General Certificate of Education

English Literature

Specification A

LTA1B World War One Literature

Report on the Examination

2010 examination – June series

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EXAMINER'S REPORT LTA1B JANUARY 2010

The summer term of Year 12 is the logical time to sit the LTA1B examination because it is intended for students who have reached the end of Year 12 and who have, in doing so, developed a breadth of knowledge about the Literature of World War One through a course of wider reading. Candidates are unlikely to have developed the necessary breadth of knowledge only a few months after they have completed their GCSE courses, so January is not recommended except for resit candidates.

The entry was in excess of 5,000 students and examiners saw the full range of marks and approaches. Centres will find the summer 2010 LTA1B mark scheme a very useful document here, as it contains not only the assessment grids which will be familiar from the previous series but also an Indicative Content section for each question, suggesting possible approaches which successful candidates might adopt in their responses. In addition, Centres will also find it useful to refer back to the reports for January 2009, June 2009 and January 2010.

To look at the achievement of candidates question by question:

Section A Contextual Linking

Question 01

Centres will now be very familiar with some slight alterations to the format of this question since the specimen paper was published three years ago. In response to the views of centres, the unprepared passage was made slightly longer to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the candidates and to offer them further scope for the establishment of links to their wider reading. The wording of the generic question was adjusted slightly: examiners on the predecessor LTA6 paper (in many ways the model for this question and this option) expressed their concern that candidates sometimes become bogged down while trying to address the idea of "typicality", so candidates on the new specification are directed simply to compare the extract with relevant aspects of their wider reading. Of course, in answering this question, candidates will still be considering what is typical of the Literature of World War One, but they will be doing so through the more direct means of exploring the similarities and differences between the extract and the most relevant parts of their wider reading.

Those centres familiar with the Legacy Specification would do well to bear their previous practice at LTA6 in mind when preparing candidates for the new LTA1B module: the skills which will be required by candidates to cope with Question 1 are very similar to those necessary to meet the demands of the Legacy synoptic paper. Of course, the Contextual Linking extract question is less demanding – candidates respond to one unprepared extract rather than three and the outcomes are assessed at AS standard rather than A2 – but the best way to prepare candidates for Question 1 is by providing them with non-fiction extracts from the Literature of World War One as part of their wider reading. Although centres have already identified three wider reading texts (one from each literary genre) and submitted details of these to their coursework advisors, it is vital that candidates' wider reading extends beyond this minimum required by the QCDA regulations governing every new A-Level English Literature specification. This point is emphasised on page 7 of the Specification: "These three texts may be supplemented with a collection of relevant extracts and shorter pieces of writing." Candidates whose wider reading only stretches as far as their centre's three nominated texts may well find themselves at a disadvantage in the examination if their opportunities to establish relevant links to the extract are limited by the narrowness of their reading. Candidates are, of course, able to refer to their prose and drama coursework texts too; indeed, as these texts are liable to be very well-known to them, they are likely to be able to refer to these in some depth and detail. To

maximise their candidates' chances of success in answering Question 1, centres are advised to develop a programme of wider reading, such as the one in the AQA-endorsed Nelson Thorne's publication, *AQA English Literature A: Literature of World War One* (ISBN 978-0748782949). Of course, centres are not obliged to use this supporting textbook, but they may find it useful as a model when constructing their own programme of wider reading. Centres are reminded that there is further guidance on how to prepare candidates for Question 1 in the 'Contextual Linking' advice which was issued in the summer of 2008.

It is also worth remembering that the extracts used in Question 1 will relate to at least one of the six key areas identified to help centres focus their studies in the rich area of the Literature of World War One. These areas are:

- The realities of war
- 'Man's inhumanity to man'
- Patriotism
- Politics
- Physical/mental/spiritual consequences
- The role of women and the Home Front

The wording of the question will usually include some of the key words or phrases from these topics, offering further guidance to candidates as they consider which of their wider reading texts will be of most relevance to the extract. Centres should use these topics when planning their course of wider reading; they may also refer to the wider reading list on pages 18 – 20 of the Specification, although the list is not exhaustive: the best centres will introduce their candidates to material from beyond this list. Centres should ensure that candidates' wider reading covers all three literary genres in equal measure: candidates are required to refer to at least one example of their wider reading in each genre when answering Question 1 and omitting a genre is bound to have a limiting effect on the mark awarded. It is not advisable to use a very narrow range of centre-chosen texts and extracts (or readings of those texts and extracts. It is not helpful for candidates if all those entered by a centre restrict themselves to exactly the same texts and extracts and exactly the same points and interpretations. Instead candidates should be encouraged to develop their own repertoire of wider reading and *readings* so that their responses are individual and so that they can choose the most meaningful links relevant to the given extract.

In attempting Question 1, candidates are advised to split their time evenly between the two parts of the question. It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to focus on the extract for thirty minutes, then spend the next thirty minutes writing about their relevant wider reading; however, more confident and sophisticated candidates may be able to produce integrated responses in which the extract and the wider reading comparisons are interwoven throughout the answer. Contrasts will also be an important part of successful responses, but their inclusion should be coherent: arbitrary, bolted-on texts with no obvious connection to the extract will not help candidates reach the higher bands of the mark scheme. However, this is most likely to occur in the responses of candidates whose wider reading has been limited to three texts: it should not be a problem for those candidates who are able to draw on a truly wide experience of the Literature of World War One.

The extract

One senior examiner described this passage as a "very carefully chosen and enabling extract". Another commented that it "opened up almost limitless opportunities for candidates to draw on their wider reading". The same examiner went on to say: "The great challenge students found (which was the heart of the question) was in assessing Onions' thoughts and feelings and determining whether she was happy or sad, or a bit of both!". Perhaps the key feature of the Onions' extract is her mixed feelings about the Armistice, and how she expresses them.

Candidates who detected and examined these conflicting feelings demonstrated a confident grasp of the extract. She is proud, as a signaller, to have played her part in conveying the cease fire order. She is relieved for herself, for France and for all those involved. She anticipates joy and celebration. At the same time and more importantly, she is acutely and increasingly aware of an atmosphere of shock tinged with melancholy that prevents an immediate response of happiness. The human cost is first expressed in her acknowledgement of France's relief from all the stresses and pressures of conflict; this intensifies when she finds herself in the graveyard considering the extent of losses on both sides. The final focus on the forgotten German grave and the fact that "somewhere a woman was sorrowing" adds a particular poignancy to her compassionate reflections. The most successful candidates explored the ways in which these mixed feelings are revealed and how they interplay in Onion's writing, in particular the intensification of her feelings towards the end. Many candidates described her response as 'emotional' (or, too often the loosely repeated word 'emotive') but the best saw that there is real restraint in Onions' writing. Those who insisted on 'emotional'/'emotive' tended to do so assertively and struggled to support this view by reference to close reading of language, form and structure. Many recognised that her military role affects her expression and not simply because she includes the words of the message she conveys. Some overstated her sense of pride to the point of claiming she was an egocentric braggart. Yet again with the chosen extract, the most successful responses came from those candidates who carefully considered tone and mood. Centres should concentrate candidates' attention on these aspects so as to help them to engage effectively with thoughts and feelings. Again, there is a tendency to try and impose a pro- or anti-war viewpoint on the extract, and indeed other wider reading texts referenced. This over-simplification perhaps stems from a desire to make comparison straightforward, but the approach is deeply flawed and closes down rather than opens up possibilities for analytical exploration.

When it came to looking at AO2 aspects of the extract, the most successful candidates related aspects of form, structure and language to meaning. It was reassuring to see how many were able to use Onions' changes of subject matter, tone and mood as an opportunity to engage with structure. This contrast also led logically into looking at Onions' different choices of language. Only the best, however, considered aspects of form. Given that this is a memoir and therefore a very personal response, form might have been the most logical place to begin a consideration of AO2. Almost all candidates commented on the memoir form but only the most successful considered how this affected tone, structure and language. Less successful approaches to AO2 were summed up by one examiner: "…endless technique-spotting, where students wandered lost in semantic fields searching for *the power of three, alliterations, assonances,* while making unsupported assertions about sentence length (*all short and simple; all long and complicated)*". Wide reading is obviously crucial to giving a full answer to the second part of the Contextual Linking question and the need to cover prose, poetry and drama has been stressed in previous reports. It is less common for candidates to fail to cover the three genres, but it still happens more than it should and tends to be a problem with a centre as a whole rather than simply being a case of one or two forgetful students. Typicality needs to be demonstrated rather than asserted in sweeping statements that are not properly supported. Many centres continue to do an excellent job of encouraging breadth as well as depth in wide reading. These candidates were able to choose the wide reading that best fitted the Onions extract in their view, so as to make coherent and illuminating links of similarity and difference. Centres and candidates perhaps still need to note that the invitation to look as 'different from' as well as 'similar to' is intended to be enabling. In other words, those who could not easily access 'similar to' (writing by women about the end of the war, perhaps, or writing about the Armistice), could always fall back on all their reading that was 'different from'. Having said that, many were able to use texts directly similar; Sassoon's 'Everyone Sang', for example, made a useful text to link in here. Many had read well beyond their coursework novels and drama texts; one or two centres had supplemented the Gardner or Stallworthy anthologies with more poetry by women, usually from

Scars Upon My Heart, and to good effect. Most centres had ensured that candidates could reference a range of non-fiction to so as to be able to contextualise Onions within the genre of memoir. As with previous LTA1B papers, there was some evidence of too much wide reading looked at too hurriedly. In these cases, it would have been better to train candidates to select and plan around the idea of at least one well-chosen wide reading reference per genre and to explore the links further. Where a candidate lacked the necessary range of wide reading, it tended to be drama that was most frequently absent. In some cases it was poetry that was absent and this seems odd given that candidates have the poetry text with them in the examination room! Candidates and centres should consult the wide reading suggestions in the Specification and perhaps refer to the texts cited in the next section of the report.

One purpose of this section of the report is to encourage centres and candidates to read widely in their courses and to explore the wealth of wide reading possible in this topic. In no sense is there a canon of works that must be studied. At the same time, it might inform centres and candidates of some the wide reading texts that candidates put to effective use. Drama texts included: *Oh, What a Lovely War!* (Joan Littelwood and the Theatre Workshop); *The Accrington Pals* (Peter Whelan); *Black 'Ell* (Miles Malleson); *The Silver Tassie* (Sean O'Casey); *Blackadder* (Richard Curtis and Ben Elton); *Not About Heroes* (Stephen Macdonald). A range of early patriotic poetry, including Jessie Pope, was used as points of contrast; the graveyard scene was linked to a wide range of trench and Home Front poetry about loss, grief and horror. Onions' references to bodies buried three deep and the pathetic German grave was used to discuss trench warfare and death in battle;one examiner reported that Graves 'A Dead Boche' was used to good effect here. The final acknowledgement of a suffering German woman and the recognition of futile losses on both sides led to links with Sassoon's 'The Glory of Women', Owen's 'Strange Meeting' and Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. However, the most successful candidates explored the many differences between these two texts and the Onions' extract. The other most popular novels included *Birdsong* (Sebastian Faulks), *A Long, Long Way* (Sebastian Barry) and *Regeneration* (Pat Barker). The first two enabled candidates to make some useful specific links: Stephen Wraysford's reaction to the end of conflict; the modern day scenes from *Birdsong*; and Willie Dunne's death from *A Long. Long Way* provided rich sources of comparison and contrast. Many candidates who discussed *Birdsong* used the quotation about war being "an exercise in how far men can be degraded". Whereas some successfully integrated this reference, others bolted it on, an example of the point made earlier about candidates all using exactly the same references whether or not they are relevant. There were also a small but significant number of references to *The Return of the Soldier* (Rebecca West) and *Tell England* (Ernest Raymond). Non-fiction was represented by Vera Brittain, Sylvia Pankhurst, Paul Nash and a range of lesser-known letters and memoirs. Many candidates had assimilated the Brittain , Pankhurst and Owen extracts used in previous examinations (the Brittain extract appears on the Specimen Paper; the Pankhurst was used in January 2009; and the Owen in June 2010). There is nothing wrong with acquiring these extracts as wide reading extracts; they were sometimes used to very good effect. However, it would be good to see centres and candidates looking beyond these extracts to explore appropriate examples of letters and memoirs.

When it came to contextualising the extract, many ways were possible. Candidates did this by: cross-referencing from one section of the extract to another to account for Onions' mixed feelings; exploring the genre of memoir; looking at the way the extract reflects changing attitudes over time; scrutinising the precise time and what they knew about the Armistice and its literature; fitting the extract into their notion of the differences between Home Front and Battle Front perspectives; considering the effect of gender. On this latter point, one examiner pointed out that "weaker candidates responded uncertainly to the 'gender aspect' of this question particularly when they lacked the contextual background knowledge of women in the war".

In subsequent examinations successful candidates will:

- explore the ways the writer's thoughts and feelings about aspects of World War One are presented in the extract
- develop their own thoughtful and considered readings of the extract
- establish a range of substantial and meaningful links between the extract and their own wider reading
- develop a repertoire of wider reading texts in addition to coursework texts that are known and understood in detail
- refer to all three literary genres when writing about their wider reading, commenting on the writers' choices of form, structure and language, as well as subject matter.

One examiner offered this further advice to centres:

- Students need to consider ***genre*** in Q1. They must prepare by analysing a range of non-fiction pieces in relation to their wider reading so that they can point out the differences in the ways in which choice of genre will shape the writing.

- It is most likely that looking for **differences from** as opposed to **similarities to** wider reading will lead to genuine exploration of how writers work. While it is right to point out thematic links, it is essential to be able to show how differently authors treat these themes.

- Listing literary devices is not analysis. Pointing out that other authors use the same devices is not analysis and can lead to some strained if not downright silly links.

- Beware of lazy assertions about context (*All women at the Home front were ignorant; all politicians were corrupt; all generals were incompetent*.) Beware of unloading context only loosely linked to the given passage.

Section B Poetry

Questions 02 -07

The poetry set text questions should be recognisable to centres with experience of the Legacy Specification and LTA3 in particular. The expectations of AS candidates remain the same – they are required to produce a balanced debate in response to the given critical opinion, supporting their arguments with an analysis of the poetry they choose to use as evidence.

This summer all three anthologies proved to be popular choices. There were many engaged and enthusiastic answers with most prepared to address poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language. As one examiner put it, "The vast majority of candidates had been taught well on how to address the debate and it was **rarely** ignored totally". Where problems occurred, they tended to be to do with:

- Balancing the debate
  Some able candidates who demonstrated high Band 3/Band 4 descriptors in other ways were prevented from fulfilling their potential by not balancing the debate. Candidates should remember to spend time identifying what they see as the debate inherent in the question before proceeding to the planning stage. 'Balancing the debate' means seeing beyond the given view; it may or may not involve a polarised debate. If they can see another way of looking at the poems, then they are balancing the debate. It may be that they spend more time on the given view or the counter argument, but they should at least spend a substantial amount of time and thought on both sides.

- Selecting appropriate material
  There was a good deal of engaged and intelligent analysis that was not clearly relevant to the question or to the candidate's line of argument. Care should be taken to select appropriate poems and to select from those poems only the most relevant aspects, rather than offloading all they know about a particular poem or poems. One of the answers to this issue is planning; time spent planning is crucial. Many candidates begin writing too soon (and the same can be said of responses to Section A). Once candidates are writing, they should make frequent reference to the key words of the question and the central debate so as to ensure that the answer remains on track. Some candidates perhaps try to cover too many poems for their own good. They should remember that there are two perfectly acceptable choices: ranging more widely, or choosing to concentrate on two or three poems in more detail. If they choose the latter they must be careful to cover depth and closeness of reading. If they choose the latter, then 'two or three' means just that; covering two poems is fine and can still enable candidates to gain the highest marks.

- Exploring poetic effects created by writers' choices of form, structure and language.
  This remains a difficult area for many candidates. Exploring aspects of form, in particular, such as rhyme, metre and stanza form can lead candidates into empty feature-spotting with little relevance and/or asserted and unconvincing links to meaning. Such features, it is claimed, are chosen by writers to "make them stand out" (?) or to create vague effects such as "flow" and "pace". For examiners the key questions when faced with these assertions are "How?" and "Why?" Candidates should also ask these questions themselves and use them to shape their responses when it comes to AO2.

The odd numbered questions naming a poem need just as much attention to the debate, to choice of material and poems and to planning. One examiner offered this comment: "Students must avoid merely 'going through' a given poem or a list of chosen poems without linking them to each other within the framework of a clearly developing argument. This seems to have been more evident in the answers to the second question on each poetry text".

Up the Line to Death

Question 02
This was the more popular of the two Gardner questions. Most found the core debate accessible and could give examples of the nobility of man, on the one hand, and other lesser aspects of human behaviour on the other. Some assumed there was a consensus about 'nobility'; more thoughtful candidates attempted- explicitly or implicitly- to define and explore the concept. The starting point for many candidates was the idea that the concept is perhaps more prevalent in earlier, pre-1916, naive poetry and less prevalent in realistic poetry from 1915 onwards. This tended to be a sensible approach and enabled candidates to move from Gardner's view to the idea of him shaping the anthology's structure. Most saw the quotation as simply a way of identifying nobility as the basis for the core debate; this was fine and produced some clear lines of argument and crisply structured debates. Some constructed equally interesting and engaging discussions by scrutinising the full quotation and the idea that war is less than noble in itself but can be the catalyst for prompting noble behaviour in combatants. One examiner pointed out that " most chose to juxtapose early poems such as 'Peace' with later ones such as 'Dead Man's Dump' to illustrate how idealised notions of nobility were tested by the realities of warfare".

Question 03.
One examiner found "many really good answers here" and went on to point out that using 'Comrades: an Episode', 'In Memoriam', 'My Company' or one of Owen's other poems to

evaluate the given view worked well as an approach. Another examiner remarked that he awarded full marks for this question on occasions so clearly it was made to work effectively by those candidates. However, this was a much less popular question. Perhaps candidates simply preferred the nobility question. Another possibility is that candidates did not feel confident about the poem and/or they did not feel confident about accessing other poems about the responsibilities of commanding officers or those who might be assumed to be responsible in some way or another. Another examiner reported that of those that attempted the questions many "did not get it", in other words missed the significance of the sentry's ordeal and his interaction with the narrator. The poignant and ambiguous ending of the poem certainly needed consideration. This is an example of a question where candidates could be tempted into 'going through' the poem rather than selecting so as to focus on the debate.

Scars Upon My Heart

Question 04
For the majority who attempted this question, it was a relatively straightforward task to find good examples of poems to support the given view. More confident candidates could distinguish the different ways in which poets revealed that they "were only too well aware". Less confident candidates struggled to find poems other than 'The Game' in order to construct a counter argument. Examiners reported that the poems of Edith Sitwell, Helen Hamilton, Mary Postgate Cole and Vera Brittain tended to feature in the best answers.

Question 05.
For many this proved an accessible question because of the popularity/infamy of 'The Call', and the fact that there is a surfeit of poems around which to construct a counter argument. Some interesting answers found a variety of attitudes within the Pope poems in the anthology. One examiner felt the need to defend Jessie Pope now she seems to have acquired demonic status: "Poor old Pope was berated by almost all of them, sometimes at the cost of actually considering how characteristic her poem is".

War Poetry

Question 06
This was a very popular question and well handled by those who resisted the temptation to become so immersed in the idea of pity that there was no time for a counter argument. It proved a successful strategy to look at the question from the time perspective. Pity was cited as a feature in post-1915 poetry; before then poets were inspired to write about other responses to the idea of warfare. There were some interesting and original debates about the extent to which pity might be found in the poetry of Brooke, Hardy and Sorley. Some less successful candidates offloaded all they knew about Owen and/or pity instead of selecting material and constructing a balanced debate.

Question 07
This was also a popular question and candidates wrote with real engagement; the majority had clearly been enthused by the poem. They were keen to reveal the subtleties, ironies and poignancy of Hughes' poem. His compassion and his philosophical reflections on time and mortality were richly appreciated. The best answers found a counter argument in nominating a more appropriate conclusion poem. Unfortunately, many candidates did not focus on the debate and either virtually ignored it or dealt with it hurriedly, and sometimes assertively, at the end

In future, successful candidates will:

- create a balanced debate in response to the critical opinion given in the question
- select appropriate poems to support their argument and counter-argument
- explore the poetic effects created by the writer's choices of form, structure and language
- remember that the debate is just as important in the odd numbered questions.

Centres are thanked for preparing so thoroughly their candidates to work with the new numbering system and the new style answer book. The majority of candidates responded well to the changes to the June 2010 exams, but where difficulties were experienced, centres are asked to draw candidates' attention to the comprehensive range of guidance material that is available on this subject in order that they are confident about what is required of them in future examinations. Support available on this issue includes Guides for teachers and students, and specimen question papers and mark schemes showing the changes in action. All documents published in support of the changes to exams can be accessed via notices published on all qualification homepages, all subject notice boards, and on the parent and student area of the web.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades
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