



GCE A Level Examiners' Report

English Literature
A Level
Summer 2024

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.edugas.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 (edugas.co.uk)

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

Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.edugas.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

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Executive Summary

All papers performed as expected with questions being accessible to all candidates and challenging enough to differentiate between them. Performance in Component 2 was slightly lower than in previous years. All principal examiners noted the general deterioration in the quality of candidates' handwriting. There were far too many responses which were almost illegible and this needs to be addressed by centres.

The Principal Examiner for Component 1 congratulated candidates and teachers who had clearly taken every opportunity to make the study of poetry for Component 1 a wide-ranging, rich and rewarding experience. The quality of work from a good number of candidates was genuinely outstanding and there was clear evidence of personal engagement leading to individual responses which were perceptive and often highly sophisticated. Candidates were reminded, however, of the requirements of a *literary* essay as distinct from a technical language study, history essay or biographical journalism. The most important guide to productive approaches is implicit in the title of the component itself, *Poetry*, and the emphasis needs to be squarely upon the analysis of carefully selected examples so as to demonstrate a candidate's understanding and appreciation of a poet's work in the light of a specific question. There was also an unfortunate trend at some centres in an over-reliance upon pre-prepared essay materials and a very limited range of study. This meant that candidates were not sufficiently well-prepared to choose examples of poems or key extracts which would be most effective in maintaining a relevant approach.

In Component 2, the Principal Examiner was impressed with candidates' knowledge of the texts and ability to quote liberally and with such confidence in this closed-book exam. There was a reminder of the weighting of assessment objectives in both sections of the paper and of the marks available for AO3 and AO4 respectively. A number of candidates wrote high-level literary essays but neglected the dominant assessment objective. It is certainly worth spending classroom time allowing candidates to explore the difference between Band 3 and Band 5 performance in these AOs. The best responses were precise, focused and informed. The strongest candidates were judicious in their selection of material and remained fully engaged and in control of their essays until the last word.

The Principal Examiner for Component 3 was pleased to see the messages from previous Principal Examiner reports reaching candidates and improving responses. It was noted that a wider range of vocabulary and more accurate use of language would go a long way to improving candidates' responses. At times, the lack of appropriate vocabulary led to candidates making inaccurate statements about the texts that suggested a misreading or not having grasped implicit meanings sufficiently. The majority of candidates engaged well with the supporting extracts in Section A to inform their reading and to shape their response. A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information or felt the need to include irrelevant or sweeping statements. The Principal Examiner reminded 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. In Section B, the most successful candidates had clearly spent time reading and reflecting on the poem. These candidates had a considered and engaged overview of the poem and were able to show from the outset where the response was heading.

As in previous years, there was clear evidence of a great deal of dedicated hard work, genuine enthusiasm for the texts and an impressively scholarly approach in many candidates' responses in Component 4 (NEA).

Moderators praised excellent practice from teachers in guiding their candidates' choice of texts and tasks to ensure a literary emphasis, as well as their carefully considered assessment of the work. In the best responses, there was clear proof that the candidates had *read, reread and studied* their chosen novels and given a lot of thought to how best to express what they'd learnt and understood about them. The most impressive essays showed evidence of careful planning and drafting, so that there was a clear trajectory for the argument, and plenty of textual detail. As is always the case, the most successful responses were firmly rooted in discussion of the texts. Unfortunately, moderators expressed growing concern that candidates' knowledge of the texts which they were writing about was quite patchy, if not shaky at times, and that they had relied more on external sources than rereading the novels. This has been a worrying trend, mentioned in previous Principal Moderator's reports, but it was noticeable this year where there was less evidence of solid literary appreciation to admire and enjoy. Problems tended to result from poor text choices, poorly worded tasks which did not have a literary focus, an over-reliance on external sources and responses which did not focus on the literary nature of the texts.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
The emphasis needs to be squarely upon the analysis of carefully selected examples so as to demonstrate a candidate's understanding and appreciation of a poet's work in the light of a specific question.	Developing an understanding of poetry	This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content. The resource is designed to complement traditional face-to-face teaching with an online learning pack that allows students to learn at their own pace.
For Section B, candidates should avoid making a link between the two plays and then moving on to deal with each play separately. Good connections need to be developed.	Making connections between drama texts	This resource is part of a broader package on teaching drama for the Eduqas A level specification.
However much time candidates think they should spend reading, re-reading and planning, they should spend more. This is invaluable and helps them consolidate their ideas and shape their response effectively	Exam walk-through on Component 3	This resource offers practical hints and tips on how to effectively approach questions in the examination paper.

Emphasis should be placed squarely on literary appreciation of the texts, helping candidates to avoid adopting an issue-led interpretation and viewing the texts through a philosophical, sociological or psychological lens	<u>A close understanding of prose fiction</u>	This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content. The resource is designed to complement traditional face to face teaching with an online learning pack that allows students to learn at their own pace.
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ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 1: POETRY

Overview of the Component

It is a great pleasure to begin by congratulating those candidates and teachers who have clearly taken every opportunity to make the study of poetry for Component 1 a wide-ranging, rich and rewarding experience. The quality of work from a good number of candidates was genuinely outstanding and examiners were full of praise for first draft writing which demonstrated all the cardinal virtues of accuracy, fluency, effective organisation and sustained relevance. Most importantly, in writing of this type there was clear evidence of personal engagement leading to individual responses which were perceptive and often highly sophisticated. Unfortunately, there was also a worryingly large number of responses to questions in both sections which were much less successful for reasons which are outlined below.

First and foremost, it is vital that candidates are reminded of the requirements of a *literary* essay as distinct from a technical language study, history essay or biographical journalism. The most important guide to productive approaches is implicit in the title of the component itself, *Poetry*, and the emphasis needs to be squarely upon the analysis of carefully selected examples so as to demonstrate a candidate's understanding and appreciation of a poet's work in the light of a specific question.

An unfortunate trend at some centres was to be seen in an over-reliance upon pre-prepared essay materials where candidates produced very similar, one-size-fits-all responses with only perfunctory nods at the set tasks. These were often no more than a restatement of the terms of the questions sprinkled throughout essays. In work of this kind, there were also indications of a very limited range of study which meant that candidates were not sufficiently well-prepared to choose examples of poems or key extracts which would be most effective in maintaining a relevant approach.

Candidates who had worked hard at memorising a model essay; a bank of critical quotations along with general contextual data will possibly be disappointed with marks which are unlikely to move beyond Band 2 in the circumstances described above. Please see below for a more detailed treatment of these issues which I hope will lead to a better understanding of how the various assessment objectives need to be addressed in a successful literary essay.

It is also important to remember the suggested timings for each response as this year we noted a significant number of unfinished and badly managed responses, especially where candidates had tackled Section B first (often at inordinate length) and then left themselves very little time in which to tackle Section A. As a general reminder, but particularly for those new to Eduqas, Section A is designed so that the short question (i) is partly intended to launch the candidate's thinking about the essay question (ii).

Comments on individual questions/sections

The driver of a literary essay should be found within AO2 (*Analyse the ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts*).

In Section B the point is made very clearly by double-weighting AO2 but even where this is not the case (i.e. in Section A (ii)), candidates *should not* make the mistake of thinking in *quantitative* terms and believing that equal *space* should be given to AO2, AO3 and AO5. We need, instead, to see this issue in *qualitative* terms where, in order to achieve a ‘purposeful’; ‘perceptive’; ‘productive’ ‘illuminating’ or ‘confident discussion’ of relevant contexts (AO3) or different interpretations (AO5), candidates need be sure to make *economical* and *relevant* reference to materials which support, enhance and develop the points that arise from their *analysis* under AO2. Stand-alone contextual or critical references of whatever length and depth cannot be described in the terms above.

Looking closely at the performance descriptors for AO1, candidates must note carefully that responses should aim to:

- be engaged and relevant
- address literary concepts
- apply relevant terminology
- demonstrate technical accuracy
- be effectively organised (including paragraphing, which was frequently lacking this year)
- make use of an academic style and register.

While these descriptors refer to high level performances (bands 4 and 5), it should be within the capabilities of most learners after a two-year A level course to:

- show that they have understood a task and how it relates to what they have studied (rather than producing a pre-learned introduction)
- understand the distinction between literary and linguistic concepts (if only that identifying a fronted adverbial, or a possessive determiner does not of itself demonstrate an understanding or appreciation of poetry)
- make use of literary terminology as a precise and accurate shorthand when analysing meaning (not simply a naming of parts)
- make use of coherent sentence structures and paragraphing
- avoid the use of slang and casual expression.

Section A (i)

Successful responses:

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

Below is an example of an opening to Q1 (i) which suggests a successful trajectory for this kind of response:

‘As Placebo addresses his “Lord so deere” his servile sycophancy is immediately demonstrated in his acknowledgement of Januarie having “ful litel need” of advice from anyone so obvious is his mater’s “sapience”.’

Less successful responses:

- waste time over-contextualising the poem or extract
- take a descriptive / narrative approach

- incorporate contextual references or quote different readings (AO2 analysis of ambiguity should not be confused with AO5 different readings)
- fail to support with economical quotation / offer overlong quotations
- list features with frequent inaccurate use of literary terminology or attempt to apply inappropriate linguistic terms

Below is an example of a less promising response to Q1 (i):

'At this point in the poem Placebo is engaged in a sort of contest with his fellow courtier, Justinus to gain Januarie's approval when it comes to giving advice on marriage to this 14th century knight who seems to have absolute power over his court and the local people which is where he wants to find a young wife.'

Chaucer

Some candidates resorted to describing Placebo's behaviour rather than looking at the ways in which Chaucer *presents* the character. *Analysis of presentation* involves an examination of factors such as sequencing; use of direct speech; repetition of key words and phrases ("deere" and "brother" for instance) and the coherence of the character's words, which, taken all together, seem to demonstrate the poet's intentions in bringing the reader to an understanding of Placebo's character. In many cases, candidates took this approach, thereby demonstrating their understanding and appreciation of literary concepts. Those who took a narrative or descriptive approach, sometimes filling-out their responses with contextual detail and / or inappropriate linguistic terminology, were not able to score well on this question.

Donne

There were some excellent analyses of both form and content here and the ways in which both the structure of Donne's verse and his use of language / imagery presented his attitudes to both earthly and divine love and the ways in which the two became intertwined and mutually illuminating. Those who were tempted to give an account of Donne's marriage and bereavement in place of critical analysis lost the opportunity to score well.

Milton

There were some very strong and sophisticated responses to this task showing a clear understanding of the effects of imagery and Milton's exploitation of all five senses. There was also some perceptive analysis of the techniques of building atmosphere and establishing implicit meaning through patterns of language. Weaker responses described the extract and / or made far too much reference to other parts of the poem and consequently lost focus.

Blake

Once again, we saw some very strong responses which were confident about the effects of structure, image choices and language patterns. Some correctly observed rhetorical devices and showed how these served the poet's perceived purposes; less successful responses concentrated on identifying declaratives and interrogatives without further, analytical comment or analysis.

Rossetti

Strong responses were preceptive in showing the effects of language in establishing distance and silence as powerful means of emphasising absence and therefore loss. Some candidates offered a general commentary on what would have been a well-studied poem without taking account of the focus of the question, which is 'loss', and consequently failed to score as well as they might have done with a better-planned response.

Section A (ii)

Successful responses:

- took careful account of the specific demands of the questions
- showed a clear intention from the start to analyse text
- gave careful attention to the structure and coherence of essays
- made relevant and economical use of contexts (please note that ‘close reference’ does not mean over-extended narrative accounts dislocated from textual analysis, as noted in the introduction to this report on Component 1)
- incorporated relevant suggestions for different interpretations of poems into their own discussion / analyses).

Below is an example of an opening to Q2 (ii) which suggests a successful trajectory for this kind of response:

‘While Donne’s prostrating and sacrifice of himself before the Christian God in Holy Sonnets such as ‘Batter my Heart’ (with its unorthodox request for divine intervention) and his lascivious praise of his mistress undressing in ‘Elegy XIX’ might both be described as acts of worship, the word is more literally applicable in the case of religious devotion. In both cases, however the strong feelings expressed in the poems are under-pinned by intense intellectual colouring seen in both the serious and farcical construction of persuasive arguments.’

Less successful responses:

- fail to demonstrate engagement with relevant texts
- rely upon raw biographical data and broad contextual ‘facts’ with little or no direct application to tasks or texts
- lack coherent structure and development
- repeat pre-learned critical views without attempts to apply them relevantly
- describe poems and assert meanings.

Below is an example of a less promising response to Q2 (ii):

‘John Donne was married to Anne Donne (even though it was very much against her father’s wishes), but he clearly worshipped her both as a young man about town and as the Dean of St Pauls. Even after her death when giving birth to their 12th child Donne continues to worship his wife when (as a protestant clergyman) he should be really worshipping only God himself This can be seen clearly in Sonnet XVII where Donne sets out different kinds of worship.’

Chaucer

Most candidates understood how Chaucer’s presentation of relationships between the sexes and between masters and their servants might well have involved a satirical, perhaps semi-serious undermining of the social order. Many responses were well-organised, building upon the presentation of sycophantic and disloyal service seen in the presentation of Placebo and moving on to look at Damyan and May with sensible glances at the world of the supernatural. Less successful responses became bogged-down in the presentation of the Merchant in the *General Prologue* and (much more surprisingly) in lengthy speculations upon Chaucer’s own unhappy marriage and his arraignment for ‘raptus’. Candidates must be reminded that Component 1 does not provide an opportunity for generalised, biographical journalism.

Donne

As is clearly apparent in the successful, opening to an essay on 'worship / keen intellect and profound feelings' above, many candidates who had studied Donne were very successful in coming to terms with this question and demonstrating a genuine understanding and enjoyment of some very complex verse. Weaker responses relied heavily upon snippets of biographical gossip and broad assertions about the culture of Donne's period. Those who had come across critical observations on Donne's qualities as a metaphysical poet mostly made good use of them. Even then, however, the stronger responses could have made a greater effort to discuss the relevant critical quotations which they had used.

Milton

Milton seems to be more popular as this specification ages and candidates clearly enjoyed debating the issue of the presentation of blame in *Book IX*. The strongest responses linked Milton's poetic techniques and use of language with the ways in which blame was implied, while weaker essays relied too heavily upon lengthy descriptions of context and abstract debate about blame rather than focusing upon the text. As with Chaucer and Donne, weaker candidates had far too much to say about Milton's marriage which distracted them from literary analysis.

Blake

Most candidates avoided the trap of claiming within the introductory paragraph that other factors than "the desire for social justice" were the driving force of Blake's poetry but for those who didn't, this is a good opportunity to remind candidates that, in tasks of this sort, the view expressed in the question must be given due consideration before an alternative is suggested. Candidates made reference to a wide range of poems but there was an obvious preference for 'London' and the Chimney Sweeper poems. Weakness appeared when candidates seemed determined to answer on the presentation of children or relationships rather than social justice. Once again, the fewer references to Blake's marriage and irrelevant but juicy biographical detail the better.

Rossetti

Ideas about death and the afterlife were seized upon with relish by most who attempted this question and there was some high-quality analysis of a range of relevant poems. A few responses drifted into the presentation of sin, weakness and women but most remained relevant. Contextual reference to Rossetti's religious faith was obviously in order but, in some cases, this opened a floodgate with a rush of lengthy considerations of Rossetti's charity work and her status within the Brotherhood. Please see the notes above on the judicious use of context. It is quality and relevance which counts, not quantity.

Section B

Much of what has already been said in Section A about AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5 applies to Section B too. However, by way of general comment it was noted in many cases that candidates did not seem to make best use of the 60 minutes suggested for this part of the paper. This was particularly apparent in those who chose to begin the examination with the Section B response. This is not against the rules of course, but it might have some bearing upon a widespread tendency to unload huge quantities of unfiltered material without adequate planning or due regard to the demands of the question and (as already mentioned) the need to focus the essay on poetry rather than biography or contexts. This becomes especially apparent in candidates' attempts to address AO4 through comparisons of the poets' lives or personalities rather than through their work.

Successful Responses:

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

Below is an example of an opening to Q10 which suggests a successful trajectory for this kind of response:

'In a poem of quite startling violence, Ted Hughes records the aggressive power of thistles as they "spike the summer air" and with images of splintered weapons", "Icelandic frost" and buried warriors he observes the irrepressible cycle of rebirth as the dead plants, like dead men, are replaced when their "sons appear". Plath also recognises the aggressive power of plants but in a different way as she loads the gift of tulips with sinister qualities, and they become representative of a world she wants to escape with their "dozen red lead sinkers round my neck." and the ways in which they "eat my oxygen".'

Less successful responses:

- offer poorly planned, overlong responses with little regard for the set task
- work through a very limited range of poems descriptively and asserting meaning
- offer extended and asserted accounts of poets' lives
- attempt to connect by comparison or contrast facets of the poets' lives
- make use of pre-learned critical quotation without regard to relevance.

Below is a less promising response to Q10:

'Silvia Plath had to spend time in hospital after an operation for appendicitis (or a miscarriage caused by Ted Hughes' abuse – critics disagree) when her family sent tulips to her hospital ward which she describes as having a very negative power over her. Ted Hughes who was brought up in the Yorkshire countryside and had a fascination for the natural world also wrote about plants (thistles) which were powerful and negative like Vikings.'

Eliot and Hardy

While not a very popular choice, Eliot's and Hardy's poetry has clearly provided a great deal of interest and enjoyment for many highly committed learners. Responses to Question 6 about connections between the ways in which the poets "write about their worlds" in the light of their suggested pessimism were thoughtful and often very sophisticated. The best essays did not lose sight of the satirical and / or dark humour which underpins the poets' pessimistic attitudes, while strong but perhaps less sophisticated writing concentrated almost exclusively upon the disgust, contempt and weariness expressed in 'The Waste Land' and Hardy's poems of 1912.

A similarly talented cohort of candidates responded to Question 7 and found much to disagree with in the set task. While most agreed that the poets did appeal to us differently, candidates did not necessarily accept (after due consideration) that the difference lay in the contrast between Hardy's heart and Eliot's mind.

Cleverly constructed arguments sometimes drew our attention to human qualities and respect (love for fellow man?) to be found in Hardy and a flintier approach from Eliot – possibly based in intellectual and social snobbery – so not quite hearts and minds, but close. It is good to see candidates (who understand the need to follow the rubric) with the confidence to take an individual approach.

Yeats and Abse

No responses were seen on either Question 8 or Question 9.

Hughes and Plath

Examiners understand that with this particular pairing there is a very strong temptation (particularly when it comes to a confessional poet in the Lowell tradition, as many candidates point out) to see the poems exclusively through the lens of the poets' relationships. However, in some whole centres this tendency has reached extremes so that there is often only a bare minimum of attention to the ways in which meaning is made in poetry and how the works of one poet connects with the other, and instead candidates offer reams of asserted biographical detail. Once again, a reminder that the title of this Component is *Poetry* seems appropriate. Candidates must not be allowed to believe that pages of biographical gossip, often disconnected from any consideration of the poems, can earn credit. That said, there were some good examples of well-informed writing about different sorts of power in Question 10 with some subtle dimensions including the power of delusion and the power which the past exerts over the present.

While most of the points above apply equally to Question 11 on the poets' ability to "transform the ordinary into something of extraordinary significance" it did attract slightly more analytical responses, although the popular choices of 'You're' and 'Full Moon and Little Frieda' did tempt candidates into lengthy and only very loosely relevant biographical / contextual writing.

Larkin and Duffy

Larkin and Duffy remain almost as popular as Hughes and Plath in this section and Question 12 on "the observation of trivial detail which is most moving and evocative" produced some excellent responses. Candidates fully explored the impact and significance of a wide range of imagery from ashtrays in 'Mr Bleaney' or "That vase" in 'Home is so Sad' connecting to the telling domestic details in 'Litany' or the jukebox in 'Never Go back'. Although this will sound a little like a stuck record on the same jukebox, many candidates could not resist the opportunities to write extensively about the lives and loves of the two poets. Again, this is more evidence that attention needs to be redirected on to the poetry itself and the ways in which meaning is made.

The invitation to explore comparatively the presentation of "relationships between people" in Question 13 gave candidates an opportunity to examine a variety of relationships rather than exclusively romantic attachments. Sadly, this opportunity was not taken up by many candidates whose responses remained limited to accounts of both poets' love lives with a wearying emphasis upon Duffy's change of sexual preference and Larkin's repeated betrayals of the women in his life. There was a great deal of ill-informed assertion here but those who went beyond 'Talking in Bed' or 'First Love' and looked more analytically at poems such as 'An Arundel Tomb' or 'Broadcast' along with 'Moments of Grace' or 'Before You Were Mine' were able to demonstrate more depth of understanding and appreciation.

Heaney and Sheers

There appears to be a growing interest in the Heaney / Sheers pairing. There was obvious interest in Question 14 on "the presentation of place" and the idea that it is not so much the places themselves as the feelings they evoke.

Candidates were alert to the ways in which a very wide range of feelings was evoked through the presentation of place, grief, family ties, national loyalties, sexual passion, loss, to name but a few, were well examined and supported.

In responses to Question 15 candidates lapsed into biographical journalism rather than analysis of poetry and discussion of illuminating connections far too often. The advice to re-balance the emphasis in these essays remains constant but the relationship between the personal and the universal was generally well-handled.

Summary of key points:

Section A

- The paper has been designed so that the Part (i) question gives candidates a 'way in' to their response to the Part (ii) question.
- Candidates should avoid pre-prepared essays or essays which are formulaic in their approach. This approach might be helpful in supporting some candidates but they lack the creativity and personal engagement of the best responses.
- Attention needs to be given to the nature of poetry and appreciation of it. The emphasis needs to be on analysis of carefully selected examples so as to demonstrate a candidate's understanding and appreciation of a poet's work in the light of a specific question
- Contextual information needs to be broader than personal biography and should always be subservient to the analysis of the poetry.
- Candidates need to read and be familiar with a wide-range of poems to allow them greater choice for their analysis in Part (ii) questions.

Section B

- Candidates should aim to write shorter, better planned and more relevantly focused responses.
- AO2 with its double weighting should drive the response throughout its length.
- Judicious choices of relevant context should be used sparingly and exclusively to support analysis; biography should be de-emphasised.
- Connections should be established on the basis of ideas and poetic technique and not upon similarities or differences in poets' lives.
- Pre-learned critical commentary on poets should be used with great discretion and only in support of relevant textual analysis. What critics have had to say about poets' lives is *not* a different reading rewardable under AO5.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMONENT 2: DRAMA

Overview of the Component

It has been a pleasure to see so much lively engagement across all texts on Component 2 this year. This is a closed-book exam, and candidates never fail to impress with their knowledge of the texts and ability to quote liberally and with such confidence. Many candidates were able to demonstrate some level of ‘academic style and register’, which is required for the top two bands of the mark scheme. In conjunction with this, it was clear that some excellent teaching of essay structure has taken place. Where this was particularly successful, as noted last year, was in the writing of introductions. There were plenty of scholarly introductions which set up a line of argument and immediately began to address two or three assessment objectives.

This paper has a dominant assessment objective on both Section A and Section B. In Section A, AO3 is worth 20 marks and in Section B AO4 is worth 20 marks. Awareness of this should inform candidates’ planning of responses, so that these assessment objectives are an integral part of the essay structure and not simply added on as the candidate is writing. As was noted last year, a number of candidates wrote high-level literary essays but neglected the dominant assessment objective. It is important that candidates go into the exam with an awareness that examiners cannot give a high mark for AO3 (in Section A) or AO4 (in Section B) if this has not been addressed in depth, even if the marks awarded for other assessment objectives are very high. It is certainly worth spending classroom time allowing candidates to explore the difference between Band 3 and Band 5 performance in these AOs.

Answers on this paper can be very long and it must be emphasised that this is not always a positive characteristic. In some cases, candidates wrote very long answers which deteriorated in quality and focus as they progressed. It is entirely possible to achieve full marks by writing fewer pages which are precise, focused and informed. The strongest candidates are judicious in their selection of material and remain fully engaged and in control of their essay until the last word.

It continues to be the case that there is a significant number of scripts where handwriting is difficult to read. Centres are encouraged to be vigilant about this and to assess whether it is more appropriate for a candidate to word process their answers.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Shakespeare

As was noted last year, many candidates chose not to complete the Part (i) extract question first and this often resulted in a shorter, less secure response. However, there were many excellent responses across the extract questions, demonstrating real engagement with Shakespeare’s stagecraft. In the Part (ii) essay question, where AO3 is dominant, there was evidence of an impressive range of contexts. It continues to remain pertinent to remind centres that context must be firmly linked to the text.

Many candidates are using context as a springboard to get their essay going but this can result in front-loading context where the candidate has not yet begun to engage with the play itself. It is quite difficult to do more than 'acknowledge' context unless it is directly linked to the text.

King Lear

This play remains one of the most popular choices on the paper.

Part (i)

Candidates clearly engaged with this extract, finding much to say about the breakdown of the relationship between father and daughter. Many candidates began with Lear's anger, with more developed answers exploring Goneril as both an estranged daughter and powerful female figure. Some were able to use Albany's interjections, and Goneril's handling of him, to shed further light on the presentation of her character.

Part (ii)

There were many excellent responses to this question. Candidates enjoyed exploring a range of relationships which demonstrated 'conflict between youth and age', often building up to interesting and individual conclusions in their essays. The character of Edmund proved a particularly popular focus, resulting in good links to context. Some candidates took the opportunity to conclude that the youthful characters who are not in conflict with their elders provide the moments where the 'play's main appeal lies'.

Antony and Cleopatra

This play continues to grow in popularity with more candidates studying the text this year.

Part (i)

All candidates were able to engage with the ways in which Shakespeare presents Antony's victorious tone and the recognition he wishes to bestow upon his men. Some of the more perceptive answers analysed how Anthony is caught here between militaristic triumph and emotional declaration, devoting considerable time to how Cleopatra's character adds to the portrayal of Antony and the mood of the scene.

Part (ii)

The essay question was generally done well, with candidates fully engaging with various moments throughout the play which provided instances of pathos, tragedy and humiliation. Many were able to draw upon the context of genre and used their knowledge of the conventions of tragedy to interrogate the critical view in the question, in a lively and scholarly way.

Hamlet

With *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, this continues to be one of the more popular choices of texts on the paper.

Part (i)

There was plenty for candidates to engage with in this extract. Hamlet's disgust was usually the starting point for analysis. A considerable number of responses were quite caught up in what was seen as Hamlet's 'obsession' with Gertrude's sexuality and sex life with Claudius. At times, this dominated at the expense of other elements of the dialogue. The stronger responses were able to appreciate Gertrude's moment of self-awareness and also to see the maternal element within her lines. Less successful responses tended to assert that Hamlet was simply mad at this point in the play.

Part (ii)

The Part (ii) question's critical view was clearly one which candidates were well-prepared to engage with. Stronger candidates noted the concept of 'fate' in the view and used this to construct sophisticated arguments. Others focused firmly on the debate between 'thought' and 'feeling', linking their ideas to the essential qualities of Hamlet's character. One very pleasing point was the range of textual support used for this question, with candidates being inspired to draw upon examples across the whole of the play and not just the most obvious scenes. AO3 was addressed very well and there was some scholarly engagement with the key ideas of the Renaissance and how these are reflected in the complexity of Hamlet's character.

King Henry IV Part 1

A very small minority of candidates study this play.

Part (i)

There was some misreading of the extract, with a few candidates being unsure of the subject of the King's speech. However, there was also some successful commentary on language and imagery and how this revealed the character's 'thoughts and feelings'.

Part (ii)

The essay question was generally well answered, with a balanced approach to AOs. Candidates explored the 'past' as presented in the plotline of the play, but others also took a contextual angle and discussed the play as social commentary for the audience.

The Tempest

The Tempest continues to grow in popularity and examiners saw some impressive responses to this text.

Part (i)

Candidates had a secure overview of the relationship between Ariel and Prospero and were able to identify this extract as a turning point or shift in the character dynamics. A large number of candidates conflated part i and ii of the question and applied the 'master and servant' focus to the extract as well as the essay. In some cases, this led to a degree of repetition of extract material in the essay.

Part (ii)

For this question candidates made very good use of the critical quotation in the question, beginning with analysis of Prospero and Ariel and then moving on to explore other relationships which present master-servant qualities. Prospero's relationships with Miranda and Caliban were a rich source of discussion, with Post-Colonial and Feminist readings being fruitfully applied.

Section B: Drama

Section B places considerable demands on the candidates in that all assessment objectives are in play. As noted earlier, AO4 is worth 20 marks and high-level comparisons need careful planning and development. The most common pitfall is where candidates make a link between the two plays and then move on to deal with each play separately, forgetting to return to the comparison point to develop it further.

The most popular Section B choice continues to be *Malfi/Streetcar*. The *Faustus/Enron* pairing is continuing to attract new centres and examiners saw some excellent essays comparing these texts.

Doctor Faustus/Enron

Question 6 was marginally more popular, with candidates exploring a wide range of different kinds of 'human weakness', such as ambition, greed and selfishness. Question 7 provided a thought-provoking critical viewpoint and there were some excellent and impassioned responses which came to very different conclusions about whether the moral messages of the playwrights are undermined. Many candidates really engaged with the stagecraft and symbolism of both plays when exploring the 'entertains' element of the critical quotation.

***The Duchess of Malfi*/A Streetcar Named Desire**

Question 8 was by far the most popular question. Some candidates focused only on sexual desire and others used the critical quote as a springboard to explore further ideas, such as desire for power, dominance or security. A number of candidates produced excellent answers linking desire to madness, which enabled productive comparisons between the plays.

Question 9 was less popular but very engaging as there are so many elements of 'false appearance' and 'deception' in both plays. Some of the stronger answers were able to explore the way in which the playwrights elicit sympathy for certain types of 'deception' which are not necessarily morally wrong or malicious.

***The Revenger's Tragedy*/Loot**

There were some remarkable responses to this pairing of texts. Question 10 sparked sophisticated critical debate about how the audience's 'ideas and beliefs' are challenged. Candidates were thoughtful about the context of reception and how audiences of different times might respond to the more provocative elements of the plays.

Question 11, which asked about 'preoccupation with the human body' and 'types of humour', was less popular but no less impressive. AO2 was generally excellent as candidates were able to write eloquently about comic effect of both the slapstick and grotesque kind.

***Lady Windermere's Fan*/Betrayal**

Question 12 sparked some good responses and the focus on 'relationships' was open enough to allow candidates flexibility in terms of the relationships they chose to focus upon. Pinter's play sparked interesting discussion of male friendship and parental/maternal relationships was another rewarding area which many chose to explore. Notably, AO5 was strong on both questions and candidates have clearly spent time studying critical opinions, using them intelligently.

Question 13 asked about a 'superficial society where respectability is more important than morality'. Candidates were able to construct convincing arguments and to interweave context skilfully. Pinter's biographical context was popular for this question and ranged from simplistic comments about his affair with Bakewell to sophisticated understanding of the shifting moral codes of the time.

***Measure for Measure*/Murmuring Judges**

Very few centres study this pairing. Question 14, for which the focus was 'ideas about dishonesty', was the most popular. Candidates found plenty of opportunities to make connections between the plays and many wrote well on the moral implications of dishonesty. For question 15, candidates were able to link 'social injustice' to contexts and to explore other 'issues' presented within the plays.

Summary of key points:

- Awareness of the heavily weighted assessment objectives in both sections should inform candidates' planning of responses, so that these are an integral part of the essay structure and not simply added on as the candidate is writing.
- Time should be taken to allow candidates to explore the difference between Band 3 and Band 5 performance in the heavily weighted assessment objectives in both sections.
- Context (AO3) must always be firmly linked to the text to be productive.
- Avoid essays which are too long. The strongest candidates are judicious in their selection of material and remain fully engaged and in control of their essay until the last word.
- For Section B, candidates should avoid making a link between the two plays and then moving on to deal with each play separately. Good connections need to be developed.
- Candidates should take some time to think and to plan their response carefully before they begin to write their response to the question.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

Overview of the Component

Firstly, congratulations to all candidates and educators. It is clear the amount of hard work that has been happening in classrooms and homes in preparation for Component 3. As stated in last year's report, it is especially pleasing to see the messages from previous Principal Examiner reports reaching candidates and improving responses, year on year. Well done!

One of the most striking things noted by examiners this year was candidates' own use of vocabulary to articulate their ideas accurately. There were comments about poems having a 'wandering tone' or being 'toxic', prose texts showing a 'distrusting mood'. While it is recognised that candidates are writing under pressure and are seeing these texts for the first time, it is felt that a wider range of vocabulary and more accurate use of language would go a long way to improving responses. At times, candidates' lack of appropriate vocabulary led to them making inaccurate statements about the texts that suggested a misreading or not having grasped implicit meanings sufficiently.

Section A: Prose

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

Despite Q2 having three different supporting materials and Q1 having only two, there was a similar amount 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. The supporting materials provided a good prompt to discuss some context but both extracts also gave candidates the opportunity to draw on their understanding of the time periods and use this in their response. A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information or felt the need to include irrelevant or sweeping statements. The Principal Examiner would like to remind centres and candidates that context should be discussed in relation to the text and that candidates should be showing their appreciation and understanding of the significance and influence of context, not just listing statements about the time periods.

A few candidates did not engage with more than one supporting extract in their response which became self-limiting. Centres are encouraged to spend more time discussing critical statements and modelling how they might be used. Successful responses 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. It is worth looking at the exemplar material on the Eduqas English Literature landing page to see different candidates' approaches and how they can be rewarded for AO3 and AO5 discussion in different ways.

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

Section B: Poetry

Both poems provided candidates with plenty of opportunity to gain the full range of marks for this section of the paper. Of the two, Ella Wheeler Wilcox's 'Friendships After Love' was the more popular choice with Vernon Scannell's 'A City Remembered' still providing some excellent responses.

There were fewer template-style answers again this year which was promising to see. However, there were some responses that were still starting with a list of techniques or the number of lines in the poem. Candidates are encouraged to spend time reading and reflecting on their ideas before writing so this 'warm up' to their answer can become a more considered and engaged overview of the poem, showing where their response is heading. As with the prose section, the more successful answers have been well-planned, and the candidate has control of its direction when they begin.

It was reassuring to see candidates discussing poetic concepts in place of linguistic terms. 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 to be cautious if they think the poems seem 'easy' on first engagement.

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Unseen Prose

Question 1: 1880-1910

George Gissing: *The Nether World*

Candidates who wrote on this extract were immediately engaged with the contextual ideas of class structure and oppression. The opening paragraph provided plentiful opportunities for literary analysis and many candidates took advantage of these within their arguments.

The majority of responses were able to analyse the creation of mood and atmosphere through weather imagery, the contrast between town and country and the juxtaposition of wealth and poverty. Less successful candidates were able to make valid comments about individual word choice and pathetic fallacy while more successful responses developed these into discussing the patterns of animal imagery, patterns across the extract and the use of perspectives to structure the extract. There were fewer narrative responses this year, which is pleasing, and the vast majority of candidates were able to make comments about the writer's techniques and their effects.

Almost all candidates were engaging with the supporting materials on some level. Generally, candidates dealt well with discussing both AO3 and AO5 with many using the supporting materials more than once to make their discussions purposeful and clear. The more successful responses had thought more about what 'a hot-bed of working-class radicalism' might mean and challenged whether Gissing was actually 'not commenting or judging on the scene or character'.

Some candidates seemed to get carried away with pre-learnt context, as with previous years, and these responses were characterised by large chunks of contextual information divorced from the text or tenuously linked. With this question, there was a tendency to go into too much historical detail about the industrial revolution, Marxism or the suffragettes. Some successful candidates made use of literary context in considering how Gissing might have been influenced by earlier writers who commented on social inequality, such as Dickens. This can be an effective way to address AO3 but, as with all comments on context, candidates must ensure it is relevant, accurate and linked to the text. While a broad understanding of the time period and social, cultural and literary context can be valuable to integrate into an answer, it must be linked to the text. It is worth looking at the language of the assessment criteria and recognising that it is the 'connections between unseen texts and contexts' which are rewarded.

Some candidates were not confident in writing about the form of the text and focused on more poetic concepts such as 'sibilance', 'volta' or 'alliteration' when there were other, more relevant, prose concepts to be discussed that could have developed their answers further. Centres are encouraged to spend time explicitly discussing forms and their relevant concepts with candidates.

Question 2: 1918-1939

Elizabeth Von Armin: *The Enchanted April*

The majority of candidates who chose to answer on the 1918-1939 period identified a range of relevant elements in the passage, such as the language patterns to set the mood and atmosphere, the free indirect discourse to give insight into Mrs Wilkins' class and circumstances and the creation of character. More candidates were able to identify the sympathy created for Mrs Wilkins and link this to the supporting extracts effectively. The majority of candidates were able to address the extract as a whole and make connections across the text.

As with Question 1, most candidates utilised the critical statements, at some level, in their response and seemed to enjoy the 'New York Review of Books' link to a 'fairy tale'. Some candidates' use of this particular extract was delightful to read with a number of comments effectively considering the tropes of fairytales such as downtrodden women daydreaming of a better life. More successful responses began to challenge some elements of the supporting materials, resulting in some mature and individual discussions. Some candidates grasped the meaning of 'a pot of lemon juice mixed with vinegar' but struggled to articulate their ideas accurately due to a lack of nuanced vocabulary.

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

As with Question 1, there were some candidates who were attempting to discuss poetic concepts or relied on linguistic analysis. Exploration of relevant prose concepts such as the varying tone, use of colloquialisms or the implied value judgements of the narrator could have resulted in more successful answers.

Section A: Unseen Poetry

Question 3

Ella Wheeler Wilcox: 'Friendship After Love'

The more popular choice, Wheeler Wilcox's poem, provided a series of challenges that were met with success by many candidates. There were some good overviews, demonstrating candidates' engagement from the start. Stronger responses were able to show sound grasp of meaning when discussing the impact of the title, use of imagery and use of personification and allegory. The majority of candidates were able to comment on the patterns of language such as 'ablaze', 'burned', 'ashes' and the change in mood through the poem.

Less successful responses only had simple understanding and imposed their own meanings onto the poem, perhaps having assumed an initial reading was enough to grasp implicit meaning. As mentioned in the general comments, it was as though candidates had read the title and opening lines and presumed the poem was straight forward and therefore, there was very little to explore. It is important to remember that the poems selected are provided for all candidates and offer the opportunity to achieve marks in all bands. To achieve Band 5 marks, candidates must demonstrate sophisticated analysis and evaluation of writers' use of poetic techniques and be fully engaged with the text. Less successful responses tended to be narrative and even speculative, debating why the relationship broke down and speculating who was to blame.

Many candidates not only identified the form as a sonnet but were able to make some considered comments about the structure and how it helped shape meaning.

Careful reading and re-reading, as previously advised, would have given candidates more time for processing their ideas, putting them on trial and then selecting the ones that could be substantiated by the text.

Question 4

Vernon Scannell: 'A City Remembered'

Scannell's poem was slightly less popular with candidates but for those who did choose 'A City Remembered', the challenges it presented were often tackled successfully. There were discussions about the effect of the title and its connection to the opening line, the creation of mood and atmosphere through imagery and the oxymorons later in the poem. Successful responses engaged with the majority of the poem, connecting patterns, identifying contrasts and discussing the effect of the poet's language choices.

Some less successful candidates had a simpler understanding of the poem, focused on specific sections and over analysed (aged nurse simile) and were only able to comment on parts of the poem in isolation. More successful responses were thoughtful about how Scannell uses perspectives, sensory memories and the change in tone as the poem develops.

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

Careful reading and re-reading, as previously advised, would have given candidates more time for processing their ideas, putting them on trial and then selecting the ones that could be substantiated by the text.

Summary of key points

- However much time candidates think they should spend reading, re-reading and planning, they should spend more! This is invaluable and helps them consolidate their ideas and shape their response effectively.
- Candidates would do well to spend time explicitly developing their use of vocabulary for essay writing. Use a thesaurus, work with lists of words to describe tone or mood, use previous exam papers to find academic, literary phrases or ideas to discuss in class, read widely.
- In Section A, candidates should avoid including pre-learnt contextual material that becomes divorced from the analysis of the text and takes time away from their engagement with the supporting materials. Any pre-learnt context should support candidates in their understanding of how meaning has been shaped.
- Engagement with the critical materials is rewarded for quality of discussion and any time spend by candidates to challenge, consider and link these to their response is valuable. The candidate should be doing the work with the critical materials, not just quoting the critical material and expecting it to do the work for them.
- Make careful and accurate use of literary rather than linguistic terminology, recognising the form of the text, whether poetry or prose, and using suitable concepts.
- Remember that the business of critical analysis is to draw-out meaning rather than to impose or assert it or, even, speculate about fictional personas' lives.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

GCE A level

Summer 2024

COMPONENT 4 (NEA): PROSE STUDY

Overview of the Component

All centres were required to submit a representative sample of their candidates' work and moderators were grateful to the teachers who compiled them so carefully. It was greatly appreciated that the vast majority of samples arrived on time and in good order.

In a few cases extra folders were requested to provide a clearer picture of the assessment pattern at the centre. Some of these additional folders were sent without signed coversheets, raising an important point regarding the importance of the coversheet as the official document of record. Irrespective of whether or not their work is part of the moderation sample, *all* candidates must attach a completed coversheet to the final draft of their response when they submit it for marking, including their signatures which confirm that the work is their own. After assessing the work, the primary marker should complete the second page of the coversheet and sign to confirm that, to the best of their knowledge, the work is solely that of the candidate.

As in previous years, there was clear evidence of a great deal of dedicated hard work, genuine enthusiasm for the texts and an impressively scholarly approach in many candidates' responses. Moderators also praised excellent practice from teachers in guiding their students' choice of texts and tasks to ensure a literary emphasis, as well as their carefully considered assessment of the work. In the best responses, there was clear proof that the candidates had *read, reread and studied* their chosen novels and given a lot of thought to how best to express what they'd learnt and understood about them. The most impressive essays showed evidence of careful planning and drafting, so that there was a clear trajectory for the argument, and plenty of textual detail. As is always the case, the most successful responses were firmly rooted in discussion of the texts.

These are the only complete prose works the candidates encounter in the GCE course and it is undeniably challenging for a learner to analyse and appreciate how two different authors have used language and prose devices to shape complex meaning. They must then compare and contrast the writers' different techniques, as well as consider the possible influence of contextual factors and other readers' views on their own interpretation, before organising all those ideas into a fluent, academic argument in under 3,500 words. The candidates definitely struggled at times, but that struggle is surely an integral part of the learning process, intended to help prepare the literature student for their exam components, for higher education and the world of work.

Unfortunately, moderators expressed growing concern that candidates' knowledge of the texts which they were writing about was quite patchy, if not shaky at times, and that they had relied more on external sources than rereading the novels. This has been a worrying trend, mentioned in previous Principal Moderator's reports, but it was noticeable this year that moderators saw less evidence of solid literary appreciation to admire and enjoy than in the past. As one disappointed moderator put it, 'There was a sense that quite a lot of the candidates had written their essays with the computer in pride of place on their desks rather than the texts, which were tucked away somewhere on the shelf.'

In the majority of centres, assessment was fair as teachers had weighed their candidates' strengths and weaknesses correctly and awarded the appropriate marks. However, in just under twenty percent of centres there was evidence of significant generosity in rewarding work that did not meet the criteria to justify the marks awarded. It was noticeable that there was some uncertainty in marking candidates' work which often appeared impressively fluent and assured initially, but which did not, on closer inspection, always demonstrate secure knowledge and appreciation of the texts as literary works. The range of marks awarded by different markers in the internal moderation stage at some centres suggested that this hesitation, along with a tendency to boost overall scores by giving high marks for AO1, AO3 and AO5, with AO2 and AO4, which should be the driving force of a literary response in this component, lagging behind.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Problems tended to result from:

Text choice

- Texts were often chosen solely to focus on one issue, often a non-literary one, such as gender, race or class inequality, identity issues or mental health problems. This is a reductive approach which can encourage candidates to view the texts as one-dimensional rather than multi-faceted and does not foster a confident or sophisticated understanding of the novel form.
- There are centres where the same two texts have been offered to candidates since 2019 or even earlier, often with a similarly limited range of topics for focus, making it very difficult for candidates to demonstrate the independent, thoughtful and creative response needed for Band 5. This can also create problems for centres in guaranteeing the security of the responses, that the work is all the candidate's and not reliant in any way on previous candidates' responses. It was not unusual for moderators to see candidates at some centres answering the same titles on the same texts as those seen the year before.
- The opposite situation was the case in other centres where the students had been allowed a great deal of freedom in choosing their texts. This admirable approach produced some outstanding work from the most confident candidates. However, all too often less confident candidates' uncertainty was palpable, especially if they were not keen readers, perhaps not having read a novel since their GCSE texts. Many candidates seemed a little out of their depth given so much autonomy and would have benefited from more support. There was a tendency towards broad, even descriptive commentary which suggested a heavy reliance on external sources.
- While encouraging independent study is very much in the spirit of the component, there are different ways to go about this and some centres have found it helpful to teach a common text in one category and offer a choice in the second as a way of supporting candidates' study. As these are the only full prose texts studied in the specification, this can be an effective way of helping candidates by stressing the importance of rereading, developing study skills and building confidence in discussing the concepts of novel writing.

It is of course each centre's decision how best to prepare their candidates for this component, but Eduqas guidance has always emphasised that candidates need a great deal of teacher input and structured support for this component; it was never intended that independent study would equate to a DIY approach for the students. Ideally, the appropriate level of independence in text choice should be reviewed each year so that it is the best possible option for the specific cohort.

Task setting

- This continues to be a very thorny issue and it was dispiriting that moderators felt the need to comment on the unhelpful wording of titles even more emphatically than in previous series. In nearly every centre report, moderators commented on task setting, making hopefully tactful suggestions about how this crucial aspect could be reviewed and refined, often repeating the same advice made in previous reports.
- Tasks were often worded in a way which encouraged a context or issue-led approach rather than a literary one, with the novels effectively being used as evidence of generalised socio-political conditions or ethical positions. This risked giving candidates the impression that literary texts have little or no worth unless yoked firmly to a contemporary issue.
- Social class, identity and toxic masculinity still figured very prominently in titles even though feedback to centres has emphasised the problems which they can cause, more often than not leading candidates away from literary appreciation towards a contextual or theoretical bias. This non-literary emphasis was often immediately evident in some introductions where the texts were viewed almost as social history rather than multifaceted, creative works of fiction.
 - For example, it was noticeable how often tasks on one of the most popular pre-2000 texts, *The Great Gatsby*, focused on female repression, with minor characters Jordan and Myrtle to the fore, or on the iniquity of socio-economic conditions, pitching Tom Buchanan against George Wilson, completely by-passing the presentation of the eponymous hero and/or his relationship with Fitzgerald's highly subjective narrator.
 - It was difficult for the candidate responding to a title on 'male violence against women' in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* to avoid imposing a sweeping, issue-led interpretation.
 - Another candidate tackling a task on 'scientific advancement' in *Frankenstein* and *Never Let Me Go* also had an uphill battle in sustaining a literary perspective on the texts as creative works of fiction.
- Some tasks were simply too open-ended, leaving the candidates with so much to cover that the essay became descriptive, as in a wide-ranging title on 'relationships between men and women' in *Wuthering Heights* and *On Chesil Beach*, or the very tricky 'some ideas about identity' in *The Bell Jar* and *Girl, Woman, Other*.
- Many centres had adopted the question setting model recommended by Eduqas, based on the tried and tested format candidates often face in their exam components. This involves the use of a slightly contentious critical statement to spark debate about the text(s), helping the candidate address AO5 and AO1 while keeping AO2 to the fore. As has been emphasised, however, this approach is most successful when the statement is a carefully crafted, literary critique of the writers' presentation of a key theme or idea.

The use of a general observation on life unrelated to the writers' presentation was less helpful, often compounding the issue-led emphasis and taking the candidate further away from literary appreciation. Aphorisms from famous people such as Oscar Wilde, George Washington, Pope Francis or Annie Lennox rarely helped the candidate engage with the writers' craft as they were not critical views of the texts. In fact, many candidates ignored the rather loosely linked statement in their title, perhaps viewing it more as a hindrance than some help. Centres would be justified in challenging the use of exam questions such as this one on *Frankenstein* and *The Road* which seemed more appropriate to an exam in philosophy than English Literature.

'Fear is the mother of morality.' (Nietzsche 1887)
With this view in mind, compare how both writers
explore the significance of morality.²

- Once again, the evidence of so many candidates disadvantaged by poorly worded titles emphasised they should **not** be solely responsible for the wording of their own titles. They must be guided by their teachers, as they simply do not have the expertise or experience to frame the question with an appropriate literary emphasis. Moreover, if they are selecting their own titles without any input from the teacher, this could be problematic for the centre responsible for guaranteeing that the work produced is the candidate's own and is not taken from another source.

Over reliance on external sources

- It was not perhaps surprising that inexperienced or reluctant readers, perhaps lacking confidence in how to study and write about novels of this complexity, turned to the internet where they could find what seemed the promise of a miracle cure via study sites such as Quizlet, Litcharts, Sparknotes, enotes, York notes... the list goes on, and that is without mentioning the plethora of AI sites available.
- The influence of such quick-fix materials was even more obvious this year than last, seen in the marked tendency to write in broad, descriptive commentary with an emphasis on *what* rather than *how* or *why* through close engagement with the writers' craft.
- The candidates often wrote with impressive fluency and technical accuracy, employing sophisticated vocabulary, although this was sometimes rather uneven with basic errors in use of capital letters or misspelling characters names at times. Even candidates awarded very high marks for AO1 made careless errors in transcribing the names of the texts and the authors as well as their own essay titles on their coversheets.
- In quite a lot of essays the candidates adopted a very forthright, definite style, echoing the certainty and assertive overview in the commentary-style approach commonly seen in textual guides. Candidates often wrote as if they were explaining facts about the texts to another learner with what seemed at times absolute certainty. This was rather at odds with the tentative, nuanced style of expression usually adopted in literary responses, where the appropriate academic register implies a keen awareness of ambiguity in creative texts where meaning is rarely fixed.

² This title might have been reworded to encourage a more literary perspective:

'In both novels, the writers create unrelentingly bleak worlds, where actions are always determined more by fear than virtue.' With this view in mind, compare and contrast the ways in which the writers present the good man in *Frankenstein* and *The Road*.

- Due to the heavy emphasis on a sociological or psychological reading of the texts in many responses, there was limited evidence of the tentative probing of language and technique which often characterises the thoughtful, mature awareness of nuanced presentation in literary texts of this quality. This more reflective approach to writers' presentation of ideas means candidates can address AO2 and AO5 simultaneously while also demonstrating a confident grasp of the appropriate academic register *in this subject*. AO1 rewards creative engagement and confident grasp of literary concepts as well as technical accuracy.
- In some responses there was a great deal of embedded quotation, but this was sometimes used more to describe than analyse and evaluate. More often, however, the textual support was rather sparse, leading to assertion and limiting the opportunities to display analytical skills or confident use of technical vocabulary. As lamented in previous reports, analysis of technique was often confined to comments on single words, in the way that textual commentaries often provide brief but undeveloped 'proof' of claims.
- This tendency towards micro-analysis, with too much meaning pinned on single words, punctuation marks, pronouns or phonological devices such as alliteration, meant that important points were often rather thinly drawn. Candidates who adopted this approach did not make a convincing case or suggest a secure understanding of how extended prose texts work. This did not always indicate a fully sound, still less a confident and perceptive, engagement with the craft of the novelists, e.g.

'Mantel evokes Boleyn's naivety and insecure power as she is introduced 'dancing in a yellow dress', specifically the concrete noun 'dress' as focusing on her clothing first conveys her lack of agency due to her gender . . . The noun 'yellow' conveys heat, signalling that the ball is a destructive force as she like Gatsby acts with naïve carelessness (wooing Henry), that becomes the catalyst of her downfall.'

- There was frequent labelling of word classes using linguistic terminology, but this was rarely linked directly to analysis of how meaning was shaped, and literary terminology was often sparse. Some candidates did make promising reference to prose devices such as motif, symbolism, stream-of-conscious and narrative viewpoint, but did not always have sufficient textual knowledge to develop these points or provide firm support.
- The economic, sharply targeted nature of introductions and conclusions was a common feature and promised well, but once again candidates' rather patchy knowledge of the texts made it difficult to flesh out these points fully in the main body with appropriate textual detail. Coverage of the texts was sometimes too narrow to make a convincing case for claims.
- There was more evidence this year of repetition and some loss of close focus on the task in many responses. Most candidates would have benefited from more careful paragraphing as a crucial factor in successful planning. There has been advice in past CPD feedback to centres which might prove useful on how to support candidates at key stages in this demanding component, covering aspects such as task setting, planning, study skills, drafting and redrafting. A greater emphasis on the drafting process can also be a helpful way to track candidates' progress and provide clear evidence of teacher input as well as proof that the final response is the candidate's own work.

- Another common feature in textual commentaries echoed in many responses is to treat the characters as if they are real and have agency, instead of focusing on the writers' *use of them* as literary constructs and the conscious artifice involved in their presentation. It was noticeable in many responses that the candidates rarely referred to the writers except when making claims about biographical contextual links.
- In general moderators were disappointed by responses which suggested more time and effort spent reading *about* the texts than actually rereading them to develop the candidate's own ideas based on thorough knowledge and understanding. Many centres had taken care in choosing accessible, engaging texts with an appropriate level of challenge, but the emphasis could perhaps have been placed more firmly on in-depth study of the novels themselves rather than resorting to study sites and other such similarly reductive resources.
- It can be more straightforward, even easier to some extent, to view a novel through a narrow lens – that it's *about* race, or class, or toxic masculinity – which is why study guides often adopt such a simplistic, reductive approach rather than tackling more nuanced and challenging universal ideas. The textual commentaries focus on explaining as simply and economically as possible what the novel is *about* with limited evidence of the engagement we want to see in candidates' response at this level, exploring *how* the writer has conveyed complex meaning and evoked such strong feeling. This unhelpful way of reading the novel has to be challenged by the teacher, encouraging a wider, more expansive view and guiding candidates towards an analytical rather than descriptive approach, or the ubiquitous study guides win the day.
- It is worth noting a new challenge for centres this year in the shape of AI as a tool available to candidates. Perhaps in future this will prove a useful addition to other methods of research available to candidates, but in the current series moderators found a number of cases of candidates relying heavily on AI to support their writing in a way which was not helpful to them. This often resulted in repetitive writing, a lack of textual support and the prevalence of certain words and expressions across responses from different centres. Good practice was seen where teachers had identified this and had asked their candidates to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT, for example, within their work, but centres will need to be alert to their candidates' use of AI if we are to see original and well-crafted responses in the future.

Making connections to support AO2 critical appreciation

- In the best responses, consideration of a range of carefully chosen context influences for **AO3** often went hand-in-hand with AO5 in supporting AO2; the most confident candidates recognised the speculative nature of contextual links, as a possible interpretation which could shed light on the texts' meaning and the writers' choices.
- Not all candidates had such an assured understanding of the relationship between text and context, however, and were often rewarded for the amount of contextual material rather than its value as a way of discussing and illuminating the texts as literary works. As one moderator put it, some responses were '*flooded with context*' and at times this was very sweeping or even inaccurate, as in reference to the writer's use of the Icarus motif in *The Great Gatsby* as evidence of 'Biblical allusion', or *Pride and Prejudice* reflecting Victorian values, or the claim that 'in the 20th Century women did not work but were expected to stay at home and look after their children' in response to *The Handmaid's Tale*.

- As mentioned earlier, the outlining of links between the texts for AO4 was often perceptive, although sometimes more contextual rather than literary as it was still quite rare to find candidates exploring connections between the writers' technique. The connections were potentially productive but when confined to the topic sentences at the start of paragraphs or even the introduction and conclusion, it was difficult to develop really illuminating links. The titles did not always include a steer towards AO4 by reminding the candidates to 'compare and contrast how [the topic] is presented by the writers', which is the wording advised by Eduqas. This emphasises the need to make development of *literary* connections between the texts a scaffold for the argument which can help the candidates with structure for AO1 as well as targeting AO4.
- Bibliographies for **AO5** varied enormously, with some being extremely impressive in length and range of reference, and in some centres, there was a commendable emphasis on directing the candidates towards high quality, print based literary criticism from reliable academic sources, which was hugely beneficial to them.
- Less impressive were the lists in some candidates' bibliographies of pasted web-links, often followed by the rather questionable term '*n.d. (no date)*', or their citing of sites like Litcharts and shmoop which are textual commentaries rather than critical views of the texts, although candidates seemed unsure of the difference or how to make use of either. Some had clearly signed the coversheet declaration confirming that the work was all their own in good faith without perhaps realising that they should place everything in the essay which was not expressed in their own words inside inverted commas.
- There was in some responses a lot of potentially valuable references to critical debate about texts, quoting the views of some eminent critics, but the candidates often stopped short of engaging directly with the opinions or using them to inform their own responses. It was rather concerning at times to note that these critical views were not all referenced in the bibliography or footnotes, making it unclear how or where the candidate had encountered them.
- The candidates had certainly read a lot *about* the texts, but the responses did not always demonstrate secure knowledge of the works themselves, and many would have benefited from rereading the novels rather than relying so heavily on external sources. It seems that this message cannot be emphasised too strongly.

Insecure Assessment

Many centres demonstrated exemplary practice and professional expertise in assessing their candidates' work accurately and consistently in line with agreed standards. In these centres the responses had been annotated in detail with specific reference to assessment criteria which made it very clear when and how credit had been awarded for each AO. At least some of the responses had been dual marked, with comments from the secondary marker and evidence of the reasoning behind adjusting and fine-tuning marks. In the supporting comments on the coversheets, the most accurate markers combined reference to the criteria with individualised comments, making a case for the candidate and justifying the centre's decisions.

In many of the centres where adjustment to marks was needed, there was not always the same attention to detail in marking the candidates' work. As repeatedly emphasised in advice to centres, it is essential that such long responses, when all five AOs are being judged, are annotated in detail to make assessment secure. It is not sufficient to give vague indications of some credit with simple ticks or to identify the targeting of AOs with bland markers such as 'AO3 context' or 'AO5 view'.

Without some indication of the quality or band being achieved at that point, such AO markers are of limited value. Moderators recognise how much work for teachers is involved in the marking of this NEA component, but in some instances the very brief comments in support of marks on the coversheets were disappointing, as was the absence of any internal moderation beyond 'Agreed' and the second marker's initials. In the external moderation of the work, no decision was made solely on a single moderator's opinion and all work where the assessment was flagged as insecure was reviewed by a senior moderator who also had to give clear reasons in support of any adjustment.

There are plenty of standardising examples of full responses covering Bands 2 to 5 available on the Eduqas portal, accompanied by detailed commentaries explaining how the criteria were applied. Three new examples exemplifying work in Bands 5, 4 and 3 were added in the spring of this year. These are intended to help centres make their assessment as accurate as possible and extracts can also be used with candidates as examples of work at different levels. It is expected that *all* teachers involved in assessment will have revisited some of these exemplar responses every year to refresh their memory of the standards and inform their own marking. Without this preparation there is the obvious danger that centres develop their own standards which may not accord with the agreed ones applied by the external moderators.

Annual Reports

It is perhaps preaching to the converted to recommend that centres give serious consideration to the guidance in these annual reports, both the Principal Moderator's overview and the more specific and individual centre reports, even if teachers only read them to reassure themselves that they are on the right track and doing a good job. Some centres have already started the Prose Study and are committed to the texts, perhaps even the tasks, when the reports are published in August, but there is still time for some amendment to tasks and assessment as the final submission date is always 15 May in Year 13.

It is reassuring when centres act upon well-intentioned advice from a fellow teacher to the benefit of their students. It can be dispiriting to note that the same advice has been offered year after year, however, and some moderators wondered if the reports are actually reaching the teachers involved in the preparation of candidates for the component.

It is to some extent the nature of reports like this to dwell on the negative, focusing on the less successful characteristics of the work seen, in the hope that highlighting potential problems will alert centres who can avoid them in future. That should not of course mean that good work is not celebrated and there were excellent responses in all moderators' allocations, well-deserving of the high marks awarded. However, there is a strong feeling that, for a variety of reasons, not all of which can be controlled by English departments, there is a shift towards issue-led, descriptive commentary of meaning and away from critical appreciation of the texts as literary works. For teachers who love and value their subject, this should be a cause of concern.

We know the candidates are living in a rapidly changing world where relying on digital support is the norm because it is everywhere and available at the touch of a key. We have to acknowledge that there has been a significant increase in the bewildering array of resources available to candidates and that they are ill-equipped aged only 17 or 18 to assess their quality. It is an increasingly difficult task for teachers to convince students that getting to grips with nuanced and challenging ideas, conveyed through subtle and sophisticated manipulation of language in demanding texts, is a worthwhile skill to learn and develop.

But they have opted to study English Literature, at the heart of which is reading books and learning how to dissect and appreciate how meaning is conveyed in words. Surely it is more important than ever that young people are taught the power of language and how to become critical readers, hopefully developing a genuine appreciation of literature in the process.

One moderator quoted a comment from the primary marker at the end of an essay:

‘Your love of history shines through!’

Had the comment been in praise of the candidate’s love of physics or maths, English teachers would be suitably horrified, but it is rather dismaying to think that the candidate’s enthusiasm for another subject was deemed praiseworthy in this case, as if English Literature was a sort of social-sciences hybrid. Hopefully, with a slight shift in emphasis it will be the candidate’s love of English Literature that ‘shines through’ in future.

Summary of key points:

- It is important to review departmental approach to text choice and task setting in light of every new Year 12 cohort. Refining the wording of titles should be part of an ongoing process for all departments.
- Emphasis should be placed squarely on literary appreciation of the texts, helping candidates to avoid adopting an issue-led interpretation and viewing the texts through a philosophical, sociological or psychological lens.
- All candidates will need carefully structured support in their study as these are the only complete prose texts covered in the A level course.
- Candidates should be encouraged to develop study skills and to prioritise rereading the texts rather than relying on study site materials.
- It would be worthwhile centres discussing strategies to help their candidates cope with the problems posed by the rapid growth in AI technology.

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

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