



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LITERATURE A LEVEL

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 Eduqas 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

All questions functioned as expected and all questions on all papers were accessible to candidates.

On the whole, examiners were impressed by the standards achieved at many centres for Component 1 this year. The Principal Examiner was disappointed that not more candidates had taken note of last year's Examiners' Report and Professional Learning events as several of the same issues were still prevalent in candidates' work. It was pleasing to see all texts being studied in Section A and although responses to Milton's *Paradise Lost Book IX* were not as common as those on Chaucer, Donne and Rossetti, candidates generally performed better on this text. Some work still needs to be done to support the reading and studying of poetry at this level and in choosing material carefully to fit the question being asked.

The Principal Examiner for Component 2 noted that candidates had taken on board some of the key messages from the previous year's Examiners' Report and there was an improvement across all the assessment objectives, especially in the integration of contexts (AO3). There were a number of candidates who spent too long on Section B, writing long and consequently unfocused responses at the expense of engaging with the extract question fully in Section A. The extract question has been chosen to give candidates a good foundation for the essay question and it was self-penalising if ignored.

For Component 3, Question 1 was the more popular choice in Section A and Question 3 was the more popular choice in Section B. The Principal Examiner believed that centres had made good use of the previous year's report. There was better use of the supporting extracts in Section A and candidates were able to deal well with the unseen nature of this exam. There was a belief that this paper is now being taught carefully, as centres seemed to prepare candidates well by developing their prose and poetry reading skills.

17% of centres were scaled in Component 4 (NEA), a very slight increase from summer 2022 (16%). Many centres, however, were mostly secure in their assessment and moderators saw work of an impressive standard. There is a need for some centres to consider more carefully how to teach the specifics of prose analysis and how it differs from reading and studying poetry or drama. It would be beneficial for those centres to consider how novels work and for candidates to consider an overview of the text rather than simply micro analysing a word or a sentence.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Make a point of showing how AO2 and AO4 should be combined in a kind of 'double helix' when it comes to making connections between the work of different poets.	Poetry: Analytical and Comparative Approaches to Poetry	Blended Learning resource.
Contexts are only useful if they support the point made or are helpful to the discussion of the question. Sweeping, uninformed statements about how people were treated in various time periods are of little consequence without specific examples.	Teaching Drama CPD 2021	The Professional Learning webinar in autumn 2022 focused on teaching drama texts. There were a number of resources based on AO3. The link takes you to the secure website. To access the materials, go to 'Resources' and choose 'Subject-specific support material'.
Give adequate time to reading and re-reading of the texts, supporting materials and question. There is often important information that is missed and can then have a significant impact on the candidate's approach.	Teaching Prose CPD 2023	The face-to-face Professional Learning event in spring 2023 focused on teaching prose texts.
Task setting should be a priority and candidates must not be responsible for wording their own titles. Teacher guidance is essential to ensure titles encourage a literary response with AO2 to the fore. Titles which are issued or have a strong contextual bias make it more difficult for candidates to meet higher grade criteria in all AOs.	Component 4 task-setting exercise	In the 2018 Professional Learning materials there are specific resources on setting tasks for Component 4 (NEA)

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 1: POETRY

Overview of the Component

While this year's cohort, in common with the 2022 entry, had suffered interruptions to the earlier stages of their education, they had benefitted from the advantage of open classrooms and the opportunity to prepare a full range of material from their chosen texts. On the whole, examiners were impressed by the standards achieved at many centres this year and, as we look to the future, it is to be hoped that subsequent generations of A level candidates will continue to experience the full range of opportunities which were enjoyed by candidates pre-pandemic.

Later in this report there will be some commentary on individual questions, but before looking at text specific matters, I hope colleagues will take time to consider the comments in the table below which are offered by way of a progress report on the ways in which teachers and candidates seem to be tackling the issues raised in the 2022 report on this component. There is no doubt in the minds of examiners who see work from a broad range of centres that there are still significant improvements to be made and I hope that colleagues will find the updated table below useful.

Issue 2022	Comments 2022	Comments 2023
Sterile labelling of features using terms from the English Language / linguistics "toolbox."	One examiner describes the use of terminology from linguistics in literary essays as "attempting to assemble Lego with a Meccano toolbox". Another describes simple identification of features such as asyndetic lists, noun phrases or semantic fields as "weighing and measuring." Once a feature such as these has been identified and labelled in a literary essay there is really not much more to say about it; it very rarely contributes to <i>literary analysis</i> but it leaves the candidate with the mistaken impression that they have written something valuable which should earn credit under either AO1 or AO2. Any use of technical terminology must have a direct and relevant role in analysing the ways in which meaning is made.	This remains an issue and appears to be growing in severity at some centres, perhaps most obviously at those where the full suite of English A Level subjects is studied and there could be significant overlap in both teaching and learning. The 2022 comments therefore continue to apply and centres are urged to help candidates understand that the simple labelling of linguistic features adds nothing to the quality of a literary essay. It was noted this year that some high-performing candidates had followed a linguistic route in parts of their responses but the quality was to be found elsewhere in the essay and at best the linguistic labelling added nothing; at worst it took up time and effort which might have been directed towards achieving an even better mark.

		In addition, some candidates are exploring the more exotic regions of rhetorical terminology which even though accurately applied (polysyndeton; synecdoche; chiasmus etc.) rarely adds much to the quality of analysis when applied simply as a label. Candidates must be persuaded that there is a difference between writing in an academic register and piling-up technical terms in a vain effort to earn extra credit.
Even taking account of the reduced content which applied this year, the further narrowing of textual study created problems for candidates.	It was sometimes alarming to see in both Sections A and B that candidates from the same centre had only the same 3 or 4 poems with which to support their responses. This is related to the point about 'template essays' below and candidates often resorted to a 'hit-and-hope' approach with unsatisfactory attempts to make memorised notes on the poems fit the set tasks. A much more flexible and wide-ranging approach to the study of poetry is strongly recommended.	It was disappointing to note in a significant number of cases that candidates had little understanding of the poem or passage selected for analysis in Section A (i) questions and which they had had an opportunity to study beforehand. In Section B, the problem remains of all responses from the same centre referencing a very limited range of poems. This suggests a highly selective approach to the study of set texts which seriously restricts candidates' opportunities to respond relevantly and effectively under exam conditions.
Lack of development and range in candidates' own vocabulary which seriously limits their ability to express themselves clearly and effectively, often preventing candidates from achieving an appropriate tone or register in their essays.	AO1 requires candidates to aim for clarity, engagement and an academic register. Centres are strongly advised to give adequate time and attention to the development of personal vocabulary through whatever means seems appropriate but thesaurus word games as a warm-up in the classroom which are geared towards the material to follow works for many. "Want" is a classic example of a catch-all word when 'need', 'desire', 'require', 'yearning', 'hankering' and so on might have been much better choices and would have perhaps indicated a greater level of creative engagement. Consider these examples: "In 'After a Journey' Hardy <u>wants</u> to return to when "Our days were a Joy." Or "In 'After a Journey' Hardy <u>yearns</u> to return to when "Our days were	In many ways this issue is related to the first one in the table where candidates are making mistakes about what constitutes an academic register and which language choices show that the candidate is fully engaged (both aspects of AO1). It is understood that the study guides which candidates might consult independently are written in a casual register but part of the preparation for these exams should be to recognise the inappropriateness of casual or colloquial language in this context and to develop as wide an active, formal vocabulary as possible.

	a joy". The second example clearly signals the candidate's engagement with the emotional tone of the poetry as well as with the idea expressed, simply by choosing a more precise word.	
Reliance upon pre-prepared 'template' essays which are shoe-horned into service regardless of the set task.	Different candidates require different degrees of support in the classroom and while it is understood that those who struggle with the subject might need a clear framework for writing, we must take care not to impose the same sort of framework on all candidates in any one cohort. There were many examples of all candidates at a centre working mechanically through a response in exactly the same way, paragraph for paragraph, with the same critical and contextual references in the same order where, clearly, some of the more able candidates would have been much better off writing a more relevant and focused response where they might have responded freshly to the actual demands of the question.	While 'readymade' introductory paragraphs – particularly in Section B responses – which attempted to engage with all the relevant AOs at once, remain a tricky feature at some centres, there seemed to be less evidence this year of candidates reproducing pre-learned essays. That said, there were plenty of examples of responses which turned away from the focus of the question and wrote on a preferred topic without giving due attention to the set question or to the view expressed in it. Marking guidelines for examiners emphasise that before offering an alternative view, candidates must give adequate attention to the view in the question if the response is to be effectively / relevantly structured (AO1) purposeful in its analysis of the texts (AO2) and productive in applying contexts, linking poets' work and making clear use of other readings (AOs 3,4 and 5).
Failure of candidates to take account of the relevant assessment objectives in different parts of the paper.	This applies especially to Section A Part (i) responses. Contextual material is not rewarded here. The other area of concern is Section B where some essays performed excellently under AOs 1 and 2 but then failed to take account of one or more of AOs 3,4 and 5.	There has been some improvement here in that fewer candidates are including unnecessary contextual references in Section A (i) responses. I remain concerned that some high-performing candidates will be disappointed with their marks for Section B essays because despite excellent work under AOs 1 and 2 – sometimes close to full marks – they have not taken a balanced approach to the other 3 AOs. There is still some work to be done in helping candidates towards a balanced approach and reminding them that examiners cannot award compensatory marks however good some aspects of the essay might be.

The use of speculations / assertions about the poets' lives presented as "different interpretations" in anticipation of reward under AO5.	An example of this approach is, "While some readers think this poem was written about a real visit Donne made to a prostitute others think that is not the case." Little or nothing is achieved by writing of this sort in a literary essay. It does not offer a different interpretation of Donne's poetry and is a distraction from the key task of literary analysis.	This issue is related to the one immediately below and remains a problem that affects work under both AO5 and AO4. It might help if candidates were to regard AO2 and AO5 as being inextricably linked when they are making use of other readings and AO2 and AO4 as similarly linked when they are making connections. Linking AO3 and AO4 does not help the candidate to establish connections between literary texts.
Extended assertion of biographical material in place of textual analysis.	An example of this approach is, "Spider bites" refers to an incident at a party in Cambridge when Sylvia met Ted for the first time and bit him so hard on the cheek that, to the horror of others at the party, she drew blood." Biographical material (especially for this pairing) can provide valid contextual references when handled speculatively, but this example, standing alone as it does, is an asserted, unsupported attempt at a connection under AO3 which doesn't in any way address the literary qualities of Hughes' poem.	At some centres this problem is becoming more severe. This year some candidates asserted firm equivalences between characters in Larkin's and Duffy's poetry and real people who had featured in their lives. This distracted them from any engagement with literary concepts and treated the poems simply as keys to biographical 'facts'. There is plenty of interesting material out there (e.g. Larkin's letters or interviews with Duffy) which candidates might find of interest but their primary task is to write a literary essay about the ways in which poets have made meaning and how their approaches might illuminate one another. This is a challenging analytical exercise which the regurgitation of biographical 'facts' is not.
Stacking-up of memorised, critical quotations throughout essays which may have little bearing upon the set task or the point being considered.	Quotations from literary critics which are left to speak for themselves rather than becoming a carefully considered part of the candidate's own response cannot really be rewarded above Band 1 or 2 where views are either described (Band 1) or acknowledged (Band 2). Critical quotations or suggested different interpretations cannot be 'purposeful' or part of a 'mature discussion' until they are examined and applied relevantly to both text and task.	This remains a bugbear for many candidates and there has been no appreciable improvement in this year's cohort. Colleagues are strongly advised to share this specific concern with candidates along with the related advice in the summary below.

The uncritical / unbalanced use of language such as <i>dehumanises</i> and <i>misogynistic</i>.	This point is related to others above where candidates' lack of active vocabulary forces them into using exaggerated language or terms which do not take account of the relevant contexts in which texts were written. For instance, several candidates felt that Chaucer was writing for an anti-misogynist, feminist 'readership' which is misleading in several ways.	There were signs of improvement here in that fewer candidates were using politicised terms as uncritically as we have noted in the past. However, assertions of ideological viewpoints (e.g. "A Marxist /feminist/historicist would feel...") remain an issue. Candidates should be advised that simple labelling of this sort will not gain much credit under AO5.
Loose phrasing / sentence structure / inappropriate register	Candidates must be encouraged to express themselves directly and clearly with due attention to grammatical accuracy and appropriate vocabulary. Essays which relied heavily upon the persistent repetition of terms such as 'connotes'; 'furthermore' and 'arguably' were usually insecure. Candidates should have an eye on the effectiveness of their expression as well as upon the relevance and power of their ideas.	Once again, there seemed to be an improvement here. It is understood that vocabulary such as the examples to the left of this column are useful in the construction of an argument but it is the <i>overuse</i> of the terms which weakens a response and this year there seemed to be more awareness of the damaging effects of repetition.
Handwriting	Articles in the media point to a disastrous decline in the quality of students' handwriting brought about, it is suggested, by lengthy periods of home working when tasks were completed on laptops or tablets. Nothing is more depressing for an examiner than to see a script which simply cannot be deciphered. Centres should make every effort to become familiar with students' handwriting and then persuade those with illegible handwriting to make use of word processors. It is easily arranged with WJEC Eduqas.	Examiners' impressions are that there has been some improvement and more candidates with illegible handwriting are, quite rightly, using word processors. The simple rule is that if teachers familiar with the candidate struggle to decipher handwriting examiners will struggle harder and possibly fail to do full justice to the work. Where there is any doubt, please take the word processor option which is easily arranged. Plenty of practice pieces (timed and handwritten) will help other candidates prepare for the physical demands of the exam.

Additional Issues 2023	Additional Comments 2023
Creative engagement (AO1)	Responses in Band 5 need to be ‘creative’ and ‘fully engaged’. It is worth modelling what is envisaged by the use of these band descriptors as much of what is written above can be brought to bear. Here are some examples of writing about a much-favoured Donne poem: • “Donne describes an occasion when he wants his mistress to undress for him.” This is descriptive; not engaged with any literary concepts and certainly not creative. • “Donne boisterously encourages his mistress to “Unpin”, “Unlace” and be naked before he is.” Note how the choice of an apposite adverb of the candidate’s own and the integration of brief quotation suggests both engagement and creative reading. “naked before he is” implies engagement with the rest of the poem which concludes with “To teach thee, I am naked first;” and is further evidence of the candidate being “fully engaged”.
Narrative / descriptive / analytical (AO2)	As learners develop relevant writing skills in the English Literature classroom, they can begin with two certainties: they will never be asked to write descriptively at A level and they will never need to re-tell the plot of a narrative poem, play or novel. Once again, this can be modelled from the very start of Literature courses. Examples: • “In ‘Sweet Death’ Rossetti writes about finding flowers in the graveyard as she goes to church. She goes on to say...” This is a descriptive approach which, in the short time available to respond to Section A (i) tasks is particularly self-penalising. • “Rossetti begins her meditation on mortality with images of decaying ‘blossoms’ and their rising ‘perfume’ which, in the context of a graveyard, imply a direct parallel with the soul’s ascension to God as the body decays to dust...” This response is analytical as well as being fully engaged – see AO1 above – and focuses upon the ways in which Rossetti has made meaning through her use of imagery.
Caesura/ enjambement / end-stopping/ sibilance/ alliteration /rhyme patterns /spondees/ trochees and other prosodic features.	It was common, even in otherwise high-quality responses, for candidates to make unrealistic claims about the ways in which features such as those listed in Column 1 contribute to meaning. Great care should be taken to avoid feature-spotting and/or (for example) argue that any appearance of an ‘s’ creates significant sibilance or that enjambement is the key to meaning in a poem.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

It is vital that candidates pay attention to the *specific demands* of part (i) tasks and remember that they will always need to examine some aspects of technique rather than write descriptively or offer a general commentary on the poems or passages. In many cases, an adjustment to exam technique would *double the marks* for this part of the paper.

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

Part (i)

A large number of responses took a descriptive approach to the extract and placed the emphasis on Januarie himself whereas the task asks candidates to analyse the ways in which Chaucer *suggests the Merchant's attitudes* as he begins his tale about the old knight. Some seemed to come to an understanding of the task in the last sentence or two where points about the Merchant's bitterness were made but these were dislocated from the rest of the response. *This provides good evidence for the necessity of careful consideration and planning even for these brief responses.*

Part (ii)

Candidates were mostly very comfortable with how Chaucer 'points the finger critically' but many were less successful at engaging with the idea of humour. The best answers were very assured about what might be considered humorous in a C14th context; what might be appreciated by a modern reader and what elements of humour could be shared across the ages.

John Donne: *Selected Poems*

Part (i)

The mention of 'garden', 'serpent' and 'transubstantiates' presented many candidates with the temptation to write extensively about biblical and religious contexts. This is perhaps an excellent opportunity for us to note *the difference between a nod to context which supports analysis and an extended display of contextual knowledge which interrupts analysis*. If a candidate writes, "Donne's claim that he has brought within him the 'serpent' that contaminates the beauty of the garden has inescapable associations with the fall of man which contributes to the poem's mood of doom and misery", then the emphasis remains upon the ways in which Donne makes meaning (AO2). If, on the other hand, a candidate writes, "Donne mentions a serpent which reminds us of the events in the Book of Genesis where Eve is working alone and is confronted by Satan disguised as a serpent who then...", this becomes an extended display of contextual knowledge (AO3) which is not rewarded in part (i) responses.

Part (ii)

This question was very well handled by many candidates who offered a very sensible balance of attention to both sacred and secular poems showing intelligent engagement with the different sorts of passion involved; the ways in which Donne had deliberately confused them and how frustrations appeared to be both serious and exaggerated for comic or satirical purposes. Those who put all the emphasis upon Donne's passion for his wife and the story of their relationship or upon other biographical elements such as Donne's religious affiliations, largely missed the opportunity to analyse the poetry in the light of the view in the question and, consequently, penalised themselves.

John Milton: *Paradise Lost Book IX*

Part (i)

Descriptions of Adam's and Eve's behaviour here without analysing how their words, actions and Milton's imagery worked together to create a mood of sensuality missed the point of the question. The task demands an examination of technique and here is a good opportunity to emphasise point made in the overview of this component above which reminds candidates that *they will never be asked to describe an extract or poem*.

Part (ii)

There were some very ambitious responses to this task, some of which took issue with the question and argued persuasively that far from being reduced to a recognizable human, Adam in particular was presented as a fallen heroic figure of myth and legend. Most took a very sensible overview of the development of Adam and Eve towards demonstrating clearly recognisable human weakness, showing how language choices, tone of speeches and imagery brought about this development and a change in readers' responses.

William Blake: *Poems selected by Patti Smith*

Part (i)

Many who responded to this question seemed uncomfortable with the poem 'A Poison Tree' and a significant number of candidates had little idea of how the imagery worked in structuring an extended metaphor or allegory. Some tried to impose meaning by writing extensively about friendship; others felt the poem might celebrate nature and there was some confusion about who lay outstretched beneath the tree at the conclusion. This might be evidence of highly selective study, as outlined in the overview at the beginning of this report.

Part (ii)

Once again with reference to the comment grid from the overview above, this was not an invitation to describe or 'work through' some of Blake's poems which feature aspects of nature. Those who took this approach were not able to progress beyond Band 2 but responses which focused on Blake's presentation of the natural world and what it reveals about the poet's 'view of life' were more successful. Some strayed too far from the brief and wrote a fairly standard essay on Blake's social conscience with little or no attention to the ways in which the presentation of the natural world provides relevant insight.

Christina Rossetti: *Selected Poems*

Part (i)

It is understood that candidates have a number of poems to study, but 'Sweet Death' comes early in the collection and it is one which focuses so many of the poet's beliefs and attitudes that it should be well known. For some candidates, however, it seemed to be an unseen text. They struggled to move beyond a description of what the poem seems to be about rather than attempt an analysis of the ways in which the image patterns work to present a set of ideas about mortal life and the afterlife, culminating in a prayer-like final stanza brining all thoughts and feelings together in the image of 'harvest'. Candidates had been asked about the use of imagery' but too many became bogged-down in rhyme patterns, syllable counts and the sterile application of technical terms with which to measure the verse. Attention is drawn to the comment table in the overview above and to the introduction to Section A: It is vital that candidates pay attention to the *specific demands* of Part (i) tasks.

Part (ii)

'Sweet Death' should have provided an ideal launchpad for this essay and it is perfectly legitimate for part (ii) essays to make brief reference to the chosen poem in part (i), provided this does not consist of much more than introductory remarks. In order to achieve high bands under all four AOs which apply here, candidate need to show some range in their selection of material so as to give themselves opportunities of showing their skill at structuring a relevant response and analysing soundly while making purposeful and sound use of contexts and other readings. Many responses focused exclusively upon Rossetti's ideas of sin and damnation / redemption to illustrate her spiritual perspective – a perfectly legitimate approach – and made good use of poems such as 'An Apple Gathering', 'Goblin Market' or 'A Daughter of Eve' but weaker responses tended to spend too much time describing biographical detail (such as Rossetti's work with 'fallen women') rather than keeping the focus upon analysis of the poems.

Section B

Biographical material must be used cautiously so that it does not come to dominate essays which must be driven by *comparative analysis of the poetry*. It was alarming to see the same half dozen biographical 'facts' trotted-out by every candidate at some centres, even in exactly the same order and in the same words (e.g. "...by then Sylvia had kicked Ted out of the family home for his affairs..."). Teachers are respectfully advised to steer candidates away from this sort of material and to monitor carefully candidates' register of language in both discussion and written work so that they are prepared to adopt an academic register (AO1) under exam conditions.

Candidates must be reminded that they should leave time for the close consideration of *at least two poems by each poet*. There was a significant number of essays which penalised themselves by referring to too few examples.

Hardy and Eliot

- Q.6 There were some very strong responses to this question with close and detailed analysis of imagery in both poets' work. Imaginative and thoughtful connections were made in terms of mood, atmosphere and attitudes as many candidates appreciated how both poets made use of the senses to connect abstract thoughts with details of the physical world. Most appreciated the emotional intensity of recollecting the precise clothing of a departed lover or the horror /disgust implicit in the observation of "smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes". Most candidates were very well-informed and chose material for analysis from an impressive range of sources.
- Q.7 This was a more popular option than Question 6 and while it was quite well handled in many cases it did not produce as many essays with a convincing literary focus. The best essays managed to consider change from a broad perspective taking in cultural / historical changes (there was some impressive writing on 'The Wasteland') as well as considering change at a personal level. However, weaker responses moved directly to biographical details, mostly Hardy's bereavement, Eliot's relationships and his conversion to Anglicanism. Please see the comment table in the overview above regarding the effective and judicious use of contextual details, especially biographies of modern poets. It is a vital skill and candidates must keep their work on contexts closely connected to analysis.

Yeats and Abse

- Q.8 No responses seen.

Q.9 No responses seen.

Hughes and Plath

- Q.10 Although not quite as popular a choice as Question 11, this task produced some excellent writing and some thoughtfully chosen poems which allowed a detailed exploration of the ways in which the poets perceived and presented hostility and comfortlessness in nature. If anything, candidates could have worked a little more at making productive comparisons (AO4) and *developing* ideas about comparisons and contrasts between the language, imagery and forms employed by both poets. As they prepare for Section B, candidates should have plenty of opportunities to analyse poems by the different poets side-by-side and achieve a clear understanding of how the double-weighted AO2 can be addressed through *analytical* rather than descriptive efforts to make connections (AO4).
- Q.11 When we ask about the poets themselves being the focus of their work, it is less biographical details that we are seeking (although they come into it) and more evidence of the poets' self-analysis or self-discovery through their poetry. This pairing seems to attract more simple, biographical accounts than other options on Component 1. Centres are strongly advised to guide candidates beyond the colourful details of the poets' lives and explore the significance and influence of wider cultural and social contexts which can be shown to have influenced their work, and the ways in which it is read and understood now.

Larkin and Duffy

- Q.12 Here, and in responses to Question 13, we found some of the worst examples of asserted biographical facts and connections made between the poets on the basis of their personal histories rather than their work. There were long, disconnected and often inaccurate accounts of the poets' relationships, beliefs, sexuality and personality flaws. In one extreme case, candidates had learned 'equivalences' between characters or voices in the poems and real people. All circumstances in the poems were asserted as being 'real' e.g. the couple talking in bed are Larkin's parents trapped in their miserable marriage; 'Arnold' was Larkin's assistant librarian at Hull and 'Havisham' is a portrait of Duffy after she was deserted by Adrian Henry. It is understood that candidates will access independently study aids which might take these mistaken approaches to writing analytically and comparatively about poetry but centres are urged to do everything they can to redirect candidates' interests and energies into the study of the poetry itself. It was sad to see that in their eagerness to repeat biographical gossip, many candidates had ignored the potential usefulness here of poems such as 'An Arundel Tomb', 'MCMXIV'; 'Nostalgia' or (surprisingly) 'Stafford Afternoons'.
- Q.13 The comments for Question 12 above apply just as relevantly here. However, there were some excellent responses to this question many of which showed a keen appreciation and understanding of the illuminating differences between the ways in which Larkin and Duffy present their fellow humans. Weaker responses tended to stick firmly to an assertive line that Larkin is both a snob and a pessimist whereas Duffy is much more a poet in sympathy with her subjects. The tendency to approach poetry in this way possibly comes from an over-eager tendency to define poets' ideas and attitudes in line with narrow expectations and miss the nuances that make the work worthwhile. A common feature which often compromised responses was the frequent and unqualified use of 'positive' and 'negative' when writing about attitudes which made for broad and assertive rather than analytical writing.

Heaney and Sheers

- Q.14 Very few responses to this question were seen. The challenge was really to organise thoughts and responses relevantly and coherently across a very broad range of possible choices of text. Candidates could have chosen any area of human experience (passion; loss; domesticity and so on) but the temptation to narrate and assert aspects of biography was too much to resist in some cases. It is very important to emphasise that work under AO3, if it is to be valid and effective, must be closely linked to analysis (AO2).
- Q.15 This question gave an opportunity for candidates to debate the view expressed and balance different aspects of the poets' work with the focus firmly upon the 'presentation of different kinds of relationship'. It is always worth stressing that candidates are entitled to take issue with the critical views expressed in questions and they might, in this case, have made a strong case for 'nature' being 'at the heart' of Heaney's and Sheers' poetry rather than relationships provided they had given due critical attention to both the range of relationships and the ways in which they are presented. Once again, the danger here was an over-emphasis upon narrated biographies. Examiners who marked this response draw attention for the need to focus more precisely upon the connections (AO4) between the poets' work.

In both responses there tended to be unrealistic claims for some of the technical aspects of the verse. There might be a case for connecting Sheers' use of tercets to one of the nine or so verse forms in Welsh poetry but the point would need to be made in the light of the set task and in the course of close analysis. It would have been more profitable to concentrate upon the poets' language choices rather than identifying and labeling devices or verse forms as outlined in the first point considered in the table in the overview to this component.

Summary of key points:

- Teachers responsible for delivering both English Language, English Language and Literature and English Literature at A level should be sure that language used in the different classrooms and in practice written work meets the specific demands of the subject. The discussion of poetry in the English Literature classroom should concentrate upon vocabulary choices, implicit meaning, tone, auditory effects, imagery and literary devices such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole and so on. Most importantly, when making use of the technical terms from the literature 'toolbox', candidates must make sure they are not simply feature-spotting but analysing how such features function in making meaning.
- Specific work needs to be done in many cases upon the development of range and precision in candidates active vocabularies. In the past, teachers have devised vocabulary-based word games at the introductory stage of lessons where the focus and content of the lesson is anticipated. This hardly needs explaining, but if a poem of a certain sort will be the focus of the lesson, then candidates might be invited as a starter to develop as much vocabulary as possible out of the key word 'sad' for instance, leading them perhaps to miserable; gloomy; wretched; desolate; dejected and so on. Discussions about nuanced differences and the emotional 'temperature' of words will be greatly beneficial. The important thing is to raise awareness of the importance of demonstrating clear engagement when writing about poetry through effective word choices.
- There are useful materials available on the [WJEC Eduqas subject-specific website](#) which will help students to see the differences between descriptive writing, commentary and analysis. A failure to write analytically is the primary reason for depressed marks in this subject.

- Take care that well-intended support for students does not produce an over-rigid approach to the examination so that candidates are unprepared to interpret the specific demands of questions and to respond freshly and relevantly.
- Candidates should be dissuaded from attempting to include every fragment of critical comment they have learned in the course of study. Exercises designed to help students apply what they know about other interpretations relevantly, and to provide examples of the development of critical discussions would be of great benefit.
- The same applies to contextual knowledge. The key is to be found in whether or not a contextual reference can be connected to the ways in which the poet makes meaning. In other words AO2 and AO3 should be seen as bonded elements. Assertion should be discouraged and the presentation of simple equivalences between poetry and the real lives of writers i.e. “this is about a time when x did y” should be discouraged.
- Make a point of showing how AO2 and AO4 should be combined in a kind of ‘double helix’ when it comes to making connections between the work of different poets. Dissuade learners from combining AO3 and AO4 as in all but the very most capable hands this approach will not allow the candidates to address AO4 (‘Explore connections across *literary texts*’) with any success.
- Be cautious when identifying prosodic features; avoid both feature-spotting and unrealistic claims for the ways in which such features contribute to meaning.

Finally, as always, congratulations to teachers and candidates who have overcome all manner of difficulties to complete courses and to achieve levels of success which, in the very best performances, are genuinely humbling. Good luck with preparations for 2024 and I hope that at least some of the advice above might help candidates working at all levels to give of their best when the time comes.

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 2: DRAMA

Overview of the Component

First of all, we should remember the context in which this examination series has taken place as we all try to shake off the shadow of the pandemic. Although the majority of candidates this year will have had very little experience of public examinations, it was evident that candidates were generally well prepared for the varying demands of this closed book paper. Most readily incorporated *relevant contextual references* in the essay questions, and the best responses were able to select for themselves material which enriched and illuminated their argument. As reported last summer, it was pleasing to see further uptake in the use of ideological and cultural contexts. **AO3** remains the biggest challenge, however, not least because this assessment objective is double weighted in Section A part (ii), but also because some candidates fail to grasp that *engagement with contexts is an essential requirement in this specification* and that they must be able to see connections between texts and contexts. A number of candidates wrote impressive literary essays but neglected this most important assessment objective. It is vital that candidates remember that examiners cannot give a high mark for AO3 if this has not been addressed in depth, even if the marks awarded for other assessment objectives are very high. In other words, an astounding literary essay that is conceptually informed and critically aware cannot receive full marks if it makes no reference to contexts in response to the Shakespeare essay or the two drama texts in Section B. The best contextual approach continues to be that of integrating contextual points into the argument, closely supported by specific reference and analysis. We are still seeing essays where sweeping statements are made about women's lives in various historical contexts as well as potted histories of King James.

There was again an improved focus on *critical engagement* this year and many learners had used their time wisely by researching other opinions on the texts. We are still seeing candidates who approach **AO5** by throwing in some dubious statements which 'a critic' has made, then failing to use the expressed view *purposefully*. It is only possible to give at best Band 2 for simple acknowledgements. Candidates should be reminded that they can demonstrate their critical engagement by developing their thinking about the text in the light of the question, and this is done so most effectively when related to specific analysis and support.

Close textual analysis (**AO2**) and support have improved, and accurate quotation was evident at all levels of achievement, impressive in a closed-book exam.

We are seeing for **AO1** further encouraging adoption of *academic style and register* across the range of achievement, and many examiners expressed their admiration for several scholarly responses which were university standard, particularly in Section B. It was also pleasing this year to see an improvement to essay introductions, as many candidates offered a focused, short introductory paragraph which usually targeted one or more assessment objectives. Similarly, in responses to the extract question on Shakespeare, there was a notable improvement in briefly placing the extract within the play, as a way in to engage in focused discussion of the extract itself. However, we would ask that learners are encouraged to aim for more concise responses to the essay task in Section B. It is evident that they have so much to say about both plays that they inevitably try to cram in everything they know, and it is not uncommon to see complete answer books on section B. Apart from the length, there are two other concerns: handwriting deteriorates rapidly in the rush to get points down, and sentences become shapeless, ungrammatical and frequently illegible and unclear.

In Section B, where **AO4** is double-weighted, there was some improvement on integrating both texts into a cogent framework for responding to the given task of *making connections* between the two plays and engaging with the critical view in the question. However, in some cases learners did not give enough careful consideration to making meaningful connections and what the difference is between merely *identifying* some features and *examining* key ideas and issues, including language, dramatic techniques and staging/setting. The best responses were focused firmly on the texts themselves and offered discussions which were conceptualised and thoughtful.

There are some practicalities which are important for a paper which is marked online, and we would be grateful if these could be remembered for future series. Some scripts are difficult to read because an inappropriate pen has been used and this poses problems for scanning these papers which is marked on-screen. Please encourage your candidates to always take a **new page** for **each new question**, as this again can be problematic for the scanning process. If the candidate's handwriting is difficult to read, the wisest solution is to apply to WJEC Eduqas for the opportunity to produce a word-processed response.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Shakespeare

Despite the positive aspects noted above, it is noticeable that many candidates do Section A last, and sometimes do not complete part (i) at all. Not attempting the first short question on the paper might be a timing issue, as incomplete responses at the end of a paper frequently occur because the candidate has run out of time, but it is careless to throw away the chance of 15 marks simply because of poor time management. This is disappointing as it provides candidates with the opportunity to link the analysis they make in (i) with their discussion in (ii). It can prove very beneficial indeed. This was most readily proven in Q5, where candidates were able to incorporate detailed analysis of Gonzalo's vision and compare it to, say, the societal impositions that make such freedoms and idealism all but impossible. It is also a very useful way into the paper. Candidates take time to get started and part (i) may be seen as somewhat of a 'warm-up' exercise for the more demanding 2 questions that follow. Inadequate responses to part (i) questions are often because the candidate has spent far too long on the Section B question. The vast majority engaged with the chosen extract and were able to discuss how Shakespeare shapes meaning through a consideration of characterisation, setting and staging. However, there were some candidates who appeared to have seen the passage for the first time and who attempted to approach it as an unseen exercise. It is advisable for all responses to be a side of a page for the extract question, as it is difficult to earn good marks unless the examiner has sufficient evidence that the candidate has done justice to the assessment objectives.

The following points need to be considered:

- Candidates must ensure they read the extract in full and respond to the specific question asked. Too often, candidates missed a large portion of the extract by focusing solely on a point which they had presumably rehearsed and were desperate to make.
- Candidates must remember that where the question asks for discussion of 2 characters, this must be done. Quite frequently in Question 1 and Question 3, candidates seemingly forgot either Cordelia or Claudius. That being said, it was not uncommon to see subtle nods to both characters (where discussion of one illuminated the analysis of the other by implication), but candidates must ensure they are explicit in their analysis. Similarly, if the question is focused on one character but one or more characters are also present and are given lines, some consideration of how the other character(s) help to shape Shakespeare's presentation is useful.
- Examiners were happy to see that many candidates referred (often in quite some detail) to these plays as a performance, which starkly contrasts with responses last year. There were some very thoughtful points about audience reaction, stage directions and the dramatic arcs of the plays.

Q.1 *King Lear*

This play remains a popular choice, and most candidates found the extract and question accessible.

Part (i)

Occasionally in the extract question, candidates made overinflated claims about the significance of one or both characters speaking in blank verse, as if this was a deliberate choice for these lines rather than the frequent choice for royal characters. (Of course, if more effectively contrasted with, say, the disjointed prose of Lear at other points, then a more valid point emerged.) Some candidates interpreted Lear as still mad or deluded to a degree that was unconvincing. Yes, he is unrealistically optimistic but the repetition of “No, no, no etc.” does not really represent a breaking down of his speech due to mental instability. Those who insisted he is mad at this stage were unaware of his arc in the play and had forgotten about the earlier scene when he awakes to find Cordelia and has his anagnorisis. Better answers saw the dramatic contrast between the pathos of Lear’s happiness and optimism in dire circumstances, and also the pathos of Cordelia’s practicality and realism. The best saw the dramatic function of Edmund in the extract as a reminder of the presentation of Lear and Cordelia as prisoners and their grim fate, and others discussed the terse, callous language of Edmund set against the lyricism of Lear. Further strong responses accurately interpreted the ‘gilded butterflies’ as the superficial courtiers of Lear’s past life as King, arguing that he is now able to distinguish between the trivial and the important.

Part (ii)

The question provided the opportunity for effective discussion, with some candidates arguing cogently in support of the division as a catalyst for the play’s suffering while others effectively considered the seeds of suffering in the Gloucester sub-plot, or other interpretations about a lack of empathy or family love being the principal cause of suffering.

There was some fruitful discussion of Shakespeare’s use of Greek tragedy features and some consideration of feminist criticism in relation to Goneril and Regan. As noted above, the ability to quote accurately and freely from the play was admirable and was a useful support for responses across the whole range of performance.

Q.2 *Antony and Cleopatra*

This play is enjoying a boost in popularity, and it was pleasing to see how candidates had fully engaged with the play and in particular, Shakespeare’s characterisation.

Part (i)

Those who had read the play diligently were aware immediately of the reason for Octavius’ anger, and his sense of personal grievance that his sister had arrived back home without due respect and acclamation. Some candidates attributed to Caesar some mistreatment of his sister that showed a misunderstanding of aspects of the extract. He does not consider her a “market-maid”, for instance, but instead is outraged that her entrance was not heralded and she has been treated by Antony as an insignificant person such as a market- maid instead of his wife and Octavius Caesar’s sister. The strongest responses grasped the difference in characterisation between Octavius and Octavia, although also observing their close sibling relationship: several saw Octavia as quietly assertive, maintaining her sense of loyalty to both her husband and her brother, while others saw her as a victim of male arrogance. Many were interested in the use of hyperbole in the use of nature imagery.

Part (ii)

The essay question was generally done well, with candidates engaging readily with the focus on some of the principal concerns of the play. Many argued cogently that the passion v reason conflict is best shown through the characterisation of Antony himself, with the best responses including a detailed analysis of Enobarbus' personal conflict. Contexts were used well on the whole and Egyptian and Roman values were closely discussed in their interrogation of the play's speeches and settings.

Q.3 *Hamlet*

Part (i)

While the question for part (i) does not specify that the scene must be placed in context, this was an extract that benefited from precisely that. Some candidates took Gertrude's statements at face value; but a more sophisticated interpretation was informed by consideration of how she and Hamlet had concluded their dealings in the closet scene, and therefore how Gertrude chose to present her son to Claudius. Similarly, Claudius' speeches were better considered in the light of his own duplicity and therefore gained resonance if viewed in the light of diverting guilt and attention from himself. Some candidates did not appear to recognise the use of the royal "we", attributing meanings to statements concerning himself only that were thus less accurate when applied to the two characters of the scene as a couple ("It shall be laid to us...so much was our love"). Some responses viewed the extract as an example of joint parental concern, while the stronger responses saw Claudius' ruthlessness, focusing on the irony of Claudius' image of disease in relation to Hamlet, and Gertrude's carefully chosen nature imagery to modify her presentation of Hamlet and allow the audience to see that she is carrying out Hamlet's request in the previous scene.

Part (ii)

The part (ii) question's critical view yielded rich scope for discussion, with family loyalty usefully applied to Gertrude, to Hamlet, to his relationship with Old Hamlet and the cause for revenge, to Laertes, to Fortinbras, to Ophelia and her obedience. The context of classical and/or revenge tragedy was usefully applied by many, with some good use also made of Protestant and Catholic attitudes to ghosts and/or purgatory, and some more tangential reference made to Elizabeth I's succession. Some approached the question by exploring the *disloyalty* of Claudius to his brother, and Gertrude's disloyalty to her husband's memory.

Those who discussed Hamlet's disloyalty to Ophelia through his antic disposition in the 'nunnery' scene and to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern forgot the question's specific focus on *family* loyalty. It was interesting to note that many candidates did not fully engage with the idea of '*destructive*'. It is important to consider all parts of the question, even though it is acceptable to prioritise one aspect over another.

Q.4 *King Henry IV Part 1*

A very small minority of candidates study this play, but those who do demonstrate a genuine engagement with the play's characters, themes and language. This particular play evidently offers rich pickings for historical and cultural contexts and candidates were able to connect the text with contexts consistently.

Part (i)

Most grasped the essence of Hotspur's character and his attitude towards the Prince. Inevitably, candidates discussed the readiness to fight, his belief in the justice of his cause and his contempt for the wildness of Prince Hal. The stronger responses drew attention to the use of the Messenger who was seen as a necessary curb to Hotspur's hot-headedness, reminding the audience also of the urgent military situation, whilst also noting that Hotspur's florid/hyperbolic language exemplifies his love of chivalry and codes of honourable military conduct. Very few made use of the key word 'Esperance' in relation to this aspect. However, there was good discussion of Hotspur's aggressive language as he anticipates the battle and his use of motivational language to rally his men.

Part (ii)

The essay question seemed to be accessible to all those who attempted this play. Falstaff as well as the Prince was seen as a useful subject for debating the subject of 'sacrificing public duty' for 'personal desires', with some detailed examination of his 'honour' speech and his contribution to the comic scenes earlier in the play. Others chose to discuss the King as a prime example of this critical view, using the rich material of the rebels' speeches with their references to the King's past behaviour as the usurper Bolingbroke, as well as the King's speeches to Hal about his conduct in relation to King Richard as a contrary point of view.

Those who had given careful thought to the presentation of Hotspur in part i were able to argue cogently that Hotspur was less about public duty in his quest for conflict with the king, and more about a personal and family vendetta.

Q.5 *The Tempest*

The *Tempest* is growing in popularity with each year that passes. Some of the most sophisticated essays which examiners see in this section of the paper are in response to this play. This particular question gave opportunities to engage with concepts and contexts.

Part (i)

It was evident that some candidates missed the irony of Gonzalo's speech, in that Sebastian and Antonio mock Gonzalo's utopian vision as impossible. Many candidates, conversely, felt that the 'Long live Gonzalo!' and 'Save his majesty!' were genuine endorsements of Gonzalo's vision. However, there were many who saw the contradictions in Gonzalo's ideal kingdom and others who had plenty to say about the marginalisation of women. It was a pity that for several candidates who were less confident of this extract that there was little engagement in the comedy of the scene for the audience in terms of the situation and dialogue. Some candidates wanted to credit contextual influences in Montaigne, where they recognised it, although context is not credited as such in part (i); but more significant was perhaps the lack of focus in some answers on the presentation of Gonzalo, rather than simply the state he portrays. His character as a noble Neapolitan was sometimes ignored, along with his good intentions; and more could have been made by some of how he and his higher ideals are shown in the effective contrast with the cynicism of Sebastian and Antonio. Their contributions to the scene were ignored by some or taken rather literally as valid criticisms of Gonzalo - although the naivety of the latter was fairly claimed by some.

Part ii

The part (ii) question was again an open invitation to discuss a range of possible aspects of the play, with useful contexts including colonialism – sometimes very relevantly applied, in criticism of Prospero or Caliban or both - as well as useful attitudes to magic.

It is entirely possible, as observed in some responses this year, for candidates to access the higher bands by delimiting their focus to a particular theme or idea. Indeed, streamlined and pointed essays are often more rigorously argued than those which attempt to incorporate everything the candidate knows about the play. The most erudite responses are judiciously selective in their material and use brief, well-explained quotations or support from the play to elucidate their analysis. Context will then deftly embolden this analysis. Rather than acting as a tag-on, candidates at the highest level interweave context where specifically relevant to the development of the argument. One of the strongest responses was seen to take Shakespeare's use of the masque in the play as a central focus for discussion of the 'negative view of an ideal world' debate. The result was a sophisticated literary essay which seamlessly blended AO5, AO2 and AO3, drawing on literary traditions and genres.

In general, candidates examined the character presentation of Prospero as their chief way in to this central debate, and most argued that the control of Prospero was the key reason why an ideal world can never be a positive construct on the island.

Section B Drama

Candidates are well advised to keep an eye on the different AOs they need to fulfil for this essay task. The occasional candidate gives a nod to context in their initial introduction, where they attribute each play to its decade and/or genre, and then does not really return to it as an AO. However, many candidates skilfully interwove the different requirements; and the best came up with connections between the plays that were perceptive, sometimes surprising and original, and well-founded, as shown by developed AO2 analysis.

The most popular pairing by a considerable margin is *Malfi/Streetcar*, and examiners were very impressed with the enthusiasm for both texts shown by candidates across the range of ability. *Faustus/Enron* are continuing to attract new centres and we saw some very pertinent context-rich essays written on these texts, as well as several of the other pairings.

Q.6/7 Doctor Faustus/Enron

Both question choices invited candidates to think about important concepts in the plays, and there was a fairly even divide in choice between the two questions. Many considered all kinds of relevant boundaries, including religious/moral, rule-breaking, boundaries in regard to personal relationships, societal traditions and expectations etc. Many found plenty to write about in focusing on the main protagonists themselves, but also by offering insights regarding the minor characters and audiences of the different time periods.

Just as in Q6, Q7 required a close examination of the main protagonists in order to discuss the idea of 'irresponsible', 'wrong' and 'regardless' of consequences', with many readily seeing connections between Faustus, Fastow and Skilling. It was pleasing to see candidates discussing connections between the playwrights' deployment of stagecraft and spectacle, and also making connections with situation/circumstances and contemporary beliefs. It was also reassuring to see the morality play genre and traditions knowledgeably discussed, while the refreshingly different spectacles and stagecraft of Prebble provided for some thoughtful and genuinely academic debate.

Q.8/9 *The Duchess of Malfi*/A Streetcar Named Desire

In Q8, Blanche and the Duchess were often considered well in the light of the statement regarding *outsiders*, with familiar material still intelligently used in the light of this statement. Other characters also came under consideration, especially Bosola and, less often, Antonio but also, interestingly, Mitch and/or Stanley, depending on how the Old or New South were characterised. The statement “focuses exclusively” invited consideration of other useful elements; but the occasional candidate omitted to answer the full question (“the presentation of outsiders”), not the statement in isolation. There was good analysis of stagecraft and detailed discussion of Williams’ stage directions in presenting characters as outsiders. The Duchess was shown to retain her identity, despite her harsh treatment as an ostracised outsider, while most felt that the consequences of being an outsider from the outset caused Blanche’s disintegration. Many acknowledged that the Duchess is not technically an outsider although she becomes one, while Blanche is an outsider throughout. Social status, backgrounds and morality were mined thoroughly for contexts. There was a surprising amount of sympathy for Ferdinand in *Malfi*, especially regarding his lycanthropy, while some sympathised with Stanley who was also an ‘outsider’ in terms of his social class. It was disappointing that many candidates virtually ignored the ‘dare to be different’ strand offered as part of the critical view in the question.

In Q9, again, there were many possibilities in the answering of this question, weighing up physical abuse particularly – but not exclusively – as experienced by the female protagonists, and also the mental suffering of a range of characters, male and female. There was no right or wrong interpretation of which had the greater impact; but the best answers kept their eye on the dramatic presentation of these experiences, as all Section B responses should. So the wording of the statement, with its mention of “dramatic tension”, was sometimes very helpfully referenced by candidates who considered dramatic structure and techniques in the unfolding of the presentation. Stella and Mitch were interestingly considered in the light of mental suffering, for example, in their crises towards the end of “Streetcar” while, as noted in Q8, Ferdinand received some sympathetic discussion in view of his mental instability and his regret in regard to the Duchess. Stronger responses argued that the worst suffering was the threat of violence and the off-stage presentation of violence, particularly for the audience. As always, candidates were eager to discuss attitudes towards and mistreatment of women in both plays and there is plenty of evidence to find in regard of this aspect. The amount of perceptive, sophisticated analysis of language, dramatic techniques and imagery was astounding this year.

Q.10/11 *The Revenger’s Tragedy*/Loot

For both questions on this pairing, responses were frequently informed by apt context, perhaps more (and obviously so) in the question on religion than its counterpart. Candidates grasped the disturbing yet comical undertones of both Middleton and Orton’s texts. Astute analysis of the moral depravity of both plays was offered. For example, there were some intellectually stimulating arguments which hinged around the propensity (and indeed desire) for audiences to suspend their disbelief and willingly engage in the complex moral framework of the plays.

For Q10, candidates embraced the opportunity to examine the presentation of sex, lust, marriage and death in determining the argument of how both plays might please and *repulse* in equal measure. Both plays offer considerable support for both, with comedy, farce and black comedy being weighed up against disturbing scenes of cruelty/violence and careless disregard for the dead. There was some excellent discussion of stagecraft in both plays, and careful scrutiny of the different types of dialogue, the strongest able to see connections by virtue of characters’ attitudes and values, particularly in regard to the treatment of women.

Q.12/13 *Lady Windermere's Fan*/Betrayal

Wilde and Pinter remain a less popular pairing but the readiness with which candidates found successful connections between the two plays continues to remind us of the rich possibilities that this pairing offers. They perhaps provide an accessible and arguably more focused pairing for some candidates. Frequent use is made of certain comments by Billington, which are helpful; but as noted elsewhere, the statements in both questions also give rich scope for AO5 argument.

Echoing observations made last year, examiners were thoroughly impressed by the responses to these texts. Evidently, candidates are working at a very high level when comparing Wilde and Pinter. These are challenging texts (as are all the other pairings on this paper), but responses were often argued with élan, and there was a consistently comparative focus on ideas of sexual morality and the presentation of women as powerless. Responses were often characterised by a sharp critical eye. Candidates, it seemed, were ever ready to tackle the foundation of the question itself. For instance, one argued in Q13 that women may well be powerless, but they arguably also establish the metrics by which they themselves are defined and so gain an indisputably strong sense of individualism in spite of the codes that society attempted to enforce.

Q12 provoked some good discussion of sexual morality, as specified in the question; often informed by the statement, although candidates made more of the “art of making conversation” in relation to Wilde (perhaps rightly). Good discussion was also had about fidelity to one’s partner, with some interesting argument that the most important fidelity in Pinter was in fact asexual (or at least, not consummated) in the friendship of Jerry and Robert.

Q13 also elicited good discussion and the question’s reference to “society’s views” prompted more explicit AO3 consideration than perhaps was the case in Q12. Some of this remains rather generalised and stereotyped, particularly in consideration of women’s roles as house-keeper and child-rearer; this does not seem very applicable to the upper-class protagonists of Wilde or the working lives of the professional gallery-owner and doctor (offstage) in Pinter. Again, some candidates successfully argued against the statement while others endorsed it, for either one or both plays. It is the skill and evident knowledge with which they present their case that is assessed, with the examiner keeping an open mind. A candidate that takes time to plan and present an overview of their judgement at the start often writes a more convincing essay as a result. Candidates must be reminded that more than 4/5 pages is almost always too long. Cogency, coherence and organisation suffer as a result.

Q14/15 *Measure for Measure*/Murmuring Judges

Very few centres study this pairing. However, those who did became thoroughly immersed in the task of discussing the abuse of *power and authority* in Q14 or society’s failure to break down *intolerance and prejudice* in Q15. One candidate wrote in response to Q14: ‘the plays both present how the authority system is in dire need of reform.’ Another reflected ‘how a lack of checks and balances’ lead to abuse of power/authority.

Examiners were impressed with how candidates showed their own concerns about power and authority from their own contemporary perspectives on society and their perceptions of those who have the power and authority to run it. The standard of discussion on these texts was consistently high, with most candidates showing an impressive grasp of concepts and issues, as well as a keen appreciation of the plays’ stagecraft and characterisation.

Summary of key points:

- Encourage learners to think carefully about *all* aspects of an essay question, signalling to the examiner that they have done so, before choosing to focus their response on particular aspects.
- Discourage over-long responses and encourage shorter sentences.
- Candidates should aim for coherence and cogency rather than quantity.
- Contexts are only useful if they support the point made or are helpful to the discussion of the question. Sweeping, uninformed statements about how people were treated in various time periods are of little consequence without specific examples.
- Continue to encourage using literary/cultural material for contexts, making learners aware that other plays by Shakespeare are useful and specific sources.
- Avoid using critical views if they are not relevant or especially if they are fabricated. Examiners would prefer to read candidates' own critical discussion.
- There is a *worrying new trend* towards *analysis by narration/description*. Please urge learners to avoid retelling the story, however beautifully and accurately. Examiners know the stories back to front!

ENGLISH LITERATURE

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

COMPONENT 3: UNSEEN TEXTS

Overview of the Component

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

Section A: Prose

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

Despite Q1 having three different supporting materials and Q2 having only two, there was a similar amount of critical and contextual material for candidates to use whichever their question choice. The majority of candidates engaged with these well, using them to inform their reading and shape their response. A small number of candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learned contextual information but it was pleasing to see this becoming less common than in previous years.

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

Section B: Poetry

Both poems provided candidates with plenty of opportunity to gain the full range of marks for this section of the paper. Of the two, Jennings' 'Absence' was the more popular choice with Douglas' 'Vergissmeinnicht' still providing some excellent responses.

The previous trend for template-style answers decreased again this year which was promising to see. However, there were still too many responses that fell back on feature-spotting or listing techniques as an approach. Candidates should be encouraged to use appropriate poetic terminology but only so far as it supports them in engaging with the meanings in the text and discussing how they have been shaped. It is also worth mentioning again the need to ensure literary terminology is used appropriately and accurately. While candidates are not marked down for using linguistic terms, a focus on this can lead them away from useful literary analysis and, in such a short exam, misapplication of their time can mean missed opportunities.

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

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

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Unseen Prose

Question 1 (1880-1910): *The Green Carnation* by Robert Hitchens

Strong responses showed an immediate and confident understanding of this extract from a satirical novel and were able to use the supporting extracts to help shape their argument. Those who carefully read the introduction were able to comment on the connections to Wilde and the Aestheticism movement. Too many candidates mis-read this information and attributed the piece to Wilde himself which led to some responses that struggled to engage effectively. It is worth reiterating the need for candidates to read and to re-read all information on the paper carefully before embarking on an answer.

The majority of responses were able to analyse the highly detailed approach to scene-setting and the rich and sensuous language used to describe the protagonist's bedroom and appearance. Many went on to successfully connect this with the supporting materials.

Stronger responses were able to explore tone and attitudes within the extract with those at the very top end able to maturely question nature of the satire.

Less successful responses were characterised by narrative comments that re-told the scene or made basic or assertive comments on the language used by the writer. In order to be at least clearly engaged (AO1) with a text candidates must be able to go beyond an accurate description of characters and events and be able, with clear support (AO2) to say something convincing about a writer's techniques and their effects.

It was pleasing to see almost all candidates engaging with the supporting materials on some level. Generally, candidates dealt well with discussing both AO3 and AO5 with many using the supporting materials more than once to make their discussions purposeful and clear. Those who were able to neatly weave pertinent contextual points throughout their essay, enhancing their analysis with concise and relevant reference to the supporting extracts were more successful.

Some candidates still relied too heavily on pre-learnt context, as with previous years and these responses were characterised with large chunks of contextual information divorced from the text or tenuously linked. With this question, there was a tendency to regurgitate a short summary of Wilde's life, trials and conviction without making this relevant to the text. While a broad understanding of the time period and social, cultural and literary context can be valuable to integrate into an answer, it must be linked to the text. It is worth looking at the language of the assessment criteria and recognising that 'connections between unseen texts and contexts' are rewarded.

As with previous years, some candidates were not confident writing about the form of the text and focused on more poetic concepts such as 'sibilance', 'volta' or 'alliteration' when there were other, more relevant prose concepts to be discussed that could have developed their answers further.

Finally, it was wonderful to see candidates seem to genuinely enjoy the opportunity to discuss the topics and themes raised in this text. There were some excellent explorations of Hastings' 'effeminate or over-the-top' portrayal and modern readings of this. However, it is worth reminding candidates that a modern reading cannot 'influence' the writer post-production and that it is the reader whose perspective is changing.

Question 2 (1918-1939): *The Lost Girl* by D. H. Lawrence

The majority of candidates who chose to answer on the extract from the 1918-1939 period identified a range of relevant elements in the passage such as the pervasive misanthropy, exploration of the class system and, of course, portrayal of women. More candidates took the opportunity to discuss the structure of the extract, perhaps because of the shifting time-settings and shift between sociological essay and story-telling styles. However, some candidates did not take the opportunity to look at the extract as a whole but 'zoomed in' on the sections with which they felt confident. This resulted in some close analysis of phrases divorced from the overall meanings in the text. Some candidates did not even discuss the introduction of James Houghton in the final paragraph. Candidates should remember that engaging with the breadth of the text and looking at it as a whole can be just as important as engaging with aspects of it in depth.

As with Question 1, most candidates utilised the critical statements, at some level, in their response. More successful responses began to challenge some elements of the supporting materials, resulting in some mature and individual discussions. There were still a number of candidates who inserted pre-learned context about industrialisation or marriage and women into their essay without really exploring the effect of this on the text. They seemed confident with the knowledge they had but unable to actually apply that knowledge to literary analysis. While a broad understanding of the time period and social, cultural and literary context can be valuable to integrate into an answer, it must be linked to the text. It is worth looking at the language of the assessment criteria and recognising that 'connections between unseen texts and contexts' are rewarded.

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

Section A: Unseen Poetry

Question 3: 'Absence' by Elizabeth Jennings

The more popular choice, Jennings' poem provided a series of challenges that were met with success by many candidates. There were some good overviews, demonstrating candidates' engagement from the start. Stronger responses were able to show sound grasp of meaning when discussing the impact of the title, the tone of melancholic reminiscence and the language patterns used by the poet. The majority of candidates were able to notice the shift in tone and there were some impressive discussions about the intensification of language towards the end of the poem.

Less successful responses only had a simple understanding and imposed their own meanings onto the poem, perhaps having assumed an initial reading was enough to grasp implicit meaning. As mentioned in the general comments, it was as though candidates had read the title and opening lines and presumed the poem was straight forward and therefore, there was very little to explore. It is important to remember that the poems selected are provided for all candidates and offer the opportunity to achieve marks in all bands. To achieve Band 5 marks, candidates must demonstrate sophisticated analysis and evaluation of writers' use of poetic techniques and be fully engaged with the text. Less successful responses tended to be narrative and even speculative, suggesting what the speaker might be feeling, regretting or missing about the absentee and why they aren't there.

Careful reading and re-reading, as previously advised, would have given candidates more time for processing their ideas, putting them on trial and then selecting the ones that could be substantiated by the text. There was some misuse of terminology, whether incorrect identification of techniques (many candidates suggested it was a sonnet) or terms used with no qualifying discussion or support to analysis.

Question 4: 'Vergissmeinnicht' by Keith Douglas

Douglas' poem was slightly less popular with candidates than Jennings' but for those who did choose 'Vergissmeinnicht', the challenges it presented were often tackled successfully. There were discussions about the effect of the title, the implicit meanings about the futility of war and the poet taking the subject-matter beyond a straight-forward account of war. Successful responses engaged with the majority of the poem, connecting patterns, identifying changes and discussing the effect of the poet's language choices.

Some less successful candidates had a simpler understanding of the poem, perhaps focusing too much on one word or image ('frowning barrel') that then led them to make unsupported assertions or miss wider ideas in the poem. Some responses also had a tendency to focus on linguistic terminology rather than literary ideas, meaning they missed opportunities to recognise and discuss the form and relevant poetic concepts.

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

Less successful responses tended to be narrative and even speculative, suggesting what the speaker might be feeling, how the soldier died (many asserted that he had taken his own life) and even how the dead soldier would feel now. These assertions were often disconnected from any textual support and meant candidates were struggling to demonstrate 'engagement' with the poem.

Summary of key points

- Give adequate time to reading and re-reading of the texts, supporting materials and question. There is often important information that is missed and can then have a significant impact on the candidate's approach.
- Spend time planning in order to offer a brief, supported overview in the introduction that confirms understanding and engagement with the extract or poem.
- In Section A, avoid over-reliance on pre-learnt contextual material that becomes divorced from the analysis of the text and takes time away from candidate's engagement with the supporting materials. Any pre-learnt context should support candidates in their understanding of how meaning has been shaped.

- Some candidate responses for Section B seemed to suffer from a lack of time.
- Make careful and accurate use of literary rather than linguistic terminology, recognising the form of the text, whether poetry or prose, and using suitable concept.
- Remember that the business of critical analysis is to draw-out meaning rather than to impose or assert it or, even, speculate about fictional personas' lives.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
GCE A LEVEL
Summer 2023
COMPONENT 4 (NEA): PROSE STUDY

Overview of the Component

The Moderation Process

This is to ensure that centres assess their candidates' work consistently and fairly, applying the criteria in line with agreed standards exemplified in supporting materials. Moderators judge the accuracy of the centre's overall marking, paying close attention to the on-script annotation from primary markers and the summative comments in support of the separate marks for each Assessment Objective.

In the majority of cases in this series, the moderators were pleased to report candidates' work had been rewarded appropriately and the centres' assessment was secure. However, in just under a fifth of the centres entered, the initial sample suggested the criteria had been applied too generously. When this happened, the centre's work was referred to a senior moderator who reviewed the sample to decide whether to recommend adjustment to the centre's marking to bring it in line with accepted standards. In some instances where the rank order was insecure, the centre was contacted to request more examples of the candidates' work. No centre's marks were altered on the advice of a single moderator; only when the work had been seen by at least two moderators were adjustments considered.

An individual report was written for each centre, giving constructive feedback on assessment and internal standardisation to help the centre make their marking as secure as possible in future submissions. Moderators have a relatively unique opportunity to see a wide range of different text combinations, approaches to task setting and good practice in annotation which can be useful perspective for centres who often see only their own candidates' work.

While centres had a free choice of text and task in this component, all texts had to be submitted for prior approval by Eduqas. No indication of how the texts would be combined was required at that stage, however, so moderators may have commented in the report on the centre's text pairing. Reports may also have included reflections on the wording of titles and how well they allowed candidates to address all the assessment objectives. Centres were often directed to existing advice on task setting and standardisation on the Eduqas website.

This Principal Moderator's report outlines the main findings of the moderation process condensed from the moderators' centre reports and is intended to help self-reflective departments review and adapt their own plans for preparing future cohorts for this component.

The moderation sample

Moderators were grateful to the majority of centres who ensured their candidates' work arrived on time and in good order. Many clearly took pride in preparing the sample carefully to facilitate the moderation process and should be commended for their professionalism.

- In the most efficient samples, the coversheets, as official documents of record, had been completed in *full* with all details checked, including the correct marks total and word count and the crucial signatures from candidate and teacher confirming that there had been no unfair practice. There were detailed supporting comments in the space provided for each AO, ideally combining direct reference to the assessment criteria with specific comments on the individual candidate's performance.
- Most importantly of all, the candidates' work was *annotated in sufficient detail to clarify how decisions about marks had been made*. Rather than simply identifying when a candidate had addressed an assessment objective with a bald AO marker, the centres demonstrating best practice indicated their value judgments on the candidate's achievements at that point via brief band descriptors, such as 'AO2 clear/sensible' or 'AO4 sound/secure'.
- *Detailed on-script annotation helped to make the assessment more secure*, as did the dialogue between teachers on dual marked essays as part of a rigorous internal moderation process; explaining to a colleague how the candidate had met the band criteria at key points was a useful process for markers. In those centres where the candidates had been encouraged to print double-space there was room for more thoughtful, targeted comments.
- The most accurate markers were often willing to point out *where opportunities had been missed as well as highlighting candidates' strengths* which gave them a more rounded picture of the candidate's performance.
- Summative comments by some markers *referred directly to Eduqas standardising exemplar essays*, making clear they had consulted the online support materials in preparation for assessing their own candidates' work. This was especially useful to sole teachers delivering the whole specification in smaller centres and was more evidence of good practice.

Unfortunately, some samples were less helpful to the moderator.

- Some work arrived very late and several centres had to be contacted to request missing candidate or teacher signatures, without which the responses were not appropriately validated. It is worthwhile recalling the specification requirement that *all candidates'* coversheets must be completed in full, not solely those chosen for the sample.
- Sparse annotation was problematic in quite a few centres and often linked to inaccurate assessment. Some markers had simply used occasional ticks and/or AO numbers without any comment or reference to the criteria to help explain decisions. This obviously made it very difficult to discern why credit had been awarded and often resulted in overly generous or inconsistent application of the criteria.
- There was limited or no evidence of internal moderation in some centres where the responsibility for assessing all the candidates' responses, and placing them accurately in rank order, seems to have been assigned to a single marker, without benefit of discussion of standards which has proven so valuable in NEA components.
- In most centres there was some indication of internal moderation in that a second marker had agreed the marks, but this was not always accompanied by any on-script annotation to clarify why the primary marker's judgements had been accepted. When the internal moderation led to altered marks, these changes were not always explained. Adjustments made on the actual coversheet sometimes caused confusion as the final marks were not always clearly legible or the total tally exactly with the one entered on IAMIS.

Moderators recognised that attention to detail in annotating essays, carrying out internal moderation and preparing the sample was not solely professional courtesy; there was often a close correlation between good practice and accurate, consistent marking, which is obviously what everyone involved in the process was aiming for.

Preparing for 2023

Assessment

In centres where the assessment was not secure, there were often issues relating to text pairing and task setting, the quality of AO2 analysis and over reliance on study materials which made it more difficult for candidates to meet the assessment objectives. In some cases these points had already been flagged for attention in individual centre reports as well as having been repeatedly covered in some detail in previous Principal Moderator's reports. Rather than include the same detailed advice in this report, it might therefore be more helpful to outline successful and less successful approaches and direct centres' attention to the more comprehensive feedback given in previous reports, especially last year's in 2022.

Text pairing

A rich array of stimulating and challenging texts was tackled by the candidates, some actually prompting moderators to read unfamiliar titles. New centres often ask for text pairing recommendations, but experience has shown that combinations which might work well for one centre or individual candidate can be less successful for another.

By far the most important factor in success was how well the candidates *knew and understood* the texts they were writing about. Any approach which encouraged the candidates to reread and study their chosen texts was worthy of consideration.

More centres this year opted to allow their candidates a totally free choice of texts rather than teaching one or both. This clearly gave confident candidates scope to demonstrate impressive levels of independence. Unfortunately, however, it was much less successful for those who are not keen readers and whose experience of prose works, and specifically novels, was less secure. As these are the only prose works studied in the A level specification, candidates clearly needed a lot of support and guidance in how to study, analyse and compare two challenging texts and not all were able to cope with so much independence.

Those centres where the free choice of texts was most successful had clearly supported the candidates with a comprehensive, carefully structured programme of study relating to the genre. When this was not in place and candidates were left more to their own devices in planning their study, there was a lack of confidence. Unfortunately, this often led to an over reliance on relatively low value on-line study materials, adversely affecting the quality of the candidates' critical appreciation for AO2 in particular.

Many centres had opted to teach a common text in one of the period categories, allowing candidates to select their second text. In some cases, this was a choice of two while others offered a wider range of texts or even a free choice. This seemed to work well in most centres, as the candidates still had opportunities to demonstrate independence but the supported study of the common text increased their knowledge and understanding of the novel genre. It was reassuring to see that most centres had wisely emphasised the need to give both texts equal attention.

Other centres decided to teach both texts in common, a valid approach but not successful when all candidates were effectively writing about the same topic even though the wording of the task might have differed slightly. This often meant the same material appeared in many of the responses and, in some cases, there were even similar approaches to the organisation of the essay. This obviously made it difficult for candidates to demonstrate the creative engagement, independence and autonomy needed for Band 5 and created problems for markers trying to distinguish between, and assess accurately, similar responses. In those centres where there was a firm emphasis on varying tasks and encouraging candidates to choose a topic which genuinely interested them, the teaching of both texts was not problematic and candidates did meet the criteria for all bands, including the highest.

It was refreshing to note that many centres were willing to review their approach to text choice in light of their moderator's comments and to make changes where advisable. It can be difficult for centres where the same texts have been taught for several years to ensure that task options are not simply repeated year on year which can lead to security problems.

It was notable that few novels written before 1900 were chosen this year. To some extent this was perhaps understandable, as previous feedback has noted that less enthusiastic readers often fare better with shorter works which they can be encouraged to read more than once. When candidates did know their texts well, however, novels by Austen, the Brontës and especially Hardy, gave confident candidates rich pickings for analysis of technique.

20th century texts featured much more prominently, with *A Room with a View*, *The Color Purple* and *The Remains of the Day* very popular choices this year. In some instances, however, both texts chosen lacked some literary heft and might have been more successfully paired with a more challenging novel. For instance, comparing *Rebecca* with *Fingersmith* or *The Time Traveller's Wife* created some problems for candidates in demonstrating sophisticated appreciation of technique.

Comparing two dystopian texts again proved a popular option, although this tended to work best when the candidates were given tasks which encouraged them to move beyond merely describing the regimes in each fictional world as if they were real. It often proved difficult for candidates to perceive the writer behind the regime and how meaning was shaped. Pairing a dystopian text with a novel from a different genre often seemed to help the candidate see the writer's artifice more clearly.

As in previous years *The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement* were the most popular texts in each period but this pairing once again proved very challenging for most candidates. Both are obviously great novels, more than worthy of academic study, but paired together their nuance and complexity seemed difficult to capture in 3,500 words and made it even more crucial that the task was suitably precise and focused. Sadly, the most common titles centred either on social class barriers, which often led to a contextual bias, or the unreliable narrator, clearly a more literary focus but one which proved very challenging for many candidates struggling with such slippery 'storytellers' as Nick and Bryony.

Task setting

As mentioned at length in previous Principal Moderator's reports, task setting is at least as important as text choice, if not more so. Once again, moderators were often dismayed to see candidates significantly hampered by poorly worded titles. It cannot be stated too firmly that candidates should be able to choose a topic which interests them but should *not* be responsible for the wording of the actual title. Teachers must take a leading role in this crucial element to ensure that the title is accessible and will elicit an appropriate literary response. It is also very important that titles are regularly refreshed to prevent material from previous years' responses being reused by candidates. Moreover, in this age of Artificial Intelligence and internet essay writing services, it is obviously not advisable to give candidates a completely free choice of essay topic. Teacher input is essential.

The most successful titles were seen in centres which had clearly recognised the importance of task setting and had devoted sufficient time to its fine-tuning. The best titles were tailored to the candidate's level of confidence and carefully worded to put an emphasis on a literary response, with AO2 to the fore. They also often invited a debate or discussion rather than encouraging a descriptive approach, helping the candidate promote a coherent line of argument for AO1 and AO5.

Less successful titles, which made it more difficult for the candidates to meet higher band criteria, shared many of the pitfalls already covered in detail in previous reports:

- Titles which were too wide-ranging or open-ended were often unwieldy in 3,500 words and tended to lead to descriptive, generalised or superficial work without a clear line of argument.
- Many candidates struggled to put a suitable emphasis on literary appreciation when their titles invited them to take a context- or issue-led. This was especially the case when texts were viewed solely as examples of social ills such as 'toxic masculinity' or female repression, racial prejudice or class inequality. As mentioned in last year's report, a focus on contentious 'issues' made it very hard for candidates to see beyond the rights and wrongs to the literary merits of the texts. In the most extreme examples, the candidates seemed to be studying sociology, politics or philosophy rather than English Literature.
- Tasks focusing on such abstract concepts as 'morality' created problems, and 'identity' proved as tricky and unwise for the reasons outlined in previous reports. This nebulous, loaded term in today's world, with so many diverse meanings for young people, often exacerbated a disastrous tendency to view the characters as 'real people' who could be psychoanalysed, all of which took them further away from critical appreciation of the texts as literary works.
- Many titles were overlong and unnecessarily complicated, often to the point of being indecipherable. It was often the case that moderators had to look back at the coversheet to remind themselves of the original title because the essay lacked a clear line of argument.
- In response to Eduqas advice, many candidates attempted to incorporate critical views of the texts in their title, but some were unsure how to do this effectively. Quotations from one of the texts were largely unhelpful, as were pithy sayings taken from 'Brainy Quotes' which rarely helped the candidate structure a clear literary argument and were often ignored.

- Some candidates were able to rise above their poorly worded titles, although this often meant using the first half page of their essays defining what their titles meant and about what they would be writing. It was encouraging to see centres where the real purpose of a good question was fully grasped and titles had been worded to help candidates navigate a clear line of trajectory. These centres also appeared to have emphasised the importance of careful planning as well as editing and thorough proofreading. Evidence of effective paragraphing was very rare, however, and many moderators commented on how candidates' responses would have been improved by thoughtful use of paragraphs to organise their materials.

Quality of AO2 Analysis

Most generosity occurred in rewarding AO2, as the analysis of technique and literary appreciation of the texts as prose works were often not sufficiently confident, perceptive or sophisticated to merit such high marks. Moderators noted certain worrying trends in the way candidates approached AO2 analysis which affected the accuracy of some centres' marking.

Microanalysis of language at word level was even more prevalent with candidates making large claims about how meaning was conveyed based on a single word or phrase. Rather than finding more evidence to develop a point convincingly, candidates made assertions based on relatively slight evidence, often quoted without helpful context, demonstrating limited sense of how ideas progressed in the text as a whole. Relatively straightforward comments on single words were labelled as 'perceptive' by some markers suggesting Band 5 achievement when Band 3 'clear and appropriate' was more accurate.

Direct textual support was often quite sparse, with one phrase quoted and then dissected in minute detail, with almost each word's effects considered in some cases. There was often sound understanding of broader meaning, but this was not always securely linked to the writers' literary choices; the emphasis often seemed to be exclusively on 'what' without sufficient consideration of 'how' and 'why'.

Candidates often seemed unsure how to develop points using textual detail and tended to resort to commentary of meaning instead, describing what the character was feeling without pinning this closely enough to the writers' technique. Candidates' work often read more like explanations or summaries rather than critical appreciations of the texts as literary works.

Most tasks centred on character, which can work well, except when it encourages the candidate to treat constructs like real people, as if it were the character choosing the words or controlling events rather than the writer. It was noticeable that in quite a lot of work placed in the higher bands for AO2 there was relatively infrequent reference to the writer, except to consider possible biographical context.

With so much emphasis on word level discussion in many responses, there was limited analysis of other prose techniques. It was good to see some worthwhile unpacking of individual metaphors and similes, but there was scope for more focus on the wider texts, on writers' use of imagery *patterns*, extended metaphors or motifs, with clear evidence and evaluation of effect. Some candidates made promising reference to devices such as narrative viewpoint, contrasts (often confused with 'juxtaposition') and setting, but these were not always developed enough to avoid assertion.

Once again, a lot of candidates fell back on assertive claims for phonological devices such as alliteration, assonance and sibilance which did not suggest confident, sophisticated engagement with the texts as extended *prose* works.

There was also a tendency to label word classes which would be more appropriate to language study than literature, as the identification of a noun or adverbial clause was rarely linked to how meaning was shaped. More successful candidates correctly placed an emphasis on literary terminology and tried to explain and/or evaluate its effects.

Reliance on study materials

Unfortunately, it was again apparent that a lot of the issues relating to the poor quality of AO2 analysis seemed to be caused by over-reliance on a bewildering array of widely available commercial study materials which candidates could access with a simple click.

There was a genuine sense that many candidates were unsure about how to study their chosen texts and gained a superficial confidence from reading *about* the texts rather than rereading the actual novels. Many candidates imitated the style of text commentaries, writing descriptively and assertively, often with limited textual support or perceptive awareness of nuanced meaning. It was noticeable that candidates influenced by such materials rarely used the tentative language appropriate when probing implied meaning, tending instead to make very definite statements about the texts.

Some candidates quoted directly from sites such as 'lit-charts' or 'e-notes', as if engaging with challenging critical views of the texts rather than echoing explanations intended to make understanding easier for inexperienced readers.

In quite a lot of essays the expression was uneven with very fluent commentary interspersed with sections of more awkward writing, suggesting that the candidate had made heavy use of support materials without fully attributing the external sources.

Candidates needed more guidance on how to use these resources to support, rather than replace, study skills, and to be constantly reminded of the inherent dangers of internet short cuts, especially those behind pay walls.

In the best work seen, it was refreshing to see such clear evidence that the candidates had been urged and encouraged to read and study their texts.

This meant that they *knew the texts well enough* to find convincing evidence and textual detail to support claims.

These candidates *rooted their responses in literary appreciation of the texts* with a strong awareness of the writers behind the characters and events and some confidence about how prose texts, especially novels, work.

Rather than describing what the texts were about, with a reductive focus on a single issue or theory, the most successful candidates *linked claims about meaning to the writers' conscious choices and how these coincided or differed in the two texts being compared for AO4*.

Wider reading related to contextual factors or the critical opinions of other readers was used to *shed light on the texts and how meaning was shaped*, with AO2 driving the response rather than being squeezed by excessive focus on AO3 or AO5.

It was reassuring to see centres where the candidates had been encouraged *to plan and draft their work*, using their own words to express their ideas and making a real effort to check and make their writing as accurate and coherent as possible for AO1.

Summary of key points

- Reviewing current departmental practice and being willing to adapt in light of feedback is beneficial to candidates; those taught in centres which adopt a self-reflective approach are at an advantage.
- With each new cohort, it is recommended that centres consider the best approaches to text selection and the appropriate level of independence to give this group of candidates.
- Task setting should be a priority and candidates must not be responsible for wording their own titles. Teacher guidance is essential to ensure titles encourage a literary response with AO2 to the fore. Titles which are issue-led or have a strong contextual bias make it more difficult for candidates to meet higher grade criteria in all AOs.
- As with exam components, candidates need support in studying their chosen texts, the only whole prose works in the specification. Emphasis should be placed on the quality of AO2 critical appreciation of the texts as extended prose works. Candidates should be helped to move beyond micro analysis at word level and encouraged to develop points fully avoiding assertion or descriptive commentary.
- From the outset, candidates should be made fully aware of the limitations and pitfalls of commercial study commentaries and/or essay writing sites and discouraged from over reliance on such low value resources. They must be regularly reminded of the strict JCQ rules relating to material taken from external sources. Whenever possible, teachers should aim to emphasise the value of rereading the actual texts, rather than reading *about* them, and of developing study skills to foster and enhance knowledge and understanding.

Moderators are fully aware of the challenging nature of this component and the responsibility it places on teachers to select texts and set tasks, as well as support candidates' study while ensuring the authenticity of their work and assessing it accurately and fairly. When moderators commend the hard work of the candidates and their teachers, they are being sincere. This NEA component is in no way an easy option in comparison with exam components and some of the work produced this year was outstanding. Hopefully, this feedback will help centres convince more candidates to recognise the benefits of the hard slog (and pleasure!) involved in rereading and studying their chosen texts and shaping their own ideas in their own words, so that we see even more high-quality work next year.

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team are on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.30pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4292

Email: gceenglish@edugas.co.uk

Qualification webpage: https://www.edugas.co.uk/qualifications/english-literature-as-a-level/#tab_overview

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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.