



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE A LEVEL

SUMMER 2022

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ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCE A LEVEL
Summer 2022
COMPONENT 1: POETRY

General Comments

The first message in this report must be one of congratulation to the teaching staff and candidates who have navigated their ways through two extremely difficult and challenging years. This year's cohort had little or no past experience of public examinations and it is testament to their determination and to the professionalism of their teachers that they were able to perform as well as they did.

That said, as the rest of this report will show, there are adjustments to be made and repair work to be done if English Literature is to flourish as an examination subject which offers candidates the opportunity to engage thoughtfully and creatively with reading that they have learned to enjoy.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

It is vital that candidates pay attention to the **specific demands** of part (i) tasks and remember that they will always need to examine some aspects of technique rather than write descriptively or offer a general commentary on the poems or passages. In many cases, an adjustment to exam technique would **double the marks** for this part of the paper.

Q1 Chaucer

1(i) is not an invitation to describe Januarie: responses needed to take full account of Chaucer's **techniques in shaping** readers' responses and to say what those responses are likely to be. Many responses were heavy-handed in asserting equivalences between January and the animals mentioned in the passage. There seemed to be a lot of misunderstanding (not helped by hints in the text notes) about the significance of Pyk and Pikerel with many suggesting the primary function of the references is to cast Januarie as a predatory Pyk and May as the smaller, younger pikerel. Very few seemed to realise that these references relate to appetite in the same way that old boef and tender veel refer to gastronomic preferences (pike were fish for the table in Chaucer's day) with overtones perhaps of predatory sexual desire. Candidates must try to differentiate between allusions (which might put us in mind of something) and metaphors or similes which make direct reference.

1(ii) was generally well-handled but some were distracted by a debate about whose selfishness deserved most punishment followed by lengthy accounts of feminist readings which might regard May as fully justified in her deceit of January and properly rewarded with her escape at the end of the Tale. This does not, of course, do justice to the ambiguity of Chaucer's conclusion. There were some odd ideas about Chaucer writing for a medieval feminist audience which could not be supported. Care should be taken in distinguishing between the contexts in which texts are written and those in which they are received.

Q2 Donne

For 2(i), candidates were not asked to **describe** the mood and atmosphere but to **explore** Donne's **poetic techniques**. Better answers did not work through the stanzas offering general commentary but identified the power of image patterns and the effects of structure and cadence.

In 2(ii) the question seemed to work very well and prompted some excellent discussions, the best showing how heart and mind were fused in Donne's poetry. Those who tried to make a strong case for one or the other tended to write themselves into a corner and arguments became strained.

Q3 Milton

In 3(i) weaker responses simply described Satan's appearance and behaviour. Stronger responses saw that there were several elements to the presentation of temptation involving flattery; stimulation of appetite; deceitful exemplification of Satan's own fictitious success and subtle appeals to Eve's latent ambition.

For 3(ii) there was some awkwardness in many responses where 'deceit' was confused with 'disobedience' giving rise to self-contradictory ideas about deceiving the omniscient God. The limitations of candidates' own vocabulary became apparent with many examples of 'deceiving' and the ubiquitous use of 'want' instead of desire, need, covet and so on. Very few probed ideas of self-deceit or the seeds of deceit implicit in Adam's and Eve's earliest exchanges which was disappointing. Many wanted to show off all they had learned about the epic and rhetoric without much regard to relevance. Milton's treatment of his daughters and muddled ideas about his theological, social and political beliefs were, once again, often mentioned without regard to relevance.

Q4 Blake

For 4(i) there were further issues of descriptive writing rather than **exploration of technique** with regard to word choice, structure and tone.

In 4(ii) there was a tendency to work through two or three poems and then nod to the task at the conclusion of each commentary. A better approach was in establishing a clear overview of the types of repression evident in Blake's poetry and then allowing the presentation and readers' perception of such repression to drive the response.

Q5 Keats

This is the last time that this text is assessed and there were very few responses seen.

Q6 Rossetti

In 6(i) only the strongest candidates managed to see the difference between *describing* examples of the natural world in 'Autumn Violets' and *exploring* the ways in which Rossetti makes use of the natural world in presenting a set of ideas. Once again, it is a matter of reading subtext and engaging with poetic techniques rather than describing.

For 6(ii) some strong work was seen. Many candidates were able to address 'vivid' and 'accessible' over a range of poems. However, some essays were weakened by an over-emphasis upon poetic form which amounted to little more than extended labelling (or "weighing and measuring" as one colleague puts it) and, a common weakness over many years, extravagant claims for the effects of caesura, enjambment or sibilance.

Section B

Biographical material must be used cautiously so that it does not come to dominate essays which must be driven by **comparative analysis of the poetry**. It was alarming to see the same half dozen biographical 'facts' trotted-out by every candidate at some centres, even in exactly the same order and in the same words (e.g. "...by then Sylvia had kicked Ted out of the family home for his affairs..."). Teachers are respectfully advised to steer candidates away from this sort of material and to monitor carefully candidates' register of language in both discussion and written work so that they are prepared to adopt an 'academic register' (AO1) under exam conditions.

Candidates must be reminded that they should leave time for the close consideration of **at least two poems by each poet**. There was a significant number of essays in which candidates penalised themselves by referring to too few examples.

Qs 7&8 Hardy and Eliot

For Question 7 was much description of Vivienne Haigh-Wood Eliot and Emma Hardy in the weaker responses, but the majority of stronger ones were more wide-ranging, conceptual and less dependent upon poorly digested biographical 'facts'. In the best essays, the presentation of relationships was seen as closely connected to the poets' broader aesthetic and cultural ideas about disintegration and decay.

Question 8 was less popular than Question 7 but very well-handled in many cases. Some excellent responses moved well beyond the obvious choice of 'The Waste Land' in their exploration of order and coherence and beyond Hardy's poems of grief and loss to examine different approaches and tones of voice in the presentation of disorder. Confident responses pointed to satirical flavours and wry humour in both poets' work.

Qs 9&10 Yeats and Abse

There was insufficient data in this first year of examining these texts.

Qs 11&12 Lawrence and Clarke

This is the last time that this pairing is assessed and there were very few responses seen.

Qs 13&14 Hughes and Plath

For Question 13, there were some strong responses with interesting interpretations of what might be signalled by 'uncivilised' and 'instinctive'. Biographical references abounded (e.g., Plath's pregnancy and Hughes' shamanism) which, as in other pairings, sometimes overwhelmed critical analysis of the poetry.

Some excellent debates were seen in essays on Question 14 and, as hoped, the better essays came up with "Yes...but" responses which cleverly explored the half-truth stated in the task. It was a slightly different question format from previous years which seemed to work well in opening up opportunities. As is so often the case, the major drawback was asserted and often inaccurate biographical material which was allowed to stand for itself and was not successfully connected with the poets' ideas and techniques.

Qs 15&16 Larkin and Duffy

Question 15 was a popular choice and there were plenty of competent responses. Some were confident enough to explore the nuances of different sorts of relationship such as parent / child as well as the more obvious romantic dimension. Dislocated writing about the poets' real lives continues to be a problem – obviously tempting with this particular task – but candidates need to be more aware of literary concepts and to avoid creating literal equivalences between poems and the 'facts' of the poets' lives. There were lengthy and sweeping accounts of Larkin's relationships and some extreme cases of using a poem such as 'Havisham' merely as brief introductions to long accounts of how Duffy herself had suffered hurt and betrayal.

Question 16 was also popular and there were some quite subtle and wide-ranging treatments of 'disillusionment' in better essays. Weaker responses tended to give accounts of how relationships had failed (i.e. mostly focused on 'Talking in Bed' or 'Adultery') leaving the personae disappointed or disillusioned rather than upon more nuanced presentations of different sorts of disillusionment.

Qs 17&18 Heaney and Sheers

It was gratifying to see more interest in this pairing from centres outside Ireland and Wales. Unfortunately, some responses to Question 17 chose to concentrate on 'emotions' rather than 'senses' which caused a loss of direct focus but, in most cases, they were still able to make valid and supported points.

It was a great pleasure to read a number of thoughtful and clearly inspired responses to Question 18. Those who chose it had little trouble in interpreting 'sublime' and offered some very interesting approaches taking in the transformation of the visual world through the poets' imagery and cadences, as well as the elevation of what might be taken for ordinary or simple human feelings and behaviour which were shown to be especially dignified or of central cultural importance and, by extension, sublime.

Summary of key points

- Teachers responsible for delivering English Language, English Language and Literature and English Literature at A level should be sure that language used in the different classrooms and in practice written work meets the specific demands of the subject. The discussion of poetry in the English Literature classroom should concentrate upon vocabulary choices; implicit meaning; tone; auditory effects; imagery and literary devices such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole and so on. Most importantly, when making use of the technical terms from the literature "toolbox", candidates must make sure they are not simply feature-spotting but analysing how such features function in making meaning.
- Specific work needs to be done in many cases upon the development of range and precision in candidates active vocabularies. In the past, teachers have devised vocabulary-based word games at the introductory stage of lessons where the focus and content of the lesson is anticipated. This hardly needs explaining, but if a poem of a certain sort will be the focus of the lesson, then students might be invited as a starter to develop as much vocabulary as possible out of the key word 'sad' - leading them perhaps to 'miserable'; 'gloomy'; 'wretched'; 'desolate'; 'dejected' and so on. Discussions about nuanced differences and the emotional 'temperature' of words will be greatly beneficial. The important thing is to raise awareness of the importance of demonstrating clear engagement when writing about poetry through effective word choices.

- There are useful materials available on the WJEC and Eduqas website which will help students to see the differences between descriptive writing, commentary and analysis. A failure to write analytically is the primary reason for depressed marks in this subject.
- Take care that well-intended support for students does not produce an over-rigid approach to the examination so that candidates are unprepared to interpret the specific demands of questions and respond freshly and relevantly.
- Candidates should be dissuaded from attempting to include every fragment of critical comment they have learned in the course of study. Exercises designed to help students apply what they know about other interpretations relevantly, and to provide examples of the development of critical discussions would be of great benefit.
- The same applies to contextual knowledge. The key is to be found in whether or not a contextual reference can be connected to the ways in which the poet makes meaning. In other words, AO2 and AO3 should be seen as bonded elements. Assertion should be discouraged and the presentation of simple equivalences between poetry and the real lives of writers. "...this is about a time when x did y" should be treated with caution.
- Some damaging tendencies, which have been gradually increasing over recent years in both the delivery of the specification and in candidates' responses to tasks, have now become severe and quite widespread; they are summarised in the table below.

Issue	Comments
• Sterile labelling of features using terms from the English Language / linguistics toolbox.	One examiner describes the use of terminology from linguistics in literary essays as "attempting to assemble Lego with a Meccano toolbox". Another describes simple identification of features such as asyndetic lists, noun phrases or semantic fields as "weighing and measuring". Once a feature such as these has been identified and labelled in a literary essay there is really not much more to say about it; it very rarely contributes to literary analysis but it leaves the candidate with the mistaken impression that they have written something valuable which should earn credit under either AO1 or AO2. Any use of technical terminology must have a direct and relevant role in analysing the ways in which meaning is made.
• Even taking account of the reduced content which applied this year, the further narrowing of textual study created problems for candidates.	It was sometimes alarming to see in both Section A and Section B that candidates from the same centre had only the same 3 or 4 poems with which to support their responses. This is related to the point about 'template essays' below and candidates often resorted to a 'hit-and-hope' approach with unsatisfactory attempts to make memorised notes on the poems fit the set tasks. A much more flexible and wide-ranging approach to the study of poetry is strongly recommended.

Lack of development and range in candidates' own vocabulary which seriously limits their ability to express themselves clearly and effectively. This often prevents candidates from achieving an appropriate tone or register in their essays.	AO1 requires candidates to aim for clarity, engagement and an academic register. Centres are strongly advised to give adequate time and attention to the development of personal vocabulary through whatever means seems appropriate. Thesaurus word games which are geared towards the material to follow as a warm-up in the classroom might work for many. "Want" is a classic example of a catch-all word when need; desire; require; yearning; hankering and so on might have been much better choices and would have perhaps indicated a greater level of creative engagement. Consider these examples: "In 'After a Journey' Hardy <u>wants</u> to return to when "Our days were a Joy" or "In 'After a Journey' Hardy <u>yearns</u> to return to when "Our days were a joy". The second example clearly signals the candidate's engagement with the emotional tone of the poetry as well as with the idea expressed, simply by choosing a more precise word.
Reliance upon pre-prepared 'template' essays which are shoe-horned into service regardless of the set task.	Different candidates require different degrees of support in the classroom and while it is understood that those who struggle with the subject might need a clear framework for writing, we must take care not to impose the same sort of framework on all candidates in any one cohort. There were many examples of all candidates at a centre working mechanically through a response in exactly the same way, paragraph for paragraph, with the same critical and contextual references in the same order. Some of the more able candidates would clearly have been much better off writing a more relevant and focused response where they might have responded freshly to the actual demands of the question.
Failure of candidates to take account of the relevant assessment objectives in different parts of the paper.	This applies especially to Section A part (i) responses. Contextual material is not rewarded here. The other area of concern is Section B where some essays performed excellently under AO1 and AO2 but then failed to take account of one or more of AOs 3,4 and 5.
The use of speculations / assertions about the poets' lives presented as 'different interpretations' in anticipation of reward under AO5.	For example, "While some readers think this poem was written about a real visit Donne made to a prostitute, others think that is not the case." Little or nothing is achieved by writing of this sort in a literary essay. It does not offer a different interpretation of Donne's poetry and is a distraction from the key task of literary analysis.

Extended assertion of biographical material in place of textual analysis.	For example, “‘Spider bites’ refers to an incident at a party in Cambridge when Sylvia met Ted for the first time and bit him so hard on the cheek that, to the horror of others at the party, she drew blood.” Biographical material (especially for this pairing) can provide valid contextual references when handled speculatively, but this example, standing alone as it does, is an asserted, unsupported attempt at a connection under AO3 which does not in any way address the literary qualities of Hughes’ poem.
Stacking-up of memorised, critical quotations throughout essays which may have little bearing upon the set task or the point under consideration.	Quotations from literary critics which are left to speak for themselves rather than becoming a carefully considered part of the candidate’s own response cannot really be rewarded above Band 1 or 2 where views are either described (Band 1) or acknowledged (Band 2). Critical quotations or suggested different interpretations cannot be ‘purposeful’ or part of a ‘mature discussion’ until they are examined and applied relevantly to both text and task.
The uncritical / unbalanced use of language such as ‘dehumanises’ and ‘misogynistic’.	This point is related to others above where candidates’ lack of active vocabulary forces them into using exaggerated language or terms which do not take account of the relevant contexts in which texts were written. For instance, several candidates felt that Chaucer was writing for an anti-misogynist, feminist ‘readership’ which is misleading in several ways.
Loose phrasing / sentence structure. / inappropriate register.	Candidates must be encouraged to express themselves directly and clearly with due attention to grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary. Essays which relied heavily upon the persistent repetition of terms such as “connotes”; “furthermore” and “arguably” were usually insecure. Candidates should have an eye on the effectiveness of their expression as well as upon the relevance and power of their ideas.
Handwriting.	Articles in the July media point to a disastrous decline in the quality of students’ handwriting brought about, it is suggested, by lengthy periods of home working when tasks were completed on laptops or tablets. Centres should make every effort to become familiar with students’ handwriting and then persuade those with illegible handwriting to make use of word processors. It is easily arranged with the WJEC.

Finally, on behalf of all those who examined Component 1, I would like to repeat the sentiments at the top of this report and offer our thanks and congratulations for teachers' hard work and support that has resulted in so many excellent performances from candidates. I know that all examiners would agree that no matter how long they have been involved in assessments of this kind every year brings fresh insights and often astonishment at the standards which young readers can achieve. I hope the advice offered above will be useful and taken in the intended spirit which is to help promote the creative and successful study of a subject which, I am sure, is close to all our hearts.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

General Comments

After the trials of the last two years, it was pleasing to see so many learners engaging with their set drama texts with such positivity and thoughtfulness. The new style of essay questions, with the instruction to 'include close reference to relevant contexts', appeared to have worked well on this paper as candidates were less constrained to a set contextual focus and were able to select for themselves material which enriched and illuminated their argument. The best responses offered ideological and cultural points of reference, whilst amateur historians and sociologists were still in evidence, describing and narrating material which did little to enhance their response to the text.

There was an improved focus on critical engagement this year and many learners had used their time wisely by researching other opinions on the texts. However, there are some who approach AO5 by throwing in some dubious statements which 'a critic' has made, sometimes of a barely literate nature, then fail to use the expressed view purposefully. Close textual analysis and support have improved, and accurate quotation was in evidence at all levels of achievement, impressive in a closed-book exam.

There is an encouraging adoption of academic style and register across the range of achievement, and some responses were scholarly to a degree not seen before. There are some practicalities which are important for a paper which is marked online, and we would be grateful if these could be remembered for future series. Some scripts are difficult to read because an inappropriate pen has been used and this poses problems for scanning these papers which is marked on-screen. Please encourage your candidates to always take a **new page** for **each new question**, as this again can be problematic for the scanning process.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Shakespeare

Q1: *King Lear*

There was some good focus on the language and imagery in part (i) and some close reading, although there was frequent misidentification when candidates attempted to use grammar terms (imperatives often described as declaratives; and terms like adjective and verb quite frequently misapplied). Some candidates dwelt on the presentation of Kent or Cordelia, without turning it to the focus of the question on Lear.

Part (ii) responses often made good use of tragic theory and its conventions, with the classical Greek terminology of hubris and hamartia etc. often well applied within a critical and contextual framework. Some excellent and insightful comments were offered on how the minor characters, such as the Fool, might complicate the reading presented in the question. Insightful and engaged responses were astutely aware of the contextual implications of this Jacobean play, although some candidates seemed to think he divided Scotland and England, not united them. Candidates often built fluent arguments around the elements they considered to be important in addition to the tragic consequences, thereby proving their case that it was indeed "more than" the question suggested, with good use made of the sub-plot and the characterisation of the evil characters (particularly Edmund) and the saintly Cordelia. Stronger responses offered links to other plays of the period and, in particular, other Shakespearean tragedies.

Q2: *Antony and Cleopatra*

There was general sympathy for Antony in the part (i) question, with some recognition of the significance of Enobarbus' contribution to the perception of Antony as a popular leader, first to Cleopatra in an aside and then to Antony when he makes the audience aware of the men's weeping. Most saw the significance of Antony's exhortation to 'drown consideration', and 'Scant not my cups', criticising him for poor leadership in failing to plan for battle and focusing on sensual enjoyment instead. Stronger responses included discussion of death and honour and showed awareness of Shakespeare's presentation of some humility in Antony. Several merely used the extract to discuss Roman v Egyptian values.

The essay question proved widely accessible, with good discussion evident regarding the issues of weak leadership and 'a great love story', many seizing the opportunity to compare the two cultures of Egypt and Rome and to point out that Caesar was clearly the best leader. The idea of Cleopatra as also a leader was not commonly seen and there were missed opportunities to discuss relationships between leaders and those they lead. Some saw the love as merely lust while others thought it is clearly a love story but not a 'great' one.

Q3: *Hamlet*

The famous soliloquy in part (i) gave the candidates plenty to write about, so the best responses judiciously selected key ideas with an eye on the overall shape and progression of the argument. Most candidates could identify some sense of struggle, though only the strongest were able to tease apart the detail of the scene and assess Hamlet's fragmented state of mind. The best also related the thinking neatly to "this point in the play", placing it on a dramatic arc; some less secure responses were a little confused about where it occurred or considered it just to be about the contemplation of whether or not to kill Claudius. There was some very effective analysis of imagery, Hamlet's focus on death and the presentation of his private questioning, the fragmented nature of thought conveyed by caesura and enjambement. One memorable response argued that when Hamlet fears the 'undiscover'd country' he is suffering from a case of 'destination anxiety'!

The part (ii) question invited thoughtful agreement and disagreement, with some of the best responses again informed by the notion of a tragic hero, informed by Aristotle, and also in some cases a sophisticated consideration of the revenge tragedy as a sub-genre. However, too many concentrated on the notion of Hamlet simply being 'disappointing' to audience and other characters alike, and some unfortunately took the given view as an invitation to discuss whether Hamlet is a 'hero' in the broadest possible and least literary sense. In some instances the issue of 'lacks pride' was simply ignored, although the better-informed candidates were happy to take the opportunity to discuss pride within the tragedy genre.

Q 4: King Henry IV Part 1

There were very few responses to this text.

Most were able to identify the extract and position it at the correct point in the play and in the plot. They perceived the King's angry contrasting of his son Harry with the 'infant warrior' Hotspur and the frustration and clear disappointment of the King with regards to his son and heir's behaviour in this speech. They were able to analyse the language with its focus on military but also emotional language and terminology, and they were able to fully understand and analyse classical references.

Similarly, for part (ii), most of the responses were at least appropriate, with a good portion of them being secure and confident. Most identified that the end of *Part 1* is a turning point for the character of Harry and made appropriate reference to the tavern episodes and Falstaff's influence. They were able to analyse the psychological complexity of Prince Hal and his evolution as a character up until the moment when he turns into a heroic figure in helping the King control the rebellion.

One concern regards the sparseness of contextual references. Most references were to the contemporary political scene and some to actual performances. Some candidates also clearly struggled to engage with other critical views of the text, although in general there was a clear engagement with the view in the question.

Q 5: The Tempest

This text is proving to be increasingly popular. The part (i) extract offered good scope to compare the presentation of Prospero in his final dramatic interaction with other characters – particularly Alonso and Ariel in the extract – and then his contemplative address to the audience. A few weaker candidates were less secure on the switch and misread some of the Epilogue as addressed to Alonso and/or all the characters, as if Prospero was asking them for forgiveness and release. Some good responses noted the effect of the switch to shorter, rhyming lines and the possible interpretation of Prospero as a controller, like a director or playwright, although the occasional diversion into biographical AO3 was not helpful on a section assessed for AO1 and AO2. It was pleasing to note, however, that most saw Prospero's transition from magus to man and recognised the significance of his reference to 'faint' strength. While some saw him as striking a newly penitent tone, others noted he is shown as defensive about his 'project' which was 'to please' and that he never appears apologetic. Those who grasped the breaking down of the 'fourth wall' offered penetrating insight into the metatheatrical aspect of the epilogue.

The part (ii) essay was best dealt with when 'moral' centre was kept in the foreground, although several ignored or misunderstood the key word 'moral' and discussed only Prospero's 'centrality' in the play as a whole. Fortunately, this usually led them to some consideration of his moral/immoral behaviour, but it is vital to engage with the **whole** question. Those who did focus on the whole question offered thoughtful discussion of the morality of the following: the treatment of Caliban and Ariel, including but not confined to colonial considerations; the controlling of Miranda and, to some degree, Ferdinand, including the position of women (and Shakespeare's daughter Susanna!) in society; different forms of magic; and the divine right of rulers, with Prospero's usurpation compared to the Gunpowder plot.

Section A: General observations

The following concerns need some attention:

- Candidates should avoid the occasional speculative biographical comment that is hard to substantiate for AO3.
- Although there was some effective analysis of verse structure, some candidates isolated moments of blank verse or iambic pentameter as if the character had exclusively adopted that form for this point in the play.
- Comments on context in the essays were often either heavy-handed or too brief to elucidate the arguments candidates wished to make. Only the best could use judicious contextual awareness to enhance their readings.
- Candidates should focus on the fact that Shakespeare's plays are exercises in dramatic stage performances, not prose texts; this appreciation allowed the best candidates to engage fully with dramatic technique and the intellectual arguments that can stem from this engagement.

Section B: Drama

Qs 6&7: *Doctor Faustus*/*Enron*

Both questions produced some astounding responses that judiciously selected textual detail to enhance meaningful, convincing comparative arguments. Candidates seemed very well prepared for these texts and there was clear engagement with the similarities and differences between the use of power to corrupt in the two plays in Q6 and ideas about change in Q9. It was particularly rewarding to see so many engage with the texts as stage productions, with various dramatic devices in the two plays being used as the foundation for detailed discussion of the focused topics. Rich contextual material, especially for *Enron*, and also the morality play genre for *Doctor Faustus*, was in general carefully integrated into comparative consideration of different kinds of power and ideas about change.

Qs 8&9: *The Duchess of Malfi*/*A Streetcar Named Desire*

The enduring popularity of this pairing of texts is clearly founded on most learners' good grasp of the contrasting techniques, periods and a well-researched range of critical responses. Candidates excelled at Q8. It was a pleasure to see so many good scripts. Many obviously enjoyed analysing the loss of identity from so many different angles, including the loss of female identity under the pressure of masculinity and social expectations, but also the loss of male identity. Some of the scripts analysed the loss of social and political identity of most characters in relation to the historical context.

The expressed view gave candidates great scope to identify the 'several angles' of their choosing in the consideration of 'loss'. Candidates interpreted the 'loss of identity' in interesting ways not only for Blanche and the Duchess but also for Mitch, Stella, Stanley, Ferdinand, Bosola, Julia. A variety of independent positions were adopted, frequently arguing that the Duchess maintained her identity whilst Blanche's disintegrated.

In addressing AO3, candidates frequently made very detailed references to the social and political structure of the contemporary historical period and the impact that this was perceived to have on the characters. There were references to the American Civil War and World War II but also to the actual Italian contextual origin of the *Duchess of Malfi* with additional references to the contemporary English situation. In addressing AO2 many were able to offer analysis of the dramatic techniques used by both Williams and Webster and how they similarly re-visit traditional genres.

The key assessment objective AO4 was generally tackled very well, with so many similarities found between the plots and the characters but also striking differences. The characters of the Duchess and Blanche were mostly compared, but also Ferdinand and Stanley and other minor characters. Social and contextual influences and expectations were also compared and the impact of male hegemony in patriarchal societies. It was particularly rewarding to see full engagement with stage directions, as strong responses analysed the use of light/darkness, costumes, props and stage positioning. In addressing AO5, candidates showed strong critical engagement with various views, a range of feminist, Marxist, and Freudian approaches being the most common.

Q9 was also a popular choice, with the destruction of family bonds explored well against various dramatic and contextual backgrounds that explored the 'worlds' of the plays and their lack of compassion or loyalty. Again, however, independent thought was much on show by candidates who offered examples of loyalty or compassion in both plays.

Qs 10&11: *The Revenger's Tragedy*/Loot

This text pairing is clearly growing in popularity, and as we have observed in previous years, a high number of candidates in response to these plays produced scholarly, erudite responses which examiners can only marvel at and applaud. Many were able to delve into considerable textual detail in their comparative analysis of both plays, and integrate apt, pertinent critical views and valuable contextual and ideological insights to illuminate their arguments. It is always refreshing to see candidates who are confident in shaping their own critical views in response to the task, and who are fully able to discuss the texts in a 'mature, discerning' way. The strongest responses recognised the 'carnavalesque' genre associated with Q10's 'carnival of nastiness' and argued cogently against the expressed view, discussing what else the plays offer, for example a strong critique of their respective societies and cultures. Q11 invited candidates to focus on how death is presented, and in response to this question we saw some particularly accomplished analysis of staging and props, with a sharply maintained focus on the audience at all times. The more discerning argued that we see only nihilism behind Orton's play but some effort at retribution and therefore a more moral and instructive message in the events and characterisation of Middleton's play. In responses to both questions and to both plays there was a sustained appreciation of farce and slapstick comedy.

Qs 12&13: *Lady Windermere's Fan*/Betrayal

In response to both questions, candidates engaged well with the central issues and had plenty to say about pretence and the destructive force of love in the plays' respective societies and cultures. Several drew on biographical material for Pinter and Wilde, but not exclusively, and when used it was frequently pertinent to the discussion rather than merely narrated. It was pleasing to see some thorough examination of the different styles of dialogue, with contextual and critical references to dramatic genres, such as the Theatre of the Absurd for Pinter, and what has now become recognised as 'Pinteresque' dramatic technique with the judicious use of pauses. In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, the tradition of social etiquette and the genre of melodrama were frequently referred to in Q12 and candidates were well informed about bourgeois culture and attitudes.

There was a clear awareness of different kinds of love in Q13, with close examination of maternal love and its capacity to destroy other relationships in both plays, with others positing that male friendship is presented, especially in *Betrayal*, as more valued and more destructive than romantic/marital love. Some candidates noted the lighter tone and use of humour in Wilde's play in contrast to the intensity of the scenes in *Betrayal*, with one candidate noting sadly that love in *Betrayal* was a lonely business in comparison to the world of *Lady Windermere's Fan* where it is regularly held up to scrutiny and gossip.

Qs 14 &15: *Measure for Measure*/Murmuring Judges

Unfortunately, no responses were seen on this pairing this year.

Section B: General observations

The following concerns need some attention:

- Comparative analysis was often at an 'appropriate' level; unfortunately, some candidates resorted to a narrative-based comparison of the texts.
- In addressing other views some candidates merely quoted a view without making use of it, or in the worst cases made up a comment in order to tick a box. These were often barely literate.
- Candidates should remember that in studying these texts dramatic staging is significant; reading these texts as prose (without considering the elements of stage and audience) does limit the framework of sustained and meaningful comparative discussion.
- Finally, it is in this section where we see the regrettable tendency to write far too much. Often candidates have achieved their marks after three sides of a page, but they persist in writing another three to four. In over-long answers candidates risk diluting the quality and compromising the structure of their response.

Summary of key points

- It is important to remember to read the set extract from Shakespeare as closely as possible, without attempting to respond immediately to the question.
- It is also important to engage with **all** elements of the essay questions, as they offer a critical view which must be addressed during the course of the response.
- Too many essay responses are over-long and consequently unstructured, with some barely coherent. Expression skills are often severely compromised when candidates are rushing to pour out all their knowledge, sometimes irrespective of the question. This should be discouraged. Examiners frequently saw 6-8 pages written in Section B, and this is unnecessary. Please remember that it is quality not quantity which is valued.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

General Comments

Section A: Prose

There was little difference between the number of candidates opting for Q1 (1880-1910) and those opting for 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.

This year, both texts had more supporting materials than previous years. The majority of candidates engaged with these, and many made very good use of them in shaping their response. A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information.

It was pleasing to see that candidates were taking more time to plan and shape their ideas more effectively. Many responses started with clear and engaged overviews that began to integrate the supporting extracts and signposted where the candidate was hoping to go.

Section B: Poetry

Both poems provided candidates with plenty of opportunity to gain the full range of marks for this section of the paper. Of the two, Wilcox's 'Bird of Hope' was the more popular choice with Wright's 'The Surfer' still providing some excellent responses.

It was pleasing to see fewer template-style answers in this series. However, 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. 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.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Unseen Prose

Q1 (1880-1910): *Golden-Brown* by Richard Jefferies

Strong responses showed an immediate and confident understanding of this non-fiction text and were able to use the supporting extracts to help shape their argument. Those who carefully read the introduction were able to comment on the 'natural history' perspective and link this to elements of both the extract and supporting materials.

Many responses were able to analyse the highly graphic approach to scene-setting, the objectification and celebration of the women described and the tone of scientific observation created by Jefferies.

Less successful responses were characterised by narrative comments that re-told the scene or made basic or assertive comments on the language used by the writer. In order to be at least clearly engaged (AO1) with a text candidates must be able to go beyond an accurate description of characters and events and be able, with clear support (AO2) to say something convincing about a writer's techniques and their effects.

It was pleasing to see almost all candidates engaging with the supporting materials on some level. This was the first series that an image has been included and stronger responses recognised its contextual significance as a nursery rhyme. It is also the first series where more than two supporting materials have been provided and candidates seemed to enjoy engaging with the range on offer.

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. Those who were able to neatly weave pertinent contextual points throughout their essay, enhancing their analysis with concise and relevant reference to the supporting extracts were more successful.

Some candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learnt context, as with previous years and these responses were characterised with large chunks of contextual information divorced from the text or tenuously linked. 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.

As with previous years, some candidates were not confident writing about the form of the text and focused on poetic concepts such as 'internal rhyme', 'volta' or 'alliteration' when there were more relevant prose concepts to be discussed that could have developed their answers further.

Q2 (1918-1939): *To the North* by Elizabeth Bowen

The majority of candidates who chose to answer on 1918-1939 identified a range of relevant elements in the passage such as the use of setting to reflect characters' moods and the free indirect discourse allowing access to the character's mind.

As with Question 1, most candidates enjoyed the wider range of critical statements to engage with and used them, at some level, in their response. More successful responses began to challenge some elements of the supporting materials, resulting in some mature and individual discussions. This year, we saw a number of successful candidates shape their essay with ideas from the supporting materials, using 'motion' or 'a sense of cultural transience' to introduce a point and then analyse the text in relation to this.

However, there were many candidates who had pre-learnt contextual information and then attempted to apply it to the text assertively. An example of this is assuming Cecelia became a widow when her husband died in the war. Less successful responses spent too much time trying to apply pre-learnt information at the detriment of engaging with the supporting extracts. 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.

Similar to Question 1, having learnt about 'stream of consciousness' or even the poetic 'volta', candidates tried to use these terms in inappropriate ways. It is important candidates recognise the form of the text and then discuss suitable concepts.

Section B: Unseen Poetry

Q3: 'Bird of Hope' by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

The more popular choice, Wilcox's poem provided a series of challenges that were met with success by many candidates. There were some good overviews, demonstrating candidates' engagement from the start. Stronger responses were able to show sound grasp of meaning when discussing the impact of the title, urgency of the message and the language patterns in stanza three.

Less successful responses only had simple understanding and 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. There was some misuse of terminology, whether incorrect identification of techniques or terms used with no qualifying discussion or support to analysis.

Q4: 'The Surfer' by Judith Wright

Wright's poem was less popular with candidates than Wilcox's but for those who did choose *The Surfer*, the challenges it presented were often tackled successfully. There were some sound discussions about the surfer's interaction with the sea and the change in tone as the sea becomes more threatening. Successful responses engaged with the majority of the poem, connecting patterns, identifying changes and discussing the effect of the poet's language choices.

Some less successful candidates had a simpler understanding of the poem, perhaps focusing too much on one word or image that then led them to make unsupported assertions. Some responses also had a tendency to focus on linguistic terminology rather than literary ideas, meaning that they missed opportunities to recognise and to discuss the form and relevant poetic concepts.

Summary of key points

- Give adequate time to reading and re-reading of the texts, supporting materials and question.
- Spend time planning in order to offer a brief, supported overview in the introduction that confirms understanding and engagement with the extract or poem.
- In Section A, avoid over-reliance on pre-learnt contextual material that becomes divorced from the analysis of the text and takes time away from candidate's engagement with the supporting materials.
- Some candidate responses for Section B seemed to suffer from a lack of time.
- Make careful and accurate use of literary rather than linguistic terminology, recognising the form of the text, whether poetry or prose, and using suitable concepts.
- Remember that the business of critical analysis is to draw-out meaning rather than to impose or assert it.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2022

COMPONENT 4: PROSE STUDY

General Comments

To say that the past two years have made the Prose Study component 'challenging' would be somewhat of an understatement. It is greatly to the credit of candidates, therefore, that they were able to produce on schedule extended responses which were relevant, engaged and coherently written. The vast majority of moderation samples arrived promptly and in very good order, a testament to the teachers' commitment and professionalism. Moderators were impressed by the hard work of the candidates and the dedication of their teachers which made possible the success of this component, despite the problems posed by conditions beyond their control. It was universally felt among moderators that centres should be proud of the way in which they have responded to very difficult circumstances and done their utmost to promote their learners' best interests.

Moderators read some excellent work as these short extracts from the moderators' reports to centres indicate:

- *'It was very clear that a truly independent, bold attitude to reading and thinking is being encouraged.'*
- *'The centre's considered approach to text selection and task setting allowed all the candidates across the ability to fulfil their potential which was excellent practice.'*
- *'The candidate's essay was a very interesting and creative exploration of the ways in which both writers had presented the topic, made possible by thorough knowledge of the novels.'*
- *'This imaginative pairing demonstrated how illuminating comparison of texts from different periods can be when rooted in skilled analysis and close reading for AO2, particularly impressive when linked directly to wider meaning in both works.'*
- *'There were some outstanding responses in the sample. Candidate X's work wove AOs together with real elegance, while candidate Y's essay showed just how illuminating and enriching comparison between two superficially very different texts can be.'*
- *'The candidates and their teachers are to be congratulated on producing such enthusiastic, fresh and ambitious work.'*
- *'It really was a pleasure to read such engaged and mature responses.'*

Areas of Concern

It was perhaps inevitable, however, that some progress made since the introduction of this NEA component would be affected when centres were not able to receive individual feedback on their candidates' work. There was a feeling among moderators that some ground gained in key areas, especially in task setting to ensure a literary focus, had been lost since the last external moderation process in 2019.

Hopefully, the next academic year will be much more settled for learners and teachers, but in the wake of such upheaval, perhaps this would be a good time for all centres to review how they prepare students for the Prose Study, reflecting and building on existing good practice but also being willing to identify areas for development.

To that end, this report will address **four key issues** in the hope of regaining some of the lost ground, helping centres to approach the Prose Study with a renewed spirit of enthusiasm:

- **The vital importance of task setting to ensure a literary response.**
- **The quality of analysis and critical appreciation.**
- **Over-reliance on on-line study resources.**
- **Making assessment secure.**

Comments on individual questions/sections

1. Task setting

This has undoubtedly proven to be a more important factor in candidate success than the choice of texts. The vast majority of centres whose marks were adjusted were those where the wording of titles did not help candidates sustain a literary perspective or allow them to meet higher band criteria.

Unfortunately, there was an increased prevalence of **context-led or issue-based questions** taking candidates away from critical appreciation of the texts as literary works and inviting them instead to use the texts as illustrations of ideas, theories or social conditions, affecting performance in all AOs. Even for AO3, the candidates were not demonstrating a 'sound, secure understanding of the connections between text and context', and marks given solely to reward the amount of contextual material in response to titles like these were often inflated:

- *'The system of social hierarchy is used as a form of oppression to dehumanise those that are materially deprived'. In light of this, compare how both authors portray class as repressive in their novels Jane Eyre and Atonement*
- *'Social attitudes had deleterious effects on people of the 1940s and the Victorian era'. How do the writers present this in their novels?'*

This was especially concerning as these unhelpful, non-literary titles often seemed to reflect the way the candidates had been taught to approach the novels. It appeared as if **texts had been selected with an 'issue' in mind**, rooted most frequently in a sociological rather than a literary connection, often meaning the candidates had viewed the novels from a limited, even reductive standpoint from the outset. Although the wording of the titles varied slightly, the candidates in quite a lot of centres were all effectively responding to the same task centring on the 'issue' at hand such as:

- racial inequality in *The Color Purple* and *The Help*
- class barriers in *The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement*
- patriarchal repression in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Power*

While this might well have been exacerbated this year by the difficult circumstances in which teachers were working, it is an approach which has been advised against in the past and one which we would want to emphasise as problematic.

This issue-led approach was especially problematic in the **very popular focus on gender, especially female repression**. More than a third of all titles focused on the notion of patriarchal oppression, imposing some very narrow interpretations on such diverse texts as *The Road* and *Pride and Prejudice*. In the latter case this entailed writing as if novel ended half-way, with Lizzie's spirited, proto-feminist rejection of the patriarchal oppressor Darcy's proposal at Hunsford; the candidates seemed unaware that they actually married at the end!

Given that this is such a loaded and contentious issue in the time of #MeToo, it can be more difficult to encourage candidates to focus their interest and energy on interrogating the texts rather than using them as a springboard to discuss the rights and wrongs of the gender debate per se. As one moderator commented, *'Having seen so many responses focusing on female repression, I'm beginning to wonder if novelists wrote about anything else for the last two hundred years'*. Might it actually be time to consider a temporary moratorium on the evils of toxic masculinity so that candidates are not having to battle with such unhelpful titles as these:

- *"Female identity is defined by romantic relationships with men". With this statement in mind compare and contrast the ways in which Forster and Adichie blame patriarchal conditioning for female dissatisfaction with relationships and within themselves.*
- *How far do you agree that the suppression of everyday life and the struggles of traditional woman stereotypes have held back the characters in A Room With A View and Brooklyn?*

Some titles were inaccessible or simply unintelligible as if the candidates who devised them were straining for sophistication. Eduqas guidance has always stressed the wording of titles should not be left to the candidate alone but must involve some liaison with the teacher in crafting a question which will target all the AOs. The use of a critical view has been recommended as a way to help candidates initiate a debate for AO5 and organise ideas into a line of argument for AO1. However, this is worthless if the title is worded in a way that the candidate doesn't fully understand with a statement which is either a hindrance or simply ignored.

- *'Both female protagonists demonstrate the exertion of pressure upon the relative epochal standards, illustrating the dichotomous shift between the notions of conformity and rebellion; their respective societies both restrict and encourage the finding of liberation.' In light of this statement, compare and contrast the ways in which the duality of limitation and defiance are presented in Brooklyn and A Room with A View.*

Using a **loosely related aphorism** taken from 'Brainyquotes' might lend some superficial veneer of sophistication but, rather than the critical view of the texts recommended, this type of quoted statement was rarely helpful to the candidate in engaging with the texts from a literary perspective, especially when there seemed to be a disconnect with the steering element in the question:

- *'Love isn't something you have to deserve' Jennifer Echols. Explore the juxtaposition of the expectation and privilege of love that is woven throughout The Great Gatsby and Atonement.*

Using **philosophical or sociological statements** can obviously make it more likely that the candidate is going to take a non-literary approach. At times very confident candidates were writing with impressive eloquence about philosophical or psychological theory rather than the texts, as encouraged by their titles:

- *"Crowds are somewhat like the Sphinx of ancient fable: it is necessary to arrive at a solution of the problems offered by their psychology or to resign ourselves to being devoured by them " (Gustave le Bon) Discuss the ways in which both authors present concerns about human psychology in The Handmaid's Tale and Millennium People.*

Effective task setting is not easy but it is fundamental to success when candidates are writing 3,500 words and a whole component's marks rest on one question. Devising helpful titles was made more difficult by unavoidable interruption to study this year, but its importance must be recognised for future cohorts. The range and literary relevance of topics offered, and how they are worded as titles to help the candidates, should be subject to constant review and refinement in an efficient, self-reflective department. The following advice taken from moderators' reports would be a useful starting point for such a process.

Advice:

- **Avoid selecting texts based on a common 'issue'** or teach with that single idea in mind. We would never approach exam texts in such a narrow, reductive way. *Hamlet* isn't just 'about' madness; Donne isn't just a 'love poet'.
- Ensure the candidates have a range of **literary topics** to explore when comparing the texts and are not viewing them from a contextual or issue-based perspective.
- **Approach the specific wording of titles as a crucial element** in success, one that must not be left to candidates to devise on their own.
- In most cases a **critical view of the texts**, ideally crafted by the teacher in close liaison with the candidate, is a useful way to narrow the focus so it is manageable and promotes a literary perspective. If the candidate would struggle to engage with the view, however, a more straightforward approach might be advisable so that the wording of the task is not another obstacle to overcome.
- Try to discourage candidates from tackling tasks on **wide-ranging, amorphous and loaded issues** which moderators warn will make it more difficult for them to sustain a literary approach to the texts: *social class; identity; truth/reality; gender; race*
- **Consult Eduqas advice** on task setting and the wording of titles in previous years' CPD materials and Principal Moderator's reports.
- Look carefully at Eduqas **exam questions as a masterclass** in effective task setting.

2. The quality of critical appreciation and analysis of technique

Following on from task setting and the emphasis on a literary approach, there was **concerning evidence of AO2 being side-lined by AO3 and AO5**. In any literary response, engaging with the craft of the writers should be firmly to the fore of the response, with contextual influences and other interpretations used to *support* and enhance critical appreciation of the texts rather than driving the argument. If essays are dominated by contextual information taken from historical and socio-political sources or, as one moderator put it, '*flooded with generalised critical theory*', there is not enough direct focus on the works to meet higher band criteria and analysis of the way meaning is shaped becomes effectively 'squeezed'. Claims are not fully supported or developed sufficiently enough to make them convincing but are merely asserted.

It was dismaying to see rather a **limited sense of the texts as novels**, as highly crafted, extended works in which ideas, events and characters progress. The texts were often viewed instead almost as if static, with characters set in time, so the candidates could 'stab' at the texts in any order to find 'evidence' to support their claims. It was interesting how often candidates jumped straight to the middle of texts or even the end to 'prove' their points with little apparent sense of the importance of structure or progression.

As these are the only whole prose texts the candidates study for A Level, we might expect to see them engaging with a range of ‘prose devices’, as indicated in the AO2 criteria, but there was relatively limited evidence of consideration of features such as: *narrative voice; authorial intervention; mood; tone; atmosphere; setting; imagery patterns and motifs; symbolism; contrasts and structural choices; beginnings and endings*, etc. Instead, there **was a worrying tendency to micro-analyse relatively short quotations at word level, often a single sentence, pinning complex meaning on a few words or even minor effects** such as punctuation or the use of sound effects:

- *‘The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news’. By her use of the semi-colon Austen demonstrates Mrs Bennet’s vulgarity.*

It was particularly noticeable this year that many candidates focused a lot on the importance of pronouns, again perhaps reflecting the significance of this as a contemporary ‘issue’ rather than a literary device. This almost exclusive focus on word-level use was mentioned in previous reports as a worrying development but has become more prevalent.

At times, candidates were merely **paraphrasing or even defining** words’ meaning but seemed to feel they were analysing and evaluating effects, perhaps reassured by another concerning tendency to **‘label’ word classes**:

- *‘...the use of the high register, receptive noun ‘glaucoma’ connotes difficulty here...’;*
- *‘The adverb ‘quickly’ before the collective noun ‘flock’ emphasises the speed’*

While this might be an after-effect of GCSE, candidates need to be aware that the simple ‘naming of parts’, without explaining how the use of techniques has shaped meaning, is not rewarded, even under AO1 which credits the **relevant application of literary terminology**. For instance, what is gained by mentioning the use of the asyndetic list in this quotation from one candidate’s work?

- *“The simplistic descriptions such as the asyndetic triplet ‘softly coloured worlds of human love, the song of birds, the sun’ are made vivid by the endless grey the Man faces.”*

Some candidates demonstrated **limited knowledge of the whole texts**, which again might have been exacerbated by the situation this year, but surely ‘sound and secure’ analysis depends on a reasonable degree of whole text knowledge, let alone ‘confident’ and ‘perceptive’? Candidates who seemed able only to refer to certain sections of the texts were less likely to meet these criteria. It was disappointingly clear that **some candidates had clearly not reread or studied the texts** and this definitely affected the quality of their critical appreciation of the writers’ craft.

There was an increased tendency to **view characters as if they were real people** and to describe their actions and feelings in a commentary style, rather than looking beyond surface events to the writer behind. Once again, this ‘real people’ approach was at times invited by the candidate’s title:

- *How have female characters in Jane Eyre and Atonement overcome childhood trauma and how has this affected their childhoods?*
- *“It is so much safer not to feel, not to let the world touch me.” Discuss how Plath in The Bell Jar and Evaristo in Girl, Woman, Other present female identity and how it impacts the psychological state.*

The problem was made worse when the candidates were trying to **compare a novel with a memoir**, such as Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* or Jeanette Winterson's *Why Be Happy...?*, and seemed unsure how to distinguish between constructed characters and the real life experiences of the writer.

As with all the comments made in relation to this year's submissions, it must be acknowledged that the teaching and reinforcement of advanced analytical skills takes time and more conducive circumstances than many centres were able to rely on in the recent period. The advice below relating to promoting AO2 skills is therefore intended to be helpful to centres reflecting on their procedures and identifying areas for development in the future.

Advice:

- It can be perhaps easy to overestimate how much candidates understand about the novel form, and it might be worthwhile making sure that they have a reasonable grasp of the genre before starting study of their chosen texts. Good practice in some centres involves **an introduction to the novel** (or short story/memoir, etc) and its conventions in contrast to other genres or prose types.
- Ensure that teaching of the texts **promotes the concept of nuanced, multi-faceted meaning** rather than novels having one set idea to dictate.
- **Encourage rereading of the texts**, an uphill battle when literature students are sadly not always keen readers, but it might work if candidates are assured that it is the best way to boost their marks. (It seems wrong to suggest this, but if a text has sufficient literary weight and challenge, and has been approved, a shorter one might be more accessible for reluctant readers).
- Along with rereading, somewhat **old-fashioned study skills can be worth inculcating** such as keeping quotation banks; plotting character maps; tracing imagery and symbolism patterns, etc. The process itself helps to consolidate knowledge and understanding.
- **Discourage micro-analysis** and pinning large claims on flimsy evidence. Model how to make a more convincing case by developing points with further evidence. There are Eduqas resources under CPD materials demonstrating this which some centres have found useful.
- Use extracts **from good examples in the standardising responses** to show effective analysis and to contrast with examples from less successful ones.

3. Over-reliance on online study sites.

It is an uncomfortable reality that the **candidates were even more heavily reliant on low-value on-line resources than in previous years**. Once again, the difficult circumstances would certainly have been a factor here. Candidates having to work more independently than they or their teachers would like might well have lacked confidence in tackling challenging prose works. This may have encouraged them to rush to 'lit.charts', 'sparknotes' and a bewildering array of sites promising easy answers and short cuts.

Providing these materials is sadly a thriving business nowadays and they can appear a very attractive alternative to the hard graft of careful rereading and study. Some candidates seemed totally unaware how to make use of these sites and quoted long chunks from them, both attributed and unattributed, and even referenced extracts as if they were insightful critiques made by literary critics. Most worryingly of all, the candidates started to ape the style and approach of these sites which affected their marks and made it more difficult for teachers to assess their work accurately.

Of course, teachers cannot reverse time and restrict access to these materials, but it is **important to make candidates aware of their limitations** and many drawbacks:

- These materials are **not designed to answer specific, personalised essay titles** but to help candidates of all abilities understand the broad events and ideas in the texts. The people who write them are not being assessed by the Eduqas AOs.
- They tend to be as concise and straightforward as possible, so rarely provide detailed evidence but instead **make simplified, assertive claims**.
- They largely consist of relatively straightforward commentaries of what happens, peppered with some brief textual support and occasional analysis. They **tend to be descriptive, even narrative**, and unwary candidates can easily fall into the trap of writing in the same generalised commentary-style rather than engaging with the craft of the writer.
- Part of their appeal as textual guides is the absence of nuance and ambiguity, because they promise to make challenging texts more accessible. For this reason, they are **often simplistic and one-dimensional**, making it easier for candidates by presenting complex novels as being 'about' a few, easily labelled 'themes'.
- They tend to **pronounce, using definite statements**, without the tentative tone needed to convey a mature awareness of the texts' subtleties which is surely an important feature of an appropriate academic register in this subject.
- They often **refer to the characters as 'real people'**, sometimes neglecting to mention the writers at all because literary analysis is much more demanding than describing what characters do and feel.
- The way the materials seem to promise all to the candidates, condensing complex meaning into neat topic areas (characters; themes; imagery; devices) means the candidates feel they don't need to do any of this 'studying' for themselves. The reliance on study sites makes it **even less likely that they will reread** and gain the secure or confident knowledge of the texts which will allow them to engage fully or creatively in their responses.
- Although candidates live in an electronic world and are well-versed in on-line technology, this does not mean that they are equipped to distinguish what is worthwhile in the **bewildering amount of material** they are faced with. (Try Googling 'the narrator in *The Great Gatsby* as an example of the sheer weight of so-called support on offer).
- Some may be tempted to go behind the pay walls where all sorts of **promises of short cuts to success** are in place to lure them into very dangerous waters...

Much as it might be tempting to turn a blind eye to the overuse of these sites, they are not going away and it is best to be upfront with candidates from the outset. Spending some time on helping candidates develop helpful study skills at the start of the course could definitely yield benefits later on.

Advice:

- **Give guidance on how best to make use of these sites as a starting point** for study and recommend the more helpful ones. Remind them that not everything they read on the internet is of high quality!
- **Introduce them to more worthy critical opinions** of texts and help them distinguish between textual commentary which explains what is happening, and literary criticism which illuminates the texts by helping us view them from a fresh, informed, literary standpoint.

- Wean candidates off study sites and **encourage instead rereading** to embed knowledge of texts. One analogy might be that sifting through all those vague summaries of the texts is like listening to a radio commentary of a football match rather than watching it live.
- **Remind them of the commercial impetus** behind these sites and how they are advertised to exploit candidates' anxieties.
- Warn of the **very serious consequences of plagiarism**. Remind candidates of the need to attribute all sources and how they need to put any material from on-line sites in own words if they are going to use it.

4. Accurate Assessment

All moderators were able to report on examples of excellent practice in the marking of candidates' work which was a credit to the teachers involved. There were relatively few instances of inaccurate and inconsistent assessment which meant the candidates' marks had to be adjusted. As this comment from one moderator shows, there was admiration for the teachers working under such difficult conditions:

- *'In many cases, centres had clearly taken action to address issues raised in previous reports and had worked very hard to develop and refine their practice, although there were still a few who didn't do much in the way of annotating or internal moderation. It's hard to know exactly how much time and opportunity some departments had for this, however, with lots of pressure this year just trying to get the students back on course and acquainted with study habits.'*

However, some adjustments were unfortunately necessary to bring marks into line with agreed standards, causing disappointment for candidates. Such action is never taken lightly, and before any adjustment, the candidates' work is seen by at least two moderators, one at senior level. In centres where the marking was insecure, there was usually evidence of less effective practice:

- **Sparse annotation** with very little guidance to support the primary marker in making reliable judgments relating to five AOs across 3,500 words.
- **Limited explanation** to justify marks awarded to secondary markers or moderators.
- Centres using only **AO markers unaccompanied by band descriptors** to demonstrate evaluative judgements
- A **discrepancy** between the on-script annotation and the final marks awarded
- **Very brief summative comments** on the actual work and the official coversheet
- A policy of **pushing candidates' marks to the top of the band** in every AO instead of fine-tuning within the band as recommended.
- **Limited evidence of internal moderation**, sometimes consisting solely of the comment 'Agreed' and the secondary marker's signature.
- **Marks adjusted upwards** by a secondary marker without any explanation

To avoid adjustment, there is best practice in the most successful centres which all can adopt in order to do the best for their candidates.

Advice:

- Before marking their own candidates' work, **all teachers involved should reread at least one example at each band level in the Eduqas standardising materials** on the secure website, and ideally discuss these with fellow-markers. These are the standards the moderators will apply so it is important to adhere as closely as possible to them as a primary marker.
- Markers should also **refer to the previous moderator's report** to consider any advice on assessment provided.
- **Annotation should be detailed** and not be confined to an occasional tick and/or AO marker. These should be accompanied by descriptors from the assessment criteria to support decisions, such as AO5 '*acknowledges views*' AO3 '*clear connection*'; AO2 '*secure analysis*'; AO4 '*illuminating/productive*', etc.
- In centres where the assessment is most secure, the markers are often willing to **acknowledge weaker areas as well as highlighting strengths** in their candidates' work
- Encouraging candidates to use **double spacing** can make room for detailed and targeted annotation.
- In many successful centres, markers write **individual summative comments** at the end of the response and make specific reference to the criteria in supporting comments on the coversheet.
- While it is acceptable to give candidates encouraging feedback on their final draft, it's important to keep the moderator in mind when annotating and to **make sure comments are supporting the marks awarded**.
- Dual marking or cross moderation is invaluable but should involve some **meaningful dialogue between markers** rather than a simple rubber stamping of the primary marker's original decision. This kind of discussion about the criteria can reassure the moderator that the marks have been carefully considered and also inspire faith in the rigour of the centre's assessment procedures.
- Some smaller centres where dual marking is not feasible **refer to specific standardising exemplar** as reference points to support decisions.
- Rather than automatically pushing to the top of the band **the most accurate markers fine-tune marks with the band**. Awarding candidates marks at the top in every AO, when they might have been more appropriately placed in the middle or lower end, can quickly add up to an overly generous total and post-moderation adjustment.

A few final points

The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement continues to be a popular text combination but it might be time to reconsider pairing these two challenging and complex novels. Less confident candidates tend to struggle with two such nuanced and demanding texts and often demonstrate quite a partial or superficial understanding of one or both.

Using **two dystopian texts**, such as *1984* and *The Circle* or *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go* can make it difficult for candidates to see anything except the generic features. The result is often a descriptive approach, detailing the evils of both repressive regimes and treating them as real, rather than analysing the writers' individual literary choices. For example, candidates responding to Atwood's novel rarely, if ever, tackle her presentation of the narrator or the importance of other key characters such as Serena Joy, Aunt Lydia, The Commander or Nick, but usually restrict their focus to describing the worst excesses of Gilead. While the vast majority of responses to this text focus on female repression, one centre's approach to task setting allowed the candidates to look beyond the 'issue' to the writer's conscious crafting with topics including the presentation of: *the myth of sisterhood; male vulnerability; the triumph of endurance; the power of passion; the unreliable narrators* etc. This focus on the text as a novel, rather than a discourse on the horrors of the Patriarchy or simply a 'dystopian text', was helped by pairing it with a range of non-dystopian post-2000 texts including: *The Secret Scripture; Americanah; The Underground Railroad; Milkman and The Silence of the Girls*.

One issue raised by a lot of moderators was **the prevalence of contextual material in candidates' bibliographies** and the relative scarcity of good quality, print-based literary critiques of the texts. Not only was this further indication of an emphasis on context rather than the texts, but moderators commented on how often reference to these non-literary sources was rewarded under AO5 rather than the more likely AO3, which also affected the accuracy of the marking.

While it can be helpful to apply **schools of thought** as an alternative reading to the texts, it can be a very blunt instrument and should perhaps be used sparingly. In some responses, just as the candidates were starting to interrogate the text in some detail, considering how and why the writer was shaping meaning, this was interrupted by a long list of different, quite assertive theoretical stances: '*A Marxist critic would view this as... while a feminist would interpret it as... A new historicist approach to this would be to... but a critical race theorist would see it as..., unlike a Masculine studies critic who would...*'. Balancing the AOs is very challenging, but it is always best to help the candidates avoid '*flooding their work with critical theory*' which tends to divert them from close focus on the works themselves.

Effective paragraphing seems to be a dying art and it might be worth spending a little time on promoting their use to help candidates structure their material into a coherent line of argument.

Lots of responses would have benefited from more **careful proofreading and editing**, especially those at over 5,000 words which were far too long and nearly always self-penalising. The recommended word count of 2,500 to 3,500 words is intended to give all the same opportunity to develop their arguments in the interests of fairness and it is an important academic skill for candidates to select and organise material into a concise, focused line of argument.

Conclusion

Although this report has focused on areas for improvement, hopefully the achievement and dedication of candidates and teachers in extremely challenging circumstances have been recognised and appreciated. Many centres will be extremely gratified by the moderator's praise and commendation in their individual reports.

As a final thought, it struck several moderators that, as candidates are sadly growing up in increasingly dark and troubled times, this might be an opportunity to reconsider some of the topics we recommend they pursue for this component. As students of English Literature, their inner lives could be enriched and uplifted by engaging more intently on the skill of the writers in portraying the human experience, the appreciation which drew us as teachers to the subject, and by celebrating the pleasure and reassurance that reading can bring. As one moderator put it:

‘So much unrelenting misery. Where is the joy?’

Another’s reflections on the moderating experience might also be food for thought:

‘I’ve found it an interesting and enjoyable process and it’s given me very clear guidelines for our students next year. Above all, I’ll be urging everyone to get the task-setting right and to try to make sure it’s properly literary and not just applied sociology/politics or ‘what-I’ve-read-on-the-internet’. It would be lovely to see more on humour, playfulness, novelistic form and fewer helpless individuals being mercilessly crushed by patriarchy, colonialism or both.’

Summary of key points

- Reviewing and refining task setting, and the specific wording of titles, should be an on-going process.
- Candidates must be guided towards a literary perspective, rather than a reductive context- or issue-led one, with AO2 to the fore, not AO3.
- Candidates should avoid too much micro-analysis at word level of short quotations, and consider instead the use and effect of a range of prose devices,
- Candidates need guidance to avoid over-reliance on poor quality online study sites and should be encouraged instead to reread the texts rather than what somebody on the internet has said about them.



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