GCE

English Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H471**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H071**

Report on the Units

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Advanced GCE English Literature – H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Literature – H071

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Chief Examiner Report

This session represented the first complete run of this new specification; there were substantial entries for F661 and F662, many of them re-sits, representing a complete range of achievement; there were also small but significant entries for the inaugural sessions of the new A2 units, F663 and F664. The Principals of these components were pleased to have this opportunity to see the A2 examination in operation, and impressed with the quality of much of the work they saw.

The AS examination, F661, already shows signs of being well settled: most candidates seemed to have a clear idea of what was expected of them, although a minority did seem under-prepared for this January session. One of the most significant shortcomings affecting performance was a failure to address the question set, especially when answering on the poetry; there is further discussion of this problem in the Principal Examiner's report. Some weaknesses from earlier sessions were less in evidence: for example, fewer candidates wrote overlong, repetitive answers, and treatment of 'other interpretations' seemed more relaxed and confident, with little in the way of poorly informed references to feminism and other broad schools of criticism.

F662, the AS coursework unit, continued to produce an exciting range of material and to extend the range of reading of moderators, many of whom were impressed by the standard of work and the increasing confidence of centres in handling this new specification: one suggested that "Overall, standards were very good this year. Most candidates had prepared well for their coursework and wrote with enthusiasm". The Principal Moderator felt that a number of centres could focus with more care and precision on Assessment Objectives, both when task-setting and assessing work; his report gives some more detailed suggestions on how this might be achieved.

Centres providing entries for the new A2 examination, F663, had generally prepared very well. The Principal Examiner stated in his report that "it is clear that tasks on this paper are accessible to candidates of modest ability, yet provide opportunities for the most capable and for the best prepared." The Shakespeare section was overwhelmingly dominated by answers on *Othello*, although impressive work was seen on the other plays; the less predictable Section B, requiring comparison of poetry and drama, produced a wide variety of answers, often showing impressive inventiveness and originality. Candidates with a detailed knowledge of both texts rose admirably to the challenge of shaping a response, even where their choice of question was unexpected.

The A2 coursework unit produced some exceptional work at the top end: the Principal Moderator reported reading "work which was impressively scholarly, assured, articulate and well-informed. Such essays were stimulating and a pleasure to read." Moderators found little very poor work, but did report some common flaws: it already seems clear that integrating the poetry text into the answer is an especially challenging aspect of this exercise; it is also clear that candidates should work hard at planning the structure of their long essays, to ensure reasonably even treatment of the three primary texts and to enable sustained comparison between texts. Centres are still encouraged to use the coursework consultancy service to obtain advice on choice of texts and tasks for both of the coursework units.

F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments

Most examiners reported that, on the whole, candidates seemed reasonably clear and confident about the demands of this AS examination now that it has reached its third session: one reported that 'it was rare to see answers which were not basically well informed and clearly expressed'; another that he 'was generally impressed by the quality of the work produced after a term of AS Level teaching. Most candidates made something of the questions set and the standard at the top end was very high indeed'. Examination technique was generally good: many candidates used effective plans and wrote answers of a sensible length. There was, of course, some weaker work, and examiners noted that some candidates were disregarding the question set, especially in Section A, and that some answers were marred by 'a large number of writing errors' and poor use of critical terminology; these comments were in the minority, however. Despite some feeling that work relating to Assessment Objectives 3 and 4 was at times 'strained' or 'mechanical', there was a pleasing sense of engagement with literature in many of the scripts: an examiner noted that 'there was evidence that many candidates actually enjoyed sitting this paper'.

Section A

Most candidates answered with at least a degree of competence on poetry, but there were a number of prevalent weaknesses. In relation to each poet on the syllabus, it sometimes seemed that the candidate was addressing the poem without substantial prior acquaintance; this often led to generalised answers that ignored the key terms of the question actually set, and often focused on alternative (presumably more familiar) poems. Some candidates wrote on the set poem only, forgetting to place it in the context of others they had studied. Others made somewhat mechanical reference to additional poems, often as a kind of afterthought at the end of the answer: in these cases, there was little or nothing offered in the way of correspondence or contrast between the set poem and those chosen as context. Many poetry answers adopted a linear approach to commenting on the set poem. While this strategy can be extremely effective and may result in high marks, it does have certain dangers: many answers of this kind do not reach the end of the poem, which may well radically affect the reading of the poem as a whole; the approach may also lead to repetition and/or to point-spotting – discussing a series of individual images or issues without achieving an overall view of the poem. It should be stated, however, that many candidates wrote with maturity, insight and skill, and were able effectively to marry technical comment to meaning in the poem, and to make telling links with additional poems, including some from outside the prescribed list.

Comments on individual questions

1   Wordsworth: 'The Solitary Reaper'

Many kinds of communication were identified in answers to this question. Candidates discussed the lass's self-expression, noting that she sings unselfconsciously with no sense of audience; they identified communication between the lass and the natural world, the vale 'overflowing' with her music; they showed how the poet hears and understands her song at a deep level, abandoning speculation about the content of her song for appreciation of communication beyond words, with a profound effect lasting beyond the moment (well-prepared candidates often referred to this as 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'). Some answers showed how the poet communicates with nature, mediated by the lass's song, beyond the immediate (reference here was made to the 'Arabian sands' and 'the Hebrides'); many identified the writer's communication with the reader through the medium of poetry, showing how the ballad form is appropriate to the

situation, and how the poem is expressed simply in 'the language really used by men', true to Wordsworth's principles. In common with previous sessions, many candidates showed some skill in placing the poem and Wordsworth in the context of the Romantic movement. There was no clear favourite choice of comparative poem, although 'There Was a Boy' was used to good effect to highlight the communication between humankind and nature, and 'Old Man Travelling' was selected at times to demonstrate Wordsworth's portrayal of solitary figures.

2   Rossetti: 'A Better Resurrection'

The Rossetti question was answered less frequently than the others in Section A, but there seems to be a gradual increase in study of her poetry on the paper. As in previous sessions, candidates often focused more successfully on form and structure in Rossetti than in the other set poets. Though both hope and despair were signalled in the trigger quotation, many answers concentrated chiefly – or even solely – on despair. Those candidates who were aware of the effects of structure and progression (quicken ... rise ... drink) dealt best with the relationship between the key terms. There was some interesting analysis of effects of metaphors/similes (stone ... leaf… harvest ... barren dusk ... frozen thing ... bud ... sap of Spring ... broken bowl ... cordial ... royal cup) translating spiritual experience into natural/material objects/processes (many references to other poems were made in support). Contextual (biographical) information was used with a varying degree of success, with some (usually speculative) connections made between feelings expressed in the poem and events in Rossetti's personal life. Candidates were usually more successful when using the wider group of poems as context, and often referred to poems with a dark mood, such as 'Despised and Rejected', to underline their discussion of despair in 'A Better Resurrection'.

3   Owen: 'Exposure'

This was – by far – the most popular poetry question. Answers were seen at all levels of attainment. The overall feeling was that many candidates enjoy the poetry of Owen (with a passion in some cases) and respond to it with intelligent individuality. Some answers at the lower end of achievement barely mentioned nature, however, and many others were organised in linear fashion, identifying/cataloguing references to nature in each stanza, sometimes sensitively with a grasp of the whole poem, often less so. Some of these linear discussions became rather unimaginative and repetitive: for example, 'the fifth stanza also has a refrain…'. Some answers traced a narrative from night through dawn into "snow-dazed" day, dreaming of "sun-dozed" home and better times, to night and the burial time. Many answers misunderstood the dream sequence of stanzas 5 into 6, and almost none noted the requirement of sacrifice acknowledged in stanza 7. There was some very sensitive unravelling of effects of imagery (brambles … ranks of grey … wind's nonchalance). By far the most popular comparative option was 'Futility' – but a wide range of other poems was quoted in discussion. A number of examiners felt that candidates were handling more general context – WWI, Jessie Pope, Craiglockhart etc – in a more selective and helpful way than in previous sessions.

4   Frost: 'Birches'

Frost was a moderately popular choice in Section A. Many answers failed to look at 'detailed observation' adequately, and the terms 'blank verse' and 'free verse' were often used without adequate care. A tendency towards sexualised interpretation was notable; it was sometimes the case that this was effectively justified. The linear approach to discussion was particularly problematic here, often leading to a fragmented answer with no real overview of the poem. Only the best answers commented on the poem's structure, recognising the initial description of physical condition of the trees (full of detailed observation); the change of direction at line 21 to reminiscence of youth; and the change at line 42 to meditation, translating birch swinging into an exploration of personal condition ("I'd like to get away from earth a while..."). Many answers

noted Frost's characteristic modulation from description/setting to reflection on significance/implication, often relating this to other poems such as 'After Apple-Picking' and 'Gathering Leaves'. In the way of wider context, some answers identified R.W.Emerson as a transcendentalist precursor in seeing nature as a symbolic language – as a candidate wrote, citing Emerson, "through nature one can achieve spiritual enlightenment".

Section B

Answers on the novels often showed a close acquaintance with the text and an impressive level of recall, although some candidates were content to offer a very narrow range of material in their answers. The most frequent problem was that many answers contained far too much plain narrative, without regard to the question set: this will receive little credit at AS level. While some answers showed evidence of effective study of critical reading in discussing, for example, narrative method or character construction, others paid little attention to the significance of narrative point of view and tended to describe characters as if they were real people, rather than figures constructed with narrative or symbolic functions. Where context was appropriately considered there was some really perceptive discussion of textual/contextual relations. Examiners noted that there was an increase overall in comment based on the recommended critical reading for the unit, especially David Lodge's *The Art of Fiction*; centres are reminded of the stipulation in the Specification that "study of the chosen text [in Section B] must be complemented by study of a literary-critical text", in order to fulfil the reuirements of the examination.

Comments on individual questions

Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

Question 5(a) *'Although much happens that could have disturbing, even tragic, consequences, disasters are successfully averted.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Pride and Prejudice*?*

This was a fairly popular question, and most candidates responded with at least a degree of competence; the quality of answers was determined by the range of examples and the exploration of their significance in the novel as a whole. Many selected Mr Collins' proposal to Elizabeth and her refusal as a disaster averted, and candidates were interestingly split on Charlotte Lucas's acceptance: had she averted the disaster of spinsterhood, or become the victim of a disastrous marriage? Most or all made Lydia's elopement with Wickham the centre of their discussion, and again considered whether the disaster of shame had been averted merely to precipitate another disastrous marriage. Elizabeth's initial rejection of Darcy was another popular instance, candidates often noting that Lady Catherine's intervention ironically has the effect opposite to that which she intends. Many answers were aware of narrative conventions of the romantic novel genre, which Austen both observes and challenges; discussion was often related to views of Regency social expectations. Only a few candidates took on the term 'tragic' from the question, and these often quoted Austen's own comment on the novel – that it was 'too light and bright and sparkling' – to suggest that the tone of the novel itself shrinks from any serious suggestion of tragedy.

Question 5(b) *'Laughter in* Pride and Prejudice *takes different forms and performs a variety of functions.'*
Explore ways in which laughter is important in Pride and Prejudice*.*

Candidates were able to take the question and use it to examine a range of possible contexts, looking at laughter within the novel – especially the propensity of Lizzy and her father to laugh at the 'follies, whims and inconsistencies' of others – and opportunities for the reader to laugh at or with the characters. Mr Collins, Mrs Bennet and Lady Catherine were the most popular targets

of humour for the reader, for other characters and for the narrator, whose ironic, usually indirect, interventions were the grounds for some perceptive and well-informed discussion. Mr Bennet was often identified as a source of humour directed against his wife, to be regarded later as an object of criticism since he seems to care less about his daughters' welfare than she does. Some few candidates wrote exclusively on irony, without considering a wider range of sources for laughter in the novel.

Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*

Question 6(a) *'Catherine's heart remains divided between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this reading of Wuthering Heights*?*

This question generated some largely narrative answers - often more attentive to Catherine's feelings about Heathcliff than those about Linton - but also some informed, closely argued and well-supported analyses of her relations with both figures, both narratively and symbolically: Heathcliff embodying natural instincts and responses, Linton representing social and cultural status and concerns. These answers were often grounded in critical reference to crucial episodes and imagery (few answers failed to refer to "foliage" and "rocks", in more or less developed detail, as key signifiers of relationships and their meanings). There were some absorbing studies of Bronte's presentation of Catherine's psychology and motives, referring often to gender as well as class politics as major concerns of the novel: references to Marxism and/or feminism as approaches to the text were more or less helpful according to the relevance and theoretical understanding demonstrated in the answer.

Question 6(b) *The power of* Wuthering Heights *owes much to the narrative technique by which conventional people relate a very unconventional tale.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

Answers to this less popular question varied between, on the one hand, narrative recounting of what Nellie and Lockwood in turn tell us and, on the other hand, sophisticated explorations of their differences of point of view, language and position in term of class, culture, urban/rural values, and gender-determined judgements on characters and events. Some candidates brought in ideas from David Lodge about 'the unreliable narrator'. As with the (a) option, this question provided plenty of opportunity for heart-felt, passionate response from candidates who often seemed especially committed to study of this novel.

Hardy: Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Question7(a) *'The Woman Pays.'*
Do female characters in Tess of the D'Urbervilles *suffer more because they are women?*

Many answers to this question concentrated entirely on Tess, despite the clear lead in the question. In others, Joan Durbeyfield and the Talbothays milkmaids were included in analysis of gender relations in the novel. Many answers turned appropriately on the dual social and moral standards operating in the society constructed in the text (and, by extension, in the Victorian world): Angel's hypocrisy in rejecting Tess in spite of his own confessed history came in for especially intense disapproval. Tess's condition of triple jeopardy - being poor, female and beautiful - was seen to make her particularly vulnerable to male exploitation, enhanced even further by the operations of fate and coincidence and impulsive tendencies in her own nature. The most convincing answers explored the implications of crucial episodes in the novel, often with telling discussion of imagery and interventions by the narrative voice.

Question 7(b) *'The settings frequently reflect the moods of the characters.'*
Explore the relationship between character and environment in Tess of the D'Urbervilles *in the light of this comment.*

This was a reasonably popular question. As with many such questions, at the bottom end of the ability range it was usual to receive a list-like structure which did little to develop or synthesise a sophisticated response to the issue at hand (it was rare to see an answer which focused on the word 'relationship' in the question). While some answers were thin on detail and critical discussion, others explored perceptively ways in which settings express mood and circumstance. Appropriately, Talbothays and Flintcomb-Ash received most developed attention, not only in relation to Tess's condition, but also as emblematic of different ways of living and farming, and the impact of historical process on individual and community. Talbothays was seen to represent traditional farming methods and relationships; Flintcomb-Ash the effects of agricultural mechanisation on people and their activities – with Tess as the victim of personal revenge as well as back-breaking work on a machine which ignores natural rhythms.

Wharton: *The Age of Innocence*

Question 8(a*) 'Anything but innocent.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the society portrayed in The Age of Innocence*?*

Among the relatively few scripts tackling this text there were a number of enthusiastic responses, sensitive to Wharton's ironies, alert to effects, and informed on the context of what Mark Twain called 'the Gilded Age'. Mrs Archer's exemplary narrowness of vision and imagination; the rigidity and monotony of social activities; the suspicion and disapproval of the outsider, especially Madame Olenska; the tendency to think the worst of people (realised when Archer discovers that everyone in the community takes it for granted that he and Ellen are lovers); the readiness to take covert action to control other people's lives: these and other features were thoroughly explored as ironic aspects of this world's "innocence". On the other hand, in response to both (a) and (b) answers noted a kind of nostalgia for a society more stable and more secure of its own values than the world of the Archers' children and that of the novel's postwar readership. In both (a) and (b) answers May Welland/ Archer was often taken as her society's most fruitfully representative figure in terms of the questions: answers argued that, regarded by Archer and, at first, the narrative voice as "innocent" (in the sense of naive), narrow-minded and intellectually challenged, she nevertheless turns out to be more perceptive than expected, reads Archer's inclinations better than he does himself, and is adept in heading off any threat to her and her family's security (by bringing her wedding forward and announcing herself pregnant before she could be sure she was). Many answers suggested that, compared with May's deep structural understanding of the ways of her world and her place in it, Madame Olenska and Archer himself are the innocents at large: as a candidate wrote, "May runs rings round both of them!"

Question 8(b) *'The narrative voice is both critical and admiring of the novel's characters.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of The Age of Innocence*?*

Answers to this question were even fewer: those seen by examiners explored Wharton's presentation of, predominantly, Archer, May, Ellen Olenska, with a sample of other characters, Lefferts and Beaufort among them, of whom the narrative voice is as critical as Archer himself. Most answers noted that Archer is the focal point of the novel, and that generally his critical commentary on his society is supported by the narrative, but argued also that he is deeply implicated in, and complicit with, the society he feels both superior to and also bound by. Ellen Olenska, answers suggested, is presented primarily in terms of her difference from the New York community and from May in particular: some argued that the narrative voice "admired" her for her independence of spirit and her moral strength in keeping in check Archer's impulsiveness, and sympathised with her isolated position; others that the voice is "critical" of her lack of concern for the community whose support she depends upon. The most interesting answers argued that the narrative voice is artfully ambiguous in its representation of virtually everyone and everything in the novel, and subject to change as events unfold.

Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

Question 9(a) *'In* The Great Gatsby*, no one is happy but everyone dreams of happiness.'*
How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of the novel?

This was by far the most popular novel, and the questions provoked a wide variety of views and approaches. The quality of answers on (a) was determined largely by the meaning attributed to the terms "happiness" and "dreams". Many narrative-based answers assessed the condition and ambitions of each character in turn, often in somewhat reductive, narrative-based terms. Nick was often seen as problematic: before his involvement with Gatsby he was characterised as reasonably happy with the excitement of New York and dreaming of making money in the bond business (very few noted his ironic self-association with "Midas and Morgan and Maecenas"). Where answers of this kind explored further into motives and outcomes there was some interesting discussion. Other answers used the question's key terms to explore the nature of the society constructed in the novel (often illuminated by reference to the context of the American 1920s), and the activities, relationships and aspirations endorsed in such a world – in which, as the experiences of the novel's characters demonstrate, adultery is taken for granted, class lines are rigorously enforced, exploitation (financial and sexual) is endemic, and crime is the only effective route to wealth and status. Some interesting answers argued that essentially the only dreamers in the novel are Gatsby, indicated by Nick's first sight of him "stretching out his arms", and the Dutch sailors with whose dream his own is associated in the novel's closing paragraphs. A few answers suggested that the only truly "happy" episode in the novel is Nick's memory of his returns from school and college in the East to the Middle West at Christmas time.

Question 9(b*) 'Nick is careful to record the different points of view of Gatsby's admirers and detractors.'*

In the light of this quotation, discuss ways in which Gatsby is presented in the novel.

Answers to this question often noted Nick's view that "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window", but also that his practice as narrator is to record a variety of perspectives, on Gatsby at least. Most answers recognised this variety, noting the viewers and speculators that Nick cites(though few lists were complete): the guests at Gatsby's parties; Jordan Baker; Tom Buchanan; Daisy; Meyer Wolfsheim; the owl-eyed man in Gatsby's library; Gatsby's father; the journalist who knocks at Gatsby's door. Most answers recognised that these comments on Gatsby reveal more about the characters making them than about the man himself, but many also explored what, taken together, they suggest about Gatsby and the society of the novel (and the 1920s). Some answers regarded Nick's account of Gatsby as "worth the whole damn bunch put together" as a corrective to these views ("He's the only one whose view we can trust"); most explored his function as an unreliable narrator, some suggesting that his view is as self-revealing as any of the others: as a candidate wrote, "Nick describes Gatsby as he wants him to be, not necessarily as he is".

Answers on both questions, though particularly (a), often invoked "the American Dream" as a model for understanding character and aspiration. Some answers recognised the complexity of this mythic model and its constituent symbolic ideas and icons; many reduced the model to an aspiration to success to be achieved by hard work ("... the American Dream where everything is possible if you put your mind to it..."); some acutely saw this reduction as an aspect of American culture in the 1920s. The model, and Fitzgerald's commentary in this novel on its current condition, need careful handling: in some answers its frequent invocation pre-empted developed consideration of character and motivation; indeed, the more often the American Dream was referred to (sometimes a dozen times or more in the answer), the less satisfactory as individual discussion the answer usually proved to be. Only a small handful of answers recognised that the American Dream is a vision not only of individual opportunity but of America itself, the possibilities offered to humanity by the discovery of "the new world ... the last and greatest of all human dreams".

Waugh: *A Handful of Dust*

Question 10(a) *'Too serious a title for such a funny book.'*
How far and in what ways is A Handful of Dust *an appropriate title for the novel?*

Among the relatively few answers on this text were a number of enthusiastic and responsive discussions, often alert to its satiric representation of contextual issues; many also pointed out correspondences with Waugh's own experience. In answers on (a) most candidates were aware of the echo of *The Waste Land*, and were able to use the reference, more or less successfully, as a way into discussion of the novel's tone and methods. Those who did not recognise the allusion were extremely resourceful in attributing meanings to the title: some took bearings from the funeral service ("ashes to ashes, dust to dust"); some developed the image of dust "blowing out of the hand, leaving nothing behind"; at least one answer suggested overlap with Blake's "to see the world in a grain of sand"; another saw in the title "an image of sand falling through a hand and running out", and wrote an interesting answer on time and change as concerns in the novel. All answers were alert to the novel's comic episodes and effects: while a few suggested that this aspect did run counter to the title's implications, most argued that the comic scenes provided support for the novel's overall disturbing themes, and some suggested that the text's characteristic energy comes from the tension between comic and serious: for example, "The comedy of John Andrew's behaviour turns bitter when he dies and his mother doesn't seem to care". Most noted that the comedy runs out as the book approaches its conclusion.

Question 10(b) *'Tony's whole world is savagely broken up.'*
In the light of this comment, do you find the satire of A Handful of Dust to be too destructive?

Most candidates seemed to welcome the term 'satire' in the question, and many had some useful contextual insights into this genre (it is worth remembering that not all context is social/historical/biographical). Weaker answers concentrated on Tony's suffering, and in a number of cases offered a very narrow range of material (for example, focusing on little more than the divorce) in support of their answers, despite the relative shortness of the novel. More substantial answers tended to take issue with the question, exploring the London scenes for satirical effects, with the Beavers as favourite examples, and noting the irony that Tony "exchanges one jungle for another". Some answers followed the question's lead quotation by concentrating on the implications, satirical and otherwise, of the treatment of Hetton as an example of cultural, social and moral decay. It was cheering, on both questions, to see answers so receptive to the novel's qualities.

F662 Literature post-1900

What a difference a year makes; last year only one Centre produced coursework for the Winter session; this year we had entries from 180 Centres.

What a difference a session makes! In Summer 2009, the favourite texts were *The World's Wife* and *The History Boys*. These occurred in every one of the eight moderators' allocations this January, so are still very popular, but not as frequently as *Atonement* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Unusual texts were *Children of Men, The Man Who Had All The Luck, The Madness of King George III, Far Away,* the poetry of Adrienne Rich*, Titus Groan,* the poetry of Sharon Olds*, Purple Hibiscus, Second Class Citizen, Jumpers, Exit Music,* Edward Thomas's poems, *That They May Feel the Rising Sun, Amongst Women,* the poetry of Kingsley Amis, *The Hound of the Baskervilles, The Passion, Writing the Body, Strong Poison,* poetry of Ivor Gurney*, Secret Narratives, The Poisonwood Bible* and *Breakfast of Champions.* Of course, F662 is more than which texts become big hits and which make new entries on the chart of the session, but it is fascinating to see what is in vogue, the range of Centres' text selections and how F662 is re-inventing the coursework scene. The last round of Specifications did not generate anything like the breadth of experimentation that Centres have demonstrated over the last two sessions.   It is exhilarating just opening the packets. Think how stimulating it must be for the students to have spent time exploring these texts!

It is also rewarding being a moderator, and the team assembled this time were unanimous in their praise for how well Centres are making this unit work: "Much good practice overall"; "This seems to have been a successful session as most Centres demonstrated confidence in using the Band Descriptors to annotate and mark candidates' work"; "There was some very interesting work this session, often based on unusual texts"; "Overall, standards were very good this year. Most candidates had prepared well for their coursework and wrote with enthusiasm"; "As with the Summer, the best thing about the coursework has been the variety of texts I've seen this session".

What was reported negatively, though, was that some Centres did not show enough address to the assessment objectives in their marginal or summative annotation and that assessment objectives were not always given their appropriate reward in terms of the task setting of individual pieces. Some thoughts follow, therefore, on the assessment objectives and how they should be viewed in relation to F662.

AO1

This assessment objective is tested in both of the folder items and takes the form of textual knowledge as well as terminology, the organising of an argument and clarity of expression. In some Centres, this seems rather to be taken for granted, as a sort of prerequisite of writing on/about literature, and clearly not given much attention. Alternatively, it might be that Centres see this as a small proportion of the available marks (a third on Task 1 and a fifth of Task 2, but of course a quarter overall). However, very often it is the "glue" to a good answer. Thankfully candidates do not often have defective knowledge of their texts; but, at the lower end of the mark range narrative still creeps in rather than point-making)or, better still, formulating an argument); and fluency of expression and a coherent line of development are skills that many candidates could improve further, even though coursework allows for the opportunity to re-draft. One team leader put it thus: "I feel that this AO is the one most likely to be ignored during internal moderation at a pocketful of Centres and the quality of written communication needs to be foregrounded again. Using an appropriate register is advised. Proof reading is advised."

AO2

It should, perhaps, be stressed once more that AO1 problems occur in only "some" or a "pocketful" of Centres. More Centres see it as the main focus - and consequently ignore the weightings given to other areas of the assessment. This is particularly the case with AO2 which, despite being dominant in both the Critical Piece and Re-creative Work , can often receive a few glancing mentions amongst material on character and theme and plot, areas of literary study with which candidates are much more happy. One of the descriptors for AO2 concerns the use and integration of quotation and some Centres have seen this as the be-all and end-all of this assessment objective. The employment of quotation indicates textual knowledge, which is of course an aspect of AO1. The issue for quotation as an aspect of AO2 is that it should be critically addressed, with illumination of matters of form, structure and language as the goal. We are looking for analytical AO2 (linguistic effects, hints of genre, insight into textual organisation) rather than mere demonstrations of knowledge or shows of being able to select evidence to back up a point. Terminology can often show that a candidate is thinking analytically, as does exploration of the effect of language or of compositional choices by a writer.

AO2 is formally assessed only in Task 1 and accounts for 10 marks of the available 15. This must mean it warrants more than the consideration of a few words in a passage gloss or sweeping statements such as "I used a chatty style because this seemed to be the character's mode" in re-creative pieces. Clearly considering form *and* structure *and* language might help some candidates to apply themselves more firmly to this assessment objective; similarly, comment on word, sentence and whole text (i.e. the re-created passage) achievement might assist candidates with commentaries on the re-creative option. However, this is not to suggest there is some preconceived agenda in moderators' minds for how marks should be awarded; there is not. There is an appraisal, after reading a piece, of whether the submission can be justified as meeting the assessment scale at the point at which it is located and a weighing-up of whether there is enough AO2 address either in terms of frequency of comment or depth of exploration. Nevertheless Centres will perhaps find it useful to read this observation by a team leader: "A noticeable omission in many responses was the lack of analysis of form, with weaker candidates focusing mostly on language. When all three strands were addressed, this was usually by Band 5 candidates. Some produced answers of great maturity and insight. "

AO3 and AO4

The Linked Texts pieces were better handled this session than last summer, although thorough and rigorous comparison and engagement with alternative readings do need to be managed for high marks (AO3). Some candidates seemed aware only of the comparison aspect of this assessment objective and did little to bring in alternative views that could be tested in terms of the argument. The candidate's personal opinion should not be seen as the way to access AO3: it's important, but surely the candidate's stance on a text should be evident in *any* piece of critical writing, regardless of which particular assessment objective is in focus? While it is too mechanistic to say that there are 10 marks available for AO3 of which 5 are awarded for comparison and another 5 for varied critical interpretations, both parts do need to be substantially addressed for Band 5 marks. Similarly, there are 10 marks for AO4 and therefore a range of material meeting different definitions of context (biographical, social, historical, political, literary, philosophical, language, psychological, etc) is advised; evaluation of contexts is also better – because more demanding as an analytical skill – than awareness. Very often essays contained some contextual comment, but the requirements of the assessment objective were not met as well as candidates' attempts at comparison.

In the words of one team leader: "Responses to AO3 and AO4 varied a great deal. Able candidates compared their texts in a number of ways. Weaker candidates wrote about one text and then the other with few direct comparisons. Again, able candidates had evidently read critical works and reviews of their texts, whereas weaker candidates seemed to have done little extra reading apart from perhaps basic internet sites. Able candidates had also been more thorough in their background reading for AO4 whereas weaker candidates devoted perhaps one or two sentences to context."

If the candidates and teachers are in tune with the assessment objectives and how they affect assignment-setting and the determining of marks, then this should help well-targeted writing to be produced. However, some thought also needs to be given to the options for Task 1 which are very different in type and require some "genre" understanding.

The Critical Piece is a close reading exercise, but not just a working through of a passage where everything is germane to the discussion and the possible material for comment is infinite. A specific task is helpful, so there is something to be argued and decided upon by the candidate. Also, the discussion should be characterised by an emphasis on form, structure and language. The passage should be manageable in size and explored in a way that its typicality or significance to the wider text is brought out. Task setting is important here and it is pleasing that moderators reported the incidence of fewer poor assignments and fewer one-size-fits-all titles: candidates are very different in their interests and motivation so providing a range of assignments is more likely to give a candidate a chance to be individual and achieve ownership of an aspect of the course - which should perhaps be a not-so-secret part of the coursework agenda. It seems that the Coursework Consultancy Service is having a good effect ; Centres that do not yet make use of it really should take advantage of this free resource. Getting that wider text application is crucial: this task privileges a small section of text, but the whole text should have been studied and appreciation of how the extract fits into the bigger picture of the text should come through in the discussion. If "come through" sounds vague, a useful rule of thumb is that reference to perhaps three other areas of the text suggested by the passage and the task is advisable; this is particularly appropriate to the study of poetry where collections are the set text and individual poems merely an extract of a mosaic of themes and one illustration of a writer's stylistic blueprint.

The Re-creative Piece is a chance for a more imaginative critical response, but it must be accompanied by a commentary that deals with specifics of style and theme in the created item and the stimulus passage. It should also contain some insight into how what has been created might fit in with the original: maybe its position between poems in a collection, perhaps its status as an afterword or appendix, maybe how it develops a theme that is secondary in the original, perhaps how it plugs a gap in the original, etc. This will allow re-creative work to be assessed in the same way as the Critical Piece: as a response to an extract which should be seen in the context of part to whole. There should be a sense of the full text influencing the created text as well as the created text's debt to a particular passage. A title is helpful in order to assist the candidate, then later the moderator, in understanding the scope of the task and have an awareness of the context of the focus extract. Cross-referencing of the created text, the stimulus passage and aspects of the full text should occur in the commentary, not just a relaying of various achievement points in terms of capturing a character or returning to a theme. The main focus, of course, should be how language choices, structural devices and formal constraints create meaning and re-create a textual world.

There has been frequent mention in the previous two paragraphs of an extract or focus passage or stimulus section of a text (which, of course, might take the form of a single poem); this must be provided with the work once the sample has been called from the Centre.
Other reminders that I should like to give:

1) Coursework deadlines are fixed and Centres should work towards them in the interests of professional integrity. Work received at the end of January is really arriving too late.
2) Bibliographies are essential for Linked Texts submissions. (It is unlikely that one is needed for Task 1, given the parameters of discussion there, but that may depend upon the approach undertaken, but AO3 and AO4 are not assessed.) Footnotes, if used, should cross-reference with the bibliography. Footnotes are not essential, but can add to the academic surface of a discussion.
3) Photocopied or electronic back-ups of coursework are useful: some Centres had mislaid work which was subsequently called for moderation. This can lead to candidates being asked to be withdrawn.

4) Clerical errors are messy to process. Please be extra-vigilant when recording marks. The most common error is the difference between what is on the computer or a MS1 and what is on a top sheet. Sometimes differences occur because of robust internal standardisation. OCR is very much in favour of this, but changes actioned should be explained in terms of comments on cover sheets.

5) "GCSE weight texts" can, of course make the transition to A Level study in the same way that *Macbeth* could at different times have been studied for SATs, GCSE, A Level or degree. However, while the likes of *Of Mice and Men* and *To Kill A Mockingbird* might be opened up by being used for Linked Texts, a poem such as "Havisham" for a Critical Piece, it was found this session, did not really stretch candidates at AS. If Centres wish to receive guidance on text choices, they should get in touch with the Coursework Consultancy service.

6) CCS160 forms must be submitted as a matter of course with the folders.

7) Three texts should be studied and written on substantially within the folders, one for Task 1 and a different two for Task 2.

8) Critical texts such as *The Art of Fiction* which are recommended support material for F661 should not be used as one of the three named texts in a Centre or candidate's work.

9) It is helpful if Centres tell moderators that a candidate has been withdrawn rather than allow the information to be sought at a later date.

10) In re-creative work, the introduction of a different narrative voice into a first person narrative needs careful thought, even when, as in *The Lovely Bones,* the first person narrator is an omniscient ghost who can read other people's minds. The inserted voice may be interesting but inappropriate for the original.

11) The cover sheet states that the word limit does not include quotations so it would be helpful if candidates indicated the number of words excluding quotations**.**

12) It is helpful if candidates indicate the post 1990 text on cover sheets.

Some of these are niggles, some tips for improvement. However, I should like to return to the positivity of the beginning of this report as F662 is very much a liberating and enriching experience.

Centres approach the demands of studying literature Post 1900 in different ways. Many Centres are beginning to adopt a thematic approach when choosing all three texts, such as science fiction; war from different perspectives; crime and punishment; gender perspectives; historical perspectives; American Literature; dystopia; growing up; love. Some of these, of course, feature in the OCR Coursework Guidance, taking ideas from which is acceptable practice – as is using the suggested questions there, although it is hoped that as the Specification progresses Centres will set their own titles, especially as they can receive free guidance from a coursework consultant. Other schools use the Critical Piece to take students in a different direction to the shared area of Linked Texts, often playing to their own enthusiasms in inspirational ways. Other Centres, of course, have embraced the English 21 debate's strong recommendation that creative approaches to literature really stimulate students and taken the opportunities offered by re-creative writing to offer something individual and appealing to their cohorts.

Whatever the approach, the majority of Centres this time showed confidence and maturity in their assessment, their candidates having produced engaged and interested essays. Well done! It is a testament to some committed and enlightened teaching. Long may this continue!

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General Comments

We were very pleased by the work we saw this January: this has been an interesting and enjoyable 'first run' for the new paper. Although candidates were taking the examination early in their A2 year, we saw much very good work: many candidates offered mature and thoughtful writing, and showed secure textual knowledge. Little of the work seen was weak or inadequate. It is clear that tasks on this paper are accessible to candidates of modest ability, yet provide opportunities for the most capable and for the best prepared. Most candidates seemed to find the questions approachable, and produced relevant and thoughtfully argued responses.

Examiners were pleased to see that teachers have carefully prepared candidates, with a clear awareness of the differing emphasis of the two sections. In the Shakespeare section the emphasis is on Assessment Objectives 2 (close examination of the effects of language, form and structure) and 3 (different readings of the texts). Candidates quoted extensively, and were able to draw with confidence on knowledge of critical attitudes to the play they had studied. Many made useful references to productions they had themselves seen in the theatre, on television, or on film. This January there was an overwhelming preference for *Othello* as the chosen text.

In Section B, where Assessment Objectives 3 (analysis of relationships between texts) and 4 (understanding of the significance and influence of contexts) are dominant, some really exciting insights were offered. It was particularly pleasing to see that, in some Centres where all candidates had studied the same texts, <u>all</u> six questions were chosen by different candidates. This meant that examiners were kept on their toes by lively and sometimes original and ingenious connections between texts: several commented on the freshness and vitality of responses. This January a relatively restricted range of texts predominated.

Responses to Individual Questions

Section A: Shakespeare

More candidates chose character-based options in this session. There was a feeling that the phrase 'dramatic structure' in some questions on the paper might have proved off-putting to some candidates: however, where these options were chosen, some excellent analysis of the effects of plotting, pace and organisation was offered. Most candidates commented on presentation of character, staging, scene arrangements and language and the ways in which these impacted on the propositions in the tasks.

1   *Henry IV Part 1*

(a)   'The comic elements of *Henry IV Part 1* are crucial to its dramatic impact.' Evaluate this view by exploring the effects of the comic elements in the play.

Candidates who studied this text were in general very well prepared, showing excellent knowledge of text and dramatic structure. Genre was well understood, and comic scenes were identified as much more than 'light relief'.

1(b)   'It becomes evident that Prince Hal and his father are far more alike than they at first appear.' By analysing the presentation of Prince Hal and the King in *Henry IV Part 1*, evaluate this view.

This was less frequently chosen. The small number of candidates who chose this play did so with confidence and showed detailed knowledge.

2   *Twelfth Night*

(a)   By exploring the dramatic presentation of Viola in *Twelfth Night*, evaluate the view that 'honesty and directness, more than anything else, set this character apart.'

Some of the most fruitful debate here was on whether Viola's disguise counts against her 'honesty'.   Some well argued answers denied Viola's honesty and directness, exploring the chaos that her disguise caused for others and herself. Her direct addresses to the audience were seen as important. There was often useful consideration, too, of how honest the other characters are, especially Feste. There was a good level of quotation throughout.

(b)   'Ideas of loss and recovery are absolutely central to the play.' Evaluate this view by considering ways in which loss and recovery are explored in *Twelfth Night*.

Candidates found loss and recovery a congenial topic. Loss was generally handled well: Viola, Olivia, Orsino, Malvolio and even Feste were explored for their trauma. Malvolio's loss – and lack of recovery, most felt – was one of the more interesting points for debate. Other answers challenged the idea that there was a restoration and discussed the increasing darkness of the play and the final cynical pessimism of Feste. Some discussed the trickery and topsy-turviness of hierarchy and applied this well to the themes of the play. Really engaged candidates appreciated the escapism of Illyria and were not entirely sure that a return to reality, post Twelfth Night, was a good thing!

3   *Othello*

(a)   'She is vital to her husband: in losing her, he loses himself.' By exploring ways in which the relationship between Desdemona and Othello is presented, evaluate this view.

This was by far the most popular task on the paper, and the great majority approached it with confidence, having clearly focused on this relationship when reading and discussing the play. There were quite frequent references to aspects of the Lenny Henry/Northern Broadsides production, and to the different versions available on DVD. These were productive, so long as they supported the answer as a whole, rather than being, as occasionally, of tenuous relevance.

A key discriminator was <u>close</u> attention to the view offered in the prompting quotation: some candidates wrote rather generally about the relationship between Desdemona and Othello, but better answers addressed themselves fully to both the 'vital' and the 'in losing her, he loses himself' parts of the question. Candidates were, after all, asked to 'evaluate this view', so that merely presenting an account of how Othello and Desdemona fell in love, and then how Iago engineered the disintegration of their attachment, did not quite answer the purpose. There were some interesting and informed responses: 'He never actually loses Desdemona – it is only his ideal of what she is that is lost'; "Othello's loss of himself is charted in the degeneration of his language from 'Put up your bright swords …' to 'goats and monkeys!'"; 'His chivalric act of winning Brabantio's daughter is inextricably linked to his military and adventurous history … and as such, in Othello's susceptible mind, she becomes "vital" to his sense of himself, and his assimilation to Venetian culture'. These views were often supported by consideration of different readings (Coleridge, Bradley and Leavis), by more recent criticism, by candidates' own interpretations, and by close attention to literary and dramatic effects. An important characteristic of better answers was their clarity in identifying opposing views, and then evaluating them. The temptation to offer a simplified, sentimental view ('they are very much in love, then it all collapses; the opinion offered is entirely correct') was clear, but it was well worth a

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candidate's time to stop and consider ways in which Desdemona is <u>not</u> vital to Othello, and ways in which his loss of self is <u>not</u> directly the result of losing her. This is not a counsel to perversity; simply, it is not possible to 'evaluate' a point of view without considering it from different angles. The best answers dealt impressively with the complexities of Othello's identity within the play: for example, the extent to which the distinction between his private and public selves collapses when he encounters the experience of doubt.

(b)   By considering the dramatic structure and effects of *Othello*, evaluate the view that 'the power of the play derives from an agonising sense of inevitability'.

Perhaps because this question steered candidates away from narrative particulars towards a more abstract and generic evaluation of the play, it produced answers which were often less predictable and better focused than 3a. There was, interestingly, a wide range of views expressed, with a significant number of candidates choosing to argue that, despite the clear presence of familiar elements of tragedy, it is Iago's improvisatory energies which lead to a conclusion which takes everyone (including Iago himself) by surprise. There was much careful analysis of the first two scenes, in which Shakespeare establishes, with unusual and repeated emphasis, the dramatic ironies which help to create such 'agonising inevitability'.

4   *The Winter's Tale*

(a)   'The character of Paulina is crucially important to the mood and action of the play.' Evaluate this view by analysing the significance of Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*.

This produced enthusiastic responses, many appreciating Paulina's position as a minor member of the court who is no minor character, particularly as she is not 'dead' for a large part of the play. One candidate wrote angrily about her cruelty in keeping everyone waiting for sixteen years – a symptom of a naïve view which treats a play as 'real life'; stronger answers avoided this approach, offering a more sophisticated awareness of dramatic structure.

(b)   'A comedy with all the ingredients of a tragedy - but a comedy, nevertheless.' By exploring the dramatic structure and effects of *The Winter's Tale*, evaluate this view of the play.

Responses to this question showed intelligent understanding of genre. An interesting 'other reading' concerned the potential unhappiness of an ending where 'Leontes' paternalism echoes his earlier tyranny'.

Section B – Drama and Poetry pre-1800

The majority of candidates rose well to the challenge of comparative work. On the whole the most successful answers included frequent and often skilful movement between the two texts – sometimes detailed examination of the two together but often simply judicious asides ('as shown more obviously by Faustus' overreaching'; 'unlike Donne's more evidently misogynistic speakers'). To concentrate lengthily on one text and then on the other was a much riskier approach, giving less opportunity for pertinent comparison and contrast. (A number of candidates did produce effective responses on this model, but either because they were exploring a strong idea whose relevance to both texts was easily kept in mind, or because they were writing long essays with space to examine a text in detail, proceed to its partner and return several times.) We are open, in this paper, to answers which form themselves as they are written: it is to be expected, given the unseen focuses of the questions and the time constraints within which candidates are working: but it is important that even when candidates do not know where, in the larger scheme, their answer may be going, they set out some comparative terms of reference (with mention of both texts) in their opening paragraphs. Otherwise it sometimes

becomes hard to be confident that there <u>will</u> be some reference to a second text in the essay as a whole.

The best answers displayed an astonishing erudition and grasp of textual detail. The *very* best revolved the texts, weighing and balancing in terms of theme, character, issues, genre, purpose, effect and the ways in which context influenced structure form and language. These were often kaleidoscopic: shifting, comparing, challenging and confident in suggesting ways in which the texts and writers both shared and parted company on all of the above and the ways in which writers wrote for specific audiences and conformed to genre... or indeed did not conform to genre. They allowed an understanding of the texts and their range of contexts - moral, social, personal, historical, political, literary and religious - to inform their judgements. The very best challenged issues in the question's proposition, and considered ways in which genre dictated presentation of such issues.

Not all candidates seemed to realise that AOs 3 and 4 are more heavily weighted than 1 and 2. In particular, there were many answers which neglected AO4, offering little more than an occasional token comment about the Renaissance, or (often inaccurately) about attitudes to sex and gender in Jacobean England. There were some very serious confusions about Catholicism and the Reformation which weakened some answers on Milton, Faustus and even Chaucer. Centres should encourage candidates to immerse themselves in the mental and cultural worlds of their two texts, as reflections of issues and attitudes of their times.

The best answers took on *the whole of* the prompting quotation, rather than just the first part of it. Often the *final* words in these quotations offered the most specific, therefore most intriguing, angles for exploration. For example, Q5 did not just ask for a comparative list of character weaknesses (but about the relationship between character flaws and the moral lessons offered in the works); Q7 is not just about intensity of emotion (but about bitterness of effect); Q9 is not just about vanity (but about how it '*too easily* destroys us'). A useful discriminator between Band 5 and Band 6 was the extent to which the candidates had used their (impressive) understanding of both texts to wrestle with the precise proposition in the prompt quote. Some Band 5 answers, in fact, were *more* neatly, conclusively argued than some Band 6 answers, because they had not risked the messy uncertainty of tackling the exact issue raised in the task. Some candidates seemed to think it necessary to force the argument towards an agreement: others did not have the confidence to go with their instincts and wrote half in favour and half against, which sometimes had an element of contrivance.

It is important that both texts are adequately explored and represented in the answer. For example, *The Duchess of Malfi* may be long, but Donne's poetry is exceedingly concentrated in effect. We saw some scripts which attempted to balance only one poem by Donne against the whole of *The Duchess of Malfi*, and we were unable to reward such unbalanced answers very highly. Good answers were allusive (sometimes referring in passing - a phrase, or an image - to a number of Donne poems) and the best characteristically used both this allusive method and a close look at three or more poems which seemed to them helpful in comparison. Each of the two texts *must* be properly reflected in the final essay.

Given the number of possible routeways through the Section B – sixteen in all – it seems most useful to comment on the most popular question choices seen by examiners. In this session, again overwhelmingly, the most popular drama texts were *Dr Faustus* and *The Duchess of Malfi,* and the preferred poetry texts were *The Pardoner's Tale, Paradise Lost Book 1* and the poems of John Donne. Excellent answers on all other texts were seen, but unfortunately not in sufficient numbers to make any general comment possible.

5   'Flawed characters are always more memorable than any moral lessons that literature seeks to draw from them.' In the light of this view, discuss ways in which writers present characters' flaws and failings.

Marlowe and Milton. This question was overwhelmingly the most popular choice. Candidates found many parallels and distinctions between Marlowe's Faustus and Milton's Satan, including their hubris; 'they share a sense of pride but react differently to their downfall – Faustus despairs, Satan rebels' so that '*Paradise Lost* begins where *Dr Faustus* ends'. They share greed for power, but Faustus also has 'a thirst for material wealth; his greed is so extraordinary that he argues with a horse-courser for ten dollars'. Both characters 'aspire to deity'. Chaucer's Pardoner was also compared with Faustus as 'hubristic'.

Marlowe and Chaucer. Answers did not always take into account the 'memorable' aspect of the question. Those who did sometimes argued that the flaws were in themselves a memorable moral lesson while others agreed with the title statement. Most of these discussions involved Faustus and the Pardoner. 'Admittedly Chaucer's message is clearer than Marlowe's, but it is still not as memorable as that effeminate fellow with the yellow hair'. Some, on the other hand, felt that the Pardoner's 'detachment from the moral of his Tale' means that Faustus's flaws are more memorable – he is more centrally involved in the action. Partly for this reason some people found it easier to concentrate on the 'riotoures' than the Pardoner. Others integrated both in the discussion: 'Faustus, the revellers and the Pardoner all have "a surfeit of deadly sin that hath damned both body and soul", although the Pardoner is seemingly unpunished – perhaps to make the point that real fourteenth-century pardoners went free'.

Webster and Donne. This worked well as a combination. Some strong answers considered in detail the ways in which Donne used conceits to deceive or to achieve selfish and personal ends through a variety of poems and the ways in which his anguish later served as a personal moral lesson. This was well combined with aspects of religious/personal guilt in Bosola, Ferdinand and the Cardinal in the Duchess. Such thoughtful answers explored ways in which women were used and exploited by male power and the structures and language in which such issues were addressed, resolved or unresolved. Some answers tended to concentrate almost exclusively on the Duchess herself, with occasional material on Julia and Bosola. The Duchess was seen as rather simply and unambiguously 'flawed'. There was some interesting writing about women, in the play and the poems, as allegedly flawed descendants of Eve. Some less secure answers on Donne and Webster seemed keen to construct a kind of dramatic biographical narrative of Donne's life – seducer, womaniser, married man, agonised cleric – which in the hands of secure candidates could be rooted in individual poems (and therefore useful), but which, in the hands of less secure candidates who could not quote confidently, degenerated into loose biographical parody.

Sheridan and Chaucer. Some candidates compared the Pardoner's ability to deceive with Joseph Surface's, but considered relatively few other aspects of question or texts.

6   'Of all the emotions that drive us, fear is the strongest.' In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore the power of fear

Webster and Donne. Some very interesting comparative insights were offered, backed with telling detail in the best answers. 'The deaths of the Duchess and Cariola serve to highlight the difference between one who has made her peace with God and one who has not … and the same conflict is played out in Donne's Holy Sonnets'. Detailed points of comparison included Donne's 'soonest our best men with thee do go' and the Duchess's 'Who would be afraid on`t,/Knowing to meet such excellent company/In th`other world?'. Webster was often very well explored, with discussion of Italian perfidy, horror and suffering, but candidates found more difficulty in expressing equally apt ideas on Donne's personal poetry of seduction and personal relationships on a much smaller scale.

Marlowe and Chaucer. Answers on Chaucer and Marlowe often compared the 'mistaken fearlessness of Faustus and the "riotoures".' Others saw their actions as an attempt to control the fear of death: going off to fight it or, in Faustus' case, thinking that he has gained control of it by sealing a pact for twenty-four years. For another 'Like Faustus, the rioters bring death on themselves in their desire to avoid it'. Though sometimes there was difficulty in fitting the Pardoner himself into the discussion, some candidates offered impressive and insightful commentaries on his hubris and on Chaucer's satiric project in creating him: a number of answers saw the Pardoner's rhetoric as 'a form of compensation for his physical lack'. Others concentrated on the Pardoner's need to instill fear in his congregation and the devils' need to frighten Faustus out of thinking he can repent. The memory of the Black Death was one context for fear in Chaucer. The Renaissance esteem for knowledge was seen as driving Faustus' original fearlessness.

7   'The more intense the passion, the more bitter its effects.' In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore intense emotion.

Webster and Donne. Many writers found 'the more bitter its effects' a useful prompt. The bitter effects of passion were to be seen in the Duchess's brothers and, less certainly, in the attitude of some of Donne's speakers. Some mature and accomplished answers contrasted the bitterness engendered by secrecy and jealousy in the world of *Malfi* with a happier, more extravagant and rakish sensuality (untainted by bitterness) in Donne. Witty examinations of expressions of intense passion did not necessarily lead to the argument that Donne's later religious verse was provoked by sexual guilt – a refreshing perception.

Marlowe and Milton. Most answers thoughtfully addressed Satan's and Faustus's passionate desire for power, and also for riches (Mammon also featured here). Where the whole question was taken into account, there were some impressive comparative discussions of the differing 'bitter effects' of passion on both protagonists. Some successful answers also tackled the ambivalent issue of the Renaissance passion for knowledge.

8   'The pleasures of pursuit are greater than the thrill of conquest.' In the light of this view, discuss ways in which writers present seduction and its consequences.

This was a very popular question, which drew admirers from all text combinations. Not surprisingly, it proved very popular with candidates who had studied *The School for Scandal*, 'The Rape of the Lock', Donne and *Dr Faustus*. Again interesting was the fact that different candidates either agreed or disagreed that the prompting view had been presented in their texts. This from within the same Centres, and even using similar evidence! Quite successfully, 'seduction' was interpreted by some candidates in different ways (for example, the moral seduction of greed and power *in The Pardoner's Tale*).

Marlowe and Chaucer. Some perceptive candidates compared 'Marlowe's seduced Faustus and Chaucer's seducing Pardoner'. Answers commonly contrasted Faustus' dreams of power through necromancy with the hollow reality – horns for Benvolio, grapes for the Duchess of Vanholt; similarly the Pardoner thinks he has given a triumphantly successful performance, only to get his come-uppance from the Host at the end. Most obviously where Dr Faustus was concerned, this pattern was seen in the context of the Morality Play tradition. One good discussion saw that in Chaucer, others suffer by the Pardoner's being seduced by greed, while in Marlowe, only Faustus himself suffers.

Webster and Donne. There was considerable potential in this combination, and some answers looked at pursuit in Webster in several sets of terms. Similarly, in Donne, though many answers talked of sexual seduction, strong answers looked at seduction by faith – and found convincing detailed evidence for this.

9   'Vanity drives us, and can all too easily destroy us.' In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers explore the power of vanity.

This was another popular task. While there were some very effective answers, a failure to identify, even if only by implication, what was understood by 'vanity' was a common weakness. Clearly, this task was likely to attract students of 'The Rape of the Lock', although some struggled to identify the (very different kind of) vanity in Faustus.

Marlowe and Milton. Successful answers often started with a wide definition of 'vanity', to include pride, ambition and arrogance, and also often noted somewhere that 'vain' had connotations of emptiness. A number discussed the different attitudes in different centuries, pointing out that pride and ambition are much praised in the twenty-first century. Others looked at the dramatic as well as thematic effects of the presentation of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Dr Faustus*. There were some neat comparisons between the seemingly admirable cosmic ambitions of Satan (albeit often undercut by Milton's narrative voice) and the speed with which John Faustus went from wanting to rule the world from pole to pole to meekly obeying requests to perform conjuring tricks. One eloquently argued that the contemporary belief in predestination meant that Faustus and Satan were both damned anyway. One or two answers attacked the vanity of God. Quite a number of candidates now treat God as on a par with Zeus and the Bible as similar to the Greek myths. However, one essay remarked that Satan still wields great power in the world. More surprisingly a number of candidates submitted quite passionate denunciations of Milton for his arrogance and vanity in writing *Paradise Lost* at all.

10   'By inviting us to laugh at foolishness, writers encourage us to laugh at ourselves.' In the light of this view, consider ways in which writers use mockery and humour.

This question was tackled, often with some originality and enterprise, by a small number of candidates studying all combinations of texts. At the more basic level this question was taken by candidates as a loose invitation to discuss what was 'funny' in the two chosen texts. Chaucer, clearly, offered much material. Nevertheless, some unexpected text combinations produced very strong answers, including astute discussions of macabre humour in Webster, of the comic in Donne, and, most gratifyingly, of the humour (both intended and unintended) of Milton. Strong candidates not only identified the humorous aspects of each text, but were able precisely to contextualise it and compare the *uses* (note the wider prompt!) being made of it in each case.

F664 Texts in Time

This first session of A2 coursework in the new specification proved to be pleasingly successful, with Centres offering an interesting range of folders for moderation. A number of Centres clearly had been following their synoptic schemes of work from the legacy specification, remodelling them successfully for coursework. Moderators saw, therefore, a lot of writing on the gothic tradition, with satire, American literature and post-colonial writing also featuring.

Several Centres had used texts and task titles featured in the Coursework Guidelines, but equally others had followed their own directions or had given their candidates free rein, resulting in some unusual and stimulating writing, often of very high quality. Moderators saw interesting work on the Romantics, on the fragmentation of the modern world, on the post WWII period and on the individual within society, to name just a few areas.

Moderators were pleased to see a wide range of interesting texts. Poetry ranged from Chaucer to Grace Nichols, while prose was selected from early gothic fiction to such contemporary works as *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Kite Runner.* Quite a lot of drama featured in the essays, from Shakespeare and Jonson to Friel and Stoppard. A number of candidates exploited the opportunity of studying texts in translation, with *The Aeneid, A Doll's House, An Enemy of the People* and *The Outsider* coming under discussion. It was pleasing to see that Centres and candidates are already exploring the extra options available in the new specification's coursework units.

With such a small entry, there was comparatively little work at the lower end of the mark range, but at this level too it was clear that candidates had engaged productively with their tasks and texts and had discovered more about them from the process of comparison.

Teachers and candidates have become accustomed to, and adept at addressing, the Assessment Objectives, and this remains the case although the AOs have been revised for the new specification. Most of the work submitted suggested that centres had clearly understood the specific requirements of the new specification and moderators read some work which achieved an exceptional standard – work which was impressively scholarly, assured, articulate and well-informed. Such essays were stimulating and a pleasure to read.

However, also evident were weaknesses common to more than one candidate and centre. The treatment of the poetry text was often the weakest aspect of candidates' argument. Candidates would often quote, sometimes quite liberally, from poems, without reference to the context or sense of the poems from which the quotations came. Some essays contained no view or reading of any individual poem. Poetry was sometimes seen as the opportunity to address AO2; while this was successful where the analysis helped the candidates to advance their arguments, it should be remembered that AO2 also refers to form and structure as well as language: narrative structure, organisation and voice in prose texts are equally valid areas for analysis, and were often neglected.

The marking criteria for AO1 refer to the 'understanding of three texts' and for AO3, to the 'consistently detailed' comparison of three texts in the upper bands. This means that all three texts must take an approximately equal role in the discussion; there is no subsidiary 'third text'. A number of folders seen at moderation suffered because one text, often but not always the poetry text, did not feature in the discussion sufficiently strongly, in some cases being left until the essay's closing stages.

Though some aspects of the Assessment Objectives have been referred to above, it is worth commenting in more detail about how the AOs were addressed by candidates in this session, beginning with the dominant AOs.

- AO3
  The essential nature of the F664 task is comparative and candidates tended to fare better where their task title clearly gave them this direction. It is quite a small thing, but the imperative 'compare' or 'compare and contrast' seems to offer much more helpful direction than 'discuss', 'consider' or 'explore'.

  The success of the comparison depends in large measure on the construction of the essay. Moderators quite frequently saw essays which were written in three sections, one section per text, loosely linked. Even with opening and closing paragraphs referring to all three texts, such essays were not successful in sustaining comparison. Equally, though, essays which maintained a constant juggling act with quick references to each text in every paragraph often failed to develop any substantial points on the texts. The strongest essays were able to show a balance, developing important points about each text, but also making comparative links consistently at crucial stages of the argument. Such comparisons ranged from the scope and sweep of the texts to specific comparisons of language and detail.

  The second part of AO3, the consideration of alternative readings of the texts, often demonstrated the real value of a coursework unit, as many candidates had explored the critical field around their texts with discriminating intelligence. It was extremely satisfying to see so much evidence of candidates' exploration of their chosen texts and their critical reception in such an enriching way. In the strongest essays, it was abundantly clear how the candidates' consideration of other interpretations had developed their own reading, and it was stimulating to see candidates engaging in that debate for themselves, often pitching different critical views against each other and challenging them with their own interpretations. A number of centres, though, did not pay enough attention to the inclusion of this part of AO3 in the marking criteria, while others rewarded the citing of critics alone. The inclusion of critical views is not enough to score highly; the top band requires 'well-informed and effective exploration' of these views.

- AO4
  With the development of the legacy specification, Centres have become very adept at the appropriate handling of contextual issues and this confidence has transferred to the new specification. With this unit's title being 'Texts in Time' and AO4 dominant (with AO3) in the marking criteria, consideration of context and its apposite inclusion in candidates' writing is clearly important.

  A wide range of contexts was discussed in essays, ranging from political and historical, through literary movements to the development of ideas, among others. As a rule, biographical context was the least usefully employed by candidates.

  By and large, these contexts were well handled, but it is worth making a few observations. In general, candidates seemed to find it easier to show the importance of context where there was clear common ground between the three texts. Candidates who had to establish and compare different contexts had a more complex job on their hands. This is not to say that it should not be done, but it needs careful preparation and candidates need to think very carefully about the structure of their essays. As with critical views, the citing of relevant context alone is not the criterion for high marks; candidates need to engage with it and demonstrate their understanding of the significance and influence of the context.

- AO1
  Though worth less numerically than AOs 3 and 4, the successful address of AO1 nevertheless underpins the whole essay. A strong comparison cannot be made if the three texts are not understood thoroughly, and as we have seen, much of the success of the comparison rests on a capable structure and control of the writing.

As virtually all work is now word-processed, candidates have ample opportunity to revise and reshape their work. They also have time, and technology, to assist them with spelling and expression. It is disappointing, therefore, to see work which bears the hallmarks of rush, with poor expression and errors of spelling and grammar. Many candidates would also do well to look carefully at the transition between paragraphs to ensure that the argument remains coherent and the direction clear. The best writing was both fluent and clear, guiding the reader through a developing argument to a clear well judged conclusion. The understanding of the texts also includes an understanding of the genre of the texts. As a rule, drama was discussed well, candidates showing confidence in their understanding of stage directions, lighting, setting and performance as essential features of the nature of drama. In prose, narrative structure and point of view were often strong features of the discussion. Much work on poetry, however, was disappointing, with discussion of content and sometimes of language, but little of verse itself. A telltale sign was the number of candidates who quoted lines of verse as prose, demonstrating insensitivity to the form.

- AO2
  As with AO1, there are fewer marks available here, but like AO1, success here contributes to the whole essay. It is very important that candidates understand that they are discussing the ways in which writers present ideas, rather than the ideas themselves, and make the literary nature of the task evident. Candidates who largely restricted their writing to characters and plot struggled to achieve high marks, while those who maintained an analytical approach to the writing of the texts scored well. The most successful candidates skilfully incorporated quotations into their writing and used consistent discussion of the effects of language, form and structure to advance their argument.

  Overall, this was a highly successful first session and both Centres and candidates are to be congratulated on what they have achieved. A few final points to end:
  - A bibliography is now a requirement and best practice is to link footnotes to the bibliography. Footnotes should be used only to acknowledge sources of critical and contextual material; they should not be used to develop extra points of argument – if the point is important, it should be included in the body of the essay.
  - The regulations on word counts are now very strict – please refer to p. 22 of the Coursework Guidelines. It is recommended that candidates state the word count, both including footnotes, bibliography and text quotations and excluding these, at the end of their essay.
  - The best titles give candidates a very clear push in the direction of the Assessment Objectives, so that by answering the question, a candidate will have at least begun to address each one. Loose thematic titles are markedly less successful.
  - Both titles and text choices can easily be checked by using the free coursework consultancy service. Many centres have used the service to good effect, while a number of others would have been well advised so to do.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE English Literature (H071 H471)
January 2010 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
F661	Raw	60	49	42	36	30	24	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F662	Raw	40	32	28	24	20	16	0
	UMS	80	64	56	48	40	32	0
F663	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	27	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
F664	Raw	40	33	29	25	22	19	0
	UMS	80	64	56	48	40	32	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
H071	200	160	140	120	100	80	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
H071	16.7	41.0	71.4	91.7	98.9	100.0	570

570 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums/index.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.