



GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**ENGLISH LITERATURE
AS/Advanced**

JANUARY 2010

Statistical Information

This booklet contains summary details for each unit: number entered; maximum mark available; mean mark achieved; grade ranges. *N.B. These refer to 'raw marks' used in the initial assessment, rather than to the uniform marks reported when results are issued.*

Annual Statistical Report

The annual *Statistical Report* (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

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ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education
January 2010
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

LT1: Poetry and Drama

Principal Examiner: Cary Archard

Unit Statistics

The following statistics include all candidates entered for the unit, whether or not they 'cashed in' for an award. The attention of centres is drawn to the fact that the statistics listed should be viewed strictly within the context of this unit and that differences will undoubtedly occur between one year and the next and also between subjects in the same year.

Unit	Entry	Max Mark	Mean Mark
LT1	3335	60	34.9

Grade Ranges

A	47
B	39
C	32
D	25
E	18

N.B. The marks given above are raw marks and not uniform marks.

LT1: Poetry and Drama 1

General Comments

The majority of candidates were well prepared: they showed clear knowledge and understanding of their texts and confidently addressed the relevant assessment objectives. The majority also used their time sensibly. This could be seen in the careful and detailed planning which often preceded the responses, especially many of the strongest. It could also be seen in the way candidates divided up their time in relation to the Sections, giving appropriate time and space to Section A which is worth 40 of the 60 marks for this paper. There was some reduction in the number of very long responses that had been a feature of previous exams. However, examiners felt that there was still a small number of rather rambling answers. The increased attention to careful planning has also led to a clear reduction in the number of responses which included irrelevant material.

Where there was a drift towards narrative in some essays, it was often linked to candidates' lack of focus on the question because of over reliance on prepared material. For example, responses to Q6 on Plath and Hughes sometimes seemed reluctant to let go of prepared material on the poets' attitudes to nature with the result that their responses tended to be general and lacked sufficient focus on 'trees and flowers'. Q8 sometimes elicited responses of a similar nature where candidates began with a focus on 'voices' but then drifted into more general discussions of the poetry of Duffy and Pugh.

The majority of candidates now have a very clear idea of the relationship between core and partner texts which has improved the quality of connections (AO3) so that most candidates in this exam developed their links beyond similarities of surface features. Candidates showed more skill in using their partner texts to explore and 'illuminate' their ideas about the core texts.

There has been a significant improvement in the organisation of responses. In Section A, many now start with clear, focussed opening paragraphs which offer a brief overview and suggest appropriate poems, then continue with discussions of key concepts, avoiding the more mechanical approach of moving through poems line by line, stanza by stanza. It was also noticeable how candidates were careful to pay particular attention to the strand of AO3 which calls for evidence of other interpretations – the strand which some examiners felt had been omitted by a considerable number of candidates in last summer's responses. This was further evidence of teachers and students becoming more confident in their approach to the new specification. There were many perceptive and delicate discussions of language, form and structure (AO2) but also a significant minority of responses where candidates drifted into a more descriptive approach, spending too much time summarising meaning or looking at surface features, neglecting to examine how the poets' effects were achieved.

Examiners saw the clearest improvement in responses to Section B. Most students now saw the importance of AO4; there was an improvement in the way candidates made links to the rest of the play which were more precise and developed in relation to the question, though some weaker responses still referred too generally and vaguely to the rest of the play. Candidates also seemed more adept at handling wider contextual influences, the stronger responses integrating historical and cultural contextual factors into the body of their argument, linking them to the extract and relevant parts of the play, while weaker answers struggled to make connections to the question. It was also pleasing to see more attention to dramatic techniques, though there was still a significant number of candidates who lost marks for AO2 because they neglected to refer to stagecraft. References to 'novel' and 'reader' instead of play/drama and audience were often indications of this. When writing about audience response, comments about how an audience might react should be supported by detailed reference to some aspects of tone and pace of dialogue, setting, lighting, stage directions and movement. The strongest responses selected relevant features from the extract, giving that prominence before moving on to make relevant connections to other parts of the play.

Section A: Poetry post-1900

All questions were addressed. Boland and Pollard remains the choice of a small number of centres. Eliot and Yeats were more popular. The other four pairs were approximately equally popular.

T.S. Eliot: Selected Poems (Core text)

(Prufrock and Other Observations, The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ariel Poems)

W.B. Yeats: Selected Poems (Partner text)

There were some outstanding answers to Questions 1 and 2. Responses to Q1 often linked death to political and cultural decay, with candidates arguing that Yeats saw death in more personal terms. Q2 was less popular but produced thoughtful discussions of the 'spiritual' significance of visits in 'Journey of the Magi', 'Prufrock' and 'The Waste Land'. Some responses lacked focus where candidates struggled with an over-abundance of cultural and biographical knowledge.

Philip Larkin: The Whitsun Weddings (Core text)

Dannie Abse: Welsh Retrospective (Partner text)

Larkin on love (Q3) was the more popular. Candidates often saw Larkin as sceptical about the value of love, as detached and disillusioned; Abse was described as more personal, more romantic, more positive about love. Examiners were impressed by the range of poems used to answer this question: 'Love Songs in Age', 'An Arundel Tomb' were popular, but candidates also used 'Broadcast', 'Faith Healing', 'Talking in Bed' and 'Wild Oats' very effectively. There was some tendency to make rather simplistic connections between the poems and the poets' lives, for example, Larkin couldn't commit/Abse was happily married. These tended not to improve the quality of argument or analysis. (The word 'simplistic' was often used to mean uncomplicated instead of the more appropriate word 'simple'.) Q4 tended to be done very well or rather poorly. 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'Here', 'Essential Beauty' and 'Sunny Prestatyn' were all used to examine Larkin's distaste for some aspects of modern life – materialism and ugliness in particular. Weaker responses found it difficult to maintain the focus on society and tended to drift towards describing Larkin's feelings about love and death while trying to link these, not always successfully, to society.

Sylvia Plath: Selected Poems (Core text)

Ted Hughes: Poems Selected by Armitage (Partner text)

Questions 5 and 6 were equally popular. There were some wonderful responses to both. Although some answers to Q6 strayed into writing in a general way about nature, there were many delicate responses comparing Plath's use of trees and flowers to reflect her own inner turmoils, family relationships, mental and emotional states with Hughes' more positive emphasis, as candidates saw it, on their power and beauty. Weaker responses to Q5 tended to list examples of looking, hearing, etc. from poems where Plath referred to her senses. Stronger answers explored the ways in which Plath and Hughes responded to the world and to people through their bodies and often took issue with the notion that a poetry of sensations excluded thought and ideas.

Carol Ann Duffy: Selected Poems (Core text)
(*Standing Female Nude, The Other Country, The World's Wife*)
Sheenagh Pugh: Selected Poems (Partner text)

Questions 7 and 8 were equally popular and there were strong responses to both. Candidates wrote with real engagement about the ways in which Duffy writes about 'women's experiences' and used an impressively wide range of poems. Question 8 on 'voices' produced thoughtful discussions of Duffy's use of tone and language to create personas and stronger responses were able to link their comments to Duffy's social and cultural concerns, and to humour. Weaker responses to both questions tended to drift into character studies or narrative.

Seamus Heaney: New Selected Poems (Core text)
(*Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark, The Haw Lantern*)
Owen Sheers: Skirrid Hill (Partner text)

Questions 8 and 9 produced many thoughtful and sensitive responses and were also equally popular. Candidates always seem to respond well to Heaney's rich language and clear forms. Perhaps the choice of 'Digging' and 'Follower', rather similar poems, for both questions (on farming and relatives) tended to narrow the range of some answers, leading to some repetition. In response to Question 10, there were some very moving discussions of 'Clearances' and 'Poem'.

Eavan Boland: Selected Poems (Core text)
(*New Territory, The War Horse, The Journey*)
Clare Pollard: Look, Clare! Look! (Partner text)

The limited number of responses to Questions 11 and 12 make it difficult to generalise or offer comments. Nevertheless, some examiners saw engaged and appropriate responses to both questions.

Section B: Drama post-1990

Strong, enthusiastic student responses to the drama texts has been a feature of this specification from the start. Clearly teachers are approaching these texts in lively ways and students are responding. It was good to see an improvement in candidates' discussion of stagecraft throughout responses in this section.

David Hare: *Murmuring Judges*

The questions on 'Murmuring Judges' were equally popular. Strongest responses linked their discussions of the relationship of Sandra and Barry (Q13) or the role of the 'criminals' (Q14) to Hare's interest in the criminal justice system and to social and political attitudes of the time. They were also adept at making appropriate links to other parts of the play to show how Hare's use of stagecraft 'presented' the 'criminals' and the relationship between Barry and Sandra. Weaker responses tended towards character studies or narrative.

David Mamet: *Oleanna*

There were some very focussed responses to the questions on *Oleanna*. Students knew the play very well and often made excellent references to other parts of the play to strengthen their answers. However, there was some tendency to discuss John's view of teaching apart from 'presentation' which in some cases minimised reference to AO2. Where candidates quite rightly related their discussion to issues of power, gender and communication, it was important that they still kept the focus of their response on 'teaching'. This was not always the case. Candidates seemed less well prepared for Q16. Some candidates who began with a clear focus on 'social and economic differences' drifted into character studies or descriptions of the power struggle between John and Carol. Stronger responses were able to explore the ways in which Carol's different economic status affected her responses to both John and the institution and how changes in her social status affected the outcome of the play. It is important that candidates focus on the key words of the question throughout their answers.

Brian Friel: *Dancing at Lughnasa*

There were some marvellous responses to *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Many candidates successfully integrated their knowledge of the state of Ireland in the Thirties and early 1990s into their discussions of the play. Maggie was discussed in relation to religion, work and popular culture and most candidates supported their comments about audience reaction with references to stagecraft, especially Maggie's tone and movement on stage. Some weaker responses, however, became over-descriptive and tended to offer little more than character studies. Stronger responses to Q17, on the play's ending, were able to make convincing links with the rest of the play in terms of characters and themes and often explored thoughtfully the effect of the ending's stagecraft on an audience.

Tom Stoppard: *Arcadia*

The questions on *Arcadia* were equally popular. The strongest responses to Q19 linked Lady Croom to the Classical v Romantic debate, to the theme of love and to the play's humour. There tended to be too much assertion about how an audience might respond to her, rather than more careful attention to Stoppard's presentation of Lady Croom on stage. Q20 produced some outstanding answers: candidates pointed out that Byron might not actually appear as a character on stage but the sense of his presence was still crucial to the plot and play's development and to the themes of Romanticism, love and historical research. *Arcadia* is often considered a 'difficult' play but the evidence of the exam suggests that students often engage very successfully with the rich context of ideas that have influenced Stoppard's writing of this drama.

Arthur Miller: *Broken Glass*

Broken Glass was a very popular choice of drama text. Candidates' responses seemed to be equally divided between the questions. There were some very focussed discussions of Harriet's role in the play, many candidates taking the opportunity in particular to discuss the influence on Miller of Jewish, gender and 1930s contexts in the creation of her character. Weaker responses tended to drift into character studies and repetition. There was a similar problem with Q22 where some candidates wrote character studies of Sylvia and Hyman instead of focussing on their relationship's importance to the issues and contexts of the play. There was a small number of candidates who digressed into accounts of Miller's life in this question: they saw Hyman and Sylvia as representations of Miller and Monroe but were not able to show how this speculative use of biographical information clearly furthered their understanding of the issues and contexts of the play.

Diane Samuels: Kindertransport

The *Kindertransport* questions, as in the two previous exams, produced some enthusiastic and engaged responses. Both questions elicited answers which demonstrated students' detailed and thorough knowledge of this play. Strongest responses focussed clearly on the 'role' of Helga throughout the play and avoided repetition and the limitations of a character study. Similarly, the most impressive responses to Q24 were able to focus on how Samuels's use of contextual influences, past and present, affected her presentation of the central issues of the play.

ENGLISH LITERATURE
General Certificate of Education
January 2010
Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

LT4: Poetry and Drama 2

Principal Examiner: Stephen Purcell

Unit Statistics

The following statistics include all candidates entered for the unit, whether or not they 'cashed in' for an award. The attention of centres is drawn to the fact that the statistics listed should be viewed strictly within the context of this unit and that differences will undoubtedly occur between one year and the next and also between subjects in the same year.

Unit	Entry	Max Mark	Mean Mark
LT4	624	80	46.1

Grade Ranges

A	62
B	51
C	41
D	31
E	21

N.B. The marks given above are raw marks and not uniform marks.

LT4: Poetry and Drama 2

General Comments

Even in an entry of just over 600 candidates, there was a remarkable spread of responses and essays were seen on all of the set poets and all of the plays except the *Richard II / Edward II* pairing. Each of the five poetry questions and each of the five unseen pieces in Section A attracted its fair share of responses and it was frequently the case that candidates from the same centre (all of whom had studied the same poetry text) selected different essay tasks and different poems for comparative reference. This is a very pleasing outcome and evidence of the fact that, in a large number of cases, the paper has encouraged fresh and independent work which is informed by teaching and individual research rather than the regurgitation of rigidly pre-prepared material. However, as noted below, there were some who took a narrow approach to their texts and seemed determined to wrench their notes into a shape to address the task whatever contortions and distortions that involved. This was most apparent when it came to making connections with the unseen poetry where the least confident writers tended to impose a meaning on the poems which suited the purposes of the chosen essay rather than reading closely in search of genuinely valid and relevant material.

Most responses to the drama questions showed a commendable depth of knowledge of both core and partner texts. This is particularly impressive bearing in mind that in this first entry preparation time has been short. In weaker responses there tended to be a similar, descriptive approach to both texts in the pair and clearly more needs to be done in guiding candidates towards appropriate ways of using the partner text for the purposes of illumination. Essays which got bogged down in lengthy accounts of the partner texts did not leave themselves time for the close consideration of the core. Interestingly, some candidates who had mastered the skill of making lighter, comparative reference to poems in Section A abandoned this approach in Section B and attempted to earn their marks through displays of knowledge rather than relevant discussion and analysis.

Sadly, there was a significant number of inaccurate, badly expressed and badly structured essays in both sections of the paper. In many of these cases, candidates had lost sight of the basic principles of organization and accurate expression which, considering they have found their ways successfully through GCSE and AS levels, is a surprise. In all but the highest Band, there is a clear need for more rigorous practice of literary essay writing which, taking account of AO1's demand for "creative" engagement with texts, should include strategies for *investigating* rather than over-simplifying what has been read.

Section A

Q.1 All of the poetry texts were brought to bear upon this question (including *Lyrical Ballads* which only a few candidates had prepared) and there were some excellent responses. The best essays explored the idea of "disturbs" and "comforts" very fully and took it well beyond the level of emotional response, showing how ideas and attitudes could also be uncomfortable, disturbing or falsely comforting in an intellectual sense. There was particularly impressive writing on Chaucer, Donne, Milton and Blake. Common faults were that enthusiastic debaters spent too long anatomizing the terms of the question, and weaker writers took the opportunity to give an account of what they had found moving or disturbing in their poems. Connections were made with all of the unseen pieces but *Turns* and *The Fair Singer* proved very popular.

- Q.2** The invitation to address style in poetry was accepted by most who responded to this question and there were some very thoughtful and carefully considered approaches to all of the set texts. Milton is quite a popular choice for centres and there were some excellent answers on *Paradise Lost Book ix*, but, there were also some ambitious responses to Chaucer. Common faults were that some who had learned their technical terminology carefully used this title as a vehicle for a “knowledge parade” at the expense of genuine creative engagement with the works and others made outrageous claims for the power of features such as rhyming couplets or enjambment to deliver special meaning. Many chose to make connections with *Epithalamion*, *The Fair Singer* and *Night In The Old Home* but all of the unseens were used.
- Q.3** This was a very popular choice and candidates came at it in a number of ways. There was some particularly good work on Milton and Chaucer but some chose to explore Donne’s light-hearted approaches and make good connections with *The Fair Singer* while others looked at the social and religious dimensions of Blake’s work and made productive connections with *Turns*. There were some responses to *A Musical Instrument* (not as many as expected) and when writing about the Wife of Bath some ambitious candidates managed some interesting connections to *Epithalamion*. Problems occurred when candidates read *The Fair Singer* in too literal a way and saw it as a case of actual mortal combat, or made very rigid and assertive statements about the contexts of Chaucer and Milton.
- Q.4** There was a little uncertainty over the meaning of “imagery” and while examiners were flexible some claims were difficult to accept. Some candidates became distracted and offered lengthy accounts of characters or events in the poems and it was surprising how few of the responses were clear in their identification of images and associated abstract ideas or confident in their discussion of poetic effects. This was unexpected and may be a timely reminder to us that these issues could benefit from a more direct approach in the course of teaching. An important note here is that many who wrote about Chaucer drew extensively upon *The General Prologue* portrait of the Wife in their answers: some offered over a page of discussion of her appearance and clothing before they mentioned the set text which is, of course *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*. Brief, illuminating cross-reference to other texts is, of course, welcome but candidates must be advised to keep their attention firmly focused on the texts set for detailed study. All of the unseens provided stimulating material for this title and choices were fairly evenly distributed.
- Q.5** This was a popular title and produced some of the strongest and weakest work in this section. All candidates saw the opportunities to address relevant contexts but weaker responses were tempted into superficial and assertive history essays combined with fairly unhelpful general writing about contemporary society and the way poetry did or did not fit comfortably into it. The challenge here was to address the contexts while keeping a close “creative” eye on the literary features of the poems. This task above all others brought out the stern moralists in our candidates and there were some quite surprising judgements passed on the unacceptability and immorality both of the poets and their subjects. Candidates should be encouraged to take a more balanced and humane view! Most of the unseens were used for comparative reference but *The Fair Singer* and *Epithalamion* proved very popular.

General Points

- There were some worrying rubric infringements where candidates used one (or more!) of the unseens as an exercise in practical criticism. A small number made no mention at all of a text which had been studied.
- Less disastrous, but worth noting, was a tendency to consider the unseen passage at length and then move on to a cursory and poorly supported treatment of the set text. On the other side of the coin, some candidates wrote extensively about their set text and then added a few remarks on the unseen passage at the end of their essays.
- Colleagues in any doubt about these issues are advised to consult the relevant section of the Teacher's Guide or LT4 Guidance.
- Candidates hoping to demonstrate "detailed critical understanding" (AO2) must be sure that they explain and support their readings (particularly of Blake) and do not simply assert a single meaning which suits their purposes.
- We have been very clear about reference to other readings (AO3) and said that candidates can address this in a number of acceptable ways such as direct quotation of a relevant remark from a named critic; acknowledgement that readings might differ (with support) or offering alternative interpretations in the course of discussion. Candidates must be advised to be sensible about this aspect of their writing as there were far too many airy claims for what anonymous critics had said when what seemed to be happening was that the candidate was presenting a personal view and attributing it to others. This gave rise to some weak but often entertaining writing such as this on *The Wife of Bath*: "As one critic said, 'It's a timeless classic – I couldn't put it down. The Wife is loud and proud, a proper tart with a heart'."
- Candidates must be advised that the inclusion of critical remarks (however high their quality) cannot earn credit unless they are relevant to the question under consideration.
- A little more care needs to be taken with the use of oversimplified commentaries on the texts – particularly when it comes to contexts. A view that was fairly widely held through several centres was that the Wife of Bath didn't give a hoot for any of her husbands because she had married them at the church door and had not even bothered walking as far as the altar! Some used this as support for her hasty/lusty nature. Another group of candidates were convinced that the fact that the knight in the Wife of Bath's Tale even dares to approach the women dancing in the woods means that he is an unreformed rapist! I think we can agree that he is not a particularly savoury character, but at this point in the tale he is seeking any means to find an answer to his quest and save his life. Close attention to the texts will always produce more reliable readings.

Section B

King Lear and Oedipus Rex

There was a distinct preference for the question on identity over that on the dramatic use of the Fool but good work was seen on both titles. As mentioned earlier, there was a tendency for less confident candidates to attempt a re-shaping of points they had hoped to make on monarchy or parent/child relations when they were dealing with “identity” and this resulted in some loose writing. There were some scholarly responses to the role of the Fool and the Greek Chorus but these were very few and many others fell back on the unsatisfactory strategy of describing the Fool’s character (likeable, amusing etc.) and largely ignoring his dramatic function (AO2). Few seemed well informed about the role of Fools in the courts of kings or the special circumstances of the Chorus and consequently missed opportunities to address AO4.

Hamlet and The Revenger’s Tragedy

Betrayal proved very popular and while there were some excellent responses on moral responsibility some candidates were thrown by the idea and reduced it to a consideration of examples of moral/immoral behaviour. The best responses integrated work on all the AOs as they looked at Hamlet himself as betrayer and betrayed while taking account of other subtle dimensions such as Claudius’ betrayal of Laertes’ youth and vulnerability. There was some very mature and sophisticated writing for such an early stage of the course. Weaker responses to both titles tended to list and narrate.

Measure for Measure and The Duchess of Malfi

Significantly less popular than the other three pairings, these two texts still stimulated mature and well-considered responses. In the few essays seen, candidates showed a good grasp of the core/partner idea and, in most cases, resisted the temptation to give lengthy accounts of life in Amalfi. There were responses to both titles but “disguise and deception” was slightly more attractive to candidates than “moderation and restraint”. In both cases, the best essays focused upon dramatic technique and paid close attention to language in their considerations of the relevant themes.

The Tempest and Doctor Faustus

Power and the supernatural were the focal points for the two essays and both proved popular and accessible across the range of ability. The weaker essays tended to list examples of the use of power or instances of the supernatural, but just about all of the essays had some sensible remarks to make about Prospero’s power or relationship with the supernatural in the light of *Doctor Faustus*. Under both titles, there was some very mature consideration of the relative moral standing of Prospero and Faustus and some detailed discussions of dramatic techniques and performance elements which underpin both themes. There was also some very well informed and convincing writing on the different contexts of the two plays and how these factors had influenced attitudes towards power and the supernatural.

Richard II and Edward II

No scripts seen.

General Points

- Several of the general points made under Section A (particularly those which refer to the use of critical views and over-simplified interpretations) apply here as well.
- Weaker candidates must be persuaded to see the texts as plays for performance and to avoid giving the impression that they were written for the express purpose of providing material for an examination answer.
- In a similar way, avoid suggesting that the plays are written deliberately to illuminate each other.
- In all but the very best essays, better strategies are needed for contextualizing points (within the text) without resorting to lengthy narrative.

Congratulations are due to all those who have prepared candidates in so short a time for an examination which, it is generally agreed, offers rigorous stretch and challenge. Many candidates have performed to an exceptionally high standard and for those who have not, the opportunity to have tested their knowledge and skills before the Summer should prove invaluable.



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