

GCE A Level Examiners' Report

English Literature
GCE
Summer 2025

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2025



Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner Eduqas

Contents	Page
Executive summary	5
Component 1: Poetry	6
Component 2: Drama	12
Component 3: Unseen Texts	24
Component 4: Prose Study (NEA)	31
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	37

Executive Summary

The Principal Examiners noted that all candidates had found the papers accessible with some excellent responses seen across all four components.

Some common points to consider in future include the following:

- The best performing candidates have a good knowledge and understanding of their set texts. There is no substitute for reading whole texts where possible for the narrative poems in Component 1 and the set texts in Component 2 and in the NEA.
- Where there is a part (i) question in an exam paper, it has been designed to be answered first as a springboard to the essay question. Candidates would be better served by not neglecting this part of the paper.
- Candidates should be directed to literary terms and features fitting to the form which they are studying. Alliteration, for example, is unlikely to lead to very productive analysis in a prose text.
- Those who considered a broad range of contexts, including cultural and literary contexts, and used them to illuminate their reading of texts were invariably the most successful candidates. Candidates who made broad, sweeping generalisations about an entire period or individuals' lives were less successful.
- The use of critical views / different interpretations always needs to be relevant to the texts and to the task.
- Where candidates' handwriting is not clear, it is better for them to word process their exam responses.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 1: POETRY

Overview of the Component

As always, examiners were highly impressed by many of the responses they saw. The hard work of teachers and learners is clearly recognisable in the determined efforts which were seen at all levels of achievement.

However, I cannot remember a report where the points immediately below have not been mentioned and there are many candidates who still need to be persuaded that English Literature requires approaches and skills which are distinct from those required in other branches of the Arts and Humanities. It is a pity when candidates compromise the coherence and purposefulness of their responses to poetry with ill-advised recourse to the following:

- The naming and listing of rhetorical devices (e.g. hypophora, erotesis or anadiplosis) on their own is never a useful way of showing an understanding and appreciation of poetry.
- Of course, the same goes for any other technical terms (asyndeton, polyptoton, synecdoche, anaphora etc) used solely as a means of showing familiarity with the term rather than an understanding of how the feature operates in any particular poem.
- Narrative approaches to contextual material which are divorced from attempts to analyse. AO3 and AO2 should be regarded as securely tethered.
- Similarly, references to different interpretations need to be integrated into candidates' analytical responses.

Teachers and learners should become familiar with the published marking grids and guidelines to help with an understanding of the ways in which AO4 operates. This could involve some delicate teasing-out in the classroom because making illuminating or purposeful connections "between poems and poets" does not mean simply identifying similarities between poets' biographies. For instance: "Heaney and Sheers both lived in the rural areas of their respective countries" is not an illuminating or purposeful connection while, "The rural landscapes of both Ireland and Wales provide both poets with distinctive images which become vehicles for the critical exploration of more abstract ideas about relationships" does, with due illustration, become a purposeful comment under AO4.

Learners need to be regularly reminded of the differences between descriptive, narrative responses and analytical writing which demonstrates an appreciation and understanding of the ways in which meaning is made in poetry.

Poor and illegible handwriting has become a critical issue. Learners must be advised that if neither the examiner nor the senior examiner can read their handwriting, it is next to impossible to award an accurate mark.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A (i)

In Section A (i) responses, it is important to remember that only work under AO1 and AO2 is rewarded. Candidates should avoid addressing contexts or different interpretations which, in the limited time available, will restrict opportunities to earn credit under the relevant AOs

Successful responses:

- made an immediate start on analysis through the lens of the set task
- were coherently organised (well-planned)
- showed clear evidence of having studied the poem or extract
- supported ideas with brief quotation and reference
- remained relevantly focused without constant repetition of the terms of the question.

Less successful responses:

- wasted time over-contextualising the poem or extract
- took a descriptive / narrative approach
- incorporated contextual references or quoted different readings (AO2 analysis of ambiguity should not be confused with AO5 different readings)
- failed to support with economical quotation / offered overlong quotations
- listed features with frequent inaccurate use of literary terminology or attempted to apply inappropriate linguistic terms.

Chaucer

Candidates were asked to “Examine Chaucer’s presentation of May” in lines 976-999 and most showed some grasp of the requirement to explore technique i.e. structure, tone, language choices and imagery which would lead a reader to an understanding of Chaucer’s intentions. Those who wrote generally and warmly about May’s deceitfulness or, alternatively, simply declared her a feminist heroine missed opportunities to write analytically about Chaucer’s poetic techniques.

Donne

The response here should have been squarely upon Donne’s use of imagery and there were some very strong responses which explored images patterns and subtle nuance. Some could not resist the temptation to write about the stages of Donne’s career and personal life which, as detailed above, limited achievements

Milton

While it was useful to make brief reference to Eve’s earlier interaction with the serpent, “the presentation of Eve in these lines” should have been the focus of attention. Some otherwise promising responses ranged much too widely in *Book IX* as well as other *Books of Paradise Lost* and lost sight of the need to examine Milton’s poetic techniques “in these lines.”

Blake

Often students of Blake are defeated by the apparent simplicity of the poems and are thrown back on to relatively basic ideas about “nursery rhyme” structure or rhyme schemes. Better responses explored Blake’s technique in presenting a complex religious vision involving the fusion of the human and the divine with careful analysis of language such as “heart”; “face” and “dress”.

Rossetti

A line-by-line analysis of poems at this level will rarely produce a well-focused and relevant response. In this case, the task required an analysis of Rossetti's presentation of "intense feelings" and it would have been wise to have started with an overview of the dominant mood, and tone of this poem which becomes apparent in "I cannot reach"; "Beyond my range"; "all in vain"; "strain"; "stretch" and finally a glimpse of redemptive "hope". While there were some complex and sensitive responses, those who concentrated solely on structure, rhyme scheme and repetition of the first-person pronoun were not able to make a success of this task.

SECTION A (ii)

Successful responses:

- took careful account of the specific demands of the questions
- showed a clear intention from the start to analyse text
- gave careful attention to the structure and coherence of essays
- made relevant and economical use of contexts (please note "close reference" does not mean over-extended narrative accounts dislocated from textual analysis)
- incorporated relevant suggestions for different interpretations of poems into their own discussion / analyses.

Less successful responses:

- failed to demonstrate engagement with relevant texts
- relied upon raw biographical data and broad contextual "facts" with little or no direct application to tasks or texts
- lacked coherent structure and development
- repeated pre-learned critical views without attempts to apply them relevantly
- described poems and asserted meanings.

Chaucer

There were some lively and very well-informed responses to the issue of admiration or sympathy for any of Chaucer's characters in *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*. The best essays showed how Chaucer's techniques swayed readers' feelings at different stages of the text and how delicately nuanced our feelings and opinions ought to be.

Donne

There were some impressive, detailed responses to this question with candidates achieving a sensitive balance in their arguments showing that in most cases there was no clear division between the physical and the spiritual or intellectual in Donne's work.

Milton

There were many very well-informed and well-balanced responses to this question with close examination of the knotty issues surrounding the presentation of the human characters in pre- and post-lapsarian Eden. Many candidates impressed with their analysis of ambition in the widest sense and in their identification of telling signs in both Adam and Eve before the encounter with the serpent. There was some subtle discussion of how "ambition" might be applied to Adam's arguments before Eve's departure and it was very pleasing to see some treatment of Milton's own ambitions in writing such an Epic.

Blake

As we know, a successful address of AO3 involves demonstrating an understanding of the “contexts in which literary texts are written and received.” In many ways there could not have been a better opportunity to address both the “written” and “received” elements of this AO. As they considered the power and timelessness of Blake’s poetry, candidates had a clear opportunity to show how the implicit values in the poems were not restricted to any particular historical period but those who wrote extensively about contemporary society seemed to forget that literary essays must be led by AO2 and the analysis of poetry always needs to come first.

Rossetti

Strong responses to this task (and there was a good number) acknowledged that much of Rossetti’s poetry might have a particular resonance for the religious reader but went on to argue convincingly that there was a great deal of her writing which could appeal to those who did not share her religious faith. This was a very sensible approach to a “How far do you agree?” style of question and there were some excellent responses which demonstrated confident ideas about the possible aesthetic appeal of the technical aspects of her poetry (religious or otherwise), as well as non-religious subject matter or cultural and social values which might be found universally appealing. It was pleasing to note the wide range of material which candidates drew upon.

SECTION B

Successful responses:

- planned coherent, relevant and well-organised responses and selected at least two poems from each poet for close analysis
- understood the need for sustained comparative analysis in the light of the task
- made use of relevant contextual detail beyond consideration of the lives of the poets
- understood that connections between the poets should be on the basis of how one poet’s ideas and techniques illuminate a reading / understanding / appreciation of the other
- made judicious use of critical quotation.

Less successful responses:

- offered poorly planned, overlong responses with little regard for the set task
- worked through a very limited range of poems descriptively while asserting meaning
- offered extended and asserted accounts of poets’ lives (for AO3)
- attempted to connect by comparison or contrast facets of the poets’ lives (for AO4)
- made use of pre-learned critical quotation without regard to relevance.

Hardy and Eliot

The best responses to Q6 concentrated upon the ways in which the two poets influence or manipulate reader's feelings and ideas through their choices of subject matter and poetic techniques. The discussion should have paid due attention to whether or not readers could find any comfort or consolation in the poems and what connections could be made between Eliot's and Hardy's ideas and techniques. There were some expertly argued responses but those who did not perform as well had not really used the question to structure their responses and instead offered a general commentary on their selection of poems. The weakest responses spent far too much time on observing parallels in the poets' lives, especially their marital relationships.

At the core of Q7 is the matter of objectivity and the presence or otherwise of "personality" in the poetry which affects the ways in which human subjects are presented. Some well-informed responses showed a confident awareness of Eliot's stated ideas on this matter and were sensitive in their analysis of Hardy's guilt-driven accounts of his grief and regrets. There was also some excellent analysis of Eliot's presentation of society in poems other than 'The Waste Land' and in both poet's presentation of the shaping influences of religious ideas.

Yeats and Abse

It was encouraging to see some very well-informed responses to Yeats and Abse. For Q8, most candidates performed strongly under AO3 and many found some imaginative ways of shaping their readings of both poets to the demands of the task- i.e. the debate about the main strengths of both lying in their qualities as storytellers. Some who seemed very keen to answer on the presentation of Irish and Welsh cultural history managed to turn their material into dealing with the ways in which the poets presented the "story" of Ireland and the "story" of Wales. Only a very few engaged in the debate by holding up storytelling against other possible strengths of both poets.

Q9 was the more popular of the two questions on these poets and candidates showed a keen awareness of the connections between the mutually illuminating ways in which poems dealt with different varieties of love. It was encouraging to see how wide-ranging many of the responses were, taking-in romance, patriotism, familial ties and friendships. Weaknesses became apparent when candidates indulged in over-long descriptions of Yeats' frustrations with Maud and Abse's grief over Joan's death, forgetting that responses need to be driven by an analysis of the chosen poems.

Hughes and Plath

Many responses to Q10 were damaged by lengthy and descriptive biographical writing with only passing references to the poems themselves. With these two poets in particular, candidates must avoid the temptation to unpack all they know about the lives and personal suffering of the unfortunate pair. Certainly, in confessional poetry particularly, biography has a place in establishing relevant contexts but assertive claims about the relevance of poems to certain events in the poets' lives without due consideration of what connections could be made between the poets in the ways in which they present "death" made for low quality responses.

Very much the same points as those made above could be made again here for Q11. That said, it was pleasing to see the subtlety with which some approached "landscapes": the most adventurous looking at the highly imaginative elements of Plath's poetry as well as the precision with which both poets create mood and atmosphere in the ways in which they "make use of landscapes".

Larkin and Duffy

In their response to Q12, candidates needed to demonstrate their appreciation and understanding of the ways in which human emotions are presented or implied by both poets in complex and nuanced ways. There was some excellent writing on this topic with confident analyses of poems such as 'Talking in Bed' and 'Havisham' with candidates showing a genuine understanding of how a reading of one poet could illuminate and inform a reading of the other. Once again, over-emphasis of biographical detail led some candidates astray. It is always *the poetry* which leads the way.

Q13 was a very popular task where a good number of candidates showed an excellent appreciation and understanding of the ways in which humble or ordinary objects or situations could be imbued with such profound significance. Weaker responses tended to list examples of "minor details of domestic life" without showing how "curtains, thin and frayed" which fall "within five inches of the sill" or "One second hand bed" could be made to reveal such profound truths about human lives. Under AO4 it is vital to make connections between ideas and poetic techniques rather than simply similarities in subject matter or the details of the poets' lives.

Heaney and Sheers

While there was not a large number of responses to these two poets, Q14 proved popular amongst the small sample and was generally very well done. Candidates ranged widely in their selection of material to demonstrate the poets' "intense awareness of the physical world" and there was some confident writing about the ways in which both Heaney and Sheers linked their observations of the material world to more abstract and complex issues such as love, grief or regret. In some weaker responses, there was a hint that candidates were attempting to re-apply what might have been a practice essay on "landscapes" which limited the depth and coherence of their writing.

There were some enthusiastic responses to Q15 which aimed to demonstrate how "emotionally engaged" both poets appear to be. Lower performing essays did this mostly through assertion and appeals to a common understanding of the effects of love, bereavement, separation and so on. Better essays took a similar route but showed how emotional engagement was demonstrated through literary techniques. Only the strongest successfully tussled with the distinction in the task between emotional engagement and sentimentality. Those who appreciated that sentimentality (which tends to be a superficial quality) was avoided though the poets' choices of language, tone and imagery when dealing with emotive subjects were most successful here.

Once again, a sincere thanks to teachers for their hard work in delivering this component and congratulations to those candidates who seem to have profited so highly from their study of poetry.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

Overview of the Component

This year we saw better structuring and shaping of responses to the essay tasks. Most candidates included a plan at the start of the response, but sometimes they invested too much time in planning at the expense of developing points in the actual essay. It was pleasing to see a reduction in the number of pages in the answer booklet devoted to the essay in Section B, with a consequent improvement in focus and purposeful discussion.

Candidates need to ensure that they complete *all* the required questions. It is disappointing to see the Shakespeare part i) task either not attempted or given scant attention with only a brief paragraph in response to the extract.

Some general trends which emerged this year:

- It was notable across all Shakespeare extract questions that candidates' knowledge and understanding of the printed extract was less assured than in previous years. Some responses indicated an unfamiliarity with the extract, entailing an 'unseen' approach, while others made errors in reading and interpretation which hampered their performance considerably for this task. We hope that we will see a return to the practice of close reading and interrogation of the Shakespeare text. Not only does this benefit candidates for the part i) extract task, but close study benefits their performance when discussing the whole play in part ii).
- It was pleasing to see improved approaches to contexts, with an appreciable uptake in ideological contextual discussion for AO3.
- Examiners were also impressed with candidates' improved consideration of other views for AO5.
- Illegible handwriting, unfortunately, was all too frequent this year, and there are still candidates who have used gel pens, despite the instructions on the front of the question paper. When papers are e-marked, as this paper is, it is vital that the rules are followed regarding which type of pen to use, as it is extremely difficult to mark scripts if the scanned marking portion is illegible.
- Candidates must try to avoid one-sentence paragraphs, as we are seeing too many of these and they are a considerable impediment to the clarity and structure of the overall response.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A: SHAKESPEARE

King Lear

This text is a very popular text and shows no sign of losing its popularity.

Part i)

Most candidates grasped the circumstances of Gloucester's blinding in this extract, and most were able to comment on Gloucester's vulnerability and Regan's cruelty. However, many were unable to see that Gloucester was not referring to himself but to Lear in his references to 'his poor old eyes / his anointed flesh / his bare head / poor old heart / he help the heavens'. Consequently, this common misreading missed Gloucester's defiant loyalty to Lear and his compassion for his suffering on the heath at the hands of his daughters, and instead there were suggestions that Gloucester is self-pitying and feeble here. His brave attack on Regan and by extension Goneril, 'I shall see / The winged vengeance overtake such children' with its dramatic irony was not always grasped, and some candidates thought that Regan was calling Gloucester a 'dog' instead of the servant. The best answers made use of the servant as a foil to Regan in discussing how Regan is presented here, pointing out the second instance of defiant loyalty in the extract, this time to Gloucester. These responses also commented sensibly on Gloucester's opening line as an example of his endurance and bravery, with Shakespeare's use of animal imagery paving the way for the cruel suffering to come in this extract.

Part ii)

In general, candidates engaged readily with this essay question and discussed fully the many examples of the play's world as being 'all dark and comfortless'.

Many argued that the blinding scene and the storm scene represented the best examples, while others began with the seeds of darkness and lack of comfort being sown in the opening scene. There were interesting angles explored, with the sub-plot's paralleling of the main plot a popular route, as well as social considerations such as the treatment of the old and the poor and mentally ill in Edgar's representation of Poor Tom. Some gave careful consideration to whether there were any redeeming features to the world created in the play, producing cogently argued discussions of the importance of Cordelia, Kent and the Fool.

Some made use of significant cultural context and religious context was also explored.

Antony and Cleopatra

This text is growing in popularity every year.

Part i)

Most candidates grasped Antony's anger with Cleopatra here, but too many misunderstood the specific reason for his anger at this point in the play. Many assumed this exchange was straight after the point when Antony left the battle and chased after Cleopatra. Those who read the extract correctly understood that Antony is displaying as much jealousy here as anger, as he discloses the reason for his rage at Cleopatra after her question towards the end of the extract – he is in a jealous rage after seeing Cleopatra flirting with Thidias, Caesar's messenger – 'To let a fellow that will take rewards....be familiar with / My playfellow, your hand'. Once this situation is grasped, the attack on Cleopatra's sexual experience and promiscuity makes clearer sense. However, candidates who missed this important trigger were still able to be rewarded for grasping that his attack on Cleopatra is sexually motivated, many pointing out the use of food imagery, 'morsel' / 'fragment', to demean her and trivialise her relationships with other famous lovers, with key words attacking Cleopatra's morality: 'hotter hours' / 'vulgar' / 'Luxuriously' / 'you can guess what temperance should be' / 'You know not what it is'. The word 'boggler' was generally understood as a comment on Cleopatra's promiscuity and lack of dependability. Antony's reference to the gods and their *seeling* of men's eyes was taken by many as Antony trying to absolve himself of blame for his loss of judgement and 'adoring' his error. His use of 'viciousness' and 'filth' was seen as an awareness of his wrongdoing in partnering Cleopatra.

Part ii)

In general, candidates engaged well with the given view of the play. Many discussed fruitfully the differences between Egypt and Rome from the standpoints of both politics and love, while there were some very impressive explorations of Shakespeare's imagery of 'melting' and dissolution as playing a pivotal role in the presentation of themes of instability / shifting sands. Strong cases were made for Cleopatra's presentation subverting the audience's expectations towards the end of the play as her stability as leader of Egypt leading up to her suicide contrasted with Antony's perceived weak leadership as one of the Roman triumvirate and his instability as husband and lover. Many explored the idea of the stability of Octavius Caesar's leadership and argued for his shrewd management of his co-leaders and common enemies. Some excellent analyses of Shakespeare's presentation of the cultural ethos of Egypt were seen, with detailed and perceptive exploration of patterns of imagery in Shakespeare's depiction of the Nile.

Hamlet

This text is still a very popular choice for this paper.

Part i)

Most candidates were able to grasp the situation here of a fencing match between Hamlet and Laertes. Those who read the extract closely were able to understand Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony and explored how Hamlet may be presented as disingenuous, pleading forgiveness for his actions when he was not in his right state of mind- 'His madness' used as an excuse when the audience knows he adopted an 'antic disposition'. Several also argued that Laertes is being equally disingenuous, as he has concocted a plot with Claudius to kill Hamlet during this fencing match, and so, of course, there is more dramatic irony. The more adventurous responses made use of the setting and stagecraft and also the use of chivalric language, with some ably discussing the performative nature of this scene, and the two sets of audiences. There was some good discussion of the different types of language used by Laertes and Hamlet to express their positions and emotions, and most commented on Hamlet's repeated use of third person and the repetition of his name in asking for Laertes' forgiveness. The word 'brother' was frequently discussed as an indicator of fellow-feeling for Laertes, and a possible reference to Hamlet's hopes to have married Ophelia.

Part ii)

In general, there was purposeful engagement with the view in the essay question. Many agreed that Hamlet himself was his 'greatest obstacle', exploring key moments in the play, such as his reluctance to kill Claudius while he was apparently praying; killing Polonius; the closet scene with his mother and many others. A popular route into the question was through the soliloquies and many explored the significance of Hamlet as an overthinker. However, there were cogent arguments put forward regarding the role of the Ghost in the play and the difficulties of the task Hamlet was required to carry out. Contextual references to religion and cultural references to the Renaissance and the conventions of revenge tragedy enhanced arguments, as well as various critical theories and views of the play. Some candidates argued that Hamlet's greatest obstacle is the corrupt court of Elsinore, analysing the presentation of the court throughout the play and using the presentation of Claudius as a key factor in the overall corruption.

King Henry IV Part 1

This text is not as popular as others on this paper, but those who study it have clearly enjoyed reading it.

Part i)

The sense of the Prince's transformation at this point in the play was noted by most candidates, with some grasp shown of Vernon's high opinion of Harry set against Hotspur's more cynical view of his enemy. – 'challeng'd you to single fight' / 'Seem'd it in contempt?'

The stronger responses commented on the idea of honourable conduct as Vernon reports in eloquent iambic pentameter that the Prince praised Hotspur and showed 'grace', while also noting that the Prince is presented as a chivalric ideal here and a model prince, 'became him like a prince indeed'. The patriotic fervour shown by Vernon was noted by some as an instance of dramatic irony in view of the coming battle, 'England did never owe so sweet a hope'. Hotspur's feelings about the Prince were seen as mixed, as he shares the Prince's desire to settle the conflict man to man to save the deaths of many, while also making light of Vernon's glowing testimony with the word 'follies'.

Part ii)

Candidates varied in their approach to the essay question. Although both strands of the view in the question were addressed, some preferred to discuss the transformation of the Prince, with less attention paid to Falstaff. Others opted to discuss Falstaff's progress through the whole play, with attention more sparingly paid to Hal's progress. The question focus of 'wins our hearts and minds' gave rise to a mixed bag of opinions, some seeing Falstaff as the real hero of the play, his humorous attack on 'honour' discussed as a valuable attribute in winning our minds, while others saw the pathos of his changed relationship with the Prince winning our hearts.

This play offers the chance for candidates to engage with rich contextual material, and it was pleasing to see that this opportunity was taken up by most.

The Tempest

The Tempest continues to be a popular text.

Part i)

As noted in previous reports, some of the most sophisticated essays which examiners see in this section of the paper are in response to this play. Most candidates grasped Shakespeare's portrayal of the two lovers declaring their love and admiration for each other, with stronger responses commenting on the courtly love theme in Ferdinand's subservience as 'log-man'. There were several who argued that Ferdinand appears to boast of his experience with previous lovers, with the repetition of 'full many' supporting this idea, but most agreed that his admiration of Miranda is without question, using the 'So perfect and peerless' declaration as the best example. Some strong responses saw Miranda as bold and independent in her assertion that she would not 'wish / Any companion in the world but you' and also in her reference to her virginity 'the jewel in my dower' as an important virtue for any prospective husband. Others argued that she is still under Prospero's rule as she reins in her love and admiration for Ferdinand at the end of her speech by reminding herself of her 'father's precepts'. Only the most discerning remembered that Prospero had made Ferdinand a 'patient log-man' as a trial of the young man's love for Miranda and so were able to explore the contrast between his status as Prince with his now demeaning position in 'wooden slavery'. The lyrical language in Ferdinand's last speech from 'Hear my soul speak' was observed nicely, and there were no doubters of the love between these two characters. Others also explored Shakespeare's use of iambic pentameter and shared lines as evidence of the positive portrayal of the lovers. However, several made the point that Prospero has orchestrated this alliance, referencing the metaphor 'jewel' as a reminder of the transactional nature of this relationship from Prospero's perspective.

Part ii)

The extract question is intended to offer a 'springboard' into the essay question and this year was no exception. Most candidates explored the relationship between Ferdinand and Miranda more fully in their essay, arguing that although Prospero's scheming could potentially tarnish the love presented between these two, there was sufficient evidence that Shakespeare wants to see their love as meaningful and uplifting. The wedding masque was explored as a positive example of this love, as well as more detailed analysis of how Ferdinand and Miranda are presented at different points in the play. There was fruitful discussion of the father-daughter relationship, many reaching for Prospero's declaration that everything he does is for Miranda. Most argued that this is a loving relationship, but some cogently argued that Prospero's controlling character sometimes worked against this presentation. Love was explored more widely in terms of Caliban's relationship with Prospero and Caliban's evident love for the island. The Prospero-Ariel relationship was also examined as an interesting kind of love between master and servant. However, many argued that it is hate and revenge which dominate this play and that sibling love is absent between Prospero and Antonio, despite the play's ending. Not many explored the idea of self-love in the case of Prospero.

SECTION B: DRAMA

Candidates this year generally seemed better prepared for the management of the different AOs they need to address for this essay task. This was evident in the opening paragraphs where a brief engagement with all or some AOs was immediately evident. However, there is sometimes insufficient focus on the double-weighted task of making connections (AO4) and consequently vital marks are lost. It is important to answer the key aspects of the question. One question choice asks for a response to the stated critical view in terms of its application to both plays, while the other asks for candidates to explore connections with a given focus, 'in the light of' the stated view. Candidates sometimes spend too long on the stated view in the second question choice, examining it in detail rather than giving sufficient time for exploring the actual focus of connections.

The strongest responses came up with connections between the plays that were perceptive, sometimes surprising and original, and well-founded, as shown by developed AO2 analysis. The most popular pairing by a considerable margin is still *The Duchess of Malfi* / *A Streetcar Named Desire*, where again examiners were very impressed with the enthusiasm for both texts shown across the range of ability. *Doctor Faustus* / *Enron*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* / *Betrayal* are continuing to attract new centres, and we saw some very thoughtful essays written on these texts, as well as on the other text pairings. Given that this paper examines only 'closed book' texts, it is remarkable how learners continue to analyse the texts in depth and detail, integrating relevant, sometimes illuminating contextual material and discussing other view of the plays with critical rigour, while tackling a question which asks them to compare two quite different plays.

Doctor Faustus* / *Enron

Those who attempted Q6 tended to either agree with the given critical view or disagree, arguing that the 'primary' focus instead is overreaching. Whichever approach was taken, most engaged with the idea of individual power being abused, the power of knowledge being a popular candidate focus, as well as the power of individuals within a broader framework such as the Enron corporation. Examiners saw plenty of good contextual discussion regarding the two different time periods and cultures, and this year candidates seemed very willing to analyse stagecraft and settings in depth and detail. There were very effective comparisons and also contrasts established, with several commenting that Faustus' fate evokes more audience sympathy at the end than Skilling's punishment as he was 'under the control of Mephistopheles' while Skilling was a completely free agent.

Q7 gave candidates a specific focus in the stem of the question – 'explore connections between...presentation of ideas about wealth' – but some focused instead only on the initial quoted view. Many engaged with ideas such as the wealth of knowledge as well as material wealth and the wealth of self-gratification, 'profit and delight'. Most seemed to see no value in the pursuit of wealth and explored the contextual backgrounds for confirmation that both central characters would find no support for their actions and beliefs from their respective worlds.

The Duchess of Malfi / A Streetcar Named Desire

Both questions were equally popular. Q8 responses generally agreed that key characters were vivid and memorable but seemed less keen to explore the 'lack of morals' angle. Candidates understandably explored familiar territory such as attitudes towards female sexuality, and there were the usual frequent references to 'toxic masculinity'. Both of these avenues were productive in discussing the morality/immorality of Blanche and the Duchess, but many argued that the Duchess' morality was not in question, only when judged by the moral standards of her own society, while Blanche's promiscuous behaviour, especially with the young boy, was universally condemned. *The Duchess of Malfi* text was forensically examined for evidence of not just immorality but amorality, and it was pleasing to see the rigour in textual analysis for this play this year. Every year we see impressively detailed analysis of *A Streetcar named Desire*, and this year those standards were maintained, with a more focused approach this year to the stagecraft and settings of both plays, which led to productive connections (AO4). It was also encouraging to see how purposefully contexts were used to support arguments, many pointing out the importance of religion as well as social class for *Malfi*.

Some of those who chose Q9 spent some considerable time discussing the quotation in detail, and spent a little less time on the actual question focus of the presentation of 'ideas about illusion and reality'. Consequently, too much time was spent comparing and contrasting the 'unforgiving, harsh society' in both plays and too little on the explicit connections focus of 'ideas about illusion and reality'. However, there were many excellent essays in response to this question, as candidates argued that dreams/illusions are integral to the situation of entrapment which Blanche and the Duchess both find themselves in within their very different time periods. Contrasts were found between the two heroines and their desires/dreams, with many noting that in Blanche's case, her dreams are rooted in the privileged past of Belle Reve, while the Duchess' dreams are rooted in the future with her husband and children. Examiners saw very pertinent and well-crafted arguments regarding Blanche's illusions about herself and her Southern Belle identity, comparing her reactions to adversity at the close of the play with the Duchess' dignified and stoic behaviour at her end. In general, candidates across the range of ability were able to discuss stagecraft, setting and dialogue in detail, and there was a sharper focus this year on other critical views of the plays. Cultural context in particular featured in an increasing number of responses this year, and most worked hard to integrate this into their central argument. However, we are still seeing some very brief engagement with contexts, where only sweeping assumptions are made about attitudes towards women over time and about women's actual lives during the relevant period.

The Revenger's Tragedy / Loot

Once again this year, examiners were treated to some excellent responses on these two plays, and both questions were equally popular. It is interesting to note that this text pairing's popularity with centres is growing.

For both questions, responses were frequently informed by illuminating contextual discussion, and the best fruitfully compared the use of stagecraft, setting and dialogue across the two plays. Candidates were able to engage readily with the disturbing yet comical undertones of both Middleton's and Orton's texts and also grasped the importance of audience for these two plays. Critical views were on the whole judiciously selected, and in some cases the candidate's autonomous reading of these plays was as sophisticated as the expert views quoted.

Those who chose Q10 generally agreed with the given statement, offering astute analysis of the bleakness and pessimism in both plays, but the strongest candidates also argued cogently for the dramatic impact of 'creating opportunities for laughter'. One candidate noted that "both playwrights employ the conventions of farce which makes the audience complicit in the disturbing contents of each narrative, revealing our own 'human nature' to find comedy in what, perhaps, we should fear."

Q11 was also popular, with most candidates agreeing that hypocrisy is an obvious focus in both plays but also arguing that there is a great deal more than this in both plays. Religious hypocrisy was seen to dominate the discussion for many, but also the hypocrisy within social institutions and rituals and the hypocrisy of political institutions were examined. Some explored the relationship between power and hypocrisy, with focused discussion on the corruption of authority figures. One candidate observed: "Orton's black farce dismantles the façade of the respectability of 1960's England, reflecting the idea that institutions such as the police force are not pillars of order – which they should be – but rather agents of manipulation."

Lady Windermere's Fan / Betrayal

This year we saw a marked increase in the number of candidates who study these two plays. Once again examiners were treated to some perceptive and highly academic responses to both questions, and it was pleasing to see how fully engaged candidates were with both plays, especially in terms of their dialogue and social contexts.

Q12 appeared to be less popular than Q13, but both allowed candidates to make connections between the plays, as the issue of 'domestic' applies readily to both, as well as the idea of 'the plays appealing to those with 'social privilege'. Most argued that Wilde's play is more obviously focused on a socially privileged society and directed towards a socially privileged audience of its time, but several saw the modern equivalents of appealing to the socially privileged in *Betrayal*, for example the significance of 'squash' and the holiday in Taormina. However, the most discerning argued that Pinter appears to criticise rather than to entertain, and the appeal of this play may be broader in scope than the Wilde play. The darker elements of Emma's marriage were explored and the reverse chronology was discussed as an important contrast to Wilde's dramatic techniques in *Lady Windermere's Fan*.

While *Lady Windermere* is of course a lady of leisure with servants, many thought that her attention to the roses at the start of the play is enough indication of her 'domestic' role and significance, and the stronger responses argued that the word 'domestic' implies a less significant dramatic context, highly appropriate for a 'comedy of manners'. In *Betrayal*, 'domestic' was seized upon more literally, with Emma's attempts to improve the flat with various domestic symbols. There was plenty of pertinent discussion of dialogue as evidence of various social attitudes, and importantly many argued that the issues of women's domination and exclusion by men make both plays serious vehicles for social messaging.

Q13 gave free rein to those who wanted to write about gender equality in both plays, and most explored the dialogue and behaviour of key characters in depth and detail. Some approached the topic through a discussion about power and a popular view was that 'women are unequal and submissive within society in both plays'. Most seemed to see Mrs Erlynne as the only female character with power and autonomy, while Agatha represented the opposite end of the spectrum. There was a strong focus on staging in both plays to illustrate gender inequality, with candidates frequently pointing that women have to secretly 'listen in to men' while hiding. The blunter dialogue by Robert and Jerry in *Betrayal* when Emma asks to join them in squash was seen as a harsher example of domineering and dismissive attitudes to women, while others delighted in exploring the more subtle and nuanced satirical dialogue of *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Overall, it was encouraging to see genre-based discussion of both plays informing central arguments, with candidates using sound literary contextual knowledge to develop their connections.

Measure for Measure / Murmuring Judges

As noted in previous reports, very few centres study this pairing. However, those who do study these plays clearly enjoy the opportunity to discuss the power of different social contexts and the social issues which arise in close comparative study. There were several very focused and ably argued responses to the idea of ‘what needs radical reform’ in Q14, and many concentrated on the abuse of power in law and justice departments / institutions and the need for society to break down intolerance and prejudice as an important starting point. Strong cases were made for the dramatic use of the female characters, with one very able candidate observing “Both female idealists, Irina and Isabella, highlight the ingrained corruption within both societies, but pose a threat to its ability to occur by forcefully opposing societal failures.”

A very small minority attempted Q15, but their main focus in discussing the ‘presentation of morality’ was appropriately on the individuals in whom the audiences see the embodiment of virtue or vice. As noted in previous reports, the standard of discussion on these texts was consistently high, with most candidates showing an impressive grasp of concepts and issues, as well as their social contexts and a keen appreciation of the plays’ stagecraft and characterisation.

Summary of key points

- Candidates should think carefully about all aspects of an essay question and should make sure they are fully engaged with the explicit focus in the question.
- There is no need for over-long notes and plans which detract from the time available to develop a good argument.
- Shorter sentences should be encouraged. Too many candidates are using one sentence paragraphs which ramble awkwardly and the examiner has to try to find the different points made. Please aim for coherence and cogency rather than quantity.
- Contexts are only useful if they support the point made or are helpful to the discussion of the question. Sweeping, uninformed statements about how people were treated in various time periods are of little consequence without specific examples. Candidates are now better at using literary / cultural material for contexts, and this is to be encouraged.
- Avoid using critical views if they are not relevant or especially if they are fabricated. There must be evidence of purposeful use.
- All candidates should use their time wisely and ensure that *all* tasks they are required to do on this paper are attempted. It is not sensible to leave out the Shakespeare extract question, and we encourage candidates to start with this in Section A, as it is intended to be a helpful stimulus for the Shakespeare essay. Leaving this question to the end is unhelpful to both candidate and examiner, as when scripts are scanned the detachment of this task from the rest of the section response can be problematic.
- Finally, we ask all candidates to try to improve the legibility of their handwriting and not to use gel pens as instructed on the front of the paper. This year was more challenging than usual, with a higher number of scripts which were extremely difficult to read. Examiners should not have to guess a word. Marks will undoubtedly be compromised if the clarity of the script is seriously impaired. If a candidate has a real problem with being able to write clearly, it is advisable to submit a request to word process the script instead

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

Overview of the Component

As with previous reports, this one must start with congratulations to both candidates and centres for their dedication and efforts in preparing for this paper in the Summer 2025 series. It is always a pleasure to see the hard work that has been happening in classrooms and homes come through in the individual and thoughtful responses we have the privilege to mark.

Examiners are increasingly seeing the evidence of educators reading, engaging with and acting upon the feedback from previous Principal Examiner Reports. There are fewer centres where candidates are being taught to use pre-prepared formulaic essays or include irrelevant pre-learnt information. The message that candidates should be considering literary concepts appropriate to the form and text seems to be having an effect, but we are still seeing too many candidates discussing assonance or alliteration in prose texts where alternative prose concepts would have been more suitable and given them more opportunities to develop their analysis. The format of the mark scheme this year should support centres in considering this further.

As has been said previously, giving candidates access to a range of poetry and prose to engage with and discuss throughout the course remains an excellent way to prepare candidates for this exam. Building experience and confidence in exploring and responding to unseen texts is something that would benefit all candidates regularly throughout their study.

A challenge faced by examiners which is undoubtedly also faced in centres is the difficulty in reading some candidates' handwriting. Examiners try their best to read everything a candidate has written in their response but marks cannot be awarded for the illegible parts of an essay.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A: UNSEEN PROSE

Similar to last year, there was a slightly higher proportion of candidates opting to respond on Q1 (1880-1910) compared to Q2 (1919-1939). Responses to both questions represented a range of ability and the challenges of the two extracts were found to be different but equal in their accessibility.

Despite Q1 having three different supporting materials and Q2 having only two, there was range of critical and contextual material for candidates to use whichever their question choice. The majority of candidates engaged with these well, using them to inform their reading and shape their response. We are seeing more candidates engage with these early on in their overviews or initial paragraphs and shape their arguments around them which is one way of using the supporting extracts. The supporting materials provided a good prompt to discuss some context but both extracts also gave candidates the opportunity to draw on their understanding of the time periods and use this in their response. A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information or felt the need to include irrelevant or sweeping statements. The Principal Examiner would like to remind centres and candidates that context should be discussed in relation to the text and that candidates should be showing their appreciation and understanding of the significance and influence of context, not just listing statements about the time periods.

More than previous years, we also saw candidates referring to past papers in their responses discussing specific extracts that have been used on Section A: Unseen Prose before as though they mark definitive literary moments of that time period. We would discourage centres and candidates from taking this approach as some of these candidates spent too much time writing about previous extracts instead of the one on the paper. They consequently missed opportunities to explore the text in front of them.

There were very few candidates who only referred to one supporting extract and these were self-limiting in their response. Successful candidates were able to select different parts of the statements and apply them to their argument effectively. There were some excellent examples of candidates challenging the critical statements and becoming mature in their discussions.

More and more candidates were beginning their essays with clear overviews of the unseen texts and showing the direction of their argument in the opening lines. The candidates who had planned, considered the shape of their essay and spent time thinking about the organisation of ideas were more successful not only with their AO1 where this is rewarded, but also with other assessment objectives.

Question 1: 1880-1910

Six Women – Victoria Cross

Candidates who wrote on this extract were immediately engaged with contextual ideas linked to the attitudes towards women, marriage and divorce. The passage also provided opportunities to explore working lives, colonisation and ideas of duty and responsibility, which many candidates also considered.

Almost all candidates were engaging with the supporting materials on some level. Generally, candidates dealt well with discussing both AO3 and AO5 with many using the supporting materials more than once to make their discussions purposeful and clear. The more successful responses had thought about engaging with how Cross might be showing 'a note of revolt' or had a 'willingness to challenge the taboos', unpicking these ideas with some nuanced debate. Less successful responses used elements of the supportive extracts as 'fact', citing Hamilton's marriage, for example, as only continuing because 'divorce was rare' or that Cross wrote about a marriage because it was a 'human relationship' with no further discussion.

A real positive is that candidates are picking apart the supporting materials and using elements of them that are relevant to their arguments. However, they should be encouraged to consider how they engage with them and develop their discussion of them in relation to AO2.

Many candidates found the text rich in opportunities for analysis with most finding something relevant to say about Hamilton's description of his wife, his surroundings and his characterisation. It was lovely to see candidates making reference to some of the 'gothic' style of imagery, showing a breadth of literary understanding and the ability to bring in their reading experience.

The extract did invite exploration of Hamilton's view of his wife or his own expectations of marriage and some candidates did this well, considering the nature of the narration, language and time it was written. However, some candidates were keen to use modern day concepts and understandings of terms such as 'toxic masculinity' without a literary foundation.

Question 2 – 1919-1939

The Judge – Rebecca West

The majority of candidates who chose to answer on 1919-1939 identified a range of relevant elements in the passage such as the colour imagery in the opening paragraph, military language later in the extract, the free indirect discourse to give insight into the protagonist and the development of character. The majority of candidates were able to address the extract as a whole and make connections across the text.

The extract invited candidates to explore a range of contextual ideas such as the conditions of the poor, social divisions and women's employment. Perhaps the context discussed most often by candidates, however, was the Suffragettes and the 'laws of patriarchy'.

As with Q1, almost all candidates were able to utilise the critical statements at some level with a contextual focus on the Scott quotation. Some even explored the idea of whether West 'grappled constantly' and discussed the supporting materials with maturity and thought. The Stetz extract also proved popular and accessible to candidates with many responses able to support or challenge the idea that West had the 'desire' to 'replicate' or 'surpass' the effects of painters, effectively integrating AO2.

One concern that was evidenced in number of responses, was candidates' understanding of how context might influence a writer. There were many answers that suggested West was deliberately 'foreshadowing' future events such as World War II, Second Wave Feminism or the achievement of full suffrage for women. Centres are encouraged to remind candidates of how to discuss context that might affect a *reading* of the extract but not the *writing* of it.

There were still too many candidates who inserted pre-learnt context about industrialisation or women or war into their essay without really exploring the effect of this on the text. They seemed confident with the knowledge they had but unable to actually apply that knowledge to literary analysis. While a broad understanding of the time period and social, cultural and literary context can be valuable to integrate into an answer, it must be linked to the text. It is worth looking at the language of the assessment criteria and recognising that 'connections between unseen texts and contexts' are rewarded.

SECTION B: UNSEEN POETRY

It is important to remember that in all other areas of this specification, candidates are given some guidance when approaching analysis of a text whether that be a question with a critical statement, prior study of texts, supporting extracts or a question they have formulated themselves with support from teachers. In the unseen poetry part of the course, the question requires them to 'analyse in detail the following poem' with no other prompt or steer.

This can be daunting for students who have not been taught how to engage with unseen texts but can also be exciting and liberating for those who have been given the opportunity to learn how to develop individual, thoughtful and considered responses to literature and feel confident in doing so.

Those who lack this confidence often cling to the parts that make up the poem; they hope that feature spotting, describing how many lines it has or writing out the rhyme scheme is enough because they do not feel confident engaging with poetic concepts like ambiguity, implicit meaning or imagery. As stated previously in this report and in previous years, providing candidates with as much exposure to a range of poetry and other literature is a great foundation for success in this component. Similarly, encouraging in this year's paper, both poems provided candidates with plenty of ways to access the full range of marks. For the first time, both poems were sonnets and many candidates were able to effectively engage with the form and structure alongside the meaning and language.

Of the two, 'Sonnet 54' by Edmund Spenser was the more popular choice with the vast majority of candidates answering on Q4. However, there were a range of responses to 'The Gossamer' by Charlotte Smith, many of which proved thoughtful and engaged.

We again saw fewer template-style answers this year and more candidates beginning with a clear overview or showing the focus of the candidate's analysis. Some less successful responses, however, were still starting with a list of techniques or the number of lines in the poem which can take candidates valuable time when they could be analysing or evaluating the writer's methods. Candidates are encouraged to spend time reading and reflecting on their ideas before writing so this 'warm up' to their answer can become a more considered and engaged overview of the poem, showing where their response is heading. As with the prose section, the more successful answers have been well-planned and the candidate has control of its direction when they begin.

It was reassuring to see candidates discussing poetic concepts in place of linguistic terms. Perhaps both poems being sonnets helped here. However, there was still a great deal of time spent naming language features that might have been better spent discussing the effect of poetic or literary techniques. While candidates are not marked down for using linguistic terms, a focus on this can lead them away from useful literary analysis and, in such a short exam, misapplication of their time can mean missed opportunities.

As with previous years, unsupported assertions were seen too frequently. Perhaps these were a result of candidates assuming a full understanding of the poem after an initial reading rather than spending more time reading and planning before beginning their response. Candidates must be careful not to presume they have got a full understanding after just one or two readings and be cautious if they think the poems seem 'easy' on first engagement.

There were some responses that were very short in length or were rushed towards the end with paragraphs becoming a rapid list of points; perhaps candidates need more experience of managing full papers to learn how to balance their time between Section A and Section B.

Question 3

'Sonnet LXIII: The Gossamer' – Charlotte Smith

The less popular choice amongst candidates, potentially because of the unfamiliar word in the title. However, the poem provided a range of moments for analysis and exploration and many candidates met with success. There were some good overviews, demonstrating engagement from the start. Stronger responses were able to show sound grasp of meaning when discussing the change in tone and atmosphere between the octet and the sestet, the fanciful reference to fairies and the effects of the image patterns. Even those candidates who were unclear as to the meaning of 'gossamer' were able to analyse implicit meaning, the contrasts between the beauty of morning and 'wither'd heath' and ideas of fragility.

The majority of candidates were able to comment on the structure of the sonnet with many making thoughtful connections between form and meaning. There were some generalised and inaccurate comments about sonnets always being about 'love' or always having particular rhyme schemes which candidates were not marked down for but did lead them away from valuable analysis.

There were a number of responses that only had a simple understanding or imposed their own meanings onto the poem, perhaps having assumed an initial reading was enough to grasp implicit meaning. Careful reading and re-reading, as previously advised, would have given candidates more time for processing their ideas, putting them on trial and then selecting the ones that could be substantiated by the text.

Question 4

'Sonnet 54' – Edmund Spenser

The more popular choice, Spenser's sonnet provided a series of challenges that were met with success by many candidates. Many of the successful responses engaged with the various elements of the poem such as exploring the contrasts between the speaker and their lover, identifying the central conceit and discussing the effect of the poet's language choices.

Less successful responses had a superficial understanding of the poem with some suggesting the title might be Spenser's 54th attempt at writing this sonnet. Others commented on parts of the poem in isolation or discussed the subjects as though they were real people and speculated about their relationship. There were elements of the text, however, that candidates responded well to, including 'senseless stone', the 'worlds theatre' and 'the spectator idly sits'.

The majority of candidates were able to comment on the structure of the sonnet with many making thoughtful connections between form and meaning. There were some generalised and inaccurate comments about sonnets always being about 'love' or always having particular rhyme schemes which candidates were not marked down for but did lead them away from valuable analysis.

As mentioned in previous reports, it was as though candidates had read the title and opening lines and presumed the poem was straight forward and, therefore, there was very little to explore. It is important to remember that the poems selected are provided for all candidates and offer the opportunity to achieve marks in all bands. To achieve Band 5 marks, candidates must demonstrate sophisticated analysis and evaluation of writers' use of poetic techniques and be fully engaged with the text.

Summary of key points

- Candidates who have regular experience of engaging with a range of prose and poetry throughout the course and who have learnt how to respond to literature independently will undoubtedly be more confident when approaching this paper. This is more valuable than essay templates, pre-learnt context or linguistic terminology when it comes to analysing literature for meaning.
- Reading, re-reading and planning gives candidates more time to carefully consider the text, organise their ideas, select relevant material and shape their essay. This is worthwhile not just for AO1 but also for the other AOs being assessed.
- In Section A, candidates should avoid including pre-learnt contextual material that becomes divorced from the analysis of the text and takes time away from their engagement with the supporting materials. Any pre-learnt context should support candidates in their understanding of how meaning has been shaped and be closely connected to the text.
- Engagement with the critical materials is rewarded for quality of discussion and any time spent by candidates to challenge, consider and link these to their response is valuable. The candidate should be doing the work with the critical materials, not just quoting the critical material and expecting it to do the work for them.
- Make careful and accurate use of literary rather than linguistic terminology, recognising the form of the text, whether poetry or prose, and using the most suitable concepts.
- Remember that the business of critical analysis is to draw-out meaning rather than to impose or assert it or, even, speculate about fictional personas' lives.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2025

COMPONENT 4 (NEA): PROSE STUDY

Overview of the Component

As a synoptic, independent unit of work, the Non-Examined Assessment component functions within the wider A Level literature qualification to provide an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their independent planning, crafting and editing skills without the constraints of timed conditions. Most importantly, the process undertaken enables candidates to hone and refine their personal style and develop autonomous study habits that will enable them to thrive and succeed in tertiary education, should they desire to pursue further study of essay based subjects. Hence, all assessment objectives are covered in this unit.

Consequently, the most successful centres skilfully support their candidates to select texts, craft titles and compose essays that enable the production of literary responses and ensure that focus is sustained on evaluation of writers' methods and comparisons between texts. As noted in last year's report, the most effective literary responses are driven by AO2 and AO4, whilst AO1, broadly defined as a productive and illuminating line of argument, is robustly centred on textual evidence and evaluation. Less successful centres typically allow candidates to pursue a contextual approach to tasks, often resulting in sweeping generalisations about historical and biographical contexts, which do little to enhance lines of argument. The equal weighting of AO3 alongside AO1 and AO2 may well mislead centres in this respect, yet the guidance relating to what constitutes illuminating and productive application of contextual knowledge is the same for all components studied for the A Level literature qualification. Nearly all centres would benefit from developing candidates' appreciation of literary context.

One of the distinguishing features of A Level literature study, as opposed to GCSE study, is the inclusion of wider critical reading. It is noted that the most successful NEA candidates tend to attach bibliographies which include academic literary criticism and are not overly reliant on online study sites. Centres are encouraged to support understanding of how to engage with literary criticism as early as possible in the course, whilst also ensuring that students appreciate that wider reading is not a substitute for independent textual evaluation and, in fact, productive and illuminating consideration of alternative literary views is only possible after independent thought and reflection.

It can be helpful to always keep in mind that this component is a prose study and that apart from any study undertaken of prose texts in Year 12, this is the only opportunity students have to engage with extended prose at A Level. The unseen component also supports the development of prose analysis skills and the guidance and support materials recommended for this component can enhance candidates' understanding of relevant skills and approaches. Where centres have clearly provided a structured support programme – including coverage of specific study skills, support with task setting and text selection and signposting of wider reading – candidates tend to be much more successful. It can be worth remembering that the deadline for submission is always 15 May in Year 13 and that the standards required for success remain consistent throughout Year 12 and Year 13, whereas candidates' composition and evaluation skills clearly develop. Thus, centres may benefit from considering how support for the NEA can be integrated into the course as a whole, including editing opportunities in Year 13 to enable demonstration of the developed ability to apply the relevant skills for each assessment objective.

In centres where best practice was evident, high academic expectations of all learners enabled the highest performing candidates to produce autonomous work, which actually exceeded the top standards required for A Level. These essays were a joy to read, reflecting a love of literature and evidencing exceptional teaching and support of the underpinning literary skills. Indeed, the component functions effectively to support the production of exceptional independent work for candidates at all levels of prior attainment and it was gratifying to see how many centres provide opportunities for a wide range of candidates to engage with the study of A Level literature. Final outcomes were most robust where approaches to text choice and task setting had been adjusted to support candidates' individual prior attainment and knowledge. Thus, although perhaps lacking the flair of top band students, there were some highly engaged, personal responses at Band 3 level, which were fully in the spirit of the NEA. Where improvement is needed, this tends to be linked to processes around delivery, levels of support required and moderation processes: less experienced teachers are advised to seek Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) support from Senior Leadership. Further guidance is provided below.

All teachers are to be commended for their commitment to candidates' academic development by supporting them to produce this challenging extended essay. It is well understood that delivery, supervision and assessment of this component is also very challenging. In the best centres, candidates had clearly been inspired to develop a love of literature and this is hugely appreciated.

Tasks

Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

In line with guidance from previous moderators' reports and in the spirit of the NEA, the most successful and effective centres had ensured that candidates adopted a literary approach and quality assured the production of effective questions. The task below epitomises best practice in this respect:

"Fictional letter-writing always allows novelists to celebrate their own process of literary creation." In light of this statement, compare and contrast the ways in which Thomas Hardy and Ian McEwan present letters and their significance in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Atonement*. In the course of your answer, you must consider the importance of relevant contextual influences on both texts.

Whilst many centres had adopted a similar structure, a common misconception was evident in that less successful candidates failed to engage with the critical statement itself, and in the least effective examples, the quotation was non-literary and not linked to the texts or question. Based on the models provided in examined units, the question above is effective because it includes 'loaded terms', which effectively invite critical engagement. The candidate is required to address how far they agree with the terms 'always' and 'celebrate', enabling a critical line of argument to be crafted from first planning. Such an approach discourages the reproduction of pre-learned content, as is cautioned against in all components, and enables thoughtful engagement with AO5 and AO1 from the start.

Focusing on the motif of letter-writing also successfully enabled a literary focus in this example, supporting the candidate to hone in on precisely how the writers employed letters to illuminate wider themes. Equally, the reminder: '*in the course of your answer*', contextual influences must be linked to the texts, served to prompt the candidate to use contextual knowledge, including reference to relevant literary context, to illuminate a literary reading. An over-reliance on what may colloquially be described as 'bolt-on' context tends to characterise weaker responses. It cannot be stressed enough that literary evaluation is the driving assessment objective of all literature essays.

Finally, the prompt to '*compare and contrast*' reminded the candidate to construct a sustained comparative piece, addressing both texts in each paragraph. Although dealing with texts in separate paragraphs is not a proscribed approach to the NEA, centres should be aware that responses where comparison is not integrated and sustained across assessment objectives are unlikely to access marks in the highest bands. Centres are advised to remember at all times that final marks are not holistic and individual marks are given for each objective. If centres fail to ensure that candidates are addressing all assessment objectives, final outcomes will be severely impacted.

An example of a less effective question structure is given below.

Compare and contrast how Mohsin Hamid and E.M. Forster present borders and barriers in *Exit West* and *A Room with a View*. Although this is an interesting and fruitful text comparison, focused on exploring a potentially illuminating and productive literary motif, the absence of a critical statement with 'loaded terms' means that the candidate has to work harder to construct a line of argument. Although many candidates write effective essays without having a critical statement to debate as a starting point, there can be no doubt that their task is subsequently more challenging.

The most successful candidates begin with a clear, critical thesis in their introductory paragraph and then proceed to effectively structure exploratory paragraphs that develop a cohesive line of argument, which builds to a conclusion. The risk posed by questions structured as the one above is that candidates may subside into generically listing the different ways a motif is presented, without properly considering why. A disturbing number of candidates failed to commence their essays with clear introductions. Hence, it is advised that support is given with planning.

In a small number of cases, candidates had been disadvantaged by a lack of opportunity for autonomy. In some centres, particularly where all candidates had been taught the same two texts, there was duplication of content, including critical viewpoints, contextual information and even the exact same literary analysis and inclusion of a limited range of quotations. As a result, these candidates struggled to formulate independent lines of inquiry and were thus effectively debarred from accessing the highest marks. Although it is not proscribed to teach all candidates the same two texts, centres who choose this option must take extra care to ensure a wide variety of tasks are provided. Ideally, candidates should select their own area of interest but be supported with crafting an effective title. It is highly recommended that centres do not allow candidates to answer the same questions on the same texts, especially where these texts have been taught in class. Equally, the very small number of centres which have been teaching the same two texts and recycling the same questions each year, regardless of candidates' personal interests and needs, would benefit from reviewing their approach and studying the online examples of the highest quality work.

Where centres feel candidates need more support, it can be helpful to teach one shared set text that can be linked to a range of partner texts. Such an approach is more in keeping with the spirit of the NEA and also more robustly supports candidates in the development of skills needed for tertiary education. Best practice was evident in centres where texts and tasks had clearly been thoughtfully paired with teachers' knowledge of candidates' prior attainment and current level of skill. For learners aspiring for the highest marks in all components, it is entirely right that full autonomy in terms of text and task choice should be encouraged. However, most candidates require more support and the promotion of autonomy should not be at the expense of outcomes for those individuals who may lack flair and legitimately require guidance in terms of making appropriate text and task choices.

There were some superb text combinations and choices this year, which made for fascinating reading. All texts were appropriate and approved. Although freedom of choice is encouraged, centres may find it helpful to bear in mind that texts for which there exists accessible literary commentary can be most productive to study, especially if access to quality print-based critical material is problematic. Best practice was evident in centres where candidates supplied academic and literary references. Quality online materials are perfectly valid but centres do still need to be mindful that candidates do not rely too heavily on poor quality online revision sites or AI summaries. For this reason, it is highly recommended that, where possible, candidates use quality editions of texts, which, if possible, include literary introductions. Nevertheless, care still needs to be taken that candidates are not over-reliant on the interpretations of others. For example, some essays discussing *Wide Sargasso Sea* made somewhat heavy use of the critical introduction to the Penguin edition at the expense of the candidates' own literary analysis of the text. In general, centres appear to be managing the challenges associated with the advent of AI in recent years. This technological development makes the inclusion of a detailed bibliography, accurate citation of references and the construction of a question that fosters an independent critical response more important than ever.

In the majority of centres, candidates across the range of attainment had been encouraged to think for themselves and structure independent lines of argument. Teachers are to be commended for their commitment to their students and, in the case of the centres where best practice and the most successful outcomes were evident, should be recognised for the high expectations instilled in their learners. It is advised that all centres are given time on at least an annual basis to allow teachers to meet and ensure their shared understanding of the standards. In particular, it would be useful for all A Level teachers to be given time to discuss examples of the very best work candidates are able to produce, so as to ensure they are able to support the autonomous production process.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

Most centres are to be commended for the accuracy and professionalism of their assessment processes, which are transparent, thorough and fair. In centres where assessment was weaker, it often seemed the case that teachers would have benefitted from more time in terms of training or support with the rigour and demands of accurate assessment and thorough and precise moderation processes.

All teachers are reminded that the purpose of the external moderation process is to quality assure the centre's accurate application of the standards. Thus, the external process functions as an invaluable professional development opportunity, enabling teachers to critically reflect on the accuracy and validity of their professional judgements. As the same assessment objectives and standards are in use across every component of the A Level course, accuracy in the NEA reassures teachers that their application and understanding of the standards is correct and, for the benefits of candidates, Heads of Centre and tertiary education, accurate predictions can be made. More importantly, teaching and learning can subsequently be honed and developed for the benefit of candidates and their eventual outcomes. Senior Leaders in centres are advised to support teachers with time to undertake this work, so as not to inadvertently disadvantage their candidates.

The very best centres had firstly ensured that primary markers were able to confidently apply the standards across all assessment objectives and could annotate individual essays with detailed comments linked precisely to the band criteria. It was also helpful to see how marks had been determined to see where less strong practice had been identified. Although there is no requirement to mark all lapses in written accuracy, it is nevertheless best practice to underline some common examples of lapses so as to support the award of an accurate mark for AO1. At the end of each essay, the very best primary markers had also included summative comments linked precisely to the criteria and justifying the mark awarded. As each essay is up to 3,500 words long, time needs to be allocated to ensure the best chance of accurate primary marking.

Centres where there is only one marker or where staff are new to the specification are advised to contact Eduqas to seek support with training linked to accurate application of the standards prior to commencing assessment of students' work and, ideally, prior to commencing teaching of the course.

In some larger centres, with multiple classes, despite evidence of both outstanding work and outstanding application of the standards, there was, at times, inconsistency evident between different teachers. In these cases, it is advised that departmental training be conducted so that more experienced and expert assessors can support less experienced or accurate colleagues to develop.

Centres where assessment was deemed insecure would also do well to review their moderation processes. In some cases, although there was evidence of secondary (and even tertiary) marking, this was not always supported with annotation or comment. Hence the arrival at final marks was often opaque to moderators and it was unclear why some candidates' marks had been changed. In the worst case examples, marks were adjusted on the cover sheets without edits being made to the overall summative comments and, in some cases, a third assessor had inaccurately increased marks with no reason given, despite more accurate initial marking from primary and secondary markers.

For the significant minority of centres where either marking was deemed to be too generous or the rank order was not agreed, it is recommended that more time be taken next year to ensure the accuracy of the rank order. To be clear, this means that once all primary marking has been completed, all work needs to be rank ordered and then moderated in comparison to the Eduqas standardising materials. It is not possible to accurately rank order work at different times, as ensuring accuracy of assessment necessitates evaluating the work alongside a continuum of standards. In some centres it appeared that work had been 'moderated' in isolation, hence the rank order was often, in these cases, inaccurate. If you require support and guidance around the moderation process, do not hesitate to contact Eduqas.

In some cases, it was evident that teachers had been called upon to fill a breach in a centre's provision and perhaps had not had time to access relevant training. For a small minority of candidates, it was also sadly apparent that difficult individual circumstances had impacted on their ability to complete the work to standard. Teachers are to be commended for their dedication to their students in often very difficult circumstances.

All teachers should be proud of the high-quality work produced by their candidates in response to a very challenging brief. As mentioned previously, much of the work is exceptional and evidence that high quality, inspirational and engaging teaching of A Level literature is thriving in many centres, particularly those that pay heed to advice and maintain their expertise in application of the standards through regular training. Where centres require support, access to time and training will be of huge benefit but all teachers should take heart from the opportunity to access high quality texts that they are providing for their candidates. Teachers and candidates are to be commended for their hard work and dedication, which is greatly appreciated.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4292

Email: gceenglish@eduqas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [AS/A Level English Literature](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | Eduqas](#)

CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

Regional Rep Team

Our regional team covers all areas of England and can provide face-to-face and online advice at a time which is convenient to you.

Get in contact today and discover how our team can support you and your students.

[Regional Support Team | Eduqas](#)

Eduqas Qualifications

We are one of the largest providers of qualifications for schools, academies, sixth form and further education colleges across England, offering valued qualifications to suit a range of abilities. Each and every one of our qualifications is carefully designed to engage students and to equip them for the next stage of their lives.

We support our education communities by providing trusted qualifications and specialist support, to allow our students the opportunity to reach their full potential.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk