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

English Language B   **ENGB2**

(Specification 2705)

Unit 2: Creating Texts

Report on the Examination

General

It is pleasing to report that the vast majority of centres are very familiar with the requirements of the unit and continue to submit work that, in the words of one Senior Moderator, 'respected the principles of the specification, and at its best would clearly be suitable for publication in their selected contexts'. While this is clearly a matter of considerable satisfaction for both centres and the moderating team, it has to be admitted that there is a number of issues noted by moderators which prevents some candidates from fulfilling their full potential. The main intentions of this report, therefore, will be to highlight some of the successes observed throughout the moderation process, but also to draw attention to areas which caused some concern.

Task setting

Reports from the Senior Moderators suggest that there is fairly substantial list of 'favoured tasks' that appear regularly in centres' submissions. These include:

- fiction (most often short stories – but sometimes first or other chapters from a larger work) from a number of sub-genres
- dramatic monologues
- different varieties of travel/holiday writing
- journalism (mostly either of an 'editorial' nature or 'weekly columns' like those produced by writers such as Charlie Brooker or Jeremy Clarkson)
- articles which argue two sides of a subject, ostensibly by two writers with opposing viewpoints
- speeches on a variety of topics for a variety of audiences.

Interestingly, moderators report that combinations and permutations of the above can be found at all levels of achievement , which suggests that, to a certain extent at least, it is not so much WHAT candidates submit as tasks in their folders, but more about HOW they approach the production of these texts.

So, what advice can be given to ensure that candidates are given the best possible chances of fulfilling their potential? A glance at the Coursework Assessment Criteria in the specification highlights a number of key terms; the descriptor for AO4 in general talks about *expertise and creativity* and this implies fluency, flexibility and originality in the production of texts; the top band descriptors then go on to talk about *ambitious* and *challenging genres, challenging audiences* and *purposes,* and the *appropriate manipulation of register*. This suggests that those candidates who are aiming for the very top marks should avoid choosing text types that are easily replicated and undemanding in terms of language choices, structures and conventions.

In addition, the audiences for whom the pieces are intended should be as specific and realistic as possible, represent a range and variety across the folder, and should demonstrate an ability to write successfully for more than just the writer's own peer group. It is not only the audiences that should be both specific and realistic but also the contexts for which the pieces are designed. Moderators were unanimous in reporting that candidates who were not completely clear for whom they were writing, and/or the target publication or situation where the text might be found tended to produce writing which lacked conviction; as another senior moderator remarked 'candidates whose pieces were aimed at the Guardian's *Comment is Free* webpage, or for a year 8 assembly, were far more convincing than those who presented 'a magazine article' or 'a speech for parents'.

Specific issues which tended to limit achievement relating to the text types mentioned above:

- first (or other) chapters from a larger work:
  this has been discussed at length in previous reports as well as at numerous meetings. While it is clearly true that a number of individuals and centres have successfully submitted these texts, it is also true that very often they prove problematic to assess accurately, unless the writer is able to contextualise the piece successfully (often by providing a plot outline) in order to ensure that the writer is not using the 'opening chapter' framework to prevent having to consider fully aspects of plot development, characterisation etc
- dramatic monologues which really were nothing of the sort – often merely straightforward first person narrative, with no gradual revelation, nor any character construction via the 'unreliable narrator'
- travel/holiday writing; only the most able candidates were able to distinguish between a piece of travel journalism combining entertainment with useful information for potential travellers and usually aimed at a very specific demographic and a chronological account of a trip with the addition a few seemingly random facts
- journalism (editorials); weaker candidates often chose subjects that they either had very limited personal knowledge of, or that really were not suited to the genre. This often led to submissions that bore little resemblance in structure or register to an authentic editorial, and depended heavily on the writing of others if source material had been consulted
- 'weekly columns' (in the style of writers such as Charlie Brooker or Jeremy Clarkson); the less successful examples of these were often barely controlled rants on topics close to the heart of the writer, but lacking in the careful crafting of language for effect that characterise the best writing in this genre
- articles which argue two sides of a subject, ostensibly by two writers with opposing viewpoints; this text type was popularised by an example from *Vogue* magazine which appeared in the training material in the early days of the specification and can still produce examples of high quality writing in the hands of writers who can successfully create two distinct voices to argue the opposing points of view. Less assured writers tended to present contradictory opinions in similar if not identical tone
- speeches; while the best examples combined a realistic context with a convincing sense of being a spoken text, expressed in language suited to topic and audience, the less impressive examples often suffered from an incredible or inappropriate situation, little or no conviction that the text had ever been, or ever could be, produced in the spoken mode or expressed in language unsuited to topic or audience.

Overall, the most significant issue associated with task setting was to appreciate that tasks need to be selected by centres taking into consideration the *individual skills and interests* of their students – and this militates against the practice of imposing uniform tasks on all candidates. While it is appreciated that there are some pressures of time to complete the course and some need to provide guidance to students, such an approach tends to produce rather formulaic responses.

Commentaries

There was evidence that the quality of commentary writing continues to improve. There were fewer examples of recommended word limits being grossly exceeded and fewer commentaries dependent on a 'template' or 'checklist' approach. The majority of centres seem to be encouraging their students to present an overview of the types of discourse they were presenting and to use relevant linguistic methods to provide an insight into how and why they had used their knowledge and understanding of ideas and concepts from language study.

If there is one area of commentary writing that would benefit from more close attention, it is that concerned with AO3 (the *influence of contextual factors*). To be awarded the highest marks for AO3, commentaries should demonstrate an insightful and detailed awareness of purpose(s) and audience of each piece and should comment systematically on the salient features from both the style models and the candidate's own writing. Several Senior Moderators noted that there was a tendency for AO3 to be over rewarded by centres where candidates were not making those explicit links between their own writing and their style models and exemplifying how they emulated (and/or maybe rejected) the most useful characteristic features.

Style Models

The teaching of this unit should be *led in centres by the use of style models to encourage candidates to experience a wide range of writing styles before the writing process begins*. In general, centres encouraged their candidates to choose appropriate style models which provided suitable structures and conventions which could inform their own writing. Detailed annotations not only provided candidates with a clear understanding of how language could be manipulated to target audience and purpose effectively and to provide an insight into relevant genre conventions, but also provided a sound basis for the AO3 aspect of their commentaries.

Where the selection of style models was less effective and the annotation was less stringently carried out, there was almost inevitably a deleterious effect both on the production of texts and the quality of the commentaries.

There was a slight, but clearly increasing tendency for candidates to find and use passages from websites – often personal blogs or unattributed articles – as style models for the production of editorial or other 'articles'. The dangers of this practice are clear; such pieces are rarely designed for specific purposes and audiences, and have no need to be carefully crafted for specific audiences or publications – and thus do not provide much worthy of emulation. It is in centres' and thus candidates' best interests to ensure that style models approved or provided for candidates should have positive features relating to one or more linguistic methods to provide material worthy of emulation and/or comment.

Evidence of Early Planning/ Preparation

There is still a small but significant number of centres who do not seem entirely clear what constitutes 'EEP'. For this reason, it is worth reiterating advice given in previous reports.

EEP is significantly different from the previous expectation that at least one draft of each piece should be included. Unfortunately, not all centres appear to have taken this on board, and too many moderators reported that some centres continued to submit drafts. 'Drafting' tends to be little more than revision and editing of the document in a word-processing application, and increasingly drafts submitted were little more than a second virtually identical print out of the final text. As the purpose of the requirement is to provide 'evidence of the process of writing', it is clear that such so-called drafts do not fulfil this requirement and thus should not be included.

Centres involved in this round of moderation presented a number of acceptable ways of providing this evidence, including, teacher-produced prompt sheets that candidates had filled in, spider diagrams, mind map, 'thought showers' (sic). One centre had produced a 'pitch' sheet clearly designed to convince the supervising teacher of the viability of the task. There is no one prescribed method of producing EEP, and centres that are unsure as to whether their procedures are appropriate should contact their allocated coursework adviser to check.

Bibliographies and lists of sources

Most centres' submissions did, where necessary, include bibliographies although there were suggestions that sometimes these appeared to be a rather rushed afterthought at the very end of the process. In general terms, most pieces of writing that fall into the category of 'Writing to Inform' make some use of some external sources to provide facts and figures – and all of these should be listed.

Teacher Annotation of Folders

Practice in this area varied considerably. The best examples had careful, illuminating comments on both texts and commentaries and extensive evidence of internal moderation, with comments from more than one teacher, but some folders contained no more than a brief summative comment, often lifted verbatim from the assessment criteria descriptors. At times, comments in the folders appeared to be aimed at the candidate, rather than providing evidence to the moderator of how and why a particular mark had been awarded.

Other issues

Centres with twenty or fewer candidates are reminded that they should send their entire entry's folders to the moderator by the due date without waiting to receive a sample demand.

There is a recommended order for the arrangement of the folder constituents; this is - piece one, its commentary, annotated style model(s), evidence of early planning, bibliography and/or list of sources, followed in the same order by the constituents parts for piece two. Ideally the whole folder should be treasury-tagged together. Bulky folders and plastic sleeves which need to be accessed by moderators as part of the checking process should be avoided.

Marks on the candidate record form should be checked against the marks on the centre mark form, especially if alterations have been made as a result of internal moderation.

It is quite clear that the vast majority of centres have a really sound grasp of how to proceed and how to enable their students to succeed, and this ensured that moderation as a whole was very largely a most satisfying process, certainly for moderators and hopefully for candidates and their supervising teachers. In the words of a member of the senior moderating team*; 'It is worth noting that the vast majority of centres fulfilled the spirit of the specification, and presented some superb work which truly uplifted the heart!'*

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