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

English Language B ENGB2

(Specification 2705)

Unit 2: Creating Texts

Report on the Examination

General

Moderators reported that, in general, centres seemed comfortable with the requirements of this specification and that there was a very high level of adherence to the guidelines for the contents of the folders. Gratifyingly, most centres also submitted work that was close to the recommended word counts, clearly demonstrating that there is no need for candidates to exceed the limits in order to achieve good results.

Task setting

There was a widespread feeling amongst the moderating team that, following this year's round of centre standardising meetings, there was considerably increased awareness from centres that in order for candidates to be rewarded at the very top of the top band for AO4 (ie 46-50), the tasks chosen should be *ambitious* and *challenging* in terms of purpose, audience and genre. This was illustrated in the standardising material by a candidate's choice of a Charlie Brooker-esque opinionated article in the genre of a column for a broadsheet newspaper's weekend supplement, paired with a short story, modelled on the Raymond Chandler-style, hard-bitten private eye-narrated detective fiction.

Unsurprisingly, a number of centres decided that these, or similar, tasks could help their candidates achieve these higher marks. A note of caution needs to be sounded here – it is not only the task that needs to be ambitious - the candidate needs to be able to provide the *controlled deployment of the structures and conventions associated with ambitious genres*. Moderators reported that they came across many 'Charlie Brooker' type articles which were nothing of the sort – but just opportunities for candidates to indulge in a personal rant. Editorials/opinion columns need to be carefully analysed as style models and the clear features of these and how the different features are specific to different publications and for different audiences need to be recognised. When candidates do this, they score highly – when they don't – the pieces very often just do not meet the higher mark band requirements.

There is always a risk that if a particular task is 'show-cased' in the standardising material, it could be seen as an instant passport to success - and in some cases it does look as though this has happened; dramatic monologues, travel writing (either in the style of Bill Bryson, or modelled on weekend newspaper supplement articles), articles that juxtapose both sides of an argument, ostensibly in the voices of supporters of each side and broadsheet editorial articles have all featured in recent submissions. There is no suggestion that any or all of these are in themselves unsatisfactory or unsuitable tasks – but, judging from moderators' feedback from the latest assessment round, they do perhaps need to be approached with caution.

For example, candidates attempting Dramatic Monologues, in order to be really successful, generally need to be able to create a convincing voice, to have a story to tell, and to be able to use the 'unreliable narrator 'to uncover this story gradually. Too often, moderators report that what they see is little more than a straightforward first person narrative, often presenting only a fairly straightforward anecdote.

The 'For and Against 'features tended to share a universal format – two columns, photo and mini intro at top then two contrasting opinions, physically juxtaposed against each other in parallel columns. However, only the most able candidates were able to successfully create two distinct voices to represent the opposing points of view.

Travel Writing based on articles in the 'Holiday' sections of broadsheet newspapers seems to be increasing in popularity but quite often moderators reported that they tended to be thinly disguised personal anecdotes about holidays the candidate had been on. Once again, the most able candidates realised some travel journalism can look like straightforward accounts of what the journalist did and where they went, while it is really being used as a vehicle for passing on relevant information to the target audience so they can decide whether the holiday appeals to them or not, and they were aware that awareness of the audience and what they might be interested in is crucial to this task.

If candidates are going to write 'editorials', they really need to examine some good quality examples of the genre in order to gain a sense of how an 'editorial' is different from any other article in the paper. They need to understand that the implied author is not just 'the editor' but in a sense the paper itself, and editorials therefore tend to use a distinctly elevated form of language to signal the serious and authoritative status of the statements being made. Moderators noted that many 'editorials 'submitted in this latest round were written predominantly in the first person, and rarely appeared to contain much in the way of crafted language features typical of the genre.

Commentaries

Moderators reported that across their allocations, there was a very high proportion of folders which contained commentaries which complied with the recommended word counts, and which were accurately allocated marks in the highest bands. The distinguishing features of these commentaries were that they were able to select the most significant linguistic features of the pieces and illustrate their importance, without having to work mechanically through the entire set of linguistic methods, irrespective of their relevance.

In addition, the best commentaries invariably made reference to the salient features of the style model(s) that had been used and also quoted judiciously from the candidate's own writing.

Less successful commentaries tended to be rigid, box ticking exercises, determinedly describing every aspect of the created text, irrespective of the significance (or lack of) that the feature had in the construction of the discourse. They also tended to talk in very generalised terms about relevant genre features, purpose and audience.

Style models

Once more, the over-riding impression from the moderating team was that more effective use is being made of suitable style models and their annotation in the construction of candidates' texts. Careful annotation of style models usually produced good pieces. Where style models were not alluded to in commentaries, not only did this have a limiting effect on AO3 achievement, but usually the pieces were less convincing in terms of genre, purpose and audience awareness.

In a small number of centres, source materials sometimes became confused with style models. A piece which relied heavily on a style model for its content as well as register, genre conventions, lexical choices etc, will struggle to achieve anything but the most basic level of originality and/or creativity.

There were also some reports of style models being analysed and annotated seemingly in a vacuum, without any clear idea of how such annotation/analysis might be used to inform the candidate's own writing. One moderator noted that he had come across a number of style models which weren't identified at all. In some folders there was just a sheet of paper with

some text on it, usually taken from a website, with no acknowledgement of who wrote it or where it came from either on the copy or in the candidate's commentary.

It is good practice that candidates clearly identify the source and authorship of the style model – this would also have the effect of establishing a rationale for choosing that particular piece to inform the candidate's own writing. In a small number of submissions the content of (often unacknowledged) websites acted as models for 'web articles' of similar indeterminate provenance. The unmediated nature of much of the internet means that there can be no guarantee of quality or reliability for a randomly selected page – and to use such a page as a style model is to risk the quality, and quite possibly the reliability of the candidate's own text.

Evidence of Early Planning

The one area that, according to a majority of moderators, continued to be an area for development was the folder requirement for the submission of Evidence of Early Planning. This requirement is an integral part of the dialogue with the moderator and is designed to be an insight into the early stages of the writing process involved in each piece; moderators saw and approved of spider diagrams, templates relating to genre, purpose and audience with sections which allowed the candidate to flag up the decision making process relating to various linguistic choices relating to this area.

What failed to meet the specification requirements were, for example, earlier drafts of a piece which differed often only minimally from the final submitted piece, teacher-marked earlier versions of pieces, documents which had clearly been completed after the piece had been written, and a page of notes which were not detailed enough to see how it informed the creation of the piece.

Annotation of pieces and commentaries

The vast majority of centres' annotations on folders fulfilled the Code of Practice requirements. Annotations from centres were mostly detailed and did link to the assessment criteria without simply copying large sections and were clearly addressed to the moderator, rather than intending to provide the candidates with areas of improvement. It goes without saying that comments should be realistic and appropriate to the level of the writing being submitted.

Assessment

Moderators across the whole entry were overwhelmingly able to confirm most centres' submitted marks. The vast majority of adjustments that were made had to do very largely with generous application of the assessment criteria. For AO4, this often was due to a tendency to allocate marks to folders which did not meet the requirements *across both pieces* for ambition, challenge, or the deployment of appropriate structures and conventions. In the AO1 section of the commentaries, credit was sometimes given for systematic and evaluative selection of linguistic methods which were insufficiently consistent. In AO2, perception and an ability to produce conceptualised discussion are required for the very top bands, but, on occasions, discussions which were *sound* rather than *perceptive* were over-rewarded. Some candidates were awarded high AO3 marks without sufficient evidence of *systematic reference to salient features of* the candidate's own *writing and style models.*

The most accurate marking tended to come from larger centres where teachers see a larger range of work. Centres are reminded to take due notice of the centre standardising materials and their accompanying commentaries when carrying out their internal assessment processes. It is always good practice to reference these materials when arriving at marks for and annotating folders. A comparison between one or more of the standardising folders and

the centre's candidates' work makes it clear how marks have been arrived at and provides a rationale based on exemplars familiar to both centres and moderators.

Conclusion

Overall, it is gratifying to be able to report that after the fifth round of moderation of ENGB2 most centres have fully taken on board the requirements of the unit, and that they are comfortable working within the reduced word counts and with the revised folder contents. Thanks and heartfelt admiration goes out to all those teachers who, without fail, continue to inspire and encourage their students to produce such wonderful writing in such a variety of genres, for such a range of audiences, and so often with such sparkling originality.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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