



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE A LEVEL

SUMMER 2017

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EDUQAS
GCE A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE
Summer 2017
COMPONENT 1: POETRY

General Comments

This poetry Component is a demanding paper which allows us to examine the study of poetry in a number of different ways. It is worth re-stating precisely the design ideas which underpin the examination and, based upon the balance of assessment objectives, the expectations at each stage of the paper.

Section A is worth half of the available marks and questions are split into two parts, part (i) and part (ii), in order to give candidates the opportunity to respond to their pre 1900 text in different ways. Candidates have access to clean copies of the texts in the prescribed editions. All of the prescribed editions for **Section A** feature introductory essays, notes and appendices. In **Section B** there are introductory essays or supporting notes in the editions of Hardy, Lawrence and Hughes. Candidates must be very clearly advised on any decision they make to use these materials and they should take careful note of the following:

- any use of other views expressed by the editors of the editions must be placed clearly within quotation marks and explicitly acknowledged as the work of another reader. Failure to do this could raise a compliance issue with potentially serious consequences.
- explanatory notes are just that and paraphrasing them in essays will not address the requirements to engage creatively with texts or analyse the ways in which meaning is made. Essays which rely upon explanation and commentary are inevitably low scoring.
- general notes on contexts or accounts of poets' private lives have a value in providing a framework in which to understand and appreciate their work but these factors should never be the drivers of literary essays.

Section A: Poetry pre-1900.

Part (i):

Part (i) answers should be **focused exclusively upon AO1 and AO2** and demonstrate **creative reading of the chosen poem or extract and understanding of relevant concepts in the light of the specific task** (such as the presentation of powerful feelings or the shaping of a reader's response and so on). In addition, candidates must show their abilities to **analyse the ways in which meanings are shaped**, once more **in the light of the specific task set**.

Q. Why is there **a specific task** in this section rather than just an opportunity to analyse a poem or extract?

A. There is an open opportunity to respond to unseen poetry in **Section B of Component 3**, so, in the interests of examining differently, a specific task is set on the poems here so that candidates can demonstrate their independent creative engagement with a poet which they have studied but not by simply reproducing memorised notes. **Band 3** and above can be

achieved only by “**relevant**” responses under **AO1** and “**purposeful, detailed**” writing under **AO2**. If a candidate attempts to write everything they can remember about a poem or extract the response is unlikely to have sufficient focus to meet criteria for the higher bands.

It was noted by many examiners that a significant number of candidates quickly strayed into writing about context or chose to quote critical views on the poet in their responses to A (i) tasks. Typically, these candidates tended to write about Chaucer’s merchant class family background; Donne’s marriage; Milton’s divorce; Keats’ illness and Rossetti’s association with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. **None of this material can be rewarded in Section A (i) and, in the very short time available for this response, candidates penalised themselves by failing to give adequate attention to the relevant AOs 1 and 2.**

This ineffective approach was so widespread that it might tell us something about the ways candidates have prepared for Component 1 and the resources which they have used. There was an over-eagerness to narrate biographical detail and to assert the “reasons” for writing a poem (the accusation of rape levelled against Chaucer was frequently brought to bear upon the presentation of January as a menacing and lustful bridegroom) rather than to address literary technique. Please see the advice below.

Part (ii):

Candidates are at liberty to answer questions on their chosen texts in any order they please but it might be helpful to remind them of the concepts in the design of **Section A**.

Examiners have a sympathetic understanding of the pressure of time in this examination and of the need for careful planning and preparation of each response. **To support this process the tasks in Section A have been designed to be progressive in the sense that issues raised in the Part (i) poem or extract should help to stimulate thought and planning for the task offered in Part (ii).** For example, Januarie’s self-deception and boasting about his prowess in Question 1 Part (i) should lead candidates into at least one strand of thinking as they consider in Part (ii) how Chaucer has presented characters who have ideas above their abilities. The gentle, implicit skirmishing between Adam and Eve in Question 2 Part (i) should lead smoothly towards consideration of Milton’s problems in presenting the perfection of Eden in Part (ii). There are similar connections in the other questions in Section A.

It was surprising to see how many candidates had left Section A Part (i) until the very end of the examination, perhaps because they had planned a strategy of addressing the higher tariff questions first. Sometimes in these circumstances responses were brief and superficial, possibly because time had run out. Candidates should consider carefully where their best advantages lie: by tackling the two parts of Section A consecutively there could be more to be gained (in both parts of the answer) than would be gained by spending an extra few minutes on the essay in Section B. Centres will decide upon their own approaches but this is worth discussing with candidates.

Chaucer was the most popular choice in Section A; Donne came second, followed by Milton, Keats and Rossetti. There was very little difference between the mean marks for both parts of Section A across all poets, and there is little evidence to suggest that candidates found the questions on one poet any more or less accessible than questions on others.

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

Q1 (i)

There were some very strong feelings expressed here but often candidates were at a loss to show the techniques and significant language choices which create these feelings in the reader. Other problems occurred when candidates took an outraged stance against Januarie and then used up valuable time by describing different approaches to women in the 14th and 21st centuries. Others took a great deal of time to get around to Januarie because they tended to “work through” the extract and therefore spent far too long on the first 3 lines which deal with May’s beauty. More effective answers showed in a brief remark how the presentation of May’s fresh and innocent beauty clashed with the language used to describe Januarie’s response to her. There were some splendid answers which showed very clearly how Chaucer has balanced disgust, contempt, comedy and maybe even a little sympathy for a foolish old man in these lines.

Q1 (ii)

Most candidates chose appropriate material from the text and there was some secure writing on a number of the characters with some subtle treatment of Plachebo, Justinus and Pluto as well as the more obvious choices. However, as in all other part (ii) responses, many candidates did not take sufficient note of the prompt in the question which should trigger AO3 work. In this case social status and ability were the prompts and as only one quarter of the marks in this section can be gained under AO3 it is fairly obvious that candidates should be relevantly focused, economical and selective in their choice of material.

John Donne: *Selected Poems*

Q2 (i)

Some candidates struggled to understand the poem. Very few could unpick the image “poor aspen wretch” and there were many who simply could not understand the basic idea underpinning the poem which is of course a threat to haunt a lost lover but to keep her wondering about the precise nature of her punishment. Once again, the tendency to “work through” the poem without establishing a clear overview hampered some candidates seriously as they lost themselves in over-detailed analyses of word choices and punctuation and lost sight of the range of powerful feelings that were on display. Here as elsewhere in Part (i) responses there was a great deal of sterile feature spotting and “naming of parts”. Candidates must be convinced that there is no merit in the use of technical terminology simply for the purposes of labelling.

Q2 (ii)

The contextual trigger here is “attitudes to women” and the view to be considered is that, for Donne, women are a source of “as much frustration as joy”. Perhaps if candidates had made a note to themselves at the planning stage of a detail such as the view mentioned in the previous sentence it would have helped them to avoid re-hashing John Carey’s and Simon Schama’s recent documentaries on the poet with all their playful speculation upon what John Donne might or might not have been doing/intending when he wrote his verse. Material such as the above, used as a primary study aid for Donne, has produced reams of unsupported assertion about the relationship between Donne’s poems and his life which contribute

nothing of value to a critical analysis of his poetry. Candidates must be convinced that it doesn't matter who the woman in *The Flea* might be – if there ever was a woman and a flea – and colourful accounts of the young Jack Donne leaving the Inns of Court to spend the evening with a courtesan in the upper room of an inn are entertaining, imaginative writing but contribute nothing to an understanding of poetic technique in *Elegy XIX*. Centres who study Donne are encouraged to move their candidates' attention away from speculative biographical tittle-tattle and back to an objective analysis of the poetry.

John Milton: *Paradise lost Book IX*

Q3 (i)

There were some carefully considered responses to Adam's speech here and what it suggested about the nature of the relationship between him and Eve but some candidates struggled to see the difference between the presentation of a character and the presentation of a relationship. The character's language, tone and attitude indicate the nature of the character at that stage of the poem but the same things imply a state of affairs between Adam and Eve and that is where the emphasis should have been. As noted above, many candidates could not resist descriptions of Milton's disappointing marriage and his ideas about divorce which could not be rewarded here.

Q3 (ii)

"...the perspective of the fallen world" should have provided plenty of opportunities to write about theological and political contexts and it would have been perfectly feasible to make use of Milton's writings on married relationships in this section. The philosophical problems inherent in writing about what cannot be experienced but only imagined are at the core of this poem and most candidates saw that there were issues here. The best responses showed how the power of imagination and Milton's imagery made some aspects of Eden convincing but there remained the issue of transgression growing by stages in the disagreements between the first couple. While many responses were of the highest quality, centres which choose Milton might do well to explore the theological and philosophical notions of sin and free will a little more thoroughly in order to avoid assertive and inaccurate approaches.

John Keats: *Selected Poems*

Q4 (i)

This is a complicated poem with several layers and turns when it comes to the presentation of the powerful feelings involved – awe; fear; false self-consolation; fear; anger; confusion and back to awe. The twin themes of mortality and the classical world are central to Keats' work and this poem should have felt familiar in terms of form and contents. Some struggled with the poem and probably turned to page 246 of their editions where they found dates, details and a note on the use of "magnitude" which were then incorporated into answers. This, perhaps better than any other example on the paper, demonstrates a fairly widespread tendency to avoid close critical reading and substitute description and assertion. In the few minutes that candidates have to answer, a brief "map" such as the one suggested in the first sentence above would (with adequate support) be more than enough to guide a candidate towards high marks.

Q4(ii)

This question sparked a lot of interesting debate with some candidates rejecting the critical view out of hand, but others took a more nuanced view and saw in most of his writing a sense of awe inspired by the arts and literature of the past which was powerfully mingled with observations upon natural beauty as well as the rigours of the living world and the limitations imposed by mortality. There was some impressive coverage of the longer poems as well as the Odes but also some hints that all candidates at some centres were confident about only two or three poems and those were used irrespective of how relevant they were to the task.

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

Q5 (i)

As with the Keats poem, the mood of this work is multi-layered – sombre, celebratory, doubtful, soberly reflective, anticipatory and, once again, if a short list such as this one had been used as a plan, many candidates could have avoided the fruitless syllable counting and often mistaken assertions about rhythm and rhyme patterns which, on their own, did little to reveal the ways Rossetti creates mood(s) in this poem.

Q5 (ii)

Many candidates interpreted “conventional morality” as religious duty and went no further; others wrote almost exclusively about Rossetti’s dedication to work with “fallen women” but in both cases the emphasis was often upon context and biography rather than the poetry. The best answers managed to range more widely on the subject of morality and made use of the contextual material above but through poems such as *Goblin Market*, *No Thank You John* and *The Convent Threshold*. Too many answers became bogged-down in biography and in the status of women which left little room for consideration of what is revealed by the poems themselves.

Summary and Advice:

- Part (i) responses must stay focused upon the demands of AO1 and AO2; answers should be brief and there are examples of simple planning above which illustrate how a short, carefully constructed, relevant list would be quite sufficient to guide about 15 minutes of effective writing. Take careful account of the shaping element within the task – it is never an open opportunity to commentate on a poem or extract.
- Advise candidates on the thinking underpinning the design of tasks; sequencing of questions and legitimate use of open books.
- Look carefully at the balance of assessment objectives in Part (ii) and make sure that context is not overdone, or critical views pursued at the expense of AO1 and AO2.
- Move attention away from poets’ biographies and more securely on to analyses of implicit meaning, technique and language.
- Encourage the use of specialist terminology and the observation of structural features as part of an analysis of meaning and not as free-standing labels.

Section B: Poetry post 1900

Overview

Just like Section A, this is an open book examination and it relieves candidates of the effort of memorising large amounts of verse. Instead, the demands are upon writing a substantial essay which requires balanced attention to all the assessment objectives which apply to English Literature.

The word “balanced” is crucial because candidates need to be clearly aware that 20 marks for are earned through attention to AO2 and “the ways in which meanings are shaped”. The other 4 assessment objectives are evenly weighted at 10 marks each. The point is made starkly because there was so much evidence of candidates writing extensively about what they considered to be relevant contexts but, as in Section A, often went no further than descriptions of poets’ private lives: Eliot’s and Hardy’s unhappy marriages as the context for “disappointment for the way things are”; or Plath’s and Hughes’ tempestuous relationship and troubled marriage as the context for their “willingness to confront the pain of experience.” There is no doubt that these supportable biographical details (quite different from speculation on whether or not it is Anne Moore/ Donne in *The Good Morrow*) could be part of an effective and relevant response to the tasks; it is more a matter of proportion when these contextual details are over-developed to the point where there is no room for the main business of the essay which is critical analysis.

In addition to considering contexts and other readings; showing creative engagement and critical analysis, candidates are required to “explore connections across literary texts” in their responses to a total of at least 4 poems – 2 by each writer in the pair.

The evidence suggests that this element (AO4) has not been well understood by significant numbers of candidates.

Many essays were found to contain a number of statements such as “Differently from Larkin, Duffy’s attitude to people from her past seems almost affectionate.” followed by a discussion of Duffy’s attitudes in *Before You Were Mine*. Left at that, whatever else is going on, AO4 is being addressed at only a basic level. It could be said the candidate “identifies superficial connections” – a descriptor for Band 1. Too few candidates realised that in order for their observations to be “purposeful” or better they would need, in their discussion of the Duffy poem, to show in detail how her affectionate recreation of a mother who, she imagines, could “sparkle and waltz and laugh” fully illuminates the contrasting cynicism or pessimism in Larkin’s presentation of a woman’s past in, say, *Love Songs in Age*.

By far the best way of addressing AO4 is to make connections throughout the analysis of paired poems so that AO2 and AO4 seem almost inseparable as they become functions of each other.

Lastly, candidates need to think very carefully about their timings in this section. Many, it seemed, had used every minute of the hour to write sprawling responses which were not always relevant and which attempted to name check as many poems as possible. **It would be much better to spend a sensible amount of time deconstructing the question; choosing and re-reading a selection of at least 4 poems in order to re-focus ideas and then writing a simple plan before embarking on the final product. As a general rule, shorter, better-focused essays with brief but apt textual support will achieve the higher bands.**

By far the most popular pairing in this section was Larkin and Duffy with Hughes and Plath in 2nd place; Eliot and Hardy came next followed by Heaney and Sheers. Lawrence and Clarke were the least popular attracting a response in low single figures.

Thomas Hardy and T.S Eliot

Questions 6 and 7

Candidates seemed to prefer question 6 on disappointment over question 7 on the use of voices. As mentioned above, responses to question 6 were often unbalanced by over-long descriptions of the marital disappointments in the lives of both poets and lacked analysis of the ways in which the theme was presented. In many essays, reference to Hardy poems was very restricted - *The Darkling Thrush* and *A Broken Appointment* were very popular choices – both occur very early in the anthology – and these essays would have been improved with wider, more detailed reference. Others concentrated exclusively upon Poems of 1912-13 and these candidates tended to be most guilty of narrative treatments of Hardy's marriage and bereavement. By contrast, there was wider-ranging reference to Eliot's poetry with some very good writing on the *The Waste Land* and *Preludes* but also some very unconvincing attempts to link any expression of disappointment to his unsatisfactory first marriage. Many of those who attempted Question 7 showed a real appreciation of the different voices in Hardy, including that of an imagined ghost and the bitter-sweet or tragi-comic voices of *The Ruined Maid*. There was some very mature writing on *Journey of The Magi*, *Gerontion* and *Portrait of a Lady* as well as on *The Waste Land*

D.H. Lawrence and Gillian Clarke

Questions 8 and 9

These were not popular and only 3 responses to question 9 were seen. Those candidates showed some scope and variety in the materials they chose but it is not possible to provide a useful report on such tiny numbers.

Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath

Questions 10 and 11

This pairing was extremely popular and candidates preferred Question 11 and the opportunity to write about the presentation of pain rather than the details of domestic life in Question 10. The mean mark for 11 was a little higher than for 10 and candidates clearly found this question more accessible. Tedious as it may be, the point has to be made again that biographical narratives and assertions about the meanings of poems are not substitutes for critical analysis. No doubt some candidates will be disappointed with their marks as they gave copious accounts of "domestic details" and the "pain of experience" in relation to the poets' marriage but said little or nothing about the poetic techniques used to communicate these matters. Essays drew upon a wide selection of Plath poems but were a little more restricted in references to Hughes: *Full Moon and Little Frieda* along with *Bride and Groom* *Lie Hidden for Three Days* were often used in response to question 10 while some of the Crow poems were used to address question 11. While it is understood that there are a lot of poems up to and including *Rain* on page 68, there was a strong sense that candidates had spent less time on their study of Hughes than on Plath.

Philip Larkin and Carol Ann Duffy

Questions 12 and 13

Another very popular pairing which produced some strong essays on the ways the poets observe the lives of others (question 12) and on the presentation of ideas about time in question 13. Candidates preferred Question 13 by a factor of 3 to 1 but the mean marks were identical. However, in both cases many ignored the critical view in the stem of the question (which should have helped to shape the response) and went on to write more generally about the observation of others' lives or ideas about time. In many cases this meant that attention to AO5 was less relevant and effective as candidates attempted to use pre-learned critical quotations but ignored the idea of "little affection" in question 12 (which should have influenced the selection of poems) or the issue of fascination in question 13 which should have done the same. Consequently, essays were weakened under AO1 – for a lack of relevance; under AO2 for lack of purposefulness as well as under AO5 where the exploration of other readings was often not really relevant and was therefore little more than a description or acknowledgement of other readings. Once again, accounts of the poets' lives and assertions about their relationships and sexuality figured largely and usually irrelevantly in many responses.

Seamus Heaney and Owen Sheers

Questions 14 and 15

While there were comparatively few responses to this pairing, candidates certainly showed a marked preference for Question 14 on the presentation of beauty and brutality to 15 where they were asked about the presentation of ordinary experience. The mean marks were quite similar but just a little higher for the less popular choice. In their responses to Question 14, candidates found a good range of connections between the presentation of harsh realities in terms of political troubles and personal hardships as well as the combination of the brutal and the picturesque in the presentation of rural lives. In the responding to Question 15, candidates were sensitive to the transformative powers of not only the imagery and poetic language of both poets but also of the musical and rhythmic qualities achieved through their choices of form.

Summary and Advice

- Make sure that with all 5 assessment objectives in play, candidates understand how to achieve a sensible balance of attention and avoid over-emphasis upon AO3.
- Make AO4 work purposeful and potentially illuminating by incorporating and developing ideas about connections with the process of close analysis so that AO2 and AO4 are closely bound.
- Use biographical material with great care – be provisional rather than assertive and do not assume that all poems are written with a purpose connected to the actual events of a poet's life.
- In the two years available for the reading and study of both poets, try to be as wide-ranging as possible – there is some evidence that preparation has been very narrow in some cases.

The demands of this Component are fully understood by all examiners who would want me to pass on their messages of admiration and congratulations to those teachers and candidates who have worked so hard to produce some of the very highest quality responses.

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COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

General Comments

This closed-book component is divided equally between the assessment of Shakespeare and pre- and post-1900 Drama. While Section A (Shakespeare) is assessed by both extract-based compulsory short task and compulsory essay, Section B (Drama) is assessed by essay from a choice of two. Candidates generally seemed to have enough time in the two hours to do justice to the extract-based question and two essay questions. It is worth noting that the Shakespeare questions have been designed so that the extract, tackled first, can be a 'springboard' for the essay question. However, many candidates started instead with the Section B essay, perhaps as this was worth 60 marks, followed by the Shakespeare essay and finally the extract. It was apparent in some instances that the Shakespeare responses were weaker where this practice occurred.

In both sections, it was encouraging to see candidates planning their responses to the essay questions, usually producing a more focused and shaped response. However, examiners saw plenty of seriously long responses, which lost their coherence on occasion, and in particular seemed to forget the question.

As the extract from their set Shakespeare play is relatively short, and candidates have a recommended twenty minutes only in which to do this task, it is imperative to produce a focused and pertinent response to the first Shakespeare task.

Hamlet and *King Lear* were by far the most popular texts, but we saw an encouraging number of *The Tempest* responses, done very well indeed, with *Antony and Cleopatra* bringing up the rear, and Henry IV Part 1 a minority choice. In Section B, the runaway favourite pairing was *The Duchess of Malfi/A Streetcar Named Desire*, with *Doctor Faustus/Enron* and *The Revenger's Tragedy/Loot* and *Lady Windermere's Fan/Betrayal* encouragingly popular in several centres. *Measure for Measure/Murmuring Judges* appeared to be a minority choice, however.

There are lots of positives to take from our experience this first summer. We saw:

- an impressive amount of detailed support and references to all three texts
- an equally impressive verbatim recall of critical views, usually put to good purpose
- considered approaches to integrating context (AO3) and other interpretations (AO5) which enhanced the central arguments in responses
- evidence that closed book' assessment seems to have worked very well: with the exception of the extract questions, it was impossible to tell that candidates didn't have the texts with them.

Section A: Shakespeare

General comments

Part (i) Extract

Whether or not they were familiar with the extract, it was refreshing to see many candidates engaging thoughtfully with the text. We saw many good responses where perceptive analysis and evaluation were offered for AO2 rather than just a list of literary devices. Given the demands of the task in the extract question, where candidates are confronted by a section of text without the actual text for reference, and as AO2 is worth twice the marks of AO1, it is important candidates ask themselves ‘what is the meaning here and how is it shaped?’ Too many trawl through the lines, mining for rich pickings in terms of terminology, while missing the central meaning of the speech or speeches in respect of the question. In a minority of cases there was a futile attempt to address AO3.

Part (ii) Essay

In the essays, AO3 approaches ranged from the token gesture ‘acknowledging’ contexts, to a full-on engagement with any form of context, tacked on and sewn in without any care to its application or relevance. Sometimes this was at the expense of discussing the actual play. Far too many responses featured sweeping generalisations along the lines of ‘Jacobean society hated all women’ or dubiously significant tales of kings and queens, and in particular that all Elizabethan/Jacobean audiences ‘would be shocked’ at some of the portrayed behaviour of the protagonists.

AO5 approaches are proving to be quite divergent, from those who just say (repeatedly) ‘arguably’ to those who spend the whole essay debating the central issues, along with quoting esteemed critics with or without understanding what these critics have to say.

Question-specific comments

1. *King Lear*

- (i) Most candidates engaged with Shakespeare’s presentation of Cordelia in this extract, but not all realised that France is part of the equation, missing the opportunity to discuss how he is used to add to her characterisation. Those who did seize the opportunity sometimes misinterpreted France’s attitude to Cordelia as one of hostility, describing him as shocked by her behaviour rather than by Lear’s behaviour.
- (ii) There was plenty of lively debate regarding the presentation of the three sisters as clear exponents of both good and evil, with most prepared to consider an alternative argument involving the male characters as equal or better illustration of the conflict, as Cordelia is absent for much of the play. The more discerning candidates embraced the concept of ‘primarily’, and some did considerable justice to the idea of Lear himself illustrating best the conflict between good and evil, with close analysis of the role of the Fool in association with that idea. Some argued that Goneril and Regan were not necessarily evil but the victims of Lear’s misogyny.

2. *Antony and Cleopatra*

- (i) Candidates generally grasped the conflict between Rome and Egypt in Antony's characterisation and discussed how the other characters in the extract are used to sharpen this aspect of Antony's presentation. Others saw how Antony is both defensive of his own actions and partly willing to 'play the penitent'. Honour was a familiar concept to most, as was the tension between Caesar and Antony.
- (ii) Most candidates seemed engaged with the ideas and beliefs attributed separately to Rome and Egypt and were ready to discuss these in the context of whether sympathy was engendered for one set of values or both. This was usually in close examination of their relevance to the portrayal of the characters of Antony and Cleopatra themselves. There was also some careful discussion of Caesar and Enobarbus.

3. *Hamlet*

- (i) Most candidates engaged with certain aspects of Hamlet's thoughts and feelings in this extract, notably his grief over his father and his plan to check the veracity of the ghost, revealed at the end of the extract. However, several struggled to grasp the situation of Hamlet's confiding in Horatio, valuing his friendship and acknowledging his composure, and there were resulting difficulties in discussing what Hamlet was talking about. In many responses Horatio did not feature at all in their analysis of Hamlet's thoughts and feelings in the extract and there were many misinterpretations of 'my soul....mistress', taking the mistress to be usually Ophelia/ Gertrude and 'pregnant hinges' persuading many that this was evidence of such a reading.
- (ii) There was a variety of responses to this question, ranging from those who debated only whether Hamlet was a 'victim' to those who gave full consideration to the notion of 'helpless' and 'world around him'. In general there was plenty of sensible discussion regarding Hamlet's responsibility as an avenger and also a son, with the world around him variously defined as the royal court, the Ghost, Claudius, with Gertrude and Ophelia also brought into the discussion as arguably 'helpless victims' themselves. Some argued cogently that Hamlet was as much a victim of his own character and beliefs as the world around him, while others proposed that he was a helpless victim of the Ghost's demands.

4. *Henry IV Part 1*

Too few responses to this text were seen for adequate comment.

5. *The Tempest*

- (i) Most responses engaged fully with both Miranda's and Ferdinand's presentation, but there were a few who ignored Prospero's contribution to the meeting. The concept of love at first sight was frequently mentioned, with some cynical of such a phenomenon, but generally Miranda's awe and Ferdinand's reciprocal admiration were grasped. Some of those who saw the role played by Prospero in the presentation of the two lovers thought Prospero was being sexist and misogynistic in calling Miranda 'wench'.

- (ii) There was an encouraging amount of lively debate in response to this question, with detailed consideration of the island setting, Prospero's magic and the contribution of Ariel and Caliban. Prospero's relationship with both of these characters was a popular avenue to explore, with several asserting that while his relationship with Caliban was realistic in terms of master-servant, his paternal relationship with Miranda was very much idealised. Others focused successfully on the minor characters and argued that their exchanges while under Prospero's spell were very realistic.

Section B: Drama

General comments

Although there were instances where candidates had not thought first before tackling this section, it was encouraging on the whole to see very well planned and well structured responses. Better responses came from candidates who had clearly been prepared for targeted discussion of connections (AO4) and it was evident they knew this AO was double-weighted. In some instances AO4 proved tricky as candidates did not seem equipped to do the kind of comparison of texts that has so many marks attached to it. Those who used points of comparison as a planned approach were most successful.

Although the *Malfi/Streetcar* pairing was the predominant choice, it was encouraging to see centres taking on *Doctor Faustus/Enron* (which proved to be very productive) and also *Lady Windermere's Fan/Betrayal*. *Revengers/Loot* produced some really excellent responses.

While it is impressive that candidates can press every relevant AO button in their responses several times, it is worth remembering that their comments on the text itself are of paramount importance, and there were instances of very able candidates discussing contexts and critics extensively, almost in a vacuum, mentioning the text only fleetingly before rushing on to make sure they press another button. AO3 and AO5 should be addressed in an integrated approach, and can only be rewarded fully where the discussion enhances that of the text in response to the question.

Question-specific comments

Marlowe/Prebble

There was some thoughtful engagement with Question 6, where there was evidence of detailed knowledge and understanding of morality play conventions, and interesting discussion of ideas such as over-reaching, greed, conceit and corruption. The more popular question was Question 7, with a range of definitions of greed and also some thoughtful engagement with 'moral compass', taking in the connections/contrasts between the corrupt business world in *Enron* and the corrupt individual egotism in *Faustus*. However, there were instances where candidates had not thought about any kind of greed other than that for wealth.

Webster/Williams

This text pairing was extremely popular, and although both questions were well represented, it appeared that Question 8 was the most popular question in the section as a whole. Many candidates seemed to agree that both central protagonists are equally victims and agents of their sexuality, so leading to their respective forms of 'destruction', while others debated

whether it was arguably more a case of their being just victims of male sexuality. It was encouraging to see so many candidates engaged with dramatic techniques and staging in particular, and it was also gratifying to note that in most cases the treatment of both plays was evenly balanced, with careful consideration given to both plays in responding to the view in the question.

A variety of approaches was even more noted on Q 9, where the word 'disordered' seemed to open all sorts of doors to really interesting analysis. There was some fruitful comparative discussion of 'violent' which again elicited some focused analysis of staging and other dramatic devices, while the concept of 'cruelty is commonplace' was either ignored or embraced as a given in the separate worlds of both plays. More discerning responses engaged with the suggestion of 'commonplace', arguing that both worlds reflected the overturning of established norms of behaviour, leading to a frightening acceptance of violence.

Middleton/Orton

Both questions were popular with those centres which had studied this pairing. There was plenty of engagement with the unsettling aspects in both plays, particularly in respect of the presentation of death and sexuality, and again there was an encouraging focus on staging and dramatic conventions. It was also evident that most candidates had been prepared well in terms of understanding dramatic genre and giving consideration to audience reaction. Those who chose Question 11 engaged with several reasons why both plays qualified as 'serious drama', such as the depiction of rape, and promiscuity, as well as the challenges presented to authority and authority figures, and as one candidate put it 'the scrutiny of family values across both plays'.

Wilde/ Pinter

Both questions proved popular with those centres which had studied these texts. In Question 12 there was evident engagement with the concept of dishonesty in both plays, although some equated dishonesty with immorality in general. In these instances most ignored the view of 'everyone attempts not to be understood', while the stronger responses incorporated their consideration of this view into their discussion of characters' dialogue, noting Pinter's particular interest in elliptical conversations as opposed to Wilde's carefully observed hypocrisy in social situations. In response to Question 13, there was some assured writing on Wilde, with detailed knowledge of the accepted social behaviour and in particular etiquette, but some more varied and less confident approaches to 'manners' in Pinter. However, morality was addressed equally in both texts, with some interesting discussion of the impact of the retrospective structure of *Betrayal* on the perceived immorality of Jerry and Emma. There were also some interesting responses where the attitudes towards women were carefully examined, and declared to be similar in both superficially different societies.

Shakespeare/Hare

Too few responses to this text pairing were seen for adequate comment.

Summary

Some issues to inform us all going forward:

- candidates should take time to consider what the question is asking, and also try to identify where assessment objectives are targeted in the question. It was a matter of general concern that in some centres it was clear to see that candidates were unaware that they had to address AO3 in both essays, and that this was **double weighted** in Shakespeare. We saw too many good candidates lose a substantial amount of marks because they had not responded adequately to this AO. Similarly, some candidates did not seem aware that they had to address AO5, and there were several instances where examiners struggled to award marks for this AO.
- candidates who signalled in the opening paragraph that they were focused on the question were generally more successful than those who started their response more tentatively.
- candidates and teachers need to remember that above all examiners look to reward **engagement with the texts** and all discussion of contexts and other interpretations should be properly integrated into the response, not merely acknowledged or invented, as appeared to be the case sometimes. There is evidence of some groups of candidates adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to context and critics, with the same material offloaded regardless of the question. It is only the most astute of candidates who can turn this around to their own advantage.
- please note that more feedback will be available in the autumn series of CPD and we very much hope teachers will be able to attend.

Finally, the team of examiners for this component wish to congratulate all candidates and their teachers for a most encouraging start to the new specification. This is a demanding component which tests knowledge and understanding of three plays, without the texts for reference, and with double weighting of AO3 and AO4.

We have been privileged to read so many interesting and genuinely academic responses to these texts.

EDUQAS
GCE A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE
Summer 2017
COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

Overview

Component 3 was designed with very clear objectives which were:

- to provide candidates with an opportunity to engage creatively with previously unseen texts and encourage them to draw upon the skills learned throughout the course in their analysis of the ways writers make meaning
- to test candidates' skills in the relevant application of critical and contextual materials seen for the first time.

In Section A (Unseen Prose) two periods were designated (1880-1910 and 1919-1939) to allow candidates to familiarise themselves with a broad range of writing from those periods while gaining insight into contextual issues. If applied relevantly, knowledge of contexts can be rewarded under AO3 as part of any credit earned for **attention to the published supporting extracts which candidates must address.**

When the objectives above are considered in light of the balance of marks available in Section A, it should be clear from the weighting of AO1 and AO2 that a creative, literary, analytical approach is of primary importance with the use of contextual materials worth **only a fifth of the total marks for this** section, and only then if the materials are used relevantly in support of literary analysis.

While examiners saw plenty of very high quality responses to the prose extracts, it was clear that substantial numbers of candidates had taken a self-penalising approach by learning and then reproducing large quantities of contextual material on issues such as fin de siècle decadence; the effects of World War 1; the suffragette movement; 1920s economy; Edwardian ideas about social class; the growth of urban cultures and industrialisation; modernism and the Bloomsbury Group. Unfortunately, in a considerable number of cases candidates had learned only “headlines” without any understanding in depth of the materials they tried to apply. This led to unconvincing, over-assertive and irrelevant writing where these materials could not be brought to bear effectively upon the unseen passages. Not only did candidates not gain very much credit under AO3 for this approach, they also lost time and opportunity to address the literary qualities of the prose extracts and so failed to gain marks for sufficient evidence of creative engagement (AO1) or analysis/evaluation (AO2).

The following message about Section A should be given very clearly to future candidates in order to help shape approaches in the classroom and to background research:

Contextual knowledge and understanding can be rewarded only if applied relevantly to the analysis of a specific writer's techniques in a given extract – this is the only way candidates can be seen to be “perceptive and productive” in their discussions (Band 5); show “secure appreciation and understanding” (Band 4); show “clear grasp of significance and influence” (Band 3). Below these levels, candidates will either be acknowledging the importance of contexts – usually through fairly general remarks or assertions (Band 2) or describing wider contexts and making superficial connections with the texts (Band 1). Candidates must bear

in mind the wording of AO3 and the emphasis upon the “influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received”. This should lead them back to the tried and tested formula of “Task-Text-Context” and keep their writing relevant (to the task of analysis) and literary (based clearly upon the text in front of them) before showing the influence of the context. Lengthy references to other literary works and protracted descriptions of the historical period will not, of themselves, produce successful responses.

It also became very clear that in their efforts to show everything that they had learned about their chosen historical periods, candidates ran themselves short of time and, in many cases, responses to Section B were much shorter than they should have been.

In a nutshell then, the tendency to rely heavily upon pre-learned contextual materials in this unseen paper causes candidates to penalise themselves in the both Section A itself and in Section B by taking up time that might have been used more profitably in reading and planning more effective responses to the poems.

In Section B (Unseen Poetry) there were some wonderfully creative and perceptive responses to both poems but, once again, there was also substantial evidence of inappropriately applied pre-learning for this unseen paper.

Some candidates took a “template” approach to the poems which produced general, assertive writing along the lines of “poets’ references to nature are always an indication of a positive attitude.”; or “the presentation of the passage of time is another way of writing about death.” Others attempted to include as much terminology as possible (much of it taken from the study of language e.g. “Lexis”; “lexical sets/fields”; “fronted adverbials”; “pre and post modification” and so on) which often affected fluency and coherence. In several centres, the candidates seemed to be taking an approach more suited to Language or Language and Literature examinations as their technical terminology was taken exclusively from studies of linguistics.

Those who were at home with terms such as: allegory; symbolism; hyperbole and onomatopoeia tended to offer much more convincing literary analyses of the poetry. However, candidates should be clear that if they are going to identify a literary device such as anaphora, their work remains at the level of identifying “basic language and stylistic features” (AO2/Band1) until they make some valid point related to the poet’s use of the device (Band 2); show purposefully and in detail how the device contributes to our understanding and appreciation of the poem (Band 3); or above these bands demonstrate increasing levels of secure and then perceptive analysis (Bands 4 and 5).

There was considerable evidence of sterile “naming of parts” when it came to the discussion of form and structure. A very large number of candidates seemed determined to make use of every tool in the subject box, but surprisingly few managed to get beyond labelling rhythmic patterns or rhyme schemes. Unless terminology is used accurately and as an economic means of making a point about meaning and impact it cannot be rewarded. This is a strand of AO1 which needs careful explanation to candidates who also need to be realistic and sensible about what can be achieved by alliteration, sibilance or the caesura.

Candidates must also be persuaded that their task is to draw meaning out of the chosen poem and not bring to it their own pre-conceived notions about what is symbolised by certain images (in the Fenton poem for instance: “a statue symbolises a person’s status and achievements” which, left at that, is a statement which takes the candidate away from the

complex ironies in the poem and compromises both creative engagement (AO1) and sound analysis (AO2).

Section A: Unseen Prose

Responses to the prose passages were fairly evenly balanced with just over half of candidates preferring the Wilde extract. The mean marks and facility factors for both passages were almost identical with a faint indication that candidates had found the Wilde slightly easier to handle.

Candidates must be reminded that the introductions printed in italics at the top of the prose passages are not the words of the author and are given to inform rather than to provide material for analysis.

Question 1 (*The Picture of Dorian Gray*)

This is a well-known text and proved popular. As noted in the overview above, candidates often delayed their analysis of the text by writing extensively upon decadence; Wilde's sexuality; his quarrel with the Marquess of Queensbury and his time spent in Reading gaol. In many cases no attempt was made to shape these materials into a relevant response.

Better answers looked closely at language and imagery; made brief but telling reference to the overt luxuriousness and decadent sensuality of the piece before picking-up on the implicit homo-eroticism in the presentation of male beauty and before linking relevantly to the extracts by Buzwell and Burdett, or making wider connections to Wilde's biography. While it was easy to forgive the candidate who under the pressure of the exam noted that Basil Hallward was "painting on an upright weasel"; those who wrote about "the omniscient narrator, Basil Hallward," or claimed that "Lord Henry is a learned man of the church" were clearly not engaging successfully. **Errors of this type were more common than expected and are probably the result of candidates' eagerness to be writing rather than reading closely and creatively. Perhaps another way in which the determination to set down pre-prepared materials causes candidates to self-penalise.**

There was a tendency to make broad and unconvincing assertions about social class both here and in Question 2. Some candidates felt that Basil was "lower class" because he worked with his hands while Lord Henry was either upper class because he could afford to smoke, or only pretending to be upper class because he used opium like so many Victorian working class folk.

Question 2 (*To The Lighthouse*)

Although Mrs Ramsay's story is less well-known than Dorian Gray's, candidates who had prepared this period had mostly heard of Virginia Woolf and had picked-up some outlines of other novels and essays plus some details of her life. However, in the majority of cases (and as mentioned in the overview above) knowledge and understanding were not very secure. Where AO3 was allowed to dominate the response, it was difficult to reward unsupported and indiscriminating assertions about class; women's political status and domestic roles or Woolf's private life. Several candidates related the idea of Rose who "would suffer" to Woolf's suicide. Understanding of social class and the complex dynamics of the Bloomsbury Group (which could well be reflected in this passage) were often very crude and led to distorted comments.

The very best responses were not simply able to name “stream of consciousness” but were able to analyse Woolf’s techniques and show how character emerged through the presentation of fragmented thoughts and free indirect discourse while making good use of the supporting extracts. Very well-informed candidates sometimes left themselves insufficient room to analyse the passage because of extended reference to texts such as Eliot’s *The Waste Land* or Pound’s *Imagist Manifesto*. While it is interesting to see how wide-ranging some preparations had been, it is worth re-stating that **however extensive and learned the wider contextual references may be, they are still worth only a part of one fifth of the marks available for this section and must not eclipse creative reading and analysis of the passage itself which together are worth more than half the allocated marks.**

One response to this passage provides us with an excellent illustration of how to use wider contexts economically and productively avoiding unbalanced, superfluous reference. In her observation of the “father rook” outside her window, Mrs Ramsay thinks: “He was like some seedy old gentleman in a top hat she had seen playing the horn in front of a public house.” It is perfectly legitimate to comment as one candidate did:

“the seedy old gentleman (or street busker) reflects the poverty and neediness in the years after World War One from which Mrs Ramsay and her privileged family appear immune as they fuss over her choice of precious jewellery.”

This is creative reading and a perceptive linking of text and context. However, other candidates used this and/or references to uncle James in India as opportunities to write extensively about post war social conditions or colonialism. This approach shifted the emphasis away from appreciation of the prose passage, damaged the structure and coherence of the essay and gained little or nothing under AO3.

Summary and Advice

Component 3 was designed primarily **to test candidates’ skills in creative reading and literary analysis**. In addition, examples of contextual materials and critical readings are supplied to test candidates’ ability to understand and apply supporting materials **which they have seen for the first time**. Not only is this an effective way to examine A level candidates, it is also one of the ways Eduqas has responded to the regulator’s requirement to examine in different ways across the whole specification. Candidates who do not give due emphasis to AOs 1 and 2 in their responses but write extensively on pre-learned contextual materials instead subvert the purpose of the examination and fail to earn much of the credit that is available under the heavily weighted AOs.

Candidates should:

- give adequate time to close reading and fact checking before embarking on analysis – mistakes such as claiming that Mrs Ramsay is called Rose or that Lord Henry is a clergyman are unnecessary and damaging
- offer a brief, supported overview in the introduction so as to confirm understanding and engagement with the arc of the extract
- take account of the general features of the passage such as level of formality; tone; structure; narrative voice and use of direct speech and/or free indirect discourse - but do not offer these as stand-alone points – observations such as these are useful only as part of an analysis of the ways in which writers make meaning otherwise they remain simply labels

- avoid or be very sparing with linguistic terminology – identifying features such as noun phrases, pre-modifiers or fronted adverbials do not, of themselves, contribute to creative engagement or literary analysis
- take careful account of the supporting extracts in the course of writing rather than devoting separate sections of the essays to addressing AO3 and AO5
- be very careful and sparing with the use of pre-learned contextual materials (see example above) and avoid assertion or distorting readings so as to accommodate irrelevant observations on contexts
- in supporting critical analysis, make brief references to key words and phrases but do not copy out long passages of the text
- study the WJEC online materials which deal with the appreciation of prose - should help candidates to distinguish descriptive writing or commentary from literary analysis.

Section B: Unseen Poetry

Carew's *Spring* was twice as popular as Fenton's *The Mistake*; the mean mark on the Fenton poem was slightly higher but statistics suggest that candidates found Question 4 significantly more challenging than Question 3.

Question 3 (*The Spring*)

This poem provides an excellent lesson in the need for careful reading and planning before the candidate commits to a response. Those who attempted to “go through” the work were often writing towards an understanding which then became confused about halfway through as doubts started to creep in as to the nature and purpose of the poem.

About half of the responses seen eventually realised that the treatment of the natural world was part of a lover's complaint to his unresponsive and possibly deceitful mistress. Some still managed to produce sound and secure analysis by reading the references to “she” as a personification of nature with some convincing ideas about the concluding lines suggesting that whatever external appearances might be, Mother Nature had hidden plans (‘in her heart’) for the return of winter.

Only AO1 and AO2 are rewarded here so there was real danger in taking a phrase such as “sacred birth” and developing what was seen as a religious reference into a full blown account of the Christian story. A successful approach to this phrase can be demonstrated by a perceptive candidate who wrote:

“The reference to ‘sacred birth’ gives the arrival of spring a spiritual significance and a sense of salvation beyond the aesthetic appeal of the ‘warm sun’ and the ‘youthful’ energy of the natural world.”

Religion is undeniably a context here but the candidate keeps the focus upon AO2 and how meaning is shaped rather than offering a description or discussion of the religious background.

Question 4 (*The Mistake*)

Many of the responses to this poem relied upon description and paraphrase. In most cases a better planned answer which focused upon the subtle changes in tone and attitude would have been far more productive than the syllable counting and elaborate claims about the

significance of iambic pentameter which were much in evidence. This poem also has a lesson to teach about reading and re-reading so as to gain some grip upon: implicit meaning and attitudes; the effects of repetition; the language choices such as “murmur” or “mild refusal”; the use of imagery from painting, film and architecture and the significance of punctuation including the use of italics and dashes. There were quite a number who did look closely at these details and managed to score very well.

Further to the point made in the overview about candidates bringing unsupported meanings to the poems rather than drawing them out, there were quite a few who spent time speculating about the sort of mistake which interested Fenton. Some wrote extensively (and without support) of the mistake he had made in choosing a partner; others suggested that he was in the wrong job (!) and was only now facing up to it. Unproductive writing of this sort damages both the sense of engagement and the coherence of candidates’ work.

Summary and Advice

Candidates should:

- recognise that unseen poetry requires very careful reading and re-reading before the nuances and complexities of the work become fully apparent – this has strong implications for time-management
- as with the prose section, a brief and supported overview of the whole work confirms understanding and engagement
- when making observations about the features of a poem always make these part of a point about how meaning is made or effects achieved otherwise this is simply naming of parts or feature-spotting
- avoid any writing about contexts or suggestions about different ways of reading the poems because these AOs (3 and 5) are not rewarded
- further to the above, understand the difference between analysing the ways a poet creates ambiguity (AO2) and discussing different interpretations (AO5 not rewarded here)
- understand the difference between using what is commonly understood to be implied by a word or phrase (e.g. ‘scared’ and religion) and discussing the context of religion in detail
- make good use of the online WJEC/Eduqas resources devoted to the practical criticism of poetry.

Examiners report on their excitement about this new component and the satisfaction experienced in marking the best responses. On the other hand, the first live run of an examination is bound to teach lessons (which have been discussed above) and it must be noted that examiners were surprised by the weight of unproductive contextual material and the formulaic approaches which candidates brought to this unseen paper. The message is that skills of literary analysis should be of primary concern when preparing candidates for Component 3; potted histories, biographies and rote learning of terminology should be placed firmly on the back burner.

EDUQAS
GCE A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE
Summer 2017
COMPONENT 4: PROSE STUDY

Main messages

Most centres had adapted very successfully to the demands of the new Prose Study unit and moderators were fortunate enough to read some outstanding responses to some inventive and stimulating text combinations. Many candidates seem to have welcomed the opportunity to read and study texts written during their life time and responded enthusiastically to a wide range of the 21st century texts.

In the majority of cases the candidates' work was accurately assessed by their teachers but adjustments were made to a number of centres' marks, although perhaps this is not surprising given a new specification and a wider mark range of 80.

In addition to advice regarding the application of the assessment criteria, moderators identified the importance of the following issues in affecting candidates' chances of success in this unit:

- Careful text selection and pairing
- Task-setting – not just the choice of topic but the actual wording of the title
- Teaching approaches
- Internal assessment procedures

Text selection and teaching approaches

- While most centres ensured that all of their texts had been approved by Eduqas, a small number had **not submitted all texts for approval** and allowed candidates to respond to post-2000 works which did not have sufficient literary merit. This led to a rather superficial approach and/or a tendency to favour the pre-2000 text to address AOs 2 and 5 in particular. This imbalance was especially noticeable in centres where the pre-2000 text was an AS set text and had considerably more literary heft and challenge than some of the relatively light-weight 21st Century texts chosen for comparison. *Jane Eyre* was a popular choice but candidates pairing it with, for instance, *The Secret Life of Bees* or *The Help*, often relied more heavily on the Bronte for close analysis of technique and consideration of alternative readings.
- **Quite a few post-2000 texts seemed to have been chosen for accessibility rather than literary merit** and did not support close, detailed analysis of language and narrative technique. There was often too much focus on plot and the tendency to write about characters as if real people which affected marks for AO2. Some texts which might be worth reconsidering include: *The Outcast*; *The Secret Life of Bees*; *The Welsh Girl*; *The Help*; *The Thirteenth Tale*. Having said that, however, there were instances of candidates who responded to texts like these with insight, perception and sophisticated, original thinking, demonstrating what can be achieved by such confident and well-prepared students. Problems seemed to arise when centres had chosen relatively popular texts for less confident candidates in the hope that their relative accessibility would be helpful. Unfortunately, in most cases, the

opposite was true and weaker candidates struggled to engage with 'slighter' texts as literary works rather than simply as stories.

- **Some text combinations were unhelpful because the texts were so similar** in subject-matter and theme. For example, candidates tackling *The Color Purple* along with *The Help*, Valerie Martin's *Property* or *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy, tended to view the works solely as very broad illustrations of racial prejudice, often making sweeping generalisations about contextual influences and largely overlooking the novels' nuances and subtleties as literary works. The reworking of established texts rarely worked well and candidates comparing Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* found it difficult not to conflate characters and themes, while comparing *The Road* with *On the Road* led to some confusion for candidates.
- On the other hand **some combinations were less successful because the texts were so different** as to make it difficult to find any common ground for meaningful comparison and contrast. While we would not wish to limit candidates' freedom of choice and independence, it must be acknowledged that some pairings were always going to prove very difficult; the candidates who compared *A Room with a View* with *Damned United* or *We Have to Talk About Kevin* faced an uphill battle!
- **Dystopian texts were popular**, especially linking *The Road* with *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Brave New World*, although there was a danger of a rather reductive approach, with the essay descending into a list of typical generic features. This was also true, as in the past, when candidates chose texts in order to compare treatment of gothic tropes in texts such as Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger* or McCabe's *The Dead School* paired with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* or *Dracula*. A narrow focus on conventions or generic features can blinker candidates so that the texts are viewed only as examples of common features rather than individual, sophisticated literary works in their own right.
- Some centres opted to focus on **literary non-fiction** which was an interesting choice but it became clear that candidates need support when tackling a different, less familiar genre: candidates comparing *The Road to Wigan Pier* with Ben Judah's *This is London* needed some grounding in reportage so as to avoid approaching the texts as if they were novels.

Although there is **no hierarchy when it comes to teaching approaches**, and centres are free to decide which is best for their students, there are certain considerations to bear in mind:

- There should be **scope to demonstrate some independence and originality**, especially for candidates aiming at higher bands. Centres can decide that it would be most helpful and appropriate for their students to study the same two texts, but it is not advisable that they respond to the same topic, let alone the same question. There were relatively few instances of the latter, fortunately, but when it did occur, not only did it make it difficult for candidates to demonstrate any individuality but also for the teachers to rank and assess candidates' work accurately. Perhaps this is hardly surprising when the candidates are including so much of the same material, focusing on the same extracts, using the same quoted evidence and the same critical views.
- Centres need to give **careful thought to the degree of independence appropriate** and to bear in mind that candidates will need support in their studies, whichever approach is taken. The two texts chosen for the NEA unit are the only prose works studied by candidates at A Level and AS candidates will only have studied two pre-2000 prose texts in Year 12. Some centres offered their candidates a very wide

choice of texts in both categories which is in the spirit of the unit, but moderators felt that some candidates found it difficult to work so independently and tended to rush to the internet for support. As with LT3, the centres who successfully offer candidates a free choice of text had developed a **carefully planned support scheme of work** whereby independent study was underpinned with structured lessons on generic skills and topics related to prose technique as well as guidance on research and essay writing. Offering candidates a completely free rein when it comes to text selection is by no means an easy option for teachers.

- **Most centres struck a half-way point between these two options** by selecting a common text in one of the categories and giving candidates some choice in their paired text, whether from a long list of titles or just two or three. In the best examples, the texts were selected because they allowed candidates to choose from a wide variety of topics one which genuinely interested them.
- There was a sense gained by many moderators that **candidates simply did not know their texts well enough** and that some had read them only once rather than studying them in detail. We need to impress on candidates that these texts have equal weight with their set texts and they should study them as thoroughly before writing about them. Rather than reading about their chosen works via on-line study sites, candidates would be better served by rereading the actual texts. Moderators felt that it would benefit candidates to have **more guidance on how to study a novel and how to make best use of on-line research materials**.

It is to be hoped that all **centres will want to review their approaches** after the first year of the specification and give some thought to teaching approaches and the best text combinations for their candidates.

Task setting

As had become increasingly obvious in the legacy spec with to NEA units, **task setting is of crucial importance and is much too important to leave solely to the candidates**. While it is hoped they will choose their *own topics*, they should not be trusted with the final wording of their *own titles*. In the most successful centres, the dialogue between teacher and candidate in fine-tuning the wording of tasks is an invaluable part of the process, helping the candidate to decide exactly what to write about and how to structure the argument.

While many candidates' titles were helpfully worded, obviously the result of careful discussion with their teachers, moderators were disappointed that there were **still far too many examples of candidates clearly hampered by poorly worded tasks** which led them away from literary appreciation of the texts.

The main problems with the wording of tasks echoed similar concerns raised repeatedly in Principal Moderators' reports for both LT2 and LT3 were:

- **Overly complicated titles** which had a superficial sophistication but which actually made it difficult for the candidate to craft a sophisticated response. At times, moderators had to confess that they couldn't actually understand what the title meant, which didn't bode well for the candidate's success in responding to it.
- **Not ensuring that a literary focus was emphasised**, leading candidates to foreground context or simply abstract ideas or concepts rather than literary appreciation. It would be worthwhile teachers emphasising the difference between the terms '*represent*' and '*present*' in a literary essay. The most successful tasks were worded so as to put the spotlight on the writers' shaping and presentation,

rather than solely on the ideas raised in the texts. Candidates are best advised to include the word 'presentation' in their titles and to understand exactly what it means and why it's so important to a student of literature.

- **Lots of candidates tackled tasks on identity** which were not always successful. While some confident candidates relished the opportunity to take a sophisticated conceptual approach to the texts, clearly comfortable with the notion of fictional identity and its shaping by the writer, it tended to encourage others towards psychoanalysis of the characters as if they were real people or into sweeping sociological or philosophical generalisations. It rarely had the desired effect of leading the candidates into closer literary appreciation of the texts and is perhaps best treated with caution.
- **An emphasis on 'society' and 'social class' was still popular**, even though this has been repeatedly raised as a tricky approach in the legacy NEA units. In nine times out of ten, this will lead candidates to take a contextual lead in responding to the texts, viewing them as illustrations of the social hierarchy at the time of writing rather than as crafted literary works. They will nearly always make sweeping generalisations about class divisions, lacking knowledge at 17 or 18 of the subtle nuances in play, and therefore gaining a less than sophisticated grasp of the writer's artistry:

'Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson would never have met if they hadn't ended up sharing a room with a view in the same pension in Italy as she's upper class and he's working class.'

'The Earnshaw, like the Lintons, are upper class and look down on Heathcliff's lower class origins'

- **Some tasks were too wide-ranging** making it difficult for candidates to explore an idea in any depth as they spread their focus too widely. Titles often invited candidates rather vaguely to 'write about' or 'describe', and even 'explore' can be too open-ended without a precisely defined focus. In most cases, using a carefully worded critical opinion or even a single qualifying adjective would have narrowed the focus and helped the candidate organise the material into a clear argument rather than a series of examples or observations loosely related to the theme.
- It might be a useful exercise for teachers and candidates to consider the potential pitfalls of some of these tasks:
 - **How social class differs from identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Atonement*.**
 - **Discuss the ways in which the writers use the themes of justice to conform to moral principles in the texts.**
 - **The characters in *Jane Eyre* and *The Outcast* are symbolic; they represent the conflicts of society.**
 - **Explore the paradigms of assimilation in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Meat Tree*.**
 - **Moran describes the late Victorian period as 'a battle between the outmoded value of the Victorian past and the rebellious, liberating possibilities of a more modern outlook.' How do Hardy and McEwan present the changing attitudes towards social class in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Atonement*.**
 - **Consider the theme of identity under pressure in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Half a Yellow Sun*.**
 - **How far do you agree that 'tradition creates relationships' and how does the statement apply to *Birdsong* and *The Welsh Girl*?**

- To what extent can we argue that Orwell in *1984* and McCarthy in *The Road* are writing dystopian novels that have any relevance to us?
- Compare and contrast how both Faulks and Rhys present male characters in *Birdsong* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and explore how the societies at the time affect the characters' attitudes and values.
- Analyse how the context of the societies in which the novels are set affects the characters in *Dracula* and *Fingersmith*.
- Consider the idea that 'Inwardness is a female disease' in *The Color Purple* and *Brooklyn*.

Balancing AOs

As with legacy NEA units, balancing the AOs is no easy task but the most successful centres were those where candidates and teachers had a clear understanding of the assessment criteria.

AO1

- This covers much more than simply accurate writing and, put simply, rewards the **candidate's understanding and knowledge** of the texts. *Sophisticated, confident* writing is always grounded in thorough knowledge and understanding while *flair* is often characterised by the candidate who can demonstrate a sophisticated understanding by writing concisely and precisely using apt, carefully chosen vocabulary.
- **Organisation** is a key part of this AO, the ability to select and structure material into a relevant argument. When ordering their ideas and signposting their direction clearly to the reader, most candidates would be well-advised to give more thought to **paragraphing**, which seems increasingly to be a dying art.
- Some centres had clearly encouraged the **careful crafting of effective introductions** in outlining the candidates' arguments, often helping them get off to a good start. However, there was a distinct vogue for opening the essay with dictionary definition of terms, such as 'conflict', 'prejudice' or the all-too-common 'identity'. The candidates clearly hoped this was a sophisticated and scholarly approach to the opening sentence but in many cases it exacerbated the focus on the idea per se rather than on the texts.
- **Accurate writing is important** and some centres do not acknowledge frequent and serious lapses in correct, coherent writing when awarding a mark for AO1.

AO2

- Even though this is not more heavily weighted as it was in LT3, it should still be the **foundation stone** of a successful literary response.
- **Commentary of meaning** is often rewarded in the name of analysis, a term quite frequently used in primary markers' annotation when candidates are demonstrating understanding of implied meaning. This is also rewarded under AO2 but analysis of technique involves **explicit engagement with, and discussion of, the writer's craft**, how his or her conscious choice of language or prose technique has conveyed meaning.
- **Knowing the text well enough** to decide which parts best illuminate the point being made and to be able to select apt quotation are key discriminators.

- The best candidates **develop key ideas** by ‘digging into’ carefully selected quotations and then finding more evidence to avoid assertion. Some candidates **over-analysed quoted words**, sometimes taken out of context, to the point that they were in danger of misrepresenting the writer’s intention completely and instead imposing their own views on the text.
- Some candidates seemed **unfamiliar with conventions of novel writing and prose technique**, and needed to revisit this to support their independent study.
- One example would be **over-emphasis on sound effects**, suggesting less than secure grasp of genre. Elaborate claims were made for two words starting with the same consonant: *‘Mr Brocklehurst has a ‘stony silence’, the sibilance suggesting he has a cold and frightening effect on young Jane’*. This candidate would have shown more secure generic awareness by concentrating on the image which conveys the meaning here.
- **Lots of impressive-sounding linguistic terms** were used, not always to good effect. This can lend a surface sophistication but candidates would do better to familiarise themselves with literary terminology (see toolkit list on website). It’s not always helpful to label all word classes or identify the ‘non-diegetic narrator’ unless there is a point to be made about why the writer made that choice. Moderators still read a lot about ‘semantic fields’, syndetic lists and ‘connoting’ but candidates do not always go on to consider why the writers used them:
 - *The noun ‘funeral’ creates a semantic field of death*
 - *The pronoun and noun ‘he’ and ‘uncle’ provide a semantic field of authority.*
 - *‘Misery’ connotes unhappiness*
 - *Bronte uses a syndetic list for Jane’s feelings...*
- Candidates were over-rewarded **for writing about characters as if they were real people** and for superficial speculation about their motives and feelings without sufficient support. It was noticeable that there was relatively sparse reference to the writers in such responses.

AO3

- As mentioned under task setting, and countless times in feedback to centres, far too many candidates let **context rather than literary appreciation drive their responses**. While there were fewer opportunities to write about the horrors of war than in the legacy specification, some candidates wrote a great deal about the political and social background to the texts, often starting with this and then moving onto the texts. At times some seemed to have forgotten that they were studying English literature!
- Band 5 marks must be reserved, not for candidates who have done a lot of research which they then unload in their essays, but for those who **fully understand the relationship between text and context** and how a range of possible influences may affect the writing and reception. These candidates can discuss, rather than assert, the significance of contextual factors and keep the text to the fore. They don’t forget what they’re studying.
- **Biographical context is increasingly popular**. In fact this was the only contextual factors some candidates considered. The fact that Cormac McCarthy had a son relatively late in life figured very large in consideration of *The Road* as did Jean Rhys’ stay in prison as a factor in her choosing Bertha Mason as a central character. The wisest candidates remember that such connections are speculative and use tentative language to consider them as a possible interpretation, addressing both AOs and 3 and 5. Those who suggested that novelists only write to describe their own experiences did not demonstrate a strong understanding of the creative process or

the conventions of literary fiction. The dangers of relying too heavily on biographical context was made clear in the candidate writing about *Cloud Atlas* who suggested that author David Mitchell's main occupation as a tv comedian clearly influenced the comic tone of his novel!

AO4

- It was very encouraging to note that most **struck an appropriate balance** between their two texts and handled this AO quite effectively.
- However, there was a **tendency to over-reward connections based on the number rather than the quality of links**, suggesting the difference between criteria for Bands 4 and 5 is still causing some uncertainty. For Band 4, connections are **sound and purposeful**, in that they're relevant to the argument and well-supported with textual reference and detail, showing **secure** understanding and knowledge. Band 5 is a step-up in that the connection becomes **productive** in actually furthering the argument and **illuminating** when the candidate demonstrates a clearer, enhanced understanding of the texts by comparing and contrasting them.
- There was occasional evidence of primary markers **rewarding connections between characters or events in the same text** as AO4 when links must be between the two texts.
- The best connections were **literary rather than contextual**.
- Most candidates wrote about the texts in an **integrated way** from the start, although some chose to consider them separately and make some connections at the end which tended to be rather superficial or assertive.

AO5

- This AO should **reward literary interpretations of texts** rather than sociological, philosophical or economic theories which might be applied to the texts but often relate more closely to context than alternative readings. The best examples are when candidates discuss what **literary critics** have written about texts, demonstrating how this has helped to shape their own responses.
- There was inevitably **less material to use with post-2000 texts** but candidates made clever use of criticisms of the more established pre-2000 text: what a critic said about Ishiguro's presentation of Stevens as an unreliable narrator could be applied to Barnes' Tony Webster in *A Sense of an Ending*.
- Lots of candidates used **newspaper reviews** for post-2000 novels which was a valid approach but it's important that the quality of the review is considered. Use of cover blurbs or readers' comments from on-line book clubs were rarely helpful.
- Too many candidates relied very heavily **on on-line study sites** and in the worst cases this led to malpractice as material was clearly plagiarised. The more centres can do to encourage candidates to go back to the text and read the writer's words rather than relying on those from some stranger on the internet, the better. These sites rely on **superficial commentary** and this is often aped by candidates who clearly don't fully grasp the difference between 'a critic on Sparknotes' and a worthwhile literary critique. Reading post-graduate essays online can also be problematic as their emphasis is not always literary. Many such theses have a sociological leaning which can mean that candidates who depend on them without guidance reproduce the same contextual focus. There is an important difference between responding to *White Teeth* as a literary novel and using it to comment on attitudes to multi-culturalism in society. Candidates do need help with this distinction and the most successful centres clearly give advice on research and effective use of

other readers' opinions, a vital skill for examination preparation as well as the NEA response.

- The most careful markers **used the band descriptors very carefully**, distinguishing between the quoting of **clear or sound** use of relevant views for Bands 3 and 4 respectively, and those who merit Band 5 marks because they can use critical opinion or alternative readings as a basis for **discussion in** arguing their case. They also made this distinction clear to their candidates.
- **Freudian and Marxist readings** of the text were often problematic and not especially helpful to the candidates as they tended to encourage a psychoanalytical or 'real people' approach or an economic or socio-political generalisation respectively. Candidates often needed a clearer understanding of these 'schools of thought' if they were to be really helpful.

Annotation and Assessment

The main issues were:

- **Not enough detailed annotation** of scripts to justify the marks awarded.
- **AO markers were still used without any clear indication of the band achieved** at that point, as repeatedly mentioned in previous reports in the Legacy specification. The most accurate markers accompany AO markers with brief descriptors, such as **clear, secure or sophisticated**, making clear to other readers, and in their own mind, how well the candidate was performing at key moments.
- Comments in margins did not always accurately reflect the standard of candidates' work, especially the crucial difference between **clear/appropriate, secure/sound** and **sophisticated/confident**.
- A lack of **consistent approaches to marking** and annotation at centres
- **Internal standardisation was not always sufficiently robust to make the rank order secure**. The best centres included evidence of meaningful dialogue between markers but moderators often reported on the secondary 'marker' simply initialling the original mark, especially in those centres where assessment was not secure.
- In nearly all cases where centres' marks had to be adjusted it was because they were **too generous**. The new marking range of 80 rather than 40 was to some extent a factor, but centres should be used to the 5 band system and the wording of the AOs is almost exactly the same as for the Legacy specification.
- After placing candidates in rank order, some centres immediately placed the top candidates' responses at the top of Band 5 without comparing them with the examples of Band 5 work in standardising materials made available to centres at CPD or in on-line materials.
- Not paying close enough attention to the **qualifying terms** in the assessment criteria.
- The tendency to **push candidates to the top of the band**, rather than fine-tuning assessment within the band. This obviously led to a serious inflation of the candidate's overall marks.

In order to avoid adjustment to their candidates' marks, it is important that departments review their assessment and standardising procedures. There will be further guidance and support for centres in readiness for next year's submission.

Administration

- Most centres were familiar with the procedure for submitting their samples of ten candidates and there were **few problems** with the administration.
- It was a little disappointing that **some centres had not included the checklist** which was designed to help centres prepare their samples efficiently and to streamline the moderation process. This checklist can be downloaded along with the coversheets from the open website.
- Some samples posted in simple AO3 envelopes were **damaged in transit**, suggesting that plastic sacks would be more secure.
- A small number of centres posted their candidates' work **very late** without alerting the Subject Officer which caused inconvenience and extra work for Eduqas staff. The deadline is obviously set to ensure all candidates have the same time to complete their work and if centres realising their sample may be delayed for any reason should contact the Subject Officer.
- Essays should be tagged or stapled, not placed in individual wallets.
- Moderators were very pleased to report that most candidates kept within the recommended word count of 2500 to 3500 words. A few were very brief and thus self-limiting but it was encouraging that teachers had clearly impressed upon candidates that writing too much can also be self-penalising.

Teething problems were to be expected at the start of a new specification and it's important to remember that the vast majority of candidates managed to write relevant, well-informed responses which were sensitively and accurately assessed by their teachers. There was much to impress and entertain the moderators, most of whom expressed admiration for both candidates and teachers in producing work of such a high standard. Along the way, we might also have helped some candidates to develop an interest in reading!



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