



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
GCSE**

NOVEMBER 2019

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2019

COMPONENT 1

General Comments

Section A

The reading material was a short story by Somerset Maugham which had rather complex chronology but only two main characters and a clear focus on a single incident when the narrator had been obliged to take the unnamed female character to what proved to be a very expensive lunch. The situation was humorous, almost painfully so, and the narrator's discomfort and anxiety increased to the point of panic as the situation unfolded.

Some candidates struggled to understand the narrative completely but many of them had quite strong feelings, particularly about the woman.

Section B

The titles in this section gave the candidates opportunities to write from personal experience or from their imagination and significant numbers tackled each of the titles. There was neither an obvious favourite nor a title that conspicuously failed to attract any interest. However, some titles were handled more successfully than others.

Some candidates struggled to sustain or structure their narrative effectively. As I have mentioned in earlier reports, there is no merit in writing endlessly but a successful narrative does need some coherence and substance. Some thought and planning would help many candidates.

A lack of technical accuracy was also an issue in many responses and candidates should try to build in time to proofread their narratives.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q 0.1 The opening question was worth five marks, as usual, and focused on a relatively short section of the text. The first ten lines of the story included the flashback to the lunch twenty years earlier but the question simply asked for a range of 'things' (facts or inferences) that the reader learned about the narrator in those lines.

For example, he had seen the woman at a play (not in a play) and had sat beside her at the interval. He had not seen her for twenty years and he hardly recognised her. The reader also learned that he had been manipulated into taking her out to lunch at a clearly expensive hotel.

At the time of their first meeting, the narrator was living in a tiny flat in London and he was earning very little money. He had written a book, which the woman claimed to have read, but he was a struggling author.

The candidates could use explicit or implicit information and most tackled this question economically and quite successfully. However, they did need to be careful with chronology and some were too imprecise at times. For example, the narrator did not ask the woman out to lunch and there was absolutely no suggestion that he was romantically attached to her.

- Q 0.2** This question was only worth five marks and the best answers were not too long but showed clear understanding of the narrator's thoughts and feelings with at least some focus on how the writer had shown those thoughts and feelings. The best way to approach this question was to track the narrator's thoughts and feelings and use appropriate textual support. The text followed a series of thoughts and feelings and it was sensible for the candidates to do the same, providing appropriate evidence from the text. Too many lost focus on the narrator's thoughts and feelings when they attempted this question.

The narrator's initial response was anxiety as the Grand was 'so expensive' he had never even thought of going there. However, he also felt trapped by her flattery and his lack of experience in saying no to a woman. He reassured himself that he could manage if he cut out coffee for a few weeks.

When he met her, he was surprised and disappointed by her appearance. She was 'not as young' as he expected and was 'imposing' rather than 'attractive'. His observation that she had more teeth than necessary was particularly cutting.

The menu 'startled' him because it was 'a good deal' higher than he had expected but he was reassured by what the woman said about not eating lunch and he was relieved enough to speak 'generously'.

The writer used verbs and adverbs precisely to show the narrator grappling with his hopes and fears.

- Q 0.3** This question focused on a much longer section of text and allowed the candidates to express their thoughts and feelings about the woman by tracking the impressions created by the writer. The question was set up to encourage engagement with the character of the woman, but it also included some focus on the writer and the better answers avoided unsupported assertions.

At first, she claimed to eat nothing or very little for lunch, suggesting that in her opinion people generally eat too much. The initial impression was created of a woman of moderate appetites and this was reinforced by her almost reluctant concession that she might manage 'a little fish perhaps'.

However, she then ordered lobster and the writer used the narrator's reaction to show how extravagant her tastes were. He 'gulped' and asked the waiter 'apprehensively' if they had lobster. Asking for smoked salmon added insult to injury, contradicting her words and exposing her hypocrisy as she said one thing but did the opposite. The narrator's heart 'sank' and she then had the nerve to lecture him about eating too much, particularly meat.

She repeated her tactic in relation to drink, flashing a smile as she claimed that she only drank champagne on doctor's orders. The narrator ordered champagne for her but he went 'pale' and ordered water for himself. She was oblivious to him and his reactions and the impression created was of an insensitive, self-obsessed hypocrite.

She was quick to take the narrator 'seriously to task' about his 'heavy lunch' but her hypocrisy was reinforced when she forced herself to have the expensive asparagus, despite her insistence that she only ate one thing for lunch. She was shameless in lecturing the narrator about his self-indulgence and opinions differed as to whether she was totally lacking in self-awareness or, more likely perhaps, a manipulative hypocrite who knew exactly what she was doing in exploiting this naïve young man. Most agreed that she was a horrible, unpleasant character and completely rude and selfish.

The writer used action and dialogue as well as the reactions of the narrator to show what she was like and the ironic discrepancy between her words and actions was used very effectively.

The key point in all of this was her hypocrisy but some candidates did comment on a decent range of impressions.

Q 0.4 This was a familiar type of question and again the best way to tackle it was to track the text methodically, looking for the narrator's thoughts and feelings and integrating textual support and any comments on authorial method into the response. The wording of the question allowed credit to be given for understanding of the writer's thoughts and feelings, and those who also provided appropriate evidence to support and illustrate their points did well.

The narrator was gripped by 'panic' as he feared not only that he would have nothing to see him through the rest of the month but also that he would not even have enough money to pay the bill. He thought about how 'embarrassing' it would be if he could not pay the bill and he could not face having to borrow money from his guest. He then considered leaving his watch as surety.

When the asparagus arrived, the writer used the narrator's perspective as he watched in horrified fascination as she 'thrust' them down her throat in 'large mouthfuls'. He was 'past caring' when she added an ice cream to the offer of coffee. The writer used the verb 'devoured' to describe the way the woman ate the ice cream and the adverb 'faintly' suggested disbelief, or perhaps despair, as she insisted that one should always still feel a little hungry after a meal. The narrator was clearly terrified that she might indeed still be hungry and the arrival of the peaches was described as 'a terrible thing'. When he thought 'God alone knew what they would cost' it showed his utter despair and anxiety. He felt embarrassed at leaving an 'inadequate' tip and was convinced that the woman would see him as mean as well as a glutton. Some candidates, quite rightly, saw him as ashamed of himself. As he left the restaurant he felt miserable, thinking that he had 'not a penny' in his pocket and the rest of the month before him. He left his guest with another lecture ringing in his ears. However, the story was not quite finished and the narrative returned to the 'present', twenty years after the lunch. Despite his disingenuous claim that he was 'not a spiteful man', the narrator seemed very pleased to have his revenge as he 'merely' pointed out that the woman weighed twenty-one stone.

Some candidates commented on the writer's use of the narrator and the dialogue but a methodical focus on thoughts and feelings and supporting detail (language and action) proved most effective. Relevant subject terminology should be used to enhance a point made. Searching for technical devices without commenting on the impact of these devices was not a helpful approach.

Q 0.5 This question required the candidates to range across the whole text and evaluate the story as a whole and in particular the ending. Candidates can find the evaluation question challenging and there is always a danger of candidates relying on simple and/or unsupported assertion and opinion for no very obvious reason. Some candidates simply resorted to telling the story or providing character sketches with no focus on the question. This narrative had most of the virtues of the good short story and it was difficult to argue convincingly that it was not successful in most respects. However, there were several ways of approaching the question and some candidates did make valid criticisms. The examiners were instructed to follow the candidates in any coherent line of argument.

Good answers tried to engage explicitly with the craft of the short story but some progress could be made through a personal response to the content of the story and the characters. As always in this type of question, the key was to take a coherent stance. Opinion is free and the candidates are completely entitled to their views but it was probably easier and safer to argue that the writer had indeed written an enjoyable story with a satisfying ending. Those who tried to argue the opposite view were usually struggling to justify their views and find supporting evidence.

It was possible to comment on various technical features of the story which made it 'enjoyable', or at least entertaining and interesting. For example, the structure of the story was tight and, although it employed flashback, the focus was on a single incident. The use of flashback showed some careful plotting in the story as it was mentioned at the beginning that the narrator hardly recognised the woman but it was not until the end that it was revealed why she was difficult to recognise. The plot was set up neatly and the chronology was complex but it was clear and used effectively, particularly in relation to the twist at the end of the story.

Some commented on the clever use of narrator and how his perspective and reactions contributed to the enjoyment of the story. Like most successful short stories, this story had few characters but they were clearly drawn and the characterisation was economical and sharp. The dialogue was funny and there was humour and irony throughout the story.

However, most answers approached this question by exploring the detail of the situation in the restaurant and the interplay between the characters. There was always potential for humour in the situation of the rather impoverished young man feeling obliged to behave in a generous and gentlemanly way in a very expensive restaurant and most candidates sympathised with his predicament and were able to pick out specific instances of his discomfort. The writer's language choices and use of dialogue showed the emotions of the narrator and how he was struggling with the situation very effectively.

It would have been surprising if the woman had attracted much sympathy but she was one of those characters readers love to hate. Her selfishness and hypocrisy were so clear and there were plenty of examples of both. Some candidates realised that this 'pantomime villain' contributed massively to the impact of the story.

The ending focused on the narrator's 'revenge' and most felt that there was an entirely appropriate and poetic justice in the fact that the woman had suffered the consequences of her gluttony. A few felt that the ending was cruel but the woman did not attract widespread sympathy.

Overall, the responses to this question could have been better and some candidates really struggled with the idea of a critical evaluation of a text.

Q 1.1 (a) The Rebel.

This title allowed any narrative which pitted an individual against authority. It was possible to be very imaginative here and some candidates attempted epic tales of rebellion. Some were perhaps too ambitious in scope and some relied too obviously on inspiration from well-known television programmes. Others went for personal experience which was usually set at home or in school.

Some of the responses struggled with structure and seemed rather awkward and uneasy in relation to the title. However, there were some commendable attempts.

(b) Write about a time when you lost your temper.

This was a straightforward, first-person narrative and the title offered a clear structure, encouraging a focus on a single incident which culminated in the narrator losing his or her temper. This was probably the most successful option as it was usually rooted in clear and relevant personal experience.

(c) The New Pet.

There were opportunities in this title for some humour and, although most responses were probably loosely based on real experience, some embellishment in the interest of entertainment was perfectly possible.

Most responses were straightforward accounts of the acquisition of a new pet for a birthday or Christmas present but there were some more imaginative efforts.

(d) Write a story which ends: ... and it showed Alex that we always have a choice.

This type of question does pose a structural challenge to many candidates and certainly requires planning and organisation. This could be a first or third-person narrative but the sequence of events should have led neatly and seamlessly to the concluding sentence. Sadly, that was not always the case and most struggled to bring their narrative to a convincing resolution.

Overall, most candidates do manage to construct a reasonably coherent narrative but many are seriously undermined by technical shortcomings and limited, or misused, vocabulary. The technical aspects of written expression are specifically weighted at 40% of the total available for writing and any preparation candidates can do to improve the accuracy of their work is time well spent.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates should think carefully about approaching the question appropriately and maintaining focus.
- Candidates should usually track the text (this is almost always the best way to approach reading questions).
- Candidates should link comments to supporting evidence.
- Candidates should think particularly carefully about the focus of their answers to evaluation questions.

In the writing section:

- Candidates should think carefully about which title they choose.
- Candidates need to plan and organise their work before they start writing.
- Candidates should take care with technical accuracy, particularly tenses and sentence construction.

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November 2019

COMPONENT 2

General Comments

Section A

The reading texts for this examination focused on London markets. One was a newspaper article about what appeared to be 'the end of the road' for Kingsland Road market in Hackney, following the council's decision to stop renewing permanent licences to stallholders, a decision that had drastically reduced the street trading for which the market was once famous. The article focused on one of two remaining stallholders, Harry West, and his determination to remain as a trader in the market. The other reading text was a passage from a Victorian magazine about Petticoat Lane market, describing the sights and sounds on a typical Sunday morning.

The two texts gave candidates the opportunity to explore the details and information about the markets and the people who traded there, and to consider the ways in which the writers captured the essence of the two markets. The materials seemed to be accessible and engaged the interest of candidates, and the questions provided the usual opportunities to consider the craft of the writer, evaluate the impact of a text and to compare specific points across the two texts. As with the summer examination, the attempt rate across most questions was very high, although where time management became an issue, some candidates failed to tackle the final reading question.

Section B

This section invited candidates to tackle two writing tasks. The first was a talk to be given to other members of the candidate's class, with the title, 'The person I'd most like to spend a day with.' The second task was to write an article on the topic of tattoos: 'harmless fun or something to regret in later life.'

Both tasks gave good opportunities for candidates to write for clearly specified audiences, the first requiring the candidate to establish an appropriate writer/reader relationship, along with sufficient detail of the person chosen as the subject for the talk and why they would be someone to spend a day with.

The second task required some exploration of the topic of tattoos, and whilst it was equally acceptable for candidates to express their personal views or to simply explore some of the perceived positive and negative arguments around tattoos without expressing their own view, most chose to offer a viewpoint. This task required some planning and organisation of viewpoint and the most effective responses often supported their views with relevant examples. The suggested length of these tasks is 300-400 words, approximately 1½ - 2 sides of writing, but significantly shorter responses on either of these tasks were often limited in terms of range, detail or development.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q 1.1 This first question followed a pattern seen in previous examinations of three one-mark questions that asked candidates to identify particular details from one of the texts, in this case the newspaper article about Harry West and the Kingsland Road market.

These were straightforward ‘search and find’ questions, but it was important to read the question carefully. For most candidates the questions afforded the opportunity to become familiar with the text which explained why Harry West continued to trade in the market.

The first part of the question simply asked candidates to give a detail from the text that suggested the market had been very busy in the past. This was explained in the first paragraph of the article, with two very specific details. Readers were told that at one time there were 150 stalls in the market every Saturday and that “there were so many people it was impossible to move.” In the second paragraph there is a reference to ‘this once-buzzing street’ so any of these details gained reward. Some candidates failed to select the correct detail, offering details such as how long Harry West had been trading in the market or giving details about what could be purchased in the market, but most candidates were rewarded. The importance of reading the question carefully was perhaps more apparent in the final two one-mark questions; the second question asked when trading had begun in the market, and for this candidates had to read further into the text, although this should not have been problematic as the fourth paragraph provided the answer in the opening sentence: ‘The market began in the mid-19th century...’, although some responses lacked the necessary precision, simply stating the 19th century. For most candidates there was no difficulty in locating the correct detail but some did not read the question carefully enough and incorrectly used the date mentioned in the first paragraph – 1970s. If some candidates got this part of the question wrong because they did not read the text carefully, others were guilty of not reading accurately the third part of the question. This asked for a detail about what Harry West’s grandson sold in the market. For careful readers, this presented little problem as readers are told that his grandson sells ‘what the youngsters want’ and his table stall displayed ‘rows of smartphone accessories and computer games.’ Unfortunately, some candidates mis-read the question and instead told examiners all about the household items that West sold, and as a result gained no reward. The questions required a little careful reading to gain full marks so it was disappointing that too many made simple errors and lost a mark or two.

Q 1.2 Having had some opportunity to become familiar with the newspaper article in answering question 1.1, this question now asked candidates to explore how the writer tried to show that Harry West was ‘determined to continue as a street seller.’ It has been pointed out in many previous examiner reports that the best way to tackle this type of question is to work methodically through the text, selecting appropriate evidence and detail and, where appropriate, commenting or exploring the impact of the detail along with the way in which the evidence or detail has been presented by the writer. In this particular article the writer gives the reader some background information about West and the market he works on, and alongside the writer’s own comments, we are also given first-hand comments from West himself. The article begins by telling readers how long West has been a trader in the market: ‘For 40 years, Harry West has been selling second-hand goods from his east London market stall’, a detail that many candidates recognised as evidence that he was long-

established and therefore unlikely to want to cease trading. We are then told about the difficulties the market found itself in when the council stopped issuing trading licences but given the first clear indication of West's determination to continue, when the writer tells us that the council 'did not bank on the staying power of 72-year-old West.' Many candidates who tracked the text carefully saw these details given by the writer as evidence of West's determination. In some cases, candidates wanted to write unnecessarily lengthy explanations about 'staying power' and some focused on his age rather than his staying power but better candidates simply collected the evidence, made a brief comment and moved on. Most candidates were able to note that the writer went on to say that West was 'fiercely determined to continue' in the following paragraph, some pointing out the impact of the adverb whilst others focused on the way in which this reinforced what the writer had already said about the trader. The skill of selecting the appropriate detail and then deciding how much to write about it was key to gaining a good mark in this type of question. Through the article were many references to West's determination to continue trading and accumulating a good number of these usually resulted in very creditable marks. In too many cases examiners saw candidates write at unnecessary length about just two or three textual details, rather than try to select a good range of details and comments from across the whole text. In some cases, candidates just explored the first few paragraphs and as a result, failed to gain higher band marks.

The writer builds up a picture of the way West operates in the market that suggests his skill and acumen in establishing a positive relationship with prospective buyers makes him successful. Despite the threat of market closure: he 'cheerfully greets' customers and has built up a 'steady stream of regulars', he jokes and chats, 'puts the world to rights' with them and is 'on first-name terms with many.'

More able candidates often noted that where the writer gave information about West and the way he operated in the market, there was often a concluding comment in some of the paragraphs that confirmed West's determination to continue trading. This had already been noted by some in their comments about West's 'staying power' in the second paragraph and this was seen again at the end of the fifth paragraph when readers are told, 'For West, buying and selling has always been part of his life and he has no plans to stop.' These comments make clear West's determination and good candidates were able to make appropriate selections from the text. It is also made clear that West feels he is there to stay by training his grandson, who sells 'what the youngsters want.' Again, the writer sums this up by saying that West sees this as giving 'the business a new lease of life', implying that his stall will continue to be there. Some candidates were also able to gain reward when they explored the idea of the stall having a new lease of life and then going on to note that having his grandson involved was "a way of continuing the family tradition."

Candidates who continued to track the text found plenty to select and comment on from what the writer told readers about West, but it became clear to some candidates that allowing West to offer his own views was an equally powerful way to demonstrate how determined West was to stay in business. The writer uses West to tell readers how he views market trading when he quotes West saying, 'The people who fail are the people who don't change with the times.' This gives clear evidence of West's determination to do whatever it takes to continue trading, and this is further supported when we are told that he will adapt to change and if necessary, will sell articles more suited to the area's increasingly wealthy clientele. Some candidates also noted that West had offered to meet members of the local council to discuss how he can continue to trade, seeing this as another way in which his determination is apparent. The writer sums this up at the end of the penultimate paragraph, telling

readers, 'He is not giving up without a fight.' The article concludes with a quote from West that effectively confirms his determination: "they have to get rid of me first."

Despite the point made in the summer examiner report about the unhelpful approach to this type of question, in which 'feature spotting' sometimes dominates responses, there were still candidates who used feature spotting as their starting point and looked for statistics or alliteration or dashes to try and explain West's determination to continue trading. However, there were some very good responses that selected details well, noted and commented on the way the writer made West's determination very clear and had good coverage across the whole text.

Q 1.3 This third question now turned candidates' attention to the second text, 'Petticoat Lane Market.' The pattern of questions, with short one-mark questions preceding a more demanding question on each text is now well-established and gave candidates the opportunity to gain an overview of the text, with three questions. As with question 1.1, it was important to read the question carefully and those who failed to do this usually struggled to gain full marks; this happened on occasions even on the first of the questions, which should have presented no difficulties at all. The first question asked candidates to name one item of clothing the writer was invited to buy. Most candidates had no difficulty in selecting 'a hat' or 'a nice coat' from the text, but examiners were given answers that ranged from a couch, a sea-chest and an eight-day clock to cheap cakes and a hand-saw. The second part of the question caused fewer errors, candidates being asked to explain how the street traders reacted when the writer stopped in front of a stall. Many were able to say how he was immediately invited to buy an item, others noted the way the sellers stared at the prospective buyer, while others wrote about the way 'a dozen eyes are upon us' or the sellers became 'like vultures looking for prey.' Some candidates noted that the sellers would yell or shout their wares, and there was also an example of one seller pulling the writer back in an effort to sell him a coat. Reward was gained for any of these details. The final part of the question asked for the evidence that the public houses were busy and most were able to select appropriate detail from the penultimate paragraph to gain a mark, most quoting that these places were 'generally crammed to excess.'

Q1.4 This next question now asked candidates to consider the 'Petticoat Lane Market' text in greater detail. The question was posed in a way that has been used in previous papers on this specification: candidates were presented with a statement which they had to evaluate, using evidence from the text to support their assertions. They were asked to consider how far they agreed with the statement that '...the writer paints a vivid picture of the sights and sounds of Petticoat Lane Market.'

As with the second question, the most profitable approach was to track methodically through the text, selecting relevant detail and commenting upon it. Some candidates were uncertain of the meaning of 'vivid picture', suggesting that it meant 'positive picture', but where they were able to select and evaluate relevant detail, they were still able to gain reward.

The writer begins the passage with a short, emphatic sentence that gives little room for an interpretation that readers are in a pleasant place: 'Petticoat Lane is long, narrow and filthy.' The passage goes on to give a little more detail, telling readers about the poor sanitary conditions in the small houses on the lane, the inadequate drainage and 'in summertime the foul waste water remains in stagnant pools', a picture that leaves little to the imagination. Just in the brief opening paragraph, candidates had lots of material to explore and comment on, and most did so quite well. Having seen this bleak portrayal of the place, they often then noted the contrast with the Sunday morning activity on the lane as the market came to life. Those candidates with an eye for detail saw the way the writer captured the noise of the

place in the phrase, 'what a din!' or the way the lane is described as 'seething with life' and its suggestion of hectic, even chaotic human activity, especially as visitors have to 'push your way through the crowd' to see the 'keen bargaining' taking place all along the lane. Even in these opening lines there were details to evaluate and comment on and many wanted to dwell on specific words that captured a sense of what was going on. It is perhaps worth saying that some candidates only dealt with these opening lines of the passage, failing to explore the rest of the text, and whilst there was some reward for sensible comments and selection, it was nevertheless, self-penalising to focus on just a small section of the whole text.

The writer moved on to capture something of the flavour of the market by giving some of the cries of the street sellers, and some candidates commented on the rather desperate attempt of the hat seller to entice a prospective customer. As the writer moved deeper into the market, we are told that stopping at a stall immediately has a 'dozen eyes upon us', with many commenting on the appropriateness of the simile, 'like vultures looking for prey.' Whilst some attempted to explain the simile in more detail than was necessary, almost all candidates were able to say this captured the pushy, rather aggressive nature of the street sellers. Some candidates attempted to describe all that could be seen and bought in the market, sometimes with over-long quotations, while others picked out one or two telling details to suggest most of what was on sale was of poor quality, despite the urgings of the sellers. Some commented on the way the writer tried to show how busy the place was, noting details such as having to, 'squeeze our way through' and the image of nearly being 'crunched like snails' particularly appealed to many candidates.

Those who were prepared to cover the full text were able to comment on the picture of the public houses: filthy, 'crammed to excess' and full of men drinking in smoke-filled rooms where stolen goods would often appear. This rather sinister picture provided another contrast to the bustle going on in the lane outside, but readers were then taken back to where a visitor would be accosted to buy a coat or where it was possible to see a seller 'sitting amid a pile of old iron, boots and shoes' shouting his wares, apparently unaware that most was discarded junk.

Where candidates tracked the text, it was difficult to avoid finding some relevant detail that helped to capture a sense of the noise and activity, and those who did so frequently gained high reward for the range of detail and quality of comment. Weaker responses were often brief or showed limited coverage and in some cases stabbed at a few textual details with little sense of how they contributed to the overall picture presented by the writer, but as ever, examiners came across some perceptive responses that showed an appreciation of how the writer made the lane come to life.

- Q 1.5** This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, invited candidates to explain what is learnt about Petticoat Lane and the area around Kingsland Road. To make the focus of the question absolutely clear, candidates were told not to spend time writing about the markets themselves; this instruction was given in emboldened type and should have helped candidates to focus on the correct details. However, as with some of the responses to questions 1.1 and 1.3, it became apparent that too many candidates failed to read the question with sufficient care and wrote responses that did not contain appropriate detail.

For those who were clear about what was required, there was no shortage of material to use in an answer. In looking at the Petticoat Lane text, many said that it was clearly a poor area to live in, often giving details such as the small houses with unsanitary conditions. The lane itself was narrow and filthy, but always busy on Sundays. Some candidates focused on the unhealthy or dangerous conditions in the lane, whilst others explained that the busy, filthy public houses were places of

criminal activity. In moving from this text to the 'Kingsland Road' text, candidates noted the contrast: this was a much wealthier area, where those with money had moved in. The area now had luxury flats and million-pound properties and as a result there were now 'high-end' restaurants and trendy shops, appealing to people with money.

It was possible to gain full marks with just a few sentences that included relevant details and it was certainly not necessary to write at great length or comment on the writers' choice of language. Although pointed out in previous reports as an approach that was rarely the most effective, some candidates still attempted to write about what 'both texts' contained, but for little reward; there were also candidates who wrote at length about just one of the texts, which significantly limited the mark that could be awarded. It was disappointing to see responses from candidates who wrote about how the markets were different or what was sold in these markets, although occasionally examiners found one or two relevant details in a response that mostly focused on the wrong details. However, many of those who read the question carefully and understood what was required were able to select and explain some of the relevant details from each of the texts, shape their answers into a few sentences and gain good marks.

Q 1.6 This question, asking candidates to compare across the two texts, is often viewed as presenting the greatest challenge in the reading section, although the two bullet points gave a clear indication of what was required. In the last examiner report for this component (June 2019), I wrote in the 'Summary of key points' that for this final reading question, *"it is imperative that candidates deal with what is specifically asked for in the bullet points, rather than other, general points of comparison."* It is advice that is worth repeating, as a number of examiners reported candidate responses that failed to focus on the bullet points and as a result gained little reward.

This question focused on the street sellers in the two texts, the first bullet point asking candidates to compare the ways in which the Kingsland Road market trader, Harry West, and the Petticoat Lane street sellers tried to sell their goods. The second bullet point asked how each of the writers showed what these street sellers were like.

In addressing the first bullet point, good candidates tracked the details to see that Harry West helped his potential customers to feel comfortable as they browsed his stall. Readers are told that he 'cheerfully greets' visitors to his stall, many of whom are described as his 'regulars' who have been 'coming to his stall for decades.' We were told that he knows them well and 'is on first-name terms with many' and we were given examples of him sharing a joke with one man who is buying some chairs or 'putting the world to rights' with another. It revealed an avuncular, confident trader who knew the business he was in, but he was also aware that he needed to 'change with the times' to stay successful; readers were told he was willing to expand the range of goods he sells, aided by his grandson who sold 'what the youngsters want' in the form of smartphone accessories and computer games. He was aware of the area's increasing wealth and recognised that in order to cater for a new clientele he might have to 'sell goods like antiques.' In contrast, Petticoat Lane street sellers were shown to sell their goods in an altogether different way. They shouted their wares to the passers-by, and were not afraid to exaggerate the quality of what were, in reality, cheap and often shoddy goods. Where there was any hint of interest in an item, the sellers focused on the prospective buyer with 'hard-sell' techniques. Readers were given examples of the way one seller 'yells into our ears the praises of an eight-day clock', or of the way another seller pulled back the writer to try to sell a coat with some persuasive patter: 'that'll fit you nicely...Fit you in a minute, sir.' Here the sellers spread their goods out on stalls tightly packed together all along the lane, whilst others sat on the street among piles of old junk, shouting 'of the excellence of

a hand-saw and jack-plane.’ Good candidates selected relevant details from each of the texts, clearly seeing the difference between the way West and the Petticoat Lane sellers invited a sale.

In dealing with the second bullet point in the question, candidates often made the obvious comparison that whereas the writer of the Kingsland Road market article presents Harry as friendly, approachable and even as a reliable trader who had built up a regular client base, in Petticoat Lane, the street sellers are presented as pushy, aggressive and desperate for any sale they can get. In the article, the writer frequently offered his own view about West’s character and dedication to the job he does and he used West’s own words that captured his determination to survive. To show what the Petticoat Lane street sellers were like, the writer compared them to ‘vultures looking for prey,’ and used the actual shouts and cries as they tried to effect a sale. In contrast to Harry West, we were told that one seller, ‘yells into our ears’ and another ‘insists’ they looked at his goods. Further on in the passage, another seller was described as having ‘an oily voice’ as he pulled the writer back. The writer’s choice of verbs and adjectives all confirmed the insistence, and even desperation, of these sellers to make money.

It was possible to tackle the question by dealing with each text separately and then making comparisons, or by dealing with each of the bullet points in turn. Either approach was perfectly acceptable and good candidates found little difficulty in explaining how the sellers operated, using a wide range of textual details. It became a straightforward task to then sum up what West and the Petticoat Lane sellers were like, if only because of the stark contrast between them that the details revealed. Many selected the striking ‘vultures’ simile in the Victorian text as evidence of the predatory nature of the sellers and it was easy to contrast this with the cheerful greetings and good-natured chatting and joking that was a feature of West’s relationship with his customers.

Where candidates failed to read the question carefully or to focus fully on the bullet points, it was impossible to gain good marks. Some wrote at length about anything except that which was asked for or desperately sought any points of comparison: one sold records while the other sold song-sheets. Some candidates argued at length that whereas Petticoat Lane sellers sold poor quality goods, Harry West sold high quality goods that wealthy people wanted. Just a little time spent reading the question would undoubtedly have resulted in a better outcome. It was also the case that some struggled to manage their time effectively and this resulted in brief, limited responses and in some cases, just focused on one text, which significantly limited the mark they could gain. That said, there were candidates who were able to gain good marks in this question, showing skills of appropriate selection and understanding about how the writers showed what these street sellers were like.

Section B

Q 2.1 In the first of the two writing tasks candidates were asked to write what they would say to their class when giving a talk on, ‘The person I’d most like to spend a day with.’ They were invited to consider people who were famous such as a sportsperson or musician, someone from the past or someone not necessarily famous but one who was admired. It was a task that gave candidates the opportunity to write from personal experience or use information they knew about the person who was the subject of their talk. Because the audience was clearly specified, candidates also had to consider how to establish their engagement with the class. It was a task with which candidates seemed to genuinely engage and predictably the subjects of these ‘talks’ ranged very widely. Musicians, particularly members of rock bands and rap stars, were popular subjects and sports stars, especially footballers, also proved

to be a focus for many, whilst others chose figures from the online world, giving examiners insights into the lives of YouTube personalities and ‘influencers’ with huge followers. Figures from the worlds of politics, science and literature, both current and from the past, also appeared regularly and examiners were treated to responses on people as diverse as Albert Einstein, Donald Trump, Ghandi, Steve Jobs and Elon Musk. Whilst many chose subjects who they admired but were not personally known to them, others chose to write about special friends who had supported them and there were many who wrote about close family members. Whilst some wrote affectionately about the love and support they continued to receive from ‘Mum’, ‘Dad’ or a sibling, others wrote warmly, and often poignantly, about members of their family who had passed on. Many of these responses recalled special times in earlier childhood, with often charming anecdotes of simple, shared pleasures.

Whilst examiners reported very high levels of engagement from virtually all candidates, weaker responses were often short and as a direct consequence, these responses lacked detail, range or development. In some weaker responses, it became clear that the candidate knew little about the person they had chosen as their subject and the ‘talk’ consisted largely of a series of questions they felt they would want to ask, where they would go for dinner and the advice they would ask about in order to emulate their subject’s success. Better responses combined some useful biographical details, along with the qualities or skills possessed by the person and some exploration of why the writer would find a day in their company enjoyable or inspiring. Often these more assured responses focused on a specific quality or key point in their subject’s life that they expanded upon, and explained why this had made a particular impression on them, which often gave the response a greater impact. Many of the responses about close friends or family had a powerful, reflective honesty about them and were often moving. Across the many varied and different subjects of this response, examiners found much to enjoy.

- Q 2.2** This second task was for candidates to respond to an invitation in a teenage magazine to give their views on the subject of tattoos: ‘just harmless fun and fashion or something to regret in later life?’ The task offered the opportunity to express a clear viewpoint or to explore both the positive and negative views about the subject. In order to write a successful piece, the task required some planning and organisation of the material. Good responses that gave a clear viewpoint often had three or four clear arguments to make and these were organised into paragraphs that began with a topic sentence setting out why a particular view about tattoos was valid. The argument was then expanded, often including examples. For example, one of the points frequently made by those who felt tattoos would be regretted in later life was that tattoos were often unplanned. Having outlined the folly in this, some went on to give examples of friends or relatives who had been tattooed whilst on holiday or they had been drunk at the time; some of the examples given of tattoos done under these conditions were amusing and alarming in equal measure. Where arguments were developed along with telling examples they were often presented with some passion and conviction. Those who were positive about tattoos were equally passionate, arguing for example, that they were often a way of celebrating loved ones in the family or important dates. They then went on to give examples of how this might apply in their own family, why a particular tattoo might have been chosen and how it helped strengthen the bonds of family.

It was a subject that candidates warmed to and whilst some brief responses struggled to have impact, there were many that made a strong case for or against tattoos. Those against pointed out the permanence of it, the health dangers of having ink injected into the skin, the expense and pain of a tattoo removal, the way in which a tattoo might change over the course of a lifetime and the way that employers might

have a negative view of a prospective employee who sported a tattoo at interview. Candidates who were positive about having tattoos saw them as art, and the opportunity to have a design or pattern unique to the wearer, they argued about the importance of an individual's right to choose how to treat their own body or that they could be a reminder of loved ones. Many who supported the wearing of a tattoo argued that removal was possible and could even be used as a way of covering an unsightly scar. Although the topic allowed for some passionate support or dislike of tattoos, others tried to offer a more balanced view, and whilst these perhaps lacked the passion of those firmly for or against tattoos, their more measured responses were often just as effective.

In some cases, candidates had not managed their time efficiently and for this final part of the examination found they had too little time to construct good, developed responses. A few candidates mis-read the task details and wrote about a topic of their own choice, and although they gained some credit for the organisation of their material, it made it difficult for them to achieve a good outcome. The best responses on the topic were well-planned and well-argued because they offered and developed a number of points and gave examples that supported the points they made. They were also aware of their intended audience and often made a direct address to their peers at points in their article.

Whilst both of these writing tasks showed high levels of engagement that rewarded candidates with creditable marks for communication and organisation, there were many who struggled with basic accuracy. Simple spellings were often incorrect – many found it impossible to spell 'tattoos', even though this was in the task instructions – and incorrect punctuation and sentence construction often meant candidates were in a lower band for this aspect of their responses.

Summary of key points

In the reading section:

- Candidates need to read each question carefully. There were too many instances where questions were mis-read and as a consequence, candidates gained few marks.
- In questions 1.2 and 1.4 it is important to have a range of textual details that support comments or analysis. It is more effective to write briefly about a good range of points from the text than to write at great length about just a few details. Good responses to these questions invariably show good coverage of the texts.
- The advice given in the summer examiner report about tackling 1.5 and 1.6 is equally relevant again: *The question asking for details drawn from both texts (1.5) is always best tackled by dealing with the details from each specific text before considering any details that appear in both texts. In the final question (1.6) it is imperative that candidates deal with what is specifically asked for in the bullet points, rather than other, general points of comparison.* As a final point on these two questions, there were still too many candidates who failed to read the questions with sufficient care and as a result, they gained few marks.

In the writing section:

- Candidates should take the opportunity to plan their responses before they begin writing. They should consider content and their intended audience and write at sufficient length to develop ideas, opinions or information effectively.
- Many candidates need to pay more attention to technical accuracy, especially basic spellings, sentence construction and punctuation.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

November 2019

COMPONENT 3

General Comments

As most candidates carried forward their Spoken Language grade from the Summer series, only a small minority of centres submitted samples of new work to their designated monitor. The monitoring process is to ensure that centres' assessment of their candidates is in line with agreed standards and that the candidates are set appropriate tasks which allow them to meet the criteria.

Administration of the sample

In most cases, the sample was made up of a small number of presentations, often the work of a single candidate, and centres made sure the sample arrived on time. However, some centres did not submit their work by the **well-established deadline of November 5th** which delayed the monitoring process.

Most centres had taken care to label their candidates' work clearly but some submitted samples with no indication of the centre's name and number. This proved very time-consuming for the monitor who had to identify the centre by searching for the candidates' names on the IAMIS marksheets. As repeatedly requested in feedback to centres, it is very helpful if each candidate announces his or her name and number at the start of the recording so that there is no doubt whose presentation is being monitored. Each presentation should be saved in a separate file clearly labelled with the candidate name and number as well as the grade awarded (P, M or D) on the device submitted.

Task Setting and Presentation Skills

Monitors saw some interesting and enjoyable work. It was clear that the presentations in some cases were a considerable achievement for candidates who were often very nervous. Many looked very relieved at the end of their presentations but justifiably proud at having fulfilled this part of the specification.

It was disappointing, however that monitors once again reported that by far the biggest factor in candidates' underachievement was poor task setting and many were somewhat hampered by their subject matter.

- Many candidates adopted a straightforward, show-and-tell approach in their presentations which largely confined them to a Pass grade. As outlined in previous advice to centres, candidates find it much easier to organise their material effectively and meet their audience's needs if they have a clear purpose for their talk rather than a vague topic to 'talk about'.
 - For instance, one well-informed candidate spoke for more than seven minutes on the very open-ended topic of feminism. There was evidence of some sophistication in the content and vocabulary, but the lack of a clear purpose meant that the ideas were not structured in a way which would help the audience to engage with the material. The candidate ranged over a wide spectrum of ideas linked to the theme without a clear trajectory, making it difficult at times to follow the thrust of the argument. Had there been a more defined and clearer purpose from the outset, it would have been easier to meet the criteria for a Distinction grade. The candidate argued well in the Q and A

section and dealt with some challenging questions, but the initial presentation was not effectively organised enough to engage the audience, meaning that not all the criteria for a Distinction grade could be met.

- In another instance, a candidate speaking about modern democracies gave both sides of the argument when reading from a scripted essay and the work was more reflective of a writing task than a spoken language one. As in the previous case, the candidate came alive in the Q and A section when giving their own views and making a convincing case for them rather than approaching the presentation as a discursive essay. A more clearly defined task, such as warning of the dangers of pressure groups, and less emphasis on reading from scripted material, would have made it easier for such a talented candidate to achieve Distinction grade.
- Many candidates spoke about their hobbies such as weight-lifting, martial arts or a sport, while others chose to present some information about topics close to their hearts, such as their countries of birth or a particular interest. While it is perfectly appropriate, and even advisable for candidates to select a topic which genuinely interests them, a simple recount of some facts usually meant they had not given enough thought to their audience's needs or ways to engage their interest, limiting their chances to move beyond a Pass grade. If the candidates had included a clear purpose to persuade their audience to agree with them, this would have helped shape their material and demonstrate more effective organisation skills.
- Descriptive talks were often accompanied by PowerPoint slides which sometimes disadvantaged the candidates rather than improved the quality of their presentations. The risks involved in this approach have been fully outlined in previous Principal Moderator's reports; candidates clearly feel more confident with an aide memoire but do not engage their audience by simply reading from the screen, often turning their backs to their listeners to do so. If candidates are keen to use PowerPoint, the advice to centres has always been that it is best to use only a few key words, or solely visual images, so that candidates are not tempted when nervous to start reading lots of text from the slides.
- Candidates should also be dissuaded from playing lengthy video or musical clips as these do not help them demonstrate their spoken language skills.
- Reading from scripts continues to be problematic and can limit candidates' achievements. While it is perfectly acceptable to use detailed notes as a support, those candidates who read with their heads lowered can struggle to prove they are engaging their audience or even meeting their needs. It is important that teachers make clear the difference between the crafting of a speech as a writing task and the adaptation of their material needed to meet the higher grades in a Spoken Language presentation.
- Some presentations were rather long and unstructured. Teachers can help candidates by advising them to edit their material so that their talks and responses to questions do not exceed the upper limit of 10 minutes suggested in the guidance for centres.

Responding to Questions and Feedback

- There were occasional glimpses of candidates' ability to engage in spirited response to well-chosen questions. Freed from reading from their scripts or PowerPoint slides, some candidates spoke with authority and even passion, leaving the monitor wishing that the initial presentation had been as engaging.
- It was very pleasing to see some teachers persisting with questions to stretch candidates and give them every chance to meet higher criteria. Not all the candidates made it to

Distinction grade level but at least they had the opportunity. Unfortunately, some candidates were not asked challenging questions, and tasked with only closed, simple feedback from peers which restricted them to Pass grade. As advised in previous reports, those candidates aiming at higher grades benefit from more probing questions posed by their teacher as their peers cannot always be expected to elicit thoughtful and perceptive responses.

Assessment

- Most presentations were realistically and accurately assessed in line with agreed standards. However, there was some generosity in awarding Merit or Distinction grades when the candidates had not met all the criteria for the specified grade. Centres are reminded of the need to apply the competency assessment model and to use the standardising exemplar materials to inform their assessment.

Key points for consideration:

- Teachers should discuss the chosen topic with candidates in advance and give advice on the most effective approaches, especially editing and structuring material to meet the audience needs.
- Tasks with a clearly defined purpose are usually more helpful to candidates aiming at higher grades than straightforward, descriptive recounts.
- Candidates should avoid simply reading scripted material and show awareness of some basic presentation skills.
- Use of PowerPoint slides is best kept to a minimum.
- The Question and Answer section is mandatory and teachers have a key role to play in ensuring the quality of the questions posed.
- Centres must submit a sample for monitoring if they have candidates who are not simply carrying forward previous grades for Spoken Language in November.
- Teachers involved in assessment should look again at the standardising examples on the Eduqas website.
- Centres should label their samples carefully so that their centre number is clear, and the identity of each candidate is clear.

Spoken language monitors would like to thank those centres who submitted their samples on time and in good order and gave their candidates every chance to meet the criteria.

Please note there is clear guidance on task setting, presentation skills and assessment on the Eduqas website. There will be additional advice for centres in the Spoken Language pre-recorded webinar materials available in January 2020.



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