



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
January 2011**

**English Literature A**

**LTA1A**

**(Specification 2740)**

**Unit 1: Texts in Context  
Victorian Literature**

***Report on the Examination***

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This January was the fifth time that candidates have been examined for the Victorian Literature AS unit and the LTA1A examiners reported that the paper worked very well: it was widely agreed that the questions were accessible to candidates of all ability levels. As an experienced examiner commented “This paper set the right level of challenge: there was plenty for the candidates to get their teeth into, but nothing obscure or beyond what they should have studied. Both the unseen extract and the poetry questions offered a range of possibilities that enabled candidates to engage with the texts in their own individual ways.” For many candidates, this individual engagement produced thoughtful, interesting answers which were a pleasure for the examiners to read. One examiner reported: “I was impressed by the extensive range of detailed wider reading references from candidates who were able to connect very specific aspects of the extract with their wider reading”, while another found that “many candidates’ responses were coherent and fluent, using direct references to the extract and to their wider reading to create a detailed, sophisticated exploration of both meaning and context.” Inevitably, however, not all candidates managed to respond successfully and it is to be hoped that, in highlighting the most common errors, this report will enable centres to ensure that future candidates do not repeat these mistakes. The unsuccessful approaches adopted by candidates in their responses to individual questions are discussed in the later sections of this report; these introductory remarks will consider the more general features which characterise the work of candidates who struggle to cope with the demands of the LTA1A examination.

As with most January examinations, the majority of entrants for this LTA1A paper were re-sit candidates aiming to improve on the result they achieved last summer. In the experience of most of this January’s examiners, however, a number of these candidates had not re-read and revised their Victorian texts sufficiently thoroughly in advance of the examination. Too often these candidates’ references to their reading were at best superficial and underdeveloped; at worst they displayed serious misreading or misunderstanding. A small proportion of the candidates were sitting the LTA1A examination for the first time, despite the advice offered in previous editions of this report that January is too soon to enter an AS examination for which a full academic year’s preparation is required. Inevitably, many of these candidates also seemed insufficiently prepared for the demands of the paper, having not yet developed the depth and breadth of reading which this AS qualification requires. Centres should bear these observations in mind when formulating their future entry policies for the Victorian Literature examination.

On the other hand, examiners felt that, in general, the answers they read were structured more effectively than those produced by the candidates in January 2009. Unfortunately, there were still a few very disorganised responses from this January’s candidates – especially those who eschewed any form of planning. Previous editions of this report have advised candidates to spend at least five minutes of the hour available for each question on planning. Doubtless their teachers have reinforced this advice too, yet less successful candidates habitually start writing as soon as the examination begins with little thought about where their responses are heading. Candidates should remember that the Assessment Objective 1 column of the mark scheme requires candidates to “structure and organise their writing” if they are to reach Band 3: too many candidates choose to ignore this requirement.

Although Assessment Objective 1 also requires candidates to “use appropriate terminology...and coherent, accurate written expression”, some candidates’ use of language continues to cause examiners concern. Weaker candidates often use the word “women” as a singular noun, while terms such as “legit” (an abbreviation of “legitimate” – not an injunction to flee) and “downer” are not acceptable in an examination context where a formal English register is required. The unhelpful labels “positive”, “negative” and “meaningful” (which, ironically, is often used almost meaninglessly) also make frequent appearances in the responses of candidates who appear to be struggling to engage closely with the literary

text. Similarly, examiners are often surprised by the paucity of some candidates' critical vocabularies: poetry is not set out in "paragraphs"; "it flows" does not constitute an effective analysis of rhythmical pattern; nor is the phrase "it paints a picture in the reader's mind" a useful way to respond to imagery. Examiners also have concerns about the inability of some candidates to demonstrate the "understanding of the significance and influence" of the Victorian context required by Assessment Objective 4. One examiner saw so many anachronisms in the candidates' contextual claims that he began to wonder whether they had used Radio Four's *Bleak Expectations* as a source text: in the parallel world presented by these candidates the Victorians are sitting at home, listening to a programme about Putin on the radio or reading the poetry of Lord Alfred Tennessee. In the same way, many candidates still seem ill-informed about the differences between a factory and a workhouse, while it should also be noted that *Wuthering Heights*' Joseph, despite his austere Northern incomprehensibility, is never referred to by the title "groundskeeper".

To consider the achievement of candidates question by question:

## **Section A Contextual Linking**

### **Question 01**

Most centres now appear to have a secure understanding of the ways in which the Contextual Linking question operates. Unfortunately, individual candidates sometimes choose to ignore the good advice which they have been offered by their teachers and, in consequence, fail to achieve the marks to which they aspire. For the most part, it is in the ways that they treat the question's Wider Reading requirements that these candidates come unstuck: most candidates are at least able to establish a basic understanding of the unseen passage (unless they seriously misread the extract, as some unfortunately did) but they often struggle to move on. It does not matter whether candidates integrate their Wider Reading links throughout their response to the unseen passage or whether they move on to the links after they have analysed the passage, but it is important that these links are detailed and relevant. The former, integrated, approach is often the more effective but, in the hands of less confident candidates, it can result in minimal or merely narrative links. Mentioning the title of a text does not constitute a Wider Reading link, as some candidates appear to believe it does, and simply referring to an event in a text is only sufficient to take candidates into the lower bands of the mark scheme. If candidates are to access the higher mark scheme bands, their links need to be detailed and analytical, showing their ability to engage with the effects created by the writers' choices of form, structure and language. Planning certainly helps candidates to construct answers which include integrated and sustained explorations of their Wider Reading but examiners saw very little evidence of planning this January – especially among less successful candidates.

Candidates who adopt the latter approach to structuring their answers, moving into the links after they have considered the extract, are sometimes in danger of writing irrelevantly. Indeed, there seems to be a tendency among some of these candidates to introduce a generalised collection of Wider Reading that they were intending to use whatever the subject of the extract happened to be. As has been stated in previous reports, this is not an acceptable approach: candidates should not move abruptly from the subject of the passage to a completely different subject in their Wider Reading. Examiners can often spot these candidates by their use of phrases such as "Another key concern of Victorian literature was..." Candidates who resort to this approach inadvertently create the impression that their reading is narrow and that they have not developed the Wider Reading resources to establish the relevant connections which examiners seek to reward. The mark scheme for this paper is very clear in its requirement that, in order to reach Bands 3 and 4, candidates need to establish relevant and illuminating connections between the set passage and their

Wider Reading. This Specification aims to encourage a fresh, spontaneous approach to the process of making relevant connections between texts and examiners expect to see evidence of candidates thinking on their feet, rather than thoughtlessly copying out generalised, all-purpose material they have learned by rote in advance of the examination. Unfortunately, examiners still encounter candidates who appear to be responding to a question along the lines of "Write everything you know about the Victorians" rather than the answering actual question on the paper. Of course it is perfectly acceptable for candidates to move into literature that relates to a different topic from the extract, but it is the quality of the link that matters. For example, rather than employing an arbitrary approach such as "Another thing the Victorians wrote about was colonialism", it is much better for candidates to write something like 'by presenting the factory workers as "dulled" and "dazed", Betjeman uses a similar vocabulary to Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* - where the slaves encountered by Marlow at the first trading station are described as "vacant" and "confused", thus opening the way for the candidate to make the intended excursion into the literature of Empire in an explicitly relevant manner. This is an effective method because it not only establishes a relevant connection between the extract and a different literary topic, but it also enables the candidate to compare the writers' techniques in a manner which will score highly in the Assessment Objective 2 column of the mark scheme.

This was the first time that a text written after the Victorian era had been used on the LTA1A paper, although most centres appeared fully to have prepared their candidates for such an eventuality. The regulations governing AS English Literature specifications require all candidates to read at least one text written in the twentieth century (or later) and, indeed, the Victorian Wider Reading list in the 1741 Specification contains 23 suggestions of appropriate post-1901 texts. Similarly, the course's supporting Nelson Thornes textbook, *AQA English Literature - Victorian Literature*, includes five extracts from texts published after the death of Queen Victoria, one of which is for the specific purpose of preparing candidates to deal with the demands of Question 1. Many candidates relished the opportunity to analyse the filtering effects created by Betjeman's imaginative biographical approach, while others explored the typical Victorian features deliberately re-created in his prose style. Betjeman's use of long, list-like sentences to evoke the frenzied chaos of Victorian industrialisation was the subject of much perceptive comment, as was his deployment of contrastingly shorter, simpler sentences when describing the simplicity of Pugin's medieval Ramsgate retreat. Interestingly, however, some less confident candidates paid little attention to the biographical details of the extract's second paragraph, choosing to focus instead on Betjeman's powerful description of the social and industrial change that characterised the Victorian era: a passage which provided plentiful opportunities for comparison with their Wider Reading.

Charles Dickens' description of Coketown in *Hard Times* was probably the most frequently cited text in comparison with the extract: Betjeman's "belching smoke" was frequently linked to the "serpents of smoke" which coil around the fictionalised version of Preston in the 1854 novel. Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* and Friedrich Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England* were also popular choices for their presentation of grim lives lived among "narrow brick slums" and "gloomy mills". Many candidates found echoes of Betjeman's "machines were the Devil" in the "red tyrant" which inflicts Satanic mechanical torture on the reapers of Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*; other candidates used this novel to provide evidence that life in the countryside was not as idyllic as Pugin believed. Other relevant aspects of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* also featured in many answers: Alec D'Urberville was often seen as an embodiment of "the growing wealth of the Midlands, the ostentation of the new rich", while the church's rejection of Tess and her dead baby was sometimes linked to Pugin's "disgust at...many Church of England clergy (although Pugin's "True Church" would probably have been equally unsympathetic). Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* furnished candidates with a similar example of religious hypocrisy in Mr Brocklehurst, while the more adventurous used Betjeman's concept of being unable to "separate buildings

from...the people who lived in them” (a phrase avoided by many less confident candidates) to explore the ways in which Brontë uses the Gothic architecture of Thornfield Hall to reflect the Byronic character of its owner. As a twentieth century representation of the Victorian era, John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* was an obvious and popular prose text for candidates to compare with Betjeman’s radio broadcast while, perhaps inevitably in an examination taken so soon after Christmas, Charles Dickens’ Ebenezer Scrooge was frequently used as an example of “the heartlessness of employers”.

For many candidates, Betjeman’s reference to “child slavery, before the Factory Acts were passed” provided an opportunity to explore Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s poem ‘The Cry of the Children’; similarly, his evocation of “the monotony of their work” was often linked to ‘The Song of the Shirt’ by Thomas Hood (not ‘The T-Shirt’ as one candidate, probably thinking of Primark, called the poem). Betjeman’s treatment of nineteenth century religious ideas enabled candidates to establish effective connections with poems such as Matthew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ and Tennyson’s ‘In Memoriam’, while Emily Dickinson’s ‘Faith’ provided some candidates with an unusual perspective on this topic. A few thoughtful, well-informed candidates connected Pugin’s medievalism with ‘The Lady of Shalott’: some argued that the poem shows Tennyson’s belief that “the Middle Ages were perfect”, or at least presents his “dream of what they were like”; others linked the presentation of the Lady of Shalott’s isolated existence to Pugin’s withdrawal from everyday Victorian realities. Some candidates established parallels between Betjeman’s description of an apparently unchanging countryside and the undisturbed rural existence presented by Thomas Hardy in his poem ‘In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations’.

As is often the case, finding appropriate Victorian drama links sometimes stretched the ingenuity of the candidates, but popular coursework texts such as *A Doll’s House* and *A Woman of No Importance* often provided relevant and effective connections to John Betjeman’s radio broadcast. Henrik Ibsen’s stage directions detailing the rich furnishings of the Helmers’ home were sometimes cited as evidence of “the ostentation of the new rich” but Oscar Wilde’s Hester Worsley offered many candidates a contrastingly modest example of a character in possession of new-found wealth. Some perceptive candidates established interesting comparisons between Betjeman’s presentation of Pugin and the character of Old Edkal, who retreats to his dream forest in the attic in Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck*. *Mrs Warren’s Profession* by George Bernard Shaw was also a popular choice, providing a further example of Victorian religious hypocrisy in the character of the drunken, philandering Reverend Gardner.

Most candidates were able to engage with the contrasts Betjeman presents between the crowded, industrialised towns and Pugin’s rural ideal. Some found evidence of Betjeman’s poetic techniques in the strong rhythms of the first paragraph. Others noted his obvious approval of Pugin’s views, although the candidate who claimed that Betjeman adopts a Marxist standpoint to Victorian industrial progress was perhaps going a little too far. Some well-informed candidates rightly placed Pugin’s views in the context of John Ruskin, William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite painters; several even showed familiarity with *God’s Architect*, Rosemary Hill’s excellent 2007 Pugin biography. The final three sentences of the extract provoked a variety of responses from those candidates who were willing to tackle them. Some candidates felt that Betjeman concludes by presenting Pugin as a lovable eccentric; others argued that these blunt statements show how childish and unrealistic Pugin actually was. Indeed, Betjeman’s tone is open to a variety of interpretations here: some candidates claimed that he is amused and gently ironic; others read these sentences as patronising or scornful. Some candidates fully understood the meaning of the term “Gothic” in these sentences; others were only able to connect it to the Gothic horror genre and consequently saw Pugin, with his Gothic plates and hair-do, as a kind of Ramsgate Dracula. Some candidates felt that Betjeman’s somewhat unexpected use of the colloquial “do his hair” was

a way of establishing a chatty, friendly relationship with his listeners; others were more interested in the fact that Pugin's wife "had to do" the hairdressing and used this as the starting point for an exploration of gender roles in Victorian literature.

Less successful candidates often seemed entirely unaware of Betjeman and his biographical approach, asserting that Pugin was the writer – although they were unsure how to explain away his persistent use of the third person and often became very muddled about the nature of the literary construct with which they were attempting to engage. Examiners were concerned by the significant number of candidates who made this serious error: either these candidates automatically made the simplistic assumption that all writing is essentially autobiographical (a worryingly superficial attitude in students of literature) or they did not bother to read the first paragraph of the question carefully enough. This latter possibility is also a worrying feature in students undertaking an A-Level Literature course: the examination tests the candidates' ability to read both widely and closely, but candidates who are unable to make use of the facts offered to them before they even begin to tackle the extract (either because they choose to ignore these facts or because they do not understand them) are unlikely to score highly. This failure to read closely also led to some very confused chronology: some candidates thought that Betjeman's radio documentary was broadcast during the Victorian era; others believed that the Industrial Revolution took place during the Middle Ages. This confusion is perhaps best summed up by the candidate who wrote "Betjeman contrasts life in the Victorian era of 1952 with the Medieval period, 1812." Examiners, with an eye on the Assessment Objective 4 column of the mark scheme, were surprised and disappointed by this tendency among some weaker candidates: the candidates' basic contextual knowledge should preclude such muddled claims about the historical context. More alert candidates put the question's chronological information to good use, noting that the programme was broadcast to mark the centenary of Pugin's death and commenting on the irony of Betjeman's use of twentieth century technology to celebrate the life of a man who believed that "machines were the Devil".

Successful candidates:

- explored and analysed the ways in which Betjeman presents his thoughts and feelings about Pugin and the Victorian era
- established a range of relevant links between the extract and their Wider Reading
- referred in detail to all three literary genres when writing about their Wider Reading, analysing the effects created by the writers' choices of form, structure and language.

Less successful candidates:

- responded to Betjeman's broadcast in a simple manner, remaining at the surface of the text or failing to engage with the writer's biographical approach
- referred only to the plots of their Wider Reading texts or missed out whole genres
- wrote about their Wider Reading in an arbitrary, general manner without making any effective connections to Betjeman.

## **Section B Poetry**

### ***Questions 02 -07***

To some extent, the effectiveness of the poetry questions in differentiating between candidates is intensified by the simple fact that some candidates have a secure understanding of the relevant Assessment Objectives and the best ways to meet them, whereas other candidates seem to think it will be sufficient to write simple accounts of the few poems they happen to have skimmed through during the evening before the examination. Candidates need to remember that Assessment Objective 3 is dominant here: the questions invite candidates to construct a balanced debate in response to a given

opinion, supporting their arguments by detailed analysis of relevant poems. Many candidates do exactly this and are rewarded with appropriately high marks. However examiners reported a range of unsatisfactory approaches which inevitably restricted candidates to the lower bands of the mark scheme. Some less successful candidates often spend much of the poetry question's allocated hour going through one or two poems line by line but paying scant regard to the opinion up for debate; others write whole paragraphs about the importance of individual words (or even individual punctuation marks!) but fail to show any understanding of the whole poems from which the words have been extracted. Less confident candidates often use up precious minutes explaining the meaning of unfamiliar words or phrases rather than analysing the effects produced by their use; others make no reference whatever to the poetic forms and techniques used by the writers. As one examiner commented, "these candidates seem over-cautious: they avoid absolute failure by playing it safe and stating the obvious, but it deprives them of the opportunity to explore literary effects and develop their own personal voice". Centres would do well to remember that it is those candidates who are prepared to explore the poetry and respond to it in an informed personal manner that this Specification seeks to reward.

### ***Selected Poems of John Clare***

Examiners saw more responses to John Clare than they did to the poetry of the Brontës this January but The Northamptonshire Peasant Poet is still a long way behind Hardy in terms of popularity with centres. The candidates who are fortunate enough to have studied Clare respond to his writing in an engaged and enthusiastic manner but there is still a tendency among the less successful to write more about Clare's life than about his poetry. Of course much of Clare's poetry is autobiographical but the best candidates engage with the ways in which he presents his thoughts, feelings and experiences rather than explaining the events that inspired the poetry. As stated in previous editions of this report, it is those who maintain their primary focus on Clare's poetic techniques and who use their answer to construct a relevant discussion of the given critical opinion that invariably do best in this examination.

### ***Question 02***

This was the more popular Clare question and most of the candidates who attempted it were able to engage with the view offered for debate. Many candidates agreed that Clare's love poetry is the most moving on the basis that love transcends time and so the modern reader can easily identify with the experiences Clare presents. Some candidates identified so closely with Clare's sentiments that they were moved to share their own romantic experiences with the examiners: however, although they were touched by these candidates' accounts of first love and encounters with latter day Mary Joyces, the examiners were unable to reward answers which drifted away from an informed response to the text and into the realms of personal writing. Inevitably, many candidates made extensive use of the poems from the *Love* section of the set text in their answers: 'First Love's Recollections', 'An Invite To Eternity' and 'Love and Memory' were particularly popular choices. Effective counter-arguments were often provided by Clare's moving poems on subjects other than love - especially poems in which he questions his own identity, such as 'I Am' and 'Sighing for Retirement'. Interestingly, the treatment of Clare's nature poetry provided examiners with a useful indicator in their assessment of the responses to this question. Some candidates adopted an abrupt "Clare loves nature" approach as a means of ignoring the love poetry focus and writing their pre-planned nature poetry answers instead: candidates are strongly advised against this *Blue Peter* approach ("And here's one I prepared earlier...") as it does not result in a high mark. More subtle candidates, having first considered Clare's conventional love poetry, went on to develop their debate by exploring the ways in which his nature poems could also be interpreted as love poems. The best of these candidates



enhanced their arguments by close analysis of the ways in which Clare uses the language of love in poems such as ‘Emmonsales Heath’ and ‘I love to hear the evening crows go by’.

Successful candidates:

- focused on Clare’s love poetry
- explored the effects created by Clare’s choices of form, structure and language
- used a range of poems to develop a balanced debate.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote about nature instead of love
- described Clare’s love life but showed little knowledge of his poetry
- were unaware of the ways in which Clare uses language to create effects.

### **Question 03**

Although only a few candidates attempted this less popular Clare question, most of those who did had a secure understanding of ‘The Fallen Elm’. As is often the case with the responses to this style of question, the candidates then differentiated themselves very effectively by what they did next: the less successful did very little except make general pronouncements concerning Clare’s attitude to nature, while the better informed went on to explore the ways in which the poem’s elegiac tone is echoed elsewhere in Clare’s writing, especially in other poems lamenting the destruction of the natural world such as ‘The Lament of Swordy Well’ or ‘The Moors’. Some candidates, remaining at the surface of the poem, simply agreed with the view that ‘The Fallen Elm’ is typical of John Clare and compared it with his effusive early nature poetry. However more thoughtful candidates, displaying a secure understanding of the poem’s personal symbolism and analysing the ways in which Clare angrily voices his radical political views, successfully argued that ‘The Fallen Elm’ is a very different kind of nature poem. Other candidates persuasively argued that ‘The Fallen Elm’ is typical of only one aspect of Clare’s writing, arguing that his love poetry, for example, is an equally important alternative element of the poet’s work.

Successful candidates:

- explored the poetic techniques Clare uses in ‘The Fallen Elm’
- developed a range of relevant links to other poems
- produced a balanced argument in response to the idea that ‘The Fallen Elm’ is typical of John Clare’s poetry.

Less successful candidates:

- produced superficial accounts of ‘The Fallen Elm’
- wrote at length about a few isolated individual words, rather than considering Clare’s choice of language in the context of the whole poem
- made general comments rather than establishing specific links to other poems.

### **Selected Poems of The Brontës**

As the Brontës are very much the minority choice among the Victorian set poets, the LTA1A examiners were not surprised to find very few responses to Questions 4 and 5 in their script allocations. Perhaps one conclusion that can be drawn from the very small number of Brontë responses to feature this January is that most candidates who studied the text last year were satisfied with the results they achieved in June. It would also seem likely that those centres studying the Brontës prudently wait until their candidates have developed a detailed knowledge of the whole selection before entering them for the June LTA1A examination: a course of action which is recommended to all centres studying Victorian Literature.

### **Question 04**

This was the less popular of the Brontë questions and the few candidates who attempted it often struggled to construct a balanced debate. The failure of these candidates to engage with the question's keywords was often the cause of the problem: most made no attempt to establish a working definition of the term "feminist" against which the poems could be tested; some seemed to confuse the keyword with "feminine" and tried to argue that the view was obviously three quarters right because Branwell Brontë is the only male poet to feature in the selection. A handful of more successful candidates argued that a defiant female voice can be found in 'No coward soul is mine', while others cited the presentation of Victorian female discontent in 'The Teacher's Monologue' as evidence of Charlotte Brontë's feminist attitude. These candidates found no shortage of material for their counter-arguments in the dominant male heroes of the Gondal and Angria poems.

Successful candidates:

- constructed balanced debates founded on a secure understanding of the question's keywords
- selected relevant poems to support their arguments
- confidently explored the effects created by the Brontës' poetic techniques.

Less successful candidates:

- struggled to understand the question
- simply described the content of the poems
- wrote long biographical accounts but made little direct reference to the text.

### **Question 05**

This was the more popular Brontë question and most of the candidates who attempted it had at least a basic knowledge of 'No coward soul is mine'. Unfortunately some candidates felt that it was enough to provide a line-by-line account of the poem with a bit of Emily Brontë biography thrown in for good measure: these responses did not score highly. Those candidates who did engage with the actual question often argued that the triumphant finality of the poem would make it an effective conclusion to the selection. Others based their arguments on the ways in which 'No coward soul is mine' deals with the common Brontë themes of love and mortality, establishing relevant links to poems such as 'Parting' or 'Death'. The most successful candidates established stylistic links between 'No coward soul is mine' and the rest of the selection – connecting, for example, the cosmic imagery of the given poem's penultimate stanza with Emily Brontë's use of similar language in the poem 'Stars'. Well-informed candidates based their counter-arguments on those elements of the Brontës' writing not present in 'No coward soul is mine' or suggested alternative poems as suitable conclusions; less successful candidates often made no attempt to produce this kind of balanced debate.

Successful candidates:

- displayed a secure understanding of 'No coward soul is mine'
- established a range of relevant links to other poems in the selection
- developed counter-arguments and suggested alternatives in response to the idea of "an effective conclusion".

Less successful candidates:

- wrote simple accounts of 'No coward soul is mine'
- established few connections to other poems
- simply agreed with the given view but made no attempt to debate it.

### ***Selected Poems of Thomas Hardy***

Once again, Thomas Hardy was by far the most popular set poet on the LTA1A paper: this text was studied by the vast majority of the centres entering candidates this January. Centres should bear in mind, however, that Hardy will not be available as a set text indefinitely, although his poetry should certainly continue to provide a useful Wider Reading resource in centres studying Victorian Literature. A glance at the current Specification will reveal that the last questions on Norman Page's Hardy selection will appear in 2012, after which the text will be replaced by the Everyman's Poetry Tennyson selection (edited by Michael Baron; ISBN 978-0-460-87802-9). Obviously the Hardy selection will remain popular during its final two years as a set text but it is not too early for centres to begin considering their choice of a replacement text for 2012. For those not wishing to move from Hardy to Tennyson, both Clare and the Brontës will remain on this paper until 2014 with replacement texts, still to be decided, first appearing on the 2015 papers.

In the meantime, Hardy responses cover the full range of the mark scheme. Hardy's poetry can inspire the best candidates to produce original and illuminating answers, but the work of less successful candidates is often characterised by the weaknesses identified in previous editions of this report. Excessively biographical approaches to Hardy's verse do not score highly, as Assessment Objective 4 is not assessed by the poetry questions. Similarly, candidates who attempt to fit inappropriate or irrelevant poems into their answers do not reach the higher bands of the mark scheme: this practice is usually an indication of limited textual knowledge, suggesting that, despite the requirements of the Specification, these candidates are not familiar with the whole Hardy selection.

### ***Question 06***

This was the more popular Hardy question and examiners felt that it enabled candidates to choose from a range wide range of poems in the construction of their answers. As suggested in the question, many candidates sensibly opted to use 'The Blinded Bird' as the starting point for their answers, often following it up with a discussion of 'The Darkling Thrush'. Some candidates developed their debate by arguing that Hardy shows admiration for the bird in the latter poem, rather than sympathy; others, less successfully, claimed that the only sympathy Hardy shows in this poem is for himself. Presumably these candidates meant self-pity as, strictly speaking, you cannot have sympathy for yourself: the Greek prefix "sym-" always denotes a relationship between two separate entities, although a number of candidates seemed to be unaware of this. 'Dead 'Wessex' the Dog to the Household' and 'The Oxen' were often used to provide further evidence of Hardy's sympathetic attitude to animals: the former poem worked well (although some candidates produced confused readings because they failed to realise that Hardy adopts the persona of the dead dog in the poem) but the latter was only of use to candidates confident enough to explore the ways in which Hardy's attitude sometimes moves beyond mere sympathy and into the realms of something far more spiritual. Some well-informed candidates also made persuasive use of the sentiments Hardy expresses in 'Afterwards': "he strove that such innocent creatures should come to no harm". While most candidates agreed about Hardy's sympathy for animals, his attitude towards people stimulated much more discussion. 'The Convergence of the Twain', with its apparent disregard for the drowned of the *Titanic*, was the poem most cited as evidence that Hardy has no sympathy for people, but most candidates were able to develop a counter-argument by using poems such as 'At the War Office, London', 'A Trampwoman's Tragedy', 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy' or 'The Man He Killed'. 'Drummer Hodge' was also a very popular choice here, although those candidates who claimed that Hardy shows his sympathy by using Hodge's first name had obviously not read the poem very closely: Hodge's Christian name is not Drummer nor, despite the poem's fourteenth line, is it Will. Some candidates also attempted to dragoon 'The Ruined Maid' into backing up this idea but this was a less successful choice: as in 'The Oxen', the strong feelings Hardy

displays in this poem appear, on closer reading, to be something other than sympathy. 'Throwing a Tree' furnished some thoughtful candidates with a highly original counter-argument (Hardy certainly appears to sympathise with the tree in this poem) but those who could not keep away from the Emma poems sometimes struggled to develop a coherent debate, perhaps because of the ambiguity of the feelings Hardy presents in these poems.

Successful candidates:

- considered Hardy's attitudes to both animals and people
- explored the effects created by Hardy's use of form, structure and language
- produced balanced debates based on a wide range of Hardy's poetry.

Less successful candidates:

- wrote only about Hardy's animal poetry
- described the content of the poems but did not consider Hardy's poetic techniques
- simply agreed with the given view and made no attempt to construct a debate.

### **Question 07**

Although this was the less popular Hardy question, it was still tackled by a significant number of candidates: they approached the idea that 'A Church Romance' would provide an effective introduction in a variety of ways. Many developed a chronological argument in favour of the given view: as so much of Hardy's verse is autobiographical, it would make sense for the collection to begin with the meeting of his parents. Candidates who were unaware that Hardy's parents are the subject of this poem were unable to use this argument: indeed, some of those who attempted this question seemed to be treating it as an exercise in unseen criticism as they had obviously not read the poem before. Similarly, those few who claimed that the poem is about Hardy's first meeting with Emma had clearly neither understood the poem nor read the question carefully enough: like those who made anachronistic claims about the Betjeman extract, they failed to make effective use of the information available to them. In the same way, the candidate who asserted that "Hardy's parents met at a party" was not a close reader. Those candidates who were aware of the identity of the "she" in 'A Church Romance' often made successful links with other poems that feature Hardy's mother such as 'The Roman Road' and 'After the Last Breath'. 'Old Furniture' was also used successfully by candidates who analysed the ways Hardy uses his poetry to explore ideas about his Dorset family roots. Noting that 'A Church Romance' is a sonnet, many candidates seized on the poem's romantic aspect as a way of connecting with other Hardy love poems. The Emma poems were valid choices for the candidates who developed this line of argument, with 'When I Set Out for Lyonesse' and 'Under the Waterfall' working particularly well in this context. Thoughtful candidates often established links by engaging with Hardy's poetic techniques rather than just his subject matter: some connected the musical imagery of 'A Church Romance' with poems such as 'The Darkling Thrush', 'Lines To a Movement in Mozart's E-Flat Symphony' and 'Any little Old Song'; others used the "circa 1835" setting to develop an exploration of the ways Hardy imagines the past in poems such as 'A Sunday Morning Tragedy' (set "circa 186-", four decades before its composition) and 'A Trampwoman's Tragedy' (set "182-", twenty years before Hardy's birth). Inevitably, there were some candidates who failed to establish relevant connections to other poems and thus did not meet the requirements of the dominant Assessment Objective for this question. Some simply wrote an account of 'A Church Romance' but made no attempt to link it to other poems; others quickly dismissed the named poem and, ignoring the question, asserted that the poems they had prepared in advance would provide a suitable introduction to the selection: candidates are strongly advised against adopting either of these ineffective approaches.

Successful candidates:

- explored 'A Church Romance' with confidence
- developed relevant links to a range of other poems
- engaged successfully with the idea of "an effective introduction".

Less successful candidates:

- wrote only a simple account of 'A Church Romance'
- did not consider Hardy's poetic techniques
- made no attempt at discussion but asserted other poems were more effective.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.