analysis and creative writing, which has three strands to it. Unfortunately, some candidates did not plan their time effectively and so did not complete, or in some cases attempt, the comparison of their own writing, Question 2 (c), and therefore were not able to achieve higher than half of the marks for Question 2.

Technical accuracy and quality of written expression is assessed in AO1 for Question 1 and 2 (c) and in AO5 for Question 2 (a) and (b) and candidates are reminded on the exam paper that assessment will take into account the quality of written communication used in their answers. However, in some responses, written expression contained lapses, not only in key spellings but in sentence construction, punctuation use and sometimes in clarity of meaning.

It is vital that candidates are equipped with a wide ranging set of technical terms before attempting this exam, in particular for Questions 1 and 2 (c). The best responses this summer used a wide range of technical terms confidently (AO1), explored approaches meaningfully (AO2) and made thorough comparisons and contrasts between the texts (AO4). Weaker responses often struggled to use technical terms, with many using just one or two basic terms; had difficulty linking the approaches identified to the meanings in the texts for Question 1 or in their own writing for Question 2 (c); and failed to compare and contrast effectively. There are online CPD resources available on the EDUQAS website to assist with the teaching of terminology as well as frameworks for supporting comparative responses. It is vital that centres make full use of the resources on offer to best serve the interests of their candidates.

Section A: Comparative analysis of poetry and unseen text.

Candidates had to write about the poem ‘The Schoolboy, taken from their anthology, and had a choice of unseen text and could write either about an extract from the novel ‘Nicholas Nickelby’ by Charles Dickens or an extract from a prepared speech delivered by Barack Obama. There was a reasonably even distribution of responses to the unseen choices offered, with perhaps more candidates opting for Dickens’ prose extract. On the whole candidates handled the analysis of the poem very well, identifying some key linguistic and literary features, such as the imagery Blake uses, and dealing well with the possible meanings of the text. Many candidates offered detailed and impressive readings of a poem which seemed to have been a particular favourite for many candidates. Most centres had obviously prepared their candidates well with this anthology poem, and some responses were very insightful and perceptive indeed. Similarly, on the whole candidates handled comparisons well, identifying some key connections between the texts. Most responses correctly commented on the poetic form and metre of Blake’s poem and made useful connections to the similar negative description of defeated and brooding schoolchildren in

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Text B. Productive links were made to the unseen extract from Obama's speech with many candidates identifying key points of comparison between the two texts, with most commenting on his own similar feelings as a child to the schoolboy. Some commented on the social and political responsibilities that Obama had towards schoolchildren and how this informed his language choices. Most candidates securely identified the audience and purpose for this spoken text and better responses made reference to its colloquial aspects. Similarly, candidates were able to compare the attitudes of Blake and Dickens' Nickelby, with many looking at the similarities of language used in the two, such as the use of metaphorical and rhetorical features to describe school life.

Errors in the identification of terms was a sometimes an issue here, as in Question 2 (c). Errors which occurred most frequently were the misidentification of 'love' in the poem ('I love to rise in a summer morn…') and some problems identifying word classes in all three texts. Listing often proved challenging, with misidentification of both syndetic and asyndetic lists, as did vocatives and narrative voice. Some candidates dealt very well with some challenging aspects of syntax in unseen texts, and this was pleasing to see, as they had obviously been very well prepared for the examination.

Section B: Creative Writing and Commentary

The key to doing well on this section relies on effective time management and planning in order that enough links and connections are embedded in the two written pieces so that pertinent connections can be made in 2 (c) at relative speed. Candidates needed to pay careful attention to genre, audience and purpose in the written tasks and should have made sure that they were producing the text type that they have been set.

2 (a) an extract from a handbook for new teachers
2 (b) the opening of a dramatic monologue

Question 2 (a) proved to be a task which many candidates approached with enthusiasm and passion, perhaps relishing the opportunity to instruct teachers on how to engage candidates' interest in the classroom. We read a range of lively and engaging responses, from the very humorous and droll to the earnest and sincere. Most contained a strong sense of audience and purpose and candidates showed themselves to be familiar with writing in a handbook genre, and did so with some success. The range of advice given was mostly sensible and sometimes innovative (with many liking stickers and rewards, but some opting for draconian punishments perhaps modelled on the 'cruel eye' in Dickens's poem), but some candidates struggled to move beyond the very general advice of 'smile' and 'take the register'; candidates are reminded to read the task thoroughly – some did not address the task which asked them to give advice on 'how to engage candidates' interest' and rather gave general teaching advice instead.

On the whole, the monologue task was slightly more problematic, with many candidates struggling the appropriate tenor and register for the spoken piece. Most candidates used the first person narrative voice, as they had been instructed to in the exam question rubric, and most were able to adopt the voice of a teacher with some success. The more successful responses were able to use elements of staging to craft and shape the monologue and create dramatic tension, and some were so genuinely imaginative in their use of what constituted a challenging encounter. The challenging situations ranged from the mundane (disruptive candidates, problematic encounters with colleagues), to the comic (a school trip encounters a bear!) and the alarming (some graphic descriptions of school sieges, murders and other extreme situations). Some drew on the material given in Texts A to C of Question 1, which was pleasing to see.

Technical accuracy and quality of written expression was a problem for some candidates.

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2 (c) An analytical commentary

It was in responses to this question that candidates who had not managed their time effectively struggled. Often, over-long poetry responses and / or creative pieces tended to result in candidates not completing or in some cases even starting this question. The key to success here was in the strength of the links made between the two written pieces, and it is sensible to suggest to candidates that they should prepare and plan for these links by including similar and different features in their two pieces. Some were lost for what to compare and offered very general comments, often venturing into evaluation of what was and what was not successful in their written pieces, which is not necessary. Whilst there are a range of approaches that could be taken in this question, those who opted to analyse linguistic and literary features of both pieces concurrently did well, as did those who used the frameworks of language loosely to structure their connections, but who moved beyond it in order to improve the quality of their links. Whilst terminology (AO1) is worth only 5 marks here, it seems the use of a range of terms is crucial to their analysis of language choice and impacts too (AO2, 5 marks), which in turn has an impact on the quality of links (AO3, 10 marks).

There are several key points to note for future examinations:

- Section A responses which are often rich with terminology sometimes struggle to explore meaning or impact
- other Section A responses included barely any terminology and were difficult to reward given that one text has been studied and prepared before the examination.
- Section B, Question 2 (c) responses need to comment on and explore connections between written pieces thoughtfully and this is best done when candidates embed into and then comment on a range of linguistic and literary terms
- comparisons are key to Question 2 (c), and responses needed to do more than just comment on one written piece and then another
- errors noted this summer include the misidentification of syndetic and asyndetic lists, noun phrase modification, as well as confusion over basic word class terms
- candidates should be accurate in their assessment of context: Blake was sometimes referred to as a Renaissance poet
- responses should be clear, coherent and accurate, common misspellings included: peice, repitition, similie, metaphore, sentance, eachother, alot, trippling, pre-modifyer, would of/could of.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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COMPONENT 2: DRAMA AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS

For the first examination of this unit, it was very encouraging to read so many thoughtful and perceptive responses to the set questions. There was clear evidence that centres had thoroughly prepared their candidates for the examination, and that candidates had enjoyed studying the texts on offer. The best responses demonstrated an ability to discuss meaning with confidence (AO2) and link this to relevant contextual comments (AO3), whilst evaluating the use of both literary and linguistic features (AO1) in the texts. However, there were some centres where the depth and thought behind analysis was thin and, as with the previous specification, knowledge and understanding of terminology is very uneven. Candidates are to be reminded that discussion of a **range** of terminology is essential in an integrated course; this should include discussion of terminology which goes beyond simple identification of sentence mood. There were also too many occasions when candidates would use a quotation and simply discuss the 'verb' without identifying which word they were attempting to analyse—they must be specific in their identification of terms.

The new aspect of the specification which appeared to cause most concern is the application of contextual knowledge (AO3). Centres should prepare their candidates with a wide and broad understanding of the social, political, historical and cultural context of their chosen text, but also how this can be interpreted in contemporary society. Far too frequently, context was simply addressed through biographical information relating to the author, and whilst this can be relevant at times, too many candidates simply included this as 'bolt-on' information at the end of a paragraph. Context should be integrated into the response where possible, and there were many candidates who performed this aspect of the course very effectively.

SECTION A

There were responses seen on all of the texts on offer, with *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* being the least popular.

In Part (i) of this section, candidates are required to respond to an extract specified in the examination. This requires the candidates to read, think and write at speed, and some candidates spent too long responding to this part, with some writing up to four pages. This is unnecessary, and candidates should aim to focus only on three or possibly four parts from the extract to discuss. In doing this, they will be able to focus on language use in greater detail, and avoid reliance on narrating the passage. On the other hand, there were too many responses which were too brief to be rewarded or contained a limited awareness of literary and linguistic terminology. Candidates should be reminded that they must only discuss passages from the specified extract and not from other parts of the play.

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Considering that context (AO3) is not assessed in this part, it was disappointing to see a number of candidates spend time applying contextual information to their analysis, This was often at the expense of using terminology to discuss meaning. In fact, this part of the examination is a key opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of terminology, and too many did not extend their discussion beyond sentence mood. Some did not use any terminology at all. Candidates should be encouraged to use terminology for each quotation.
In Part (ii) of this section, candidates are instructed to refer to **at least two** other episodes from the whole play in their discussion. Far too frequently, examiners were unable to reward discussion due to candidates commenting on the extract from Part (i) of the question. It is clearly stated in the question what candidates are required to do, but careful planning and preparation are skills which perhaps need revising prior to the examination. For this part, there should be careful selection of different episodes from the whole play, to enable candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of the text and their analytical prowess. For an episode to prove successful, it should be a passage of the play which is significant and potentially rich in both language and content. This provides candidates with more opportunity to analyse and discuss, rather than when some candidates chose multiple passages but said very little about how they were relevant to the question. This, all too often, led to highly descriptive responses. It is also essential to remember that context is heavily weighted in this response, but that it should be woven into their essay, rather than something which is simply added at the end. The most successful responses tended to start with an overview of the text and question, but then also internally contextualised the episodes they had chosen to discuss.

Alan Bennett: *The History Boys*
Candidates had clearly enjoyed studying this text, and there were some outstanding responses in evidence. Both questions were equally popular, with candidates able to imbed contextual discussion into their analysis for part (ii). There were many comments on the role and position of women and how this has changed since publication, but also interesting and frequently entertaining discussions regarding attitudes towards teachers.

Diane Samuels: *Kindertransport*
This was another popular text with centres and candidates responded well to the questions. Question 3 was more popular and allowed candidates to discuss this key episode in the play. There were some thoughtful responses to the challenges to the mother/daughter relationships, with most focusing on Helga and Eva at the start of the play, compared with Helga and Evelyn towards the end. There were also some engaging responses to the relationships between Evelyn and Faith. Responses to question 4 had a clear focus on attitudes towards German Jewish identity and the challenges this presented, but some candidates also considered Faith's concept of identity when she learns of her past.

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*
There were very few responses seen on this text. The majority of those seen responded to question 5 and were able to discuss gender roles and male identity with some assurance.

Brian Friel: *Translations*
Question 7 was more popular than 8 for this text, with candidates making purposeful comments on Manus in the extract, and also commenting on education/learning in detail. Most discussed Hedge schools and National schools, with others also linked this with a variety of attitudes, such as Marie's desire to learn English. In question 8, the most successful candidates made pertinent comments about colonisation, and linked this especially to the relationship between Yolland and Marie. There was also thoughtful discussion about language differences and communication.

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Tennessee Williams: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*
Candidates responded very well on this text and there was much to reward. Question 10 on Big Daddy and then masculinity was the more popular choice, and candidates mainly discussed the differences in his character, and his desire to be seen as the patriarch. There were some interesting comments on the concepts of legacy and fatherhood, but also contextual attitudes to women. Responses to question 9 proved slightly more problematic, as some candidates struggled to link their comments to context effectively.

SECTION B

In this section, *In Cold Blood* and *Once in a House on Fire* were the most popular texts, followed by *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* and *Homage to Catalonia*. There were no responses seen on *Skating to Antarctica*.

This section of the exam has the potential to lead candidates into a more literary style of approach due to the size of the texts being used for analysis. However, if there is careful selection of specific 'episodes' from the text, there is more scope for close literary and linguistic analysis, which will enable candidates to access the upper bands of the mark scheme. Prior to the examination, candidates could select a wide range of episodes from the text they have studied for close exploration. Remembering that they will have the text in the examination with them, this should enable them to quickly identify which 'episodes' are most relevant and plan their response accordingly. The selection of examples to support their argument is also addressing AO1, as this Assessment Objective considers their line of argument and the organisation of their response.

Most of the responses seen demonstrated an understanding of the conventions of non-literary writing, and many candidates were able to successfully discuss the importance and influence of contextual factors on the texts. But it was the range and breadth of evidence from the text which seemed to limit candidates in this section. Candidates should be able to demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of a range of different episodes from the text they have studied, including detailed analysis of language, and an awareness of the significance of contextual factors. There was also strong evidence of candidates drifting from responding to the set question, instead producing a prepared response to a different topic and attempting to manipulate the content to fit the question. Candidates should avoid this approach as it prohibits them from accessing the full range of marks available.

Andrea Ashworth: *Once in a House on Fire*
Responses to this text were evenly weighted between the two questions. On question 11, some candidates tended to over focus on the friendship between Andrea and her sisters, and whilst this was a valid area to discuss, it did not represent the full range of friendships in evidence throughout the text. More successful answers demonstrated a greater range, including Andrea's friendships with both Wendy and Tamsyn in school, and other friends mentioned in the Afterward. For question 12, again there was substantial discussion of Andrea and her sisters, with better candidates commenting on the subtle differences in relationships between them.

Jenny Diski: *Skating to Antarctica*
No responses were seen on this text.

Dave Eggers: *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*
Question 16 was far more popular than question 15 for this text, and candidates were able to draw on a wide range of material in their response. Whilst virtually all candidates discussed Eggers himself and how he coped with challenging situations, more interesting and engaging responses branched out into a discussion of other characters such as John or Beth. Some responses also paid specific attention to Toph. Contextually, there was sound discussion of ideas relating to the nuclear family, youth culture and post-modernism.

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Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood*

This was the most popular text on the paper, and candidates responded well to both questions. Question 17 invited them to give some account of the presentation of the American justice system, and many did not hold back in their views regarding capital punishment and imprisonment. Most candidates paid close attention to the different figures representing the justice system, and held the KBI and Al Dewey especially in high regard. However, other figures such as Judges and the jury on the case did not fare so well. Some candidates also commented on the various penal institutions evidenced and the effects of prison on individuals. For question 18, there was a strong focus on Perry and Dick, but at times responses almost became a character study of these two, or an account of the murder. The most effective responses drew clear contrasts between the friendships of Perry and Dick, and Nancy and Susan Kidwell. Many also commented on Willie-Jay and his friendship with Perry, and some the friendship between Capote and Perry.

George Orwell: *Homage to Catalonia*

A few centres had studied this text, and most focused on question 19 concerning conditions on the frontline during the war. Responses considered the poor conditions the men endured, including the boredom and inexperience of the soldiers. There was also consideration of the poor equipment provided. Contextually, candidates made effective connections with trench warfare from the First World War and class/political struggles.

Key points:

- a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology is essential for success in AO1
- planning and careful selection of specific 'episodes' from whole texts enables candidates to create a more effective line of argument
- technical accuracy and correct spelling is essential, as is the use of standard English
- context should be used in a meaningful manner and closely linked to analysis
- avoid narrating/describing the text. Follow S/E/A and include at least one term for each quotation.

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