

GCE

English Literature

Advanced GCE **A2 H471**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H071**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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F661 Poetry and Prose 1800-1945

General Comments:

Many candidates in this session rose impressively to the challenge of this unit, offering close reading skills of a high order and the ability to synthesise knowledge from many sources into cogent argument.

Answers on poetry showed that almost all candidates were aware of the need to make the set poem central, to keep the question in view at all times and to make illuminating links to at least two other poems. Examiners were impressed by the maturity and sophistication of candidates' writing this session, perhaps especially in answers on W B Yeats. Some candidates, however, seemed determined to pursue an inflexible interpretation of a given poem sometimes to the extent that they found it difficult to adjust their material to the demands of the question; this inevitably made it hard for them to achieve marks in the highest band.

Section B answers were generally well focused on the question and well balanced between material from the primary text and supporting references to alternative views and context. The best answers were both detailed and controlled, always aware of the direction and purpose of the argument. One examiner found that 'AO3 is now well done: economical, integrated into the argument, and a tribute to the scholarship of the candidates and their teachers'. Weaker answers were either over-supplied with references of doubtful relevance or else somewhat brief and generalised, making assertions without supporting evidence.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A

Robert Browning

Better answers on Browning's 'Two in the Campagna' noted that the poem is a dramatic monologue and were able to relate the form to the question about a 'passing moment', showing how the poem develops from the subjective experience of the speaker and evokes a relationship with his silent interlocutor. Some detailed studies were especially good at following the 'turns of thread' and of thought. There were often useful comparisons with 'Love Among the Ruins'. Some writers spent too much time on partially relevant biographical contexts, many believing wrongly that Elizabeth Barrett Browning died before the poem was written. Candidates are advised to remember that AO4 is primarily rewarded for reference to other poems, and that biographical material where used should be accurate, pertinent and concise.

Emily Dickinson

Answers on 'My Life had stood – a loaded Gun' once again demonstrated candidates' fascination for and engagement with this writer. The best answers managed to balance their interpretations of this enigmatic poem with explicit focus on language and knowledge of the poet. Most identified the loaded gun itself as the primary source of suspense in the poem, often citing Vesuvius as another and discussing the riddling quality of the work as a third. Less successful answers struggled with the surface meaning of the poem and rushed straight for one of a range of settled interpretations: for example, that the poem is 'an extended metaphor for a relationship between a man and a woman', or that 'the diegetic narration of the gun is a conceit throughout the poem against organised religion'. Candidates offering such answers often found it more difficult to analyse the features of the poem on the page in relation to the question asked.

Edward Thomas

Answers on 'Lights Out' generally offered a developed discussion of the journey metaphor in the poem by quoting Thomas's use of the language of travelling ('Forest's brink', 'road and track', and subtle changes in tense suggesting movement onwards). The best candidates scrutinised the subtle effects of Thomas's language: the 'jarring acoustic of "they cannot choose"', for example. Many candidates discussed the wartime context of the poem, though surprisingly few explained the use of the bugle call 'Lights Out' as the poem's title. Some were aware that Helen Thomas, the poet's wife, insisted that the poem is simply about going to sleep and should not be read as a metaphor for death; many contextualised the poem by referring to Robert Frost's 'The Road Not Taken'. Some depended rather too heavily on generalised discussion of Thomas's depressive tendencies and the unsatisfactoriness of his family life.

W B Yeats

Examiners read a great deal of impressive work on the human body in 'Sailing to Byzantium', one noting that 'I have always thought this a difficult poem, and have been agreeably surprised at the clarity and indeed thoroughness of candidates' work on it in such a short time in the exam room'. Several answers saw 'tattered' as suggestive of feelings about both Maud and Ireland; some argued the 'battered coat' symbolises separatists who have campaigned for so long; an eco-reading saw crowded seas as symbolising overpopulation. As with answers on Dickinson, some weaker responses struggled at times with the poem's surface meaning: for example, some candidates thought that the 'country' referred to in the first line was Byzantium. Similarly, there was some elementary confusion about historical context in some places. However, the overwhelming impression was of mature and knowledgeable work from candidates who had risen to the challenge of studying some very demanding material.

Section B

Frankenstein

Candidates wrote enthusiastically in response to the (a) option about Frankenstein as both hero and villain of the novel. Many good answers skilfully contrasted images of Victor as Romantic hero or Enlightenment Scientist with views of him as a hubristic over-reacher and misogynist. Candidates often concluded that he is heroic as scientist but villainous as a man, and held him responsible for the crimes committed by his Creature. There was some excellent, sophisticated placing of the novel in the context of both Romanticism and new scientific discovery. Responses to the (b) option about the unreliability of the novel's three narrators were usually clearly argued, although there was some tendency in weaker answers to slide from unreliable narrators to unreliable characters. It was generally felt that both Walton and Frankenstein filter the story, attempting to portray themselves and each other in the best light while the monster's narrative is more genuine and probably the most reliable. Good answers often demonstrated how Shelley uses the epistolary frame as a way of giving credibility to the fantastical aspects of the narrative.

Jane Eyre

The (a) question on revealing encounters between female characters was generally well done, and usually featured discussion of Jane's meetings with Mrs Reed, Helen Burns and Bertha Mason; also less often with Miss Temple, Mrs Fairfax and the Rivers sisters. Candidates frequently developed the argument to consider encounters with male characters which were often held to be at least as telling, and usually included Mr Rochester and St John Rivers. Better answers usually discussed what was being revealed, sometimes including the social conditions of the time (the position of governesses; the dominance of males) or Jane's own character and

its development. Some very good responses here explored the idea of doubles and of Bertha being Jane's alter ego or secret self while Helen is her spiritual self. Occasionally general material on feminism in the novel eclipsed more detailed response to the question. The (b) option on the novel's structure reflecting Jane's journey of self-discovery led to many discussions of *Jane Eyre* as Bildungsroman. Candidates often included a fair amount of plot but usually managed to steer back to the question; some became too involved in the early parts of the novel to cover much after Lowood. Place names were often considered as representing Jane's psychological state or position while in that place.

The Turn of the Screw

The (a) question invited debate on whether the Governess is a strong female role model. In common with other sessions, there were some candidates who could not get much beyond the debate as to whether the ghosts are real and dealt only indirectly with the notion of the 'strong female role model'; better answers thought about likely beneficiaries of the Governess's example, such as Flora or indeed the female reader. On the whole, candidates tended to come down against the Governess; indeed one very good answer started out with the statement 'the idea that the governess is a strong female role model is almost laughable'. The (b) option on Gothic effects was rarely chosen; again, answers were often derailed by the questionable existence of the ghosts, but stronger answers offered detailed AO2 and sometimes put the text interestingly into the wider context of Gothic writing and Victorian ghost stories.

The Picture of Dorian Gray

This question attracted many lively responses, and candidates identified a range of dualities in the novel: for example, east and west London; the privileged and the poor; the double life of the marriage experience as led by Lord Henry Wotton and his wife; the split existence of Sybil Vane between her own personality and the Shakespeare roles she plays. Answers often involved the doubleness of Dorian and his portrait, and indeed it was surprising that some did not touch on this central image of the novel. Candidates were able to find many dangers and attractions in these pairs, some tying their answers to a Marxist reading, considering the haves and have-nots, and others to the context of Wilde's own biography and his illicit secret life. The best answers to the (b) option were clear about defining what they thought could be 'resolved' by the novel's powerful ending, for example the plot, the destinies of the characters or important moral questions. Weaker answers sometimes discussed a range of arguably unresolved issues raised by the novel but neglected to discuss the ending and its powerful qualities.

The Secret Agent

The Secret Agent was by a long distance the least popular choice of Section B texts, and answers were almost exclusively responses to the (a) option on the absurdity of Verloc. Strong answers to this question discussed vividly the absurdity of Verloc's death and his physicality. One candidate argued that 'although Verloc himself cannot be taken seriously, the reader is forced to take his actions seriously'; another characterised the dark humour and tone of the narrative by suggesting that 'we are kept at arm's length throughout.' Most examiners saw nothing in response to the (b) option.

Mrs Dalloway

There were many substantial and detailed responses to the (a) option on the need for people and institutions to become more compassionate. Candidates were quick to identify the medical profession as lacking compassion, and many contextualised this part of the discussion by

referring to Virginia Woolf's own mental health problems and struggles with doctors. The strongest answers ranged more widely for their material including one sensitive study which identified Richard Dalloway as a notably compassionate character; there were also some thoughtful analyses of the strategies Woolf uses to excite compassion in the reader – a narrative technique, for instance, which involves us closely with a range of characters rather than a single protagonist. Answers on the (b) option about the novel's multiplicity of views were often well informed about Modernist writing and able to show the qualities Woolf introduces to the novel by abandoning a straightforward traditional narrative. Examiners were frequently impressed with the depth and sophistication of writing on Woolf's narrative method.

F662 Literature post-1900

General Comments:

Tasks set for F662 were largely appropriate and a significant minority of centres had availed themselves of the Coursework Consultancy Service. However, there were a very small number of centres that had provided unsuitable reading for their candidates: texts earlier than 1900 and no post 1990 text.

For Task 1, it was observed that centres who offered a Critical Piece were focussed in the main on form, structure and language to meet the demands of AO2 which was dominant for this item. Centres were generally more confident directing their candidates to aspects of language rather than comments on form and structure, however. There were still some centres that set up tasks with a thematic rather than stylistic address and that did not show enough intra-textual reference even though the majority of the answer should be passage-based.

Centres offering Re-creative Work had often clearly directed candidates to a pastiche length shorter than the accompanying commentary, which was good practice. The work was very suitable for the Unit, imitating the stimulus passage/section by intelligently recreating the world and style of the base text, with hardly any examples of original creative pieces and text transformations observed, the type of inappropriate styles of writing seen in previous sessions.

For the Linked Texts piece, tasks were in the vast majority of cases appropriately comparative and a number had a contextual loading which foregrounded the importance of AO4 in the balance of marks. There were some centres offering light coverage of poetry and short story collections, which affected the AO1 achievement (knowledge of the text).

Many teachers seemed well acquainted with the assessment bands and the majority submitted marks within the acceptable mark variation. However, there were instances of leniency, indeed significantly more totals showing generosity than severity. It was disappointing that a small number of centres were far adrift from the standard of the Unit and that some centres seemed to push marks close to but not beyond tolerance as an apparent strategy. Of course, the aim of moderation is to confirm marks if at all possible and, with that in mind, the largest cause for concern were those centres with comments indicating particular stages of the assessment scheme but marks from another area of the grid entirely.

Annotation of folders has improved through the life of the Specification, which is a very pleasing development. Many centres target the assessment objectives sensibly and evaluate candidates' strengths and weaknesses in respect of different assessment foci in order to justify the marks offered. A number of centres do not take sufficient notice of candidates' written expression and accuracy and should bear in mind that AO1 relates to both tasks. Similarly, for Task 2, the use of alternative views and contextual material is sometimes a matter of off-loading than engaging with and assessing the impact of. There are still a minority of centres that still do not provide much of an insight into the marks awarded or that have "see end of essay" directives in the summative comment box on cover sheets, which denies them the opportunity to comment on the folder as a whole.

Most centres were secure in their recording of marks, but there were still too many instances of clerical errors with disparities between what was written on folders and what had been submitted to data capture and thereby appearing in Modman. Clerical errors are a time-consuming irritant to the moderation process which probably could be avoided with due diligence at an earlier stage.

There are, unfortunately, issues of plagiarism each year. These also are time-consuming for moderators and inevitably get referred back to centres. It is helpful when centres deal with issues of the submission of other work than the candidates' own before the work leaves the centre as it is an internal matter rather than a Board concern primarily and comes back to the centre anyway.

Another issue requiring maximum attention and diligence is the rubric for this unit. The texts chosen should all be post-1900 and one of them from 1990 or beyond. Sometimes whole centres were in breach of this requirement; sometimes individual candidates. Thankfully, the number of centres offering work that could not be viewed as Re-creative (text transformation, original writing, springboard writing) had declined markedly.

As ever, the best work sparkled with its academic style, advanced terminology, cogent argument and astute awareness of the assessment objectives. The candidature had risen well to the demands of close passage study (and imitative writing) and comparative contextual writing. The sustained willingness of centres to re-invent their work programmes and to try new texts was a notable feature of the cohort's work: an ever-increasing range of gothic novels, *Rapture* and *Feminine Gospels* as well as the ubiquitous *The World's Wife*, and relatively recent plays such as *Her Face* and *The Pillowman* and *The Cut* and *Jerusalem* occurring in different centres' selections.

F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

General Comments:

Once again, the paper provoked a wide range of responses, some of them very good indeed. One particular strength noted by examiners was the wide range of critical materials used in argument, with some original and intriguing resources being brought into play.

AO4 continues to be a problem, though at best - in answers comparing, for example, Blake or Chaucer and Restoration Tragedy – it can be both sophisticated and stimulating. AO4 is not a dominant objective in Part A, so those (many) answers on King Lear which opened with an historical-contextual paragraph rarely gained by it. Generalisation is a bad sign in AO4, since sweeping statements are rarely helpful.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A:

Question No.

1a ‘Charming, creative, chaotic.’

This question – which, to an extent, set its own agenda – attracted some very engaged and engaging responses. Some of the best used the ambiguity of ‘charming’ to explore Puck’s double-sided nature. The best answers also looked at the fairies.

1b ‘Nothing in the play is quite what it seems.’

There were some wide ranging responses. One pointed out how to Egeus love is quantifiable – Lysander's love-tokens – whereas the forest reveals ‘the fluid nature of love as shown by the lovers’ changing allegiances’. Bottom, unlike many of the characters, remains what he appears to be: ‘he remains the same hempen homespun even when he is transformed into an ass’.

2a ‘Despite its tragic outcome, the play is filled with humour and warmth.’

Some candidates wrote only about humour or only about warmth. Some combined the two effectively: ‘humour adds warmth, humanising the characters’. There were some good accounts of the charisma of Antony and Cleopatra – his dolphin-like delights, her ‘infinite variety’ – and of the contrasting coldness of Caesar in many scenes. Strong answers moved further to explore the humorous elements in the play: Cleopatra’s response to the messengers, the use of sexual innuendo (figs, worms and so on) and the bathos of Antony’s botched suicide. Some really successful answers saw the whole play in terms of the ironic dichotomy it presents between hyperbole and reality, inflated language and the absurdities of human passion. Enobarbus was well used as a barometer of Antony’s warmth: ‘even Enobarbus, who seemed so cynical, has his heart broken by Antony’. Less confident answers pushed the argument towards the pre-rehearsed answers on the contrasting worlds of Rome and Egypt.

2b ‘Octavius makes political success seem very unattractive.’

Many writers felt that it is as much Antony's charismatic appeal as Caesar's ruthlessness that makes political success unattractive. One essay usefully contrasted Antony's treatment of Enobarbus with Caesar's of Cleopatra. Another argued that while early audiences may have found Caesar and his political success attractive, ‘the individualist ethic of Egypt appeals to the modern viewer as the collectivist ethic of Rome does not’. But for some Caesar's human moments – such as his final tribute to the lovers – ‘make him a far deeper character than just a two-dimensional figure bent on political success’. Other answers were more appreciative of Caesar’s merits as statesman, politician and soldier. Some argued interestingly that if we see

Cleopatra as Antony's weakness, we must recognise Caesar's political genius. Inevitably some essays were simply character studies of Caesar, but many rose to the challenge of considering political success more widely.

3a 'The Fool guides the audience just as much as he guides the King.'

This was a popular question. Many candidates saw the Fool as a kind of moral compass within the play. Freudian readings explored, sometimes badly but sometimes ingeniously, the Fool as a kind of lost fragment of Lear's self – a personification of his conscience or super-ego trying to rein in the violence of his wayward id. Some answers tracked superbly the parallels between Cordelia and the Fool, finding intricate verbal and rhythmic echoes between them in their commitment to gnomic plain-speaking. Some candidates seemed to imply that Cordelia actually became the Fool after she was banished. Others used the Chorus figure in Greek tragedy as a way of thinking about how the Fool mediates the play for us. Some of the answers movingly showed how the Fool catalyses Lear's realisation that he has made a terrible error. Less successful responses tended towards narrative and explored the Fool's actions in the play rather than their significance. Some interesting ideas mentioned the nature of Lear removing his clothes, reflecting him becoming at one with nature and reflecting a mortal image of a man. Others explored Lear's infantilisation and how the Fool speaks in childlike couplets to reflect Lear's state of mind.

3b 'In this play, there is no escape from the family.'

This was the most popular question by some margin. It provoked a myriad of responses, some focussing on the absence of mother-figures in the play (Kahn remains ubiquitous). Others built on the inference that Goneril and Regan have been victims of some kind of sexual abuse by their father when younger, arguing that Lear is thus getting his rightful comeuppance (one candidate referenced the Saville inquiry). One candidate built on Lear's phrase 'degenerate bastard' to Goneril to argue that Queen Lear must have had an affair - these kind of interpretations are often thought-provoking; the danger is when they ossify into a received wisdom. Edmund was much in evidence, with his struggle against prejudice being seen as his attempt to escape from his family. One candidate saw the play as possessing a dreamlike logic whereby parents and children are constantly being driven apart and then pulled back together again; she pointed out the strange number of coincidences that allow father and son and father and daughter to find each other again and again. Many candidates argued rather bleakly that death is the only escape from family.

4a '*The Tempest* is a play about control and manipulation; nevertheless its outcome is a surprise.'

This was also a popular question which, when done well, produced some remarkable responses. Interesting answers argued that Caliban represents the lesser elements of earth and water, his powers moving him from the bottom of the chain of being to the top. Many answers saw the play as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage and his renunciation of dramatic illusion. Post-colonialist perspectives were cited frequently. Ariel was often seen as a crucial figure, subverting Prospero's desire for control in that it is Ariel who teaches him how to be human again. Some answers widened the argument by bringing in Stephano and Trinculo's use of alcohol to control Caliban. One interesting essay showed how 'Prospero manipulates Caliban through language, debasing him in his own mind to legitimise his oppressive control, referring to him in such zoomorphised terms as "tortoise" or "hag-seed".' Others looked closely at Prospero's tetchiness towards Miranda ('What, my foot my tutor?') as examples of his desire to shape and control everyone and everything on the island. One candidate explored how the reconciliation scene in Act 5 when they are playing chess is a metaphor for their new control and their playing of political games. Some also compared Prospero to Machiavelli as a sharp reminder for Elizabethans. The 'surprise' element in the question divided answers: some felt that his renunciation was a surprise, others that it was predictable; some couldn't make up their mind.

4b 'The education of Miranda and Ferdinand is at the heart of *The Tempest*.'

This was less popular, but often answered well. The love between the two children was seen variously as symbolically redemptive or as a darker attempt by Prospero to use them cynically to achieve his political and dynastic ends.

Section B

5 'All things truly wicked start from innocence.'

This was popular with a wide range of texts being paired up. The most common links were Ford or Webster and Milton or Blake. The precise phrasing of the question was often missed with candidates defaulting to a more generic answer on corruption. Ford was often explored well, with Giovanni being seen either as a naïvely romantic intellectual, testing out the boundaries between the acceptable and the forbidden, or a corruptor of his sister. He was often compared with Satan in Milton. Stronger Miltonic answers had an overarching sense of the poem as a whole and saw the boundary between innocence and corruption being destabilised. Marvell was sometimes used, often rather clumsily, as if his poems are autobiographical accounts of his crypto-paedophilic attempts to seduce the innocent. Webster was used to explore a corrupt world where the Church holds sway, with Blake's priests and blackened churches being cited in comparison. Jacobean, medieval and 18th century contexts were adduced with varying degrees of relevance and precision.

6 'Literature suggests that few people are as clever as they think they are.'

Again, a popular question. The Wife of Bath was seen as from a whole range of perspectives, from proto-feminist heroine to imbecilic misquoter of Theophrastus. Volpone was also used well, the best answers capturing the vicarious pleasure we as an audience take in his trickery. Eve was an obvious candidate for over-confidence, though often seen sympathetically, with Adam getting all the blame, as is often the case.

7 'Humour is the writer's most effective weapon.'

This was not attempted frequently. Sheridan and Chaucer were popular combinations with the different modes of humour (satirical, ironic, bawdy and so on) being explored quite well. Weaker answers saw it as an opportunity to describe the funnier moments of 'The Rivals' without picking up on the 'effective weapon' part of the question. It was sometimes hard to see any sense of the comic nature of the texts: jokes and irony were often addressed with leaden seriousness.

8 'Marriage can be a prison: marriage can be paradise.'

This question was very, very popular. Chaucer and Ford were often paired, or Milton and Webster. Sheridan was widely used too. Isabella in Webster was cited as a virtuous wife brought to an untimely end. Often candidates took a bleakly feminist line, seeing marriages as paradises for the male characters and as prisons for the female ones. The exception is Chaucer, with Alison finding paradise through 'maistrie' and all that 'swynking' - the Wife makes her first three marriages good with money while 'Lydia believes that it is money that destroys a marriage'. (Many essays suggested that marriage is a paradise for the Wife and a prison for her husbands.) On Jonson and Milton: 'Both Celia and Eve are imprisoned by their gender in a marital relationship' or in Ford and Milton: 'In the end only Giovanni thinks marriage - or his equivalent of it - is a paradise, calling Annabella his 'Elysium', but it is obviously a prison for her as for Adam, Eve and Soranzo'.

9 'The last thing we should expect from literature is a just outcome.'

Not a popular question, but productive in allowing candidates to explore the amoral worlds of Webster in relation to the moral ambiguities of Milton's Eden. Volpone's and Mosca's fates were also cited, with the severity of the latter's punishment being discussed. The terrible fates of

Putana and Annabella in *Ford* were seen as unjust compared to the leniency with which the male characters were treated. The suffering children in Blake, chimney-sweepers, youthful harlots, school children and orphans et al, were also seen as symbols of moral injustice. Writing on Jonson and Milton candidates observed that the seventeenth century audience 'expects to learn moral lessons from literature – the punishment of vice in *Volpone*, the negative effects of evil in *Paradise Lost*'. *Ford* can address the just or unjust outcome of incest partly because 'as theatre moved indoors playwrights were no longer appealing to "groundlings" so topics became more controversial'.

10 'History helps us to understand literature.'

This was not done often, but those who did it made thoughtful points about the way texts such as Marvell, Blake, Milton, Chaucer and Jonson did more than merely reflect their contexts – rather, they refracted them in surprisingly dynamic ways. Plenty of New Historicist insights were offered in the best answers.

F664 Texts in Time

As one Moderator noted, in this session there was again apparent 'a genuine sense of intellectual engagement and excitement about the work, with a real feeling of personal discovery.' The unit continues to offer Centres and candidates an opportunity for intellectual exploration of literature beyond the confines of set texts and pre-determined examination questions, and many candidates demonstrated a real sense of excitement of discovery and relished the opportunity to follow their individual lines of reading and inquiry.

Clearly this calibre of research and writing is most likely to occur when candidates are given their head, with individual, independent projects being encouraged and facilitated.

Administration

In most cases, the administration by Centres was excellent, helping a smooth moderation process with consummate efficiency. There was, though, a significant number of Centres where the handling of the coursework was less smooth, creating some problems and delays. It is perhaps worth pointing out the key principles of good administration.

Firstly, the work is marked carefully and evaluatively, leading to a complete cover sheet, including a summative comment highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the work, and in so doing justifying the mark awarded. Completion of the coversheet is a specification requirement and is the Moderator's working document; it must, therefore, be a record of the candidate's attainment. It should include the correct candidate number.

Where there are different teaching sets, clear signs of internal moderation are apparent, showing that the Centre has considered the rank order of candidates as a single group, rather than just in separate teaching sets. This avoids the time consuming process of Moderators returning work to Centres for remarking.

Any work that exceeds 3000 of the candidate's words is dealt with appropriately, following the instructions on the reverse of the coversheet, before submission.

The mark on the coversheet matches the mark submitted to OCR and the work is attached by staple or treasury tag. Loose-leaf collections or paperclips are insecure and sheets are liable to become dislodged and disarranged.

Marks are submitted to OCR by the deadline and the sample is sent to the Moderator in good time.

For most Centres, these procedures are second nature and their care and professionalism is applauded.

Texts and Tasks

One of the great pleasures of moderating this unit is seeing the very wide range of texts which is studied by candidates. The traditional canon is well represented, with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Romantic poets, Victorian novelists and major twentieth century writers like Eliot, Conrad, Joyce and Lawrence cropping up frequently. Equally, though, candidates explored a wider range, including Mansfield's short stories, Ackroyd's *Hawksmoor*, Atwood's *Cat's Eye*, Carter's *Nights at the Circus*, Amis' *Money*, Duffy's *Rapture*, Hughes' *Wodwo*, Walcott's *Omeros*, Heaney's *Beowulf* and Lowell's poetry. Often these were candidates' individual choices as they had used

the opportunity to pursue individual interests. There was a real sense of intellectual engagement and excitement about such work, with personal discovery very apparent. This calibre of research and writing is most likely to occur when candidates are given the opportunities to construct individual, independent projects. Most Centres now allow candidates to choose at least one of their texts to create a greater sense of candidate ownership over the work. Some Centres directly teach the three texts and provide critical and contextual material to their candidates, which produces a lack of individuality in the responses and deprives candidates of the most important learning opportunities of coursework. A genre-based approach is often the most successful, offering a range of texts for individual choice, but providing a common area for teaching of key ideas, critical views and contexts.

Even after six years of the specification, poetry still often causes problems for candidates. This is exacerbated when the approach in the essay relies on plot and character, rather than on the writing. This can lead to the personas of poems considered as characters, often with an undue reliance on biography, so that Larkin, for example, is compared with the characters of a novel, without clear recognition that one is a fictional construct. In very many instances, the poetry discussion is restricted to individual words or phrases, without acknowledging their context within the whole poem's developing meaning, leading to rather limited argument.

There also remain Centres which allow candidates to write on a single poem. The Coursework Guidelines and all Principal Moderator's Reports make it clear that the poetry text should be equivalent to that which might be set for an examined unit. Candidates are expected to show detailed understanding of four or five poems, depending on length, in the essay, with passing reference to others where they fit the developing argument. Even longer poems such as 'Christabel' and 'Goblin Market' should be studied alongside further poems. The same rule applies to short stories, where candidates should refer to two or three stories in detail. Moderators are instructed to deduct marks for insufficient text coverage.

Question setting has improved over the years, but there are still many which do not make the essential comparative nature of the task explicit and which do not focus that comparison in a literary way, using 'presentation', 'portrayal', 'treatment' or similar terms.

Malpractice

Moderators were unfortunately required to submit a relatively large number of essays to the Malpractice office. The requirements for the specification are explicit, but a number of candidates offered essays which omitted one of the compulsory genres and some, including entire Centres, submitted work on texts which appear on the set text list for the examined units. Plagiarism threatens the viability and integrity of coursework and thus threatens a valuable model of learning and assessment. Moderators are highly skilled in spotting lifted and adapted passages of criticism and a high number of examples were found. In some cases, teachers in a Centre might miss some carefully adapted sentences lifted from a critical source, but it is surprising when long passages, sometimes over a page in length, in a different register from the candidate's own, are not spotted in the Centre. Centres are reminded that malpractice is a Centre responsibility, signed on the Coursework Authentication Form CCS160. There were fewer examples of overlong work this year and most Centres followed the instructions on the reverse of the coversheet when necessary.

An effective way to combat malpractice is to ensure candidates have a good understanding of the conventions of acknowledging sources with footnotes and of providing a full bibliography listing all texts and sources used in preparation of the essay. Oxford referencing is preferred, but the clear acknowledgement is more important than any particular method. Footnotes should be used only to cite sources; they should not be used to add information or extend point of argument.

The Assessment Objectives

AO3

When candidates are fully aware of the comparative demand of the unit, they can produce highly accomplished work, moving deftly and purposefully between their texts to develop the argument, bringing together key similarities and teasing apart significant differences. The strongest essays are clearly focused on a comparison of the ways in which writers explore a particular concern which allows exploration of the concern itself as well as structure, language and characterisation. Strong answers also develop the comparison by moving through the texts in different ways, perhaps opening an aspect with discussion of texts 1 and 2, then contrasting with text 3 before considering 3 and 2 together, concluding the section with a point about all three. Sometimes candidates were so determined to include all three texts in every paragraph that the paragraphs were long and undirected, losing the clarity of argument and impacting severely on the addressing of AO1.

Many successful essays demonstrated how candidates had developed their understanding of the texts by careful consideration of critical readings. There was evidence of substantial detailed exploration of critics' views, with top band candidates actively debating and challenging these different viewpoints. Top band work considers the whole argument and how it has been made, rather than relying on the particular 'soundbite' that is quoted to represent it. Some Centres still reward the citation of a key sentence, often used to conclude or summarise an argument, rather than encouraging candidates to explore the implications of the views. While not always available, academic readings create most opportunities for candidates, while reviews from quality sources on contemporary work can be successful. References to shmoop, goodreads, gradesaver and sparknotes seldom lead to advanced discussion.

AO4

Texts are often chosen with a particular context in mind, which is a productive way of approaching the unit. This leads to groupings of texts under the umbrella of Modernism, gender, satire, immigration, twentieth century change and so on. It is usually in cases such as these that the contextual references are used most successfully, because the information has a direct bearing on particular points of the argument and on the understanding of key aspects of the texts. Texts from different contexts can be used, of course, though this requires a little more work by the candidate to research and make appropriate use of the different contexts. Whatever the method, a successful approach to AO4 makes good use of detail, showing the candidate's appreciation of the relationship between the texts and their contexts, with full consideration of their significance and influence. Moderators saw a wide range used well, including historical, social, political, scientific, cultural, psychological, philosophical, religious and literary contexts.

AO1

Moderators saw many essays which were fluent and directed, carefully teasing out sophisticated arguments about the chosen texts. By creating an opportunity for extended individual research beyond the confines of prescribed texts and timed examination questions, this unit very frequently gives candidates the time and space to write remarkable essays, well beyond the mark scheme criteria. Top quality essays are crisply structured, detailed and precise in argument, making focused comparisons. Critical interpretations are used to modify and redirect the argument, contexts are used to illuminate and the essays are supported throughout by close reference and analysis.

However, a number of Centres still rewarded with the top mark work which was flawed in expression and discussed the texts rather generally, rather than argued a specific case. Both quality of written expression and quality of argument are key aspects of AO1, sometimes overlooked in Centres' marking. As mentioned above, long unshaped paragraphs were often accepted without comment, despite obscuring the clarity of argument.

It should also be remembered that knowledge of the texts is not the same as understanding. AO1 looks to reward literary understanding – how writers express ideas, shape their texts and

how readers derive meaning. AO1 and AO2 are therefore very closely related. Work which concentrates on character and theme, therefore, tends to be less successful, as it tends to rely on narrative commentary, concentrating on the 'what', rather than the 'how' of texts.

AO2

Focus on the effects of language, form and structure is a key aspect of writing about literature, so although AO1/2 have a lower mark weighting than AO3/4, analysis is still central and should underpin any essay. Task titles should therefore encourage this, by asking for comparison of 'presentation' or 'ways'. Moderators saw much well-directed and probing analysis, showing developed and subtle appreciation of writers' techniques and effects. Restricting such analysis to language and imagery only, or only to poetry, is clearly disadvantageous, but this approach is common to a relatively high number of candidates and is not always recognised as a problem by markers. Equally problematic is work where genre is not considered and poetry and prose are treated for their content only, with no apparent recognition of the difference in the form of the writing. It is often difficult to distinguish from candidates' writing whether they are writing about a poem or a prose text, sometimes further exacerbated by treating drama in the same way. The difference in genre should be seen as a helpful starting point for the comparison. Writing on drama should consider the impact of stage directions, lighting, props, costume and setting as well as the tone and language of dialogue. Novels should be discussed not just in terms of language but also by considering narrative voice, sections, chapters, paragraph and sentence structure. In poetry, various poetic devices should not be recognised only, but their effects on the communication of meaning discussed.

Marking and Annotation

As suggested at the opening of this report, most Centres carried out the marking of the coursework very carefully, providing full and evaluative marginal annotations and precise summative comments. Such diligent marking is very helpful to the Moderator as it clearly justifies the mark awarded, considering both the strengths and weaknesses of the work.

Marking of this kind represents best practice. It is much more valuable than marking which consists only of ticks and AO markers in the margin. Just as candidates should not see the AOs as separate hoops through which to jump, markers should consider how each AO contributes to the development of the essay as a whole.

There were also many examples of rigorous, professional internal moderation which was sharply focused on the bands and marking criteria, reflecting discussion within the Centre. When marks are raised or lowered by this process, it is helpful to see some justification, perhaps with comparison to other candidates' work in the cohort.

There were a number of occasions when the processes of internal moderation were not apparent in the sample and sometimes it seemed that different teaching groups had been brought together without adequate supervision of the overall rank order. In a number of cases, this led to work having to be returned to Centres for remarking.

The top mark in each band, especially Band 5, is only to be awarded to work that fully meets all the criteria for that Band. This allows for greater discrimination within the band to arrive at a 'best-fit' mark for all candidates. There is certainly plenty of work that deserves full marks, but placing candidates less deserving on 40 risks causing an adjustment for the Centre which would lower marks for all candidates towards the top of the mark range.

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