

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCSE

GCSE English (1203)

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1203 1B

1B (Written Coursework)

The external moderation process again worked very smoothly this year. Candidates are well prepared for this component and their overall performance remains consistent with that of candidates in previous years.

Most assessment was within acceptable limits and on a par with that of previous years; few centre adjustments were likely to be needed. Many moderators commented on evidence which showed that centres had conducted careful internal moderation procedures. There were occasional problems with centres, whose candidature is restricted in range of ability and who sometimes struggled to assess candidates, falling outside their normal range, at an appropriate level.

Centres are now well used to designing tasks which address the specification requirements and the assessment objectives. There were virtually no problems. The price paid for this tends to be a conservative approach to both texts and topics for reading units; 'Of Mice and Men' and 'Romeo and Juliet' as ever predominate, with the almost inevitable focus being, respectively, on 'The American Dream' and the character of Juliet. There were some individual issues with units that are addressed in the specific comments which follow. Centres are also increasingly linking units together in meaningful ways so that in some instances there is an internal cohesiveness in the folder.

The vast majority of teacher examiners are meticulous in ensuring that units are marked accurately according to the grids, and check carefully that the submitted units are the candidate's own work. Centres are also increasingly alert to the possibility of plagiarism; they show awareness in their assessments of the degree of assistance offered and often acknowledge drafting.

There were, however, the usual administrative irritants - for example, the failure to include candidate numbers on the frontsheet, mismatches between the mark on the folder and the mark on the optems, un-headed student unit sheets and so on - all of which take time for external moderators to resolve, but there were few issues with Candidate Authentication Forms this year. Occasionally problems were caused by the failure to check the adding up on the frontsheets; centres need reminding again that this may cause serious problems.

Candidates in general performed well in this component of the specification and the best folders were very impressive in both their individuality and their range. Most centres are confidently aware of the syllabus requirements, and often a great deal of thought is given to ways in which these requirements can be met.

Personal and Imaginative Unit

The writing unit still produces the most engaged work in the folder; the overall level of personal writing is high perhaps because the work for this unit is generally well tailored to the individual candidate. There was a huge range of writing, including description, narrative and autobiography. It was noted that a much greater emphasis was placed on love/friendship as a theme. Other literature extension work included empathic pieces based on 'Journey's End', mostly war diaries and letters. In general, the more personal the writing, the more powerful and engaging it was. Writing in a specific genre (for instance horror, 'twist in the

tail' stories) worked less well; horror tended to be envisaged entirely in visual terms and the twist was often all too predictable.

1203 Different Cultures and Traditions

The work for this unit was again largely based on 'Of Mice and Men' and 'To Kill a Mocking Bird' or on the short stories from the Edexcel anthology. Tasks usually allowed candidates to consider the writer's techniques and the cultural context. Other texts were used, for instance 'The Commitments', but these were very much the exception. Most work demonstrated a good understanding of the cultural context and how this affected the lives of the characters and the events of the novel or short story. Overall the standard of response was generally sound, though on occasions there was a tendency to narrate the plot. More successful candidates were able to engage with key features of the writer's craft and demonstrated sophisticated understanding or appreciation of language features.

Shakespeare

The favoured texts were again 'Macbeth' and 'Romeo and Juliet' and the tasks were also very familiar, but most were still capable of stimulating a new generation of candidates; questions on fate, witchcraft, the nature of kingship, the role of the tragic protagonists provided rich fields for analytical commentary. On occasions, however, task setting was disengaging; it was noted that meaningful answers could not arise from a title as generic as "write about the importance of Act Three", which presumably depends on intensive teaching and does little service either to the weakest or the strongest of candidates. Another disquieting trend, noted by moderators, is to limit the task to the consideration of one scene, often a scene which had been used for a Key Stage 3 examination. Technically such tasks are in breach of the specification requirement to consider whole texts; most candidates try to relate the scene to the whole play, but such additional comment is often very basic. On the other hand there was challenging work on texts such as 'King Lear' (on the theme of relationships) and 'Hamlet' (the presentation of women). There was a variety of texts being used this year including "Titus Andronicus", "Othello", "The Tempest", "Julius Caesar" and "Much Ado" in one centre alone. Some candidates wrote lengthy introductory sections on the historical or social background to the play and then failed to link these meaningfully to the rest of the assignment.

1203 2F

Introduction to Papers 2F and 4H

The papers proved to offer an appropriate challenge to candidates at all levels, and performance covered the full range of what would be expected. There is some sense that centres may be preparing candidates in greater depth for the poetry than the non-fiction prose.

There continues to be generally encouraging evidence in Reading questions that candidates are willing and able to think about the effects of language used by writers. Supporting comments by evidence is clearly now a way of life for many candidates, and it leads to responses which are often well-focused as well as full of insight. 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.

Examiners commented on the positive response to the Writing tasks with candidates often revealing real insight into their lives and attitudes, often in ways that were striking and even touching.

Last year, the report stated that "themes from previous years remain stubbornly persistent". Although many centres clearly pay heed to such issues, it remains the case that, if candidates paid greater attention to these basic elements, they could often improve their performance significantly. Some of these recurrent points are listed again below, in the hope of continued improvement in these areas:

- In Section A, a significant proportion of candidates wrote on only one poem rather than two or had very uneven coverage. Candidates should appreciate that their 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' 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, or blue-black ink.
- Candidates should ensure that they take time and care to ensure their writing in the exam is clearly legible.
- 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.

It would be extremely beneficial if centres encouraged candidates to write down plans and notes on a question in the answer booklet itself in the relevant section of the paper, before the start of the question. Whilst many candidates did this, others had written a plan or notes for a question at the end of the previous section or on an assortment of pieces of paper which were either attached by a treasury tag at the end of the script, or with the corner turned down to 'attach' it, or sometimes just included loosely between two pages. If such plans and notes are included in the booklet, candidates should just put one line through them before starting the answer or indicate clearly that it is rough work.

Paper 2F

Section A

The poems in each of the three selections were all ones on which candidates could make a suitable response. The level of comment on language was a key discriminator. In the questions where a second poem had to be selected to go with the named poem, a discriminator was the ability to make a choice that could be justified clearly in relation to the specific demands of the question - or indeed the ability to choose any second poem at all. 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, since weaker candidates showed a lack of full grasp of the (unusual) situation described in *Brendon Gallacher*, whereas the better responses dealt well with attitudes and impressions both in this poem and *You Will Be Hearing From Us Shortly*. On the former poem, there were still some who seemed to forget or be unaware that it was an imaginary character who was being discussed. Many however commented on the role of the character in the child's life with sympathy and sensitivity. On the latter, some again thought that the interviewee's replies were part of the text, when in fact the poet is silent on what was said in response to the questions, and adds brief comments from the interviewer. When discussing the language, many candidates listed figures of speech but gave no examples or failed to develop their point. For instance, one candidate noted, correctly, the use of short sentences in *Brendon Gallacher*, and suggested that "this is effective because it makes the reader ask themselves 'why the short sentences?'" Unfortunately, no attempt to answer this question was offered - had the candidate suggested that this was because of the child's voice used in the poem, it would have received more credit. Some more able candidates were able to comment sharply on discrimination and prejudice; fewer had anything to say about whether language of this kind was characteristic of interviews or was exaggerated to make the point more strikingly. There were some unbalanced answers which were much stronger on the first poem than the second.

Question 2

The question, which dealt with the experience of fear, uncertainty or sadness in *Lucozade* and one other poem, had a good range of responses, with the stronger answers exploring the range of emotions on both poems and making appropriate choices for the second. Figures of speech in *Lucozade*, such as personification, were readily identified, and in responding to this poem candidates often showed that they could relate to the teenager's voice. There were some thoughtful answers on

the language in *Lucozade*, with the best commenting effectively on specific images. The ending of this poem was interpreted in different ways, with some seeing it as very optimistic and others taking quite a different view.

Question 3

This question differentiated strongly, depending on how well candidates understood the content and context of the two poems, *Miracle on St David's Day* and *At Grass*. There were responses which were very perceptive and recognised the significance of the imagery. This was also true for *At Grass*, although many examiners commented on the uncertainty of interpretation which they encountered: one observed that few seemed to provide focused comments on the horses' racing career or show understanding of racecourse images.

Question 4

The choice of a second poem to go with *Death of a Naturalist* - in relation to the question's focus on the 'natural setting' - often had a strong bearing on the quality of the overall response: the choice of *The Barn*, so that candidates were exploring two of Heaney's vivid reminiscences of childhood, often produced stronger responses than some other poems chosen, where there was little to support the idea of exploring the 'natural setting'. There were some candidates who simply listed devices such as alliteration and metaphor but failed to give examples. On the other hand, the richness of Heaney's language in the named poem was picked up well by many, even where they missed the change in the poem and failed to appreciate the panic of the ending. One candidate who wrote well on *Death of a Naturalist* commented effectively on the oxymoron in the phrase 'bubbles gargled delicately', as well as on 'bluebottles wove a strong gauze of sound around the smell' which the candidate thinks really gives the reader "a vivid idea of what the scene looks like, smells like and sounds like; [the writer] is exploring everything his senses felt so the readers can feel as if they were there."

Question 5

There were some good answers in response to these two poems, but overall responses were of variable quality, depending particularly on whether the candidate dealt adequately with the idea of 'strength' in the poets' imagery in the poems *Nettles* and *Trout*. Better answers showed a sound grasp of the extended military metaphors used in both poems, and most of those who attempted this question had at least a fair knowledge of the themes and linguistic features of both poems.

Question 6

This question was well done by those who focused on how the mushrooms, in the poem *Mushrooms*, moved in a stealthy but ultimately triumphant way, thus linking the idea of movement to wider themes. Others were far less focused on the movement in the two poems dealt with and some simply retold the content of their two poems, in particular finding the concept of movement connected with mushrooms tricky. The choice of second poem was again crucial. Some appeared to just select any poem from the Nature section, such as *The Flowers*, without really referring to movement. This was a pity, as better answers showed that movement was a strong feature in a number of the poems from the Nature section, as in one candidate who used *The Thought-Fox* where the word 'move' itself features prominently: The writer is thinking of something to write about from his

imagination: 'And this blank page where my fingers move'. This suggests that he's thought of something and so is starting to play with his fingers... gradually throughout the poem the writer describes vividly the movement of the fox and how it gets around. 'It enters the dark hole of the head'. This fox has finally developed and his body, face, everything is now in the poem."

Section B

Question 7

The passage, which dealt with changing attitudes to discipline over the years, was one to which most candidates were able to respond appropriately, but where much uncertainty over the detail of the content and ideas was in evidence. The use of textual evidence was a key discriminator. The question thus permitted a clear distinction between those who grasped the essential chronology and ideas and those who were confused over the times and the messages. The best answers dealt with the issue of bias in the writing. At the other end of the spectrum, there were instances where candidates offered little apart from their own opinion on child discipline or found it difficult to distinguish between the various eras discussed in the article. A significant minority of candidates, for example, seemed to think that the strict discipline of Victorian times led to children running riot and that 'laissez faire' and strict discipline were one and the same thing. Weaker candidates failed to master the skill of combining information from more than one paragraph to give a more sophisticated response, and they took a paragraph-by-paragraph approach to their response, a method which led to a rather lumbering and often fragmented answer.

The point is sometimes raised that in an English examination candidates should not be penalised for a lack of historical knowledge. This is a fair point. However, since all candidates should have studied and prepared this article, it is reasonable to expect some awareness of context. Centres might be encouraged, for example, to adopt a 'timeline' approach to ensure that candidates understand the sequence and such terms as 'post war' and the 'Victorian era'. A significant minority of candidates copied out large chunks of the article with little or no interpretative comment. Some responses gaining very low marks started quite well but then were diverted into a personal essay about smacking, as though they were doing an answer to a Writing question. Some went off into imaginative rants about Victorian cruelty.

Section C

There was good discrimination both in terms of content and in the levels of technical proficiency (AO(iii)): weaker 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.

Question 8

Under the title 'A Near Miss', this was a question where candidates' capacity to adopt an appropriate register for a newspaper article, including such items as eye-witness accounts, made a significant difference to the quality of the writing. Weaker candidates tended to narrate, and often did so with less technical control. Some candidates included sub-headings and interviews, and where this was done well it added to the conviction of the register. Others miss-spent time on pictures, columns or on formatting rather than concentrating on the content and writing

skills. There were some detailed and imaginative newspaper reports about accidents that nearly happened and quite a few about near misses in football matches. Not all candidates, however, managed to achieve an appropriate style; some started off well, with a captivating introduction, but their ability to sustain this faded as they went along. For example, one candidate began confidently: "It was in the fast-beating town of London where the 'Near Miss' narrowly spared the lives of hundreds'. However, this was less well followed through into the body of the response. Where a consistent newspaper style was adopted throughout, this could lead to more successful writing, as in the case of the candidate who began: "Yesterday afternoon at four fifteen on the A127 heading eastbound, a dramatic explosion almost happened." The ending maintained the register, with the words: "One of the fire crew said: 'It will take a day and a half for them to clear the road. The fire was intense. It was the worst fire I have ever seen, and I am relieved that almost everyone got out alive!'"

Question 9

This question, which asked for a letter to a friend about an outing or shopping expedition to spend birthday money, discriminated sharply: answers falling short of the criteria required for higher bands were often unable to develop a clear line of writing beyond rather naïve or simple listings; the stronger responses, however, elaborated their ideas in a more convincing and personal way, with a reasoned explanation of the options they had considered and the choices they had made. One, having listed some exotic possible locales, including Miami, Atlanta, Barcelona and New York, wrote: "We will have a girls' holiday, spending money like crazy, just having the time of our life. I've made these choices because all the places I put down are the places I've always wanted to go to. They seem fun. They all have their own differences!"

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, this is an important consideration.**

1203 3F

Overall the papers engaged the candidates and most responded well with all sections.

Candidates are increasingly confident in addressing media features (including language) in Section A texts, but some answers were excessively long. Candidates need to be selective in their approach to this question and avoid unnecessary detail in their responses, particularly when dealing with two texts. It is important to leave adequate time to plan and write responses to the other sections.

Section C responses were generally the least successful and briefest. Candidates tend to describe and narrate, rather than analyse, comment or review. A few moments in planning would also have benefited them, particularly in terms of structure and expression. Some candidates used bullet points, and, even more limiting, lists in their answers. Such approaches do not provide opportunities to demonstrate variety in sentence structure and vocabulary. There were also some error prone answers which created significant ambiguity. One candidate wrote about "holding a fait on the local green... all the money will be spilt...the rare breads farm will lend us their donkey." Careful attention to detail is as important as demonstrating ambition in expression.

Paper 3F

Section A

Question 1

The two charity texts for Section A were accessible and there were plenty of distinctive features, including language ones, to comment on; the fact that both texts were promoting the same charity, but in differing ways, was helpful to candidates. Most candidates identified the differences and the most successful brought out the distinctive features of each very clearly. Of the two texts the website text proved the more challenging and abler candidates at this level commented on its more dynamic tone, style and its web features. There was no requirement to compare the two texts but many candidates found this an easy way to make key points.

The bullet points were adequately addressed by most candidates. As with the Higher Tier paper, the placing of the "use of language" bullet point in the second position on the list meant that many candidates addressed this one more directly. Most candidates were able to identify a few key linguistic features, typically the rhetorical questions and the repetition of the pleas for funds, and some were able to make straightforward comments on their purpose. Candidates were more confident in analysing the design features, for example the use of fonts, including colour and size. They made extensive comments on the images and the message they conveyed. Most appreciated the positive nature of the photographs of happy people enjoying fresh water. Some remarked that the pictures were too happy and thus lacked persuasive power. Some interesting comments were also made on the charity's logo, some seeing it as a tear drop, adding to the emotional impact of the leaflet.

The most successful answers were those which identified the differing purposes and audiences for each text and were able relate their analysis to these. In particular most candidates responded to the pleading, personal tone of the

leaflet/letter, but some felt that the website was more successful because it offered something to the reader as well as asked for funds. The more meticulous candidates commented on the direct debit form, which, in their view, confirmed the legitimacy of the charity, especially with its official number. The placing of this was also noted as an incentive to contribute in a convenient way. There were some dissenting voices who commented critically on the Charity's tactics and for whom the texts had little appeal.

Many candidates used the point-evidence-comment (PEC) approach, though in some instances this became too systematic and unrelated to the question. Other common weaknesses included the failure to support points with comment, evaluation, analysis, or with quotation; occasionally also unsupported quotations were used. A frequent weakness was to describe not analyse, sometimes resulting in a response which was merely a summary of the texts. At the lowest level of achievement candidates responded to the texts by promoting the charity themselves.

Section B

Question 2

Most candidates appeared to find it easier to promote a charity than write a report on it. Many used the material from the question 1 texts to good effect, though some found it difficult to incorporate ideas without transcribing sections of them.

In general, candidates felt very aware of their responsibility as human beings to support the less fortunate, some commenting on how they might feel if the situation were reversed.

Candidates found it easier to address the topic of fund raising, than to report how it would help children. Sometimes the most effective parts of answers were the suggestions made for collecting money, including non-uniform school days, sponsored events, fetes, sales of homemade cakes and second hand clothes. Many commented on the kudos accruing to their school should it be known that they had supported a charity, thus encouraging parents to send their children to the school.

Question 3

Candidates responded confidently both in terms of writing to a friend and in coping with the letter form and style. They used the latter part of the question as a structure for their answers (what the activity is, why it is a challenge and what would be gained from it). Occasionally, as with question two responses, the persuasion became a promotional appeal.

Examiners were open-minded about candidates' interpretations of the word "challenge"; some wrote about trips abroad and at home, others of more obviously genuinely adventurous activities such as racing, skateboarding, and (taking inspiration from the website text) skydiving. Some of the best answers derived from personal experience, including those who participated in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme. Many commented that the successful achievement of the challenge would increase their self esteem and self confidence and, typically, help them to overcome phobias, for instance the fear of heights. Several also concluded with a comment related to the ways in which such an experience could strengthen the ties of friendship. More successful candidates chose their words and sentences carefully to maximise the impact on their friend.

Section C

Question 4

Most candidates could comment on how to plan a celebration but fewer could, or wanted to, analyse the process. The majority of responses sensibly followed the list of points given in the question and demonstrated some grasp of purpose, setting out a plan and including some attempt to weigh the options in a reasonably appropriate way.

Some of the most developed essays were those dealing with weddings, detailing the events before and afterwards. Choice of the venue gave plenty of scope for decision making, with reference to suitability, accommodation and available furniture and the budget. Decoration was outlined in detail, as was entertainment and the guest list.

Expression and structure, however, were also challenging. There were some difficulties with tenses and the conditional form of the verb. Some candidates opted for a bullet point approach which left little opportunity for analysis; the weakest responses simply offered a list of names and food with no further comment. Some also wrote about the event as a description or a narrative (sometimes recounting an event that had already happened), a viable but demanding approach, only successful if analytical comments were embedded in it.

Question 5

Many candidates wrote graphically about a particular advertisement and its impact on them. The choice of advertisement made by candidates ranged from hair straighteners and make-up, motor bikes, computer games and mobile phones, however. Some responses carried a moral about not being drawn into purchasing items against one's better judgement; one candidate wrote about the lesson he learnt after being hoodwinked by a seller on the internet.

Some candidates conveyed advertisements, especially television ones, in a way which showed a considerable grasp of media techniques and purposes, and analysed their impact on themselves in some detail. In weaker candidates the balance of the answer tended towards a review of the product itself (occasionally the celebrity promoting it) rather than the advertisement, or towards description rather than review.

1203 4H

Introduction to Papers 2F and 4H

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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'.**
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Paper 4H

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

Section A

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 teaching which could on occasion seem over-directive.

Question 1

This question, on setting and mood in the two named poems, produced responses of widely varying success, but it was often answered very well by those candidates who really grasped the theme of the question, with its focus on 'the importance of setting and mood'. Stronger candidates were astute on the effect of imagery and change in rhythm, focusing on syntax and line length. Hardy's deathly imagery and sombre mood were identified, with close exploration of the imagery of desolation combined with good use of critical vocabulary. The complexity of the ideas in this poem, however, defeated some candidates, who were very uncertain of Hardy's point of view. They sometimes compensated by writing at length on *Dulce et Decorum Est*, on which poem most candidates made useful comments and some were exceptionally cogent in their response. In general, those candidates who satisfied the criteria in the mark scheme for top bands showed the capacity to respond with insight and detailed analysis on both poems, some showing a keen eye for the striking language effects employed by both Owen and Hardy. The weaker candidates struggled to understand how the writers, by choice of language, conveyed setting and mood and instead discussed the contexts of the two poems in much more general terms.

Question 2

The focus of the question was time, in *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom* and one other poem this distinguished sharply between those candidates who adopted a 'write everything you know...' approach and those who explored the way in which the theme of time united the poems' ideas. More able candidates understood the

theme, in *Electricity Comes to Cocoa Bottom*, of 'technology v. nature' and explained the imagery in that context. Some successful answers on this poem contrasted the vivid descriptions of the light provided by nature and that produced by the electricity cable, which was compared to a pencil line across the sun. Some thoughtful answers considered the time spent for the climax, and also commented on time on a larger scale: modernisation and the awe and trepidation, as shown where Granny P "peeped". Sometimes candidates penalised themselves with their choice of a second poem - for example, some struggled to find much material relevant to time in poems such as *Brendan Gallacher* or *Death in Leamington*, although there was some potential in each of these. Indeed, the theme of time was occasionally ignored in the choice of second poem, and candidates just wrote about another poem - *Wherever I Hang* was a case in point.

Question 3

This question elicited many very good responses, with candidates often exploring the effect of a brother's death in *Mid-Term Break* and the complex feelings expressed in *Once Upon a Time* with subtlety and sensitivity. Some very impressive language terminology was used by candidates. However, such good responses were by no means universal, and those who failed to analyse or produce textual evidence scored much less well. Often comments on *Mid-Term Break* were not directly focused on the question - often candidates were determined to write about the scene at the end and the significance of the snowdrops and candle, without relating this to people's feelings. Responses in the lower range tended to focus on the reaction of the characters around the boy in "*Mid-Term Break*", whereas higher band responses explored how the style and structure of the poem revealed how the boy himself was concealing his own grief and was detached from the situation. The 'poppy bruise' and possible link to remembrance was explained only in the higher quality responses. On *Once Upon a Time*, there was often a sound appreciation of the idea of smiling without expression, shaking hands without feeling or uttering words without meaning - all ways of concealing true feelings.

Question 4

The Quality of candidates' response was often determined particularly through candidates' choice of a second poem to accompany *Warning*. Where this was less clearly relevant to the question's focus, comments about stereotypical views were correspondingly thin and ill-focused. Higher range responses, however, identified the humour in the poem and paid close attention to the effect of words such as "gobble" and "spit", as well as referring to subtle changes in tone. Those who chose to write, for their second poem, on *Not My Best Side* had ample scope for relevant comment on each of the three characters, and sometimes wrote at considerable length, supporting their points strongly, as in the comments by the following candidate on the portrayal of the dragon: "It begins with the viewpoint of the dragon who stereotypically is depicted as a ruthless murdering beast. However, Fanthorpe cleverly flips the situation on its head. As the readers, we are drawn into the mind of the character, who feels he has been misjudged in his characteristics, saying: 'The artist didn't give me a chance to pose properly'." Similarly, many candidates who examined *Still I Rise* gave impressive answers, with detailed language analysis and well-chosen quotations throughout. "Hide and Seek" was also a good choice, with able candidates exploring the changing mood over time and responding to the richness of imagery. More able candidates identified the changing rhythm and mood via sentence length. On the other hand, a number

of candidates who chose the poem *Mirror* discovered that this was not the best poem for the theme of stereotypes.

Question 5

Questions 5 and 6 remain the least often chosen, and many centres do not appear to consider 'Nature'. Those who take this selection often justify their choice by excellent and sustained responses, commenting on language effectively and showing intelligence in their interpretation.

In Question 5, candidates were asked to look at *Wind* and *The Thought-Fox*, looking at the writer's use of imagery and other effects. As always, Ted Hughes brought out the best in the most able - but. The majority of the candidates responded to *Wind* very well and were able to write confidently about Hughes' use of language.

There was less confidence in candidates' responses when dealing with the portrayal of nature and answers were at times superficial in their analysis: some weaker candidates did not go beyond paraphrasing, ignoring tone and rhythm.

When writing about *The Thought-Fox*, some candidates focused solely on the fox and failed to connect it with the writing process. Some good answers explored the way in which the natural scene was much calmer than that in *Wind*, and considered how imagery, and rhythm captured the fox's movements and the corresponding thought processes, though few considered the aural quality of Hughes' writing.

Question 6

The question focused on *Thistles* and one other poem, inviting candidates to explore the relationship between humans and natural forces. This question was handled very well by the majority of those attempting it - perhaps because *Nettles* was obviously suited as a choice. Most wrote about these two poems, exploring the military imagery common to both poems with a degree of success. The inability of man to overcome nature easily was generally well grasped and better candidates noted the interesting similarity between human ageing and that of the plants ('Then they grow grey, like men'). Some other appropriate choices were made and often led to good treatment.

The comparison between thistles & Vikings was clearly understood - as was the pain of nettle stings: some also commented on the irony of "bed". Candidates were able to understand the military imagery and the concept of futile battles between man and nature and consequently gained credit for language evaluation. Not all comments were equally well attuned to the poems' ideas: one candidate wrote of *Thistles* that "the battle will continue until a good weed killer is found". Language comments on occasion needed sharper focus or explanation: a candidate wrote, for example, that 'In *Thistles* the writer uses a lot of commas to emphasise the strength'. Sometimes the comment on war imagery was repetitive and what was lacking was the underlying message of the father's futile desperation to protect his vulnerable son in *Nettles*.

Section B

Question 7

The question on the article 'Mind Games' discriminated especially through the capacity of the more successful respondents to focus on evidence of writer bias in the selection of arguments and language. However, at times candidates did not always quote appositely or convincingly from the article. Examiner commented that it was pleasing to see that many candidates had been taught the ways the writer presented her argument. Most responses showed understanding of the content and made some attempt to explain how it worked. The best noted the use of opinion as fact, while most commented on the use of experts and studies. One response noted the title 'Mind Games' as also implying thought manipulation. Examiners commented that it was evident that candidates had been taught to question what they read and not necessarily accept it at face value: better candidates pointed out the bias in the article and how the use of words such as 'believed', 'can raise', 'might' and 'seem to be' suggested that there was another side of the argument. However, some went too far and, without offering any evidence, said that Berliner was producing *fake* or *bogus* results, or that she was deliberately using pseudo-scientific language which nobody could understand in order to baffle readers into believing her statements.

There was some evidence of high quality teaching and learning, with candidates able to comment in quite sophisticated ways about techniques of persuasive writing. More able candidates identified how such features as emotive language, expert opinions and statistics had an effect on the reader. For example, one candidate thoughtfully explored how reference to a specific piece of research supported the writer's argument: "This phrase clearly shows the findings of a particular study and conveys the results to the reader easily through use of simple lexis... the use of quotations from people described as experts suggests that the facts are accurate and these quotations lend credence to the article." A small minority wrote detailed comparisons of two sporting articles, or even wrote on all four, which failed to concentrate on the focus of the question. The connection between better health and the increase in metabolic rate by exercise was made by some. In general, candidates' personal responses related to information in the article, though inevitably there were some exceptions.

Section C

Outstanding essays were particularly marked on Question 9, which illustrates that young people are extremely capable of reflecting on their own lives as well as on wider issues within society.

Question 8

The title 'When one door closes, another opens', evoked answers of widely differing quality, and hence was clearly an effective discriminator. The idea of the 'two doors' proved an effective stimulus to many candidates to write about 'lost opportunities', sometimes making less out of the new door which opened. In the less effective responses, ideas did not communicate the antithesis at all clearly and were limited by less than proficient control of accurately expressed English. The doors in question offered views into many different worlds, which were a pleasure to read. Many pieces were clearly imaginative and not based on personal experience, but that of a fictional character. Errors in the spelling of high-

frequency homophones and failure to accurately use apostrophes correctly were common features of mid to lower range responses.

Candidates wrote about many different subjects, with sporting opportunities or lost opportunities presented particularly frequently, often with a sense of humour. One wrote with a refreshingly sophisticated degree of self-mockery, in the style of a teenage magazine, about an infatuation from which she was relieved to have escaped: "I recall that he looked somewhat like a vampire, with the stark contrast of his milk-white skin and ebony hair, smoothed back with a layer of gel which gave it a blue sheen. His hair glistened in the sun, although its beauty was broken for me as the slimy, tadpole-like substance melted in the radiating heat, sliding down his left ear like a snail's tail. His name was Peter and I was obsessed by him..." A few candidates showed how something had affected family relationships and explained how a new opportunity had improved matters. Some also referred to how an entry into one higher education establishment had been lost and another gained, or how a career in drama or singing had had to be abandoned but a contrasting career had arisen as a possibility. One examiner noted that there were some engaging accounts of high aspirations that were shattered by some catastrophic event.

Question 9

On this question, where candidates had free rein to express personal views on a range of contemporary issues in a diary entry on paper or on a website, there was a marked difference between those who used language flexibly and thoughtfully in support of strongly-articulated and revealing ideas and those whose views were basic and expressed with less clarity. However, the former category was strongly represented. Examiners referred to responses as "a real eye opener", and several described it as an insight into teenage minds and twenty-first century life through the student's eye: for another, marking the responses "re-affirmed my faith in the youth of today", and another referred to marking these answers as "enlightening and frightening".

Some extremely mature outlooks were presented and a wide range of issues was raised thoughtfully - including global warming, drug and alcohol abuse, medicine and even world politics. Responses looked at the lives, pressures and fears that young people face today, with mature discussion of how today's world was or was not different from previous generations, as in the following thoughtful example. "I have heard people say that the world is a more dangerous place now than it was in the past. On the face of it this appears to be true... But I do not think that this is so different from how the world used to be. There are still wars and diplomatic tensions, people still killing each other just to steal some loose change. I believe the world is just as dangerous, only there are new dangers to fear." The common perceptions expressed by society and media about 'youth' were addressed with great maturity. Technology, covering ipods, mobile phones, HD television and many others clearly rather alien to many examiners, was another common theme: it was either loved or hated, or candidates were undecided: they could not live with or without it, in some cases. There were also many observations about changes in family and social life, often expressed in contemporary vernacular terms: "chavs," "hoodies", "emos", "peer pressure". A huge concern was expressed about knife and gun crime and violence amongst young people in general, not least because of a resentment at being tarred with the same brush as the disruptive minority. They wished to dissociate themselves from those who gave all young people a bad name: many seemed to be saying - 'yes, some of us are bad, but not all of us, so give us a chance.' The fear factor with regard to such crime was particularly evident

throughout all responses, with candidates often referring to their or their parents' fears about the young going outside alone.

Writing registers varied, as would be expected, and mostly were apt for something written personally and not necessarily for wide consumption. Sometimes the tone was at the extremely informal end; on other occasions, candidates chose something more akin to an academic essay register, including attempts at a formal, objective assessment of life. Grasp of the centuries, including our own, was not always secure. One candidate wanted to live in the 20th century to see the work of Newton (should that have been Einstein?). In the 1900s, according to one candidate, people apparently "sent their children out to play in the dead of night".

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, this is an important consideration.**

1203 5H

Overall the papers interested and engaged the candidates and most coped well with all sections.

Candidates are increasingly confident in addressing media features (including language) in Section A texts, but some answers were excessively long. Candidates need to be selective in their approach to this question and avoid unnecessary detail in their responses, particularly when dealing with two texts. It is important to leave adequate time to plan and write responses to the other sections.

In common with the 1204 specification, Section C responses were generally the least successful and briefest. Candidates tend to describe and narrate, rather than analyse, comment or review. A few moments in planning would also have benefited them, particularly in terms of structure and expression. Some candidates used bullet points, and, even more limiting, lists in their answers. Such approaches do not provide opportunities to demonstrate variety in sentence structure and vocabulary, and are difficult to reward on the marking grids. There were also some error prone answers which created significant ambiguity. One candidate wrote about "holding a fait on the local green... all the money will be spilt...the rare breads farm will lend us their donkey." Careful attention to detail is as important as demonstrating ambition in expression.

There are still candidates who write very informally and inappropriately, sometimes using expletives. Such work will inevitably receive very low marks on the marking grids, particularly in terms of "communicative effectiveness."

Paper 5H

Section A

Question 1

The linking theme of animal conservation was clearly a subject which candidates related to. The two texts - one a leaflet, the other a website - also worked well in providing stimuli for later questions.

Answers to this question were often very long. The more successful candidates were those who were able to identify the distinctive purposes of the texts and the differing readerships, and then select relevant details to discuss, whereas less successful ones tended to collate both texts and lose themselves in a welter of details and sometimes repetitively made points. Candidates did not have to compare the two texts, and were not assessed on this basis, but most tended to do this and often the best responses incorporated well made comparative evaluations.

In general the leaflet was handled better than the website, and preferred, but sometimes solely on the basis of its detail and, particularly, the images (comments on "cute" animal photos abounded.) However, some of the more discriminating answers rated the website highly; these came from candidates who recognised that the web page was, by its very nature, not intended to provide a complete picture of the organisation but provided links via which the reader (or net surfer) could access a vast range of topics, including Photo Galleries, presumably illustrating the work of WWF.

The bullet points worked well. The positioning of the “use of language” bullet point in second rather than its usual last position helped candidates to focus more strongly on this crucial aspect. However there were still candidates who merely described or paraphrased the texts (at times in considerable detail) without meaningful evaluation and analysis. The more able candidates found plenty to analyse in the language features of the text, though again some were content to note technical features (such as alliteration) without evaluating their contribution in stimulating the interest of the readers. However, the general level of response was good, with some exceptionally impressive answers.

Section B

Question 2

This question produced some very strongly engaged answers - many candidates felt passionately about animal welfare. There were many excellent answers, though occasionally logic - and expression - collapsed under the pressure of emotion. Weaker candidates also tended to focus on the maltreatment of pets rather than the plight of endangered species; one candidate wrote “There may be a time when your beloved pet becomes extinct.” Most showed a good grasp of appropriate letter style and structure, though some wrote speeches, promotional leaflets and even, in one instance, designed a poster.

Stronger answers used language persuasively (often using rhetoric) and logically, structuring and linking argument carefully to present their cases, all in the framework of a letter. In the best answers, too, supporting evidence was used effectively, whereas weaker answers tended to include statistics that were clearly manufactured for the occasion and weakened rather than strengthened the candidate’s case; one claimed unconvincingly that “millions of animals die every year and over 80% because of us.” Most candidates expressed their views with considerable force and, at times, graphic imagery.

Question 3

This, though less popular than the previous question, also stimulated some excellent answers, both for and against reducing working hours. Most were against long working hours for reasons of health and, especially, the need for families to have time together; many candidates find that they have much less contact with their parents than they would like because of current working and travelling hours. However there were others who felt long working hours were necessary for the economic health of the nation or simply to keep up with the credit crunch.

Most candidates argued clearly for one side or the other, but some approached it in a different but acceptable way, debating the pros and cons of each side of the argument, and concluding with a summative paragraph which made it clear which side they favoured. Some, however, weakened their answers by failing to come to any sort of resolution. Some read the question to mean that a reduction in hours had actually been proposed rather than suggested, but this did not invalidate their responses.

The quality of argument depended significantly on the extent to which the candidate had thought through his or her ideas, chosen vocabulary and sentence structures carefully and used persuasive language effectively. The quality of expression often let candidates down. At times statements were difficult to understand fully statements such as “Britain has the longest working population in Europe” and “the clear fact that one time the sun never set on her Empire.”

Section C

Question 4

This was a challenging question as it required both report and analysis. Most wrote appropriate answers but responses tended to be methodical rather than inspired and some became little more than lists of possible activities (fairs with tombolas, bouncy castles etc.) to raise money for unspecified youth projects, or catalogues of events, which in some instances had already taken place. The best reports appeared to draw on actual experience and had a real focus in the local community. Some others identified a specific youth cause to be worked for - such as deprived children in Africa - and tailored their fund-raising and publicity to the specific nature of the project.

Question 5

This was a successful question which produced some inspiring responses. While some candidates wrote about devoting much time to sport because they enjoyed it, many wrote impressive accounts of time spent in voluntary work to help others or of raising money for a cancer charity owing to the death of a close relative (sometimes such accounts appeared to be more imaginative than real). Schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Awards have clearly stimulated many into community service and some of the best written answers came from participating candidates.

A key discriminator was the extent to which candidates analysed why they were prepared to make the effort. There were many interesting and well structured commentaries in which narrative was combined skilfully with analysis. Others were less successful in this respect and relied too much on description or narrative. Examiners had to tease the analysis out of sometimes implausible narratives; one candidate claimed to have played football alongside Rio Ferdinand and undertaken a month long scientific expedition to the Amazonian jungle. The veracity of a candidate's answer is not an issue but the quality of expression is, and this tends to falter in final questions.

Statistics for GCSE English 1203

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

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary Mark	100	61	49	37	25	13

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

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E
Boundary Mark	100	85	74	63	53	44	39

Notes

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

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