



**AQA Certificates**  
**June 2012**

**English Literature**  
**(Specification 8710)**

**8710/2F**

***Report on the Examination***

---

Further copies of this Report on **the Examination** are available from: [aqa.org.uk](http://aqa.org.uk)

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

**Copyright**

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered schools/colleges for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to schools/colleges to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).  
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

## Certificate in English Literature

### Principal Examiner's Report - 8710/2F - June 2012

With the first examination of a new qualification there is always a certain amount of anxiety as to how teachers and, more importantly, students will respond to the challenges and opportunities it offers. It was therefore very pleasing to see clear evidence in students' responses across the exam and coursework options that schools have embraced the qualification's philosophy of freedom, flexibility and enjoyment.

There were excellent responses to the texts across the ability range: the higher tier papers gave students the opportunity to explore the texts in detail and the freedom to take their responses in different directions; similarly the foundation tier was accessible while having the flexibility to reward students who developed their own readings supported by the texts. Similarly, the best coursework was produced by students who had been encouraged to explore a wide range of, often original, text combinations bringing out impressive and independent responses.

Reflecting this, the students scoring in the higher bands in both tiers demonstrated the ability to interpret the texts they have read independently and make often insightful connections between them and the contexts they contain. This is at the heart of what the qualification aims to achieve and we will continue to reward original and thoughtful responses.

#### **Paper 2 F – General comments**

Given that the Certificate is a new qualification, it is not surprising that entries were relatively small and of all the entry options foundation paper 2 was the smallest. However, it is still possible to draw a number of general conclusions from the range of scripts entered. The questions and selection of texts proved accessible for the students who seemed well prepared, engaged and, in most cases, relished the flexibility the questions offered. The students were able to express their ideas and explore areas of the text that were of interest to them.

Group B texts proved the most popular, with the most common pairing being *Lord of the Flies* and *I'm the King of the Castle*. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was also well represented. The responses were varied, with the combination of texts bringing out different themes, features and ideas in relation to the questions. Where Group A texts were addressed, the vast majority of students chose to compare *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Frankenstein*, though a minority combined *Frankenstein* with *The Tempest*.

Due to the limited number of entries for this component it is not possible to comment on the full range of possible text combinations; however all combinations seen provided rich opportunities for students to address the questions. The choice of texts did not seem to be a significant factor in determining level of difficulty, which suggests the questions were able to provide a clear central focus or idea for students to respond to while being broad enough to be equally applicable across different text combinations.

Significantly, it was extremely rare for any students to have been prepared to answer on the poetry texts in either group. One candidate compared *Frankenstein* with *Christabel*, and while a reading was developed and interesting connections drawn (they were able to develop a reading and draw some interesting connections), even here coverage was heavily weighted towards the narrative text. There is considerable potential for rich comparisons between poetry and prose texts, particularly in relation to language and structure, and we hope that in the longer term poetry texts will be better represented.

The two part format of questions in foundation tier has been designed to help students structure their responses and for the most part this was enabling. However, there were some examples of students who had covered all the points in part a, often merely repeating points they had already made in the second half of their essay. Though students were not penalised

for this – parts (a) and (b) were marked holistically – it demonstrates the importance of reading both aspects of the question and planning responses accordingly. There was little evidence of rubric infringements- the sole example being a candidate who chose to answer a Group A question referring to Group B texts.

### **Assessment objectives**

**AO1** requires students to respond critically and imaginatively to texts and the better answers were able to do this. Where less successful, responses tended to be more formulaic, focused on reproducing sometimes only partially digested ideas rather than using taught content as a springboard for developing independent responses. All students were able to support their ideas with evidence and examples, though in the better responses these were concise and precisely linked to the point being made. Weaker students tended to copy out larger, if still appropriate, chunks of text, sometimes leaving the marker to extract what was most relevant. In the responses of weaker students there was also a tendency to use the ‘Point, Evidence, Explanation’ model of comment mechanically, with the explanation being little more than a restatement of the point. In many cases, this model seemed to hinder rather than help students as they wasted time labouring and/or repeating points that they had already been credited for.

Of the assessment objectives there was least explicit coverage of **AO2** – language, structure and form. Each question included an aspect asking students to respond to how the writer presents or shows characters, themes, ideas etc. While the best responses were able to take a broader view of an area such as narrative voice and illustrate it with a few well chosen examples, many gave a large number of ‘micro examples’ which, as noted in relation to AO1, didn’t show any more evidence of understanding than the first couple.

Too often students dealt with **AO3** - addressing comparisons and links between the texts - implicitly, with the weakest responses effectively providing two parallel ‘mini-essays’ assuming the connections to be self-evident and leaving the marker to draw their own conclusions. This is particularly disappointing in a paper that is specifically built around the rich possibilities offered by related but distinct texts. Only the very best answers attempted to organise their responses thematically – taking an area or idea and exploring how both texts dealt with it – whereas most tended to deal with the texts separately with varying degrees of linkage and explicit comparison. Better responses linked the texts by focusing on exploring smaller number of telling points rather than merely pointing out similarities and differences.

Students approached **AO4** – social, cultural and historical context – in a range of different ways. The stronger responses explored contexts that emerged directly from the events and characters or addressed it through the themes and ideas they chose to write about. The majority focused more on how a text reflected the historical and social contexts in which it was set or written, rather than how the text engages with or responds to it. Positively however, there was relatively little evidence of students including ‘bolt-on’ paragraphs of undigested and largely irrelevant biographical or historical material. Students and teachers may benefit from taking a broader view of what ‘context’ means, as too often this is interpreted as simply examining the context in which the text was written or set, whereas a more abstract context such as ‘morality’ would be equally valid to explore.