



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE A LEVEL

SUMMER 2018

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?l=en>

Online 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.

Annual Statistical Report

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

Unit	Page
Component 1: Poetry	1
Component 2: Drama	9
Component 3: Unseen Texts	17
Component 4: Prose Study	22

ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCE A LEVEL
Summer 2018
COMPONENT 1: POETRY

General Comments

This is a demanding examination with three distinct sections each of which requires a different kind of approach. After the first run in 2017, the report offered detailed advice and reminders about best practice in preparing for and tackling this component. Much of that guidance remains relevant after this second series and will recur below amongst the comments aimed specifically at this year's paper.

Section A: Poetry pre-1900

Part (i)

As explained last year, Section A is worth half of the available marks and questions are split (i) and (ii) in order to give candidates the opportunity to respond to their pre-1900 text in different ways. Once again this year, it is vital to emphasise the different approaches necessary for success. Part (i) answers should be focused exclusively upon AO1 and AO2 and demonstrate creative reading of the chosen poem or extract and understanding of relevant concepts in the light of the specific task (such as the presentation of powerful feelings or the shaping of a reader's response and so on). In addition, candidates must show their abilities to analyse the ways in which meanings are shaped, once more in the light of the specific task set.

This year fewer candidates strayed into writing about context or chose to quote critical views on the poet in their responses to A (i) tasks but this is still an issue at both ends of the ability spectrum. On the one hand, some very well-informed candidates who had digested a great deal of contextual material and critical commentary could not resist making use of it and often hampering or limiting their achievement in part (i) responses; other candidates with fewer ideas about the poems or extracts resorted to contextual writing as a substitute for critical analysis and sadly earned very little by doing so. Typically, as last year, these candidates tended to write about Chaucer's merchant class family background; Donne's marriage; Milton's divorce; Keats' illness and Rossetti's association with the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.

None of this material can be rewarded in Section A (i) and, in the very short time available for this response, candidates penalised themselves by failing to give adequate attention to the relevant AOs 1 and 2.

Candidates must also be reminded that general, descriptive commentary plus assertion of meaning and/or relevance is not a successful technique and work of this nature will struggle to emerge from Band 1 or Low Band 2

Part (ii)

While this year there seemed to be fewer examples of candidates copying directly from their editions, centres are reminded that although clean copies all of the editions for Section A feature introductory essays, notes and appendices, candidates must be very clearly advised on any decision they make to use these materials and they should take careful note of the following:

- any use of other views expressed by the editors of the editions must be placed clearly within quotation marks and explicitly acknowledged as the work of another

reader. Failure to do this could raise a compliance issue with potentially serious consequences

- please remember that explanatory notes are just that and paraphrasing them in essays will not address the requirements to engage creatively with texts or analyse the ways in which meaning is made. Essays which rely upon explanation and commentary are inevitably low scoring
- biographical time-lines, general notes on contexts or accounts of poets' private lives have a value in providing a framework in which to understand and appreciate their work but these factors should never be the drivers of literary essays.

Organisation

Candidates are at liberty to answer questions on their chosen texts in any order they please but it might be helpful to remind them of the concepts in the design of Section A.

Examiners have a sympathetic understanding of the pressure of time in this component but they also recognise the need for careful planning and preparation of each response. To support this process the tasks in Section A have been designed to be progressive in the sense that issues raised in the Part (i) poem or extract should help to stimulate thought and planning for the task offered in Part (ii) on the same text. For example, Pluto's attempts at misogynistic domination in Question 1 part (i) should lead candidates into thinking about the presentation of the battle of the sexes in part (ii). The challenge to authority and the natural order in the scene between Eve and the Serpent in Question 2 part (i) should help to guide thoughts towards the wider issue of the presentation of authority in part (ii). There are similar connections in the other question in Section A.

Last year's report contained further comment on this issue but for this year all we can do is confirm that there did not seem to be any discernible benefits to those candidates who took a tariff-led approach to the order of questions and it is quite likely that responses were adversely affected by this strategy.

Once more this year, Chaucer was the most popular choice in Section A; Donne came second, followed by Milton, Keats and Rossetti. There was very little difference between the mean marks for both parts of Section A across all poets, and there is little evidence to suggest that candidates found the questions on one poet any more or less accessible than questions on others.

Geoffrey Chaucer: *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale*

Q1 (i)

The best answers to this task took immediate note of the slant in the question which was to examine the ways in which Chaucer "shape[s] the reader's response to Pluto in these lines." The emphasis is squarely upon technique and picks up the point above about the specific nature of tasks in this section. Those who offered a general commentary on the lines could not show sound evidence of understanding or engaging with Chaucer's techniques and therefore could not score highly under either of the AOs. There were still plenty of answers which relied upon general contextual comments on the treatment of women; or others which gave full accounts of the myth of Pluto and Proserpine and therefore did not earn very much credit.

Q1 (ii)

Most candidates managed to engage with the idea of a battle between the sexes but only the very best answers made full use of the terms in the question designed to trigger analytical discussion of context and possible readings of the poem. "Eternal" gives opportunities to range across relevant contexts and "surprising outcomes" provides a key to both medieval manners and values as well as suggesting a way of reading issues around

May's success/failure or Proserpine's defiance of her domineering husband. There were some authoritative and deeply impressive essays which wove together (with apt and economical textual support) the Merchant's apparent defeat by his new wife; the implicit and explicit conflict between Januarie and May; the subversion of the courtly love tradition; the conflict between the supernatural and, as a final seal on the essay, the Host's nervous statements about his own marital problems. Lengthy, irrelevant or poorly deployed critical comments did not improve the quality of essays and there were still too many examples of writing where the majority of space was taken up with regurgitated contextual notes which acted as an impediment to creative engagement and critical analysis.

John Donne: *Selected Poems*

Q2 (i)

Last year's opening comment applies just as relevantly to this year's responses: "Given that most candidates have had two years in which to study Donne, it was surprising to see so many bemused by this poem." Some candidates who produced high quality essays on Donne in the next part had very little idea of the tone, attitudes or moods expressed in "Love's Alchemy". On the other hand, some very well-prepared candidates were able to analyse powerful feelings in subtle detail showing, with very economical support, where there might be outrage or mock rage; contempt; disappointment or distaste; where there might be irony or sincerity in the feelings expressed or where false feelings had been worked-up in support of a theoretical argument. To finish where this section of the report began, a quotation from last year's report: "Here as elsewhere in Part (i) responses there was a great deal of sterile feature spotting and "naming of parts". Candidates must be convinced that there is no merit in the use of technical terminology simply for the purposes of labelling."

Q2 (ii)

Once again the point must be made that after two years' study of an Elizabethan poet it is perfectly reasonable to expect candidates to be familiar with the term "Renaissance" and with its implications of matters such as learning; manners; skills; discovery; travel and so on. This was the contextual trigger in the question and was offered as an opportunity for candidates to make use of what they had learned about the period and to encourage them away from assertions about Donne's private life. The other part of the question "intellectual and emotional all-rounder" partly unpacks "Renaissance" while providing an opportunity for candidates to address critically a point of view. When this is fully understood, the need for carefully hoarded but often irrelevant or poorly focused contextual and critical material diminishes. There were some outstandingly good responses but as was the case last year it is time to emphasise to candidates that they should use with great care "John Carey's and Simon Schama's recent documentaries on the poet with all their playful speculation upon what John Donne might or might not have been doing/intending when he wrote his verse. Material such as the above, used as a primary study aid for Donne, has produced reams of unsupported assertion about the relationship between Donne's poems and his life which contribute nothing of value to a critical analysis of his poetry." (Principal Examiner's report 2017)

John Milton: *Paradise lost Book IX*

Q3 (i)

The key point here is once again the focus of the task. This is a conversation between the two characters so it is reasonable to ask how Milton shapes the reader's response to both of them in the course of it. Carefully planned but appropriately brief responses showed through attention to key language points how a reader's feelings might change over the course of these lines and very successful responses dealt in a sentence or so with the situation in the passage and examples such as the following stick in the mind and perfectly illustrate some of the skills required by this part of the paper: "Separated from her husband and protector by her own wilfulness, Eve's naivety is exposed and exploited by the corrupting tempter." Even

as the scene is set, the candidate wastes no opportunity to imply what our feelings might be towards the characters. Of course, after this introductory sentence the analysis becomes more explicitly focused on the techniques for shaping our feelings. Less successful responses described the circumstances in Eden at length or made detailed reference to what had brought about the separation of Adam and Eve. Please see notes below for further comment on writing skills.

Q3 (ii)

As suggested above, the slant of Question 3 (i) should have focused candidates' thinking about authority and the way it operates in Eden. The inclusion of the phrase "beyond the confines of Eden" encourages candidates to make use (with proper caution) of their contextual knowledge of both theological issues and the political circumstances of Milton's world. Some well-informed and thoughtful essays carefully explored the idea of God the "absent friend" who remains outside the confines of Eden and, for subtle moral/theological reasons, is unwilling to assert his authority over Satan. Some also made fruitful reference to kingship and politics in Milton's day which they saw reflected in his concerns over law making and breaking in Eden. In light of last year's comments, "While many responses were of the highest quality, centres which choose Milton might do well to explore the theological and philosophical notions of sin and free will a little more thoroughly in order to avoid assertive and inaccurate approaches.", there appeared to be some improvements in this area as many candidates addressed very complex issues with confidence. Those who allowed themselves lengthy, assertive descriptions of Milton's domestic life were self-penalising.

John Keats: *Selected Poems*

Q4 (i)

Famous for its rich ambiguity, this poem deserves the closest attention to the use of imagery and the creation of implicit meaning and mood. Many candidates were not prepared to go beyond a descriptive paraphrase or a limiting assertion of meaning when it would have been more appropriate in a task on the "use of imagery" to reveal layers of possible meaning and unresolved ambiguities rather than striving for certainties. I'm sure Keats would have approved of such an approach! Last year the point was made that in responses to Keats candidates often tried to "avoid close critical reading and substitute description and assertion." Unfortunately this remains the case for some, but the best answers managed to say a great deal in a very short space pointing once again to the advantages enjoyed by those who have developed their writing skills and vocabulary as well as their experience of texts in their two years of study at A level.

Q4 (ii)

The wording of this question allowed candidates to make use of what they had learned about the literary and cultural context of the Romantic period and the notion of "rebellion" allowed them to consider readings of the poetry which provide different views of reality from those supported by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. There are, of course, other ways of seeing Keats as a soul in rebellion and some made very strong cases for the ways in which Keats challenges the restrictions imposed by mortality/illness or those placed upon conventional human relationships. There was some very thoughtful work on this topic and it is a real pleasure to see how much some candidates have enjoyed their study of Keats. As always though, less satisfactory responses regurgitated "data" about Keats' personal life and career without establishing clear and relevant relationships between that and the poetry.

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

Q5 (i)

The direction to examine poetic techniques is one of the group of "command lines" used in this section to illicit a literary-critical response. The necessary brevity of the response calls for careful planning and preparation in all cases but particularly so where there are

potentially so many angles to take: imagery; symbolism; language choices; tone; structure; implicit meaning and so on. Candidates need to use good judgement here and understand that only a selection of material can possibly be covered in the time allotted. This calls for a brave use of time at the start of the process where a few minutes spent re-reading and planning a coherent selection of relevant points will pay real dividends. The issue of time-management is mentioned over and over again by examiners and centres are advised that this should be an integral part of candidates' preparation.

Q5 (ii)

Responses to Q5 (i) should have loosened-up candidates' thinking about the operation of the creative imagination and the ways in which ideas and attitudes are liberated by it. However, work on Q5 (i) will also have reminded candidates that however creative and inventive the writer might be there are potential cultural restrictions which have to be negotiated. This is not material for the first part of the response but candidates now had a full opportunity to make use of their contextual ideas as they addressed "restrictions of life as a Victorian woman" and judged to what extent Rossetti is freed from such restrictions by her art. It was pleasing to see how widely candidates ranged and how closely they engaged with Rossetti's work in the context of a rule-based society as she considered amongst other things issues around religious devotion; femininity; patriarchal attitudes and romantic relationships. However, once again to quote from last year's report: "Too many answers became bogged-down in biography and in the status of women which left little room for consideration of what is revealed by the poems themselves."

Key Points:

- Part (i) responses must stay focused upon the demands of AO1 and AO2; answers should be brief and there should be evidence of basic planning which would be sufficient to guide about 15 minutes of effective writing. Take careful account of the shaping element within the task – it is never an open opportunity to commentate on a poem or extract.
- Centres should advise candidates on the thinking underpinning the design of tasks; sequencing of questions and legitimate use of open books.
- Look carefully at the balance of assessment objectives in Part (ii) and make sure that context is not overdone, or critical views pursued at the expense of AO1 and AO2.
- Move attention away from poets' biographies and more securely on to analyses of features such as implicit meaning, technique and language.
- Encourage the use of specialist terminology and the observation of structural features as part of an analysis of meaning and not as free-standing labels.
- Candidates should avoid a technique which boils down to "assert relevance of poem to task – work through poem offering general commentary and asserting meaning – re-assert relevance." Those whose writing was otherwise fluent and accurate failed to make an impression with this non-analytical, poorly supported approach.
- Taking the example from a candidate's writing on Milton above, use this as a starting point for developing flexible strategies for improving the quality and confidence of candidates' written expression.

Section B: Poetry post 1900

I believe it is worth offering an edited version of last year's overview of this section: Just like Section A, this is an open book examination and it relieves candidates of the effort of memorising large amounts of verse. Instead, the demands are upon writing a substantial essay which requires balanced attention to all the assessment objectives which apply to English Literature.

The word “balanced” above is crucial because candidates need to be clearly aware that 20 marks are earned through attention to AO2 and “the ways in which meanings are shaped”. The other 4 assessment objectives are evenly weighted at 10 marks each. The point is made starkly because there was so much evidence of candidates writing extensively about what they considered to be relevant contexts but, as in Section A, these approaches often went no further than descriptions of poets' private lives.

In addition to considering contexts and other readings; showing creative engagement and critical analysis, candidates are required to “explore connections across literary texts” in their responses to a total of at least 4 poems – 2 by each writer in the pair. The evidence suggests that this element (AO4) has not been well understood by significant numbers of candidates.

By far the best way of addressing AO4 is to make connections throughout the analysis of paired poems so that AO2 and AO4 seem almost inseparable as they become functions of each other.

Lastly, candidates need to think very carefully about their timings in this section. Many, it seemed, had used every minute of the hour to write sprawling responses which were not always relevant and which attempted to name check as many poems as possible. It would be much better to spend a sensible amount of time deconstructing the question; choosing and re-reading a selection of at least 4 poems in order to re-focus ideas and then writing a simple plan before embarking on the final product. As a general rule, shorter, better-focused essays with brief but apt textual support will achieve the higher bands.

By far the most popular pairing in this section was Larkin and Duffy. The second most popular choice was Hughes and Plath, followed by Eliot and Hardy, Heaney and Sheers. Very few candidates responded to the questions on Lawrence and Clarke.

Thomas Hardy and T.S Eliot

Question 7 on the voices and portraits being those of characters “adrift in an uncaring world” proved the more popular choice and produced some excellent responses with genuine insight into the ways in which the poets had created sombre; pained or neurotic voices operating in hostile worlds. There were some thoughtful and clever connections between the ways in which the poets presented alienation and the best essays rose above the personal/biographical and looked at alienation as a wider cultural issue. It was a little alarming (presumably after two years' study in most cases) to see how few candidates ventured outside Hardy's poems of 1912-13. The temptation for some to write at length about Emma Hardy's estrangement from her husband and link this to Eliot's own marital problems proved too much and tended to produce assertive, low-scoring essays with insufficient attention to the heavily weighted AO2. As has been said so often, biographical material in measured doses can be a valid and effective way of addressing context provided it is linked through analysis rather than assertion to relevant text.

There was a little less enthusiasm for Hardy's and Eliot's use of weather and seasons in Question 6 but still there were some strong answers where candidates had made sensible use of the critical quotation and explored how such imagery might be the “key to meaning”

as well as a factor in creating mood and atmosphere. There are some very obvious poems from both poets which were sensible choices for close study but once again, there does appear to be a fairly restricted programme at some centres where all candidates used the same 4 poems and in some cases these were not the best to support writing on this topic. “The Ruined Maid” is popular for very good reasons but can only be seen as tangential when writing a relevant response to this task.

D.H. Lawrence and Gillian Clarke

As was the case last year, the responses to this pairing were small and it is not possible to offer general conclusions about candidates’ approaches. Those who did respond showed a preference for Q9 on the poets’ use of “older, primitive worlds” and there were some sensible analyses of the ways in which the natural world, human significance and human society were viewed through the lens of an imagined distant past as well as through the consideration of older or primitive life forms.

Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath

As was the case in 2017, this pairing was extremely popular with candidates showing a slight preference for Q10 on “death and decay” over Q11 which asked candidates to consider the potential offensiveness of poetry in a culture which promoted “directness and honesty in the arts.” In their responses to both questions candidates readily lapsed into context-driven accounts of suicide; illness; dysfunctional personal relationships; childhoods brutalised by bereavement or the realities of the natural world in Yorkshire and so on. In some ways this is understandable but in terms of relevance and intellectual challenge these are the “low-hanging fruit” and in many cases produced descriptive, assertive writing which was divorced from textual analysis. For those many centres which will continue to study Plath and Hughes, there is a clear need to re-focus attention on the literary qualities of the poems and how they might be mutually illuminating. Advice in this report and elsewhere talks of the need to establish connections between poems and poets on the basis of the poetry itself rather than upon assertions such as, *“these poems are closely connected because Ted and Sylvia were both experiencing conflict in their marriage just weeks before Sylvia’s suicide.”* Candidates must be shown that this chatty approach is typical of low-end feature journalism rather than literary analysis. It is worth repeating that AO2 and AO4 connect seamlessly in high quality literary analysis.

Philip Larkin and Carol Ann Duffy

Larkin and Duffy continue to interest a very large number of candidates but, as with Hughes and Plath above, there is a narrowing tendency to see the poems as pure, factual autobiography rather than artistic creations. This causes essays to swerve away at the earliest possible stage from considerations of the ways meaning is made with regard to the poets’ approach to popular culture or in Q13 the presentation of unhappiness. The most successful essays had obviously spent time at the planning stage for Q12 deciding what might be meant by popular culture and how far the definition would stretch. Confident candidates were able to analyse the presentation of “cut-price” weddings; consumerism; leisure pursuits and sentimental love songs alongside the presentation of pop music; quiz shows; fashion and sensational media. The best answers to Q13 were equally careful in observing different kinds or degrees of unhappiness – lack of fulfilment; rejection; isolation; disappointment; self-loathing and regret instead of offering generalised assertions about misery or pain inevitably linked to the “facts” of the poets’ lives. Once again, centres are advised to re-focus candidates’ attention away from the careers or personal habits of both poets and squarely onto the ways the poems are made and how they might connect in illuminating ways. The conclusion to last year’s comments on this pairing was as follows, *“accounts of the poets’ lives and assertions about their relationships and sexuality figured largely and usually irrelevantly in many responses.”* Getting the balance right and viewing contextual material through the poems themselves is central to successful writing.

Seamus Heaney and Owen Sheers

Once again this year there were, comparatively, very few responses to this pairing, and barely enough to arrive at any general conclusions. There was a handful of responses to Q14 and “the importance of the past” where candidates made sensible references to Irish history but some were led astray by what they had learned about Sheers as a novelist and screen writer and tended to make references to his work on the first and second world wars. However, there was effective writing on family circumstances and locations as factors in shaping poetic sensibilities. The very few responses seen to Q15 were skewed quite markedly towards politics and terrorism in Heaney’s case but this produced challenges when making connections with Sheers. There are other very obvious elements in the poems such as colourful/typical characters and folk culture which would have made points of connection and allowed for a full exploration of comparisons as well as contrasts. As with all of the poets above, care must be taken when dealing with the poets’ biographies – candidates must be encouraged to see the ways life experiences have been made into art rather than regarding poems as simple records of experience.

Key Points:

- Make sure that, with all 5 assessment objectives in play, candidates understand how to achieve a sensible balance of attention and avoid over-emphasis upon AO3.
- Make AO4 work purposeful and potentially illuminating by incorporating and developing ideas about connections with the process of close analysis so that AO2 and AO4 are closely bound.
- Use biographical material with great care – be provisional rather than assertive and do not assume that all poems are written with a purpose connected to the actual events of a poet’s life.
- In the two years available for the reading and study of both poets, try to be as wide-ranging as possible – there is some evidence that preparation has been very narrow in some cases.
- There is sufficient time in Section B to allow for careful choosing of material and planning an effective response: candidates must be persuaded that shorter, better focused, analytical writing will always do better than badly organised, lengthy descriptive/assertive accounts.
- Encourage mature, effective writing strategies - from the use of topic sentences to developing general vocabulary and varied sentence structures to achieve economy and show more secure creative engagement.

The demands of this component are fully understood by all examiners who would want me to pass on their messages of admiration and congratulation to those teachers and candidates who have worked so hard to produce some of the very highest quality responses.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2018

COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

General Comments

This closed-book component is divided equally between the assessment of Shakespeare and pre and post-1900 drama. Candidates seemed to have enough time in the two hours to do justice to the extract-based question and two essay questions. As was the case last year for the first examination, some candidates started with the Section B essay, perhaps as this is worth 60 marks. However, it is worth remembering that the Shakespeare section is also worth 60 marks in total. The compulsory Shakespeare extract question is designed to help candidates think about their approach to the compulsory Shakespeare essay, and yet there were several who attempted the extract as the final task on the paper.

It was encouraging to see candidates planning their responses to the essay questions first, usually producing a more focused and shaped response. However, examiners saw plenty of seriously long responses, which lost their coherence on occasion, and in particular seemed to forget the question.

There are several points to note for the coming academic year, some of which were also noted last year:

- Candidates should take time to consider what the question is asking, and also try to identify where assessment objectives are targeted in the question.
- Candidates who signalled in the opening paragraph that they were focused on the question were generally more successful than those who started their response more tentatively.
- The set extracts proved to sort candidates out quite sharply into those who had read their Shakespeare play in depth, either in class or at home, and those who had presumably only familiarised themselves with some big speeches; it is difficult to do justice to a passage of Shakespeare in twenty minutes if it is essentially an 'unseen'.
- In the essays, AO3 approaches vary, with the weakest offering a narrative/descriptive comment with no apparent relevance to the question. Sometimes this was at the expense of discussing the actual play. Far too many responses feature sweeping generalisations based on historical material. It was encouraging this year to see other types of contexts explored, literary context in particular proving to be generally productive.
- AO5 approaches have improved this year in general, with candidates clearly engaging with other views of the text and also offering alternative interpretations of their own.

Where responses were successful they generally featured:

- good knowledge and understanding of the text
- appropriate support from and references to the play
- a clear engagement with critical views, usually put to good purpose

- considered approaches to integrating context (AO3) and other interpretations (AO5) which enhanced the central arguments in responses
- generally accurate and coherent expression.

Where responses were less successful, they generally featured:

- insecure knowledge and understanding of the text, particularly in the extract question
- poorly constructed sentences and paragraphs: it was common to see sentences which stretched to over half a page in the booklet and pages with no paragraphs
- sweeping generalisations in discussing context/inaccurate historical referencing
- too much time retelling the narrative
- failing to engage with the whole essay question.

Hamlet and *King Lear* were by far the most popular texts, but an encouraging number of *The Tempest* responses were seen, with *Antony and Cleopatra* also modestly popular. *Henry IV Part 1* remains very much a minority choice.

Section A: Shakespeare

Part (i) - Extract

As the extract from their set Shakespeare play is relatively short, and candidates have a recommended twenty minutes only in which to do this task, it is imperative to produce a focused and pertinent response. It is vital that candidates come to the examination as fully prepared as possible to respond to an extract from the set play in twenty minutes.

There were several instances as last year where candidates were clearly unfamiliar with the extract, possibly seeing this part of the text for the very first time and therefore responding to it as if unseen. On the other hand, where candidates were better prepared, it was refreshing to see them engaging thoughtfully with the text.

We saw many good responses where perceptive analysis and evaluation were offered for AO2 rather than just a list of literary devices. Given the demands of the task in the extract question, where candidates are confronted by a section of text without the actual text for reference, and as AO2 is worth twice the marks of AO1, it is important candidates ask themselves ‘what is the meaning here and how is it shaped?’ This year there appeared to be a clearer focus on analysing the meaning of the extract in relation to Shakespeare’s presentation of characters/attitudes/relationships. However, all too often candidates are not reading in accordance with the punctuation, misinterpreting the meaning of the whole sentence by looking at the opening phrase in isolation.

Part (ii) - Essay

In the essay task, AO3 is double weighted at 20 marks, yet a number of candidates are still not properly addressing context. Again this year we saw instances where AO5 had not been addressed at all, with a further loss of up to 10 marks. It is vital that all candidates are aware of what is expected of them prior to entering the examination room.

Approaches to AO3 ranged from the token gesture ‘acknowledging’ contexts, to a distracting chunk of narrative/descriptive relating of contexts with little or no application or relevance to the question. Sometimes this was at the expense of discussing the actual play. Far too many responses still feature sweeping generalisations claiming that Elizabethan/Jacobean audiences and even ‘Jacobethan’ audiences ‘would be shocked’ at some of the portrayed behaviour of the protagonists. The most successful responses integrate discussion about contextual significance into their argument, not merely presenting it as a stand-alone comment of questionable relevance. Some candidates saw the value of literary contexts in enriching their arguments, and this constitutes a positive step forward. It is also rewarding to

see many engage with other critical views than their own in addressing AO5, and ‘make use’ of them to advance their own argument, as indicated in the assessment grid descriptors for this AO. As noted last year, there is still a trend to over-use the word ‘arguably’ in the belief that this is enough to address AO5. In one response the candidate used this word in almost every sentence within the whole response. It is also not acceptable to allege what ‘some critics’ say when making a reference to a simple feature of the plot of the play, for example ‘some critics say that Edmund is illegitimate’.

King Lear

Part (i)

Most candidates engaged with Shakespeare’s presentation of Lear in this extract. The majority noted his mental instability, anger and distress and that he is reacting to the storm on the heath. Fewer engaged with Lear’s thoughts on justice, or saw that he was imagining criminals, perhaps in response to his own feelings of injustice at the hands of his daughters, but it was encouraging to see candidates at least engage with the pattern of imagery relating to justice/crime/sin. The better answers argued that the ‘dreadful summoners’ are the elements of the storm calling the guilty to account in Lear’s mind. Most were able to discuss the key lines where Lear declares himself ‘more sinn’d against’ and that his ‘wits begin to turn’. The latter line was interpreted as either turning towards more composure and sanity, as he develops a concern for others, or turning into full-blown madness. Those who were secure in their reading of this extract were aware that Lear is accompanied by the Fool as well as Kent, and were able to interpret accurately the compassionate questioning in Lear’s last lines.

Some noted the impact of Kent’s speech in presenting Lear was to remind the audience and Lear of his vulnerability and the situation he finds himself in, a victim of the ‘hard house’. Some also noted that Kent’s deferential language ‘Gracious my lord’ reminds Lear of his former status and also confirms the respect he still engenders in his loyal followers.

Part (ii)

There was plenty of lively debate regarding justice in the play, though the issue of whether the audience is left ‘clearer about what is unjust than what is just’ was not always tackled or even acknowledged. It is important that candidates engage fully with the view given in the question.

Many discussed Lear, Gloucester and Cordelia as the best examples of unjust treatment, while there were many engaging arguments concerning Edmund’s candidacy for an ‘unjust death’ on the grounds of the ‘social injustice’ of his illegitimacy. Those who focused only on events missed the opportunity to discuss key speeches in the play which pertain to the issue of justice. Too many candidates spent rather too long on the opening scene, using it in some cases as their only source material for constructing an argument. Shakespeare’s use of the pagan gods and the idea of fate/destiny was explored in some cases, with productive results. One candidate argued that Gloucester’s blinding was ‘fate acting as a quasi-vigilante avenger’.

Antony and Cleopatra

Part (i)

This extract enabled candidates to engage with Antony’s thoughts and feelings in reaction to having been told about Cleopatra’s ‘death’. Some candidates were unaware of the dramatic irony and did not appreciate that Cleopatra is still alive at this point. Most were able to engage with Antony’s despair and his suicidal thoughts, although fewer appreciated Eros’ role in his planned demise or understood that suicide presented the most honourable means of escaping his ignominious fate in Rome at the hand of victorious Caesar. Antony’s reference to ‘dishonour’ was sometimes wrongly attributed to the earlier battle and so some argued that he was still angry with Cleopatra instead of admiring her courage in taking her

own life and preventing Caesar from parading her as his spoils in Rome. The imagery of military honour was discussed as indicative of Antony's moment of anagnorisis as he reflects on the glory of his past achievements with his 'sword' and 'ships' in contrast with his present decline, expressed through the imagery of 'shame' and 'baseness' in his imagined scenario in Rome. Only a few candidates discussed the impact of Eros' reaction to Antony's request in terms of how his strongly expressed reluctance colours the presentation of Antony as a whole, confirming the loyalty he inspires in his servants and followers.

Part (ii)

Most candidates welcomed the opportunity to discuss 'personal conflict', some only briefly engaging with 'political'. Fewer engaged with the idea of 'dramatic appeal' and it is important to remember that questions often have a number of elements to address within the expressed view. It is not advantageous to focus on only one aspect and ignore the others.

Stronger responses argued cogently in favour of either the dramatic appeal of political or of personal conflict, usually citing sound evidence from the text and supporting their argument with other interpretations. Antony and Cleopatra's relationship was explored from both sides of the argument, as being key to the concept of conflict. In some cases there was some good discussion suggesting that the personal and the political are so intertwined by Shakespeare that it is difficult to decide which is more dramatically appealing. It is important that candidates remember that this is a play and that they should give consideration to dramatic techniques as well as language in addressing A02. It is also worth remembering that general discussion which skims over the play's events/narrative cannot be rewarded in the same way as textual analysis.

Hamlet

Part (i)

This question produced a variety of approaches to 'parents', with some considering Hamlet's attitudes to his stepfather Claudius as well as to Gertrude and King Hamlet, while others discussed only his attitudes towards Gertrude and Claudius. There were many instances where candidates ignored Hamlet's dead father altogether, despite the many references to him in this extract. The majority, however, concentrated on Gertrude and King Hamlet.

Most candidates grasped Hamlet's anger at his mother for marrying Claudius as the chief aspect of the presentation of his character here. Some noted the disgust directed at his mother's sexual relationship with Claudius as being the chief object of Hamlet's fury, expressed through the use of 'act' and 'deed' and the animal imagery of 'feed' and 'batten', coupled with the insult 'You cannot call it love'. Very few grasped the meaning of 'judgment', sometimes attributing it to God and retribution instead of Gertrude's common sense.

The antithetical imagery in the first speech was discussed well by some candidates, with almost all engaging with 'blister' as connoting disease/infection in contrast to the 'rose' image of love and beauty. Some misinterpreted the 'glow' of 'Heaven's face' to be a positive image of the first marriage, missing the connotation of shame and disgust in the last two lines. The contrasting imagery to depict the brothers was generally noted, especially the analogies with gods to convey Hamlet's admiration for his father. The 'mildew'd ear' was generally seen as an image of infection or unhealthiness, with only a few spotting the double entendre of King Hamlet's death.

Part (ii)

This question produced a range of opinions, although most seemed to decide in their conclusion that they agreed with the given view. Most gave some consideration to the word 'appeal' and there were some good responses where 'any audience' was given careful contextual consideration, especially with regard to 'Hamlet the avenger'. The best responses

were able to move beyond the narrative and focus on the key speeches where we see the conflict between both roles presented to the audience. There were some enterprising and engaged responses which argued cogently that Hamlet's appeal is neither son nor avenger as he fails in both roles; instead the appeal is drawn from his presentation as a Renaissance man.

Henry IV Part 1

Although this was very much a minority text in terms of popularity, those who had studied it did more than justice to the extract and essay, applying to both tasks good knowledge and understanding of Shakespeare's referencing to the King's history as Bolingbroke the usurper.

In response to part (i), most engaged with Hotspur's attitudes of deep resentment expressed through irony at the start of his speech and his sequential detailing of Hotspur's family's involvement in Henry's path to kingship, with the better responses engaging in close analysis of Hotspur's expression of feelings of betrayal.

The responses to part (ii) varied from those who agreed with the given view, as they focused primarily on Hotspur and partially on the King, to others who argued convincingly that although the 'costs of political success' are clear in the play, it is 'essentially about' Prince Harry's development as future king.

The Tempest

Part (i)

Candidates who were fully aware that this exchange is after the wedding masque were better able to engage with the meaning of Prospero's speeches. The opening aside was taken to indicate Prospero's private concern regarding the threat of Caliban along with his expressed hatred for the 'beast', with the dismissal of the spirits which quickly follows showing his usual authority. Stronger responses noted the function of Ferdinand and Miranda in this scene, some seeing them as 'foils' in terms of their newly-wed happiness and concern set against the troubled and introspective Prospero. As both convey their surprise at the perceived change in Prospero's behaviour, many saw this as a useful indicator to the audience that some transformation in Prospero is imminent.

Most were able to engage with the philosophical and introspective musings in Prospero's monologue, but more secure readers were able to see the references to both the masque as the 'revels' and the possible implied reference to Prospero's own art or indeed Shakespeare's in his final play. Some, usually weaker responses, took the reference to Prospero's 'old brain' in conjunction with 'weakness' literally and thought that this confirmed his senile dementia.

Part (ii)

Most candidates were able to produce an engaged response with the second half of the given view in the question, discussing characters in particular and sometimes 'situation', although some failed to consider the first part at all, missing the opportunity to discuss 'a series of conjuring tricks' as being the essential 'dramatic action'. As noted in the general advice, it is important to engage fully with the question view. This is designed to enable candidates to begin to address AO5.

Stronger responses considered the use of magic as an inherent feature of characters and their relationships, discussing Prospero and Miranda's relationship being one of control and dependency, Ferdinand and Miranda's relationship as being illusory and Prospero's relationship with Caliban showing the worst features of colonialism. Others wrote engagingly about the comic effects of conjuring tricks with the behaviour of the minor characters, while there were some interesting analyses of the opening shipwreck scene.

Section B: Drama

It was encouraging, on the whole, to see once again very well planned and well-structured responses to the essay questions in this section. Better responses came from candidates who had clearly been prepared for targeted discussion of connections (AO4) and it was evident they knew this AO was double-weighted. Those who used points of comparison as a planned approach were most successful.

Although the Malfi/Streetcar pairing was the predominant choice, it was encouraging to see more centres taking on *Doctor Faustus/Enron* and also *Lady Windermere's Fan/Betrayal*. *Revergers/Loot* produced some really excellent responses, as was the case last year, and there were some equally strong responses to *Measure for Measure/ Murmuring Judges* despite this pairing being less popular.

While it is important that candidates must clearly address all the assessment objectives in their response, their comments on the texts themselves are of paramount importance, and there were instances of candidates discussing contexts and critics extensively, mentioning the text only fleetingly. AO3 and AO5 should be addressed in an integrated approach, and can only be rewarded fully where the discussion enhances that of the text in response to the question.

Marlowe/Prebble

Both questions were popular. There were some excellent responses to Question 6, where well informed candidates analysed the significance and dramatic contribution of the various types of theatrical spectacle and argued convincingly for its role in creating the 'intellectual substance' of the plays. Others briefly engaged with the spectacle and moved on to discuss the plays' essential concerns with overreaching and the consequences of pride. Stronger responses discussed the impact of Enron's theatrical devices and produced astute arguments, some noting more contrasts than comparisons between the staging of the two plays.

Question 7 encouraged some candidates to make use of 21st century context, where one enterprising response drew analogies between Skilling, Faustus and the creator of Tesla cars as over-reachers, suggesting that testing the boundaries of knowledge can be intrinsically immoral. Most, however, took the opportunity to discuss how ideas about knowledge are presented in both plays, and made sound cases for connections, finally agreeing that morality issues were intertwined with the acquisition and application of knowledge.

Webster/Williams

This text pairing was extremely popular, and although both questions were well represented, it appeared that Question 9 was the most popular question in the section as a whole.

In responding to the view in Question 8, candidates were required to engage with three concepts: boundaries of acceptable behaviour/unequal society/changing society. It was regrettable that in several instances candidates only wanted to discuss 'unequal society', seizing the chance to talk about 'patriarchal societies' where female characters were oppressed, usually for their sexuality. It is important to give careful consideration to all elements of the question, particularly where the question framing asks specifically 'how far would you apply this comment'. Candidates must resist the urge to adapt the question to respond on the one aspect they hoped would come up.

A similar pattern emerged in response to Question 9, where some missed the word 'reputation' entirely and just wrote about attitudes to women. Stronger responses did justice to the whole question, giving some consideration to Ferdinand's words in connecting both plays. There is a tendency to generalise when making contextual points about the different

periods, with sweeping assertions made about men returning from the World War II to perceptions of all women seen as a lesser species in Jacobean England. Better approaches carefully argued the differences between Blanche and the Duchess in terms of their social standing and reputations, also seeing the similarities between the attitudes and behaviour exemplified by Stanley, Mitch and Ferdinand. Female sexuality was a popular source for debate with many finding connections in the oppressive treatment suffered in both plays by the female protagonists.

There was a great deal of impressive referencing and quoting verbatim in support from both plays, with some producing excellent analysis of language and imagery patterns across the texts.

Middleton/Orton

Both questions elicited strong responses, with candidates engaging fully with the opportunity to discuss the 'bleakness and pessimism' of both plays in Question 10, as well as base desires. There were strong responses where the comedy in *Loot* was connected with the darkly comic aspects in *The Revenger's Tragedy* to present a counter argument to the given view. It was encouraging to see so many responses analysing imagery and staging closely and productively. It is also good to see candidates discussing the contextual influences of dramatic genres.

In responding to Question 11, candidates did more than justice to the issue of 'no respect', mining both plays for plentiful examples of this, but also acknowledging the black comedy as well as the macabre element in the use of the body/body parts as props.

Wilde/ Pinter

Both questions proved popular with the increasing number of centres which had studied these texts. It was encouraging to see many candidates integrating contextual discussion into their arguments, sometimes using contemporary facts/statistics or literature of the time to support their points. Even those who wandered down the well-trodden 'biographical' path used their sources wisely.

Question 12 encouraged candidates to think about not only adultery but other kinds of betrayal, and it was interesting to see many embark on discussions of the betrayal of male friendships in both, although particularly in *Betrayal*. Other responses argued the case for self-deception as an important aspect of betrayal in both plays, while some put forward a strong case for the betrayal of family.

In responding to Question 13, there was a strong focus on the different attitudes to family in both societies, but also connections regarding the attitudes towards children in both plays. There was a tendency to ignore the 'superficial society' in weaker responses, and this affected their response adversely. The implied focus on morality in this phrase was picked up by stronger candidates, one of whom asserted that the difference between the plays was that "Pinter offers no moral judgement".

Shakespeare/Hare

Although this pairing was again a minority choice, we did see some excellent responses to both questions, with Question 14 appearing to be the more popular. In responding to this question, candidates engaged with Angelo's presentation in particular and compared it to the authority figures in *Murmuring Judges*, arguing in most cases that the individual was inflexible rather than the system. More discerning answers saw variations on this theme between the texts, exploring how systems of control are presented in both.

Some also considered the inflexibility of other individuals, such as Isabella, and whether this was a strength rather than a criticism.

Question 15 encouraged candidates to focus on how the law is presented as deceitful in both plays, and those who tackled it did justice to both texts, in some cases arguing that the justice figures are themselves flawed in terms of their personal morality, rather than the institution itself. Attitudes towards females in both societies were explored in the light of what many argued were patriarchal societies.

Summary

Candidates and teachers need to remember that above all examiners look to reward engagement with the texts and all discussion of contexts and other interpretations should be properly integrated into the response, not merely acknowledged or invented, as appeared to be the case sometimes. As noted last year, there is evidence of some groups of candidates adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to contexts and critics, with the same material offloaded regardless of the question. It is only the most astute of candidates who can turn this around to their own advantage.

Finally, the team of examiners for this component wish to congratulate all candidates and their teachers for a most encouraging response to this paper. This is a demanding component which tests knowledge and understanding of three plays, without the texts for reference, and with double weighting of AO3 and AO4.

We have been privileged to read so many interesting and genuinely academic responses to these texts.

Please note that more feedback will be available in the autumn series of CPD and we very much hope teachers will be able to attend.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2018

COMPONENT: UNSEEN TEXTS

General Comments

There was a significant number of splendid responses to this component and many candidates are to be congratulated upon the quality of writing and analysis which they have produced on unseen materials under timed condition. However, there remain important issues to be addressed if candidates are to achieve their full potential in Component 3.

After the first series of this examination in 2017 the report made a number of explanatory points designed to help centres to refine approaches and, while it must be repeated that there were some very impressive responses, clearly there are still improvements to be made. It would seem idle to repeat the recommendations of last year's report word for word so a summary of that and any additional advice is offered at the end of each section below, but centres might notice close similarities with last year's guidance which remains a useful support to purposeful preparation for this examination.

Section A: Period 1880 - 1910

Q1. (from *Tono-Bungay*, H.G. Wells)

It might be helpful to demonstrate the approaches of a very successful candidate to this passage and hold that up against less effective styles of response.

Good Responses:

- begin with a confident overview which hints at the fully analytical approach to follow while showing some understanding and application of the contextual and critical extracts

Example:

"In Wells' quasi journalistic account of the English class system around the turn of the twentieth century, his detailed emphasis upon social ranking which goes to extraordinary lengths in distinguishing one class from another suggests a satirical humour underlying the precision normally associated with factual reporting. On the other hand, the literary qualities of the piece, which might be equally critical or satirical in intent, become apparent in his presentation of her "leddyship" and her cousin as "a thing of black silks" and another "thing of broken lavender" respectively. Women whose "physical and emotional indigestion" leaves them "no appetites" for their dinners while those beneath them barely hide their hostility in their mockery of their so-called "betters".

(Here is a candidate working at the highest level. It will be clearly seen that this introductory paragraph offers a confident overview of both the content and tone of the passage; the start of supported analysis and the carefully moderated (discerning) reference to or direct use of parts of the supporting extracts.

- continue with close attention to the details of language and structure - such as the use of inverted commas around "place" in the first line which might suggest an attitude on the part of the narrator
- observe the techniques of fiction such as denying reader's information to promote curiosity – "After my fight with young Garvell I was of course banished..." or the use of free indirect discourse later

- the use and significance of imagery such as “Olympians”; “the Presence”; “Head and centre” or “painted goddesses” and how these images form a pattern within the piece.

Less Successful Responses:

- are explanatory e.g. “This is an extract from the fictional autobiography.....etc.”
- are context-driven e.g. “in the early years of the twentieth century when the British Empire was still strong and Britain was fighting a war in Africa as well as governing India etc.....”
- offer an assertive and exaggerated word-level focus e.g. “When Wells uses the word ‘countryside’ in line one he draws our attention to the fact that only rich people live outside the towns in early twentieth century England....”
- offer assertive, usually invalid and generic points about fiction e.g. “first person narratives such as this one give the reader assurance that the writer is speaking the truth.....”

All of the examples above have been taken from samples of this year’s work

Period 1918 - 1939

Q2. (from *The Midnight Bell*, Patrick Hamilton)

In this passage there were some challenges to candidates’ understanding which needed close consideration and this is a very good example of material which requires careful re-reading and digesting before attempting a response. In order to appreciate the full impact of the passage, readers need to understand that the barman has fallen asleep drunk in his shoddy room after his lunchtime shift in the pub and before he begins his evening duties. This rumpled, frowsty picture of working life partly depends upon that context and it was alarming to see a significant number of candidates react to the idea of waking-up by suggesting that it was five o’clock in the morning and Bob was getting up before dawn for a day’s work. This is a mis-reading which seriously changes the meaning and diminishes the intended impact of the piece and brings into question those candidates’ engagement.

As in Q1, weaker responses were context-led and despite the care taken in stating Bob’s age at the top of the passage and the date of the novel’s publication, there were still many candidates who felt that the personal trauma of the First World War was the most significant factor in Bob’s alcoholism. Many of the same candidates felt that Ella’s light-hearted humming and “buoyant body” were the direct consequences of women gaining the vote which allowed them to go on to lengthy discussions of the Suffragette movement. Equally, Bob’s dream of the coast of Spain in 1929 was presented as evidence of his need for a holiday in the sun. Candidates need to be persuaded to interrogate a passage in the light of common sense as well as their broad historical knowledge.

The issue of unbalanced and excessive (often unconvincing) approaches to context was discussed in detail in last year’s report and colleagues are respectfully advised to take another look at that. For this year, suffice to say that broad and assertive writing on pre-learned contexts usually took up the time needed to analyse the style and techniques of this fascinating passage and produced some low-scoring responses.

At the other end of the spectrum some candidates made effective and convincing use of their knowledge and understanding of Modernism which, at its best, went beyond name-checking writers such as Joyce and Woolf and showed some genuine insight into new techniques illustrated by this passage. High quality essays also made constructive use of both extracts which had been chosen as examples of comment which could have been effective in addressing either or both AO3 and AO5 depending on how candidates chose to use them – a good number showed excellent judgement and understanding in this respect.

Key Points:

- give adequate time to close reading and fact checking before embarking on analysis;
- offer a brief, supported overview in the introduction so as to confirm understanding and engagement with the arc of the extract
- take account of the general features of the passage such as level of formality; tone; structure; narrative voice and use of direct speech and/or free indirect discourse - but do not offer these as stand-alone points – observations such as these are useful only as part of an analysis of the ways in which writers make meaning otherwise they remain simply labels
- avoid or be very sparing with linguistic terminology – identifying features such as noun phrases, pre-modifiers or fronted adverbials do not, of themselves, contribute to creative engagement or literary analysis
- take careful account of the supporting extracts in the course of writing rather than devoting separate sections of the essays to addressing AO3 and AO5;
- be very careful and sparing with the use of pre-learned contextual materials and avoid assertion or distorting readings so as to accommodate irrelevant observations on contexts
- in supporting critical analysis, make brief references to key words and phrases but do not copy out long passages of the text
- study the WJEC online materials which deal with the appreciation of prose; these should help candidates to distinguish descriptive writing or commentary from literary analysis.

Section B Unseen Poetry

It was pleasing to see that both poems seemed to be equally appealing and accessible to candidates. In many centres the candidates split half and half which confirms equal accessibility but might also suggest some breadth of experience in reading for this Component.

However, on the other side of the coin, there was a worrying increase in what can only be described as a template or writing frame approach – some whole centres began responses with a formulaic paragraph one of which went as follows: “Poets make meaning in their poems through language, imagery, structure and the use of devices such as caesura and enjambment”. This was then used as the starting point for generic remarks about language choices and was possibly one of the reasons why many candidates took an over-emphasised and unrealistic approach to the effects of punctuation and structure upon meaning. While it is recognised that candidates have access to a wide range of unsatisfactory study materials which might recommend approaches of this sort, centres might need to reconsider their advice and emphasis on tackling this part of the component.

Q3. 'A Lady' by Amy Lowell

When it comes to engaging with the meaning of poems, candidates must be prepared to use the common sense mentioned above and avoid over-elaborate or fantastical interpretations because they have the mistaken notion that poems can mean “whatever you want them to mean” as one candidate mentioned this year. Of course, she has misinterpreted a perfectly sound idea that the individual reader's interaction with a poem produces shades of meaning and emphasis which are valid insofar as they remain convincing and supportable. Quite a few candidates wasted a great deal of time attempting to defend opening assertions that this was a poem about a painting or a statue or a character from opera. Here is an extract from one of the more ingenious approaches which realises that it has hit a snag when the sense of smell comes into play in line 10. The candidate has spent a lot of time discussing the fact that the subject is a statue:

“...when the poet mentions that the perfume of the statue’s soul has ‘the pungence of sealed spice jars’ we realise that he [sic] is not looking directly at the lady’s statue but viewing its reflection in a pond which accounts for the spicey pungence.”

The primary purpose of using this example is to illustrate three things:

- a misuse of time and energy in making a case which is unconvincing rather than addressing what is most obviously apparent
- a failure to gain control of the whole poem before embarking upon analysis – a point that was made last year with reference to Carey’s “Spring”
- the need to be provisional and circumspect when discussing meaning in poetry.

Lastly, with the rewardable AOs in mind it is vital that candidates avoid lengthy contextual references. While it is part of the appreciation of meaning to suggest that opera might have associations of grandeur while harpsichords might show how this grandeur is translated into delicate fragility it is a mistake to embark on a description of which operas the poet had in mind or in one memorable case to develop ideas about the lady being angelic because of the frequent appearance of “angels with harpsichords” in eighteenth-century painting – the lady herself being an example of such a painting.

Q4. 'Suburban Dream' by Edwin Muir

In many ways, candidates were more secure in their approaches to this poem and it was very pleasing to see the ways in which meaning was interrogated. There was some real sensitivity in identifying the implicit ideas surrounding the differences between genders, childhood and adulthood. Good responses noticed that the schoolboy was doing something business-like and purposeful in studying his history book and therefore perhaps preparing for the working world occupied by the absent men, but candidates still recognised the celebration of freedom and leisure enjoyed by the women, girls and children. There were three places where unwary candidates veered off into over-elaborate contextual writing: those who took a heavily political position and saw the poem as a condemnation of patriarchal authority and rather than examining imagery they talked in general terms of women’s and men’s roles; those who wrote at length and in too much detail about stereotypical men’s roles and those who paid too much attention to Chopin as a composer.

However, amongst many very strong responses the extract below seems to me to illustrate very clearly what we mean by creative engagement and perceptive analysis:

“The first line of the last stanza in all its brevity marks the sudden end of a dream or fantasy and the imagery which follows provides a complex mix of aggression, oppression and military pomp in the “tramp of feet” and “Fanfare” which announces the return of those who will impose a tyrannical order on this domestic paradise.”

It also illustrates once again the advantages of a varied and precise vocabulary when writing about the ways meaning is made.

Key Points:

- recognise that unseen poetry requires very careful reading and re-reading before the nuances and complexities of the work become fully apparent – this has strong implications for time-management;
- as with the prose section, a brief and supported overview of the whole work confirms understanding and engagement;
- when making observations about the features of a poem always make these part of a point about how meaning is made or effects achieved otherwise this is simply naming of parts or feature-spotting;

- avoid any writing about contexts or suggestions about other readers' views of the poems because these AOs (3 and 5) are not rewarded;
- further to the above, understand the difference between analysing the ways a poet creates ambiguity (AO2) and discussing different interpretations (AO5 not rewarded here);
- make good use of the online WJEC/Eduqas resources devoted to the practical criticism of poetry.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCE A LEVEL
Summer 2018
COMPONENT 4: PROSE STUDY

General Comments

The Principal Moderator's report for 2017 acknowledged there would be obvious teething problems in the first year of a new specification. The report was longer and more detailed than usual for that reason, highlighting the main issues which adversely affected candidates' performance, especially in those centres whose marks had been adjusted. There was also emphasis on suggesting ways to make improvements based on examples of good practice seen in successful centres.

Sadly, the same issues arose again this year and a number of centres' marks were adjusted. In order to avoid the same disappointment for candidates and teachers next year, and to make sure that all candidates are helped to reach their full potential, it is important that all centres are willing to review current practice in light of advice based on moderators' reflections on the work sampled.

Characteristics of successful centres

On a positive note, all moderators reported on centres where good practice is already embedded and whose teachers can be justifiably proud of having given their candidates every opportunity to achieve. A lot of centres had acted on advice given in their 2017 moderators' reports, whether it was to make small tweaks to current practice, consider quite important changes, or simply to carry on doing a good job! There was, as always, evidence of excellent work from gifted candidates which was a genuine pleasure to read. Of course, not all candidates are blessed with that level of confidence and maturity, and it's by no means expected that all will achieve Bands 4 and 5. Good practice was seen in centres with very different profiles, even in those where no candidates met Band 5 criteria and where the majority were accurately placed by their teachers below Band 4.

Irrespective of the size and ability range of the cohort, the most successful centres tended to adopt a self-reflective approach. Many had reviewed decisions about how best to prepare candidates in light of specific feedback and more general advice offered in the Principal Moderator's report.

Successful centres tended to demonstrate the following characteristics:

- correctly judging the appropriate level of independence for this particular cohort when deciding on text choice and teaching approaches
- selecting texts which had enough literary heft to allow for in-depth study
- planning ahead in order to begin study as soon as possible
- placing emphasis on studying the whole texts in the same way as examination texts, so that the candidates could draw on and demonstrate secure knowledge and solid understanding
- ensuring candidates had a firm understanding of the genre and how prose works might differ from poetry and drama
- encouraging candidates to choose from a range of suitable literary topics so they could follow genuine interests
- guiding candidates in the crucial wording of their titles so that there was a firm emphasis on literary appreciation rather than foregrounding theory or context

- advising on planning, drafting and editing so as to balance the AOs effectively
- marking candidates' final drafts using the EDUQAS standardising materials as guidance to help fine-tune marks within the agreed band
- annotating folders in detail to demonstrate careful, considered application of the assessment criteria
- making sure internal standardisation was robust by dual or cross marking to reach an accurate rank order.

Most centres will feel that they have done all of the above and will therefore be disappointed if their marks were nevertheless adjusted. It is important to stress at this point that moderators do not refer any centre for further scrutiny unless they feel there is good cause and no centre's marks are adjusted unless their sample has been reviewed by a senior moderator.

Unfortunately, there is a small number of centres where advice is not being heeded. It is strongly urged that those centres in particular take this opportunity to reflect on their own approaches, revisit guidance and identify areas for improvement.

Main factors affecting success:

As these issues were discussed at some length in the previous report, it would be unproductive to repeat the same information in this year's. The PM's report for 2017 is still available on the EDUQAS website and might be a useful starting point for centres wishing to review their procedures. There will also be available on the website an appendix* to this main report giving more detailed feedback on key areas for consideration.

It might be more useful here to outline as briefly as possible the main concerns:

- inappropriate or unhelpful text choices and/or combinations
- lack of secure knowledge of texts and/or reductive focus on a single idea across the sample
- task setting: poorly worded titles which led candidates away from literary responses
- common pitfalls in addressing and balancing AOs
- inaccurate assessment: marking which was overly generous and did not reflect accepted standards.

(a) Texts Selection and Approaches to Study

- A small number of centres did not submit their texts for approval and some candidates were seriously handicapped by unsuitable choices.
- Some texts, especially in the post-2000 category, did not help candidates look beyond plot and character to appreciate the craft of the writer.
- Some texts had been combined to focus on a single connecting idea which led to a reductive, narrow approach rather than a clear overview. In many cases all the candidates were effectively writing about the same topic.
- Candidates had not always studied the texts in sufficient detail and simply did not know or understand the texts well enough to write with confidence, engage creatively or support their claims to make convincing arguments. There was often the sense that the texts had been read only once and, in some cases, that only extracts had been studied in any detail.
- Some candidates given a free choice of texts seemed unable to cope with that level of independence and had relied too heavily on study guides as a result. This often led to a tendency to emulate the descriptive, commentary-style approach of such materials as well as compromising independence and personal response.

(b) Task-setting and wording of titles

- Despite repeated emphasis on the crucial importance of careful task-setting, many candidates seemed to have devised their own titles which were often poorly worded making it more difficult to craft effective responses. To be frank, if some of the titles tackled by candidates in this unit were to appear on exam papers, there would quite rightly be a torrent of complaints from centres! As learners, candidates cannot be expected to have the experience and knowledge needed to craft effective titles which will target all five AOs.
- Previous PM's reports for this and the legacy specification have advised steering candidates away from the following unhelpful emphases in tasks, yet these were nevertheless popular choices in many centres: social class; generic features such as gothic or dystopian; identity; philosophical ideas or theories.
- Many titles were simply too abstract, complicated or wide-ranging, making it difficult for candidates to organise material into a structured response
- Some titles included a view or statement in the wording, which can be a helpful way to make the focus of the response more precise and defined. However, this is less effective when the statement is not a literary criticism but instead: a quotation from one of the texts; a philosophical viewpoint; a loosely linked saying by a famous person; a bland statement with which the candidate cannot engage.

As suggested in previous guidance, it would often be more helpful if the critical statement was worded by the teacher in discussion with the candidate, so as to give a clear focus for a literary argument.

- Some able candidates were seriously hampered by tasks which encouraged them to focus on ideas or theories rather than the texts. For instance, there were candidates writing detailed discussions of Foucauldian or Hegelian theory or classical mythology with relatively limited focus on the texts themselves. At times, theories were being imposed on the texts, leading to actual distortion of meaning. This was assertion rather than creative engagement, which is rooted in thorough knowledge and confident understanding of the texts as literary works. There was often evidence of sophisticated thinking but not always sophisticated literary appreciation. In extreme cases, the candidates were not writing literary responses but using the texts to illustrate essays about theories or ideas. Not only is this far from the spirit and ethos of this component, it is unlikely to help prepare the candidates for the examination units, especially Component 3 where the focus is on literary appreciation of an unseen prose extract and the ability to use an unseen literary critique to enhance understanding of the extract.

(c) Common pitfalls in addressing AOs

AO1

- Some candidates strained too hard for sophistication in their expression and vocabulary but actually made their meaning more obscure rather than communicating clearly what they knew and understood.
- Excessively long responses, some more than 5,000 words, were nearly always self-penalising and would have been improved by editing and careful proof-reading.
- A worrying number of candidates wrote in overlong paragraphs which did not help them organise their material effectively.
- Some candidates – and markers - did not seem fully aware of the difference between creative engagement, firmly rooted in confident knowledge and understanding of the texts, and mere assertion of ideas.
- There was even more pervasive use of linguistic rather than literary terminology in evidence this year. While this is not penalised, and can be used to support valid

literary analysis, there is a danger that candidates will mistakenly feel that they are demonstrating sophistication simply by identifying features such as syndetic lists, pre-modifiers, concrete nouns and semantic fields.

- Some terminology used demonstrated insecure grasp of the genre and would be more appropriate in the discussion of poetry or drama. For instance, many candidates focused intently on phonological devices such as sibilance or alliteration and some even included obliques to indicate the end of lines of prose when quoting evidence as if referring to line breaks in poetry.

AO2

- There is an increasing tendency to micro-analyse brief quotations at length, making claims for each word and punctuation mark and how it exemplifies complex ideas and overarching themes. This suggests a less than secure grasp of how prose writers, especially novelists, convey meaning. While there is obviously a place for close analysis of language, candidates need to avoid assertion by providing more direct textual evidence to develop and support claims fully, rather than pinning all their argument on a few brief quotations taken out of context.
- The most successful candidates demonstrated a strong sense of the genre by analysing how novelists used other prose devices to shape meaning: imagery patterns and motifs; narrative viewpoint; setting; characterisation; use of dialogue; structure or organisation of events; tone, etc.

AO3

- The relationship between text and context continues to cause problems for many candidates. There was still a pronounced tendency in many responses to let context drive their responses, using the texts as illustrations of generalised attitudes rather than considering how awareness of possible influences on the writing and reception of the texts can enhance our appreciation and understanding of them. Sadly, in some cases, the emphasis on AO3 at the expense of AO2, suggested that this had been a factor in the way the texts had been approached in the classroom.
- Many candidates would have benefited from keeping in mind the simple advice to avoid starting or ending any paragraph with context but to focus instead on the texts.

AO4

- Many candidates made really illuminating connections between their texts. They used comparisons *and* contrasts productively to further their argument and showed clearly how their understanding of one or both texts had been enhanced by studying them together.
- These illuminating and productive links were less evident in centres where the texts had been chosen to focus on one over-riding connection which had dominated candidates' study.

AO5

- There was encouraging evidence of candidates making use of high quality literary critiques of the texts to inform their own interpretations. Some cleverly used criticism of more established pre-2000 texts to consider the post-2000 work as well, targeting both AO5 and AO4 simultaneously.
- Unfortunately, there was still a tendency to rely too heavily on study guides, both print and on-line versions, and candidates did not always make fully clear when they were using another writer's words rather than their own. Centres must impress upon candidates the strict requirement to place all material taken from other sources inside quotation marks and to reference such sources in their bibliographies. It is not

sufficient to use vague footnotes which do not make clear whether or not candidates are quoting directly other readers' comments.

- Too much emphasis was placed on non-literary views which related more to the general topic than the texts and took candidates even further away from literary appreciation. For instance, Queen Victoria's view on marriage had only a limited value in a discussion of *Pride and Prejudice* and *White Teeth*.
- Some bibliographies were dominated by contextual material rather than worthwhile literary criticism which did not bode well for the candidates' attempts to balance AO3 and AO2 effectively.
- In some confident candidates' responses, there was too much consideration of other readers' views of the texts, at the expense of close focus on the texts. It is important to keep the relative weighting of AO2 and AO5 firmly in mind. In the best responses, candidates had clearly read and absorbed a lot of worthwhile critical views of the texts and used them to inform their own understanding of what the writers were saying and how.

Assessment

Although a significant number of centres' marks were adjusted, the majority assessed their candidates' work fairly and accurately and there was evidence of exemplary good practice. Those centres which had used the EDUQAS standardising materials as benchmarks tended to assess their own candidates' work more accurately and some actually referred to these materials in their summative comments to justify their decisions.

In the overwhelming majority of centres where assessment was judged to be insecure, the marking was too generous or inconsistent:

- While the relatively wide mark range of 80, and centres' relative unfamiliarity with it, may well have played a part, the assessment criteria are well-established. In many cases, centres had not correctly identified the band which accurately reflected the candidates' achievements in each AO and marks were very inflated as a result.
- In quite a lot of centres, all the candidates had been placed at the top of Band 4 and above, while some had awarded all their candidates Band 5 marks which were difficult to justify.
- Some centres had opted to complete the Prose Study component in Year 12 rather than 13, which is perfectly acceptable. Centres are best placed to decide how to organise the different components in the time allowed. However, in situations like this, centres must bear in mind that candidates may not have reached their full potential in Year 12; we know many mature considerably in the final year of study. There was the sense in some centres that teachers had awarded the mark they felt the candidate *could* attain rather than one which accurately reflected what had actually been achieved.
- Even when the correct band was awarded, there was still a tendency in some centres to 'push to the top' and award the highest mark in that band rather than fine-tuning within the band.
- Annotation was often too sparse with only AO markers used instead of the qualitative judgements in marginal comments recommended as the best way to ensure accurate assessment.
- Internal standardisation had taken place in most centres and many had demonstrated good practice by dual marking folders. This was more difficult in smaller centres, although some had contacted the Subject Officer to ask for guidance on this matter. In larger centres where there is more than one class, internal moderation is obviously vital. However, there were cases where there was a clear

lack of consistency in applying standards between primary markers which had not been addressed during the internal moderation process.

Key Points:

- centres should be willing to reflect on approaches in light of specific feedback and general guidance
- it is advisable to review text-selection, judging the appropriate level of independence for each new cohort and how best to support their study of prose technique
- candidates should start reading and preparing for this component as soon as possible in Year 12
- task-setting and the specific wording of titles should be made a priority
- the emphasis should be placed on reading and studying the texts in some detail as with examination texts
- primary markers should consult all available guidance on standardising before assessing their own candidates' work
- heads of department/Team Leaders should review internal moderation procedures to ensure that the centre's assessment is consistent and in line with agreed standards.

Although some might view this report as patronising or overly critical, it gives moderators no pleasure to identify problems which lead to adjusted marks or to write reports which dwell on the negative. The intention is to encourage in all centres the self-reflective approach seen in the most successful, to the benefit of all candidates. The pressures on English departments are intense and have not been overlooked, but it is hoped that some relatively small changes will make a difference without adding too much to teachers' workload.

To end on a happier note, many centres will have received well-deserved positive reports complimenting dedicated teachers on the support they have given their candidates which has undoubtedly helped to prepare them for their examination components and higher education.

* The appendix to this Principle Moderator's report with more detailed advice on text selection, task-setting and assessment will be available on the EDUQAS website in the Autumn Term.



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