GCE A Level Examiners' Report

English Literature

A level

Summer 2026

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026



Introduction

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

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

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

Further support

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

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

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

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

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Component 1	6
Component 2	14
Component 3	21
Component 4	26
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	31

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Executive Summary

Examiners noted again how well candidates, across the range of ability, are prepared for this qualification and how well they engage with and write about their set texts.

Some common points to consider include the following:

- The best performing candidates often take time to think and to briefly plan responses. The best examples of this suggests that they have been taught how to prepare and to plan successfully.
- Those who know their texts well, have read and re-read them, invariably succeed.
- Having a sound overview of the texts and the ability to analyse the detail is more successful than being armed with an impressive knowledge of terminology.
- AO3 is most illuminating when a range of specific contexts are considered, including literary contexts, and used to enhance the analysis of the text(s).
- AO4 and AO5 are most effective when connected closely to the analysis of the text(s) (AO2).
- A significant number of candidates' expression and vocabulary were weak, while handwriting continues to be problematic. These are issues which need addressing.
- Teachers and candidates should use the wealth of resources available on the Portal and on the Eduqas Digital Resources site.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2026

COMPONENT 1: POETRY

Overview of the Component

Once again this year, examiners were very impressed by many of the responses they saw. The hard work of teachers and learners is clearly recognisable in the determined efforts which were seen at all levels of achievement.

However, the points immediately below have been mentioned previously several times and there are many candidates who still need to be persuaded that English Literature requires approaches and skills which are distinct from those required in other branches of the Arts and Humanities. It is a pity when candidates compromise the coherence and purposefulness of their responses to poetry with ill-advised recourse to the points raised below.

The naming and listing of rhetorical devices which *on their own* do not provide a useful way of showing an understanding and appreciation of poetry. The same applies to any other technical terms (asyndeton, polyptoton, synecdoche, anaphora etc.) used *solely as a means of showing familiarity with the term* rather than of an understanding of how the feature operates in any particular poem.

This year there has been a noticeable increase in references to auditory elements in poetry where candidates have written unconvincingly about the significance of devices such as "plosive alliteration", "dental fricatives" or aspirant alliteration". Often these elements are accurately identified, but when they become a major focus in responses this tends to have a weakening effect. Please use with caution.

Narrative approaches to contextual material which are divorced from attempts to analyse cannot really get beyond the Band 2 descriptor "acknowledges the importance of contexts" and if there is little or no attempt to connect to the texts then low Band 2 is usually the maximum reward. AO3 and AO2 should be regarded as securely tethered. Similarly, references to different interpretations needs to be integrated into candidates' analytical responses.

Teachers and learners should become familiar with the published marking grids and guidelines to help with an understanding of the ways in which AO4 may be addressed. This could involve some delicate teasing-out in the classroom because making illuminating or purposeful connections "between poems and poets" does not mean simply identifying similarities between poets' biographies. Take, for example, Question 6 on unhappiness in the poetry of Hardy and Eliot from this summer's paper.

Response 1:
"Eliot and Hardy both experienced unhappiness in their married lives" is <u>not</u>, on its own, an illuminating or purposeful connection.

Response 2:
"Prufrock in his unhappiness fails consistently to connect with the world and as he considers the mermaids says, "I do not think that they will sing to me." which might be echoed in Hardy's despair as the voice he wants to hear will be "Heard no more again, far or near."

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

With due analysis, this could become a purposeful or even productive and illuminating observation under AO4.

Learners need to be regularly reminded of the differences between descriptive, narrative responses and analytical writing which demonstrates an appreciation and understanding of the ways in which meaning is made in poetry. There are Eduqas resources available that should help with an understanding of this issue.

As mentioned last year, poor and illegible handwriting has become a critical issue. Learners must be advised that if neither the examiner nor the senior examiner can read their handwriting it is next to impossible to award an accurate mark. This is especially relevant now that work is scanned and marked on screen. The instruction to use only black ink should be taken very seriously.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A i): PRE-1900 POETRY

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

In successful responses candidates:

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

In less successful responses candidates:

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

Chaucer

Candidates were asked to analyse Chaucer's presentation of the relationship between May and Januarie in lines1178–1198. A point that could be made across all these part i) questions is that candidates must pay careful attention to the specific nature of the task. For instance, this question was about the relationship between the characters, which amounts to asking about the way Chaucer has presented the dynamics between May and Januarie. A descriptive account of the characters and their behaviour does not address the specific requirements of the task. A good number of candidates did respond thoughtfully and explored the attitudes of the characters towards each other and the changing balance of power within the marriage.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Donne

The task for those studying this poet was to analyse the tone and mood of the poem 'Song'. Just as in the approach to the question on Chaucer, it is very important for candidates to focus on exactly what is required. Those who launched immediately into a line-by-line commentary on the poem (often producing very lengthy responses) did not score highly as tone and mood were mentioned only incidentally if at all. This was a good example of a task that required thought and planning. This might have reduced the time for writing but perhaps it would have increased the relevance of the approach. Once again, your attention is drawn to Eduqas's online resources where there are some examples demonstrating the differences between descriptive/narrative and analytical writing.

Milton

The relationship between Adam and Eve from lines 267–295 was the focus for those studying Milton's *Paradise Lost Book IX*. The focus of responses should have been on the dynamics of the relationship between Adam and Eve and the ways in which Milton alerts the reader to subtle changes and subtext which increasingly undermines a sense of perfect harmony. A line-by-line commentary on the two characters did not meet this requirement – except by implication in some cases – which means that however well written such responses struggled to demonstrate purposefulness (AO2/Band 3) or be mostly relevant (AO1/Band 3). The best responses were able to show an appreciation of the nuanced friction between the two characters and how this influences our understanding of their relationship in terms of power, affection, loyalty and obedience.

Blake

Candidates were asked to analyse Blake's use of imagery in the poem 'A Dream' There was a confused approach to this poem by some candidates as they appeared unfamiliar with the text. Consequently, there were some insecure observations about emmets and the voices heard in the poem. Possibly for this reason, candidates tended to narrate their way through the poem in order to consolidate their understanding but did not get around to imagery until the very end. That said, very few missed the importance of light and the glow worm's symbolic function. As observed elsewhere, more time spent reading and re-reading (especially if this poem were new to some candidates) combined with a foregrounding of imagery at the planning stage might have produced shorter but more successful responses. Images of light and shade; wilderness and safety; the notion of "Angel-guarded"; light and dark ; confusion and clarity were confidently handled in a good number of responses.

Rossetti

In candidates' analysis of the use of imagery in Rossetti's 'A Daughter of Eve', most responses demonstrated a clear understanding of the symbolic significance of images such as "rose"; "lily" and "garden-plot" and the personification of "sorrow" at the end of the poem. Candidates were a little less confident about the ways in which Rossetti makes use of images of time and seasons with some puzzling over the significance of sleeping at noon and waking at night. There was also a little less evidence of looking at patterns such as "cold moon" and "sun-warmed" as well as the ambiguous image of "stripped-bare". On the whole though, there was some thoughtful engagement with this poem.

SECTION A ii): PRE-1900 POETRY

In successful responses candidates:

- took careful account of the specific demands of the questions

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

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

In less successful responses candidates:

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

Chaucer

This task on Chaucer’s use of comedy in *The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale* elicited some of the best work examiners have seen around the “perceptive discussion” of relevant contexts and the “confident discussion” of other interpretations. There was some very sensitive and well-informed writing about different audiences’ understanding and appreciation of humour; the relevance of the fabliaux tradition and some thoughtful discussion of what might be considered ugly or unpleasant by different audiences. Opinion was fairly evenly divided as to whether or not Chaucer had failed in concealing the unpleasantness in *The Merchant’s Prologue and Tale* but on both sides, there were many very well-argued and supported analyses. Some sophisticated responses made strong cases for humour and unpleasantness being inseparable.

Donne

There is a general tendency for candidates to take all Donne’s presentations of intense feeling (especially in the secular poetry) at face value and then jump to contextual and biographical points rather than explore the ways in which such feelings are presented intensely through an analysis of language, imagery and structure. Some high quality, nuanced responses, however, did suggest that poems such as ‘The Flea’, ‘The Apparition’ or ‘Love’s Alchemy’ might be read as self-satirising and the apparent intensity of feeling regarded sceptically. Candidates seemed to be on more secure ground when responding to the Divine Poems but, once again, there was a tendency to spend time on speculative biography rather than on the poetry itself.

Milton

Examiners were pleased with the variety, freshness and thoughtfulness of responses to this task on the ways in which Milton holds our interest in *Paradise Lost Book IX*. Many candidates engaged enthusiastically with the proposition in the question and proceeded to find their own ways through the material, creating strong arguments for maintaining reader interest. These included the fleshing out of the story in Genesis; the dramatic tension generated by Eve’s decisions; the presentation and “humanising” of Satan with insights into his “psychology” and the casting of Adam as a tragic hero. Good use was made of Milton’s political context and his other non-literary publications showing their relevance to ideas about free will; the role of women; the nature of authority and marriage as they are presented in *Book IX*.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Blake

Many candidates working at all levels seemed to be comfortable in examining some of the ways in which Blake makes use of the natural world. They often made very sound choices of text to support their analyses but some, who were predominantly interested in Blake's perceived social commentary, did their best with poems such as 'London' or 'Holy Thursday' which produced a lot of writing about the evils of society but little true focus on the perception of human complexity through the natural world. This is perhaps another opportunity to advise candidates to spend longer considering the question, choosing their material wisely and making a plan. The urge to put pen to paper is understandable, but candidates should be reassured that shorter, relevantly focused and effectively supported responses are likely to score better than lengthy accounts which are AO3 heavy and at a tangent to the set task.

Rossetti

Many responses on the poet's presentation of women would have benefited from better planning. The key element of the task is to balance "moral seriousness" with its implications of severity and judgemental attitudes against evidence of the tenderness, tolerance and forgiveness which might be seen as characteristic of compassion in Rossetti's presentation of women. There were some excellent responses based upon the exploration of prime choices of text. In other cases, candidates were keen to argue the case for Rossetti's "feminism" based upon biographical details, showing how she had refused suitors and taken an interest in fallen women but refused to support the women's movement. There might be opportunities to make use of some or all of these contextual details in an essay which tackled the evidence in the poetry first. Once again, candidates are reminded that AO2 and AO3 should be seen as very closely linked.

SECTION B: POST-1900 POETRY

In successful responses candidates:

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

In less successful responses candidates:

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

Hardy and Eliot

While there was little opportunity for disagreement with the assertion that unhappiness is the dominant feature of Hardy's and Eliot's poetry, confident responses did manage to introduce caveats, pointing to some wry, satirical humour on Hardy's part or glimmers of religious

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

optimism in Eliot's writing. However, most set about the task of dissecting the different threads of discontent and unhappiness they had found in both poets' work. Some candidates showed confidence in ranging beyond the favourite choices of 'The Darkling Thrush', 'Drummer Hodge' and the *Poems of 1912-13* which provide perfectly good material for this response but some selections from *Moments of Vision* were used very effectively. There were some very sensible selections from parts of 'The Waste Land' and 'Prufrock and Other Observations' but it was also refreshing to see some making good use of 'Marina' with interesting, nuanced links to Hardy. At Band 5 there were some genuinely extraordinary achievements.

For Q7, some candidates decided from the outset that the essence of Hardy's and Eliot's presentation of human experience was pessimism and perhaps they might have done better to choose Q6, as a heavily context-based response to the unhappiness of the human experience in both poets' times did not necessarily allow them to address the opportunities presented by the view in the question. Better responses chose a broader range of human experience exploring, for instance, emotional fragility in Hardy's later poetry alongside Eliot's 'Prufrock' or 'Portrait of A Lady' or considering 'A Broken Appointment' side by side with the typist and her lover in 'The Fire Sermon' in an analysis of numbness and disappointment. The task was designed to allow candidates to make free choices of material under the heading of human experience and many did so wisely and impressively.

Yeats and Abse

No responses were seen on this pairing.

Hughes and Plath

For Q10, the poets' biographies are inevitably significant factors when considering their expressions of intense feelings. There is plenty of evidence in the poems themselves and in studies of Hughes and Plath, however, to support a belief in their extraordinarily intense feelings for each other. The intense feelings of harm in 'Daddy' may well be connected with maltreatment of one sort or another from Hughes but this needs to be addressed via the metaphorical landscape of the poem rather than treating the poem as a near literal biographical account. The same applies to Plath's perceived attitudes towards her late father about whom reams of questionable claims were made. Candidates seemed on more secure ground for a literary essay when addressing Hughes' poems such as 'The Lovepet' which was often connected to Plath's 'Daddy'. In this poem and elsewhere with Hughes, responses were much more focused on the poetic qualities and devices which might have pointed to real events in life, but the "facts" of the situation were not the main concern. A key message here is that while it is interesting to read about and repeat recorded events from the lives of the poets, it is much more important for literary essays to address and analyse the comparative techniques and impact of the poems as they present "intense feelings". The issue of bridges or barriers was tentatively explored in most cases with some regarding Plath's accounts of psychological fragility as distancing while others regarded them as invitations to empathise. The forceful brutality in Hughes' work was seen as alienating by some but fascinating and indicative of deep and primitive human truths by others.

Q11 asked candidates to examine connections between the ways the poetry of Hughes and Plath might both excite and disturb the reader. Many responses confidently analysed the visceral pull of Hughes' subject matter as well as the shock effect of his language choices often amplified by the form of the poems. Excitement was found in the treatments of animal power, harsh landscapes, threatening elements and in the presentation of different varieties of violence. Sensibly, candidates found that excitement and disturbance were very difficult to separate in Hughes' work. By contrast, many claimed that any excitement to be found in Plath's confessional poetry was to be found in her sharing of her own strong emotions

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

ranging from elation in motherhood to despair at the burden of living. Once again, disturbing elements were found to be woven through Plath's expressions of excitement. Please refer to the report on Q10 above for observations on the limitations of context-driven responses which apply just as relevantly here.

Larkin and Duffy

This pairing was far and away the most popular in Section B and there were plenty of excellent responses to Q12 on the presentation of female subjects. There were some clear analyses of the females in the most popular poems such as 'Havisham' and 'Wild Oats' but there was also some very thoughtful and detailed writing on poems such as 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Litany' with carefully integrated ideas about context and authorial attitudes. A weakness which is becoming more obvious over the years is a tendency to be over-assertive and judgemental about both poets rather than their work. A heavily politicised approach to Larkin which lambasted his perceived misogyny and an opposite but equally politicised celebration of Duffy's perceived feminism led to badly balanced writing with an over-emphasis upon asserted biographical detail and a lack of attention to poetic techniques. Candidates must be reminded that this is a poetry paper where analysis can be illuminated by relevant contextual references, but descriptive biographical writing is not a valid substitute for literary analysis. Please remind candidates of the point above about the close tethering of AO2 and AO3.

Although not as popular as Q12, there were still plenty of high-quality responses to Q13 on the ways in which Larkin and Duffy make use of everyday language and images. As expected, there was close attention to both poets' use of profanities and some lively discussion as to how this language might be considered poetic with some thoughtful consideration of how cultural values and mores might affect poets' choices. There was also some careful consideration of how slang or vernacular language might work in creating mood and providing clues to poets' attitudes. Many had come across the quotation from Duffy, "I like to use simple words but in a complicated way", and this proved a very fruitful starting point for discussion. Having said that, the less successful responses tended to focus too closely on the biographical details that might be gleaned (rightly or wrongly) from the poet's public statements and the remarks made about them as people which were often presented as AO5 (e.g. "A critic claims that Larkin never married") which it isn't. If relevant, such material might be rewarded under AO3 but it must be used with the greatest caution.

Heaney and Sheers

Q14, which asked candidates to examine connections on the ways in which Heaney and Sheers present their human subjects, proved by far the less popular on this pair of poets. Even across a small number of responses, however, there was still a marked difference in approaches. Those who began with careful comparative analysis of poems such as 'The Harvest Bow' or 'Farther', noting how the poets' techniques (including their use of metaphor, settings, landscapes and very precise observation) evoked the characters, tended to do well. On the other hand, there were several pieces which relied heavily from the start on biographical assertion at the expense of any consideration of poetic concepts or techniques.

The task for Q15 demanded a close consideration of the presentation of different sorts of relationships, giving candidates a broad range of options. Romantic relationships, families, friends, mentors and colourful acquaintances were very obvious targets and many responses demonstrated understanding and appreciation of the poets' techniques and attitudes across a good range of poetry. There was a suggestion in some responses that candidates had hoped for a different task and were shoe-horning their prepared ideas into an essay on relationships, which quickly became considerations of nature or conflict. These

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

could certainly play a part but not as the predominant focus of writing, and they tended to do less well than perhaps they should have under AO1, AO2 and AO4.

Once again, our sincere thanks to teachers for their hard work in delivering this component. Congratulations too to those learners who seem to have profited so highly from their study of poetry.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2026

COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

Overview of the Component

Component 2 is a closed-book paper which tests knowledge and understanding of three drama texts: a Shakespeare play in Section A, assessed in a two-part question, and two plays in Section B. In Section A, the part i) task assesses reading and understanding of a printed passage from a Shakespeare play, while part ii) is an essay which assesses knowledge and understanding of the whole play.

The assessment objectives for part i) of the Shakespeare question are AO1 and AO2, with part ii) featuring AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5. AO3 (context) is double -weighted.

Section A part i) carries 15 marks, while part ii) carries 45 marks.

Section B assesses knowledge and understanding of one pre-1900 play and one post-1900 play. The task in Section B is an essay where the focus is on making connections (AO4) between the two set plays. AO4 is double-weighted, and this task features all five assessment objectives. The Section B essay carries 60 marks.

This year we saw more variable approaches to the structuring and development of responses to the essay tasks. While some engaged with texts and tasks from the opening paragraph, others were more tentative and struggled to focus on the question. Where candidates included a plan at the start of the response, sometimes they invested too much time in planning at the expense of developing points in the actual essay. There are still too many candidates who think they have to write five or six pages on the Section B essay, and frequently this led to a deterioration in focus and purposeful discussion.

As in previous years, we are still seeing papers where the part i) extract task is not attempted at all or given scant attention. Candidates must answer all questions on their set texts. In general, candidates were better prepared for the extract questions than in previous years. However, some examiners noted that some candidates were responding to the extract as an unseen text, and concern was expressed regarding the impression received that not all candidates had studied the whole play.

Illegible handwriting remains a problem, and this is now accompanied by illegible typing. Examiners can only reward what they can read.

Poor punctuation was endemic this year and the one-sentence paragraph is becoming too popular. Candidates must understand that examiners struggle to follow the argument if it is expressed in one sentence of ten lines which only pauses at the end of the paragraph. In addition, examiners this year have observed a new trend: the employment of complex critical terminology but accompanied by a lack of basic control of sentence, grammar and vocabulary. Frequently this resulted in garbled essays which lacked coherence and clarity.

Responses were strongest where candidates manage to integrate seamlessly the five assessment objectives into their central argument for the Section B essay. We saw once again this year some scholarly and erudite responses to all the set texts.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Context (AO3) proved to be a discriminator on both essays, as too often candidates resorted to biographical context only, therefore limiting their opportunities to make good connections between texts and contexts. It is also worth noting that we still see some instances where the candidate has tried to address AO3 and AO5 in their extract task, where these AOs are not assessed.

Examiners have noted an improvement in textual analysis and an improvement in textual support, so candidates are to be congratulated on their more detailed and purposeful use of the texts. This is particularly notable in view of the fact that this is a closed-book exam, so candidates have to memorise quotations from the text, other views and contextual materials.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A i): SHAKESPEARE EXTRACT

King Lear

Candidates responded well to the extract and recognised Lear's fall in both status and language, with stronger responses also commenting on the tonal shift towards the end of the passage in Lear's interactions with the Fool and Kent.

Most candidates recognised Lear's situation here and were able to comment on his mental state and ideas about sinning and injustice. Some were unclear, however, about Lear's references to examples of sins/crimes which escape justice, seeing these as direct reference to his personal experience. Those who made the case for indirect reference to his own experiences fared better, while those who saw his comments as a general rant against injustice were then able to grasp the move to his feelings of personal injustice in 'I am a man /More sinn'd against than sinning.' Better responses saw the shift towards a new concern for others at the end of the passage and a recognition that in his new circumstances of suffering and hardship, exiled on the heath, 'vile things' such as the hovel, can be 'precious'. Knowledge and understanding of the whole text were apparent in those who realised Lear's comments to 'my boy' are to the Fool who has been present throughout this scene, while 'my fellow' refers to Kent. Many neglected to consider the impact of Kent in helping to present Lear here, missing the opportunity to comment on his loyalty and concern for Lear's vulnerability in the storm, with the dramatic irony of his disguise adding poignancy to the presentation.

Antony and Cleopatra

In general, candidates grasped Antony's anxieties here regarding his rivalry with Caesar and his chances of success in future conflict with him.

Most also grasped the significance of his decision at the end of the passage to leave Rome for Cleopatra as an escape from his military anxieties, with the last line spoken by Antony as indicative of his priorities despite the Soothsayer's prophecy. Stronger answers referred to Shakespeare's dramatic use of the Soothsayer, pointing out the creation of dramatic tension and foreshadowing of Anthony's tragic downfall.

Shakespeare's use of gaming imagery and metaphors linked to fate and fortune in the passage encouraged focused analysis, giving rise to some candidates arguing that Antony is shown here to be superstitious and lacking pragmatism. Others commented on Shakespeare's use of light imagery in 'thy lustre thickens when he shines by' by the Soothsayer as a powerful confirmation of Antony's thoughts and feelings of being overshadowed by Caesar.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Hamlet

In general, candidates were able to comment meaningfully on how Laertes is presented here, with varying thoughts on whether his advice is well-intentioned or patronising. In the mid-range of responses, candidates reflected upon how Laertes' advice to Ophelia is shaped by ‘patriarchal ‘structures. Better responses also addressed his evaluation of Hamlet's role in the court, with some seeing Laertes as astute and sensible as well as politically perceptive. Most grasped the implicit meaning of the nature imagery used to emphasise Laertes’ concern that Ophelia must remain chaste and not succumb to Hamlet’s romantic approaches. At the top of the range candidates also picked up the imagery of disease or corruption in ‘contagious blastments’ as an important aspect of Laertes’ worry for his sister and his desire to protect her. Those who thought Laertes was overbearing or misogynistic commented on the fact that this is a monologue and that Ophelia is not given a voice here.

King Henry IV Part 1

Very few responses were seen on this text this year.

The opening scene of the play provided opportunity for candidates to explore Shakespeare’s initial presentation of the King. Most saw his concern and appeal for peace and unity after a period of political upheaval, with most responses linking language about the nation to the idea of a body politic. A few recognised the irony of appealing for military action to achieve peaceful unity, and linked imagery to just war. Stronger responses discussed the personification of the country as a human body, with the king’s use of imagery such as ‘breathing’ and the body parts of lips, with references to bruising and blood and ‘opposed eyes’. Some saw composure in the regular iambic pentameter as well as a determination to restore balance after chaos.

The Tempest

The responses seen varied in success. Some carefully considered Prospero's use and potential abuse of power, with a number criticising both male figures for their use of language to possess Miranda, often finding the interaction troubling rather than humorous. However, those who answered the question appropriately on how only Prospero is presented were able to comment on Shakespeare’s use of the other two characters in this scene to reveal other aspects of his character, and also the dramatic use of an aside and stage directions. Not many actually saw any humour in this extract, but most saw a controlling and manipulative side of Prospero, as he seeks to engineer the relationship between Miranda and Ferdinand. His use of magic to control Ferdinand’s reactions to the proposed punishments was seen as further proof of his misuse of power, with his curt responses to Miranda’s pleading perceived as patriarchal control. Very few appreciated how an audience may find the suspension of Ferdinand’s sword visually comic, especially as they have been told by Prospero that this is an act to ensure no ‘light winning’ of Miranda. Stronger responses noted the mercantile language in regard to Miranda, winning and prize, with frequent comments that this shows Prospero as a controlling businessman who has little regard for Miranda and uses her as a bargaining tool to get his revenge.

SECTION A ii) : SHAKESPEARE ESSAY

King Lear

In general, candidates engaged readily with this essay question and managed to discuss examples of both ‘sin’ and ‘redemption’. Most responded with sustained engagement to the view in the question, arguing it is far from simple. Higher range students addressed the bleakness of the ending and whether there was sufficient hope, with some debate about

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

smaller moments of redemption preceding deaths. There were varying valid arguments and critical discussion of other views regarding whether this play is a ‘simple tale’, and interesting choices of characters provided focal points for discussion. Lear and Gloucester were understandably popular choices, but Cordelia and Edgar proved to be rich sources of textual analysis for the ‘redemption’ discussion. Contextual material was generally appropriate, though in weaker responses examiners saw a reliance on historical narrative which offered statements without analysis or further comment.

Antony and Cleopatra

Many candidates engaged well with the question, arguing strongly in agreement or disagreement, while some posited that Antony was equally blinded by his political loyalty to Rome. Contexts were generally used purposefully for this question, with encouraging attention paid to cultural ideology.

Candidates analysed key scenes illustrating Antony and Cleopatra’s relationship, many choosing to explore the first scene for evidence of Antony’s divided loyalties and loss of status and reputation, with the final scenes between the lovers used to present the argument that their deaths raised the tragic status of both characters and also made the case for an exoneration and even apotheosis of their love for each other.

Hamlet

Candidates responded with some enthusiasm to the view regarding the ‘rotten state of Denmark’, with some thoughtful and sensitive responses integrating specific contexts in connection with the text as comment on political corruption, humanism, and differing theologies of the contemporary audience.

Interestingly, not many took up the opportunity to examine Shakespeare’s theme and imagery of corruption/disease. However, there were many who explored Hamlet’s soliloquies as further evidence of ‘rot’ or corruption, as well as the speeches of the Ghost. Claudius was a popular choice for discussing the cause of the state’s corruption, while others latched onto Gertrude and her relationship with Hamlet. Examiners noted a tendency to refer to critical opinion without development or endorsement, although in several responses candidates took the critical view further that Hamlet himself has become corrupt by closely examining his behaviour in antic disposition mode. This was not always successful as the antic disposition was forgotten and his misogynistic treatment of Ophelia was taken literally.

King Henry IV Part 1

Within the wider play, candidates approached the debate on kingship balancing views of the threat of civil war with the threat posed by charismatic personalities, with some foregrounding the presentation of Hotspur and the internal familial conflict between royal father and son. A few evaluated the extent to which the Prince was casting off Falstaff/his past and moving towards a more honourable role, whilst also acknowledging that Hal’s behaviour was as much a challenge to the King as the threat of civil war.

Though a small number, the responses seen shared an enjoyment of the text which was quite refreshing to mark. They all also cited 'The Hollow Crown' as a critical interpretation/performance context so that adaptation does seem to have given the text a boost.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

The Tempest

The discussion of power generally carried well into the whole play response. Work here was more consistent, with candidates examining Prospero's treatment of Caliban and Ariel with some success and showing recognition of the presentation of magic and nature as an important aspect of the magus' control. It was encouraging to see some using the opening tempest scene itself to argue how power extends from this point, with analysis of minor characters' roles, including in the comic scenes, to mirror Prospero's command of the island. Many chose to discuss Prospero's relationship with his daughter as a key example of the less attractive aspects of power and control, and there was some analysis of how Miranda nonetheless resists her father's control. Prospero's relationship with Caliban was discussed in detail and the stronger responses ensured their arguments were informed by the context of colonialism. At the top of the range of responses candidates saw the ambiguity in Shakespeare's presentation of power and control and argued that Prospero's role in the play is 'performative' throughout, culminating in the metatheatrical ending, so that we should focus on the dramatic use of power and not the misuse of power.

SECTION B: DRAMA

Once again this year, candidates seemed generally prepared to manage the different assessment objectives which they need to address for this essay task.

This was evident in many opening paragraphs, where a brief engagement with all or some AOs was immediately evident. However, although examiners saw better attempts at juggling all five AOs, and better textual analysis and support, there were less positive findings regarding AO4 (making connections). As this is double-weighted, vital marks are lost where the candidate has not made clear connections between the two plays. It is also important in this section to answer all elements of the question. One question usually asks for a response to the stated view in terms of its application to both plays, while the other asks candidates to explore connections 'in the light of' the stated view.

Examiners observed that candidates often presented diffuse comparisons at times: the development of comparative ideas was more superficial than in previous series, and there was a tendency to focus on plot-driven comparisons rather than concepts/ ideas needed for the higher bands in the mark scheme.

The most assured comparisons were at once direct and detailed; comparing methods that dramatists use can be an effective way to introduce comparisons. However, these need to be linked to the question asked, and it is fundamental that candidates remember what their essay is in response to.

As in previous years, the strongest responses made connections that were perceptive, sometimes original, and well-founded through developed textual analysis. The most popular texts are still *The Duchess of Malfi* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but other pairings are increasing in popularity, such as *Faustus*/*Enron* and *Lady Windermere's Fan*/*Betrayal*. Given that this paper examines only 'closed book' texts, it is remarkable how learners continue to analyse the texts in detail and depth, integrating relevant and sometimes illuminating contexts and discussing other critical views with critical rigour.

Doctor Faustus and *Enron*

Those who chose Q6 generally agreed that both plays painted a 'depressing picture' of human nature, although some argued that both plays showed the plight of individuals, both of whom are not necessarily representative of society as a whole. There were others who argued that Faustus' dealings did not impact on society, whereas Skilling's decided the fate

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

of a substantial number of people. In general, candidates found that the ending of *Enron* offered no sense of redemption and there were frequent references to Skilling not learning much from his experiences. Some applied the same view to Faustus. Examiners saw some excellent comparative analysis of stagecraft and the use of dramatic genres in both plays.

In responding to Q7, candidates mostly wrote with a critical eye when discussing 'ambition' in the plays. There was a secure grasp on how *Enron* employed Brechtian techniques and *Doctor Faustus* echoed earlier morality plays when presenting hubris and eventual downfall of the protagonists. Responses drew effective comparisons, with some critical and evaluative work at the higher end of responses on what texts say about atheism/secular desires, with many exploring Skilling's lack of remorse and 'crucifixion' before his sentencing. While the notion of ambition in *Faustus* and *Enron* was fairly discussed in most answers, the framing and context of ambition was often less well defined; this meant that there was sometimes a wayward quality to answers which sought to cover ambition in a general discussion of the plays rather than offering a sharp focus on how ambition looks similar or different in Marlowe's and Prebble's plays.

The Duchess of Malfi and *A Streetcar Named Desire*

Q8 was incredibly popular, but there was mixed success in responding to the specifics of the question: when examiners were assessing performance, it was vital that candidates were clear on their interpretation of 'fight for acceptance'. This is not the same as struggle or hardship, and some candidates did not recognise this. Others, however, argued that the fight for the Duchess was never about acceptance. Candidates engaged using a variety of approaches, with some arguing that the aberrant behaviour of the male antagonists was also driven by a desire for acceptance in equally hostile contexts. Most responses worked to connect and contrast Blanche and the Duchess, with a few choosing to centre Stella and explore how she abandons her sister to gain acceptance. Some responses included meaningful discussion of Webster's performance contexts and how these would increase the horror of the torture of the Duchess. Some context work on Williams remained a little 'bolt-on' and all too often candidates resort to biographical details of Williams' life which are stated but rarely used to develop the argument. Again this year examiners saw sweeping and meaningless comments about women's lives just after WW2, and candidates who offer subjective comments in this way cannot expect to get a good AO3 mark.

Q9 was less popular, but those who attempted it engaged with the critical view and found that they had a freedom of approach. Some thought there was more hate than love, while others thought the opposite, offering defences of the chief male oppressors by virtue of their own psychological issues.

Inevitably, most focused on Blanche and the Duchess as the primary victims of hate, and the strongest responses analysed key scenes, staging and dialogue with considerable skill. Consideration was also given to these two characters in relation to love. Some contrasted the Duchess' daring but loving relationship with her husband with Blanche's disastrous attempt to find love with Mitch. Some included the Cardinal's corrupt relationship with Julia as an example of a mixture of love and hate, while others saw a primarily abusive relationship between Stella and Stanley.

The Revenger's Tragedy and *Loot*

These questions were equally popular with those who had studied these plays. Examiners reported seeing some sensitive and exploratory comparisons and most candidates were firmly engaged with both plays. In general, responses agreed with the statement in the Q10 and focused sharply on 'enjoys' in the critical view. Examiners commented on the detail and depth of the textual analysis and saw encouraging discussion of dramatic technique and

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

stagecraft. In relation to contexts, candidates were generally well informed and included some discussion of 'Ortonesque' as a dramatic genre as well as black comedy or farce. Others combined AO3 and AO5 in their discussion of critic Emma Smith's 'black camp' genre.

Q11 was very well done on the whole, where the strongest responses gave close consideration not only to the different types of comedy but also the impact on audiences. Examiners were impressed, as in previous years, with candidates' ability to analyse in depth and detail and seamlessly integrate context and critical thought. Contextual attitudes towards religion were fruitful discussion points, especially when contrasts between the texts was the focus.

Lady Windermere's Fan and *Betrayal*

In general, responses to Wilde and Pinter were less accomplished than in previous years, with few candidates exploring the intricacies of elements of humour, irony or satire.
Q13 was considerably more popular than Q12, and candidates showed a keen interest in the idea of 'social expectations' making individuals 'struggle'. The focus for many candidates was firmly set on women as the characters who struggled, with the portrayal of men in society appearing to be free of the constraints holding women back. Some were able to discuss social and cultural contexts quite purposefully, while the weaker responses made sweeping, uncorroborated statements about what life for women was like in the 1970s. However, Victorian social expectations were generally discussed from an informed perspective. This year, candidates showed some limitations in analysing the dialogue in both plays. This was most notable in engaging with *Betrayal*, where candidates mentioned Pinter's 'pauses' for example, and 'reverse chronology narrative' without discussing how they worked in the language of the play.

Candidates who chose Q12 seemed to engage more successfully with Pinter's dramatic techniques. At the top of the range of responses to Q12, well-informed candidates were able to discuss how the plays both act 'as an exploration of bourgeois attitudes to love, honesty, and social appearances'. Wilde's witty dialogue was fully explored by several candidates and the given critical view was considered critically and in depth. One candidate wrote, 'Both plays, therefore, use an entertaining surface as a façade behind which to present subversive ideas about the societies in which they were written.'

Measure for Measure and *Murmuring Judges*

Sadly, there were too few responses to these texts to enable comments to be made.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2026

COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

Overview of the Component

It has been wonderful to see the culmination of all the hard work that has been happening in classrooms and homes in the Summer 2026 responses. It has been a privilege to read and mark so many thoughtful and considered essays where candidates have been able to demonstrate their skills in responding to unseen texts.

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

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

A challenge faced by examiners which is undoubtedly also faced in centres is the difficulty in reading some candidates' handwriting. We would encourage centres to ensure candidates have had plenty of experience hand-writing responses under timed conditions, for extended periods of time, so this skill is exercised before the exam season.

Comments on individual questions/sections

SECTION A: UNSEEN 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. Candidates generally seemed more confident writing about the prose, perhaps because they were able to address more AOs, or had the supporting extracts to help structure their arguments.

Despite Q1 having two different supporting materials and Q2 having three, there was a range of critical and contextual material for candidates to use whichever their question choice. The majority of candidates engaged with these well, using them to inform their reading and shape their response. We are seeing more candidates engage with these early on in their overviews or initial paragraphs and shape their arguments around them which is one way of using the supporting extracts. The supporting materials provided a good prompt to discuss some context but both extracts also gave candidates the opportunity to drawn on their understanding of the time periods and use this in their response. In each time period, the supporting extracts offered the opportunities for reward under either AO3 or AO5,

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

depending on how candidates engaged with these. It is worth remembering that each supporting extract is not there for reward under only AO3 or AO5.

A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information or felt the need to include irrelevant or sweeping statements. The Principal Examiner would like to remind centres and candidates that context should be discussed in relation to the text and that candidates should be showing their appreciation and understanding of the significance and influence of context, not just listing statements about the time periods.

It is clear from many of the responses we read that centres are using past papers to prepare candidates which is, of course, an excellent idea. However, we have been seeing candidates use contextual ideas and supporting extracts from other papers or even mentioning the texts from previous papers during their responses. We would want to encourage centres to use these in preparation and teaching but to ensure candidates are exposed to a wider range of texts and get a broader understanding of the time periods, literary trends, themes and styles, rather than only being exposed to past papers and limiting their understanding to these only.

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

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

It is also worth considering ensuring candidates have been taught how to read and engage with prose texts and how this might be different to writing about drama or poetry. There were times when candidates were focusing on the characters as real people, discussing their potential thoughts or reasons for actions rather than focusing on characters as literary devices and the methods used to present them. This shift to a literary focus is always encouraged and can help elevate candidates' responses.

***The Suspicions of Ermengarde* - Maxwell Gray (1880-1910)**

Most candidates who wrote on this extract immediately engaged with the description of setting and the pathetic fallacy of the fog. Many were able to link this with wider themes from the text in their analysis.

Near enough all candidates were engaging with both the supporting materials on some level. Generally, candidates dealt well with discussing both AO3 and AO5 with many using the supporting materials more than once to make their discussions purposeful and clear. The more success responses had thought about how Gray might be using Ermengarde as a vehicle to express 'dissatisfaction with the contemporary position of women in marriage and in society' or were able to explore her 'lightness of tone' or 'subtleties of mood', and even discuss the mildly satirical treatment of Ermengarde's feelings.

Less successful responses spent too much time explaining the fog as a symptom of industrialisation, with dates and unrelated historical facts. The passage also provided opportunities to explore early C20th marriage, the New Woman, and leisure and travel.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

There were candidates who struggled to engage with the text, perhaps not having taken the time to read, reread and think carefully about what they were reading. Some candidates imposed meanings on what they were reading such as overly sexualised discussion about the fog or Arthur paying the waiter's tip. Others spent time on micro-analysing auditory techniques such as alliteration or sibilance which would have been better spent considering more appropriate prose techniques.

Many candidates found the text rich in opportunities for analysis with most finding something relevant to say about Gray's use of free indirect discourse, the characterisation of Ermengarde, the setting and the introduction of secondary characters.

***At The Bay* – Katherine Mansfield (1918-1939)**

The majority of candidates who chose to answer on 1918-1939 identified a range of relevant elements in the passage such as the characterisation of Stanley and Jonathan, the satirical and critical tone, language patterns and the introduction of secondary characters. The majority of candidates were able to address the extract as a whole and discuss both Part II and Part III.

The extract invited candidates to explore a range of contextual ideas such as Edwardian values, domestic life and gender roles in the early C20th.

As with Q1, almost all candidates were able to utilise the critical statements at some level. Each critical statement gave the opportunity for reward under both AO3 and AO5, depending on the candidates' engagement with it. Many candidates seemed to enjoy exploring the 'ripple of laughter' and 'sense of the absurd' and there were some very well considered discussions about Mansfield's 'watchfulness' verging on the 'sinister'.

Again, there were still too many candidates who inserted pre-learnt context their essay without really exploring the effect of this on the text. Also, some candidates made sweeping statements that, rather than demonstrating understanding, suggested some misunderstandings or misreadings. While a broad understanding of the time period and social, cultural and literary context can be valuable to integrate into an answer, we are not then looking for a 'broad' or scattergun approach when discussing context in the essay. It should be well chosen, linked to text and point, accurate and specific. It is worth looking at the language of the assessment criteria and recognising that 'connections between unseen texts and contexts' are rewarded.

Most candidates demonstrated engagement with the language and characters in the extract, such as the colloquial language and the use of free indirect discourse exposing more of the characters' thoughts and feelings. Very few took note of the form with some commenting that the extract begins *in media res* whereas it is actually the second part in a 12-part short story. This is an example of where candidates have learnt techniques or features and try and spot them in the extract, rather than begin with the text and draw out meaning from reading, re-reading and thinking.

SECTION B: UNSEEN POETRY

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

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

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

Those who lack this confidence often cling to the parts that make up the poem; they hope that feature-spotting, describing how many lines it has or writing out the rhyme scheme is enough because they do not feel confident engaging with poetic concepts like ambiguity, implicit meaning or imagery. As stated previously in this report and in previous years, providing candidates with as much exposure to a range of poetry and other literature is a great foundation for success in this component.

In this year's paper, both poems provided candidates with plenty of ways to access the full range of marks. All candidates were able to say something about the poem they had chosen and many were able to structure an effective and considered response. Both poems proved popular with a reasonably equal number of responses to each.

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

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

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

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

It is important to remember that the poems selected are provided for all candidates and offer the opportunity to achieve marks in all bands. To achieve Band 5 marks, candidates must demonstrate sophisticated analysis and evaluation of writers' use of poetic techniques and be fully engaged with the text.

The Confirmation **by Edwin Muir**

Candidates who chose to respond to this task were able to recognise the poem's themes and ideas and comment on a range of poetic devices.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Successful responses were able to discuss the tone of the poem, identifying patterns and shifts and being able to draw on subtle vocabulary choices to explore ideas with nuance. Many were able to link the significance of the title with their readings and to hold discussion on the image patterns, similes and conclusion.

Less successful responses approached the poem as more of an insight into a problematic relationship, sometimes imposing ideas about the speaker and their subject. As has been said in previous examiner reports, candidates should be reminded that they are aiming for a literary approach and that time spent reading, thinking and planning is invaluable in the unseen component and essential in shaping a coherent and considered response.

We still saw some candidates itemising the features of the poem and trying use pre-learnt information – some commented on this 'almost' being a sonnet, others a ballad, some even an ode. A useful activity with candidates in preparation for this paper would be to look at the mark scheme and note the AO2 bullet points do show there is reward available for 'structure of stanzas and effect of rhyme scheme' but this is only one of 10 suggested areas of reward.

***Clay* by Carolyn Jess-Cooke**

Cooke's poem provided a series of challenges that were met with success by many candidates. Many of these successful responses engaged with the various elements of the poem such as the boot and sole metaphor, the plain but significant language choices and the metaphors such as 'curious nose of wind and voice of earth'.

Less successful responses had a surface level understanding of the poem and spent too much time imagining the mother, her pregnancy and challenges throughout child-raising. Others mis-read some of the meaning and suggested it was a poem about parental or institutional abuse. Further work with candidates on recognising tone and interrogating their ideas would be valuable to ensure they do not move away from the text in their exploration of the poem.

We still saw some candidates itemising the features of the poem and trying use pre-learnt information – as with the Muir, some commented on this 'almost' being a sonnet. A useful activity with candidates in preparation for this paper would be to look at the mark scheme and note the AO2 bullet points do show there is reward available for 'the boot/sole metaphor as a structuring device' and 'concluding ideas' and that discussion of poetic structure does not have to always include rhyme schemes, numbers of lines or counting iambic pentameter.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

SUMMER 2026

COMPONENT 4: PROSE STUDY (NEA)

Overview of the Component

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

The most successful centres skilfully support their candidates to select texts, craft titles and compose essays that enable the production of literary responses and ensure that focus is sustained on evaluation of writers' methods and comparisons between texts. It was noteworthy this year that the most successful candidates had clearly been provided with guidance around planning and editing. Many centres would benefit from remembering that such support is permitted. A significant minority of candidates submitted poorly structured essays with somewhat fragmented paragraphing, a lapse which can be remedied with effective planning and editing. It may also be helpful to remember that 3,500 words is not a target and it is entirely possible to achieve full marks with more concision.

It remains the case that the most effective literary responses are driven by AO2 and AO4, where a productive and illuminating line of argument (AO1), is robustly centred on textual evidence and evaluation. Although discussing texts in alternating paragraphs is not a proscribed approach, this can make it harder for candidates to access the highest bands for A04. The most successful candidates tend to integrate their comparisons into every paragraph and make connections across all assessment objectives. A significant minority of candidates wrote significantly more about one text than the other, which, again, could be avoided with more effective planning and editing.

Although fewer candidates pursued a contextual approach this year, there was still a tendency to make sweeping generalisations about historical and biographical context, which do little to enhance lines of argument. As mentioned in last year's report, nearly all centres would benefit from developing candidates' appreciation of literary context.

It remains the case that the most successful NEA candidates attach bibliographies which include academic literary criticism and are not overly reliant on online study sites. Centres are encouraged to support understanding of how to engage with literary criticism as early as possible in the course, whilst also ensuring that students appreciate that wider reading is not a substitute for independent textual evaluation and, in fact, productive and illuminating consideration of alternative literary views is only possible after independent thought and reflection. Centres may also find it helpful to remind students that literary criticism, which is typically more readily available for pre-2000 texts, can be utilised to make links across both texts, thus enhancing AO4.

Apart from any study undertaken of prose texts in Year 12, the NEA is the only opportunity learners have to engage with extended prose at A Level. The unseen component also

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

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

In centres where best practice was evident, high academic expectations of all learners enabled the highest performing candidates to produce autonomous work, which actually exceeded the top standards required for A Level. These essays were a joy to read, reflecting a love of literature and evidencing exceptional teaching and support of the underpinning literary skills.

Once again, it was gratifying to see how many centres provide opportunities for a wide range of candidates to engage with the study of A Level literature. Although perhaps lacking the flair of the highest achieving students, there were some highly engaged, personal responses at Band 3 level, which were fully in the spirit of the NEA. Where improvement is needed, this tends to be linked to processes around delivery, levels of support required and moderation processes: less experienced teachers are advised to seek Continuous Professional Learning support from Senior Leadership. Further guidance is provided below.

All teachers are to be commended for their commitment to candidates' academic development by supporting them to produce this challenging extended essay. It is well understood that delivery, supervision and assessment of this component is also very challenging. In the best centres, teachers had clearly been supported with sufficient time to support candidates. In centres where time is lacking, teachers are advised to seek support from their leadership teams. Many candidates had clearly been inspired to develop a love of literature and this is hugely appreciated.

Tasks

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

It was pleasing to see that in line with guidance from previous moderators' reports and in the spirit of the NEA, the most successful centres had ensured that candidates adopted a literary approach and quality assured the production of titles. Although some candidates write effective essays without having a critical statement to debate as a starting point, there can be no doubt that their task is subsequently more challenging.

Based on the models provided in examined units, the most successful tasks include 'loaded terms', which invite critical engagement, enabling a productive line of argument to be crafted from first planning. Such an approach discourages the reproduction of pre-learned content – as is cautioned against in all components – and enables thoughtful engagement with AO5 and AO1 from the start. However, it remains the case that a significant number of candidates included a quotation in their title which was non-literary and not linked to the texts or question. These were, invariably, unhelpful to the candidate.

It remains the case that the most illuminating and productive tasks promote a focus on prose techniques, which is far more suited to A Level literary study than the microanalysis of single

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

word classes that dominated in some essays. For example, one candidate successfully used the following critical viewpoint as a springboard: “Both writers use settings to primarily unnerve and disturb the reader.” In contrast, candidates who chose to write about broad themes such as identity and trauma typically displayed a tendency to write about characters as though they were real people, as opposed to literary constructs. Such an approach to a literary essay is always limiting and these candidates were subsequently disadvantaged.

It also remains the case that the most successful candidates are prompted to consider relevant contexts. Unfortunately, some candidates were poorly served by the omission of any contextual links, a point which could have been easily rectified with some time spent editing. Equally, an over-reliance on what may colloquially be described as ‘bolt-on’ context still tends to characterise weaker responses. It cannot be stressed enough that literary evaluation is the driving assessment objective of all literature essays, hence any contextual points should serve to illuminate textual analysis and line of argument. As one experienced moderator observed, “Just a reference to something specific (an event, a change in the law, etc.) makes such a difference. The most useful context remains literary context, especially genre.” A focus on literary comparison and evaluation also enables candidates to access the top marks in AO4.

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

Where centres feel candidates need more support, it can be helpful to teach one shared set text that can be linked to a range of partner texts. Such an approach is more in keeping with the spirit of the NEA and also more robustly supports candidates in the development of skills needed for tertiary education and success in the examined components. Collections of short stories can be especially useful in this respect.

Best practice was evident in centres where texts and tasks had clearly been thoughtfully paired with teachers’ knowledge of candidates’ prior attainment and current level of skill. For candidates aspiring for the highest marks in all components, it is entirely right that full autonomy in terms of text and task choice should be encouraged. However, most candidates require more support and the promotion of autonomy should not be at the expense of outcomes for those individuals who may lack flair and legitimately require guidance in terms of making appropriate text and task choices.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

There were some superb text combinations and choices this year, which made for fascinating reading. All texts were appropriate and approved. Although freedom of choice is encouraged, centres may find it helpful to bear in mind that texts for which there exists accessible literary commentary can be most productive to study, especially if access to quality print-based critical material is problematic. Best practice was evident in centres where candidates supplied academic and literary references. Quality online materials are perfectly valid but centres do still need to be mindful that candidates do not rely too heavily on poor quality online revision sites or AI summaries. For this reason, it is highly recommended that, where possible, candidates use quality editions of texts, which, if possible, include literary introductions. Nevertheless, care still needs to be taken that candidates are not over-reliant on the interpretations of others. It was noteworthy this year that a significant minority of students relied on broadly assertive comments about texts, unsupported by precise evaluation of the effects of prose techniques.

In general, however, centres appear to be managing the challenges associated with the advent of AI in recent years. This technological development makes the inclusion of a detailed bibliography, accurate citation of references and the construction of a question that fosters an independent critical response more important than ever. Centres must ensure that any use of AI is referenced in candidates' bibliographies.

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

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

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

The purpose of the external moderation process is to quality assure the centre's accurate application of the standards. Thus, the external process functions as an invaluable professional development opportunity, enabling teachers to critically reflect on the accuracy and validity of their professional judgements. As the same assessment objectives and standards are in use across every component of the A level course, accuracy in the NEA reassures teachers that their application and understanding of the standards is correct and, for the benefits of candidates, Heads of Centre and tertiary education, accurate predictions can be made. More importantly, teaching and learning can subsequently be honed and developed for the benefit of candidates and their eventual outcomes.

Senior Leaders in centres are advised to support teachers with time to undertake this work, so as not to inadvertently disadvantage their candidates.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

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

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

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

It was noteworthy this year that a small minority of teachers had annotated contextual points as AO5. Centres should be reminded that AO5 is typically evidence of wider literary critical reading. A number of candidates also made extensive references to psychological theories, which, rather than illuminating their literary evaluation, tended to encourage reductive discussions about literary constructs as though they were real people.

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

All teachers should be proud of the high-quality work produced by their candidates in response to a very challenging brief. Much of the work is exceptional and evidence that high quality, inspirational and engaging teaching of A Level literature is thriving in many centres, particularly those that maintain their expertise in application of the standards through regular training. At a time in history when it seems that the ability to think critically and independently is more important than ever, teachers are to be commended for their dedication to supporting candidates to develop autonomy. This dedication is greatly appreciated.

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.
Tel: 029 2240 4292
Email: gceenglish@eduqas.co.uk
Qualification webpage: AS and A Level English Literature | Eduqas

See other useful contacts here: Useful Contacts | Eduqas

CPD Training / Professional Learning

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

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

Regional Rep Team

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

Get in contact today and discover how our team can support you and your students.
Regional Support Team | Eduqas

Eduqas Qualifications

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

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

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026



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

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2026