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RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

GCE

English Language & Literature

Report on the Units

January 2007

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Advanced GCE English Language and Literature - 7829

Advanced Subsidiary GCE English Language and Literature - 3829

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Chief Examiner's Report – GCE English Language and Literature 3829/7829

Overall the work of candidates entered for Units this January stands up well in comparison to the same entry in previous years. The detailed Unit reports provide useful feedback highlighting specific strengths and weaknesses but the general impression is of improved use of time, effective engagement with tasks set and a lower incidence of poor expression in written communication.

2714: Linking Language and Literature

General Comments

There was a generally good focus on the question requirements, with a range of answers showing a good balance between linguistic and literary features and values and attitudes. There were some effective explorations of cultural differences and the impact of a new culture on ethnic minorities. There were many committed and informed responses. Candidates seem on the whole to have been well-prepared for the nature of this module and there were few rubric infringements or incomplete scripts. Occasionally, promising answers seemed to run out of time and had less space to deal with the transcription. Candidates would also be well advised not to waste time by almost copying out the introductory material/context as part of their opening paragraphs. Quite a number seemed to take a while to get going. Candidates should also be aware that the purpose of the question is to explore the set passages in comparative detail: some take the opportunity to unload general differences between spoken and written dialogues, simply using the extracts as a framework to hang those differences on.

Comments on Individual Questions

1   Candidates approached the first extract with some informed and focused ideas. The attitudes of the central characters and possible aspects of their relationship were commented on effectively, with some responses noting the rather ambiguous attitudes of Chanu. More probing answers did not avoid the narrative aspect and analysed the significance of the ice-skating in terms of Nazneen's thoughts about her own situation. One or two perceptive answers noted the use of the word 'conquered' in relation to the female ice-skater and the way in which Chanu used the same terms several lines later to describe his own achievements, implicitly isolating Nazneen's sense of insecurity and lack of needed success. There were some answers which seemed to omit commentary on certain parts of the passage, particularly the last three paragraphs. Some responses explored the conversation in terms of particular theories and these elicited some lively ideas. For example, ideas about the roles of men and women in everyday spontaneous conversation threw possible light on how Nazneen could be viewed in this situation, how Chanu set the agenda and tried to maintain dominance not just in terms of speech but in terms of the household structure. Less secure answers tended to approach the passages in a more generalised fashion, using a few aspects of the material to identify learnt linguistic and literary terminology. Candidates need to ensure that they focus on the specific material set.

The transcription, on the whole, was handled soundly. Effective answers on this kind of material tend to explore whether there is any sense of structure to the piece - whether the values and attitudes of the speaker develop or change in any way as the passage unfolds. Some noted that Judy seemed to grow in confidence and that her attitude seemed at odds with Nazneen's, that one wanted to reject stereotypes while the other wanted earnestly to fit in with a particular culture. Effective answers noted how Judy's defiance seemed to increase but that, at the same time, her spoken English showed aspects of accent and dialect of the community whose perceptions of her she wished to alter. Some answers also noted that Judy was able to mimic the accent of the area she lived in and added that this showed her strength of character. Less engaged answers tended to focus more on fairly safe and identifiable features of spontaneous speech and described items such as fillers, voiced and unvoiced pauses, micropauses, ellipsis and so on. While such features are relevant, they tend to display basic understanding if their effects are not noted or explored. A number of candidates seemed to frame their essays by copying out the information about the passages at the start of their responses and, then, at the close spend quite a substantial amount of time writing in general terms about the differences between mediated and spontaneous speech. They would be advised to spend this time keeping the focus on the details of the set material.

2715: Poetry and Prose

General Comments

As with most January papers, there was a noticeable improvement on the performance in the May session. Most candidates seemed able to apply basic textual understanding and a relevant (AO1/AO3i) literary/linguistic approach. There was, encouragingly, less evidence of candidates pursuing their own agenda rather than answering the question as set. Allocation of time between the two questions was hardly ever a problem. Where scripts showed an imbalance, it was generally due to a lack of textual knowledge rather than a failure of examination technique.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 CHAUCER: *The Nun's Priest's Tale*

"Digressions" should have been a straightforward question focus, but very few responses managed to concentrate proficiently and directly on Chaucer's use of this feature. Related matters such as the narrative layers of the Tale received more competent attention, though there was some confusion as to who (the Hostiler, the dreamer, the murdered man, Chauntecleer, the Nun's Priest, Chaucer) was speaking in any one particular line.

The second bullet-prompt ("ways in which the speaker tries to involve the listener") elicited useful comment on shifts in register, with candidates picking up (for example) the references to the listener in line 10 ("as ye han herde") and in the (rhetorical) question of line 18. Discussion of sentence structure was less successful. Candidates struggled to identify variations or articulate reasons for them, though they were aware that pace was being generated somehow in lines 4-10 and 30-34. Uses of enjambements and connectives were often asserted but less frequently located. Better candidates were able to explain how the sermonising register of lines 22-29 was built on the use of the abstract noun "mordre" four times in eight lines, the first three of which consisted of two exclamatory and one declarative sentence, followed by four lines of amplification.

AO4 responses included comparison with the later apostrophes to "Destinee … Venus … Gaufred …" A few candidates were clearly trying to 'off-load' what they had learned abut the medieval church, some of it relevant to the task.

2 CHAUCER: *The Miller's Tale*

Candidates answering on this text were generally well-prepared for a question about audience/reader responses to John. Most found the figure of pity / figure of fun dichotomy helpful; but a few interpreted "fun" in the modern colloquial sense to mean something like 'a fun guy'. Such answers were not wholly irrelevant, since they were able to respond to the bullet-prompts by commenting on (for example) how Chaucer presents the practical skills and energy shown by John in lines 10-19 of the passage. However, such a mis-reading of the question does raise doubts about the cultural experience of candidates who do not recognise "figure of fun" as an invitation to write about a literary 'type' or stock character.

Most candidates did recognise John's place as the cuckolded husband who deserved a mixture of pity and ridicule, and were able to construct reasoned discussions (AO1/AO3i) of how Chaucer (through the Miller) shapes the audience's response to his behaviour and predicament in the passage and elsewhere in the text. The most popular comparative (AO4) passages were the ending, where the Carpenter cuts the rope and falls, and the earlier passage in which John is manipulated by Nicholas into believing that the Flood is coming. As is often the case, candidates' response to diction was much more secure than their discussion of sentence structure (first bullet prompt), with useful comment on the adjective "sely" (seen as typically used of the Carpenter just as "hende" is of Nicholas) and

the series of verbs in lines 8-10. Chaucer's 'listing' technique with compound strings each beginning with "And" in lines 11-13 was also noticed, and some candidates made a great deal of the phonology of lines 15-18. Very few, however, noticed that lines 4-10 were in the present tense; a few more commented on the 'fronting' of "His owene hand" and/or the positioning at the end of the line of "his hony deere."

Candidates need to be more careful over who is 'speaking' in any particular line. This seems to be more of a problem at the start of extracts: some candidates forget that the extract is just that – an extract – and fail to consider the lines immediately preceding. So some attributed lines 1-3 to the Carpenter, thus missing the impact of the narrator's exclamation, and under-estimating the shades of meaning in "greet".

3   ROBERT FROST: *Selected Poems*

Even when they were struggling with the specifics of the set poem, 'Desert Places', candidates still managed to engage fruitfully with the external-scene / internal-state-of-mind focus of the question. The question evoked some relevant (AO4) comparison with (usually) 'Stopping by Woods'. Candidates were keen to see the poems as similar (or at least comparable) in terms of content and of form. This led to some rather loose assertion of (claimed) effects of metre, which was often not well understood.

The mark-scheme indicates some ways in which (AO1/AO3i) aspects of both bullet-prompts might be approached. While it was clear from their comments that candidates had studied and prepared this poem, there was some questionable judgement of which features of diction might be considered significant. For example, "smothered" (line 6) was often over-interpreted in a most sinister way, as if implying that all animal life was extinguished. The next two lines (7-8) were under-interpreted, with "absent-spirited" and the whole of line 8 being seen as just other ways of saying "lonely". Some candidates took refuge in references to Frost's sad/difficult life as an explanation for what they saw as evidence of depression and suicidal tendencies.

In each of the last two sessions, the Report has acknowledged that Frost's poems present some difficulties, and has encouraged candidates to build an answer from the details of what they have securely understood. There was a sense in many answers this time of candidates making assertions (about symbolic meaning or poetic effect) which they thought sounded vaguely plausible but with which they had no real engagement.

4   WENDY COPE: *Making Cocoa for Kingsley Amis*

This question had a simple and obvious focus ('"ways in which Cope writes about men") which candidates had no difficulty in engaging with at some level. The second bullet-prompt ("mixture of emotions") guided weaker candidates away from over-simplification. Still, however, the complexities and nuances of Cope's language escaped most. Candidates were aware that the collocations "joyful and unswerving devotion … uncivilised and rough … boring and defensive" belonged to (a) different register(s) but lacked the precision of AO1/AO3I/AO5 skills to explore where such language might have come from or might be going to.

Ignorance of Christopher Smart was not a disadvantage. Those who knew something of 'Jubilate Agno' tended to assert that, in imitating a poetic form originally used (at least ostensibly) in praise of a cat, Cope's intention was to mock her lover. AO4 comparison generally supported such a reading, emphasising the humour somewhat at the expense of the tenderness. 'Rondeau Redouble' proved useful in allowing candidates to write about stereotypical male behaviour and attitudes. As in previous sessions, however, some candidates went too far along this road, asserting with little textual support that Cope's satirical target was the male literary establishment.

5   EMILY BRONTE: *Wuthering Heights*

Candidates revealed sound textual knowledge in the range of (AO4) comparative passages selected to answer this question as well as in their reading of the passage. The contrasts between Edgar and Catherine were well observed, candidates picking up competently (AO3i/AO5) the latter's manipulative behaviour from reporting clauses and other features of Nelly's narrative. A few candidates distorted the question slightly by trying to compare Cathy 1's behaviour here with Cathy 2's elsewhere.

6   MARY SHELLEY: *Frankenstein*

Here the question-focus was "language to convey hope and disappointment". Some very impressive answers showed the ability to move comfortably between conceptualised overview, seeing the hope/disappointment dichotomy as central to the novel, and skilful detailed analysis of the passage. The precise details of Milton's Satan and of Prometheus continue to elude most candidates, but they were still able to engage productively with imagery of fall and ruin. Similarly, there were some brave attempts to grapple with sentence structure, which candidates seem to find more accessible in this than in the other prose texts.

AO1/AO3i/AO5 work was sometimes blurred by candidates evaluating language choices in unhelpfully vague terms ('lots of negative lexis') or merely listing examples of diction ('Shelley uses words like … ') Walton and his situation were well understood, but there was considerable mis-identification of the speakers in the three paragraphs, a confusion which at its worst was highly damaging to an answer. Yet again, as in previous sessions, the most commonly-selected passage for (AO4) comparison was the creation of the monster, which did at least allow candidates to develop the hope/disappointment discussion.

7   RODDY DOYLE: *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*

Every year the Report comments on how candidates tend towards writing a 'default' answer about Paddy's maturation through the novel and the deterioration in his family circumstances. Choices of (AO4) comparative passages in this session once again to some extent reflected this bias. The usual (AO1/AO3i) casualty is sentence structure, the first bullet-prompt, which candidates again found it difficult to focus on. This is a great pity, because the passage contained such a wealth of material for analysis of Doyle's methods in creating the first-person voice for Paddy and the effects on the reader. Disappointingly, no candidate analysed lines 11-13.

The second bullet-prompt helped guide candidates into a sound reading of the larger movements of the passage. Examiners again commented that candidates (and Centres?) under-estimate Doyle's technique in crafting the narrative. It is not always helpful to see it as (merely) non-chronological, random and full of non sequitur.

8   IAN McEWAN: *The Child in Time*

Most candidates were able to engage with the presentation - largely through the mechanics of conversation - of matters of power and status in the passage. There was some over-simplification, with assertions that Stephen felt powerless as well as being "speechless"; but many answers made at least a sound job of tracing the power-dynamics through details of dialogue and narrative.

There was less (AO1/AO3i) reference than might have been expected to the features of speech candidates cope routinely with in 2714. Few identified, for example, adjacency pairs in those terms. The mark-scheme contains further examples of features which might have been identified, and whose effects might usefully have been explored in examining McEwan's presentation of status.

Most responses revealed sound (AO4) knowledge of aspects of power and status in the text as a whole, but there were some unhelpful choices of comparative passage. The PM's visit to Stephen's flat was the most popular and also the most successful. Candidates who were trying to answer a question of their own devising about 'the political' tended to choose passages involving Charles, and struggled in consequence.

Unit 2716 Styles of Writing (Coursework)

General Comments

As always in the January series, there was only a small entry of candidates, and from a limited number of centres.

Candidates wrote in a number of different styles and genres. Often the best work was clearly based on a known genre, which then allowed commentaries to explore the links between the models and what was actually achieved by the candidates. Monologues were the most popular choice for the literary piece (though sometimes candidates did not make it clear whether they were simply to be read, were for the theatre or for television). Speeches and newspaper opinion columns proved most popular for the non-literary piece.

One or two centres have taken to presenting an invented transcript as a piece of non-literary writing. This is fraught with danger, as there is quite a strong possibility that the piece will have exactly the sort of edited features that might be associated with a 'literary' piece. Whilst not strictly outside the rules of engagement, candidates certainly need to be aware of how they have set themselves up for some very particular discussion of spontaneous speech in their commentaries in order to demonstrate that they are not simply providing two literary pieces. Centres need to remind candidates, too, that at some point in their work they must engage with spoken language.

At times, candidates who write pieces linked by theme divert themselves from matters of technique in their commentaries and focus instead on the linking issue. This is to be avoided where possible.

At all levels candidates need to be reminded as they reach the final drafts of their work that the quality of their written communication is important in its own right, not merely because it fulfils A06. At the very top of the mark scale the pieces should be flawless if they are to rise into the top half of Band 1. All too often, candidates seem prepared to let computer spell-checkers do the work for them, with no thought that these devices are simply aids to better writing, not substitutes for human intervention.

A couple of centres entering single candidates found it hard to pitch a precise level for their candidate's performance. Those apart, there was a high degree of accuracy in the assessments, in part because centres are willing to engage with the Assessment Objectives as they mark, indicating clearly where they are being fulfilled. Cover sheets were helpful. Centres are reminded, however, of the need to ensure that all submissions are accompanied by a signed Centre Authentication Form. Centres should ensure, too, that if they have candidates for both this unit and for 2718 they treat the entries as entirely separate, even if the moderator is the same for both units.

2717: Language in Literature: Drama

General Comments

In overall terms the standard for this session was slightly lower than in January 2006. There were slightly fewer really impressive individual performances at the top end and there was an increased distribution of weaker performances toward the lower-middle range and lower end. More candidates were entered than at the same time last year, and they seemed to be a touch less well equipped to engage intelligently with linguistic detail and complexity in the ways that tend to distinguish really proficient responses. Candidates were generally able to respond with knowledge and understanding, however, and frequently advanced relevant, well-constructed arguments. Relevant and fruitful passages were usually selected, and candidates were, in the main, comfortable using appropriate linguistic terminology in their analyses; there seems to have been a steady and discernible improvement in this regard. Written expression was, on the whole, quite accurate.

Comments on Individual Questions

1 (a) This was a popular choice and candidates responded quite successfully. There were some close readings of selected passages, which demonstrated a generally competent level of understanding. The majority of candidates elected to examine the characters of Agrippa and Octavia. The best answers focused on details of presentation, making explicit judgements about the ways in which both characters embody 'Roman' values. Few candidates engaged with specific linguistic details with real sophistication, however. Weaker candidates tended to focus their arguments on character traits rather than details of language.

   (b) Another popular choice, this question was answered very satisfactorily in the main. Most candidates used well-chosen passages and there were some very competent explorations of utterance types, pragmatics (the Egyptian/Roman context) and dramatic effects. Weaker candidates tended to discuss episodes involving conflict between Antony and Cleopatra in fairly broad terms, without focusing on the significance of context, agenda or subtext. The best answers demonstrated a sensitive appreciation of the expressive qualities of intense and complex feelings.

2 (a) This question was rarely chosen and it prompted generally sound answers. Few candidates engaged successfully with relevant details and complexities of language; a limited number of candidates who probed beyond the identification of character traits did demonstrate some real flair however.

   (b) More frequently chosen, this question was answered well on the whole. Better candidates engaged thoughtfully with the psychological and linguistic complexities of both characters, selecting passages that enabled them to focus on the presentation and significance of the *relationship* between them. More mediocre answers did not go beyond attempting to 'compare and contrast' Touchstone and Jaques at the level of temperament and attitude.

3   (a)   This question was very popular and elicited a range of responses. Some were very strong, focusing on linguistically rich passages and engaging very fruitfully with the specific terms of the question. Many candidates were able to make independent, well-supported judgements about both Prospero's and Miranda's levels of control, agendas and linguistic choices. Weaker responses tended to offer fairly simplistic paraphrasing of Prospero's narrative and discussed only a narrow range of evidence.

      (b)   Also popular, this question elicited responses of variable quality. Most were relevant, although some restricted their range of reference to Prospero's relationships with Ariel and Caliban. Better answers demonstrated stronger interpretive skills, making broader reference to Milanese politics, the sub-plot (and its comic implications) the significance of Gonzalo's philosophy, and the presentation of Miranda's relationship with Ferdinand. The best answers anchored their arguments in careful analysis of relevant linguistic detail.

4   (a)   More limited numbers of candidates answered questions on *Waiting for Godot* his session, and the quality of response was variable. The majority of answers demonstrated some awareness of thematic implications of the question and how these might relate to aspects of dramatic form. Most answers were also adequately illustrated with reference to relevant passages. Surprisingly few candidates focused their attention on possible linguistic dimensions of time-wasting, or on what might constitute the 'idle discourse' referred to in the question's prompting quotation.

      (b)   This question was chosen so infrequently as to make meaningful generalisation very difficult.

5   (a)   This was a very popular choice and was generally answered successfully. Most candidates produced substantial, knowledgeable and relevant answers. Encouragingly, most candidates considered the Owen/Manus relationship in relation both to Hugh and to wider political/historical perspectives. Better answers were sensitised to the emotional dimensions and dramatic expression of this relationship, and the best were incisively linguistic in their focus. Weaker answers tended to discuss both characters as individuals, rather than the relationship between them.

      (b)   This question was chosen infrequently and prompted responses of slightly disappointing quality. Few candidates showed a discriminating engagement with the terms of the question and its emphasis on the role and importance of language in representing history. Better answers managed to focus on the significance of classical languages/mythology and some of the implications of the play's title. Few candidates managed to deepen their responses into the consideration of Friel's use of George Steiner's ideas or how the play's concerns with language/history are embodied in its linguistic details and dramatic form.

6　(a)　This was a popular choice and it prompted many knowledgeable and discerning responses. Candidates were often astute in selecting appropriate passages and exploring the significance and effects of particular influences. Candidates managed to cover a good deal of relevant ground, examining the possible implications of Blanche's background as an English teacher, her psychological and emotional complexities and her use of language. Illuminating contrasts were sometimes made with the language used by Mitch and Stanley. The best answers also explored Blanche's use of allusion and the significance of music.

　　(b)　Again a very popular choice, this question encouraged some thoughtful and knowledgeable explorations of the significance of games and play. Most candidates made use of the prompt quotation in focusing on the psychological dynamics of the Stanley/Blanche relationship and the seriousness/destructiveness of the 'tactics' involved. Many candidates, too, were able to engage with the language of games and play and its symbolic uses and effects. There was much illuminating analysis of passages involving poker playing and its central importance in the play. There were few really weak responses to this question.

Unit 2718: Issues in Language and Literature (Coursework)

General Comments

This January series always produces comparatively few candidates for assessment, from a very small number of centres, so it is difficult to discern patterns of performance which might be significant.

Candidates submitted work across the whole range. At the very top end there was work which showed real grip and understanding of topic areas. The candidates worked within the word limit, and often pieces significantly under 3000 words were able to score very highly. This is because candidates focus their efforts and ensure that every word counts. Lower down the scale, more prolific writers often produce work which contains a lot of background contextualising. The important thing to recognise is that the whole piece should contain an over-arching argument, and that there is a premium on keeping all the pieces presented for discussion in view throughout the essay. Where candidates often lose marks is through presenting three different essays which have then been cobbled together, with only the last page or so really offering comparison.

As always, the best work demonstrates that candidates have taken a limited amount of material and worked hard to provide detailed focus on its strategies, audience and genre. The best work often has a clearly personal flavour to it, suggesting that candidates have been encouraged to research and come up with some of their own materials. Less successful candidates often choose much more source material and then end up having to do a general overview, which in turn does not quite fulfil the criteria set out for the unit.

Centres should remember that there is an element of assessment centred on the quality of written communication which goes beyond the requirements of AO1. This often acts as a discriminator towards the top end of a mark band. In particular, when a candidate is given marks beyond 55 in Band 1 the work should be near-perfect both in terms of fluency of expression and technical correctness. The moderation team often find themselves pulling back from agreement with the highest scores simply because a candidate has failed to correct quite basic errors of spelling and punctuation. An over-reliance upon the checking qualities of Microsoft Word is often only too clearly in evidence.

Centres entering candidates in this series had done a sound, conscientious job in terms of assessment. In general, the work was carefully annotated, though it would be useful at times if centres were to make qualitative evaluations of the Assessment Objectives, rather than merely pointing out their presence at various points.

2719: Experience Into Words

General Comments

There were a few entries for this paper. On the whole, there was a differentiated range across the cohort. Effective answers tended to offer detailed, comparative approaches, blending in awareness of linguistic and literary features with perceptive analysis of their effects: less secure responses tended to outline ideas in general terms and engage in feature spotting. Where brief and relevant embedded quotations were employed candidates had the opportunity for developing ideas and exploring language and style; quite a number of candidates did not really address this practice and produced rather generalised, surface engagement. Generally, there were few rubric infringements and time was managed competently.

Comments on Individual Questions

1   The focus of these two passages seemed to be grasped successfully. The extract from *The End of the Road* elicited some sound - if, at times, unadventurous - material. Effective answers noted the isolation of the narrator and his lack of motivation; the formality and nature of his lexis was explored well by some candidates, leading to sense of irony about his precision and status in relation to his present situation. Further contrast and irony was commented on in terms of his lack of movement, in contrast to the movement and activities going on around him. Some candidates also explored the use of animal imagery and the structure of some of the narrator's expression, especially his use of lists, his mixture of short and then complex sentences. The second passage was addressed proficiently by some: they noted the sense of excitement and the use of humour and the orthography of the extract. Here, too, some of the linguistic structures were explored sensitively and perceptively by answers at the top of the range. Comparative insights ranged form the informed to more basic comments; less successful responses tended to avoid the effects of particular aspects of the language and style.

2   There were some solid and focused responses. Candidates in the main redirected the original material sensibly into an appropriate format, although one or two produced the lead-in to an article rather then the start of the article itself. Some writers tended to include aspects of spontaneous speech in the article [words like 'yeah', 'ain't'] and some even added fillers. Effective answers blended brief anecdotal issues with focused and direct advice, coupled with an appropriate register and attitude. At the top of the range, commentaries used brief embedded quotations from both the original transcription and the re-creative piece sensitively to make incisive and perceptive comparisons; less secure answers relied on generalised identification of aspects of spontaneous speech and offered more basic or limited insights.

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January 2007 Assessment Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	a	b	c	d	e	u
2714	Raw	60	45	40	35	30	25	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2715	Raw	60	45	39	34	29	24	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2716	Raw	60	49	43	38	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2717	Raw	60	46	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2718	Raw	60	51	45	39	33	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2719	Raw	60	44	39	34	30	26	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3829	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7829	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3829	7.5	20.9	47.8	74.6	97.0	100	67
7829	37.5	75.0	100	100	100	100	8

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/exam_system/understand_ums.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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