

Report on the Units

January 2008

1900/MS/R/08J

OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations) is a unitary awarding body, established by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate and the RSA Examinations Board in January 1998. OCR provides a full range of GCSE, A level, GNVQ, Key Skills and other qualifications for schools and colleges in the United Kingdom, including those previously provided by MEG and OCEAC. It is also responsible for developing new syllabuses to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers.

This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this Report.

© OCR 2008

Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

CONTENTS

GCSE English (1900)

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Unit/Content	Page
Chief Examiner's Report	1
2431/01 Non-Fiction, Media and Information (Foundation Tier)	2
2431/02 Non-Fiction, Media and Information (Higher Tier)	5
2432/01 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument (Foundation Tier)	12
2432/02 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument (Higher Tier)	15
2433/01 and 02 Literary Heritage and Imaginative writing (Foundation and Higher Tier)	21
2434 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing (Coursework)	28
2435 Speaking and Listening (Coursework)	31
Grade Thresholds	33

Chief Examiner's Report

Key Points

- A significant number of Candidates appear to have been entered for an inappropriate tier. This resulted in there being a higher number of candidates than usual who failed to achieve even the lowest possible awardable grade on both Higher and Foundation Tier units. Centres are advised that it is unlikely to be in the best interests of candidates who achieved significantly lower than grade C in a previous examination series to be entered for Higher Tier units if they re-sit at a later date. Centres are also advised that the Entry Level Qualification in English exists and caters specifically for those candidates who are likely to find difficulty in coping with the demands of Foundation Tier GCSE English.
- Conversely, Centres are reminded that potential grade B candidates will be best served by being entered for Higher Tier units. There was some evidence in this series that some such candidates had been disadvantaged by being entered for the Foundation Tier, especially for Unit 2433.
- Examiners of all Units express concern about the increasing number of candidates who appear to assume that *analysis* of a writer's language and techniques is dependent on identifying different literary devices wherever they may appear in the passages under consideration and then making some generalised comment about the function of such devices. Centres are advised that such an approach is unlikely to be rewarded with marks higher than those in Band 5 at the best. In order to achieve marks in higher bands, it is essential for the candidates to start from *what* the writer says and explain *how* the words used in their context affect the readers. Candidates are required to apply their understanding and appreciation of writers' techniques in a holistic way – device spotting alone is not enough.

2431/01 Non-Fiction, Media and Information (Foundation Tier)

General Comments

Candidates were genuinely engaged by the material in the paper. They were clearly interested in the statistics on Blackpool, though one or two got carried away and compared holiday beds in Portugal with those in Greece.

The media text was accessible to all candidates, who appreciated the photographs, though presentation was not well-tackled otherwise. Very few commented on the font of the titles, though this would have been an easy point to make and one within the experience of this generation of candidates who are so familiar with computers. The more difficult language section of the media question proved to be beyond many candidates, even though the unusual words in the passage should have given a strong lead.

The text about Blackpool provided enough material for those candidates who were searching for a topic for their Section B answers or who misunderstood the task: these resorted to writing about the text used for Questions 1 and 2. Some Centres produced answers of a high order, with a few at the top of the range, but there were many examples of writing which revealed a lack of planning and a colloquial form of expression.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading: NON-FICTION

Question 1

(a) *From paragraph one, write down three facts about Blackpool.*

This question proved to be an easy opener, where most candidates scored full marks, as there were plenty of facts to choose from at the beginning of the passage. There was a little confusion with some candidates: 'Blackpool used 40 potatoes a day'; 'Blackpool had more sunbeds than Portugal'.

(b) *From paragraph one, state which is Europe's most popular tourist attraction.*

For this question, the one word 'Vatican' was a perfectly acceptable answer, but, surprisingly, about half the candidates did not give this, though it was clearly stated at the end of the first paragraph. Possibly, they did not understand that the Vatican was a tourist attraction, though some candidates responded with 'a Vatican theme park'.

(c) *What reason did the writer give for wanting to visit Blackpool?*

With 1(c), most candidates correctly identified the illuminations as the reason for the writer's visit.

- (d) Re-read **from the beginning of the second paragraph** ('It was the illuminations...') **to the end of the passage.**

What were the writer's thoughts about Blackpool?

Use your own words as far as possible, and **do not repeat points** made in 1(a), (b and (c).

1(d) was the most disappointing question in terms of candidate response. Many wrote only four or five lines and so their answers included only a restricted range of points: they were at the 'some grasp of a limited number of points' or the 'rudimentary understanding' level. Others just copied out large amounts of text despite the clear instruction to use their own words. Some of the more able answered the question as though it were Question 2: they included unnecessary quotation and comment on the writer's choice of words, which the question did not ask for.

Reading: MEDIA TEXT

Question 2

How does the website set out to make Blackpool's illuminations and trams attractive to visitors?

In your answer, you should write about:

- *the way the material is presented on the website*
- *how the information given about the illuminations and trams makes them attractive to visitors*
- *how some of the language used about the illuminations and trams makes them attractive to visitors.*

This produced many answers which were long but which consisted of only very general and descriptive comments – 'the language used was good/exciting/made us want to read it' – with no reference to the passage or any explanation of why the language had these qualities. There was an uncertainty about the approach required for each section of the task. When discussing presentation, too many candidates reiterated prepared statements on the use of short paragraphs, or the writing being set out in columns, without being able to elicit the significance of these techniques.

A notable exception to this was that many candidates seemed to think that a good comment to make was that the photographs 'exemplify textual content'. In the discussion of language, there were many sweeping statements about an author's use of irony, alliteration and personification, without any explanation of the effects which these were intended to produce. There was evidence of much learning to analyse by rote without actual understanding. Each year, Examiners mention that many candidates are obsessed with spotting alliteration and 'lists of three'. There is a feeling that such candidates work with a list of features to look for and they do not know what to do if they are not there. Comments such as 'vocabulary is descriptive/informal/formal/factual' should be made in conjunction with examples to show how they relate to the text. In this paper, it helped that there were many words and phrases readily identifiable as 'exciting', such as 'buzzing', 'electrifying', 'razmatazz showcase' and 'extravaganza'. Generally, however, Examiners felt that candidates should abandon checklists and apply their intelligence to the matter in hand. Only then will they be able to offer incisive analytical comment. Explaining the effect of a particular word is better than merely labelling it 'onomatopoeia' or 'alliteration' or, currently, 'a strong adjective'.

Section B

Writing to INFORM, EXPLAIN, DESCRIBE

Question 3

Describe an event which did not live up to your expectations, and **explain** why.

A wider range of topics was written about than has been the case in previous series. Almost all candidates were able to identify a suitable event that had not lived up to their expectations. There were many holidays in Spain or in holiday camps or caravans, and many candidates had had a disappointing Christmas or boring days out. There had been many concerts which were below par and inevitably, there were also poor football matches.

Although many wrote well for AO3(i), there were many shortcomings with AO3(ii) – structure, development and paragraphing. This is disappointing because a simple formula such as 'a beginning, a middle and an end' could raise marks significantly. Many candidates were unable to define features which prevented an event from living up to expectations. Too many adopted a narrative approach, beginning promisingly with the false claims of a holiday brochure enticing the writer and family to go on the holiday of a lifetime. Soon, however, the description of the grim reality would turn into a meandering narrative of a week in Spain, with the narrator forgetting the task and writing about the holiday being saved by games on the beach or the discovery of a nightclub selling cheap lager. Many candidates wrote as they speak, without paragraphing or much punctuation.

Technically (AO3iii), the writing achievement, was mixed. Common errors were that sentence construction was faulty, with sentence endings unmarked, loose agreement of number, weak tense sequencing and capital letters scattered regardless of need. Constructions sometimes owed much to slangy speech, especially with 'yeah' as in 'I went in and yeah it was OK to start with'. The ubiquitous and all-inclusive term 'stuff' can refer to almost anything: people, objects, belongings, ideas, arrangements or even feelings. Spelling was generally satisfactory, though 'exciting' and 'disappointing' gave problems, which was a pity, given the nature of the content.

2431/02 Non-Fiction, Media and Information (Higher Tier)

General Comments

Entries for this January series were significantly larger than previous January series. A significant proportion of the cohort appeared to be taking this unit for the first time which meant that there was a far more even balance between the numbers of such candidates and those re-taking the paper than has traditionally been the case at this time of year.

In general, candidates were engaged by the subject matter of the reading passages (the importance of history) and responded to it with interest. However, the abstract nature of the arguments of both passages caused problems to some candidates in identifying key points in response to the tasks in Section A. This problem was further compounded by candidates who failed to appreciate fully the requirements of the questions and who adopted unsuitable approaches to them. These issues will be considered more fully in the comments on individual questions which follow.

The writing task in Section B was completed at least adequately by the majority of candidates and extremely well by some. There was, however, a significant number of candidates who failed to produce responses of adequate length which made assessment of the development of their ideas difficult, if not impossible. A larger number of candidates than usual appeared to have forgotten that the writing task in this unit is intended to test writing 'to inform, explain and describe' and not 'to argue, persuade and advise', or even, in a number of cases, 'to explore, imagine and entertain'. It is important for candidates to remember that careful reading of the rubric of the question paper and of the questions themselves is equally as important as reading the passages printed in the reading insert.

Overall, presentation of scripts was of a satisfactory standard, with fewer reports from Examiners of illegible handwriting than in previous series. Examiners, however, continue to comment on the use of text-speak and other inappropriate contractions, as well as expressing concern about the increasing use of the lower case *i* for the first person singular pronoun, the inappropriate use of capital letters for the beginning of common nouns (or even, in some cases, randomly in the middle of words) and a failure to paragraph continuous writing.

Most candidates used their time well and succeeded in producing responses of adequate length to all three tasks, although, as mentioned above, there were more short responses to Question 3 than is usually the case. There were a number of candidates who did not produce responses to all three tasks but when this occurred it appeared to be due more to a failure to realise that both questions in Section A were compulsory or from a wilful decision on the part of the candidates not to involve themselves fully in the examination. There were also some candidates who answered the tasks in Section A by referring to the wrong passage. Once again, these points reinforce the importance of reading instructions and questions carefully. Although the majority of candidates were entered correctly for this tier, it was felt by all Examiners that some of those whose scripts they marked would have been better suited to the Foundation Tier.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading: NON-FICTION

Question 1

Bringing the past to life.

Outline what the article says about the importance of history and what the campaign 'History Matters' hopes to achieve.

Use your own words as far as possible.

Although the majority of candidates had little apparent difficulty in understanding the text vocabulary or the requirements of this question, there were some who had difficulty in fully appreciating the import of the more abstract concepts dealt with by the passage. Others failed to appreciate that the question required a summary of the ideas contained within it, and instead attempted an analytical response far more suited to Question 2. Others appeared to be so engaged by the content of the passage that they digressed into giving their personal opinions on the topic, or writing anecdotes relating to their own history. The most common problems or misinterpretations were:

- Difficulty separating time references with reference to the influence of the past on the present and future. Candidates veered into discussions based on mistaken views such as 'You can tell the future from the past' or 'You can stop mistakes from happening by studying History'.
- Difficulty separating the views of so many different contributors in the attempt to achieve an overview; this made it quite hard for candidates to transpose text in their own words, thus denying them access to the higher mark bands. There was considerable selective lifting, quoting for emphasis, direct lifting, repetition and narrative excess of the 'He says' variety.
- Difficulty separating several similar strands – there were frequent elisions and imperfectly understood points as candidates found it very difficult to access the finer nuances of meaning whilst trying to write in a concise form in their own words. It became far too easy for them to drift into descriptions of views and to offer personal opinions and/or Question 2 type analysis of purpose and effects.
- The presence of Stephen Fry in both texts caused some confusion – it was common for him to be discussed in terms of personal involvement, for example, or for his opinions from Question 2 material to be included here.
- Many candidates either misquoted or misrepresented the Mori poll statistics so as to fit in with the assumed theme that most people are more interested in sport ('59% only go to heritage sites for the sport' and '75% were interested in history but 59% were not because they were more interested in sport'). Similarly, many candidates saw the reference to Stephen Fry's television programme simply as a recommendation that we should all watch historical TV programmes. Better candidates recognised that the real point was that personal involvement/experience conveys a more vivid and immediate sense of history.
- A significant number of candidates failed to distinguish clearly points relating to the importance of history from those concerning the aims of the 'History Matters' campaign.

The following comments describe the main features of the different levels of responses to this task:

Higher Range Responses

At this level, candidates understood the passage very well with many making detailed and copious notes in appropriate two-column plans. However, as indicated above, many failed to gain the highest marks because, although they were able to provide a clear and concise overview of the material in their own words, they did not always provide clear appreciation of all the inferential points. Sometimes, these candidates became so intellectually and personally engaged by the subject matter that they lost sight of the task objectives by allowing themselves to discuss implications and opinions. In general, candidates at this level identified ten or more of the points listed in the Mark Scheme.

Middle Range Responses

Candidates at this level were typically able to spot some 4-9 points. Answers were generally very close to the text and in chronological order, thus demonstrating some selection skills but less organisational ability. Some candidates attempted to write concisely but answers were mostly undermined by repetition and excessive illustration of points, especially those relating to the way historical events have an influence on the present.

Lower Range Responses

There were very few candidates indeed who produced responses to this task which were assessed below the Band 6 range. In general, answers at this level were very short, based mainly on points relating to history's influence on individuals, the misconception of history being boring as a result of having to learn dates in school and the aim of encouraging people to discuss history in the pub or work place. There was considerable lifting from the text and little attempt to organise random selections. There was a lot of personal opinion and commentary especially in relation to England's World Cup experiences.

Section A

Reading: MEDIA TEXT

Question 2

The future's in the past.

How does Stephen Fry set out to persuade his audience that history is important?

You should consider both how he presents his argument and his use of language.

As always, this question produced a wide range of responses; the best showed a clear understanding of Fry's general strategy – how he was challenging and surprising his audience and aiming to get them onside. They recognised the wit and the pithiness of his expression and picked up on his various rhetorical devices.

Less successful responses did little more than produce a narrative summary of the original with extensive lifts and little, if any, attempt to analyse either presentation or language. It should be emphasised that, in the terms of this question, the word 'presentation' refers to the ways in which the writer (or speaker in this case) structures and organises an argument in order for it to have the maximum effect on the target audience; those candidates who interpreted the term as referring solely to 'layout' found little to comment on here, other than to say that the passage was presented in paragraphs. There were also a number of candidates who failed to understand that the passage was, in fact, the text of a *speech* and, as a result, omitted to mention some straightforward but relevant points.

There remains a significant minority of candidates who approach this question with, apparently, a wrong idea of why it is set and how it should be answered. They approach it with preconceived ideas as to features which the passage should contain and with the assumption that it is their responsibility to spot and identify features. For example, noticing that Fry's speech was printed in the *Guardian* newspaper, such candidates then treated the Examiner to a paragraph or two on the putative readership of the *Guardian* and information about the socio-economic class to which this readership belongs; an understanding of this was used to explain why Fry used the occasional long word in his speech. A further feature of these responses is that those producing them are on a careful look-out for any figures of speech that they may recognise; thus rhetorical questions are referred to with enthusiasm because they always draw the readers in and make them want to read on (occasionally actual examples of this device may also be quoted by the candidate); hyphens are used by the writer because they lead to an explanation of points previously made and semi-colons are used in order to give emphasis. Frequently, however, the candidate's desire to match up as many devices as possible with those on their check lists leads to serious misunderstanding. They want to find alliteration in the passage and so they identify the phrase 'cheap celebrity culture' as containing it and state that the writer is using it for emphasis, not recognising that alliteration refers to the initial *sound* of a letter rather than to its printed form; they search for examples of the rule of three and incorrectly select the quote containing four adjectives that history is 'thrilling, absorbing, fascinating, delightful and infuriating'. In their eagerness to discover emotive language they pick on words such as 'cruelty' and 'Holocaust' which in their context here have little or no emotive purpose. Occasionally, candidates who produce such responses try to explain how their chosen examples help to convey the writer's purpose but in the majority of such cases the mere identification of a device or figure of speech is deemed to be sufficient as a response to the question.

This approach to Question 2 appears to be on the increase and is a cause for concern as it reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of what the question requires - the ability to analyse a piece of writing and, through the consideration of appositely selected examples, to explain how writers set out to communicate with and influence their audience. It is important that candidates show an overall appreciation or overview of the writers' purpose and identify the tone of the passage, explaining how the vocabulary, sentence structures and specific features of the content help to convey this. It is not necessary to fill a response full of remembered (and frequently misapplied) technical terms; what is much more important is to attempt to explain how those which are there have their effect on the reader. The advice to all candidates is to start from what is actually in the passage itself – not from a list of terms that they have previously studied and which they hope will be present.

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

Candidates generally performed better on this task than in Question 1. Answers were well organised and not overlong. Some attempted to differentiate between the impersonal and subjective comments and all were completely clear about the use of lists, quotes, different kinds of questions and the use of personal anecdote for manipulation. Some answers which fell into the Band 2 range did not reach Band 1 because they were so engaged by the ideas raised in the text that they embarked on discussion of their own personal opinions. However, had these responses turned such personal opinion into more focused analysis of the content of the passage, they would have reached the top band.

Middle Range Responses

These responses were mostly of the 'Quote and Comment' variety and consisted of paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of the narrative with some understanding of purpose. Answers were, however, more descriptive than analytical. Many scripts consisted of lists of content points with some accompanying commentary on chosen references but very little effective analysis of the intended effects, for example, 'History is bunk'; the candidates invariably agreed with this statement without appreciating Fry's purpose in quoting it – or, in fact, appreciating that it was a quotation at all! There were misleading references to informal tone and attempts to discuss humour. Attempts to discuss language betrayed the candidates' discomfort with both vocabulary and structure as in 'Long, complicated vocabulary and sentences sound mature and persuade the reader to agree with him'. They often referred to the use of 'Strong' language or 'long/big' words with and without appropriate examples, but quickly drifted back into further descriptions of content rather than explanation of chosen quotations to demonstrate why the language was effective. Common examples were 'exponential' and 'politically correct lesson' (a phrase they recognised but could not explain in context). It was quite common for candidates to omit examples and provide explanations of the effects for obvious points such as the use of rhetorical questions. They wrote 'He uses rhetorical questions' and left things there, leading to Examiners frequently writing 'How?', 'Ref?' or 'Effects?' in the margins.

Lower Range Responses

There was little evidence of mechanical copying. Even the weakest did try to explain sometimes but answers were often very short, fragmented and somewhat random lists of unsupported assertions. A few candidates struggled with Fry's language. They tended to retell the narrative of the Holocaust/TV programme (Question 1) or comment on such content that they recognised, for example, the heritage site reference, but they frequently did not show evidence of having understood it and contented themselves with personal opinion on the usefulness of such visits.

Section B

Writing to INFORM, EXPLAIN, DESCRIBE

Question 3

*Write the words of a talk to your fellow students in which you **describe** a recent event that you believe will influence the future and **explain** why.*

You could choose to describe something personal or something of wider significance.

In general, candidates did not struggle for content and most engaged well with the task. It was, however, necessary for Examiners to exercise considerable leeway in the interpretation of what exactly constituted an 'event'. Many candidates referred to activities planned to take place in the future, usually of a fund-raising variety and some were 'eventualities' (outcomes) of other events. Responses were often well-practised rewrites of previous similar 'talks', frequently on topics such as global warming and healthy eating which could only just be accepted as 'events'. Such responses were often narrative or persuasive with too little focus on the need for detailed support and explanation.

Attention to the required genre was usually successful with strong oral focus, many starting their answers with such opening phrases as, 'Hello/Good Morning. I am going to talk to you about...' and concluding with suitable phrases such as, 'Thank you for listening. Any questions?' However, it was also fairly common for candidates to present an indeterminate register and focus on audience, starting many of their responses with, 'I think/believe' and so on. This led to further misplaced focus on the need to persuade rather than to describe and explain.

Paragraphing, sentence construction, boundary punctuation and spelling were all generally reliable with some pleasing evidence of better use of punctuation for effect – especially successful parenthesis – than has been the case in previous series. The need to build vocabularies, however, remains an urgent priority, especially for middle range candidates whose efforts are circumscribed by an inability to select precise vocabulary for particular effects, leaving them trapped firmly in the world of magazine-speak and predictable cliché.

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

Many candidates at this level showed an impressive, wide sweep of general knowledge of current affairs on a national and international scale. They wrote with great confidence in their fact bases and interpretations. They were based mostly on 9/11, the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the disappearance of Madeleine McCann and the murder of Rhys Jones (or other young boys/teenage gang/gun/knife culture). Candidates immediately established excellent audience awareness and sense of purpose with a good use of genre. The best responses were able to include very effective interjections for example, ‘Wake up Tom ... this is important!’ or ‘We all know what THAT means... (groan/yawn!)’. Those who wrote of the cancer-caused or accidental deaths/injuries to family members were often very interesting and suitably detailed but some failed to reach the highest marks because it was so easy to slip into subjective writing and overlook the need for explanation. Conversely, these often achieved the best audience focus by such effective direct address as ‘How sad is that?’ and references to ‘Your Mum/Dad/Granny’.

Content was developed in well-organised and linked paragraphs. Many of these adopted the simple but effective shape of a defined list with the introduction concerned with definition of the event and subsequent paragraphs outlining detailed exegesis beginning with ‘First’, ‘Secondly’, and so on.

Technical skills were impressive with varied sentence constructions and some sophisticated vocabulary, especially so in the case of those who chose political/international events. There was accurate use of punctuation for effect.

Middle and Lower Range Responses

There was more evidence of inconsistent focus on the audience and lack of oral register at this level, with candidates often starting with such inappropriate opening statements as, ‘The pressure of GCSE can affect the rest of your life’. This tended to lead to subjective and narrative accounts of personal choices with some emphasis on the factual basis for decisions made and explanation of outcomes, and some description of new courses available, but the overall emphasis was misplaced and the subject matter did not easily lend itself to the category of an ‘event’. Content, therefore, became descriptive/persuasive in nature so that the overall structure was rather list-like. Another common approach was to slip into subjective opinion on the writer’s thoughts, beliefs and teachings. This was particularly true of those who chose to write on sports-based subjects, such as the recent appointment of Capello as England manager, the performance of the England rugby team in the World Cup or the sledging in the test between Australia and India. Other examples of writing to persuade and loss of strict focus on the triplet were invariably caused by those choosing to write on global warming issues or the Live8 concert.

Examiners reported assessing very few responses at the lowest levels as a result of inadequacy of content rather than of writing skills. There were some candidates, however, whose vocabularies and uncertain syntax made it very difficult to engage in a serious way with the required genre but who were, nevertheless, able to offer simple descriptions. Such candidates found explanation very difficult and almost always wrote of school-based experiences.

Report on the Units taken in January 2008

Ideas were generally organised in appropriate paragraphs but there was a marked tendency to overuse rhetorical questions to engage/persuade the audience, such as 'What do you think?'

AO3 iii

Spelling

Examiners report that, overall, spelling was a little better than in previous series, although some common errors occurred such as: *incite* for *insight*; *illiteration* for *alliteration*; and *affect* and *effect* almost universally confused.

Punctuation

Candidates appear to have abandoned the use of the apostrophe to denote possession and indicate abbreviation, possibly because of the increased use of text messaging. Boundary punctuation was generally secure. Those who fell into Band 5 and sometimes Band 6/7 did so mainly because of insecure sentence boundaries and lack of sentence variety. Internal punctuation was generally better than in previous series, but is not yet always secure, partly because the correct construction of subordinate clauses is only partly understood and, therefore, their correct separation from the main clause is often absent. Candidates sometimes lost control of complex sentences because they became lost in missing second halves of parenthetical commas or dashes. Conversely, there was a pleasing increase in the correct use of parenthesis for effect as mentioned above. The use of the semi-colon and colon is still not properly understood. Internal punctuation for stylistic effect was sometimes correct, but there was overuse of the exclamation mark, thus reducing its effectiveness, and there was common omission of the question mark from interrogatives and rhetorical questions.

Conclusion

Responses to this paper reflected the whole range of ability expected from this tier. There was a lot of good work seen by Examiners and the quality of the best scripts was very high indeed. Nearly all who sat this paper treated it seriously and responded to the tasks conscientiously. The main messages for teachers to convey to future candidates concern the importance of reading instructions carefully and of being fully aware of the different approaches required by the different tasks in Section A: Question 1 is primarily a summary of the aspects given in the question, whereas Question 2 requires an explanation of the ways in which writers attempt to influence their readers; as always, the key words relating to these tasks are *what* and *how* in that order. It is important for candidates to try to avoid over-complicating the issue for themselves.

2432/01 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument (Foundation Tier)

General Comments

The paper generally worked well across the ability range of the cohort of candidates: Y12 re-takers; Y11 top and lower sets; some Y10 candidates. There were some encouragingly strong performances, although none which suggested that candidates had been entered for this tier inappropriately. There was more work than usual that was weak. Many such scripts contained rubric errors of all kinds: some candidates failed to respond to any of the questions. There was a little work on *Things Fall Apart* some of it very worthy; but most candidates responded to *Opening Worlds* or *The Old Man and the Sea* in equal measure – a slight but perceptible decline in candidates offering the OCR anthology. As in previous series, candidates at the lower end of achievement persist in having great difficulty with using correct syntax and punctuation.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A: READING

Question 1

*How do the writers in this passage and in **one other story**... show someone discovering something about themselves which is very important?*

(The passage is the final paragraph of *Games at Twilight*.)

This was less popular than Question 2 and generally less well answered. The difficulty was not in responding to the passage: almost all said that Ravi discovered that he had been ignored by/was disliked by/had been completely forgotten about by the rest of his family. Nor was it in exploring the dramatic contrast of his desire for victory and triumph with the numerous death images the writer uses to orchestrate this. It was finding another such moment elsewhere that proved problematical for some candidates. Better answers explored the conclusion of *The Winter Oak* to excellent effect and others dealt with issues in *The Red Ball* and *The Pieces of Silver*. A number of responses on *The Young Couple* were confused and missed the point, losing focus on the task, while others struggled to make much of *Leela's Friend*.

Question 2

*How do the writers in any **two** of the stories... show problems caused by people who lack understanding?*

Responses to this question were generally more secure on both the chosen stories. Work on *Leela's Friend* was more convincing, with some effective analysis of the Sivasankers and the Inspector. Similarly *The Young Couple* offered opportunities to show how Cathy or Naraian and his family or both lacked understanding of each other. This question allowed candidates the opportunity for wide, cross-cultural responses. Much that was good was said about the teachers, Chase and Anna Vasilevna, as well as Bolan's father. The best answers showed candidates with a pleasing determination to show what they knew about the writers' choices of language.

Question 3

*How does the writer show the relationship between Santiago and the marlin here and at **one** or **two** other moments in the novel?*

(The passage is from the central section of the novella, prior to Santiago's final capture of the marlin.)

Whatever the degree of detail used to support the response, a very pleasing number of the candidates who chose this question saw that there were two sides to the answer. The best examined the duality in the passage and picked one or two more passages to develop this. Some, perfectly legitimately, went to Santiago's battle with the sharks and his responses to this to make the point. The story had clearly been enjoyed and understood by the vast majority of candidates.

Question 4

*Why does Manolin admire the Old Man? Refer to both the beginning **and** the end of the novel.*

Like Question 3, this task elicited some strong responses, supported by clear textual reference. Candidates focused on Manolin's regret at no longer fishing with the Old Man, his admiration for his fishing skills and their shared love of baseball, for example. The best answers gave clear and well supported pictures of the role reversal of carer and cared for, at both extremes of the text. There was good understanding shown of Manolin's role at the end of the story with appropriate use of examples to show his concerns for his hero.

Questions 5 and 6

*How does the writer show the importance of religion to the Ibo people here and in **one** or **two** other moments in the novel?*

*How does the writer show how Okonkwo's behaviour is very different from that of his father, Unoka, at any **two** moments in the novel?*

There were very few answers on the text-based passage. The few responses seen limited themselves almost entirely to what was given in the question paper. This was generally narrative recapitulation with little attempt to go beyond this.

Many of the responses to Question 6 suggested that many candidates had anticipated an Okonkwo question. Most answers, including the strongest, went to the description of Unoka in Chapter One and then sought contrasting evidence in their examination of Okonkwo. Favourites included the wrestling match with Amalinze; Okonkwo's treatment of Nwoye and of his wives; and the decapitation of the Court Messenger at the end.

Section B: Writing to ANALYSE, REVIEW, COMMENT

Question 7

How well did you deal with a situation in which you experienced a clash of loyalties?

Whilst almost all the responses managed to analyse, review or comment, differentiation was clearly achieved by the degree of their relevance to the task. Band 4 and 5 answers were comfortable both with clashes of loyalty and with the relative judgement the task invited. Below this were responses which dealt with loyalty and some of its alleged difficulties, often relying on

the prompt material. Next came work which said something about loyalty and, finally, answers which found the whole concept confusing. Overall, this proved to be a successful task which elicited a wide variety of both quality and quantity in response. There were some confident personal responses and much honest revelation throughout.

Writing to ARGUE, PERSUADE, ADVISE

Question 8

Your local newspaper has printed a number of letters complaining about the behaviour and appearance of some of the students at your School or College.

Write a letter to the Editor arguing your point of view.

Candidates enjoyed this task, taking delight in rebutting the allegations: only a few agreed with the assertion made in the prompt. A surprisingly large number of candidates responded from the point of view of the Head/Principal, revealing precocious insights into the problems faced by school leaders. Refreshingly, the vast majority of these responses gave the Head warm support and sympathy in a difficult aspect of their work. Almost all made the distinction between behaviour and appearance inside school and when students had left school at the end of the day and were no longer under the school's jurisdiction. Many candidates were aware of league table points and positions and used these as part of their argument.

The better answers to both of these questions revealed a clear and competent grasp of written English as required by the specification. Less successful responses, however, were much less coherent and accurate in spelling, punctuation and - especially - sentence construction.

2432/02 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument (Higher Tier)

General Comments

Examiners reported that the performance of candidates on this examination was generally good. The entry represented a significant increase on the previous January and consisted principally of centres who are using the flexibility of entry, in terms of tier and time, to their advantage. The entry clearly continues to reflect the intentions of most centres to use 2432 for the terminal examinations in this, the fifth year of the specification being offered by OCR. Certainly, evidence from Examiners indicated that candidates had been thoroughly prepared for and coped successfully with the demands of the paper.

The time available to candidates in the examination did not appear to affect their ability to offer responses of sufficient length to reward positively. Examiners reported that virtually all candidates made good use of their time in dealing with their three chosen tasks.

The majority of centres had decided to use the 'Opening Worlds' anthology to prepare candidates for this examination. Although this involved working on two texts, responses revealed a genuine grasp of the writers' skill in their capturing of the feelings of a character at a particular moment and how specific events influence the lives of characters. Once again, centres should note that Question 1 no longer requires the candidate to explore both the passage and the rest of the story it is taken from. They must, however, continue to examine a second story from the list specified at the top of the page. Many candidates will feel that further exploration of the text from which the passage is taken is most useful in responding to the task, but the constraints of time make the study of all three elements, passage, rest of text and second story, very demanding. Consequently, there is no penalty for the candidate who selects references exclusively from the passage, or indeed the rest of the story, before going on to deal with a second story. Question 2 proved equally popular, perhaps because the candidates were given the opportunity to select texts that they had personally enjoyed, revealing a genuine understanding of the influence of events upon lives. Similarly, good answers came from candidates who attempted Question 1 where they were able to draw upon the emerging emotions of the young teacher, Anna Vasilevna, as she looked on past and present experiences, so skilfully articulated by the writer, as well as selecting a character from a second story where the feelings had been powerfully communicated. Indeed, all six stories were successfully used in responses to this question.

Questions 3 and 4 were tackled confidently by a smaller number of candidates, the short novel enabling centres to prepare individuals thoroughly for the demands of the questions. Certainly Question 3 proved by far the more popular, although the nature of both tasks encouraged the majority of candidates to respond with insight and understanding.

Examiners were pleased to note that *Things Fall Apart* had been chosen by a significant number of Centres for study. Question 6 was the more popular as it enabled candidates to focus on a particular section of the novel. However, those who attempted Question 5 were rewarded with the opportunity to analyse closely a specific extract that clearly had significance for the whole of the novel through the life of Okonkwo. This was clearly useful to candidates given the time constraints of the paper. The open nature of the tasks produced a wide variety of thoughtful responses.

Although Section A produced many worthy responses, Examiners did note a rather worrying tendency to follow a strict formulaic method of analysis that is likely to prove self penalising at GCSE. Of course it is entirely appropriate for candidates to make points, provide evidence and

offer further explanation, but long tracts of discussion regarding the effects of the writers' words upon audience, followed by detailed examination of what the reader consequently feels, is not a model well-suited this examination.

The performance of candidates on Questions 7 and 8 was good. The opportunity to write a speech in which they argued a point of view regarding the proposal that, 'The age of the individual is over. We are fast becoming clones of one another', produced animated responses, frequently with candidates drawing from personal experience. Interestingly, candidates were split very evenly over this issue in pursuit of their argument. Equally, the opportunity to consider the most important influences on their lives led to many engaging responses in which candidates drew upon the immediate, as well as those of a more universal or abstract nature. Certainly the issue was one that was particularly familiar to them, giving candidates considerable material for discussion regarding their perceptions of the influences which shape their lives.

However, not for the first time, there was considerable evidence that candidates had been entered for the wrong tier of the examination for this series. Centres are advised once more that they should not risk entering their candidates where performance is likely to fall below what is required for an award at this tier.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A: READING

Question 1

*How do the writers capture the feelings of a character at a particular moment, here and in **one other** story from the list above?*

and

Question 2

*How does a specific event influence the lives of characters in any **two** of the stories in the list above?*

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

The most successful responses were from candidates who were able to relate their knowledge of the text to the main thrust of the questions and provide coherent, structured and sometimes incisive analysis, characterised by comments referring back to the range of ways in which writers captured the feelings of a character at a particular moment and the ways in which specific events influenced the lives of characters, supported by brief, appropriate references. Indeed, examiners felt that a tight focus on the language of the passage in Question 1 produced many excellent responses without candidates having to go beyond the confines of the passage before moving on to their second choice. They certainly grasped the writer's fine portrayal of Anna, a character haunted by earlier feelings of inadequacy, yet basking in the confidence and authority of her role as a teacher, candidates drawing heavily on the writer's powerful symbolism. Question 2 enabled candidates to spend their time profitably in responses that revealed genuine analysis of how a specific event influenced the lives of characters. Certainly the open nature of the task encouraged an examination of some of their favourite individuals.

Middle Range Responses

In the middle range, candidates, even when their knowledge of the texts was very sound, sometimes found it difficult to shape what they knew to the needs of the question. Often, what were appropriate and quite sharp insights lost their immediacy because their relevance to the question was left implicit rather than being explicitly stated. Centres are advised to impress on their candidates that any comments must be directly related to the question. Similarly, an imbalance in the quality of analysis between the two stories was a feature of responses which initially showed promise, but ultimately was disappointing, usually on the second story. Centres are advised to encourage candidates to spread their time evenly over the two stories.

Lower Range Responses

At the lower end of the range was a minority of candidates who had clearly struggled to see beyond the mere narrative; indeed they reproduced much of it in their attempts to formulate a relevant response to either task.

Once again, Examiners were concerned that a few candidates were struggling under the misconception that they would have time to re-read the complete texts in the examination and produce a satisfactory answer. Invariably, such responses were very short. Centres need to remind candidates that in an examination situation the text can be used as no more than an *aide-memoire*, to assist with the selection of appropriate references, and that there is insufficient time for any substantial reading.

A further limitation of scripts in the middle and lower ranges was over-long quotation. Candidates should be advised that Examiners are looking for succinct references and are not in the habit of awarding high marks to scripts which include many quotations spanning six or seven lines.

Examiners were pleased to note that candidates did not select stories for analysis outside the six identified at the top of the Question 1/Question 2 page. Centres are advised that such responses would inevitably be self penalising and that for future examinations candidates must respond to questions using the specified stories for the paper.

Question 3

What do you learn about Manolin, here and elsewhere in the novel?

and

Question 4

How does the writer capture Santiago's experience of a solitary life at sea?

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

The best responses offered a genuine engagement with the text and a keen eye for short, pertinent references to back up comments which were entirely focused on the question. Answers to Question 4 were detailed and perceptive, particularly in dealing with the obvious lack of human contact Santiago experiences set against the companionship he finds in all things natural whilst at sea. Question 3 proved more popular, with candidates successfully focusing in on the tremendous faith Manolin has for Santiago in the passage, combining this with a thoughtful examination of the ways in which he sustains his great friend elsewhere in the novel, as well as the words of Santiago in revealing so much about his young friend.

Middle Range Responses

Middle level responses had a clear understanding of the general themes in *The Old Man and the Sea* and were able to provide sufficient textual support for their answers. Some candidates were determined to include their thoughts on the novel generally and there was some manipulation of ideas to fit the task. Equally, a large number of candidates failed to go far beyond the passage which was inevitably self penalising. Conversely, a small number of candidates focused almost exclusively on the rest of the novel to the exclusion of much relevant detail in the passage.

Lower Range Responses

The least successful responses frequently fell into a narrative which was seldom supported by explicit textual reference. Responses at this level were brief or extremely repetitive, failing to convince the Examiner that there was any genuine understanding of what we could learn about Manolin from the text, or indeed how the writer captured Santiago's solitary life at sea.

Question 5

How does the writer prepare us for Okonkwo's death, here and elsewhere in the novel?

and

Question 6

How does Achebe portray the changes in village life following the arrival of the white men?

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

There were many excellent responses to these tasks. The best examined in considerable detail how Okonkwo's death is foreshadowed at the very outset of the novel in his embracing of violence and his inability to adapt and compromise, as well as drawing heavily from a passage steeped in the ceremonial preparation of a man, out of time and place, for his death. Here, there was a genuine engagement with the text through short, pertinent references which were invariably focused on the question. The more popular Question 5 produced some good responses with candidates examining how village life for the people of Umuofia changes so dramatically with the coming of the white men, many citing their life beforehand before articulating the political, spiritual, social and economic changes that had taken place with the arrival of the white men. Explicit references abounded with short pertinent use of quotations.

Middle Range Responses

Responses in the middle range revealed a genuine grasp of the themes in this novel but often failed to support their comments with relevant reference and quotation. These very accessible tasks should have encouraged a very close study of the text where the characters and their lives are so clearly drawn for the reader.

Lower Range Responses

The least successful responses came from candidates who struggled to find useful references in the extract and text. Their scripts were almost invariably marked by very superficial analysis that lost focus on both tasks. Unsupported narrative was very much in evidence in responses that were frequently very short.

Section B **Writing to ANALYSE, REVIEW, COMMENT**

Question 7

*What have been the most important influences on **your** life?*

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

The most successful responses were wide ranging, analytical and thought provoking. Many examined influences both positive and negative, drawing upon the invitation in the task to go into both the obvious influence of family and friends, as well as more subtle influences candidates perceived upon their lives, and presented their work in virtually flawless English with a mature range of vocabulary and expression. Such candidates invariably introduced a variety of their own viewpoints which they interwove with the stimulus material in a logical structure with a clearly identifiable effective opening and a strong personal summation.

There were many commendable responses to this task in this series with candidates effectively analysing the powerful and immediate influences upon their lives. This was clearly a topic which candidates found relevant and important.

Middle and Lower Range Responses

Middle and lower level responses, on the other hand, tended to reveal a very superficial examination of influences on candidates' lives which relied heavily on the material provided. Many answers in this range lacked structure. A significant number of candidates appeared to lack knowledge of how to construct an analytical response. Consequently, there was considerable repetition of a few simple points. Such candidates would clearly benefit from help with connectives to rationalise their considerations.

Question 8

'The age of the individual is over. We are fast becoming clones of one another.'

*Write the words of a speech to your class arguing **your** point of view.*

The following paragraphs summarise the main features of the different levels of response to this task:

Higher Range Responses

The most successful responses revealed a confident, persuasive tone, frequently marked by a confident use of rhetorical questions and a well-judged application of punctuation marks to enliven the written work. Such responses were very convincing in their address to an audience who were skilfully drawn into the debate. Such work was invariably influenced by cogent argument, either for or against the belief that the age of the individual is over, or indeed that we are fast becoming clones of one another. The very best were passionate in their defence of individualism, or reluctantly accepting of a world heading towards conformity, one sadly stating, 'We are all ants under a microscope, all following each other round until one steps out of line and is burnt by a focused ray of sunlight!' Clearly the topic had engaged candidates, a second addressing her audience directly, 'So go on, do your own thing. However, it's only a matter of time before someone tries to copy you and then you'll have a whole new movement on your hands. Humans aren't made for individualism'. The majority found an appropriate tone of

address, a rational development of ideas and a powerful conclusion suitable for the purpose of the task.

Middle and Lower Range Responses

Middle and lower levels responses came from candidates who were at ease with the subject matter of the task but frequently failed to convince Examiners that their arguments had any persuasive merit. The instructions clearly asked for an address to a receptive audience which should have opened up many opportunities for persuasion. However, at the lowest level, candidates merely saw the task as an opportunity to list the advantages and/or disadvantages of being an individual, or mistakenly ventured into the arguments for and against cloning, in spite of the guidance in the stimulus material, with little attempt to persuade the intended audience. Once again this year's task did not overtly penalise those who argued both for and against the statement in the task. This is now the intention for future argumentative tasks, but we advise candidates to strive to follow a line in logical, persuasive argument that does not confuse the intended audience as to their actual point of view, or indeed dilute the strength of their argument.

Centres are advised to ensure that candidates are aware that the appropriate tone and form are key indicators to Examiners with regard to the award of marks in such tasks.

This task enabled candidates to give a very clear indication of their abilities and Examiners noted that a significant majority of responses revealed genuine engagement with the issues surrounding the demise, or otherwise, of the age of the individual, together with considerable maturity of thought and expression.

2433/01 and 02 Literary Heritage and Imaginative writing (Foundation and Higher Tier)

General Comments

Although, once again, there was a disappointingly low entry for this examination series, Examiners encountered the full range of performance, including some scripts of exceptional quality. Evidence suggests that candidates were largely entered for the correct tier: most Foundation Tier answers reflecting Band 5 qualities and below, apart from a number of candidates who should have been entered for the Higher Tier. Higher Tier scripts tended to reflect Band 5 and above, although there were a number of Band 6, even 7 answers in the Higher Tier, especially in Section B. The Examiners' impression was that these responses were often due to an inadequate grasp of examination techniques rather than a lack of understanding of the literary texts, although some candidates found the poetry section difficult. Success in these papers depends on a disciplined approach, a wise allocation of time, and a strict, explicit focus on the question.

Writing to EXPLORE, IMAGINE, ENTERTAIN

Question 1

Higher Tier

Copy out the sentences below, and then continue the story, EXPLORING THE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OF THE NARRATOR.

Foundation Tier

Copy out the sentences below, and then continue the story. SHOW THE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OF THE NARRATOR.

After much delay, the train slowly pulled out of the station. Sighing with relief, I ...

In assessing narrative skills across both tiers, Examiners are essentially looking for the ability to organise and structure ideas into a coherent piece of writing that communicates clearly and is convincing and controlled in its development of a chosen genre. Although the exploration of thoughts and feelings in the context of a significant situation and the build up of suspense can be the means of engaging or entertaining the reader, the effectiveness is marred if the result is confusing. Some plots proved too complex, flashbacks too bewildering, switches to streams of consciousness writing too abrupt; or, the necessary narrative clues at convenient stages were omitted so that the reader lost track of what was actually happening or was expected to happen. In developing a suitable narrative situation, there is an opportunity for candidates to use their imagination; however, continuations that ventured yet again into haunted houses, blood-thirsty monsters, and alien invasions were rarely convincing. Similarly, those who ignored thoughts and feelings to concentrate on an action-packed plot, complete with superman feats, not only failed to signal an appropriate genre but also often lost all credibility. The most successful tended to be those which developed the situation in terms of attending vital job interviews, or escaping from prison, domestic abuse or wartime duties; a surprising number wrote empathically about wartime evacuation into the countryside of city children. Appropriate continuations often led on to significant encounters, dramatic accidents, even terrorist attacks; full credit was given to the development of a strong narrative voice. Thoughts and feelings could relate to past, ongoing or prospective happenings, but they needed to be sustained throughout. Particularly impressive were those who chose to explore moral and psychological repercussions, personal dilemmas, questions of guilt and reasons for disappointment or unhappiness. Sadly, some of the weakest responses appeared to be prepared essays that bore little or no relationship to the opening sentence given.

The least successful answers lacked overall control, often becoming too chatty, rambling, or over-reliant on dialogue. Technically, this resulted in erratic or non-existent paragraphing, even where there were constant changes of speakers, and a failure to recognise, let alone punctuate, sentence endings correctly. In trying to explore feelings as they formed, some candidates had difficulty in controlling tenses, often switching from present to past and from indirect to direct speech in an effort to produce streams of consciousness writing. While some candidates could adopt this style most effectively, for others this sometimes also led to choosing basic, rather repetitive vocabulary and sentence structures, and a neglect of narrative detail that would have created some helpful atmosphere for the reader. Other weaknesses included too little development (well under 200 words) to demonstrate the ability to sustain an appropriate mood, no sense of direction so that the ending appeared too abrupt or contradictory to what had gone before or, conversely, going on to such a length that the quality showed a marked deterioration. Those who produced 4-5 sides, ignoring the recommendation to work on only a section or mini chapter of a story (2-3 sides maximum), not only succeeded in weakening the good impression created by their best sections of writing, but also left themselves seriously short of time to devote to the literature questions. Many such scripts had to leave out one question altogether, and several produced short, superficial responses, or tackled only one poem.

Section B: READING

SHAKESPEARE

In both tiers, most candidates were able to engage with the question, and demonstrate a sound understanding of their chosen play. Many candidates, however, wasted valuable time explaining in a lengthy first paragraph what they were intending to do, then repeating this in similar form as a conclusion, without developing the middle section in any real detail. Others, similarly, under-achieved through adopting a wide-sweeping generalised approach, with little attempt to support their ideas with detailed reference to the text. While background information on Shakespeare's ideas and beliefs, his time, and audience expectations can be invaluable in enabling the candidate to reach a more perceptive understanding of the play, candidates cannot afford to devote whole paragraphs to such matters instead of focusing immediately on the demands of the question.

Much Ado About Nothing

There were no answers on this text from the Foundation Tier. Most Higher Tier candidates showed an impressive knowledge of the play and were well-trained to support their answer with regular and apt choice of quotation.

Question 2a

Higher Tier

*How does Shakespeare make a friendship or relationship between **two** characters interesting in *Much Ado About Nothing*?*

Most candidates chose Beatrice and Benedick or Claudio and Hero, showing a sound knowledge of how they interact in the play. However, few chose to show understanding of thematic issues among their reasons for interest, which would instantly have signalled a Band 2/3 level of perception. The main discriminator, therefore, proved to be the consistency of focus on explicit reasons for interest as opposed to reasons inferred from a largely narrative response, and the range of supportive detail and/or an attempt to analyse some of the interesting use of language.

Question 2b

Higher Tier

Explore some of the different ways in which Shakespeare presents men in Much Ado About Nothing.

Most answers focused on the main male characters, although a few included Dogberry. Again, candidates quickly demonstrated a wide-ranging knowledge of the play by focussing on two or more very different characters, but few included in their exploration the impressions we are thus given of the society of Messina or their thematic significance within the play. Otherwise, the main discriminator was the extent to which an answer focused on 'ways' in which the men are 'presented', to explore use of language and other dramatic devices (e.g. an analysis of some of the verbal exchanges involving Benedick or the cruelty of the language used by both Claudio and Leonato to insult Hero).

Romeo and Juliet

Question 3a

Higher Tier

*Explore the importance of pride and honour to **one** or **two** male characters in the play, Romeo and Juliet.*

Foundation Tier

Show how pride is important to ONE male character in the play, Romeo and Juliet.

Write about:

- *how pride is shown in what he does and says*
- *how his pride affects what happens later in the play.*

Most Centres had studied this play and most of the candidates who chose this question demonstrated a sound understanding of how pride motivated Tybalt, Mercutio, Romeo, or Capulet, and could provide significant quotation from different areas of the text to provide convincing support for the points made. Additional credit was given to those who went on to analyse the effects on other characters of some of the insulting language used. Few, however, in the Higher Tier, saw the invitation in the wording, 'Explore the importance' to look at thematic significance, for example, in terms of pride perpetuating the feud until only the sacrifice of the 'star-crossed lovers' could bring peace to Verona. Similarly, in showing how pride led Capulet to threaten his daughter, few saw this as a key link in the chain of events causing the final tragedy. There were some interesting responses to the conflicts and personal dilemmas caused by a sense of honour, particularly for Romeo, but also Capulet in his treatment of Tybalt. The least successful answers tended to give a narrative account of one or both of the scenes where Tybalt challenged Romeo, forgetting the need to analyse the role of pride, and, in the Foundation Tier, ignoring the second bullet which directed them to trace the resulting effects on what happens later in the play. Although Examiners mark positively, and welcome the more enthusiastic response that is found when candidates have the opportunity to write about a character they have enjoyed studying, those who focussed on Benvolio rarely found enough material to develop into a full response; similarly, it proved difficult to analyse Friar Lawrence in terms of pride convincingly. Candidates must choose wisely.

Question 3b

Higher Tier

*How does Shakespeare make the friendship or relationship between any **two** characters interesting in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*?*

*You may choose to focus your answer on **one** or **two** moments in the play.*

Foundation Tier

*Which friendship or relationship between any **two** characters interests you in the play, *Romeo and Juliet*?*

Write about what you find interesting in:

- *what they say*
- *what they do.*

The key discriminator in this question was the ability to focus explicitly on reasons for interest rather than simply producing a narrative account, and, in the Higher Tier, to begin to analyse how interest was achieved. Again, Examiners accepted the candidate's idea of what constituted a friendship or a relationship, and were pleased to encounter a number of different pairings, not just the obvious lovers. Again, choice could prove significant, especially where 'interesting' could lead to a discussion of related thematic issues or an analysis of language used. For example, some of the best answers on *Romeo and Juliet*'s relationship looked beyond the elements of love at first sight, the secrecy and danger, including the willingness to die for each other, to consider the dramatic interest in their role as 'star-crossed lovers', how we are reminded throughout that their love is doomed, and/or the difference in essence between their idea of love and the philosophy of Mercutio or the Nurse, as revealed in a brief analysis of some of the language used in the love scenes. Clearly there is only time to include such detail if the candidate sustains an analytical approach, confident that the Examiner is sufficiently familiar with the play not to need a narrative account of key events/actions; however, points made must be rooted in the text and supported by close reference and/or apt choice of short quotations and comment. Quotations running into several lines in length are given little credit, as the Examiner is left to identify what is important. Similarly, quotations that merely confirm facts are of limited value.

There were many pleasing Foundation Tier responses that gave clear reasons for interest and demonstrated an understanding of the play as a whole, rather than of just one moment. For example, using the Nurse and Juliet, less successful answers laboured the close mother/daughter element, and possibly the teasing, but better responses looked at the risks taken by the Nurse - her real concern that Romeo would be worthy of Juliet; her standing up to Lord Capulet, but then her advice to reconsider Paris: all interesting for the mixture of common sense and romantic optimism, loyalty and contradiction shown. Few in this tier thought to show interest in the effects of a relationship/friendship (e.g. that the Nurse 's betrayal would drive Juliet to take the potion; that Friar Lawrence's help and advice led indirectly to the lovers' deaths; that Lord Capulet's concern for his daughter's marriage led to her subterfuge and death).

POETRY pre-1914 or post-1914: Opening Lines (OCR)

For both Foundation and Higher Tier entries, to achieve a Band 4 mark, candidates must be able to show a straightforward understanding of the two poems selected, a generally consistent focus on the question, and the beginnings of a response to the poet's use of language/techniques. Although credit is given for any attempt to analyse language as relevant to the question, answers that fail to show understanding of the ideas/feelings/tone of the poem as a whole are self-limiting. Although there were some impressive responses, too often Examiners were disappointed by the considerable misunderstanding shown, giving the impression that these poems had not been recently revised, if studied at all during the course, or that candidates had

mistakenly turned to Section C War when they had been prepared for Section H The 1914-18 War (ii). Some responses made a valiant attempt to look at structure and other devices, but often lacked the total understanding or confidence required to explain their effect on the reader. Others produced a sound synopsis of the views offered by anti-war poets in Section H, but failed to look closely at any aspect of the poems themselves. Another weakness was to supply several lines of quotation followed by a simplistic 'translation', which showed at best a very basic understanding of the poet's views. Answers offering only one poem had to be penalised. The few who offered all three were usually self-limiting in that there was insufficient time to demonstrate the ability to analyse detail. Although answers were received from sections C, D and H in the Higher Tier, by far the most popular was Section H: Poetry of the 1914-1918 War (ii). A few candidates made an impressive attempt to compare their two poems with others in the Section or *Journey's End*. Although this demonstrated a scholarly grasp that would be admirable in Coursework, and augurs well for their future studies, it is unnecessary in an exam where they need to provide an in-depth analysis of two poems in 30 minutes' preparation and writing time. Similarly, in coursework combining Literature and Language requirements, candidates are required to compare poems. In this examination, a comparison is not required, and, although some candidates may find it helps them to sustain an analytical approach, the pitfalls were all too obvious for some who were reduced to identifying trivial similarities and differences instead of focusing on the question and analysing a few details in depth.

SECTION C: War

Question 4

Higher Tier

Explore some of the ways in which the poets convey suffering and loss caused by war, in **two** of the following poems.

Foundation Tier

How do the poets use words and images to show suffering and loss caused by war, in **two** of the following poems?

(page 37)	Byron	<i>The Destruction of Sennacherib</i>
(page 39)	Whitman	'Come up from the fields father...'
(page 40)	Dobell	<i>Tommy's Dead</i>

The best answers demonstrated a clear to perceptive understanding of at least one of their two poems. Well-meaning comparisons of the two farms in the latter two poems focussed on the care taken of one, and the neglect of the other, thus missing the significance of the contrast between the serene autumnal scene in Whitman and the threat presented by the arrival of the letter, and the strong sense of waste and desolation resulting from the slaughter of young men that is depicted in Dobell. Few candidates seemed able to understand the complexities of the Byron, although credit was given, nevertheless, where some apt details were selected as examples of suffering and loss, the most common being the analogy of summer and autumn leaves.

SECTION D: Town and Country

Question 5

Higher Tier

Explore some of the ways in which the poets create a sense of sadness and regret, in **two** of the following poems:

Foundation Tier

How do the poets use words and images to create a sense of sadness and regret, in **two** of the following poems?

(page 48)	Hardy	<i>Beeny Cliff</i>
(page 50)	Hopkins	<i>Binsey Poplars</i>
(page 53)	Meynell	<i>A Dead Harvest – in Kensington Gardens</i>

Most answers chose to compare the poems of Hopkins and Meynell. Few answers clearly identified Meynell's feelings about the futility of life in London and her nostalgia for a more rural way of life; however, several picked up a dislike of the town from 'graceless grass' and the funereal images used. Some were misled by the references to red and brown leaves to think of happy colourful images, ignoring the emphasis on 'rows of ... dead' that introduces them, and many confused the 'gold and grey' of the nostalgic view of the hay with colours found in the park, compounded by the failure to pick up on the effect of the irony in the title *Dead Harvest*. *Binsey Poplars* produced the best responses (except where candidates took the personification literally and referred to regret at his past treatment of a woman) as most could identify regret, sadness and indeed anger at the loss of the poplars and appreciate how the repetition and the harsh sounds used mirror the destruction caused. The loss of a loved one, and the emotion implied in the euphemism and dashes in the penultimate line of *Beeny Cliff* were clearly understood. Few candidates analysed the contrasts in any detail, or explained convincingly the effects of the alliteration used. Too many wasted valuable time identifying rhyme schemes and structure without appreciating their effect, or commenting on the use or absence of devices, such as alliteration, personification, similes, and metaphors, without explaining how they contributed to the sense of sadness and regret.

Section G: How It Looks From Here

Question 6

Higher Tier

Explore some of the ways in which the poets make us question how we look at things, in **two** of the following poems:

Foundation Tier

How do the poets use words and images to make us question how we look at things, in **two** of the following poems:

(page 92)	Duffy	<i>In Your Mind</i>
(page 95)	Plath	<i>Mirror</i>
(page 97)	McGough	<i>Defying Gravity</i>

There were no responses to this question in the Foundation Tier. The very few Higher Tier responses were disappointing in the level of understanding demonstrated, and rarely tackled two poems, which suggests the candidates had either chosen a section they had not studied, or had failed to revise poems studied some time ago. Although these are challenging poems, they do

offer candidates a range of examples of clever use of language to conjure up associations and make us question how we normally think about or interpret what we see.

SECTION F: Poetry of the 1914-1918 War (ii)

Question 7

Higher Tier

Discuss some of the ways in which **two** of the following poems explore feelings about death in war:

Foundation Tier

How do the poets use words and images to show feelings about death in war, in **two** of the following poems?

(page 108)	Cole	<i>The Falling Leaves</i>
(page 109)	Herbertson	<i>The Seed-Merchant's Son</i>
(page 110)	Owen	<i>The Parable of the Old Man and the Young</i>

This was by far the most popular section across both tiers. 'The Seed-Merchant's Son' proved the most accessible. Many candidates were able to identify sorrow at the loss of an only child, the physical and emotional toll on the Father, and the emphasis on the youthfulness and naïvety of the son. The best answers were able to comment on the ambiguity of the last section, and the associations with 'seed'. Although the main analogy in *The Falling Leaves* was understood, few candidates had the confidence to explore the implications of 'snowflakes', 'gallant multitude', 'strewed' and 'Flemish clay', resulting in an unbalanced response. Owen's poem proved a good discriminator. Those who could relate the analogy to those responsible for prolonging the war could identify feelings of anger, bitterness and frustration and then had scope to comment on the mingling of images of war with the Old Testament language of sacrifice. Few saw the significance of the reference to 'half the seed of Europe'. Less successful answers seemed unaware of how the original story of Abram had been adapted, or took the simplistic view that some fathers, in contrast to the seed-merchant, deliberately killed their sons or sent them to war in response to God's will. As in the other poetry sections, the hallmark of less successful responses was the propensity to paraphrase rather than to identify the poets' thoughts and feelings, or to resort to device-spotting even before identifying the feelings expressed. To be awarded marks in Bands 1 and 2, candidates needed to provide an immediate overview that clearly identified these feelings, before going on to select details of use of language and structure that conveyed these, with comment on their effectiveness throughout.

2434 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing (Coursework)

General Comments

This year a large number of Centres again submitted coursework for this series, indicating that the flexibility of an entry in January and then in June is still popular with a large number of Centres.

Again, it was generally pleasing to see the diligent and conscientious approach of Centres in applying the assessment criteria. Teachers seemed confident in the application of assessment criteria, and the detailed annotated comments on coursework showed the hard work of the majority of teachers in delivering the coursework component.

In terms of general administration, Centres tried hard to meet deadlines, although many had difficulty in getting folders promptly to Moderators as the deadline was the first week back after the Christmas holidays. A number of Centres claimed to have difficulties because staff were absent or missing and this slowed down the administration process considerably.

In the majority of cases, the coursework assessment forms were filled in accurately, and detailed teacher comments were helpful to Moderators in establishing what mark had been awarded. Most Centres showed the breakdown of marks for the writing piece, and this made the moderation process much easier.

Some minor points that Centres might like to address in the future are as follows:

- **MS1 Mark sheets:** Many Centres are still sending carbon copies of marks to Moderators that are illegible. These have to be returned to Centres for marks to be indicated clearly, before the moderation process can begin. It would be helpful if Centres checked the legibility of mark sheets before despatching them to Moderators.
- **Re-submission of coursework:** A number of centres were entering candidates for the January series who had added one more piece of work to their June 2007 entry. It would be helpful if Centres could indicate clearly on the cover sheet which pieces are, in fact, new work.
- **Application of assessment criteria:** Most teachers are now very skilled at applying the assessment criteria accurately. Where Centres' marks are too harsh or too lenient, it is often apparent that teachers have not annotated students' work and there is little or no evidence of marking in Bands, just an overall grade given at the end of the work. When this occurs, Moderators have reported that teachers seem to lose sight of the bands more easily, and regular referral back to the wording of the assessment criteria throughout the course might help eliminate this problem.

AO 3.2 READING

AO 3.2 (iv) and (v) again proved to be the biggest differentiators. Selection of material and making cross-references, 3.2 (iv), was something only the most able candidates could manage.

Response to Shakespeare

The majority of Centres again chose *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*, but there were also some interesting responses to *The Merchant of Venice*, *Twelfth Night* and some excellent responses to *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale* and even *Hamlet*.

Candidates seemed generally confident in understanding plot, themes and character, and the more successful candidates were able to comment on language and its effect.

Centres demonstrated a varied approach to the interpretation of 'Shakespeare's stagecraft'. Some Centres still interpret this as presenting detailed notes on costume and make up in a certain scene. Centres are reminded that 'theatricality' implies an awareness of the whole play, and candidates who submit detailed responses to specific scenes are often disadvantaged, when assessed against the criteria for higher bands, if they cannot make some reference to a specific scene in the context of the whole play.

Evaluating film versions or producing actor's notes were successful when highly able students rooted their responses in an understanding of text and dramatic effect, but more commonly answers focused on lighting and costumes, and showed only the most generalised knowledge of the text.

Generally, an increased number of candidates demonstrated an understanding of language and form, and the range of more challenging tasks which had been set helped to encourage candidates to move away from more narrative responses.

There was evidence of empathic responses from some candidates, the most popular being Romeo's or Juliet's diary. Centres are again advised that more able candidates who attempt 'diary' tasks often cannot meet all the assessment criteria necessary to achieve marks in the upper bands, since the diary format tends to elicit narrative responses .

It was encouraging to see many examples of challenging and exciting tasks, and teachers are to be congratulated for the wide range of stimuli that they have clearly developed to make the coursework unit on Shakespeare as interesting and demanding as they have.

Interestingly, this time, there was a limited return of the 'bulk' folder, but there were some Centres where candidates were submitting essays in response to Shakespeare that were over 40 sides in length. Some teachers clearly still feel that they should reward quantity rather than quality.

Response to Poetry

Again, as in June, 3.2 (v) was the greatest differentiator. Candidates are still showing their expertise in identifying structural and presentational devices but cannot always then go on to show their effects upon the reader.

Most Centres are now only comparing two poems. The most popular pairings were again *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Dulce et Decorum est*, Blake's *London* and Wordsworth's *Westminster Bridge*, or love poetry.

Generally, Centres are to be congratulated for the stimulating and challenging responses that they have enabled candidates to achieve. Some of the best responses were from candidates

who had clearly been able to comment critically on both structure and effect and showed appreciation of the function of form and language in a way that was personal and enriching for the reader.

AO3.3 Writing

It was encouraging to see the diversity of responses again, with some candidates relishing the opportunity to display their creative talent. Centres seem to have encouraged more candidates to be aware that quality of response is not always commensurate with the length of it. As a result there were fewer lengthy mini-novels and more succinct, sharper pieces.

Moderators reported a generally higher standard overall, with an interesting range of narrative allowing candidates to write creatively and engagingly. This time there were fewer autobiographical pieces and fewer empathic responses to texts. This led to more candidates attempting tasks where they could demonstrate a response which could meet the whole range of assessment criteria. For this examination at least, 'The Assassin' also seemed to have died a long-overdue death!

Overall, Centres are to be congratulated for their generally consistent application of the assessment criteria in relation to a range of interesting and demanding tasks. It would seem that increasing numbers of Centres have embedded effective means of teaching coursework into their long term planning at Key Stage 4, and there is extensive evidence of effective implementation of assessment criteria and internal standardisation. Teachers are to be complimented on their hard work in providing practical and supportive feedback through detailed annotation of their candidates' work, and for their dedication in making the coursework component an interesting and challenging element of the GCSE course.

2435 Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

The trend continued from last year's January series, with a number of Centres entering an entire cohort of candidates, rather than just seeing this series as a 'resit' session. However, still for many Centres, the January examination is an opportunity for candidates to improve on their June result, often working in remodelled groups and on different activities.

The activities covered by many of the January candidates crossed over with their Sixth Form studies, giving a relevance and immediacy to their performances; this often resulted in a marked improvement in achievement. There was evidence, therefore, of a range and variety of appropriate activities having been undertaken, many of them based on non-literary material. Often, the added boost came from developed confidence drawn from a more sympathetic and responsive audience. Extra maturity resulted in an ability to analyse and reflect on experience and handle challenging material, synthesise complex items, organise points and challenge assumptions. Comments from Centres on performance often highlighted added skills in sensitive and sympathetic listening as a factor in improvement and a willingness to encourage quieter members to participate and then build on their contributions.

The drama-focused context was often the most successful. Candidates, having been through the process, seemed to be clearer about what was required and more skilled in adopting and sustaining a role realistically and convincingly.

This point underlines the advice to Centres, to teach the skills needed for this component and to give candidates opportunities to develop and hone their skills. Many Centres now refer to Speaking and Listening as an integral part of Key Stage 3 work, feeding into Key Stage 4.

A key part of the process is record-keeping. The majority of Centres maintain careful, thorough and clearly presented records, with a detailed and informative picture of progress achieved during the course; teachers' judgements are criteria-referenced and marks accurately awarded. A standard format for record-keeping places the process within a systematic framework and ensures that all the required information is supplied to the Moderator. The vast majority of Centres used the OCR form; those Centres, which did not, nevertheless, supplied the necessary information.

Centres are reminded that one context should be matched to one range of purpose triplets – the primary focus – even though there may be elements of other strands. The assessment criteria have been drawn up in this way.

Internal standardisation procedures continue to be secure and in many instances, rigorous and thorough. Attention, nevertheless, is drawn to the Inter-Board Training and Guidance DVDs and videos, which should be used by Centres to confirm their own internally-set standards and which provide vital support material for small Centres and teachers working in isolation.

As regards the administration of this component, the majority of Centres were problem-free, but there was a sizeable minority where all the relevant paperwork was not in place by the published deadline. As Centres move to systems where non-specialist Examination Officers are increasingly the point of reference and dispatchers of coursework material to Moderators, it is important that descriptions of procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties. Departmental co-operation in assembling and checking the documentation is gratefully acknowledged and greatly facilitated the process of moderation, enabling Moderators to meet their deadlines.

Report on the Units taken in January 2008

Finally, this component is often a real strength for candidates and this is a testimony to all the hard work and dedication of the teachers involved in preparing their students; many thanks as always for your continuing commitment.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
English (Specification Code 1900)
January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2431/1	Raw	63				48	40	32	25	18	0
	UMS	62				54	45	36	27	18	0
2431/2	Raw	90	73	67	61	55	49	46			0
	UMS	90	81	72	63	54	45	41			0
2432/1	Raw	63				56	48	40	33	26	0
	UMS	62				54	45	36	27	18	0
2432/2	Raw	90	78	71	63	56	49	45			0
	UMS	90	81	72	63	54	45	41			0
2433/1	Raw	41				34	28	22	17	12	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2433/2	Raw	60	53	47	40	33	27	24			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0
2434	Raw	40	37	33	28	23	17	12	7	2	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2435	Raw	40	37	33	27	21	16	11	7	3	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1900	300	270	240	210	180	150	120	90	60	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
	3.7	14.6	29.2	57.4	82.9	92.6	97.6	99.8	100	3602

3602 candidates were entered for aggregation this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

14 – 19 Qualifications (General)

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

For staff training purposes and as part of our quality assurance programme your call may be recorded or monitored

Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations
is a Company Limited by Guarantee
Registered in England
Registered Office; 1 Hills Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EU
Registered Company Number: 3484466
OCR is an exempt Charity

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

© OCR 2008

