Examiners' Report Summer 2009

GCSE English (1203)

Contents

GCSE English: 1203 1A

Training and Advisory visits took place mainly during the autumn term. There was a lot of very positive feedback from these; many teachers commented on how helpful they were in helping them apply the marking criteria and thus establish accurate levels of assessment, and, also, how effective the tasks themselves were. Moderation visits, which have to occur after the marks have been submitted and focus on actual candidates, were both more difficult to arrange and more formal in nature, but moderators reported that there were relatively few problems with these and that, in the main, they were well received. There were a few exceptions. It should be noted that any centre, entering any number of candidates, may be subject to a moderation visit.

Teacher assessment during the visits was usually accurate and closely referenced to the marking grids, with an overall tendency to stringency at the top end of attainment range and leniency at the bottom. However, centres, entering relatively few candidates, often within a narrow range or with special difficulties, sometimes found it difficult to pitch marks at the correct level. Candidates in one centre were not helped by the fact that they had not undertaken any speaking and listening work during Year 11 and thus found it difficult to adapt back to its demands. It would be wise for teachers to incorporate an element of speaking and listening in all activities throughout the GCSE course. Moderators noted that some centres were making quite strenuous efforts to encourage their students in the use of Standard English in formal contexts.

Most centres welcomed the fact that visiting moderators brought activities with them. These were mainly well trialled small group discussion tasks, which involve a considerable degree of spontaneous speaking and listening. These work well throughout the range; it is not uncommon for very able candidates to fulfil the A* band descriptors within a 15 minute group discussion. Centres often express surprise at how positively and capably their candidates respond to this kind of task. Centres should consider incorporating more opportunities for spontaneous talk in their work schemes. The dangers of over prepared speaking and listening work are similar to those of scaffolded coursework; it can limit the attainment of the best candidates, who are constrained by a script, and can also impair the work of less successful candidates who rely on prepared material which they do not fully understand.

The quality of record keeping continues to improve. On the visits, most centres presented detailed departmental records, some of which were impressive in scope. There was abundant evidence of internal moderation and, also, fewer examples of incomplete records. Overall, the records indicated that centres relied on a varied range of tried and trusted activities, which fulfilled the specification requirements and addressed the assessment objectives.

Overall there was a pleasing sense that candidates were growing in confidence and competence in this component, and that teachers were managing it very effectively indeed.

GCSE English: 1203/1204 1B

Candidates had again been well prepared for this component, engaging successfully, in the reading units, with a wide range of challenging texts and tasks and, in the writing unit, demonstrating a variety of writing styles within the assignment choices. The quality of teacher assessment remained high and the vast majority was within an acceptable level of tolerance. Most individual units, and sometimes the top sheets of folders, were copiously annotated by teachers, with references to the marking criteria. In many cases there was evidence of a thorough internal moderation process.

Task setting posed few problems. Most tasks addressed both the specification requirements and the assessment objectives. The best phrased topics allow candidates to engage with them at an individual level and to demonstrate attainment throughout the marking grids. There were some concerns. The "one task fits all" approach limited candidates at both ends of the ability range. Some reading tasks (for instance character studies) were more suited to literature and failed to allow students to address the assessment objectives for English. There were doubts too about reading tasks which did not allow candidates to show their study of whole texts. Empathetic tasks should not be used for the reading units as these cannot be squared with the assessment objectives.

Most centre administration was very good and posed few problems. The most common complaint from moderators was about the occasional centre's failure to submit Coursework Authentication Sheets for each candidate in the sample or to include the folders of the centre's weakest and strongest candidates in addition to the requested sample.

But these reservations fall beside the positive achievements of coursework, especially the high quality of the work submitted by the majority of candidates. Moderator Reports are full of references to good practice and impressive candidate performance. The overall quality of personal writing was high and the level of engagement with reading texts, including perennial favourites like 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Romeo and Juliet', was impressive.

1B (Written Coursework)

Personal and Imaginative Unit
It is difficult to do justice to the full range of writing submitted for this unit and some of the best units were superbly crafted. The overall standard of writing was good; most work was structured and expressed carefully with appropriate attention paid to technical and grammatical accuracy. There was plenty of evidence of a wide and appropriate range of imaginative and reflective writing, with crafting for deliberate effect and for specific audiences. The writing unit was often the best piece in the folder and thus lifted the overall score of the folder. Overall the best responses were those which derived from personal experience; candidates obviously enjoyed the personal engagement involved in this kind of writing and there were some excellent, moving autobiographical units, often based on life changing moments; in this genre, the "Day in the Life…" format still produces good work, throughout the range, allowing candidates to use voice and tone in individual ways. There was also considerable variety in the narrative approaches, the least successful probably being those which re-hashed the plots of Hollywood blockbusters; 'The Assassin' units also looked rather tired.

1203 Different Cultures and Traditions

Most responses were again based on a relatively few texts: 'Of Mice and Men' (focused mainly on the theme of loneliness or the American Dream), 'To Kill a Mockingbird and short stories from the Edexcel Anthology. Most titles were phrased in a way which allowed candidates to write about the text's cultural background and to explore the writer's use of language, but some were narrower in scope and seemed to be essentially literature tasks. Short stories (typically being linked with the theme of racism or gender) worked well for less successful candidates but there was a tendency to paraphrase or narrate rather than analyse.

1204 Media Texts

In general the units submitted for this unit were high in standard.   A range of film, newspaper and television texts was used, and typical tasks included comparative studies of broadsheet and tabloid coverage of the same story; detailed comparative analysis of television and press advertisements; individually directed studies, for instance into the portrayal of students in the media, and of prisoners in films; a comparison of the presentation of ethnic characters in television soaps, and so on. The most successful centres had taught candidates how to write analytically about the techniques of their chosen medium and to choose their own examples, producing fresh and often insightful writing.

Shakespeare

Most centres used 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet' as the basis for studies and there were some detailed and engaged responses. At the lower ends of the attainment scale the focus was mainly on film, with sometimes scant reference to the text, and studies of individual scenes, but there were also some good units on these plays, demonstrating detailed analysis of language with attention to stagecraft and to the play as a whole. At the upper end of the attainment range candidates offered original ideas and interpretations. At this level the selection of texts was very wide and included 'The Taming of the Shrew', 'Othello', 'The Tempest' and 'Hamlet.' Task setting at this level was often excellent (for instance asking students to consider Hamlet's relationships with women, bearing in mind the cultural context of the time, or to consider whether a text (for example 'The Merchant of Venice') was still relevant for modern audiences and allowed candidates to access the higher bands of the assessment criteria. The weakest task setting included the setting of a single scene for commentary without allowing candidates to comment on the whole text - as the specification requires. Occasionally centres used inappropriate empathetic tasks, which are incompatible with the assessment objectives.

GCSE English: 1203 2F

Introduction

The papers again offered an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected, with a number of impressive scripts that showed a high quality of engagement. At the lower end of attainment the tendency to cover only one poem when two are required continues to be a feature of some candidates' responses, although this has been mentioned regularly in Examiners' Reports. On occasion, candidates' responses to the Reading questions again gave the impression of being somewhat unprepared, especially on Question 7. However, it was pleasing to note some outstandingly good responses on this question.

Both on poetry and prose, candidates showed themselves willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers. The extent to which they did so successfully was a key determinant of their overall success. Many candidates supported their comments by quoting textual evidence, producing responses which were at best well-focused as well as full of insight. As was stated last year, there is still a need in some cases to do more than simply list effects ('feature spotting'), a practice which has been commented on before in these reports. Examiners note that there are candidates who have learned a number of technical terms and are often able to give appropriate examples, but that they do not always look for how observing such an effect contributes to their understanding and appreciation of the text or how such examples are relevant to the question set.

Examiners' reports again comment on the positive response to the Writing tasks set, with candidates often revealing subtle and varied writing skills. One commented that it was "a real pleasure to mark" many of the responses.

Again it is worth repeating some general comment from previous reports, since examiners referred frequently to the same issues. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas

- In Section A, candidates should appreciate that their response should be equally balanced between 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.
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- 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' or 'play' 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 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.

Paper 2F

Section A

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. Many candidates, however, wrote on 'Where the Scattering Began' (Q1) in a way which demonstrated limited grasp of the context of the characters. Candidates often showed a reasonably sound grasp of the poems' content, but where they failed to offer comment on the poets' language they performed less successfully, with this aspect of the response proving, again, a critical discriminator. In the questions where a second poem had to be selected of the candidate's choice to go with the named poem, the quality of responses depended to a considerable extent on the ability to make a sensible choice that could be justified clearly in relation to the specific demands of the question. Mostly, candidates chose appropriately, for example 'Hide and Seek' made a good pairing for Q2 and 'Warning' did so for Q4.

It was again noticeable that the relatively small proportion of entries on the Nature poems were often of very good quality, and showed that the powerful language and imagery in these poems could elicit a strong and personal response.

Question 1

This question discriminated well, with less successful candidates showing a poor grasp of the situation, especially in 'Where the Scattering Began' - some thinking that the author was frightened of the strange people of foreign origin. The better responses dealt well with contrasts between the writers' heritage and their experience of life in the UK. In general, 'Wherever I Hang' was tackled better than 'Where the Scattering Began' and some picked up on the fact that just because the country left was sunny it was not without drawbacks – especially, the presence of rats. Language analysis often consisted simply of picking up on 'foreign' words. A few thought that 'Wherever I Hang' was written by a small child ('me people, me land, me home'), rather than recognising that the language was an interpretation of a Caribbean way of speaking.

Question 2

There was a good range of responses, with the stronger answers dealing well with the importance of time in the two poems written about and selecting relevant language examples, especially the personification of the clock and the 'compound' words in 'Half-past Two': " 'Gettinguptime', 'Timeyouwereofftime' and 'tvtime' suggest that the child… can only tell the time when an action occurs… When these things don't happen the child was lost." Most responses chose 'Hide and Seek' for the second poem, because of its strong focus on 'time'. There was some imbalance in a number of responses, with candidates at times dwelling mainly on 'Half-past Two'; however, where they wrote at length, they sometimes offered excellent analysis for this level. Other poems selected also included the element of time passing, but in some cases this was not brought out fully enough.

Question 3

Question 3 also differentiated strongly, depending particularly on how well candidates understood the nature of the decision-making in 'An Unknown Girl' – whether that of having her hands hennaed or her resolve to maintain a contact with her roots. Many candidates found this difficult, some thinking that it was a love poem, with the writer yearning for the girl. The extended metaphor in 'A Road Not Taken' was mostly grasped, with some candidates commenting interestingly on how

the poet felt about the choice he made, including different interpretations of the 'sigh', and how things would have been different had he made the other choice.

Question 4

On Question 4, the choice of second poem was usually a suitable one (most often 'Warning'), but occasionally a less well-chosen poem made it difficult for candidates to develop a response on strength of character. Among less successful candidates, there was a tendency to over-reach the evidence and produce somewhat speculative comments. The brevity of 'I Shall Paint My Nails Red' was perhaps one reason why candidates indulged in speculation about the woman's age, state of mind or health. On 'Warning', a few thought the author was already an old woman, which hindered their understanding. There were a number of thoughtful answers for this level, with candidates able to work systematically through the text of 'I Shall Paint My Nails Red' and comment relevantly on each line: one candidate wrote that being a 'survivor'"... gets the readers thinking she is unstoppable"; another commented on the use of 'because' at the start of every line: "It is used to show excitement".

Question 5

This question received responses of variable quality, from a limited number of candidates. The more successful answers were sensitive and sympathetic to the plight of the stag in 'The Stag', as was the candidate who wrote: "How terrible that the animal [stag] was chased till he 'dropped into strange country', was lost from his own surroundings to be hunted by 'blue horsemen who 'pulled aside the camouflage of their terrible planet'". Many also understood the childish lexis and excitement of 'Iguana Memory': 'like big big lizard'. Better answers picked out examples of emotive language to support their interpretation. The length of the former poem was both a barrier for some and an opportunity for more detailed comment for others.

Question 6

There were relatively few answers, but the question offered good scope to candidates who understood the two chosen poems well, and the evocative language of 'The Storm' in particular enabled the more successful candidates to show how the writer achieved his effects. For example, one candidate wrote "The writer makes you aware of people's feelings of helplessness because you can't control the storm, you can only wait and hope that it goes away." This poem was coupled with a variety of others, usually with reasonable success.

Section B, Question 7

Question 7, on the passage on 'School sports culture leads to violence' was one to which candidates were mostly able to respond appropriately. The use of textual evidence was a key discriminator, as was an appreciation of the transatlantic cultural differences to which the writer refers. More successful responses also appreciated the way in which less athletic types were discriminated against in American student bodies. There was a strong response to those parts of the article that identified bullying of 'nerds' and 'dweebs' (words the candidates clearly enjoyed): one wrote that "the question 'If children who are good at sport are heroes, what does that make those who are not?' plays on the guilt of the reader as it explains that the 'nerds' and 'dweebs' are worthless."

Whilst many students were able to synthesise details of the article into quite good summaries, only the strongest candidates were able to pick out particular features of language and analyse them to achieve marks in the higher bands for this tier. Few candidates picked up on the influence sport had on colleges and their selection process and on the lack of success many sportsmen had in their academic studies at

college and why – although some did comment on the low graduation rate from many of the basketball colleges.

Section C

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): less successful candidates often failed to communicate in well-constructed, comprehensible and accurate English, as well as tending to write only briefly and with few ideas. Both tasks elicited a range of responses from the thoughtful and developed to the cursory and staccato.

Question 8

Question 8 was a question where candidates varied in their capacity to give explanatory reasons for the chosen jobs. Better responses, however, were marked by clear evidence that candidates had thought seriously about the sort of work which was suited to their ability and temperament: one candidate wrote, on working with young children: "Children are the future to this world and you have to embrace that". Less successful responses were often unrealistic or unsupported, providing just one or two sentences based on the bullet points in the question.

Question 9

Question 9 discriminated sharply: answers falling short of the criteria required for a higher grade on this tier often did little beyond listing the bullet points, perhaps with a simple supporting statement; the stronger responses, however, elaborated their ideas effectively and in particular were able to look at both the advantages of money and its dangers and limitations. The best answers were those which had a clear register for a talk to the class and a sense of purpose. For example, one candidate started with: "What does money mean to you? Is it a way of fairness and survival? Or a way to ultimate happiness? Or just some paper and metal? It is potentially all of them."

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. **It is still 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.**

GCSE English: 1203 3F

There are a few general observations. In particular the efficient use of the time available is crucial. It is important for candidates to spend an equal amount of time on each section. Many commentaries on the Question 1 texts in Higher Tier were overlong and had sections which were redundant, because they were essentially descriptive or dependent on paraphrase, and this had a knock on effect, particularly on the responses to Section C, which could be over brief.

As far as the writing questions were concerned, candidates in both tiers usually addressed the purpose of the questions well and attempted to adapt expression to suit different contexts. They were less consistent, however, in terms of structure, particularly in Section C answers; even the ablest might fail to use paragraphs. Those who prefaced their answers with plans or notes, tended to produce more coherent answers. The accuracy of expression was also variable and, at times, lax, for instance the random use of upper case letters and the use of the lower case for the first person pronoun.

The quality of handwriting remains an issue. Whilst most responses were legible, a few showed little consideration on the part of the candidate that they were to be read by another person; some, including very strong responses, took several minutes to decipher. Examiners, of course, mark answers on the basis of the quality of expression and understanding, but it is less easy to do so if the presentation is poor.

Paper 3F

Section A (reading)

Question 1:
The texts worked very well and provided a clear contrast for Foundation Tier candidates to consider. The differences in style, typographical features and content provided an ample field for comment, but most found the use of language the most difficult feature to address. However, most were able to convey the main purpose of each article, summarise reasonably clearly the different views on computer and video games presented in them, and to use quotations or textual reference to support their points. At the lower end of the attainment range, candidates responded to the material by offering a personal opinion rather than analysis or interpretation, or dealt with only one text. Moving up the range, candidates could describe and sometimes contrast the obvious graphical and typographical features without explaining what the effects of their use were. Mid range candidates made generic comments about the language and form of broadsheets and tabloids which were not entirely appropriate to these texts. Stronger candidates began to show an ability to analyse, commenting on the 'The Times' photograph in some detail and its implications, and on the use of statistics and expert opinion; some contrasted the features of the first person account in 'The Times' article with the impersonal reporting in the Sun, though the almost universal assumption was that the latter article was written by Dr Tanya Byron not the journalist. The closest readers picked up the conflict between the statistics, given in the box in the Times, and the content of the article, and also commented on the humorous references to the father.

Section B (writing)

Question 2:
This was a very popular question. Most candidates engaged strongly with the task, some warning of the dangers of gaming, others furious at the way games were misrepresented. Many candidates used the texts in the first question as a starting or reference point. Less successful candidates tended also to copy sections of the Jack Miller article or were unable to sustain the purpose of the article and changed their viewpoint in mid stream. More successful responses used Jack Miller's ideas as a stimulus and wrote clear and journalistically engaging responses, which attempted to persuade the reader. These also made useful references to their own experiences and those of their friends. The strongest of these had a clear grasp of purpose and sense of audience, often using headlines to good effect. Such answers also tried to use persuasive devices (using rhetorical questions, first and second person pronouns, statistics, expert opinion and so on) to strengthen the argument (for example, one candidate began: *"We all love coming home from school and going on facebook, myspace, bebo and our x-box, but is it really a good thing to do?"*). Some answers were weakened by the use of columns, with the inevitable squeezed-in writing, by un-assessable illustrations, and by the use of implausible statistics. Most answers were reasonably clearly structured.

Question 3:
This produced some lively responses, most arguing in favour of the second quotation, with some dissenters. Less successful candidates found it challenging to reflect on their own (and others) level of selfishness, though most could express an opinion on it. Many candidates started their answers with a strong viewpoint but then had little more to say. An effective structure was thus a key discriminator. The most successful candidates developed and sustained their ideas by referring to their own and their friends' experiences, sometimes justifying the need to adopt a 'selfish' approach to succeed in today's society. A few drew effectively on their own experiences in charity or working with youth groups.

Section C (writing)

Question 4:
The focus of this question was familiar for many candidates through P.E. and science lessons and media coverage, and they were able to draw on their knowledge of the subject and on a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. Less successful responses tended to offer advice rather than analysis, with little structure or development and some presented their ideas in the form of a promotional advertisement, again with little evidence of analysis. More successful responses showed some grasp of the magazine/website context, and often adopted an upbeat tone. The best were well structured pieces, dealing usually with dangers (e.g. obesity, damage to eyes and so on), diet (the importance of eating properly and well), and exercise (options etc), providing analytical comment on each of these.

Question 5:
This was the most popular question in this section and seemed to hit a nerve. The quality of the answers was unusually high for a final question, many candidates clearly drawing on their own experience of facing the dilemma of whether to leave home (to go to college, to get a better job, to move in with a partner and so on) or to stay. There was detailed comment on, and thoughtful analysis of the pros and cons of their neighbourhood and home, and the effects these had on their choices. Less successful responses tended to assert a view, listing a few reasons. More successful

candidates made a variety of points, weighing each clearly, and linked their ideas fairly cohesively into a reasonably structured response, using personal experience and anecdotes to support their points. Most gave a clear indication of their decision, the majority opting for the familiar and for the security of family (for example *London is where my family, friends and beloved Arsenal are, and, of course, where all the money is; well, used to be!*).

GCSE English: 1203 4H

Introduction

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- improvements, but many do not undertake this valuable process at all.

Paper 4H

All questions discriminated well, and contained responses covering the full target range of grades.

Section A

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. All questions elicited some exceptional answers, in which candidates revealed a level of understanding and interpretation of outstanding quality, with detailed analysis of language effects and sometimes employing (with apt examples) technical language such as *asyndeton* and *metonymy*. Such maturity of response contrasted with other responses where the grasp of meaning was insecure.

In general, responses conformed to patterns established in previous years. This section again produced much excellent writing, with many candidates responding maturely to the poems and engaging thoughtfully with the texts. The sensitivity of their interpretation was often impressive. Many made a very good attempt 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 poetic devices, such as alliteration, and offer examples. This suggested that teaching has often been successful in encouraging such comment. Examiners once again noted that candidates were generally capable of an individual response, geared towards the demand of the question – although some answers plainly demonstrated the effects of strong teaching which could on occasion seem over-directive.

Question 1

Question 1 discriminated well, since less successful candidates showed a lack of full grasp of the poem 'Where the Scattering Began'. There were also some unsubstantiated comments on 'Lucozade', whereas the better responses dealt well with feelings and concerns, both of the sixteen-year old child of a sick mother and of the narrator of 'Where the Scattering Began'. Less successful candidates tended to offer a general criticism of 'Lucozade' or focused on the mother rather than the daughter, giving little of the daughter's feelings apart from the fact that she was scared that her mother was going to die. However, one candidate wrote: "The simplicity of the language makes the child seem more vulnerable". On 'Where the Scattering Began' several scripts included a brief history of the slave trade and how the ancestors of the people in the poem had been brought to London against their will, rather than commenting directly on the language and effects within the poem. There were relatively few excellent responses, but those there were showed a very mature grasp of the situations.

Question 2

This question also had a good range of responses, with the stronger answers making appropriate choices for the second poem to go with '*From* War Music': very often this was 'Dulce et Decorum Est' because of the linking theme of war; however, other choices, including 'Brendon Gallacher', worked equally well except where candidates failed to deal sufficiently with the idea of a 'vivid' picture of characters. Candidates did sometimes penalise themselves by choosing a second poem that offered little relevance to the terms of the question: it is difficult to focus on the central character in 'The Darkling Thrush', for example. On the first poem, candidates often enjoyed the comparisons made between the slow-witted Ajax and the nimble Hector. This question was often the choice of better candidates and answers reflected understanding of the texts and appreciation of the language in which they were expressed.

Question 3

Question 3 was done extremely well by many candidates, who were able to focus on characterisation of the named characters. A differentiating feature was the degree to which the central characters were kept central in the responses, since less successful responses tended towards an inclusion of extraneous material without showing its connection. Good responses were wonderfully sensitive to the natural imagery ("bird breaking the darkness", "spring water" etc) with one candidate likening it to an epiphany. A surprising omission in some responses, however, was to the nature of the 'miracle': perhaps this was simply taken for granted; at any rate, a number of candidates stopped consideration of the first poem half-way through and avoided commenting on the 'miracle' itself. Several candidates, despite the wording of the question, seemed uncertain who the labourer actually was, confusing him with the "chestnut-haired boy" or, in one case, the narrator. In 'Digging', a key element of the best responses was the way in which they commented on the imagery and language used in describing the father and grandfather. Several candidates created difficulties for themselves by struggling to find similarities between the two poems, although they were not required to do so: "The silence of the labourer… is similar to 'Digging' in that all the central characters are silent to begin with".

It may be helpful for Centres to advise students to avoid speculation that cannot be supported by the text. For example, remarks that the labourer was traumatised because of the Aberfan disaster, that he was still shell-shocked from the war or that he had been struck dumb because of some kind of horrific accident in his youth cannot be justified from the text and divert attention from more relevant avenues of analysis.

Question 4

On Question 4, the choice of second poem often had a strong bearing on the quality of the overall response: a choice of 'Follower', so that candidates were comparing Heaney's vivid reminiscences of childhood in contrast with his father's ageing, often worked particularly well. Sometimes, however, the choice of second poem meant the focus on family relationships was lost. There were some excellent explorations of the tensions in Fanthorpe's description of her father – the blend of admiration, sympathy and resentment: one candidate wrote "On closer analysis, we can see that she only feels as she does because, inferably, for the first time in her life she has control over their relationship and is able to actually form one." These contrasted with some answers which described the old man's former and present state clearly enough, when writing on 'Old Man, Old Man', but did not home in on the relationship between parent and child, or deal with important lines such as 'not good with daughters' or 'disinherited children'. Several scripts found it necessary to extract a moral that they thought the poem provided: "Even though there are hardships, at the end of the day your family is going to be there for you every step of the way". "We must cling to our family as they are the only ones to support us". "Everyone needs to be loved and families should stay together."

Candidates who chose 'Once Upon a Time' as their second poem found it difficult to focus on the 'wide range of feelings' required by the question. They were clear about the fact that the father envied his son's outlook on life and disliked his own but seldom went beyond this. A few less successful candidates penalised themselves by choosing 'Mirror' since this did not lend itself to the terms of the question and the answers produced were merely a synopsis of the poem.

Question 5

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen. Those who take this selection often justify their choice by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

Question 5 received responses of variable quality. Less successful candidates struggled to explain the situation clearly, especially in the poem 'The Horses', which not all understood: they sometimes failed therefore to show fully how the writers in both poems demonstrate the ways in which war affects both humans and animals within a changing landscape. Better answers showed a good grasp of the 'post-catastrophic' situation of the survivors and the imagery in 'The Horses' (eg "the poem suggests we have to use the 'strange horses' once again in order to cleanse and wake the world. They are shown as representing hope, 'their coming our beginning'"). They also appreciated the writer's reflection on the rat's easy shuttling between the opposing lines in 'Break of Day in the Trenches', responding thoughtfully to its impartiality: "Rosenberg shows us that war shifts the hierarchy of life, making vermin more powerful and man helpless".

Question 6

Question 6 received some very effective responses, especially where candidates placed 'Keeping Orchids' alongside 'The Flowers' in a thoughtful way to look at the two very different mother/daughter relationships. There were some particularly effective analyses of the symbolism employed in 'Keeping Orchids' and the effect of the violent images (eg 'cutting the stems with a sharp knife').

Section B, Question 7

Question 7 elicited many extremely good responses, with few candidates failing to identify apt examples of the author's use of humour. The passage was one to which candidates were able to respond appropriately and indeed in many cases did so with great skill and evident relish. Only a small number were unable to find several clear examples of humour. The more successful answers often categorised the types of humour effectively, looking for example at cinematic or cartoon effects, at wordplay and at military metaphors and referred to specific techniques such as irony, caricature and euphemism. A few candidates felt that there was nothing humorous in the violence. Some examiners noted one example of over-zealous striving to comment on effects: one candidate wrote "The phrase 'upset a bowl of airag' is an example of humour as it is personifying an alcoholic liquor which you cannot really upset."

Several candidates commented on how much they had enjoyed the piece, some even admitted to laughing out loud – and their responses were accordingly lively and detailed. However, some seemed to be genuinely concerned that the tone of the piece was rather 'patronising' and 'disrespectful' to the Mongolians. One writer gloomily observed that "… the guest may have been right to sing a song about a doomed wedding because by the bride and groom's behaviour this wedding is doomed anyway". In comparing the two cultures some unwarranted or exaggerated claims were made. Some more able candidates selected many humorous techniques but failed to explain fully their effect, which limited the mark they received. An impressive number used the appropriate terminology even if they did not then analyse examples well.

Section C

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): less successful candidates often failed to communicate in well-constructed, comprehensible and accurate English, as well as tending to write only briefly and with little development of ideas.

As in previous years, this Section produced some of the best answers from many candidates, who often respond to the tasks with passion and commitment. Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 8, which shows that many candidates respond very effectively when invited to use their imagination and write with descriptive detail.

Question 8

Question 8 was a question where candidates' capacity to adopt an appropriate register was well tested: many appeared to enjoy the challenge offered by a competition entry to write in their most evocative manner, employed subtle and flexible vocabulary to conjure striking visual effects, and sometimes using the view as a springboard for a personal viewpoint on the environment or society. Many embraced the full range of linguistic conventions to enhance their responses.

Examiners were intrigued by the different approaches adopted. One wrote: "Amongst them all I enjoyed a surreal view from a tower block, a gypsy mobile home, a prison cell and a holiday villa that was so beautifully described that I googled the place name in the hope I could book a holiday!" Another commented: "It was a delight to find some original perspectives: a view from a car window in Egypt; the view of a dummy in a shop window; a suicidal person's view of the city from the top of a tall building; the view from a train window contrasting the grey of the city and the colour of the countryside; looking from a position of unhappiness on to a happy family (or vice versa); the view from an apartment window in an Asian city over wealth and poverty or a view of the soul through the metaphorical window of the eyes." One candidate dealt with the view from the computer program 'Windows' and offered a fantastic insight into how society's view of the world and technology changes with the click of a mouse, compared with the view from a traditional window.

Candidates deserve credit for so convincingly evoking such vivid views from their place in an examination hall. Many wrote about idyllic country or garden scenes, although many of the more interesting essays were about street or urban views - human activity added interest. Where candidates strayed too far from describing a real or imagined view, they sometimes lost focus and slipped into rather more general narrative description. Descriptive effects, though often excellent, were not always quite so well judged: an examiner was diverted by the image of "the emerald blue of the sea". There were a few candidates who misinterpreted the question and wrote the advert for the competition, rather than an entry.

Question 9

Question 9 discriminated sharply: answers falling short of the criteria required for a higher grade were disappointingly thin or unconvincing in their explanations; far more often, however, candidates elaborated their ideas in a highly convincing way, identifying experiences which had clearly meant a great deal to them and from which they had learnt much. Use of narrative techniques such as direct speech helped the more engaging answers, whereas less successful answers presented bland lists of tasks, with their reflections often sounding like something taken from a job application or CV. Good responses often had a strong sense of personal voice and were well-structured, with a clear sense of cohesion. For example, one candidate

wrote of an arduous hiking expedition: "Fun? This was torture. Nevertheless it was worthwhile torture. My mind had been stimulated rather dramatically, and the joys of actually completing the journey were met by emotions of anguish, grit and determination." The range of such experiences was impressively wide, underlining not only what a variety of opportunity is offered by educational institutions, including work experience, but also how many young people take advantage of youth movements and societies within the wider community. The informative nature of the task tended to lead to many straight-forward retellings with little in the way of any enhancing of style, resulting in a rather limited range of language being employed. However, it was an approachable task for those who did not wish to attempt the creative writing alternative. A number of candidates wrote of travel abroad, where they had learned how privileged their own lives are, and many wrote about various sports coaching activities.

As with Paper 2F, weaknesses in candidates' writing sometimes remain: poor structure; lack of clearly written sentences; errors of spelling such as over single or double consonants, homophones and 'phonetic' spelling. The use of paragraphs was often insecure and many students need to pay more rigorous attention to the importance of the full stop. **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.**

GCSE English: 1203 5H

There are a few general observations. In particular the efficient use of the time available is crucial. It is important for candidates to spend an equal amount of time on each section. Many commentaries on the Question 1 texts in Higher Tier were overlong and had sections which were redundant, because they were essentially descriptive or dependent on paraphrase, and this had a knock on effect, particularly on the responses to Section C, which could be over brief.

As far as the writing questions were concerned, candidates in both tiers usually addressed the purpose of the questions well and attempted to adapt expression to suit different contexts. They were less consistent, however, in terms of structure, particularly in Section C answers; even the ablest might fail to use paragraphs. Those who prefaced their answers with plans or notes, tended to produce more coherent answers. The accuracy of expression was also variable and, at times, lax, for instance the random use of upper case letters and the use of the lower case for the first person pronoun.

The quality of handwriting remains an issue. Whilst most responses were legible, a few showed little consideration on the part of the candidate that they were to be read by another person; some, including very strong responses, took several minutes to decipher. Examiners, of course, mark answers on the basis of the quality of expression and understanding, but it is less easy to do so if the presentation is poor.

Paper 5H
Section A (reading)

Question 1:
The two passages were accessible, engaged the candidate's interest and provided ample material for comment and analysis.

More successful candidates brought out clearly the distinctive purposes and audiences of the two texts. They also commented on the language in a more discriminating way. In particular they picked up the figurative language of 'The Times' article, particularly the phrase "the gorillas of gaming" and commented on its impact and effect. They were particularly close readers of the 'askaboutgames.com' text, commenting, for instance, on the content of the boxes at the side of the text and the small print at the bottom of page, which led some to query the objectivity of the advice. Mid range candidates typically began their commentaries with the contrast between the message of the photographic image in 'The Times' and the content of the headline. They also made pertinent comments on the use of statistics and technical language in the article, contrasting it with the more vivid and clear cut features of the website. They also grasped the difference in tone and bias in the two articles. Less successful candidates made descriptive, generalised comments, especially on language and typography (e.g. the small font of 'The Times' article; the colours of the website, compared with the boring black and white type of The Times) or made generic comments on broad sheets (not always appropriately) and web sites. Some candidates seemed to assume that computer gaming was, in itself, non-educational and therefore bad, and looked only for comments that supported this point of view, even misinterpreting the website quotation "one in four British women play games regularly" as a criticism. The weakest candidates (very few indeed) commented on one text only or made a personal response to the issues raised by the text.

Typical weaknesses included the tendency to describe punctuation or the use of words in detail without commenting on their effect and relevance to the writer's intentions. Candidates did not always understand the differences between 'formal' and 'informal' English; one asserted that "The Times article is very informal because it contains a lot of information and facts." Similarly some candidates described the Times article as "formal" simply because it is a broadsheet newspaper.

Section B (writing)
The two questions in this section were equally popular.

Question 2:
The text of the Question 1 'Times' article provided both a starting and a reference point for many answers, but there was no lack of opinion on this topic. Examiners were also surprised by the fact that opinion amongst teenagers was equally divided on the subject. Much of the discussion focused on whether computer technology enhanced communication or compromised it. The discerned advantages included educational, social and recreational benefits, whilst the disadvantages emphasised the negative effects on attention span, social engagement and personal health, especially of the eyes.

Responses to this question were soundly structured, most balancing points for and against before coming to a conclusion. Persuasive devices, including rhetorical questions and expert opinion and 'statistics', were used for the most part effectively, though some interviews and surveys were so implausible as to undermine the basis of the argument. Even shorter responses were developed enough, with clear introductions and conclusions and ideas clearly developed in linked paragraphs. The most successful responses tended to show a strong sense of the media context and audience, often prefacing the response with an engaging headline and rounding off with a snappy ending (for example "And for a finishing word, I declare World War 111 on games. In the spirit of the popular game 'Call of Duty'!"), and making good use of quotations and statistics. Less successful candidates, however, tended to put form before content, using columns with squeezed in writing and, sometimes, illustrations.

Question 3:
The combination of an informal context and a serious topic made this quite a challenging question and, from an examination point of view, it discriminated well. Stronger candidates got both the tone and register right (for example "Dear Grandad, As I know you so well, I thought I would write to you because otherwise I won't get a word in edgeways...") whereas less successful ones struggled (for example "Dear Elderly Relative, I am writing to inform you...")   Persuasive devices – rhetorical flourishes, facts and statistics (sometimes unconvincing, for example "only one in four people from 1954-1970 went for secondary education") - did not sit well in an informal letter, but abler candidates incorporated telling points in an informal style, often to devastating effect (e.g. "I'd ask you for help with maths but you've probably never met scientific calculators.") More successful candidates concentrated on a clear structure and lively expression rather than length alone.

Candidates were almost uniformly convinced that modern education was vastly better nowadays and pointed to the advances in computer technology, the widening of the range in subjects and the lack of corporal punishment, though they did acknowledge the problems caused by the poor behaviour of some of their peers, typically "blown completely out of proportion by the press."   Sometimes the execution belied the argument (for example "we are living in a world where

education is excelling to new depths" and "we no far more than your generation!") but many responses were very accomplished.

Section C (writing)

Question 4:

This was by far the most popular question in this section and posed no problems of access for candidates, who had plenty to say on the topic. The contrasting statements in the question polarised the issues neatly and stimulated some very balanced analysis; many answers showed a strong sense of purpose.

The advantages and disadvantages were, for the most part, discussed clearly and essentially focused on whether the advances in this kind of communication were matched by the quality of what had to be communicated. Most agreed on the value of the mobile phone for emergencies and personal safety, and for ease of communication with close friends and relatives. More contentious were the issues of multi-functionality; some were in favour of music and games but others were opposed to them. Texting came in for criticism because of its negative impact on spelling, and, interestingly, because of its potential to undermine rather than enhance interpersonal communication; the problems of bullying and the incidence of theft were also raised.

Candidates had plenty to say, but structure – both paragraphing and punctuation - suffered as a result of the haste to complete the final answer. Some adopted a media article approach, which worked well enough, if the answer provided analysis; less successful responses tended to be subjective and concentrated too much on one side of the issue, or resorted rather artificially to unconvincing quoted comments and statistics (for example "40% of people who use mobile phones get brain cancer.")

Question 5:

This was the least favoured of the two questions in the section, nevertheless it produced some engaged and engaging answers, written with great gusto and in a style and register entirely appropriate to a popular magazine. Responses perhaps suffered from being the last question in the paper; and there was a higher frequency of errors. The question, nevertheless, gave an interesting glimpse into modern youth culture. Some candidates objected to the pressure to conform to other's taste and fashions, particularly those initiated by celebrities.

GCSE English: 1203 Grade Boundaries

Option 1, 3, 4 & 5
1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
1B READING AND WRITING
2F THE CRAFT OF THE WRITER
3F MEDIA (UNSEEN) (F)

Grade	C	D	E	F	G
Lwr	60	47	34	22	10

Option 2, 6, 7 & 8
1A SPEAKING AND LISTENING
1B READING AND WRITING
4H THE CRAFT OF THE WRITER
5H MEDIA (UNSEEN) (H)

Grade	*	A	B	C	D	E
Lwr	84	73	62	52	42	37