



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
January 2011**

English Literature

47103

(Specification 4710)

**Unit 3: The significance of Shakespeare and the
English Literary Heritage**

Report on the Examination

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

Introduction

Twelve centres submitted Controlled Assessment units for English Literature in January 2011. All but one of these were Unit 3, Shakespeare and ELH. The new cover sheets and other documentation appeared to have presented no difficulties, and all aspects of administration were well-managed.

Texts

Teachers appear to have enjoyed the freedom to choose their texts for this unit. The Shakespeare and ELH assignments covered a range of linked text choices across the genres, including *Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *Henry V*, *Much Ado* and *Romeo and Juliet* linked with ELH Poetry; *Macbeth* linked with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and with *Animal Farm*; *Romeo and Juliet* linked with *Wuthering Heights* and with *Pride and Prejudice*.

The linked texts chosen were, in most cases, helpful in prompting focused, detailed and appropriate responses to meet the Literature assessment objectives. Where they were less successful was in a narrow range of poems linked to the Shakespeare, where one or two poems were used to make some rather laboured extended comparisons of a limited range of ideas or literary techniques. A wider selection of poems would have enabled more developed consideration of the various aspects of conflict in war, for example, rather than a definition of conflict as battlefield experience. A wider study of poems would also have helped candidates to show more individuality in their response. Where the same one or two poems are used by all candidates, it is likely that they make the same points about them, sometimes in the same order, and with the same supporting detail. This does not help them to display the “imaginative selection of detail” associated with marks in the higher bands.

Other responses were helpfully enabled by clear focus on one main character in the Shakespeare and a couple of characters from the poems. This prompted some interesting exploration of writers’ attitudes and presentation of strong female characters based on, for example, Lady Macbeth and some of Browning’s monologue personae, focused on characterisation and contextual issues.

There was some evidence that candidates were basing their responses on a very limited source selection rather than the complete Shakespeare text. This may have been a result of early submission, but it raised the issue of how candidates can address aspects of structure and development when they may have been confined in their study to a thin representation of the text. Clearly, a specific focus is better than a catch-all sweep, but a 25% mark share for the Literature CA does suggest a need for more substantial study than was indicated by some responses. There is no requirement to *write about* the whole text, but there is a requirement to show *awareness* of the text as a whole.

Tasks

Tasks were usually suitably adapted from the task bank, but there were some examples of tasks which were not recognisable as adaptations of the central focus. Where candidates are encouraged to consider Evil in *Macbeth* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, it is necessary to tie the thematic focus to the key word in the task bank which is “conflict”. There is ample scope for customising the task bank titles, so the invention of completely different titles can only be seen as a failure to meet the requirements of the unit. The *Themes and Ideas* focus seemed more popular than the *Characterisation and Voice* focus, but it is worth emphasising that the mark scheme puts a strong value on authorial craft, so that the choice of a *Themes and Ideas* task does not mean that the texts can be approached only for their “message”. The danger of this approach is that candidates write about texts as real life, and characters as real people, rather than imaginative constructs skilfully made to appear real. It is appreciation of the skill behind the construct that enables candidates to meet the higher band descriptors.

Timings

Several submissions were longer than they need to have been and longer than candidates were able to sustain a display of relevant skills. The recommendation is to allow “up to” four hours. Most candidates, including the most able, do not need four hours to show their skills. Teachers must judge how much time, realistically, is necessary for the chosen task. It may be helpful to start thinking of this by asking how much more than an hour do candidates really need. Of course, some tasks may be more complicated and may be split into parts, justifying a longer time, but the evidence is that few candidates writing at length show skills in the last few pages that they have not already shown in the first few. Organisationally, splitting the same task into three or four lessons seems to involve some loss of momentum and involves teachers in additional security measures, as well as taking more time away from teaching.

Early submission

Some centres may have chosen early Literature CA submission to spread the assessment load more evenly across the course. Others may have been putting out feelers and using the opportunity to get some feedback. In either case, moderators felt that the work submitted tended to lack the subtlety and sophistication that would be expected from submissions later in the course, when the responses to Literature had been matured by further and wider study as well as the benefit of age. It is worth reflecting on the implications of entering a 25% CA unit after only one term of GCSE study. There may be various reasons to do with data gathering, establishing practice, gaining feedback, but all of these may need to be weighed against the educational priorities related to developing a mature, reflective and independent response to Literature.

Assessment

It was necessary to adjust more centres' marks than has been the case with coursework in the legacy specification. The trend was to inflated marks, especially at the upper end of the mark range. Marks in the Band 5 range were sometimes awarded for work which was clearly not of the same quality as exemplified in the Preparing to Teach training sessions and in the autumn standardising meetings. This may be over-rewarding the work of candidates at a very early stage of their GCSE study, but it may also indicate the need to adjust to the new 5 band mark scheme, which compresses the available marks in comparison with the legacy 9-band mark scheme.

It was apparent in rather too much of the work submitted that candidates had been prepared with some heavily directed teaching and a heavily scaffolded approach to the task. This resulted in many near-identical responses. Whilst personal qualities will always result in some differentiation in response to a common task, moderators expressed some concern that controlled assessment was, in some cases, producing work as heavily over-directed as sadly evident in legacy coursework. Where this was of least advantage to candidates it was a matter of the same subheadings used to organise comments which were similar in nature about a common stock of quotations. Whilst direction and scaffolding can provide helpful focus to weaker candidates, it does little to advantage the more able, who will inevitably find it difficult to show qualities of “sophisticated”, “perceptive” and “imaginative” writing about their texts when they have merely reprocessed the common preparation in structure and in detail. Equally, it is difficult for candidates to show a developed response, let alone a sophisticated one if they are limited by formulaic constraints such as the PEE formula. This acronym was of service when it helped candidates to meet level 5 criteria in Key Stage 3 SATs, but it is a recipe for inhibiting potential for exploration, development, personal response, evaluation and analysis when used at GCSE. It is an inadequate formula for those aiming above a low Grade C.

It may help to illustrate weaknesses and strengths in candidates' writing. Those who incorporate some technical vocabulary in their attempt to comment on a writer's craft, but are insecure in understanding of literary or linguistic technicalities, or unable to comment on why a technical feature is effective, or how it works, can be credited with “some” understanding of language form and structure (AO2). For example, a candidate writing something like:

“The metaphor in this poem is ‘nesting machine guns’. A lot of adjectives are being used such as ‘sung’, ‘slipped’, ‘working’, ‘stands’ etc.

will be showing “some” understanding. More successful comment on a language detail will include the possible effect of a writer’s choice. A candidate writing something like:

“...’gelled back thorns of your hair’ suggests that he’s no longer a child now because he’s styled his hair and his prickly hair suggests that he is unapproachable.”

will be recognised as working at Band 3. Band 3 “clarity” of explanation is usually recognisable when the candidate explains the attitudes implied by details of an author’s word choice. This would be amply signalled by a candidate writing something like:

“They have used the word ‘strewed’ which means scattered about. They have used this word to say that the soldiers were thrown around casually and the fact that their lives were not important.”

What sometimes keeps candidates in the Band 2 area of attainment is an inability to explain the possible purpose or effect of a detail of writer’s choice in ways other than the literal. Moderators will find Band 2 features in the sort of comment that is limited to literal possibilities of meaning, as when a candidate writes something like:

The quote “Bent double like old beggars under sacks”, would have made the readers of Dulce et Decorum Est think of weary old men that had nowhere to go living on the streets, having no food. This showed that the army was very unorganised, with the troops being badly looked after.”

Another barrier to demonstrating the Band 3 “clear and consistent” quality is the inability to use acquired knowledge in a way that shows how the knowledge relates to the specifics of a text. This is frequently the case when candidates have acquired or been given technical knowledge designed to help them to develop a sense of literary or cultural context. A candidate will be signalling an uncomfortable ownership of knowledge when writing something like:

‘Petrarch’ created sonnet form where love is unattainable, also the lover suffers for there unrequited love. The convention Petrarchan Sonnets were widely used by Elizabethan poets. The conventions are used in ‘Romeo and Juliet’. Love was important in both texts and used efficiently.’

Whilst teachers may have very good reasons to provide some scaffolding for an informed response to texts, it is important in assessment that the candidates are seen to build upon (or within) the scaffolding, rather than mechanically transport the apparatus from one place to another.

Notes

Candidates may derive a strong sense of purpose and confidence from having extensive notes. Unfortunately, too often the purpose is insufficiently focused on criteria and the confidence is a false confidence which misunderstands what moderators are looking for in candidates’ work. It is clear to moderators that there is no correlation between quantity of notes and quality of response. Rather, the reverse seems to be the case. Where candidates simply write out more fully what they have prepared in condensed form as a draft answer, it soon becomes apparent that their use of the controlled assessment time was for repeating, not building from their notes. This does not in any way advantage them. Notes should be brief and help to remind them of the skills they need to show to meet assessment objectives and/or band criteria, and some page references.

Annotation

The purpose of annotation, as it was in coursework, is to show where candidates have fulfilled criteria and to justify the mark awarded. Sometimes, this is not what appears in annotation. Some annotation show no awareness of the skills hierarchies built into the mark bands. For example, writing “*language*” in the margin where a candidate has mentioned language means nothing in terms of professional assessment. “Language” is mentioned in the second descriptor in every band, so there is no indication of a judgement about where the candidate’s comment may be placed in attainment. There has to be use of the qualifiers – *Limited, Some, Clear, assured* and *sophisticated*, and there has to be some use of the discriminator nouns such as *awareness, understanding, insight*, etc.

There is an understandable tendency for annotation to flatter the candidate, but the annotation that gains a moderator's confidence is the annotation that shows a sensitive and critical application of best fit features – indicating realistically what the candidate is and is not doing. Writing “*analysis*” in the margin when a candidate is merely describing is a sign that the annotation should not be taken on trust – and that the mark awarded is likely not to merit trust. Writing “*context*” against a candidate's reference to the date of writing is another indicator that quoting a fact is being mistaken for exploration of historical or cultural significance.

Moderation should be a different process from examination prime marking. The moderator has a teacher's judgement of the work as well as the work itself, so a fairly quick impression should be enough to confirm a centre's grade. The key question for a moderator is “Can I see why this teacher has awarded this mark?” If the moderator can see why the mark was awarded, it is then a matter of agreeing it. It is when annotation appears to be uninformed by criteria, or where terms from the criteria are implausibly linked with what has been written, that moderators are forced to go into a mode of reading that is more like prime marking.

Inappropriate or implausible annotation has the effect of failing to gain a moderator's confidence in the centre's assessment, triggers a more searching reading of the text. For example, if a candidate writes something like:

“Macbeth's downfall is brought about because of his meeting with the witches, Lady Macbeth's influence and Macbeth's own ambition.”

and this is accompanied by an annotation such as *Perceptive response*, the moderator is not led to confidence in the annotation. Similarly, if a candidate writes something like:

“16000 people were burned to death between 1560 and 1603”

and this is annotated with something like *Social & historical context*, there is little to help the moderator to see a judgement of the level of attainment.

It is important to reference key words in the band criteria, but this needs to be done with some sense of realism. If a candidate writes something like:

“Lady Macbeth took full control of planning Duncan's murder and carrying it out. This shows the readers (sic) how devious and manipulative she is”

and the annotation records *Sophisticated interpretation of character*, the moderator is likely to question the centre's assumptions of what may be “sophisticated”, which is not likely to result in a confirmation of marks.

Terms like “perceptive” and “sophisticated” need to have a universal currency across the AQA's constituency of 400,000 candidates. Effective use of the terms can be undermined by a parochial view of ability and by flattering performance on undemanding tasks. For example, it is not enough to believe that the strongest candidates of one school are the same as the strongest candidates of the whole entry. Equally, it is difficult to show these qualities in tasks which mis-direct candidates into writing which merely describes characters or narrates plot or lists features of language. These terms need to be understood and used as markers of high performance, combining independence, engagement and responsiveness with challenging material and tasks.

Moderators read the annotation to get a sense of teachers' familiarity with descriptors and how to apply them – and to judge the realism of claims about what candidates are doing. If they are to follow the basic instruction of moderating – to confirm, where possible, the centre-awarded marks – they need to be assured that teachers have understood the mark scheme and also applied the standard exemplified in standardising materials published by the AQA.

There are key words in the mark bands which help assessors to judge attainment in students' work. If teachers, moderators and candidates share the same understanding of these terms, the new CA mark scheme will become a secure basis for assessment - and for target setting. A mark scheme has the practical benefit of being a tool for teaching and learning as well as a tool for assessment.

Band 5 ‘sophisticated and perceptive’ means ability to show different ways of interpreting details that go beyond the obvious. “Sophisticated” means some subtlety in dealing with complexity, ambiguity or ambivalence. “Perceptive” means insight into characters’ motivation, behaviour or reactions, or the implications of parts of a text for readers/audiences in general or the candidate in particular. “Perceptive” comments find interest and significance in minor details that others may not notice or think worth a comment.

Band 4 ‘assured and thoughtful’. This means confident understanding of the implications of a question and relevance of a text. “Assured” responses make successful use of a range of reference and quotation to illustrate and qualify comments. “Thoughtful” responses communicate ideas and feelings about texts, showing the candidate has thought about implications of the text for himself/herself or for the way we live today.

Band 3 ‘clear and consistent’. This means that there is sound understanding and expression of the skills, and repeated evidence of this through the response. Usually, this sort of response makes a range of points supported with detail, an explanation of how the point relates to the text, the author’s purpose or the demands of the task. Clarity is usually marked by a strong sense of why any point is being made or why any detail is important.

Band 2 ‘Some’. This means that there are a few signs of focus on the skills necessary for a response but not all of them and not often. Usually, this sort of response mentions ideas and attitudes and mentions language or contexts but does little to explain them or support comment with detail.

Band 1 ‘Limited’. This means that there are hardly any signs of the skills necessary for a response, or not all of the skills mentioned in the bullets. Usually, this sort of response simply tells the story.

Finally

It is still very early days in the life of this new specification, but it may be that some of the issues raised here go beyond early practice – in which case this report may be a useful signalling of some aspects to adopt and some to avoid.

What seems impressively evident from the first submissions is that candidates are bringing enthusiasm and commitment to their Controlled Assessment tasks, and rigorously applying guidance and direction provided by their teachers. This makes it all the more necessary that teachers are providing guidance and direction that is based upon sound pedagogy and assessment practice as exemplified in the extensive professional development and training which has been nationally available since the launch of the new specification.

Controlled Assessment can be an organisational minefield or it can be a way of building assessment into the time, conditions and ethos of the normal teaching and learning routine. It needs to be different from examinations. It needs to be different from coursework. This first submission provides some reassuring evidence that it offers teachers considerable freedom of choice and it offers candidates considerable scope for developing their ideas and responses in relation to some stimulating links between texts. The new spec offers a substantial 25% markshare for what can be a single piece of work, which is a gain compared with 30% for three pieces of work in the legacy spec. If the price to be paid for that gain is adjusting to a new mark-scheme, it is a price well worth the gain.

The senior moderators would like to thank those centres which submitted work for this early series. The experience of reviewing the samples has been very helpful to them in observing differences between the legacy and the new specifications, and the observations arising in this report will, they hope, be helpful to other centres still planning their submissions for the next and later entry dates.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.