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

English Language A   ENGA2

(Specification 2700)

Unit 2: Representation and Language

Report on the Examination

General

The vast majority of coursework folders submitted for this summer's assessment were complete. In a few cases, only one piece was submitted, presumably by candidates lacking in commitment to their AS English Language course, which accounted for some of the lowest marks. Generally speaking, it was clear that, in nearly every centre, candidates and teachers had worked hard on the coursework pieces, to ensure that they represented the candidates' best possible work, fairly assessed to arrive at a mark that took into account both weaknesses and strengths.

Some folders included first drafts and clean, as well as annotated, copies of source texts for Investigations. This is **not** a requirement of the unit; only the final draft is assessed and annotated copies of source texts are admissible, provided that the original text is still legible.

As centres and candidates have become increasingly familiar with the requirements of the unit, so the range and variety of topics chosen to illustrate representation has grown. The advice from moderators, early in the life of the specification, for candidates to cast their linguistic nets widely has clearly been heeded and has, in many cases, produced very interesting and worthwhile results.

However, the gap between candidates familiar with and those uncertain of the requirements of this unit has continued to grow. Centres are therefore urged to take careful note of recommendations given in this and previous reports on the unit and convey them to candidates as part of class preparation for coursework. Key points are reiterated below.

Representation Investigation

Making a careful choice of subject is a key element determining the success of Investigations. It is essential to focus on Representation; relevant issues should be foregrounded and used as a guide to the selection of linguistic features for analysis (hence the precedence of AO3 over AO1 in this report). The body of the Investigation will demonstrate how particular representations are created through the manipulation of language and style and their effects on intended readers. Successful candidates demonstrate a depth of understanding of context, which allows them to explore how texts work for specific audiences, rather than simply explain the connotations of individual words.

AO3: Analyse and evaluate the influence of contextual factors on the production and reception of spoken and written language

There was a huge variety of topics. Local scandals about teenage misbehaviour were linked to more academic studies from The *Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*. Battles over Tesco's expansion were also a good hunting-ground for bias and special pleading. In national news, student protests and the abolition of the EMA were, understandably, popular subjects, again, most productive when analysed in the light of different perspectives, from *The Daily Telegraph* to student protest blogs. At the international level, candidates examined the reporting of Middle Eastern conflicts and leaders' downfall from power, as well as the Commonwealth Games in India, from both English and Indian articles. There were a number of representations of the changing fortunes of those whose early political successes were perceived to be compromised by subsequent events, particularly Nick Clegg and Barack Obama.

Away from politics, popular choices included attitudes to cosmetic surgery, teenage pregnancy, Facebook and other forms of social networking. Celebrity profiles are still a popular choice, but they work best when linked to larger issues: for example, Kate Moss's celebration of 'skinny', tied to more serious examinations of BMI; the news that Prince Harry was to be best man at his brother's wedding investigated for explicit or implicit attitudes to

royalty; the pursuit of Raoul Moat compared to his own rambling views on justice; Elton John and David Furnish's adoption of Zac seen in the light of other reports on gay lifestyles.
As well as making standard broadsheet and tabloid comparisons, candidates discovered some much more specialised websites, from richardawkins.net to pinknews.co.uk and the weeklygripe.co.uk. At the same time, there were still some familiar, inaccurate stereotypes of mass media readers: 'upper class' for *The Independent,* 'right-wing businessmen' for *The Telegraph* or 'closed-minded gossip-hunters' for *The Sun*. With so much information available about media audiences, candidates ought to be better informed; a more successful approach was not to approach the task with pre-formed judgements, but instead to make deductions based on the language and style of the source texts used for the analysis.
Less successful subject choices included attempts to analyse the representation of race or gender in a range of film scripts or transcripts. These tended to rely on brief extracts, with little in the way of context or rationale for choices and, lacking the crucial visual elements, struggled to present convincing arguments. Others selected celebrities past their linguistic sell-by date: Michael Jackson, Jade Goody and Princess Diana. However fascinating their stories might have been, unless there is a current resurgence of interest and a new representation to compare with material generated during their lifetime, what should be analysis usually turns into hagiography or souvenir-hunting.

Having chosen an appropriate subject for their Investigation, candidates can boost their chances of producing a well-shaped argument and avoiding unproductive repetition of points by selecting source texts that have contrasting representations. If the texts are reasonably substantial, there is no clear reason to select more than three, since this often leads to superficial analysis. It is important to remind candidates that, with twice as many marks for AO3 as for AO1, they need to make sustained, developed analytical points that lead to a prepared conclusion.

Weaker investigations tended to consist of line-by-line analysis, frequently with the result that only one or two paragraphs of a lengthy source text received consideration. This approach often led to fragmented and inconclusive analysis. The aim should be a synthesis as well as analysis to present a complex argument: for example, in the representation of a controversial politician like Ed Milliband or Nick Clegg, there will be a variety of charges, and depth-charges that need discriminating assessment.

Another indicator of weaker investigations was the use of quotations, typically either too few or too many. Without the anchorage of a well-chosen quotation, analysis becomes simple assertion; conversely, quotation alone does not constitute analysis, but needs to be accompanied by a succinct comment on effect. This links the linguistic feature and the writer's representational purpose. It is important that meanings are fully explained rather than simply asserted.

In a large number of cases, sources were not clearly presented to moderators. Some investigations included only the bare texts used, with no mention of date, author or publication, which made it very difficult to see which was being referred to in the candidates' work. Others referred to Text A, B and C, but had not labelled the source texts accordingly and presented them in a different order to that used in the analysis. Candidates who were more careful about presentation, labelling and ordering texts appropriately, tended to be those whose investigations demonstrated a similar attention to detail. A very small minority failed to submit any texts at all, which made linguistic labelling unverifiable and interpretations hard to credit.

AO1: Select and apply a range of linguistic methods to communicate relevant knowledge using appropriate terminology and coherent, accurate written expression

Successful candidates were able to demonstrate confident understanding of linguistic features relevant to their chosen representation and included sentence and clause types, as well as a range of detailed word classes. Weaker candidates tended to label familiar features, whether or not they were relevant to representation.

There is still fairly widespread confusion about the use of some linguistic terms. Examples include: nouns and pronouns (with some labelling of 'proper' or 'abstract' pronouns); collective and plural nouns; phrase and clause. Candidates who attempted to add detail to verbs were often unable to distinguish between present participle and continuous aspect, past participle and perfect aspect. Some candidates were able to identify sentences only as short or long.

A few candidates had learned lengthy and unusual rhetorical terms, such as anapodoton and tapinosis, but tended only to identify them in examples, rather than closely analyse their use with regard to representation. Sometimes there was no other evidence of linguistic knowledge in candidates' work. It is essential for candidates to demonstrate their ability to identify and also comment on the features listed in the marking grid's hierarchy: sentence functions, word classes, preferably in detail (eg types of noun, tense and aspect of verbs, passive voice), clause and sentence types.

Finally, selected features need to be clearly supported by one or more quoted examples. Candidates were often uncertain about how and what to quote. This resulted either in punctuation errors or quotations that were too short to prove a point about, say, a clause or sentence, or too long for clear identification of a single word class.

Successful candidates:
- had a clear representational topic, which was worthy of detailed investigation
- selected sources of manageable length, with contrasting representations of the subject and which were of stylistic as well as semantic interest
- used a minimum of three texts and a maximum of five
- edited lengthy texts, clearly labelled as A, B, etc and highlighted quotations
- began with an overview which showed awareness of contexts and wider representational issues
- looked closely at the writer-reader relationship and did not judge audience on pre-conceived ideas about readership
- skilfully linked together the analyses of source texts to create a coherent and well-structured argument
- illustrated their points with brief quotations and used a varied linguistic register
- analysed a range of carefully selected linguistic features, significant for representation, from each text, underlining examples, where necessary, to avoid ambiguity
- used a varied critical vocabulary and explored effects in detail.

Less successful candidates:
- did not focus on representation or lacked a clear representational focus
- selected too few or overlong sources
- chose bland or very similar sources, which limited analytical potential
- began their analyses abruptly, without commenting on contexts, sources, audiences or purposes
- made sweeping assertions about audience
- wrote three or four unconnected analyses, with repetitive identification of similar features in each one
- used no or overlong quotations, without identifying linguistic features precisely
- produced unbalanced investigations, in which one or more sources were analysed only superficially
- lacked a suitable critical vocabulary and relied on formulaic expressions for effects.

Representation Production

AO4: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English in a range of different contexts, informed by linguistic study

Some candidates appear uncertain about how to interpret the specification requirement to 'produce or challenge' a representation. To 'produce' a representation is to write about a social group, individual, event or institution from an angle that is not already widely represented in existing publications. Most candidates choose the second option, to 'challenge' a representation already in existence. This might mean, for example, to defend a social group or individual widely criticised in the media. Alternatively, it could be a matter of endeavouring to change public perceptions of a social group, event or institution.
The Production should be an original piece of writing, but with a clearly defined representational focus. It is important to specify the intended publication or context of use for the finished piece and for it to target a specific audience. This distinguishes the task from the more general term, 'creative writing'.

A: Form and Content

On the whole, topics chosen for Production pieces were less imaginative than for Investigation. The tendency simply to produce a representation in praise of a widely admired figure is still evident; such pieces are usually more or less derivative, since the candidate has to rely on existing publications for factual information. There is a danger of being influenced by the style of such publications as well as the factual content, with the result that candidates' texts appear strongly derivative and unoriginal. More successful subjects are often those of which the candidate has personal knowledge and/or experience. It is essential for candidates to find their own voice, their own forms of expression and their own style if they are to be highly rewarded for this task.

In a small minority of cases, candidates succumbed to the temptation of simply copying whole sentences, paragraphs, or, in extreme cases, texts from internet sources. This clearly constitutes malpractice and, when found, will result in a zero mark for the candidates concerned. Teaching strategies, especially in the early coursework stages, to ensure that the work is the candidates' own are advisable. Plans and first drafts, for instance, can be produced in class, at least in part. Teachers need to exercise vigilance at the final marking stage. Where they have doubts about the authenticity of candidates' work, they should communicate these to AQA and should not sign the authentication on the Candidate Record Form.

Interesting pieces included either positive representations of the commonly demonised (for example, McDonalds, video games, paparazzi, travellers, bankers, tattoos) or challenges to the representations of subjects whose virtues are, in many quarters, taken for granted (for example, Barak Obama, Greenpeace, Jodie Picoult, the EMA, prenuptial agreements). In both cases, subtlety and surprise were more effective than relentless rhetoric. A good understanding of the intended audience characterised pieces such as an account of the first men on Everest for a children's book and a report on the Reading festival for a music website. There were some attempts at producing fictions, some of which were original in approach, if not always completely successful in terms of representational aims. Others relied on existing models, particularly with regard to gender issues or political correctness. Some weaker examples dealt with subjects inappropriate for the implied young readership. Recent or current issues in the media were fairly popular: press treatment of Chris Jefferies, initially arrested in connection with the Jo Yeates murder case; baby abduction in *East Enders*; student 'riots' over university tuition fees.

Although print media genres were again the most popular choices in terms of form (editorials, articles, reviews and letters), there was a wide variety of alternatives: pre-planned speeches, chapters of biography, obituaries, and pamphlets. Some familiar pitfalls continued to claim the unwary, such as the distinction between newspaper editorial and article, pre-planned speech and spontaneous transcript. Some effective obituaries (designed to be held on file by media publications) were produced for current politicians and other public figures. Other original choices of form included reports from nurseries and schools, an Imam's sermon, a relationship advice leaflet.

Less appropriate were attempts to script unscripted interviews with real public figures. There were also some predictable film reviews, often closely reliant on existing ones and limited in terms of representational focus. A number of candidates produced obituaries for recently departed celebrities (for example, Michael Jackson and Jade Goody); these were not only highly derivative but also decidedly problematic in terms of publication. Few of the candidates who chose the blog as a media genre were able to go beyond rants and rambles; although such models certainly exist, blogs with any lasting value and loyal readers need to be as fluent and trenchant as any other opinion piece.

B: Style and Structure

Many candidates demonstrated stylistic flair as well as a grasp of representational issues; the most successful shaped their style to a specific audience and publication. There were, unfortunately, quite a few glaring examples of poor proof-reading, which limited marks for pieces that might otherwise have been highly rewarded. Some candidates attached helpful style models to their Production pieces, to show what had guided them in terms of form and language. A few attached a bibliography of sources used to extract factual information. Perhaps inspired by last year's top band spoof charity appeal for bankers (in the standardisation material), there were more satirical pieces than usual. However, few managed to be witty or sharp enough to appear in a publication such as *Private Eye*, as some commentaries claimed. If candidates send up an account of David Cameron's day or a Vice-Chancellor's welcome to students, in which ignorance and contempt emerge subtly, their writings must be very accomplished to show up the notional speaker.

C: Commentary

The commentary should give specific details of where the representation should appear in print or in performance and of its intended audience. Too often these were entirely omitted or alluded to only in vague terms. If the nature of the representation itself is ambiguous, moderators rely on receiving further guidance in the commentary; without it, marks for AO4 A and B, as well as C, may be affected. A monologue from an HIV sufferer may be a powerful piece of writing. It appears even more successful, when we learn that it would be performed at the opening of a medical conference on developments in the treatment of HIV.

It was not uncommon for the AO4C mark to be lower than those for A and B, often because candidates had failed to appreciate the need for specific grammatical analysis, instead giving only a series of general observations about the style they had chosen to use. The other common tendency was to focus only on aspects of style, often rhetoric or address to readers, without linking these to the representational focus of the Production piece. Candidates need to show awareness of how their texts produce an original or challenge an existing representation and then to demonstrate the effectiveness of their linguistic choices.

Some commentaries still exceed the word limit quite substantially; this should be discouraged. The most impressive commentaries were those which succinctly illustrated a range of particularly effective strategies and techniques and commented on their effects in one or two well-formed sentences.

Successful candidates:
- presented a representation of an individual, group, event or institution in such a way as to challenge or subvert the reader's initial assumptions
- knew precisely the intended context of use, as well as specific audience and purpose
- made such intentions explicit at the start of the Commentary or on a separate front sheet
- showed a confident grasp of form and textual conventions
- produced content that was interesting, unusual, stimulating or entertaining
- had a strong sense of voice and address
- wrote stylishly as well as clearly and accurately
- identified in their Commentary a range of key linguistic features, including sentence and clause types, word classes and lexical/semantic items
- added succinct comments to show how the selected features were designed to shape the reader's response
- wrote a 400-word Commentary in well-structured paragraphs beginning with topic sentences.

Less successful candidates:
- produced derivative texts, very similar to existing published ones or created a mis-match of form and content
- failed to consider context of use and audience both in the Production piece itself and in the Commentary
- ignored or omitted to use appropriate conventions of form and layout
- lacked a coherent voice and addressed audience needs inappropriately, if at all
- made frequent basic errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar
- produced a Commentary that consisted of generalised assertions, with little reference to the Production text in the form of quotations or specific comments on language and style
- exceeded the word limit without illuminating the writing process.

Administration

Most work had comprehensive formative and summative comments; these greatly assist moderators, leaving them to enjoy the creative and critical pleasures of language that is well-used and well-understood.

In some cases, marginal annotations were too sketchy to convey precisely the level of achievement. Brief references to the marking grids are needed to supplement ticks and AO numbers. Centres which prefaced the candidates' work with highlighted grids helped to show the strengths and weaknesses in detail.

It is always helpful to have evidence of internal moderation, but resulting changes to marks need to be clearly documented. Some alterations were considerable but unexplained. In a few cases, marks were changed on the candidates' work but not recorded accurately on the Centre Mark Forms. Since moderators see only a sample of work, it is vital that internal checks are carried out before marks are submitted.

The majority of centres use simple, open-sided plastic folders or treasury tags to secure candidates' work; these are much less unwieldy than plastic pockets or card folders. In a very few cases, work was submitted as a collection of loose sheets, which is inadvisable.

Moderators reported that some Centre Mark Forms and, subsequently, sample folders arrived very late. In some cases, yellow copies of the CMFs, needed for the sample folder selection process, were not included in the initial despatch.

Summary of Key Advice

It is very helpful to moderators and/or candidates if teachers do the following:

a) General
- discuss with candidates at the start of coursework preparation appropriate choices of topic for representation
- advise candidates at first draft stage to meet length requirements as nearly as possible
- remind candidates at final draft stage to proofread carefully for technical and labelling errors and, if necessary, edit or extend their work
- familiarise candidates with marking grid descriptors
- annotate candidates' work thoroughly to identify strengths and weaknesses, so that moderators are able to understand the rationale for marks given
- show the breakdown of marks awarded for AO4A, B and C
- ensure that marks on candidates' work are consistent with marks on Candidate Record Forms and Centre Mark Sheets, particularly in cases where internal moderation has resulted in changes to the original marks
- discourage the use of complicated folders but check that pieces of work are securely fastened, ideally with candidate name and centre number on each sheet
- remind candidates of appropriate fonts, layout and type size
- consider the use of internal summary sheets to show teachers' and internal moderators' comments as well as candidates' titles or topics, sources used for investigation, context of use and audience for production
- remember to include Centre Declaration forms.

b) Representation Investigation

- encourage candidates to engage actively in researching topics and texts and to consider issues of genuine controversy, social significance and seriousness, rather than trivial examples of celebrity journalism
- emphasise the need to explore how social values are produced or challenged, involving close study of writers' strategies and techniques
- encourage selection of source texts that cover a range of viewpoints and attitudes, to facilitate a coherent line of argument
- exercise quality control of final choices, in order to ensure texts are not overlong but sufficiently challenging in content and style
- check that candidates have a clear sense of focus on representational topics and issues
- ensure candidates are aware of the need to consider relevant contextual factors and the wider significance of the specific representational focus selected
- encourage exploration of strategies used for audience positioning
- emphasise the need for careful selection of features for analysis in order to produce relevant interpretations within the prescribed word limit
- discourage line-by-line analysis or feature-spotting
- emphasise the need to exemplify linguistic points with well-chosen quotations
- encourage candidates to use a range of lexical, semantic and grammatical features, noting the hierarchy of features in the marking grid for AO1.

c) Representation Production

- devise strategies to minimise the risks of derivative or plagiarised work
- encourage candidates to consider a range of genres and writing styles in order to make a judicious choice of form for their production piece
- check that candidates have chosen a suitable form for the content they wish to produce
- check that candidates have a clear idea of the specific context of use for their work, in terms of publication and audience
- identify cases where a bibliography might be advisable to show sources of factual content, illustrations or diagrams
- encourage candidates to place their representations within a wider context of social issues and to mention this briefly in the introduction to their Commentaries
- urge candidates to work on their style and expression as well as on content, structure and argument
- emphasise the need in the Commentary for careful selection of key linguistic features, supported by brief quotations and succinct comments.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results Statistics** page of the AQA Website.

Converting marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by visiting the link below:

www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.