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Examiners' Report

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EXAMINERS' REPORT - 1203

Introduction

2F/4H

The major change this year was to Papers 2F and 4H. This was the first year when 'clean' anthologies were used in the examination rather than an annotated copy. Generally, there were encouraging signs that this had helped candidates to focus more on the specific demands of the question rather than reproducing all of the marginal annotation from their marked version.

Work is, however, still needed, especially with Paper 2F, to ensure that all candidates are able to offer a secure interpretation of the poems. Not all candidates focused closely on the language of the poems - perhaps the lack of prepared prompts was one reason for this.

On Paper 4H, most candidates dealt extremely well with having 'clean' anthologies. This produced more evidence of a personal response and independent argument. Because of this absence of unassimilated material, candidates often made a great effort to tailor their answers to the question, and to write rather better organised essays. There was evidence that they had spent time thinking about what was required, and many responses referred to the question throughout. Sometimes the responses seemed a little thinner (in terms of coverage of the texts) than in previous years, but they were more relevant.

There were a number of examples where candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two, or had very uneven coverage. This may result from a failure to read the rubric carefully: questions will always require treatment of two poems.

In Section B (Non-Fiction Prose) candidates should make sure that they draw on relevant evidence from the passage, but also that they avoid any tendency to re-tell the story without making comment which relates to the demands of the question.

Particularly because of online marking, Centres should stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, preferably, or blue-black ink.

Many answers showed signs of careful planning, so that candidates were able to maintain a clear focus on the demands of the question. However, it is important to remember not to spend so long on the plan that the answer is not completed.

The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is something which is stressed annually. The skill of looking over one's writing and making improvements is an important one, and can result in considerable improvement.

3F/5H

Both papers worked well and all components were appropriately accessible to the candidature.

In terms of **reading**, the competence with which candidates for both Higher Tier and Foundation Tier answered the questions on the charity appeals suggested that they had been well prepared for this kind of media material. The vast majority of candidates wrote a relevant, planned commentary and most were able to develop it at least to some extent. It was particularly noticeable - and very frequently mentioned in examiners' reports - that most candidates for both papers were also able to identify, illustrate and comment on language use. More successful candidates could go beyond simply identifying linguistic features and analyse the way each served a specific purpose in its context and added to the overall effect of the text.

The quality of **writing** was much less consistent in both tiers. In general, candidates are good at writing which is directed at the Section B writing triplet (argue, persuade, advise) perhaps because there is a strong supporting link with the speaking and listening 'discuss, argue, persuade' triplet. The writing in response to the Section C questions (writing to analyse, review, comment) was not as generally competent. Balance and objectivity are crucial to successful writing of this kind.

Many concerns were expressed by examiners about elementary errors, often appearing in the work of apparently able candidates. At this level it is almost unforgivable for a candidate to use a lower case 'i' for the first person pronoun, and yet in occasional answers this mistake was repeated throughout essays. There were also surprising numbers of lapses in Standard English, particularly in verb forms; "gonna", "aint", "wanna" and "shouda" appeared with surprising regularity in the work of candidates who clearly aspired to at least a C grade. Most answers require formal expression, but even when an informal register or style is appropriate, candidates should remain aware of the examination context and, in particular, should not use street language and text style.

Paper 1A: Speaking and Listening

Centre marking was consistent with last year's standard and there was little need for adjustment. Attainment varied widely across a huge range of centres and candidates. Overall there is abundant evidence that students enjoy speaking and listening and are growing in confidence and skill in this component.

Speaking and Listening was again monitored by two kinds of visit, one advisory and the other moderation. The former, which allows teachers to discuss tasks and assessments in detail with the visiting moderator, is the most welcomed and valued. There is more awkwardness in moderation visits, though most centres acknowledge the necessity for these in ensuring the integrity of the whole process.

Moderation visits were based on a task provided by the board. This was a group interaction task, combining problem solving and a degree of role play with spontaneous discussion. By minimising the preparatory work required by schools and candidates, this system helps to make visits briefer and more targeted. Other key advantages are that visiting moderators can be standardised more effectively to ensure consistency in the application of marks and that it provides a good test of candidates' communication skills in a realistic context.

The main finding of the visits was that marking standards were generally acceptable. In many instances there was a strong correlation between the visiting moderator's and the centre's levels of assessment.

Teacher practice in assessment was often exemplary. First candidates were placed in rank order, then marks were given within each group, and, before a final decision was reached, these outcomes were cross referenced with the marks of candidates in other groups. Some centres also used more than one teacher to establish a consensus. One moderator commented, "I listened to some excellent discussion of marks and grades, all with close reference to the relevant criteria in the marking grids."

Centres, however, tended to mark conservatively on visits. There are likely to be disparities between the marks given by the centre to individual candidates during the moderation visit and those ultimately awarded to them, but where this happens to a significant extent throughout the range, concerns are raised and the centre's marking may come under further scrutiny.

There are concerns that some centres over support candidates in speaking and listening in much the same way that they do for the written coursework and it is clear from teacher records that many tasks for speaking and listening are heavily prepared. Centres target the three required activities very carefully and allow candidates plenty of time to prepare for them. Teachers seem nervous about tasks which involve spontaneous discussion because they fear their students will not perform well. Sometimes the reverse is more true - students surprise the teachers with their off the cuff ability to discuss, argue and persuade, often throughout the range. One moderator noted, "School should be encouraged to do less prepared work; candidates often do less well because they are reliant on notes."

Records vary in their form and quality. There are no recommended methods and a variety of approaches is seen - often within centres. The best tended to be those

with centre wide systems, suggesting a clearer centralised control. These are also best from the point of view of the external moderator, especially when they include a written comment on each assessment. **Though not a specification requirement, a centre wide system of record keeping has many advantages** including providing an effective basis for internal moderation and also helping to ensure that comprehensible records are retained, even when there are significant changes in teaching personnel.

Most centres had, as required, clear systems of internal moderation. The new interboard videotape, produced this year by Edexcel, proved helpful in this respect.

There were some administrative weaknesses, the most serious of which was **incomplete records.** Moderators reported that some teacher examiners had not fulfilled the requirements outlined in the letter sent by the Assessment Leader. This resulted in various omissions, including incomplete front sheets and marks not finalised.

In most instances, however, centres went to considerable lengths to meet the requirements for visits and arranged good accommodation for the task, provided a suitable range of candidates, reflecting the centre's academic profile, and ensured that all records were available.

In general the experience of the visits was a positive one for all concerned - candidates, teachers and visiting moderators - and the standard attained by most candidates was one that was compatible with their level of ability.

One moderator's comment sums up the overall experience: "It was clear that centres took Speaking and Listening very seriously and several mentioned the usefulness of Moderation visits in giving oral coursework a high profile. This was welcomed."

Paper 1B: Written Coursework

- There is little to report that is radically different from last year. **The specification was interpreted appropriately and skilfully by the majority of centres**, who now have a confident mastery of this component and are very good at guiding candidates of all levels of ability to present folders which show their capabilities to the best advantage.
- **The standard of marking remains constant and on a par with last year.** Rank orders were reliable and teacher examiners used the marking grids accurately. There were very few centres whose marking went beyond tolerable limits.
- **The quality of work also remains the same as last year.** One moderator's comment is typical, "Nearly all folders were interesting and enjoyable to read." **Overall there is a solidity of attainment which reflects both the hard work of students and careful, well targeted teaching.** There is less evidence, however, of the innovative and exploratory work that used to characterise the best coursework pieces.
- **Task setting is generally sound.** Writing questions are, in the main, well tailored to the individual candidate. There is also a sound understanding of what texts and topics are appropriate for the reading units.
- Weaknesses remain. **Most centres differentiate in the topics they give to stronger and weaker candidates, but some still rely on limiting and unimaginative centre wide tasks.** There are particular concerns also about whether abler candidates are being allowed sufficient opportunities to address the requirements of the higher bands, whose descriptors include references to 'originality,' 'flair' and 'sophisticated control,' and a capability "to explore alternative interpretations." Some reading topics were particularly narrow in their focus.
- **Teacher annotation was of a generally high standard and often very helpful to the moderator, particularly when comments on whole folders were included.**
- **There were very few examples of blatant plagiarism, though this is still very much an issue. More insidiously worrying is the growth of what one moderator described as "teaching by numbers" and there were other references to "over reliance on teacher notes" and "similar responses within a centre."** In such cases **teacher guidance to candidates stretches what is acceptable to the limit (and beyond) by providing over detailed essay plans, which specify what should go in each paragraph, including the points to be made and the quotations to be used.** This puts candidates into a strait jacket, which stifles any worthwhile individual response and limits accessibility to higher grades. It also makes external moderation very difficult, if not impossible, because it is unclear what work is the pupil's own. There is a heavy risk that penalties will be incurred.
- **Administrative errors seem to be on the increase.** These included incomplete or inaccurate details on coursework front sheets; discrepancies between the OPTEMS and the folder mark, sometimes caused by the centre's failure to record the outcomes of internal moderation; marking folders out of 80 instead of 40; incorrect and/or unclear *pro rata* adjustments for incomplete folders; failures to send the highest and lowest mark folders, if not included in the sample. **At best these**

mistakes create extra work and delay the whole process; at worst they can trigger centre wide adjustments.

- In general the standard of marking and moderation was excellent, as was the level of assistance provided by the centres to the moderator, particularly in cases where there was a perceived problem.

Personal and Imaginative Unit

- There was a huge variety of approaches including narrative, description and reflection.
- Moderator response was mixed. One commented that “creative writing is now very uninspiring; candidates are not encouraged to use their own voice” whilst another reported that “personal responses were more entertaining and engaging this year.” At its best the writing for this unit was excellent; there were many powerful stories and accounts of personal success and tragedy.
- Less successful centres tended to use the same task across the centre, for instance, an extension piece of a literature text, often blandly executed to a common formula. Stronger responses resulted when centres stimulated personal responses from their candidates by the use of tasks which encouraged them to write from their own viewpoint or experience.

Different Cultures and Traditions

- Candidates wrote knowledgeably and often enthusiastically about their chosen texts. Much work was predictably (and appropriately) based on the Different Cultures and Traditions section of the Edexcel Anthology, and on literature texts like ‘Of Mice and Men’ and ‘To Kill a Mockingbird.’
- One moderator commented that “The standard of analysis was impressive with pupils trying to explain and comment on the cultural background of the text.” Weaknesses included generic openings (often reproduced across centres) to essays on ‘Of Mice and Men’, paying lip service to the cultural and social context.
- Task setting was mixed. A question like “How do you respond to Curley’s wife?” did not invite much attention to cultural background whilst another question based on character - “Examine Celie’s development in ‘The Color Purple’ - elicited essays that explored the theme of racism and the struggle of black women.
- It was pleasing to note that there were very few infringements of the rubric this year; the importance of writing on at least two short stories was acknowledged and there were only a handful of units based entirely on poetry.

Shakespeare Unit

- A wide variety of plays are studied, but the favoured texts were unquestionably 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Macbeth.'
- Task setting was mixed. There was much that was stimulating, but some topics were very narrowly based and did not always allow candidates to consider the text as a whole, as the specification requires. It is difficult to see how the ablest candidates can really show the full extent of their abilities if they are simply asked to write about the role of Capulet in 'Romeo and Juliet.'
- The framework approach (already referred to) was most in evidence in the work submitted for this unit. The same topic was typically used throughout the centre, leading to very similar answers.
- This unit was often - and deftly - submitted for English Literature as well, but centres should note that an empathetic response is unlikely to be sufficient in itself to address the assessment objectives of both specifications successfully.

Paper 2F

Section A

Question 1

Candidates engaged well with the question and could relate to the feelings conveyed. The possible reasons for the child's 'invention' of Brendon Gallagher were explored sensitively by some candidates. However, there were a few who took what was said in the poem too literally: '... his dad was in prison for robbing cats'. Mostly, candidates showed a slightly better grasp of the ideas in this poem, finding it more accessible than 'Lucozade'. The language in this poem was at times found confusing, and this led to some misunderstanding of the context and the mother's situation (with occasional references to her being an alcoholic or having an eating disorder). The final section of this poem was interpreted in different ways: either as a happy ending or one which was still rather bleak. Language comments were often rather restricted (eg to repetition and use of the personal pronoun), but clear points about tone were sometimes made.

Question 2

On this question, candidates generally sympathised with the predicament of the interviewee in 'You Will Be Hearing From Us Shortly', and there was often a strong personal response. However, weaker candidates showed confusion over the speaker - some wrongly assumed that the brief responses came from the interviewee, and failed to recognise that all the words were spoken by the interviewer. A few candidates, aware of recent equal opportunities legislation, pointed out that the personal nature of the questions was now inadmissible. The most common choices for the second poem were 'Hide and Seek', 'Refugee Blues' and 'Wherever I Hang', all of which were appropriate. There were some good responses, picking up on how intonation could convey attitudes. Weaker answers tended to be too narrative.

Question 3

Not all responses showed secure grasp of the content of either 'The Barn' or 'Mid-Term Break'. The language of 'The Barn' posed problems for weaker candidates, many of whom did not grasp what was happening. Better answers were sensitive to language or imagery, revealing understanding of the effect of the barn's interior on the poet as a child, although there were some examples of feature spotting and comments were not always fully supported. The basic situation of 'Mid-Term Break' was mostly found more accessible, although not all realised the identity of the dead child. The majority of answers successfully provided the narrative details, and the best looked closely at the effect of the untimely death on the poet. Weaker responses tended to ignore the evidence about the feelings expressed in an understated way within the poem.

Question 4

Most candidates grasped the central symbolism and metaphor of 'The Road Not Taken', seeing this as a reference to life's journey. The more successful responses explored how this idea was developed, but candidates did not always take their analysis as far as they might have done, by examining closely the way in which the two possible paths are presented, together with the poet's choice. A variety of relevant choices were selected for the second poem: 'Warning' and 'I Shall Paint my Nails Red' were the most popular, but 'Not My Best Side' and 'Digging' were also used. Occasionally, candidates penalised themselves by selecting poems which did not evidently deal with critical choices, such as 'Mid-Term Break'.

Question 5

The best of those candidates who chose this question (still a small minority) showed a laudable grasp of both Hughes's and Patten's intentions, commenting on the link between poetic inspiration and Nature. However, there were some candidates who found it difficult to go beyond a synopsis of the two poems, 'The Thought-Fox' and 'A Blade of Grass'.

Question 6

There were some good responses to this question, although it was again answered by relatively few candidates. 'The Storm' was most commonly linked to 'Wind' - perhaps the predictable choice - as the second poem. Better candidates explored imagery and language, making sound textual references and engaging well with the subject. In general, candidates discussed the often vivid language of these poems more successfully than in other sections.

Section B

Question 7

For this question, candidates were invited to consider the way in which the pupil Joseph Barclay is presented. Examiners noted that this was mostly found to be an accessible question, and that the character of Joseph was one which evoked strong reactions, from those who admired his abilities ('I don't know half the information he knows and I've got five years on him') to those who found him a 'geek' who was too old for his years. Most were able to pick out some salient points about the boy, including his love of history and unusual appearance and way of speaking: better answers explored his distinctive language effectively. However, weaker responses failed to develop these points fully and there were many very brief pieces. The best answers were those which, rather than simply paraphrasing the main references to the boy, used the evidence skilfully to draw out his character and relationships. There were, however, a number of blank scripts, perhaps sometimes from candidates who did not feel able to respond to such a sustained piece of writing. The tendency to refer to the piece as a 'poem' was noted by several examiners, and a small minority confused Joseph Barclay with the school inspector.

Section C

Some examiners felt that this year they had encountered an improvement in the overall structure of candidates' writing, while others commented on a lack of paragraphing. Many reported the by now commonplace confusions over homophones (their, there, they're), use of inappropriate colloquialisms (ain't, gonna), text messaging devices (m8, u), use of capital letters and incorrect word divisions. Spelling in general is inconsistent, and variety of vocabulary and of sentence structure is often limited. Punctuation errors continue to be widespread, with the absence or misuse of the apostrophe a recurrent problem. Legibility of handwriting is at times problematic.

Question 8

The question was found accessible by most candidates who attempted it, and the best achieved a good journalistic style, sometimes capturing the flavour of a local newspaper effectively by the tone and register they selected. Reports on dramatic sporting fixtures (especially football) were frequent, with some capturing the excitement within a credible reporting style. Not all handled the newspaper format

so effectively: some pieces were in more of an oral register, and some had the character of a marketing or advertising piece. The word 'event' was not always registered: some wrote about a topic such as climate change and pollution or capital punishment - a feature rather than a report.

Question 9

By far the more popular choice of question in this Section, many candidates clearly appreciated the chance to think about and explain what they hoped to do in ten years' time. There was some lively writing, and the bullet points were found helpful in enabling candidates to structure their responses logically. The most successful answers were genuinely interesting to read, with insights into young people's aspirations. Some candidates opted for the 'fantasy' lifestyle of the wealthy celebrity; others were grounded in a more limited vision, often having a touching sense of realism and honesty. Some explored both possibilities: 'I have always wanted to be a model or a well-known actress, if not something quiet like a pharmacist.' The answers provided a fascinating dossier of the media-fed views of the young and changes in social attitudes to relationships and children. Answers reflected an increasing preoccupation with fast cars, large mansions, swimming pools and international jet-setting travel: many intended to finance these dreams as budding Bransons, professional footballers or owners of such businesses as hair and beauty salons.

Paper 3F

Section A

Question 1

The leaflet, similar to, but more straightforward than the Higher Tier text, worked well and candidates found plenty to write about, particularly on the first three bullet points, where there were many features to evaluate. Most candidates were able to identify the key linguistic features of the text, like the use of repetition and rhetorical questions, and sometimes the use of the pronoun "you", and to use quotations to support points. They were much less able to relate these specifically to their impact in the context of the passage. The design features also elicited some useful comments. Able candidates picked up less obvious points and, for instance, wrote thoughtfully about the sequences of indented paragraphs at the bottom of side one, some comparing them to stanzas in a poem, and also about the use of "gift" instead of "donation", pointing out how apt this was for a Christmas appeal. Weaker candidates tended to describe or paraphrase, and indulged in feature spotting without explanation, or responded subjectively by saying how they would contribute, and urged us to do so also. A few found the concept of an 'army' doing charity work difficult to grasp.

Section B

Question 2

More than three quarters of the candidature attempted this question. Plenty of focused, clear advice was given and, in the main, candidates discriminated clearly in outlining what was appropriate action for each of the specified groups. Candidates were very concerned about the topics specified and had many ideas on them: most were honest about their own responsibility for the problems and they were often scathing about what was already being done to combat them. Stronger answers gave clear and instructive advice, explaining ideas (for instance designating specific areas where graffiti artists could display their work) carefully. There were pleas for more understanding of teenagers and better lines of communication. Weaker answers tended to be brief and repetitive, some amounting to little more than unexplained and unsupported statements, giving basic advice - for instance, to ignore vandals because they're only drunk and will go away soon; or that the provision of more litter bins alone would solve the litter problem. Overall answers were structurally insecure, typically a paragraph of advice for each group under a heading.

Question 3

Comments are much the same as for the similar question in 5H. There was a variety of approaches to 'leaflet.' Some candidates wrote general essays about why it was good to do this kind of work, but most attempted appropriate formats and used headings, frequently feeding off and adapting the Question 1 letter. Candidates were helped by the bullet points, which provided them with a clear structure. Most were able to make valid points about each point and to choose words and structure sentences in a deliberate attempt to persuade people to help, often using the linguistic features apparent in the Question 1 text. The weakest answers were those which simply wrote a charity appeal, ignoring or misinterpreting the actual question.

Section C

Question 4

This produced some lively answers, though candidates were not entirely at home with the conventions of informal letter writing. Most, however, were able to comment on points that the would-be runaway needed to consider, but were less able to provide an objective review of them. Many responses developed into pleading letters, sometimes giving impassioned advice. Stronger candidates did, however, write with some degree of balance, using personal experience and worldly awareness to good effect. Clear structure and expression characterised the better responses, but weaker ones were written loosely and in a very informal register and style which extended well beyond what the candidate should have recognised as being acceptable in the examination context. Text and street language (including expletives) was used all too frequently.

Question 5

Though this was almost as popular as question 4, the writing was less secure and often undeveloped. However, both viewpoints were invariably addressed, usually drawing on the candidate's own experience in a realistic way. Many candidates opted to comment on each quotation separately; some answers consisted of two paragraphs under the heading of each quotation. Better candidates were able to link ideas and develop a reasonably coherent and balanced commentary, carefully referring to the strengths and weaknesses of each viewpoint. Weaker candidates merely stated whether they agreed with the quotation and gave their opinions bluntly, sometimes in street language and couched in extreme terms. Some candidates adopted a bullet point approach which did not allow them to make a fluent commentary and other answers were clogged because the candidate seemed unable to refer to one or other of the views without reproducing the entire quotation.

Paper 4H

Section A

Question 1

Most candidates made a reasonable attempt at the question, which was far the more popular choice in this Section, and often included a personal response to the poems, 'The House' and 'Wherever I Hang'. On the latter poem, many looked closely at the nature of the writer's choice of language - noting, for example, the change to 'my' in the final line.

On 'The House', several candidates referred to the effect of alliteration ('sending scouts under the stairs', 'cockroaches/came from under a cupboard') in conveying the 'horror' of the house - the 's' sound emphasising the organised intentionality of the rats, their military campaign to take over the house; the hard 'c' evoking the horrible scuttling of the cockroaches. Candidates emphasised the 'gothic' dimensions of the house (usually not defining 'gothic'); it was indeed, thought some, a house of horror - 'cold', assailed by the wind, 'dark', full of 'corpses' (there was some confusion over where these came from), watched by 'crows'. A few commented on the way that creatures and natural forces were given intentionality - the wind attacking the house, 'sunlight' trying to enter but daunted by the gloom of the house, the Atlantic delivering its dead to the house, the crows 'planning' to take over the chimneys. The force of the last two lines was interpreted variously. The reversal was noted, especially the switch to the first person. Some thought that a child forced to grow up in such a terrible house would be traumatised; others thought that the 'but' meant that we should re-interpret the preceding lines; perhaps it was not so horrible; perhaps the piano meant that there was music and enjoyment in the house and that the poet is telling us that, whatever the condition of a house, if one grows up there, it is actually 'home'.

Question 2

Candidates were asked to look at how the poets of '*From War Music*' and one other poem handled the reality of war. 'Dulce et Decorum Est' was the most common choice, with 'The Send-off' also frequently chosen. Some also chose 'Refugee Blues' - seeing the real effect of war as displacement and hopelessness.

There were some interesting and well-sustained answers. Some candidates dealt with the poem of their choice more fully, although the most successful candidates engaged fully with the language and imagery of '*From War Music*'. A number commented on how '*From War Music*' showed the horror of war. The graphic description (Ajax's cheeks 'slapped ...to soft red pulp', his head forced 'back and forth' by his exertions, the 'air... thick with arrows') demonstrated the ferocity of the attack. Others thought that the language was too light-hearted to convey 'reality', and noted comic elements, such as the head moving like a 'clapper inside a bell', the 'staged' nature of the combat between the dancing Hector and the lumbering Ajax (Ajax 'lunged'; Hector 'jived'), the humour of 'Ajax and his spear, both empty topped'; perceptive candidates occasionally commented that these were deliberate distancing devices, inviting us to watch the combat as if it were a show.

In writing about 'Dulce et Decorum Est', many brought out the contrasts in treatment, seeing the Owen poem as presenting the harrowing experience of war more strongly. On 'The Send-off', candidates saw the 'reality' as the presentation of the quiet resignation, the anonymity of the soldiers as opposed to the heroics of Hector, for instance.

Question 3

This question generated a number of extremely interesting and thoughtful answers. There was some careful analysis of 'Mirror', although weaker candidates tended to find this poem difficult. Better responses emphasised the mirror's acquiring the depths of a lake, and the woman's reaching beyond appearance to search for 'identity' ('searching my reaches for what she really is'). These candidates thought that the poem raised the issue of appearance (the mirror as reflecting only the surface) and identity (the lake offering insight into the depths of the self). Some concluded that the woman does not acquire this insight and does not ultimately grasp the distinction - her 'tears' at the approach of the 'terrible fish' are evidence that her 'identity' is expressed by her appearance, and that she cannot see beyond this.

The situation in the poem 'At Grass' was in general rather better understood. Occasionally, candidates assumed from the title that the subject-matter was the grass itself, rather than the horses. A number of very thoughtful responses were offered, often looking at the human implications of the way in which the horses were presented. The better candidates dealt well with the challenges posed by the question. Opinion divided neatly into two: the horses regret the passing of their glory days; the horses are happy to be in retirement. Whatever the interpretation, candidates managed to use language evidence ('cold shade', 'wind distresses tail and mane' and 'anonymous' are taken as indications of the unsatisfactory nature of retirement; on the other hand, 'memories plague', and 'gallop for what must be joy', and the heat and bustle of the race days (third stanza) led others to conclude that retirement for the horses is a relief. The most effective responses, however, noted Larkin's reluctance to present a definite opinion - noting that the language reflects what could possibly be ambivalence. These commented that part of Larkin's intention is to raise the issue of human tendency to project onto animals their own concerns and ideas - humans might assume that the horses regret the passing of their fame, but fame and glory are human constructs; the horses may be simply glad to be left alone. Occasionally, the poem's language led candidates astray, including those who inferred a marriage from the word 'groom'.

Question 4

This question produced many appropriate choices of a second poem to put alongside 'Miracle on St David's Day'. (Popular choices were: 'Old Man, Old Man', 'Warning', 'One Upon a Time' and 'An Unknown Girl'.) Candidates often produced careful and thoughtful analyses of the two poems, looking closely at the ways in which the poets presented issues concerned with a person's identity. Good use of quotation to support the points made was a feature of the better responses.

On 'Miracle on St David's Day', there was a general assumption that the labouring man, in reciting the poem, had recovered his identity, that hearing the poem had triggered his childhood memory and that he had become 'himself' again, had recovered the lost years of silence and 'misery'. Some, perhaps more sophisticated, analyses doubted this: these saw Clarke's 'miracle' as more tentative. These explored what 'identity' might mean, and concluded that the silent years were possibly lost, suggesting that the return to childhood recitation constituted only an automatic, instinctive impulse to speak - a 'miracle', indeed, given the years of silence, but what was spoken was only that which was 'safe', could be spoken 'by rote'; it was not the man's own 'text'. There was a good deal of sensitive comment on the language of this poem - the hush and awe of nature ('daffodils ... still as wax', the 'flowers' silence'), and nature's applauding of the

miracle ('A thrush sings/and the daffodils are flame'). This poem clearly touched the emotions of many candidates.

On the other poems chosen, there were some subtle interpretations of 'Warning', focusing not just on the 'identity' one might adopt when old, or on the shedding of one identity for another, but on the way in which identity is itself a shifting and elusive concept. Analyses of 'Old Man, Old Man' were generally quite straightforward: the old man has lost his power and authority; he is no longer a 'lifelong adjuster of environments' and is no longer useful ('missing crusted streaks/Of food on plates'). The contrast with 'Miracle' was seen by many as a straight opposition: the labouring man recovers, the old man loses, his identity, 'Once Upon a Time' also proved a good choice, if handled well. Analyses were sound - 'identity' (equated with the sincerity of 'the heart') is gradually lost as we grow older and learn to dissemble.

Question 5

There was some perceptive work on 'Keeping Orchids' and 'The Flowers', although this was not a question chosen by large numbers. Most of those who attempted it showed good understanding of how flowers were used in the two poems to explore human emotion, but some could have extended their range of points and comments on language. Weaker responses lacked sufficiently clear focus on the demands of the question, tending to pick out examples without relating them to people's feelings.

Question 6

Candidates answering this question - a minority - were mostly able to make an appropriate choice for the second poem (such as 'Iguana Memory', 'Roe-Deer' and 'The Thought-Fox') and offered thoughtful comments on the way the different creatures in their two poems were portrayed. Some sensitive comments on language were included, though a small number found it harder to offer relevant observations.

Section B

Question 7

In order to test candidates' ability to interpret a text, they were asked to consider what the inspector (the writer, Gervase Phinn) was looking for when he visited the school. Most candidates focused effectively on the different aspects of the school on which Phinn commented, although weaker responses took a more limited perspective. Answers often included a selection of appropriate material, and the best candidates, whose work was excellent and extremely perceptive, were able to organise detailed, well-illustrated and analytical accounts of what the inspector was looking for and what he found. Candidates showed, for the most part, a clear understanding of what an inspector does, providing many examples from the text; they noted that he focused on buildings, decorations, display, quality of pupils' work, standard of teaching, literacy, relationships, attitudes of pupils (whom he found happy and lively). There were a few candidates who wrote only briefly or who did not attempt the question.

Many had been taught detailed analysis of the effect of the writer's language - his descriptions of the moor, his humour, the bird imagery to describe the teachers. A number of these simply could not, however, integrate these insights into a response to the question. Almost all candidates referred to the question, but differed markedly in the extent to which they kept it in focus.

Section C

There were a number of factors which led to unevenness in the quality of response to the Writing question. These include the fact that some candidates do not plan their time sufficiently well to ensure a full and careful answer in this Section, which they have time to check through at the end in order to improve clarity and accuracy. Not all candidates are equally successful in selecting an appropriate register and vocabulary for the specific task, with a marked tendency to increasing colloquialisms in inappropriate contexts. At best, however, candidates see this question as an opportunity to combine wide-ranging ideas with a strong personal voice, subtle and flexible vocabulary and a clear sense of writing that is fit for its intended purpose and audience.

Question 8

This question about the life of a refugee, which encouraged candidates to think outside their immediate experience, elicited some superb responses - creative, imaginative, sensitive, structured and choosing vocabulary well. Examiners were encouraged to look positively at letters which looked sensitively and thoughtfully at the feelings of being in a different country: some candidates drew effectively on their reading (for example, 'Refugee Blues', 'Wherever I Hang' or 'Once upon a Time') as a stimulus for their response, offering appropriate information and description about their new situation. There were some excellent evocations of the difficulties of adapting to a strange environment. Many candidates were successful in capturing the right tone for a letter to someone back at home, although at times too formal a register was adopted and some letters to a close friend or relative ended with 'Yours faithfully'. Comparisons between the old and new life were common, as were problems of being accepted. Quite a large number of those dealing with this aspect seemed to understand and recount in detail the problems of encountering racism. Almost all (except the few who were 'on holiday') described their homesickness (often evoking in touching detail what they missed about their homeland - the mother's cooking, the landscape, the friends, the customs, for example). Some gave detailed accounts of the journey to the new land, obviously drawing on what they knew (or had experienced?) about how one becomes a refugee, and about the process of seeking asylum.

Question 9

Candidates mostly responded effectively to the requirement to suggest improved facilities for young people, although not all managed to strike a register which was right for such a letter to a newspaper. Suggestions ranged widely, from Youth Centres with adult volunteers or councillors to manage them to a number of specific leisure activities such as skateboarding, bowling, swimming, cinemas and free tennis courts. A number lamented what they perceived to be a real dearth of such activities in their area, and this lent a sense of passion and commitment to their responses. A few adopted a persona - usually an older person, deploring the behaviour of unoccupied young people, but feeling that better facilities would curb their troublesome activities.

The best responses had a well-judged tone and some excellent phraseology. Almost all wrote in a suitable register. Various tones were adopted. Some were rather pleading ('please understand young people'), others were outraged at the lack of facilities ('warning - if we do not provide for young people now, they will not

become productive members of society'), and others again appealed to a sense of community ('let's do something for the young people so that they are not marginalised and so that our local community is not divided'). Many captured the required spirit well.

Where answers were less effective, the vocabulary often lacked ambition and ideas were not always presented in a clear and cogent structure. A few were a little muddled as to the audience, writing as if they were addressing the council, for example.

Paper 5H

Section A

Question 1

The text for this question was a leaflet, in letter form, from 'Help the Aged.' This worked well and appealed to candidates, some of whom said that they were moved enough to wish to contribute to the charity. Candidates seemed, almost universally, to have a good grasp of the media features involved in this kind of appeal. The leaflet contained plenty of material to write about and the first three bullet points provided ample scope for detailed commentary. Candidates were clearly stimulated by the strongly emotive content. Unusually the language bullet point had been placed second in the list, but this was justified by the abundance of familiar language features - among them rhetorical questions, repetition, alliteration, and the 'rule of three' - in the text. There was strong evidence to show that candidates had been taught to identify these features. Candidates throughout the range were able to write at length and in some detail on them; the extent to which they were able to bring out the specific effectiveness of their use for the purpose of the appeal was a key discriminator in assessment terms.

Candidates reflected in interesting ways on the leaflet's distinctive design features, including the charity's yellow logo, the extracts from actual letters, and the black and white photograph, which was analysed in some depth. The format of the letter, including the salutation and subscription, the use of postscripts and website addresses, also elicited some good comments.

The fourth bullet point - "any other aspects which you think are relevant"- attracted few specific comments, though some able candidates began to explore the contrived artifice of the leaflet. The small print, which revealed that the photograph was not the real Maud, whose name was not Maud anyway, stimulated thoughtful candidates to comment in some depth.

Stronger candidates produced lengthy, detailed and objective analysis, whilst weaker ones responded emotionally to the leaflet, usually in a simplistic way, for instance urging their own reader to contribute, or by stating "the whole thing's a con", with little or no supporting analysis to back up what was an interesting point of view.

Section B

Question 2

The less popular of the two questions in this section, it nonetheless attracted some good answers. 'Leaflet' was interpreted in a number of ways, but many candidates, influenced by the Question 1 text, wrote their answers in letter form. The bullet points proved useful in directing candidates to an appropriate type of charity/organisation, though some chose their own. Most opted for charities which helped the elderly (again showing the impact of Question 1), though charity shops were also popular. The few who chose the hospital radio station option did it well - writing knowledgeably, often about the technical aspects of the work. Those who made their own choice often wrote about charities for children with physical disabilities. Many candidates adopted and adapted the linguistic techniques of persuasion used in the 'Help the Aged' leaflet. There were some confused

interpretations of the question. The occasional candidate wrote general essays about the importance of voluntary charity work to the community as a whole and to the individual. The weakest candidates wrote appeals for funds rather than helpers. Stronger candidates had a clearer idea of what kind of leaflet they wished to present and were able to deploy language in a convincing and persuasive way and in an appropriate format. The best work undoubtedly came from candidates who had working knowledge of appeals of this kind, often (it was clear from the context) operating in their own centre.

Question 3

This question also produced good answers throughout the range. As with question 2, the system of allowing candidates to write about a topic of their own choice (in this instance a controversial issue) or one drawn from a bullet point list of suitable alternatives worked well. Skateboarding was the favourite, with the nightclub a close second – lurid (and convincing!) details of noise, drunkenness and violence were often included to support the argument. Candidates showed they had a good grasp of this kind of letter writing and were well schooled in writing letters of complaint. Stronger candidates showed an ability to understand what “joining in a debate” entailed in terms of logical argument. Some enjoyed taking on and sustaining a variety of persona, even including a “Disgusted” of Tunbridge Wells, and there were a few outstanding answers where candidates used irony to great effect. Most candidates were able to write relevantly, clearly and at reasonable length about issues they felt very strongly about, though a few had problems grasping what a “controversial planning issue” (examiners were told to interpret this very broadly) might be. The weakest answers were those which simply asserted (sometimes very aggressively) a viewpoint, without supporting evidence.

Section C

Question 4

About one in three candidates answered this question. Those who did were able to make sequences of points about both the advantages and disadvantages of having an ambition, but found it less easy to link these into a coherently argued response. There were many creditable answers and a few impressive ones, but there were few that really engaged the reader and the quality tailed off significantly towards the lower end of the range. Candidates might have found it easier if they had given examples to illustrate their ideas. Overall, answers tended to be shorter, perhaps because it was the last attempted question on the paper or, perhaps, because candidates found less to say on a fairly abstract concept. Few attempted to define ‘ambition’ and most interpreted it solely in career terms.

Question 5

The writing in answer to this question seemed to be much more engaged and engaging. In the main candidates wrote with knowledge and enthusiasm - often in quite idealistic terms - about their future careers. Would-be teachers looked forward to the smile on a child's face as they were taught to read, would-be doctors wanted to serve the poor in third world countries and would-be lawyers wanted to right injustice. A considerable number of candidates looked forward to sparkling careers in sport (especially football) and show business, whilst others favoured more mundane jobs like plumbing and building. Some lacked any sense of realism, but most answers were sensible and realistic in their evaluation of the work and the candidate's suitability for it. Strong answers were fully developed and well structured, with some degree of balance in the discussion. Weaker answers tended to be more like job applications with superficial comments about personality ("I am a bubbly person") rather than skills or character attributes.

Statistics for GCSE English 1203

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Unit/Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Mean Mark	Standard Deviation	% Contribution to Award
Paper 2F	75	27.1	9.1	30
Paper 3F	75	27.9	8.1	30
Paper 4H	75	46.0	8.5	30
Paper 5H	75	48.5	8.2	30

Paper Boundaries - Foundation Tier

Grade Boundary	Max. Mark	C	F
Boundary mark - 2F	75	40	17
% of candidates		6.2	86.7

Boundary mark - 3F	75	39	18
% of candidates		7.5	89.0

Paper Boundaries - Higher Tier

Grade Boundary	Max. Mark	A	C	D
Boundary mark - 4H	75	54	39	30
% of candidates		18.2	83.3	96.9

Boundary mark - 5H	75	56	42	36
% of candidates		19.9	81.2	94.5

Option 1 - Speaking & Listening, Written coursework, Paper 2F/3F

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G	
Boundary mark	100	53	42	31	20	9	
% of candidates		10.1	47.0	77.5	92.7	98.5	

Option 2 - Speaking and Listening, Written coursework, Paper 4H/5H

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary mark	100	83	73	63	53	42	36
% of candidates		5.5	26.0	62.4	90.9	98.4	99.1

Overall

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	3.3	15.8	37.9	59.2	78.3	90.7	96.6	98.9

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