



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE
GCSE**

SUMMER 2023

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' reports offer valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. They are written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and detail how candidates have performed.

This report offers an overall 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 goes on to look in detail at each question/section of each component, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.ⁱ

The information found in this report can provide invaluable 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 annual programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 6 months after the examination.	www.wjecservices.co.uk or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the overall 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 (eduqas.co.uk)

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC secure website. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	www.wjecservices.co.uk
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	www.wjecservices.co.uk or on the Eduqas subject page.
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Subject Officer's Executive Summary

Both Component 1 and Component 2 followed a familiar structure and candidates' performance was relatively comparable to previous series. Reading questions across the components assessed candidates' ability to retrieve information, respond to implicit meaning, analyse a writer's use of language, synthesise, compare texts with a specific focus, and evaluate. In the writing section, candidates were given the opportunity to demonstrate skills in creative and transactional writing.

Both components were broadly similar in terms of accessibility to previous series, but some candidates struggled to engage with the reading passage in Component 1. This was particularly noticeable in question 05 which had a lower overall mean when compared to previous series. The attempt rate was also the lowest on this question, falling into the 80th percentile.

In Component 2, Q16 and Q22 also had lower attempt rates. This may have been a time management issue, with candidates spending too long perhaps on questions worth fewer marks. When Q16 was attempted, it was pleasing to note that most candidates were able to make some clear comparisons across the two texts. The overall mean was therefore higher for this question than it had been in previous series. Centres will find areas that worked well and areas for improvement at the end of each component report.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Tracking the text/area of text stipulated, to ensure a range of relevant points are made for 10-mark questions	<u>CPD MATERIALS</u>	Previous CPD materials for examples of good responses and strategies for sensible tracking.
Developing a coherent argument in the evaluation questions	<u>KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER</u> <u>POWERPOINT</u>	Evaluation Knowledge Organiser A PPT with strategies to improve evaluation skills.
Improving proofreading skills/technical accuracy	<u>POWERPOINT</u> <u>BLENDED LEARNING RESOURCES</u>	A PPT with strategies to improve technical accuracy. Interactive resource for self-study on improving technical accuracy.
Developing ideas in transactional writing.	<u>KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER</u> <u>BLENDED LEARNING RESOURCES</u>	Transactional Writing Knowledge Organiser Interactive resource for self-study on developing detail in writing.
Developing presentation skills for the Spoken Language NEA	<u>WEBINAR</u>	Spoken Language webinar with strategies to help candidates develop confident presentation skills.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 5 assessment objectives (AOs).

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The reading material for this paper was a short story, written by Penelope Lively but narrated by one of the main characters who proved to be a less than reliable narrator. The surface of the narrative was not particularly difficult to follow but the subtlety of using an unreliable narrator was a challenge for some candidates and grasping the tone of the story required some careful reading and response. A significant number struggled to sort out the difference between the narrator and the writer and that created some problems for some candidates.

Section B

This section followed the familiar pattern and there was a choice of four titles which offered opportunities to write imaginatively or from personal experience. All four titles attracted significant numbers of candidates. Most candidates made a genuine attempt to construct a narrative which had some substance and coherence but too often they were undermined by technical shortcomings in spelling, grammar and punctuation. Control of tenses remained a widespread problem.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- Q0.1** Predictably, this question tested the ability to identify explicit and implicit information and ideas and a list of factual points about Lisa was all that was required here to gain full marks. Candidates had to confine themselves to the opening six lines of the story but there was plenty of material in those lines. Most answers were clear and concise as the candidates understood that this question had to be dealt with quickly and efficiently.

For example, Lisa was an artist and 'not like other people'. She was two years younger than the narrator and from an early age she was good at drawing. According to her mother, she lived in a world of her own.

It is worth noting that those pieces of information, if presented clearly and separately, were enough for five marks. However, there were other possible points such as Lisa was the difficult child. She had tantrums and got upset at things. Everyone made allowances for her.

There is never any intention to put obstacles in the candidates' way in this opening question and this was a straightforward path into the examination paper. However, some candidates were careless or imprecise and lost marks needlessly.

Q0.2 As usual, this question was only worth five marks and the challenge to the candidates was to be thorough but concise. The question asked for impressions of Lisa's mother, and this inevitably involved direct reference to the text but also some inference and explanation. The more successful candidates achieved a pragmatic blend of inference and evidence while remaining aware of time's winged chariot flying by.

For example, it was clear that Lisa's mother was proud of Lisa as she was 'thrilled to bits' when the teacher said her daughter had artistic talent. She admired 'creative people' and she seemed to be living out her frustrated ambitions through Lisa. She had wanted to be artistic but Lisa achieving it was 'the next best thing, or better'. Lisa's mother was prepared to make sacrifices to support Lisa by taking a job in a shop. She had some health problems as she had had asthma for years and she had no work-related qualifications. She seemed to be rather snobbish and self-conscious about working in a shop. She was described as feeling 'awkward' when serving in the shop and she made a distinction between a delicatessen and a supermarket. Some argued that she was shy or just socially awkward and those alternative inferences seemed valid. Some candidates argued that Lisa's mother gave the impression of favouring Lisa over her sister and that also seemed to be a very reasonable inference.

Less successful answers offered limited impressions and relied simply on quoting 'facts' from the text.

Q0.3 This question was worth ten marks and focused on a section of the text which was relatively short and certainly manageable. It was a two-part question and, although its primary aim was to test analysis of how writers use language to achieve effects, it allowed credit to be given for accurate comments about the changes in Lisa when she went to art college. The issue of 'how' the writer showed the changes in Lisa was often a matter of selecting the relevant evidence. The writer used carefully chosen language but also the narrator's guileless thoughts and observations.

After just one term Lisa's appearance changed and, according to the narrator, she looked 'weird as anything'. She was almost unrecognisable, and certainly flamboyant, with her hair dyed red and wearing black clothes with pop art stuck on them.

Her behaviour also changed. She became demanding, selfish and extravagant, spending a lot of money on 'plays and things' and 'needing' more, and more expensive, clothes. She embraced the lifestyle and image of the art student and she simply had to travel for months to see paintings and architecture. She seemed to be drifting away from her family and background as she was away for months. She changed her image again and appeared with frizzed, blonde hair and wearing a lot of leather, a suede coat and expensive boots.

She qualified at the art college but could not, or would not, find a job she wanted. She had become hard to please and seemed to have an inflated sense of herself. Some candidates described her as arrogant.

All of this was seen through the eyes of the narrator, or her mother, and they were both conventional and limited in their outlook. The writer used the details of Lisa's appearance and behaviour to show the changes, but the narrator's tone and voice were also used effectively. For example, when the narrator said 'she did come home for Christmas' it seemed only to emphasise how infrequent her visits were. Similarly, the mother's attempt to justify Lisa's unwillingness to take the jobs available to her seemed to stress how self-obsessed and self-important she had become.

Q0.4 This was also a two-part question which required the candidates to identify the narrator's thoughts and feelings and to show how those thoughts and feelings were conveyed. The most successful way to approach the question was to track the text from line 34 to line 66, identifying and accumulating the evidence of her thoughts and feelings. Those who adopted a methodical approach to the question had a real opportunity to score well here. However, too many candidates struggled to approach this question effectively and seemed to be answering a different question.

The narrator thought she would go back to work as a teacher when her children went to school and she thought her life was clearly mapped out. She described herself as 'following a clear path'. She thought that Lisa was 'fed up' living at home and she noticed but accepted her mother giving up her bedroom without criticism. Similarly, she seemed to think it was perfectly reasonable for her mother to sell her wedding present to pay for creating a studio for Lisa. She thought Lisa's art was strange and incomprehensible. She thought her sister painted 'funny things' of which she couldn't make 'head or tail'. However, she felt that this lack of appreciation was her fault as she did not understand. She admitted that she was 'not experienced' in such things and felt rather inadequate. When Lisa did less and less painting, the narrator thought it was 'sad'.

She thought that Bella Sims' gallery was 'real art' and she felt 'thrilled' and moved to tears when Bella agreed to exhibit Lisa's work. She felt rather intimidated by Bella and considered her to be 'posh'. She thought Melvyn was 'creative' but not a 'real artist' because he only taught design. However, she thought he was 'nice' and was pleased when Lisa and Melvyn decided to marry. She thought that being a child-minder for Lisa was not a problem as 'an extra one' would not make much difference. She did think it was a 'strain' to look after four young children when Lisa had Jason, but she remained calm and accepting, never really feeling exploited.

The use of the narrator clearly enabled the writer to show her thoughts and feelings but 'how' is also a matter of content, of what happens and what is thought and said.

- Q0.5** The last question in this section required critical evaluation of the text as a whole and the wording of the question invited a personal response to the issue of to what extent the narrator and her mother were aware of what Lisa was really like. The narrator proved unreliable and there was an ironic gap between what the narrator saw and what the reader saw. The narrator and her mother saw Lisa as gifted and entitled while the reader was inclined to see her as spoilt, manipulative and self-absorbed. It was that gap that this question addressed.

The best answers established a coherent argument and worked through the passage to build a convincing case. The very best (and there were some outstanding responses to this question) showed real subtlety in argument and engaged purposefully with the text. The less successful responses struggled for coherence and/or substance. In general, the more successful responses argued that the narrator and her mother were blinded by what they saw as Lisa's 'artistic talent'. The narrator and her mother felt that her artistic temperament justified every self-indulgence and that she lived in 'a world of her own' where her self-obsessed behaviour was beyond criticism. They made sacrifices and excuses for her and allowed themselves to be exploited. At the end there was just a hint that the narrator was realising the truth about Lisa, but the mother remained blissfully unaware of what she was really like. She was oblivious to Lisa's failings and shortcomings. Opinion is free but some arguments are harder to sustain than others and it was difficult to argue that the narrator and her mother had a clear or objective view of Lisa.

For example, in the opening paragraph Lisa's mother made 'allowances' for her daughter's 'difficult' behaviour and tantrums because she was 'artistic' and the narrator added 'we all did'. When Lisa was at art college, neither the narrator nor her mother questioned her 'need' for clothes and travel and the mother saw her moods and bad temper just as something you had to expect from someone artistic. Lisa was not blamed for rejecting good jobs and the tone of the mother's comments (what a waste of her talents' and 'it's ridiculous') revealed her attitude as she justified her daughter. The mother gave up her bedroom and sold a wedding present to pay for a studio for Lisa with no complaint or criticism from the narrator, who found Lisa's 'work' incomprehensible but attributed this to her own ignorance. The exhibition was something of an ordeal for the narrator and her mother as they were ignored and humiliated but, as usual, Lisa having a good time and meeting Melvyn was enough compensation. The narrator was used by Lisa as a convenient child-minder while she went to London to see her friends and pursue openings for her work. There was only the merest hint from the narrator that this was in any way unreasonable as she admitted that looking after four young children was 'a strain'. When Lisa approached her fortieth birthday, after an unsettled life with a string of relationships and several more children, the narrator still felt that it was not 'right' that life seemed to be behind her sister. The mother continued making excuses for Lisa to the end, convinced that the freedom to express was all that mattered. When the narrator did not answer and eventually did so rather uncertainly, there was perhaps a suggestion that she had finally realised the truth about Lisa.

The less successful answers really struggled to engage with the text or the question. Some answers were very brief while others were long but unfocused. The key to this type of question is the ability to put together and sustain a coherent argument. Sadly, some candidates did not do this and were unable to think through a convincing stance.

Section B

Q1.1 (a) The Big Decision

Some of the 'big decisions' seemed rather contrived but most candidates who attempted this option tried to include at least a moment of choice, even it was only whether to put the penalty to the left or the right of the goalkeeper.

(b) Write a story that ends: ...and I don't miss her at all.

In this option, the candidates were given the ending to the story. When choosing this option, it is important that candidates do have a clear sense of the structure of their narrative so that the ending doesn't feel disjointed. The most successful stories were very good indeed, but some struggled to make the ending fit the rest of the story.

(c) Write about an occasion when you did someone a favour.

This title offered a good opportunity to write from personal experience and there were some good responses, ranging from babysitting and walking dogs to saving injured competitors in races.

(d) Write a story that begins: Mum insisted that I went to the supermarket with her.

Some candidates almost ignored the trip to the supermarket and simply moved from the opening line to a trip to a football match or another location.

However, when this was done well it was done very well indeed. The best responses often had a lively voice and presented the relationship between a mum and a demanding child (or sulky teenager) with insight and humour. The best responses showed an eye for authentic detail and usually avoided the unconvincingly melodramatic in favour of close observation.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- Dealing with questions Q1 and Q2 quickly and efficiently and managing time successfully.
- Adopting a methodical approach to the 10-mark questions and not drifting outside the lines.
- Relevant use of subject terminology which enhanced the point made rather than a 'feature spotting' exercise.
- Developing a cohesive argument with relevant textual support in response to the statement given in Q05.
- Having a clear sense of the direction and structure of their narrative writing.
- Developing character and dialogue effectively to create a sense of authenticity in narrative writing.

Areas for Improvement

- Candidates need to work methodically through the text, particularly in questions worth ten marks.
- Candidates need to provide some substance and detail in questions worth ten marks. Some answers are too brief and offer very limited coverage of the text.
- Candidates need to line up the question and answer the question that is actually there (for example in Q.04).
- Examiners reported seeing some very brief narratives this year. As a question worth 40 marks, candidates need to develop their ideas to give their narrative writing substance and detail.
- Candidates need to take care with tenses. This has been mentioned in previous reports but the failure to control tenses is an increasing problem and it seriously undermines a lot of writing.
- Candidates need to take care to communicate clearly and accurately.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 2

Overview of the Component

This component tests candidates' skills, knowledge and understanding across 6 assessment objectives (AOs)

- AO1 Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.
- AO2 Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.
- AO3 Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.
- AO4 Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.
- AO5 Communicate clearly, effectively, and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences and organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.
- AO6 Use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Section A

The two reading texts for this examination were accounts of women who were involved with dramatic rescues at sea. One was a newspaper article about Aileen Jones a member of the RNLI, based at Porthcawl, who carried out a rescue mission to save two fishermen, whose boat was in difficulty, and the other was an account from the New York Tribune in 1869 that described the rescue of two soldiers whose sailing boat had overturned in a ferocious gale. The rescue was made by Ida Lewis in a small rowing boat, and who, with the aid of her brother, saved the men from almost certain death.

The questions followed a familiar pattern and most candidates showed understanding of the events in the two accounts. Successful candidates made effective use of the texts to support their responses, while weaker candidates sometimes failed to develop their responses sufficiently. In some cases, time-management issues meant candidates struggled to complete the final reading question.

Section B

In this examination the two writing tasks candidates were asked to complete were an article for their school/college magazine with the title: 'The Best Way to Spend a Saturday' and to respond to a letter that had appeared in a newspaper suggesting that young people should have to do a period of voluntary work when they left school. Both tasks gave candidates the opportunity to respond from a personal perspective if they wished and there were many engaging and confident responses to both tasks. As usual, there was an expected length of 300-400 words for each task, and where responses were significantly briefer, they frequently lacked both range and the development of the points raised.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q1.1 This first question focused on the newspaper article, 'We save people. It's just our job', with the familiar three one-mark questions that invited candidates to select specific details from across the text. The questions were straightforward 'search and find' but meant that candidates had to read the complete article before tackling the more demanding second question. The first part of the question simply asked for the date of the rescue that Aileen Jones was involved in and this information, 24th August 2004, was given in the second paragraph. Most candidates had no difficulty with this question, although some had incorrectly homed in on 'January 2005', mentioned in the opening paragraph, and others simply gave the year of the rescue rather than the date, and gained no reward. The other parts of this question were equally straightforward: 'Give the name of the boat that got into trouble' and then 'How long did the rescue last?' Candidates who read both the question and the text carefully had no difficulty in gaining all three marks, but some incorrectly called the boat the 'Gower Pride skipper' whilst others just appeared to have guessed the time for the rescue. For most candidates, this opening question gave them a clear sense of the events in the article and prepared them for the second question but some read with insufficient care.

Q1.2 Having already read the article for the opening question, there should have been little surprise that this second question asked candidates to explore how the writer showed that the rescue was both dangerous and dramatic. As in previous examinations, tackling this type of 'craft of the writer' question was best tackled by working methodically through the text, selecting appropriate details and commenting where appropriate how these reflected the drama and danger of the situation.

In the opening paragraph, careful readers noted that the area was 'one of the most dangerous stretches of coastline in the world', which clearly set the scene for the dramatic events that followed. Readers were also told in the second paragraph that the weather and sea conditions were especially bad because of the 'force eight winds and 10-foot waves'. Although the article then gave some background information about Aileen Jones and her motivation for being a member of the lifeboat crew, candidates had to hold their nerve in the selection of appropriate textual details until they arrived at information that was linked to the actual rescue. This began in the fifth paragraph when readers were reminded about the 'unseasonably stormy' weather that day, and the urgency with which Jones responded to her alarm pager: she 'dropped everything' and rushed to the lifeboat station to lead the rescue. The article then gave details of how the events unfolded, and candidates were able to write about the difficulties the fishing boat had got into and the fact that one of the crew had sustained an injury, which would have made a rescue attempt more difficult. Most candidates were at least able to comment on one or two of the dramatic details of the rescue attempt itself, during which the lifeboat was 'frequently thrown airborne by the waves' and struggled to get close enough to the fishing boat to effect a rescue. Many noted that Jones talked about the boat being like 'a seesaw', 'being tossed vertically in the water' and there were details of the unsuccessful attempt to secure a towline. When the lifeboat did eventually get close to the fishing boat, candidates highlighted the drama of the situation as one of the crew 'managed to clamber across' and 'scramble on board' to secure the towline. With the rescue taking three and a half hours, it was clearly dangerous as well as dramatic and resulted in Jones being awarded a medal for bravery. Good candidates selected a range of appropriate textual details from across the text, explaining and commenting on them, accumulating the details and shaping them into good, coherent

responses. There were many who gained good marks for this question and there was certainly no shortage of textual details to explore. Less successful candidates too frequently snatched at fragments of text that lacked clarity and really needed greater explanation or context to merit reward. Others simply tried to copy down lots of quotations with little or no comment or explanation and this approach limited them to lower marks.

Q 1.3 This question asked candidates to read and respond to the second text, from the New York Tribune newspaper in 1869. As with the opening 1.1 question, this comprised three one-mark questions that should have given candidates some overview of the text and prepared them for the next question worth 10 marks. The first part of the question asked how many people Ida Lewis saved in her first rescue. Although this was a simple ‘search and find’ question and the answer was in the opening paragraph, there were some candidates who failed to read the question sufficiently carefully and focused on her subsequent rescue of the two soldiers. Most however, noted that she had saved ‘four lads’. The second part of the question asked ‘how long the soldiers were in the water before the boy was swept away?’ and most candidates had no difficulty in selecting the appropriate information – half an hour. The final part of the question asked for one piece of evidence showing the soldiers were in a poor condition after the rescue. Some candidates failed to read the question carefully enough and selected details before they were rescued; this provided another example of the need to read both question and text with care.

Q 1.4 This question asked candidates to consider the New York Tribune newspaper article in greater detail. They were given a statement: “The newspaper article paints a vivid picture of the difficult conditions faced by Ida and her brother on the day they rescued the soldiers” and asked to what extent they agreed with the statement. Those candidates who concentrated on the ‘difficult conditions’ of the rescue were able to select a wide range of textual details that supported the statement, each paragraph in the passage offering some appropriate detail. For example, in the very first sentence readers were told that it was ‘a stormy, cold March afternoon’ on the day the events took place, followed in the second paragraph by more precise details that many candidates commented upon: the ‘rain fell...in blinding torrents.’ Good candidates also commented on ‘a gale drove the waves across the harbour...’ in the second paragraph and were able to comment on the writer’s explanation about how difficult the conditions made for a rescue for even ‘the most experienced boatmen’.

Careful tracking and keeping the statement uppermost provided good candidates with lots of opportunities to gain reward, although less-assured readers tended to drift from the focus of the question in their responses, sometimes focusing on details not linked to the ‘difficult conditions’. Sometimes candidates were able to probe and comment sensibly on the writer’s use of language: the ‘fury’ of the storm, the ‘ferocious storm’, ‘the foaming water’, ‘fierce salt waves’ and so on. It was important to separate the ‘difficult conditions’ from other aspects of the newspaper account and weaker, less-assured readers sometimes found this difficult. When candidates moved through the passage as it described the soldiers’ boat capsizing, the details of this provided further proof of the strength of the storm and here candidates were able to comment on the ‘huge waves’ and the way these were ‘dashing against the upturned boat’ as evidence of the dreadful conditions. When exploring the details in the final paragraphs the importance of careful tracking was clear. Some candidates were able to comment on the ‘perilous situation’ for the soldiers but also the ‘heavy’ sea and the ‘fearful gale’ that greeted Ida and her brother as they set out on their rescue mission. Many were able to comment again about the difficulty facing the ‘management of the boat’ even for Ida, who was ‘an experienced oarswoman’.

Good candidates gained high marks on this question through their unwavering focus on the 'difficult conditions' and their selection and comment on many of the textual details mentioned above. Weaker candidates found it more difficult to sustain the focus on the key point of the statement given and too frequently drifted into other aspects of the newspaper account.

- Q1.5** As usual, this penultimate question asked candidates to select relevant material from across the two texts, with a little brief explanation about the immediate reactions of Aileen Jones and Ida Lewis upon hearing that the fishermen and the soldiers were in danger. As indicated in previous reports, the best approach was to deal with each text separately. Those who tried to say what 'both' women did sometimes struggled. For example, some suggested that "both women dropped everything", when in fact readers were not told what Ida was doing at the point when she was told of the situation out at sea.

Readers were told that Aileen Jones 'dropped everything' that she was doing when her alarm pager sounded and she 'rushed to the lifeboat station'. She also realised that she would have the responsibility of taking the lifeboat out if she arrived first. In a similar way to Aileen Jones, Ida Lewis 'rushed outside' to the rescue, on the way grabbing a coil of rope before jumping into her boat and calling to her brother to assist her.

In this question most candidates were at least able to select a detail from each of the texts and many comfortably gained full marks. As with some of the other questions, some weaker candidates lost the focus of the question and gave details of the rescue itself, which gained no reward and probably meant they had less time to tackle the final question. As in previous examinations, this was a question that needed precision of detail and candidates could gain full marks with just a sentence or two providing they accurately captured the precise details.

- Q1.6** This final question asked candidates to compare the impressions the writers created of Aileen Jones and Ida Lewis and how the writers had created those impressions. Although in some previous examinations this question has proved to be rather more demanding than others, on this occasion, perhaps because the two women shared some similar qualities, candidates on the whole found this question rather more accessible and the mean mark for all candidates was higher than in previous series.

As in the previous question, the most effective way of approaching the question was to deal with each of the women separately, even where the impressions of them were similar. The first impression readers were given of Aileen Jones was probably that she was brave. The details of the rescue provided strong evidence of this, and good candidates were able to link appropriate evidence of her bravery to that impression of her. Some offered the precise details about how she battled in the dangerous conditions to bring the two fishermen to safety and gave further evidence of her bravery from the recognition she received in gaining an award from the RNLI. Some quoted the words of the RNLI spokesman, while others pointed to the way she was viewed as 'a local hero' or the first woman to be given a medal for bravery since 1888. She was also seen as selfless, putting the safety of others before her own and being prepared to 'drop everything', including preparing food for her children, in order to get to the lifeboat as quickly as possible. Other impressions of Aileen Jones that candidates recognised in the account were her leadership skills linked to her skilful handling of the lifeboat that showed her determination to ensure a successful rescue. Other candidates were aware of her modesty and the way she eschewed the description of 'local hero', the best responses exploring her 'ordinary' nature which then seemed at odds with the bravery and selflessness demonstrated in the account.

of the rescue. Sometimes weaker candidates snatched at any possible quality Jones might have, with some making a case that she was a 'kind' person or that she was 'likeable'. In some cases, whilst candidates were able to correctly identify the impression given of her, the link to appropriate evidence was sometimes limited or even tenuous, and sometimes incorrect.

Many of the impressions gained of Aileen Jones could also be applied to Ida Lewis. She too was shown in the newspaper report to be exceptionally brave, the rescue of the two soldiers being described as 'a deed of great heroism' with the report also linking this rescue with one she carried out when she was younger. As with the focus on Aileen Jones, good candidates were able to select some well-chosen textual details that made it clear how this impression was gained from the article. Many candidates were also able to make the point that a further impression of Lewis was her selflessness, particularly seen in the way she rushed to the aid of the two soldiers with 'little thought of her own safety' and without even stopping for appropriate footwear or head covering. There were also candidates who pointed to her skills as 'an experienced oarswoman', with good candidates noting the way her skills in this area made it possible for the rescue to be effective in such difficult circumstances. As with the text about Aileen Jones, it was often the quality of the link between the impression of the woman and the careful selection of textual evidence that marked out the best responses.

Section B

Q2.1 The first of the two writing tasks was to write a school/college magazine article: The Best Way to Spend a Saturday. There were many lively and engaging responses from candidates eager to advise about the benefits of 'a long lie in', a hearty and substantial cooked breakfast that could only be a feature of a non-school day, the pleasure of playing online games without a time limit or the distraction of homework overshadowing the game or even the opportunity to get homework or revision completed so as to allow Sunday to be a stress-free day.

Most candidates understood that they were writing for their peers and whilst some were keen to give advice about filling Saturdays with a range of activities, there were many who took the view that this was a day where 'doing nothing' had just as many merits. Good candidates kept their intended readers firmly in mind and wrote at sufficient length (300-400 words) to ensure that they covered some range of suggestions and dealt with each in sufficient detail. For example, some wrote about spending the morning in a leisurely fashion, but with details that meant readers gained some insight into exactly how that time was spent, whether it be an account of watching morning TV in bed, cooking that hearty breakfast to the amusement of a watching parent and so on, whilst others advised that Saturdays meant not a minute was to be wasted, with trips to the local sports club, leisure centre or going to the local park for a meeting up with friends. Many of these good responses gave suggestions about how to spend morning, afternoon and evening in the best ways possible, giving their response shape and structure, and whilst suggestions often focused on filling the day with activities, whether with friends or family, or they offered an alternative view and were advocating that time should simply be spent relaxing with a book or spending time with the family, what marked out them out as good responses was the willingness to develop the suggestions: which books or films at the cinema had given the greatest pleasure, exactly how the day with the family would be spent or the finer details of the fortnightly visit to the football ground. Weaker responses were often quite brief and this meant that whilst some had tried to include a range of suggestions, details were often very limited and amounted to little more than a list in some cases.

Q2.2 The second writing task was to respond to a letter in a newspaper that had suggested young people should do a period of voluntary work when they had left school. As was indicated in last year's report, most letters to newspapers tend to offer a clear personal viewpoint, sometimes forcefully, rather than offering a balanced view explaining why some would take a positive view of a situation and others a negative view. On this particular topic, most candidates sustained a viewpoint, and there was broadly equal support for and against the suggestion of voluntary work for school leavers.

Those who opposed such a scheme often offered a range of arguments, some saying it was an infringement of human rights, some saying school students deserved their free time after a gruelling five years at secondary school coupled with the stress and hard work leading to examinations, whilst others pointed out that in this particular suggestion, voluntary actually meant mandatory, and would surely conflict with students who had already secured work, had planned holidays or had college courses to prepare for. Others opposed to the scheme wondered how all school leavers could possibly be accommodated, with many businesses unwilling to accept those who did not want to be there anyway. What would be done, some asked, if the young people simply refused to go; would there be punishment meted out to those not turning up for this updated version of 'national service'?

There were equally strong arguments put forward by those who felt this would be the making of a rather lazy, 'want-it-on-a-plate' generation, who would discover the world of work meant effort, discipline and giving back to the community. Others wrote about the benefit such a scheme would have on charities and local community groups, and how young people themselves would benefit, as the scheme might offer opportunities for them to experience the sort of work they might eventually want to be engaged in. Some who saw the benefit of such a scheme occasionally adopted the persona of a harassed mother of two or three 16-year-olds, feeling that such a scheme offered something useful to fill the long summer holidays. Overall, most candidates were able to offer a response, although weaker candidates' responses were often brief, sometimes confused the intended audience and assumed the newspaper Editor to be the architect of the proposal or sadly, had incomplete responses because of time-management difficulties. In contrast, examiners saw many well-argued responses, set out correctly as a formal letter, where candidates made effective use of examples, anecdotes and 'research' evidence to support each of their arguments. These responses had well-organised paragraphs in which an argument was advanced and supported, and whilst putting forward their case forcefully, maintained an appropriate register and tone.

As has been mentioned in previous reports, the quality and accuracy of writing remains an issue for many candidates, with many gaining marks in one band for the content and organisation of the material, only to be marked in a lower band for VSSPS. Too many candidates failed to spell basic vocabulary accurately, even with words on the exam paper, such as 'voluntary' frequently mis-spelled. In many cases, such basic errors will have impacted on the overall mark for candidates' written responses.

Characteristics of Successful Responses

- Methodical tracking of the text in 10-mark questions, selecting appropriate textual detail and commenting where appropriate.
- Maintaining a clear focus on the statement and using appropriate evidence to support opinions in the evaluation question.

- Addressing both bullet points in the comparison question and dealing with what is specifically asked for in the bullet points, rather than other, general points of comparison.
- In Q15 and Q16, making it clear which text is being referred to.
- In writing, careful consideration of intended audience and writing at sufficient length to develop ideas, opinions, or information effectively.
- Adopting a tone appropriate to the intended audience and task
- Evidence of proof-reading to correct technical errors.

Areas for improvement

- Too many candidates still don't read the questions properly and lose the focus of the question. Candidates should read the text related to questions 1.1 and 1.2 closely and carefully. They should then check exactly the focus of each question before they begin their response. They should then repeat this process for the second text and questions 1.3 and 1.4.
- Questions focused on a specific text (1.2 and 1.4) are best tackled by tracking through methodically. The best responses always include a good range of detail from across the texts.
- "Feature spotting" as a method of tackling these 10-mark questions rarely results in good marks and is to be discouraged.
- The question asking for details drawn from both texts (1.5) was best tackled by dealing with the details from each specific text and being precise with this detail.
- Candidates need to develop detail and ideas more effectively in the writing tasks to achieve higher bands.
- Candidates should take the opportunity to plan their responses before they begin writing.
- Lack of technical accuracy remains an issue. Basic punctuation such as full stops, commas and question marks are still missing from some candidates' writing responses.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 3

Overview of the Component

Although centres have been assessing their candidates' Spoken Language for the last four years, they have not been required to submit evidence for monitoring since 2019. Given such a long gap covering an extremely difficult period of upheaval for schools and colleges, it was very reassuring that the majority of centres submitted their monitoring sample on time and in good order. This made the monitoring process much easier and was greatly appreciated. The monitor's role involves checking that centres have a secure understanding of what is meant by a presentation in relation to this component and that their assessment is in line with agreed standards.

As in previous series, it was reassuring to report that most candidates' presentations had been accurately assessed by teachers who had applied the criteria consistently and fairly. However, there is still concern regarding a significant number of centres where there appears to be some uncertainty about key specification requirements, especially regarding the competency model of assessment. This meant that assessment in these centres was not fully secure leading to candidates being awarded the incorrect grade.

The competency model of assessment for Spoken Language differs from the 'best-fit' approach as **candidates must meet ALL the criteria for a grade before they can be awarded that grade**. If they do not meet all the criteria, they must be awarded the grade below. For instance, a candidate who has met the criteria for a Merit relating to content, vocabulary and organisation but whose response to feedback is brief and straightforward must be awarded a Pass grade; that candidate has not satisfied all the Merit criteria. It can seem harsh on paper, but the model is designed to be straightforward for teachers to apply. Most importantly, candidates can – and should – be made aware of the relatively accessible, pared down criteria and guided on how to meet them.

When candidates were awarded the incorrect grade, the problems tended to be related to three key issues which would be appropriate areas for improvement:

- **ineffective task setting**
- **reading rather than presenting**
- **disappointing response to feedback or questions**

Comments on individual questions/sections

Ineffective task setting

The key issue of what the candidate actually talks about continues to be a serious problem and can lead to underachievement.

- **Candidates invariably did better when they could choose the topic for their presentation.** Imposing the same task on all candidates or giving them a very narrow choice made it difficult to meet higher grade criteria; if they were not engaged by the topic, it was harder to engage their audience.

- **All candidates need help fine-tuning their topics and organising their material.** The specification makes clear the requirement for teachers to discuss subject choice and planning with each candidate. Left completely to their own devices, candidates did not always select a subject with sufficient challenge or sophistication. Many chose subjects which limited them to a straightforward or descriptive approach, such as anecdotal or personal accounts about their hobbies or interests, their heroes/heroines or a memorable event. Topics like these made it difficult for the candidates to include challenging content and vocabulary or to sustain an appropriate level of formality needed for higher grades.
- **Monitors reported some well-motivated and articulate adult candidates in FE colleges were disadvantaged by topics without sufficient challenge.** These candidates often spoke enthusiastically on personal topics such as their chosen careers, their hopes for the future or simply something they found interesting, but often adopted a descriptive approach which tended to limit them to a Pass or a Merit at best. A clearer understanding of the criteria and the chance to see some of the standardising examples might have helped them improve their presentations.
- **While many candidates were keen to tackle complex issues close to their hearts, they still needed help organising their material to meet audience needs.** There were some impressively weighty topics covered, including climate change, gender politics, post-pandemic pressures on young people, the exam system and a variety of other social problems. It was extremely heartening to see candidates speak with conviction on such a wide range of serious topics, and those achieving Distinction criteria had clearly given thought to their listeners, making sure to shape their ideas in an accessible and engaging way. Sadly, not all candidates tackling potentially sophisticated material achieved Distinction grade because they were hampered by their organisation. Too many dry facts or statistics delivered in a chronological or straightforwardly descriptive way made it difficult to engage the audience's interest.
- **As recommended in Eduqas guidance, it undoubtedly helps candidates to organise their ideas if they have a clearly defined purpose for their talk,** such as promoting a point of view and attempting to persuade their audience to agree. Those who chose less precisely focused tasks tended to experience more problems in meeting audience needs or demonstrating strategies to engage. For instance, there was a marked difference between a talk from one candidate simply entitled 'Climate change' and another from a classmate aiming to persuade the SLT to allow him to attend a Just Stop Oil protest rally in school time. The first was very wide-ranging, almost impossible to do justice to in a five-minute talk, and the speaker bombarded the audience with facts and statistics. The second was sharply focused with a clearly defined purpose and audience which certainly demanded a sophisticated range of strategies to engage and persuade them!
- **Some tasks are not fit for purpose in preparing candidates for this component and should be avoided.** Group and pair work are permitted in the specification but need to be carefully planned to ensure that all participants meet the requirements for an 'individual presentation'. Merely inviting a pair or group to discuss any topic, however challenging, wasn't successful. By far the most egregious of the ill-advised tasks was the 'Room 101' talk which was unfortunately still adopted for the whole cohort in some centres. As past feedback has emphasised, this task made it extremely difficult for candidates to tackle challenging or sophisticated material because it is designed to be light-hearted and informal, with content and vocabulary to match. Topics chosen by candidates seeking to entertain their classmates included the less than challenging: euthanising OAPs who walk too slowly; why French bulldogs are ugly and disgust for teachers who don't finish lessons in time for the bell.

- **There is clear guidance on task setting on the Eduqas website which would be worthwhile all centres revisiting.** This includes advice on how to adapt topics to give candidates the opportunity to meet higher grade criteria along with examples of some helpful approaches and less successful tasks which would be best avoided.

Reading rather than presenting

Monitors were disappointed to note a sharp increase in the number of candidates who read their presentations directly from prepared speeches. The minority who spoke more spontaneously, without relying so heavily on reading, certainly stood out. Of course, using notes is permitted, but candidates should be made aware of the difference between writing an effective speech to earn good marks in Component 2 Section B and the presentation skills rewarded in Component 3. There is clearly an overlap, as planning and organisational skills are important to both, but there are criteria for *Spoken Language* which cannot be met simply by reading aloud, however carefully written the speech may be.

- **Candidates who read with lowered heads** from exercise books, cards and phones, or turned to read from PowerPoint slides, were less likely to exhibit the range of strategies to engage their audience needed for Distinction grade.
- **Most candidates understandably felt apprehensive delivering individual presentations** and even those who started with some eye-contact or intonation often succumbed to nerves, lowering their heads to read their scripted speeches. Unfortunately, quite a lot of candidates read too quickly which meant they wasted the rhetorical devices and other useful strategies they had incorporated in their written speeches. Some stumbled over unfamiliar words, making their presentations less engaging or even coherent at times. Others were clearly unwilling in front of peers to appear too enthusiastic, so adopted a veneer of weary teenage reticence, delivering their ideas in a monotone.
- **This kind of nervousness was obviously exacerbated when the candidates were still in Year 10, or even Year 9,** and less likely to have developed a little more confidence that a crucial extra year can bring at GCSE level. Many younger candidates *wrote* impressive speeches but their spoken language skills often confined them to a Pass grade. It is a tall order to expect such young candidates to meet Distinction criteria especially, and it is not appropriate to assess them on future potential, on the skills they are likely to demonstrate when in Year 11. Of course, it is each centre's decision when to carry out this component of their GCSE assessment, but it is designed, like the other components, to assess the best work the candidates can do during the GCSE course.
- **Monitors felt strongly that it would be beneficial to remind candidates that their presentations are an official part of their English qualification.** Even though it does not contribute to their overall grade, the endorsement earns them a separate grade which appears on their GCSE certificates. As teachers themselves, monitors are realistic and aware of the huge pressures on teachers and students, but suggested taking a little time to emphasise the importance of Spoken Language and encouraging some sense of occasion would boost candidates' performance, especially as a degree of formality is required. Simple presentation skills, such as using prompt cards, making some eye-contact, varying intonation, smiling and just standing up, could all help the candidates engage their audience and make the most of their carefully prepared material.

- If candidates feel more comfortable reading prepared speeches, **they can be given advice on how to read more clearly to engage their audience.** It can obviously be helpful to practise a little to avoid stumbling over unfamiliar words, and to develop simple tactics to cope with hesitations or losing track temporarily. We know not all candidates will bother to do this, but it might help some who clearly care enough to write interesting speeches but seem unsure how to present what they've written as a Spoken Language exercise.
- **The Eduqas website has guidance on basic presentation skills which could be condensed and reworded for candidates and might be worth consulting.** The inter-board standardising materials can also be useful illustrations of effective approaches for candidates. Both Charlotte and Laura had written their speeches but achieved Distinctions because they *presented* them effectively. Neither presentation lasts longer than eight minutes and both could be shown to candidates in lessons as helpful guides on how to meet higher grade criteria.

Disappointing response to feedback

Monitors were concerned by how many candidates fell at the final hurdle in this series. After preparing and delivering their ideas effectively, the quality of candidates' response to questions too often let them down, meaning they did not achieve the grade their presentations warranted. One criterion in each grade relates directly to this response to feedback and its importance as an integral part of the performance must be acknowledged if candidates are going to achieve their full potential.

- **In order to achieve a Pass, Merit or Distinction grade, all candidates must respond to some feedback or questions on their presentations.** If they do not give at least straightforward and appropriate responses to some feedback, they have not met all the Pass criteria and must be awarded an N grade. In a small number of centres, none of the candidates in the recorded sample responded to questions, meaning that all the grades awarded were technically inaccurate. In other centres, there were candidates in distinct teaching groups whose Q and A sessions were omitted, suggesting that some teachers were not fully aware of the specification requirements and how to apply the competency assessment model.
- **Centres must ensure that all candidates are given the opportunity to respond to questions and that all teachers preparing candidates for the endorsement are aware of this requirement.** The department member in charge of preparing the monitoring sample must also ensure that this part of each presentation has been recorded and is included in the evidence sent to the monitor.
- Thankfully, the majority of candidates did answer questions but in too many cases **their responses were simply too brief and/or superficial, as if tacked on as an afterthought.** This meant that they did not include enough detail or development to meet Merit criteria, let alone the perceptive responses needed for Distinctions.
- **As in the past, some candidates were simply not asked sufficiently probing or challenging questions, which obviously limited the quality of their responses.** Candidates understandably feel apprehensive asking for questions on their talks and the yawning silence can be daunting for them. It can help if the audience fully understands the importance of this part of the presentation and receive some guidance on how to prompt more perceptive responses. It was clear that some centres had taken previous advice on board as there were examples of very impressive questioning skills which helped speakers achieve the higher grades.

- However, if the candidate is hampered by poor quality questions from peers, **it has to be the teacher's role to give more stimulating feedback and sustain the appropriate level of formality in the Q and A session.** One suitably challenging question which prompts some considered elaboration will suffice. (It is significant that all three candidates awarded Distinctions in the standardising materials meet this criterion by responding in a perceptive and developed way to a single question from the adult in the audience.) There was evidence of thoughtful, incisive feedback from teachers which definitely helped candidates achieve the appropriate grade. However, in a few cases, kindly and sympathetic teachers keen to reassure nervous speakers almost turned the feedback into a friendly chat. This was not problematic if the candidate was working at Pass level but was less helpful to candidates aiming at higher grades.
- **In quite a few centres candidates gave rehearsed answers to pre-planned questions** and some candidates actually read their responses from their scripts or phones. There is nothing to prevent candidates taking this approach, but it definitely made it more difficult to elaborate on details from the presentation in a perceptive way for a Distinction grade and pre-planned questions are not strictly *feedback* on a live presentation.
- **The concept of an 'audience' has always been flexible** and monitors recognise that not all candidates will deliver their presentations to the whole class. That approach might be off-putting for less confident candidates or simply unsuitable because of time constraints. There was some sympathy, however, for candidates delivering their presentations to a single teacher in an empty classroom or even a cupboard, often battling interruptions and noisy corridors. Schools and colleges are busy places, and it's not possible to ensure optimum conditions for all presentations, but some centres had clearly tried to give their candidates a head start. Smaller groups of supportive classmates in a quiet room tended to be the most conducive arrangement, and in one centre borrowing the lectern from the assembly hall definitely helped give the presentations a sense of occasion!

Key Points

- After an enforced hiatus, this might be a good time for centres to review their approach to Component 3, especially in relation to effective task setting.
- Ensuring that all teachers involved in assessment are fully confident of the criteria and how to apply the competency model should be a key part of departmental procedure.
- Candidates should be made aware of the difference between reading a scripted speech aloud and giving a Spoken Language presentation.
- Centres should place sufficient emphasis on the response to feedback and its importance as part of the presentation.
- Sharing the assessment criteria, advice on presentation skills and some of the standardising examples should be considered as a way to help candidates achieve the higher grades.

Monitors saw some excellent practice and memorable work from a diverse range of centres and would like to commend candidates and their teachers on their hard work in preparing for Component 3. The status of Spoken Language as an endorsement, rather than contributing to the overall grade, is disappointing to many English teachers, but it was interesting to note that giving greater prominence to speaking skills was being discussed at government level recently. It is always heartening to see how many teachers continue to recognise its importance to the candidates and do their best to make it a worthwhile experience.

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ⁱ 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.