

# Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCSE

GCSE English A (1203)

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# Introduction

## 1203/2F and 1203/4H

This is the third year when 'clean' anthologies were used in the examination rather than an annotated copy. This has now become accepted into the system, and no specific comment is needed, except to confirm that the change has had beneficial effects on the approaches adopted by centres and candidates.

Generally, the papers have worked very well in enabling candidates to make a response to both the Reading and the Writing questions. Mostly, candidates understood the demands of the question and there were few basic misinterpretations. Centres are working hard to ensure that candidates do comment on language when answering Reading questions, and that they quote examples and support them. Most candidates did attempt to consider linguistic devices. There are still some (more so on Paper 2F) who do not go beyond general comment, however, or who struggle to comment on such features as imagery. This is a key differentiator. At the top end of Paper 4H, there were some outstanding responses, well above what would be expected within GCSE levels. Examiners' reports comment on much sensitive response to the Writing tasks set.

Themes from previous years remain stubbornly persistent, and it is to be hoped that centres will note that, if candidates paid greater attention to these basic elements, they really could improve their performance significantly. This is particularly the case where, in Section A, candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Such errors may result from a failure to read the rubric carefully: questions will **always** require treatment of two poems. One examiner commented on the fact that some responses were "more like two separate exercises than a single, integrated answer". Response should be equally balanced between the two poems, whether the second is named or is one of their own choosing. A simple plan covering both poems, is a good way of ensuring that they do not simply forget that they are asked to write on two poems, as sometimes seems to happen.

There remains widespread confusion over the difference between poems, plays and stories, with candidates frequently mixing the terms appropriate to each genre, such as 'stanza' and 'paragraph' and 'poem' for 'prose'.

Centres should continue to stress to candidates the importance of clear handwriting which is not too small and which is in black, preferably, or blue-black ink. The actual quality of handwriting in some instances is such as to make responses virtually illegible.

The importance, especially for Writing questions, of checking work carefully for technical accuracy is stressed annually. Some candidates have acquired the skill of leaving sufficient time to look over their writing and make improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all

## 1203/3F and 1203/5F

Both question papers were compatible with those of previous years in terms of content and level of difficulty.

Answers to the reading questions throughout the range suggested that candidates had understood and engaged with the passages and the questions, and addressed all the bullet points; comments on use of language were generally more effective and developed than usual.

Though there were variations in degrees of popularity, all writing questions proved accessible and, in most instances, candidates wrote on them with both conviction and engagement. The quality of writing is improving in some respects, for instance the use of paragraphing and connectives, but there are areas of concern. The intrusion of text forms and lower case "i" still vitiates the work of even able candidates. Errors of style also included the use of expletives (albeit mild ones) and street language in formal contexts. In their anxiety to demonstrate a wide range of punctuation, some candidates use semi colons and colons in places which detract from meaning rather than enhance it. Some answers were in bullet point style and format; bullet points do not allow candidates to answer reading questions with any cohesiveness and continuity, and writing questions in a way which addresses most purposes and contexts (letters, magazines, commentaries etc.)

Experts and statistics are freely quoted to support arguments; this can be an effective technique, but when the expert is clearly bogus and the statistics patently absurd, it detracts from a serious argument. To be told that "20% of children who go on school trips get kidnapped or lost" (Question 4, Higher Tier) undermines logic rather than bolsters it.

Clear handwriting has always been an advantage in examinations. Examiners take great care to mark each answer with equal thoroughness, but where writing is barely legible this becomes a difficult task.

Overall, however, there was a sense that answers to both reading and writing questions were more focused and purposeful, perhaps because of the wider range of resources now available to support the specifications.

## 1203/1A Speaking and Listening

Centres continue to maintain a high degree of accuracy and consistency in the assessment of oral work and there is very little to add to previous reports.

A programme of Training and Advisory Visits took place last autumn and a number of Moderation Visits, with centres selected on a random basis, in the spring.

The experience of these visits confirmed that most centres use the marking grids with confidence and a considerable degree of accuracy. The quality of record keeping is variable, but, again, the centres which have clear, easily referenced systems are in the majority. The candidates seen on the visits are invariably at ease with oral work and, in particular, are good at inter active group work.

There are some concerns about over assessment. Whilst centre marking on the visits is usually realistic, there is some inflation of marks when the final mark is submitted. This is explicable in terms of context; the visits impose pressures on candidates, whereas teachers can (quite appropriately) choose when to assess candidates and when not to, and also tailor tasks for individual candidates.

Typically for all examination boards, speaking and listening marks are higher than for other components in the examination. It is arguable that this reflects the fact that most teenagers are more skilled in speech than writing. However it is important that centre marking does not become over generous and that grade drift, which has not been a problem in the past, does not occur.





## 1203/1B Reading and Writing (Written Coursework)

This component is so well established there is little to add to previous reports.

Centre assessment remained very sound, and, in the vast majority of cases, within acceptable limits. Assessment Support Meetings, which centres are required to attend, are held each autumn to standardise coursework assessment, with the help of a booklet of exemplar folders, and this process has clearly helped to ensure consistency of marking over the years.

There were fewer adverse comments from moderators this year about centre administration. There was a particular improvement in the submission of Coursework Authentication Sheets. Centres are also reminded that they should include the top and bottom folders in the sample, if these candidates are not included on the requested list. There were still incomplete or inaccurate topsheets, a seemingly endemic problem, which poses a potentially serious risk for centres as mistakes might trigger centre wide adjustments.

As frequently noted in the recent past, folders were more remarkable for their solid worthiness than their flair. Plagiarism remains a pervasive issue. The evidence of the folders suggests that centres take this very seriously and impose whatever controls they can to ensure student work is authentic. Teacher annotation is usually clear and explicit and there are frequent indications of careful internal moderation procedures. Some doubts inevitably remain. One way of avoiding problems of this kind is by task setting which is tailored to individual groups or students; in this way it would be very difficult for candidates to use downloaded generic essays. Some Centres still use titles across year groups and repeat them year after year, a process which can discourage fresh approaches.

Centres must encourage candidates to spell check their work as mistakes often subvert intended meanings. Centres must continue to correct and comment on errors.

### Personal and Imaginative Unit

A familiar mixture of autobiographical writing, empathetic responses and story telling was submitted and the overall standard remained high. "The Assassin" again figured frequently as a title. This facilitated candidates to write in their own voice but within a very limiting framework, which allowed them to create and maintain a (sometimes sickeningly violent) atmosphere, but provided few opportunities for character or plot development. Occasionally there was a sense that units were awarded marks on the basis of quantity rather than quality and centres were particularly inclined to over reward on the second marking grid; some work, which was riddled with spelling, punctuation and grammar mistakes, was awarded incomprehensibly high marks.

### Different Cultures and Traditions

This is the unit which poses the biggest problem in terms of provenance. The most favoured text was, 'Of Mice and Men.' Though the topics were familiar and there was much use of writing frameworks, the resulting work was often surprisingly fresh. 'To Kill a Mockingbird' and the short stories in the Edexcel Anthology were also studied and there was some variety in the task and topics used. Most candidates managed to analyse key elements of the texts and also explore aspects of the cultural

background. Weaker candidates still tended to retell stories with occasional references to the title of the assignment. The work of stronger candidates was often defined by an ability to focus on and analyse the ways in which writers use language.

### **Shakespeare**

Most work was based on 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Macbeth' and the comments made about the uniformity of tasks in connection with the 'Diverse Cultures' unit apply here also. The quality of work was very mixed. Weaknesses included an over reliance on teacher notes and a tendency to similar phrasing and the use of the same quotations. There were also notable strengths; some centres specialise in certain plays (for example 'Othello' and 'The Tempest') and tailor tasks very effectively to their candidates' abilities. Similar good practice is sometimes reflected in assignments which are based on a single aspect of the text, but allow for expansion to cover the whole play.

# 1203/2F The Craft of the Writer

## Section A

All of the poetry questions worked well, but *Nature* remains by far the least often section selected. Candidates respond to the poems, often quite well, but do not always focus sharply enough on the specific demands of the question. The failure to deal adequately, or at all, with two poems is particularly marked in some responses on this paper, and seriously affects the outcome for candidates. Not all deal directly with the language of the poets, and weaker answers often fail to quote from or comment on examples from the poems. There is some tendency, in a minority of scripts, to take metaphorical language literally, which can lead to serious misunderstanding.

### Q1

This was the more frequently answered question from *In Such a Time as This*: it asked candidates to comment on *Hide and Seek* and *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom*. Most understood the basic situation and sequence of events in *Hide and Seek*, although some misinterpreted the location of the different children or misunderstood the dénouement, not realising the child was left alone at the end. At all levels of ability there was a personal response, for example in the comment: "Although you feel sorry for the little boy, you also understand that his friends are children too and they must have got very bored because it's no fun when you're the seeker". Some referred successfully to the personification of nature, and many picked up on visual and sound images to some degree, commenting also on the urgency and excitement conveyed. Many identified the early simile and the use of personification. *Electricity comes to Cocoa Bottom* elicited more varied, and often more cursory, responses, with not all candidates clear what the children were waiting for, or misinterpreting 'the moment had passed' to mean that the children had missed seeing the lights turned on. Some did not refer to the electricity, apart from in the title, appearing to think that the awaited event was the sunset. In some answers, there was little comment on the many striking images in the poem, and there was apparently widespread ignorance of the location of the poem's setting.

### Q2

There were far fewer responses on *Refugee Blues* and one other selected poem, for which a common choice was *You Will Be Hearing From Us Shortly*. There was in general a sound level of interpretation of the circumstances in which the characters were subject to victimisation and prejudice, with fair comments on both the explicit and implicit cruelty. Some were clearly outraged or incensed that anyone should be treated in such ways: for example, "That makes the Jews sound like thieves and poor, unwanted people, and it's not nice to hear people talking about you like that". On *Refugee Blues* there was a large number of well-focused answers, with a personal response and sound coverage of the imagery. Some used historical background information well; others floundered, insecure on the period and issues. While many responses on the second poem were also sound, coverage was generally less good, and on *You'll Be Hearing From Us Shortly* there were examples of misunderstanding about who was speaking the brief comments, with a number thinking that these 'asides' were actually the interviewee's responses.

### Q3

There was a very even split between this question (*Not My Best Side* and *Warning*) and the other in the section. There were a few candidates who did not distinguish the three characters in *Not My Best Side* effectively and were confused about the identity of the speaker, especially in the first stanza, but the majority were able to make sound points about the characterisation, noting the oddity of a speaking dragon, an unmaidenly maid and a 'brash techno-geek' of a knight. The words of the characters were often analysed in a successful way, with candidates often showing signs of enjoying the humour and quirky details, realising that the girl's attraction to the dragon was, to say the least, 'unusual', and occasionally exploring themes such as vanity: "the dragon does not care about being slain, he just cares about how he looks". Because some wrote at great length on the first poem, there was often too little on *Warning*. Here, some candidates offered in effect only a summary of the poem, with little response to the images or to the spirited thoughts and wishes of the narrator.

### Q4

Around half of the candidates answering on **Identity** attempted this question, on *Follower* and one other poem. The second poem selected was usually *Digging*, and for many candidates this worked well, enabling them to make connections on Seamus Heaney's childhood. In a minority of cases, the similarity of themes meant that the focus became blurred, without sufficient identification of the language of each poem. More often, however, candidates responded with some appropriate attention to such phrases as 'globed shoulders'. Many understood the reversal of roles at the end of *Follower*. There were some misunderstandings based on insecure grasp of the nature of farming, although others handled the technical detail well. Successful choices of a second poem included *Death of a Naturalist* or *Old Man, Old Man*. Where a poem such as *Mirror* or *Miracle on St David's Day* was selected, candidates often struggled to relate this to the question's requirements.

### Q5

It was still a comparatively small number of candidates who responded on **Nature**. Twice as many of these answered this question, on *Thistles* and *Trout*, as attempted Question 6. These were both short poems, with very compressed language which many candidates found hard to comment on effectively, although some picked out key words appropriately and commented effectively on some images in *Trout*, as well as noting the military language of *Thistles*: "'Stiff with weapons" suggests how the thistles stand tall and even when they are mown down they manage to keep their ground "fighting back".'

### Q6

A minority choice, this question asked candidates to write on *Wind* and one other poem. There were examples where candidates interpreted metaphors literally, thinking, for example, that the house had actually been 'blown out to sea'. Some appreciated the physical and tactile nature of the descriptions in *Wind*. The most common choice for the second poem was *The Storm*.

## Section B

### Q7

This question, on 'Mongolian Wedding', received a reasonable response from candidates, who were often clearly interested in the unusual detail, finding points of comparison with wedding traditions known to them. Not all had sufficient understanding to contrast Mongolian and Western or other wedding traditions. Many dealt reasonably with points from the start of the passage but not thereafter: this may suggest that some were approaching the passage less prepared. There was some tendency for weaker candidates to become sidetracked into anecdotes about weddings in this country, and not to be focused on the text securely enough. A minority of candidates commented on the use of humour (for example, 'The language used in the prose is quite humorous, such as the granny getting flattened and the bride's eldest sister falling off the truck: "She bounced twice and came to rest, smiling, against a door post"') and many mentioned the Mongolian terms used in the text, but without any close language analysis. Some, instead, simply gave a narrative summary with little or no comment. The best were able to see clearly the narrator's viewpoint on the events.

## Section C

### Q8

In Section C, somewhat more candidates answered on this question, on how to live a long and happy life, with many candidates focusing on the importance of health-related issues. They often showed considerable knowledge, including relevant scientific information at times, on the vocabulary and principles of dieting and fitness régimes. One candidate wrote, for example: "Never get surgery for your weight. You can do it yourself." There were many warnings on the dangers of smoking, drugs and alcohol, in contrast to the attitudes of teenagers which are commonly presented. Many referred also to the importance of successful relationships in achieving happiness and mixing with the 'right' kind of friends. The best responses adopted a lively magazine style and showed control of tone, as in the following comment: "Want to live a long, happy life? If your answer is yes, then I have the solution for you." A growing weakness, it seems, is for candidates to lapse into bullet point lists, often not in sentence form. **Centres should note the importance of continuous prose in connected sentences.**

### Q9

For this question, on 'A lonely person', some wrote in imaginative detail and included moving observations. Many set out their response in a suitable way, using an appropriate register and drawing effectively on personal experience or real life situations. There were a few very perceptive responses which examined the nature of loneliness: "she dreads her alarm clock going off in the morning. As it goes off she wakes up, barely ready for another day of life." Some portrayed their engagement with characters, who sometimes turned out to be themselves: "This girl was me, but I've conquered that now." The bullet points were generally found helpful in structuring a response. Most commonly, candidates chose to write either about a tramp or down-and-out person, or about a social isolate in a school context. In some accounts, there was evident sympathy for the person described, with candidates giving vivid descriptions of the living conditions of those rejected by society and expressing their desire to offer help. Some candidates had not planned sufficiently

and, having started to write about a lonely person, ran out of steam quickly. Others used the question as a springboard for a story very loosely connected with the theme of loneliness.

Common weaknesses in candidates' writing remain: poor structure and inadequate paragraphing; lack of clearly written and punctuated sentences; frequent errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and 'phonetic' spelling.

## 1203/3F Media (Unseen)

### Section A

#### Q1

The reading question worked well; as the pamphlet was targeted at teenagers, it was very accessible in all respects. The design features and language provided ample material to evaluate and analyse, within a relatively straightforward but stimulating range. The bullet points helped candidates focus on key points but sometimes were treated as sub questions, without reference to the main question. As with the Higher Tier, candidates had to say what the purpose of the text was, as well as to comment on its success in achieving this. Understanding of this basic purpose was a discriminator; weak candidates saw the leaflet in terms of job promotion, whereas stronger ones grasped that its primary purpose was to inform teenagers of their rights as workers. For this question it is vital that candidates study the text fully before attempting the question; most comment on the bullet points suggested that candidates had not only read and understood the leaflet, but had engaged with it to the extent that some were even confident enough to be critical of its effectiveness. Most were able to make clear comments on language (referring to its simplicity, the use of second person pronouns and so on) and on the design features (bullet points, fonts and use of colour.)

The images of young people attracted some lively analysis and this aspect was often a key discriminator. Abler candidates linked the image of the saluting girl with the outline of rules, and some felt this was inappropriate, as teenagers object to being told what to do. There was some good comment also on the image of the girl on the front; some felt this was ambiguous - was she shopping or working? As usual, weaker candidates simply identified features, whilst abler candidates analysed their effectiveness. The tendency to write separately on each bullet point, almost as discrete parts of the question, is very marked at Foundation Tier and can weaken answers if the candidate does not relate all comments back to the lead question.

### Section B

#### Q2

Q2 was significantly more popular than Q3. It followed logically from Q1 and many candidates drew on the content of the leaflet to develop their responses. The main challenge was to present arguments for opposite viewpoints on the topic of teenagers having part time jobs; most did this, but with varying degrees of competence. Writing in a style appropriate for a "report" was a key discriminator; weaker candidates produced media reports, and included interviews with students. This approach weakened the focus on the question's main requirement. A few candidates were unsure what a school or college council was; provided they set out arguments for and against, this posed no problems for assessment.

#### Q3

Those candidates who answered Q3 provided reasonably clear and developed advice on how work experience could be improved in adequately structured letters, which adopted a suitable tone. In many responses, however, the suggestions for improvement were limited to widening the variety of workplaces available. "Community Service" was misinterpreted by a few candidates as a punishment.

## Section C

### Q4

This question produced many of the best responses in the paper. Candidates listed their favourite subjects with some relish, and explained fully why they enjoyed them, often paying warm tributes to teachers. Weaknesses included constant repetition of the wording of the question and a tendency to write about subjects separately, sometimes under headings, with little attempt to link them. Some wasted time on unnecessary graphics. Most, however, showed a reasonably sound grasp of both the context of a school magazine and what was appropriate for its audience. Stronger answers gave clear insights, sometimes using language in very engaging ways, into the candidate's reasons for liking a subject.

### Q5

Q5 produced the weakest responses, many of which, in contrast to those in answer to Q4, were very brief. Most answers outlined with some clarity what their schools or colleges did to prepare them for the world of work; a few extended this to comment on life generally; fewer still were able to make more than a rudimentary comment on the value of that advice. However, where this latter aspect was grasped fully, responses were very strong and, of these, the best were often very critical in their evaluations.



# 1203/4H The Craft of the Writer

## Section A

This Section produced much excellent writing. Many candidates responded maturely to the poems and engaged thoughtfully with the texts. Their sensitivity of analysis was often impressive. There were often very good attempts to show how the poets' use of language enhanced the meaning of the poems. Even less strong candidates were usually able to pick out some conscious poetic devices, such as alliteration, and offer examples. This suggested that teaching has often been successful in encouraging such comment. Examiners also noted that there was now far less evidence of a single "teacher's voice", partly because of the use of plain texts, although occasionally a prepared response missed the particular point of the question.

A weakness in some responses was that candidates laboriously told the examiner how many stanzas (commonly referred to as 'paragraphs') there were and what the rhyming or metrical scheme was, but did not analyse this information at all, in terms of its contribution to the poem's purpose and effects. This was sometimes allied with other forms of 'feature spotting' by just naming linguistic devices or failing to show their effect convincingly: one candidate wrote "enjambement is used to keep the reader interested", for example. Occasionally, candidates used clichés such as that the language was "simple and straightforward" (often when it was anything but) or that a device "is used to make the poem flow". Centres should continue to encourage their students to think about the *how* of poetic writing.

## Q1

For *In Such a Time as This*, by far the majority of candidates answered this question, on *Lucozade* and *Death in Leamington*. Many demonstrated a good grasp and offered sensitive and detailed comparisons of the way in which each poet handled their subjects. For example, they noted the far greater impersonality of the description of the nurse and the old woman, compared with the mother and daughter relationship: "This detached view is also brought out in the third person format, being more descriptive of the events rather than the emotion of *Lucozade*, and is seen as much more routine for the Nurse." They were mostly able in addition to pick out features of negative language. There were signs of misunderstanding on the part of some candidates about the events and context. Relatively common was the interpretation of *Death in Leamington* as a murder story, with candidates taking the reference to turning down the gas as evidence that the nurse had killed the woman. Others were unaware that the woman was dead when the nurse arrived, or assumed that the poem was set in a nursing home. On *Lucozade*, many candidates dealt well with Kay's imagery ('orange nostalgia', for example, or the 'sad chrysanthemums'), although occasionally this was found slightly baffling. Interpretations of the outcome varied - in this case more defensibly, since there is greater ambiguity in the poet's writing. Not all candidates noticed or responded to the second part of the question, about the effects of the events on those visiting. Weaker responses were often rather too narrative.

## Q2

A smaller number answered on *The Send-off* and one other poem, but responses were mostly thoughtful, perceptive and personal. On *The Send-off*, candidates generally found the language accessible: they often noted and appreciated the conspiratorial

feeling behind the nodding signals and the winking lamp. Many also picked out the oxymoron 'grimly gay', and often they were able to explain and develop the point made here, although occasionally they thought the soldiers were really happy despite their grim looks: 'gaily grim', perhaps. A large number successfully chose as their second poem *Dulce et Decorum Est* by the same poet, looking closely at the detail of Owen's language, and showing the strength of emotion with its more blatant anger and passion and anti-propaganda stance. There were also some excellent evaluations which focused on the contrasting attitudes in *from War Music*. The focus on 'contrasting emotions' was handled with varying success: some looked at contrasts **within** each poem; others picked out contrasts **between** their two poems: either approach was acceptable. Less successful responses failed to pick up on the keyword 'contrasting'. Several candidates wrote well about the very different emotions conveyed in *An Unknown Girl*, *The Darkling Thrush* (with its contrast between hope and despair) or *Refugee Blues*. Weaker candidates did not fully justify their choice of second poem (for example, *Warning*) and wrote about it in only very general terms.

### Q3

**Identity** was the most frequently answered poetry section, and within this Question 3 was answered by the considerable majority of candidates (it was the most answered question in Section A). This was on *Mirror* and *Old Man, Old Man*, and most candidates were able to make worthwhile observations on the way in which the ageing process is dealt with. It produced some outstandingly penetrating analyses and sensitive responses, original and thought-provoking and making pertinent points about language, narrative voice and authorial intent; but it also generated a minority of the least successful answers, which failed to grasp the central point of the poems and were cursory and superficial in consequence.

A number of candidates engaged strongly with the tone and imagery of the poems. For example, one candidate wrote of the 'lake' as being "Deep and unknown, reflecting, maybe, the state of mind Plath is in". One examiner noted that they often 'recognised that there was something more than plain "sadness" at growing old in *Mirror* and that the sympathy for her father in *Old Man, Old Man* is slightly twisted by the underlying bitterness in such phrases as "World authority on twelve different sorts of glue".' Some noted the difference between the focus on losing one's looks and losing one's power and mind. Weaker candidates showed some confusion over the voice in *Mirror*, sometimes thinking that the words were those of the woman herself and that "silver and exact" referred to her grey hair. Those who interpreted the poem too literally referred to an actual lake, somehow connected with the events of the author's life. Although some wrote very perceptively on the situation portrayed in *Old Man, Old Man*, others lost focus and wrote more about what they saw to be the relationship between the old man and the writer than about concerns over growing old. Some examiners noted a moralising tendency, as shown by the comment "*Old Man, Old Man* shows you should not be afraid of growing old because there will always be someone there to help you".

### Q4

This was on *The Barn* and one other poem. There were some very positive responses from candidates on this question. By far the most common pairing was with *Death of a Naturalist* (also by Heaney), which elicited many intelligent responses and analyses of language in both poems, as well as allowing candidates to evoke a sense of place and feelings, as well as exploring how these changed as the poem progressed. The opportunity to write about two poems by the same writer was clearly appreciated by

some. Candidates often seemed to enjoy recognising the use of warlike imagery and vocabulary in the poems. One commented on the “cacophonous alliteration of coarse croaking’.” There was often a pleasing appreciation of how such images as “cobwebs clogging up your lungs” actually work. Other choices for comparison included *An Unknown Girl*, where candidates were able to focus on the intense imagery used to create a sense of place, *Mid-Term Break* and *Still I Rise* - with occasional responses, of good quality, on *Miracle on St David’s Day*.

#### Q5

Nature was again a minority option, with responses split evenly between this question, on *Break of Day in the Trenches* and *A Blade of Grass* (which was interpreted imaginatively by some candidates, with developed personal responses), and Question 6. Many engaged quite thoughtfully with the ideas behind the poets’ use of natural objects. In writing about *A Blade of Grass*, for example, one candidate wrote: “The blade of grass represents his affection for his partner, showing how something so small and worthless can mean something so huge”. Most candidates selected an appropriate natural object (for example, the rat or the poppy in *Break of Day in the Trenches*); many noted that the rat was oblivious to the horrors of war. Weaker candidates often struggled with the ideas in *A Blade of Grass*, unable to relate closely to the poet’s message and sometimes simply agreeing that a blade of grass really was a rather bizarre gift.

#### Q6

This question was on *The Stag* and one other poem. The most popular choices were *Roe-Deer* (easily the most common, and offering good potential for exploring links and contrasts), *Iguana Memory* and *The Horses*, with some also choosing *Trout*. The question produced some thoughtful and perceptive analysis and comment, with plenty of references to language and its effects. There were well-considered ideas on the relationships between humans and animals that were developed from the ‘meetings’. One very able candidate who chose *Roe-Deer* for the second poem wrote: “In both poems, emphasis on the importance of the meeting is shown by making the divide between the worlds clear, as if to suggest that any collision between the two is extremely significant, as well as unusual.” In *The Stag*, many candidates dealt well with the predicament of the stag and noted the creature’s journey from his own domain (“his favourite valley”) to the alien “strange country” of humans. Those writing also on *Roe-Deer* were able to offer clear contrasts in the reactions, intentions and interpretations of the meetings. One examiner noted that on this pair of poems candidates often “made close reference to language and structure to compare the crass indifference and brutality of the people towards the stag with the magical sense of wonder in connection with the roe-deer”.

As with Paper 2F, weaknesses in candidates’ writing sometimes remain: poor structure and inadequate paragraphing; lack of clearly written and punctuated sentences; frequent errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and ‘phonetic’ spelling. It remains the case that careful attention to editing would improve the technical accuracy of candidates’ work and, with 8 of the 25 allotted marks going to Assessment Objective iii (a third of the marks), this is an important consideration.

## Section B

### Q7

Candidates mostly responded very well to the question about Bennett's capacity to provide variety and interest in *The Lady in the Van*. There was much evidence of engagement, enthusiasm and sympathetic reading of Bennett's presentation of "the lady", although only the able candidates picked up on the ambivalence of the writer's attitudes towards his subject, or saw his respect for her shining through the more comic effects. One candidate noted that at first he acted as 'a bizarre witness to a mysterious woman', but later commented: 'We learn of Bennett's admiration for the woman, saying "it [her life] was not a failure".' The question enabled candidates to select from a wide range of examples and also to pick out a number of different characteristics of Bennett's writing, including especially: diary form; use of humour; and dialogue. The best responses also looked at such elements as irony, pathos (at the end) and the use of authorial asides. Some focused on a small number of techniques and explored these in considerable detail. Sometimes candidates concentrated too much on Miss S's character, without due consideration of Bennett's techniques, with the less perceptive seeing hatred rather than affectionate amusement in Bennett's attitude.

## Section C

As in previous years, this Section produces some of the best answers from many candidates, who responded to the tasks with real interest. One examiner said that there were some "stunning responses". Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 8, which perhaps illustrates that it is not always the more obviously accessible question that generates the most subtle response.

### Q8

Responses to this question, on the memories evoked by a photograph, were written enthusiastically by candidates at all levels of ability. This resulted in many answers which were lively, engaging and at times very personal. Often, the writing was detailed, with minute description, clear and accurate. A good example of an effective opening is the following: "The photograph sits in a silver frame, gilding my happy memory... It evokes in me memories of summer, smells and sounds, lost but for the images left behind in frames or boxes." Some candidates used a real photograph, while others drew on their imagination, sometimes adopting a persona effectively (a grandma, a war veteran, a teacher) to conjure vivid pictures. Common subjects were holiday or family snaps, which brought back childhood memories, together with pictures of deceased relatives or those now 'lost' through divorce or migration, as well as whole class or school photos.

There were also responses which treated more unusual subjects. One examiner was struck by an account of an accidental picture of a door handle, which then examined events from the point of view of the door: 'Why do I get slammed when she shouts?'. Another commented on 'a photo of the Earth from space, a Vietnam war photo and a photo of a fire, taken from a mobile phone'. Examiners noted that some responses were so skilful and evocative that it was hard to tell whether they were real or imagined - either approach, of course, was fully acceptable, nor did it matter whether the examiner could tell. Where responses were less effective, it was largely because they resulted either in minute description of detail without elaboration of

context or because the writer (and hence the reader) literally lost sight of the photograph and slipped into only vaguely linked reminiscences.

## Q9

Question 9, on applying for a reality TV programme, inspired many candidates, who were obviously writing about something many of them would love to do, presenting themselves as perfect 'wannabes', either because they are or because they entered successfully into the spirit of the task. The letter form was adopted with consistency: candidates wrote as though they had a real addressee in mind, which created a strong sense of register and focus. Many gave lively, if often plainly tongue-in-cheek, explanations as to why they would be the ideal contestant, with explanations of their myriad talents and how being on the programme would benefit them or the other people on the show. Adopting a clearly different persona - such as a middle-aged woman - often helped the writer towards an imaginative response. Examiners noted the universal confidence candidates evinced that their inclusion would have phenomenally positive effects on audience ratings. Weaker candidates were sometimes more pedestrian in their approach to the letter. They may have asserted their 'bubbly' nature, but often they failed to communicate this through what they wrote. Examiners were pleased, by those responses which contained an evident sense of irony and demonstrated 'a healthy disregard or cynicism for the whole notion of instant celebrity'.



# 1203/5H Media (Unseen)

## Section A

### Q1

The pamphlet for the question worked very well both in terms of subject matter, which candidates were deeply concerned about, and presentation. The leading sentence included an additional requirement to say what the purpose of the text was, as well as to comment on its effectiveness in delivering this. This proved to be a key discriminator; weaker candidates failed to discriminate between “smoking” and “passive smoking” and saw the leaflet as a warning only to smokers, whereas stronger ones realised the audience and purpose were much wider. Weaker candidates also tended to address the bullet points separately and sometimes with little reference to the main question. Most candidates found plenty to write about; they were able to identify and illustrate the key features of the use of language, but analysis of the design features tended to be stronger, perhaps reflecting the nature of the text. The graphics were particularly rich in detail and stronger candidates were able to comment on the subtleties.

Most answers commented effectively on the front cover of baby and serpentine smoke, but more successful answers were able to comment on the differing and distinctive impact of each of the other two photographs, picking up the social differences very precisely. Most candidates were able to identify language features (e.g. the use of pronouns, questions, ‘the rule of three’, and punctuational devices) and relate them to purpose. Again there were clear distinctions between weaker and stronger answers. Less focused answers referred to all questions in the text as “rhetorical”, whereas more discriminating candidates referred to “frequently asked questions” formats and the way each question tried to engage readers in a personal way by the use of pronouns and straightforward language.

## Section B

### Q2

This question was significantly more popular than Q3 and produced many of the best responses in the paper. Candidates are well schooled in writing letters and most relished the opportunity to sound off on the issue of alleged discrimination in the NHS. Virtually all grasped the idea of arguing either in favour or against the decision. There were supporters of both sides of the argument, and most showed a capacity to develop and link arguments, as well as structure sentences and choose words for persuasive impact. Weaker answers simply registered an expressive objection or statement of support; some used invective more suited to speech. A significant number of candidates also addressed the letter to the NHS or the hospital and not the newspaper. Some quite strong candidates weakened their arguments by developing the answer into a general attack on the NHS, rather than focusing on arguments for or against the decision, as the question required. More successful responses (and there many of these) were defined by quality of expression, particular in the effective use of rhetoric, and by cogency of argument; some candidates saw the decision as endemic of the “nanny state” and a “Big Brother” mentality or, conversely, wrote about finite resources and personal responsibility. Some of the best made references to medical ethics and the Hippocratic Oath (one candidate punning on ‘hypocritical.’)

### Q3

There were also some lively, occasionally passionate answers to Q3. The most favoured topics were race and gender; age also produced some interesting responses, usually involving candidates writing about their own experiences of discrimination. Many candidates showed a good grasp of the school magazine context and its implications in terms of audience. A few candidates wasted time on graphical features (e.g. writing in columns, illustrations) which cannot be assessed in an English examination. More successful answers adopted an appropriate tone and style, often varying sentence structures for particular effects, and used convincing statistics, expert opinion and quotations in support of the argument. Less successful responses lost sight of the school magazine context and made little attempt to engage the implied readership. A few candidates wrote a news report, rather than an article; these recounted an incident involving discrimination, rather than developed an argument against it, and often depended on lengthily quoted statements.

## Section C

### Q4

This was by far the most popular question in this section, perhaps stimulated by the fortuitous and imminent ban on smoking in public places in England. Most comment (including that of smokers) was in favour of a ban. Responses were generally thoughtful, reasoned and illustrated by personal anecdote. Many were strongly influenced by the leaflet that accompanied Q1, weaker candidates lifting sections verbatim from it. Most grasped that comment could be personal but also needed to be objective. As a last question, the pressure of time seemed to work in differing ways; in some answers looser paragraphing and an increased number of orthographical errors were evident, whilst in others expression was sharper and structures tighter.

### Q5

Despite a relatively small uptake, this question seemed to attract abler candidates and produced some thoughtful answers. Most showed a capacity to analyse the pros and cons objectively, highlighting key points, as well as expressing a personal viewpoint. Most were very positive about foreign trips, and identified the social, cultural and linguistic benefits. The disadvantages included the traumas of leaving home even for a short time, student misbehaviour, expense and the loss of valuable school. Many listed the danger of being kidnapped, perhaps reflecting recent media coverage of child abduction in Europe. In general, however, the benefits of school trips were seen to outweigh the drawbacks. Though responses were relatively short, and occasionally incomplete, they were often more effectively focused and precisely expressed.



## Statistics for GCSE English 1203

### Option 1: Paper 1A, 1B, 2F, 3F

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	100	59	47	35	23	11

### Option 2: Paper 1A, 1B, 4H, 5H

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary Mark	100	82	72	62	53	43	38

### Notes

**Boundary Mark:** the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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