**General Certificate of Secondary Education
January 2011**

English Language   **ENL03**

(Specification 4705)

Unit 3 Understanding spoken and written language and writing creatively

Report on the Examination

Introduction

As perhaps might be expected after only one term of the new specification, there was a very small entry of approximately 200 candidates from one centre. The comments in this report, therefore, are based upon an extremely small sample. Some of the comments are, however, not necessarily based upon this small entry but also reflect wider evidence gleaned from several meetings and communications between centres and AQA.

The centre which completed Unit 3 for its Year 10 cohort did so with considerable confidence and competence. Many centres have expressed anxiety about features of controlled assessment such as use of notes, the new spoken language study, applying new mark schemes and finding the time to fit everything in. The evidence of this centre is that candidates and teachers took controlled assessment in their stride.

Part A - Understanding written texts (extended reading)

The centre used 'Of Mice and Men' as the text for Extended Reading. The task selected from the task bank was the one focusing on the theme of power. It proved to be a very successful choice because candidates at every level of the ability range were able to find material they could explore at an appropriate level. In the lower mark bands candidates could make straightforward points about how Steinbeck showed power relationships between characters, while candidates at the higher end of the ability range could explore similar aspects in greater depth and link their observations to, for example, the ways in which Steinbeck explores power in terms of nature, gender and race. All candidates used the same task but their responses showed that there had been differentiated teaching approaches across different classes.

Differentiation is as important in controlled assessment as in coursework and can be approached in a variety of ways. In the case of Extended Reading centres have considerable flexibility in choosing the texts to be studied. Texts may be drama, poetry or prose (including literary non-fiction) with no requirement to satisfy National Curriculum requirements concerning, for example, Shakespeare, texts from different cultures or from the literary heritage. Candidates of different abilities may benefit from studying different texts. The text is likely to be one studied in English Literature, especially if an integrated approach to the two courses is being developed, but if a centre decided to enter candidates for English Language in one year and Literature in another (usually Language in year 10 and Literature in year 11) or, if the centre is free from the programme of study requirements for literary heritage, there may be even greater flexibility in choosing a text that is not part of the Literature course.

The example of exploring the theme of power in Of Mice and Men shows that it is possible to use the same text and title across a wide range of ability by differentiating in the classroom. The influence of the KS3 Strategy has, in the case of coursework, led to a fairly widespread reliance on frameworks or

scaffolds for candidates in KS4. It is worth re-iterating the advice which was often a feature of coursework reports: that modelling and scaffolding are important teaching tools in helping candidates learn how to structure writing but that they are problematic for assessment purposes. Teachers should avoid giving candidates the same framework for a controlled assessment task. This is especially true of higher ability candidates: it is difficult to see how candidates could produce work assessed as 'sophisticated' if several candidates are following the same route, making the same points, using the same textual detail and reaching identical judgements. A term like 'sophisticated' would suggest considerable independence of thought and approach.

A simple method of differentiation would concern the use of bullet points in the task title: lower ability candidates can be steered in the direction of key assessment objectives by the concise use of bullet points.

Part B – Producing creative texts (creative writing)

The two pieces of writing submitted for the January series were very confidently shaped and developed. Candidate responses were, on the whole, concise, usually two or three sides of handwriting and seven or eight paragraphs. The two tasks taken by every candidate were the response to a film and 'Don't Get Me Started On!'. Of the two, the latter was considered the most successful. The recent Teacher Standardising Booklet contained two excellent examples of this task and some similarly effective responses were seen in the January series. Candidates seemed to enjoy the task because it invited them to have some fun in a structured rant, and there were some wonderfully comic touches in the writing from several of them. Interestingly, although it was refreshing to see candidates writing about a wide variety of topics, many chose to write about Christmas. They did this because the task was approached in December, so the subject matter was highly relevant. It is surely to be encouraged that candidates are given opportunities to write about topics and ideas that are current and relevant, and that they have some choice.

Choice is a potential area for discussion in departments when it comes to writing about films. One reason the Moderator considered the responses to 'Don't Get Me Started!' better than the writing about film was that all candidates wrote about the same film, Avatar, often making very similar observations. This has been a fairly common approach in coursework and for very good reasons, as it must help in the development of resources and in standardising. At this early stage of a new specification, however, it is appropriate to suggest consideration, at least, of an approach which uses a common film for teaching purposes but then encourages candidates to apply their skills to a film of their own choice. Again this may be particularly important for candidates capable of addressing the criteria for Band 5. It is also worth repeating the advice given in coursework reports that long responses to films in which candidates work diligently through a given list of technical terms should be re-considered. The advice is especially important in a Unit labelled 'Creative'. If pieces of writing are concise – five or six paragraphs rather than the five or six sides sometimes seen in coursework – then

it may be more possible to create opportunities for more than the minimum two pieces of creative writing during the course.

Part C – Spoken Language Study

For their Spoken Language Study the centre chose the task based upon the representation of spoken language in soap operas. Candidates used the same common data. Several candidates responded` successfully to this quite challenging task, the most successful being able to analyse concise amounts of data in some depth. Where responses were less successful, two features predominated: some candidates seemed to find it difficult to extend and develop their responses as they seemed not to have developed their ability to analyse features of spoken language as well as others; and a few candidates, not many, adopted an approach in which they worked their way through a list of technical terms, an approach which was highlighted as being potentially problematic in the recent Standardising Booklet.

The centre which submitted Unit 3 for assessment this January had used, almost universally, the strongly recommended AQA Notes form and there were no difficulties in confirming that candidate notes were 'brief'. There remains work to be done in developing candidates' skills in devising helpful notes. In the case of the Spoken Language Study, for example, a lot of the notes used by candidates are dominated by lists of technical terms rather than key points to be made in the response. It might be helpful for candidates to think of arranging notes in ways which respond to the three strands of the Spoken Language mark scheme:

- points to show understanding of how spoken language is adapted
- key issues concerning 'public attitudes'
- key points arising from the data

Of course these are inter-related - understanding of how spoken language is adapted should be displayed through engagement with the selected data – and will be integrated in most candidate responses, but connecting 'notes' with key Assessment Objectives must be in candidates' interest.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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