



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE

NOVEMBER 2012

Statistical Information

The Examiners' Report may refer in general terms to statistical outcomes. Statistical information on candidates' performances in all examination components (whether internally or externally assessed) is provided 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.

ENGLISH/ENGLISH LANGUAGE

General Certificate of Secondary Education

November 2012

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FOUNDATION TIER

Unit 1 (Reading)

As with the Higher Tier paper, this paper was produced at very short notice, but seemed to engage candidates and many showed the range of reading skills appropriate for this tier. The material was accessible and most candidates were able to show at least a basic understanding of the texts and some ability to see the links between the two texts. Many candidates found the newspaper article interesting but at times allowed themselves to be distracted from the questions to offer a personal response about the boy who appeared to live entirely on a diet of jam sandwiches.

The questions followed a reasonably familiar pattern, and most candidates understood that on this tier tracking the text carefully would earn them good reward, though where the question demanded that candidates take the extra step into very specific detail or analysis, only the more able readers scored highly. Most candidates completed the paper, but it was disappointing to see there were still candidates who had struggled with time management in the examination and failed to complete or reach the final question.

Q.1 This question required careful reading of the whole text and the selection of specific detail. There were three parts to the question but two of the questions required selection across the text and this proved demanding for less accurate readers. The first part of the question asked candidates to identify two of the foods that Craig Flatman had refused to eat. Most gained the two marks available and as the details could be selected from the second paragraph of the text, this provided a gentle introduction to the rest of the paper.

However, the second part of the question, to identify five foods that Craig had eaten or attempted to eat, proved more demanding. Part of the reason for this was undoubtedly that the details had to be selected from across the whole text and it was not possible to score more than two of the five marks available without careful reading and selection of relevant information from a number of paragraphs. Some candidates also misread the question, and merely repeated in more detail the answer to the first part of the question. The question also demanded some precision in writing the answer and a number of candidates provided only part answers and scored less well than more careful responses. Candidates who were prepared to keep the question uppermost as they scanned the text found that Craig ate not only a bowl of chocolate cereal every day but also chocolate cake. As they tracked through the text some candidates were misled into assuming he had eaten both burgers and

chips, though more careful readers saw that this is what Craig says he would love to eat rather than what he had actually tried to eat. It was only later in the text that there was evidence that he had indeed attempted to try eating chips and baked beans. In another part of the text readers are told that he had enjoyed eating sugar sandwiches and then subsequently, chocolate spread sandwiches. Markers reported that significant numbers of candidates failed to score full marks on this part of the question and showed there is still a need for candidates on this tier to practise careful tracking of the text to make effective selections of relevant material.

The third part of the question again required candidates to select specific detail from across the text: to identify and list what Craig's parents did that showed their concern about their son's unusual diet. Most candidates selected relevant information. For example, the parents had taken Craig to a dietician to check whether his health was suffering because of a lack of balance in his food intake. They had also taken him to the Nuffield Hospital in Ipswich to have tests that checked his overall health. Further into the text we are also told that because of their continuing concerns his parents sent Craig on a six-month course for youngsters with eating disorders at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital. Many candidates gained the full three marks available for this question but some failed to pay sufficient attention to the question and included incorrect details. Some wrote about the parents taking him to a psychologist, although this was a suggestion given to the parents by one of the doctors rather than a course of action taken. Other candidates were too imprecise in their answers, for example, saying only that he was taken to hospital, with no supporting information given at all.

This was a question where careful tracking, a focus on the specific question details and a willingness to respond with a measure of precision yielded full marks but there were lots of examples where candidates, because of a mixture of the points referred to above, failed to score full marks, and in some cases gained disappointingly low marks in what was a straightforward question.

- Q.2 This was the most demanding question on the paper and tested candidates' ability to analyse the text critically, comment on the writer's selection of detail and suggest how this might interest the reader. The question offered bullet points that should have helped candidates focus on relevant aspects of the text but they also suggested a way of structuring the response. Many candidates saw that the subject of the article, Craig Flatman, was interesting first and foremost because of his bizarre diet: the fact that he had lived on little more than jam sandwiches for fifteen years. Less assured readers cast around for anything to focus on and some felt the fact that Craig was 6`2" and played football was extremely interesting, but they omitted to mention he lived solely on jam sandwiches. The two details that markers hoped candidates would explore was his diet and also the fact that he was nevertheless a very healthy 15 year-old. Stronger candidates wrote about how surprising this was and made sensible comments about how readers of the article would want to know more about him. They often used the text well, noting that not only was Craig healthy but in describing him as a `towering teenager` and a `strapping 15-year-old` who was `a picture of health`, they showed they were able to probe the language of the text. These more able readers made good use of the details included in the article, with some selecting a few facts about his diet, such as his mother having to buy four loaves of bread and a 1kg jar of jam a week. There was reward for the selection of detail but where this could be used to support sensible comments, there was greater reward.

There was plenty to say about Craig and what made him interesting, from the details of his early attempts to eat solid foods as a baby, to the concerns of his parents and the lengths they went to in order to provide a more normal diet. Some gave details of his parents' visits to hospitals and how they felt about his diet, but weaker readers drifted from the focus of the question and simply recounted what Craig's parents did, rather than using the details to discuss in what ways they contributed to the readers' engagement in the article.

The photograph of Craig standing next to a tower of sandwiches representing a week's supply of his meals was striking and good candidates had plenty to comment on, with some saying the picture was `amazing`, and that the huge stack of bread as tall as Craig himself was both humorous and striking. Some weaker readers merely commented that the photograph showed Craig eating a jam sandwich or that it was "a colourful photo" and this earned them little reward.

In trying to explore the different ways in which the writer had tried to engage the readers, some sensibly commented on the interviews with Craig himself, particularly where he rather wistfully commented that he would "love to eat things like burgers and chips". Others used some of the statistics in the article to show how the writer gained the readers' interest, with many commenting in a lively way on the seventy thousand sandwiches that Craig had consumed over his lifetime. Some candidates also focused on the interviews with Craig's parents or the hospital spokesman, where it was clear that even the best of medical practitioners could only speculate why Craig found normal food impossible to consume. Although this was the most demanding question on the paper, candidates whose focus stayed on the question often produced good responses and the bullet points seemed to help them. Weaker readers often struggled to comment, even where they identified details or features that would engage readers, and often answered a question that was more about what we learnt about Craig than how the writer made his story an interesting one.

- Q.3 The second text was in the form of a factsheet about the importance of a balanced diet for children and the two parts of the question required candidates to select specific details from across the text. The first part of the question asked candidates to identify the benefits of a balanced diet for children according to the factsheet. This required some quite careful tracking of the text as the details were threaded through different sections of the factsheet. Some weaker candidates struggled to focus on the question and responded by writing about what might happen to children who did not have a balanced diet, and in doing so, found it difficult to accrue many marks. This part of the question was worth five marks but too many candidates contented themselves with identifying just one or two benefits and then moved on to the other part of the question.

The text began, accepting that children can sometimes be fussy eaters who may not always be overly concerned with notions of a balanced diet, but went on to emphasise in the first paragraph that this was important for healthy growth and development. It explained that having a balanced diet would also help children to make good food choices into adulthood, and that the benefits were far reaching, making children less likely to suffer from chronic conditions later in life. Further into the text, some very specific benefits of a healthy diet were identified such as helping children to reach maximum growth and also promoting healthy, strong hair. In some ways this part of the question was a good discriminator in that those candidates who were more dogged in their tracking and were prepared to scan carefully often gained maximum marks, whilst other candidates satisfied themselves with just one or two points, usually from just one part of the text and were unable or unwilling to probe all of the text carefully.

To some extent, the same was true of some candidates' approach to the second part of the question, where they were asked to explain why breakfast is such an important part of a balanced diet. There was a section of the text that specifically focused on breakfast, but only those candidates who were prepared to look at the whole text could achieve maximum marks. In an earlier section of text, readers were reminded that a breakfast low in sugar but high in whole grains and fibre could help children concentrate and improve their memory, but many readers omitted to include this information in their response. Most candidates were able to select and use some relevant details but few gained the full 10 marks on the question serving to emphasise again the importance of careful tracking and the need to keep the question uppermost in mind as candidates move through a text.

- Q.4 This question involved looking across both texts but although the first part of the question could be regarded as primarily locating specific details, answering the second part of the question required candidates to cross reference some of the details from the first text. The first part of the question asked candidates to list the problems and dangers linked with a poor diet, and again those able to scan carefully often gained full marks. They saw that a poor diet increased the risk of obesity but also that poor diets were often high in sugar which could lead to tooth decay. They were able to note the link between poor diet and short height and that it often resulted in thin or greasy hair. Most candidates were at least able to make some connection between a poor diet and poor health, and careful readers noted some of the specific problems mentioned in the factsheet such as increased blood pressure or damaged arteries and the increased chances of having specific diseases.

When they turned their attention to the second part of the question, the more able candidates linked what they had identified from the first part of the question to show that Craig, despite his unusual diet, was nevertheless healthy. Many identified his height as a sign that he was healthy, some candidates reminding markers that those with a poor diet often failed to grow to maximum height. At 6'2", this could not be said of Craig. He also had what the writer described as a "thick shock of hair", when the factsheet reminded readers that a poor diet often led to thin or greasy hair. He was described as "a picture of health" and many noted that he enjoyed nothing more than playing football with friends, a sure sign of a healthy teenager. Some candidates gave the evidence from the tests he underwent that pronounced him to be "in excellent health" or the dietician who confirmed he was receiving sufficient protein, minerals and vitamins from his food intake to remain healthy. Others used the textual evidence that he was "a healthy 11 stone", that he had no tooth fillings and had never had been ill during his childhood. Weaker readers usually gained some marks on this question but often missed some of the simple details. In contrast, good readers often achieved full marks here by using the textual details sensibly and by seeing the links between the two texts.

UNIT 2 (Writing)

Although tackled in a different order from candidates on the Higher Tier, the two tasks were the same across the tiers, and the key messages in the Higher Tier report apply equally to candidates who took the Foundation Tier examination.

As with all of the Unit 2 writing tasks, candidates need to be very clear about the purpose and audience for their writing, as this helps to shape the content, and the correct register and tone to adopt. As the Higher Tier report makes clear, there should be enough time for candidates to spend a few minutes planning their content and considering how they might develop and sustain the points they intend to make. In too many cases, candidates had relevant points or ideas for their writing but failed to develop them sufficiently to have real impact, and this sometimes resulted in rather brief and limited responses. The suggested length for each task is about one to two sides of the examination booklet, but many responses were much shorter. Basic accuracy in writing remains an issue for many candidates, and as this accounts for a third of the marks, where it is weak it usually means that the marks on both pieces of writing can be significantly affected.

- Q.1 The first task was to write a report for the headteacher/principal on students' views about the lunch arrangements in the school or college. On this tier candidates were given some support with structuring the report in the form of specific sections to include. Most candidates tackled the task in a sensible and serious manner and often tried to temper criticisms with some positive points.

As with Higher Tier candidates, most candidates on the tier had plenty to write about and more assured candidates often used the suggested sections to give information as well as offering a viewpoint or suggestion about improvements. Quite a lot of candidates began with a brief introduction that helped to establish the purpose of the report and this often helped to create the right level of formality for the writing. Occasionally, candidates adopted a rather informal, even casual style that sat uneasily with the task, but most made it clear they wanted to provide a report that would be useful to the headteacher. When dealing with the opening section: how lunch time is organised, most reports offered a brief overview of the current arrangements and then went on to suggest what could be improved. Many gave examples of a `staggered` lunch arrangement that appeared to lead to some students having little choice or having to put up with cold meals. A common complaint too, was the length of the lunchtime. Most felt more time was needed and often recommended that an extension to the lunchtime was absolutely necessary for the students' wellbeing. Few advocated a longer school day to accommodate this extended lunchtime. Others complained about issues such as the policing of the queue, or the inadequacy of the seating arrangements, or the policy that required students to stay on site, and many reports offered suggestions about how some of the issues could be overcome. In some cases, the suggestions seemed to take no account of the additional costs: doubling the number of lunchtime supervisors was often seen as a solution to a number of problems, but only a few candidates explored the financial implications of this or other cost-related suggestions. Many candidates tried very hard to be even-handed and balanced criticisms with praise for some aspects of the arrangements in place.

When they moved on to discussing the range of food and drink available, few were stuck for something to say. Some demanded greater range, some wanted bigger portions and many complained about the prices being charged. Others were very concerned about the limited vegetarian options or wanted more (and sometimes less) healthy options on the menu. Some candidates praised the more adventurous menus that had been introduced in `theme days` that offered Italian or Chinese and even Thai food, and there was support or suggestions for `meal deal` arrangements, where students could buy their food and drink in a more economical way. When they moved into the final two sections that covered students' views about the arrangements and suggestions for improvements, some candidates tended to cover ground already explored but others tried to show that a good range of students' views had been incorporated into the report and the better responses tried to conclude the report in a way that emphasised the measured approach to the task and that often implied that just a few simple changes would benefit not only the students but the school as a whole, not least because the changes would attract more students and therefore more income for the school. Often the content was sound, perhaps because the bullet points in the task helped candidates to structure their response, but also because it was a subject close to their hearts and they genuinely had plenty to say. However, sound content was often not matched by candidates' technical accuracy and markers reported the most basic of errors, even including incorrect copying of spellings given in the task details: `arrangements`, `views`, `available` and `improvements` were all errors seen frequently. In many cases, basic errors stacked up very quickly and led to a poor mark for accuracy. For some candidates it will have undoubtedly affected the overall grade.

- Q.2 This second task, a formal letter of application for a holiday job, offered the opportunity for candidates to use some of the details in the advertisement to show that they were "the right person for the job" but frequently this task was done less successfully than the first one.

Most candidates made some attempt at letter conventions such as addresses and salutation but some struggled with even the basic layout, with postcodes appearing on the first line and a jumbled order of street, town and county following.

The most successful responses were those where the candidate had used the advertisement as a basis for the letter, sometimes dealing with each of the activities that were to be offered in turn, and explaining their aptitude or experience for the activity. Where a little detail or anecdote was offered to support a claim, this often strengthened the application, but too frequently letters merely asserted a level of expertise without any supporting detail or information. Because they lacked information or detail, some of the letters were inevitably quite brief and though earnest, they were ultimately unconvincing. Other candidates made claims that implied they were experts in all fields and could handle any situation they were faced with and though these were sometimes phrased in very assertive tones, they too were unconvincing and at times perhaps a little arrogant. Where candidates were more successful, they often were rather more modest in their claims; in some cases they even professed a lack of expertise in one of the activities but wrote about their willingness to learn and their interest in developing some of the necessary skills. Whilst less successful responses made vague assertions about how well they would be able to work with young children, better responses attempted to include details of the sorts of things they had actually done, such as working in a primary school on work experience and taking a small group of children for painting sessions; where some detail had been included, they were often quite convincing and persuasive. In addition to the skills candidates claimed to have, some also tried to persuade the intended reader they would be suitable for the post by talking about their personal

qualities and here again, where the claims were backed up by one or two telling examples or anecdotes, this strengthened the quality of the letter. However, too many candidates failed to do this and at times the letters took on the tone of a rather desperate appeal to the recipient. As with the first task, there were some significant issues of technical accuracy, with a range of simple spelling and punctuation errors and rather too often, some loss of clarity of expression. There were few candidates who did not try hard with these written tasks but too often basic weaknesses affected the overall quality of the work.

HIGHER TIER

Unit 1 (Reading)

Although this paper was produced at very short notice, it seemed to work well enough and I was pleasantly surprised by how many of the candidates made a really good attempt at it. The material proved to be quite accessible, even though it included some subtle arguments on a topic which is quite complex in the issues it raises. The paper was challenging but the candidates seemed to rise to the challenge in most cases and those who had been entered appropriately for this tier handled the texts and the questions with some understanding and commitment. It seemed that many of them were actually rather engaged by the topic of Fairtrade and the piece by Brendan O'Neill was certainly thought provoking because it cast doubt on the benefits of this type of ethical shopping.

It was possible to structure the questions in such a way that the texts could be handled in manageable sections, which undoubtedly made things easier for most of the candidates, although some got into difficulty with time management and did not complete the paper. The questions followed a reasonably familiar pattern and it was encouraging to see that most candidates seemed to know how to approach them.

Q.1 This question required understanding of the conditions in the mine and village of San Luis as presented by the journalist, Liz Jones. It was not particularly difficult to see that the conditions were appalling in both mine and village but the better candidates understood that they had to search for evidence to support their views and try to make some inferences about the precise nature of these 'terrible' conditions.

Some answers got slightly distracted by Liz Jones herself and the fact that she felt tired but most saw that the work in the mine was 'back-breaking', and not just for middle-class, Western journalists. The text mentioned that the mine was 'dark' and the miners only had their lamps to provide any light but it also touched on the dust and the uncomfortable fact that the mine was 'wet'. The good answers demonstrated understanding by separating these points. The 'steep, dark drops' clearly suggested danger and the feelings of 'vertigo and claustrophobia' experienced by the writer indicated how cramped and enclosed the mine was. Some candidates made the point that the mine was also frightening, not least because it was unregulated and there were no safety rules for the handling of dangerous materials such as chemicals and cyanide which were used in the treatment of the gold.

If the conditions were harsh and tough in the mine, the village of San Luis was no better. Most candidates seized on the fact that children played near an opencast mine and reacted with horror to the danger. It was fairly obvious that the village was poverty-stricken and basic with no facilities such as a crèche. Houses made of old sacks were mentioned frequently, and rightly so.

This was not a particularly difficult question and many candidates responded well to it, taking the opportunity to get off to a confident start.

Q.2 This was a familiar type of question and essentially it required the candidates to explore 'how' the writer demonstrated the benefits of Fairtrade.

A lot of progress could be made here by a sensible selection of relevant material from the text. Liz Jones used a wealth of facts to illustrate that Santa Filomena had gained immeasurably from Fairtrade. For example, very few candidates missed the significance of the level of income for these miners and, although not a fortune by Western standards, it was clear that this represented a considerable improvement and gave the workers a financial incentive to be environmentally responsible. Similarly, the text insisted that Fairtrade workers 'respect the environment' and do not allow dangerous chemicals used in the mining process to enter the eco-system. The facilities in the village were listed in detail and, although the weaker answers had a tendency to copy rather unselectively, the shrewder candidates separated the various items in the list and began to see patterns. For example, there were benefits in child care and education represented by the school and the crèche and improvements in health care represented by the clinic and social benefits such as sick pay and maternity leave. Fairtrade also improved the living conditions of the villagers as they had 'proper wooden houses' and 'rapidly improving sanitation'. Liz Jones also stated that some of the poorest people in the world had been given 'protection and a future' because of Fairtrade.

However, it was also possible to engage clearly with the issue of the writer's method and to explore some of her language choices and how they helped to achieve her intentions. Listing the benefits of Fairtrade was the obvious method here but another obvious method was the use of contrast and Liz Jones explicitly compared Santa Filomena, described by some of the candidates as a 'paradise' or 'heaven', with San Luis which was clearly a 'terrible' place. The use of the word 'enormous' to describe this contrast was not 'exaggeration' but rather a deliberate way of emphasising the gulf between Fairtrade mines and those which were not Fairtrade.

Another method employed by Liz Jones was to use the specific example of Paulina, a miner's wife from Santa Filomena, who clearly felt that 'two rooms, a stove and chickens' represented a huge leap forward in her life, and the lives of her family. She focused on the individual experience of this woman and her family to illustrate the benefits of Fairtrade and the difference it makes to the lives of real people. She used the journalistic technique of quoting Paulina directly in the text and her optimism and hope were quite emotional, particularly in relation to her children who had 'a way out' of the mines because of the school.

There were a lot of very competent answers to this question and, although only the best really engaged with the writer's methods, most could see not just what she was saying but also the significance of what she was saying.

Q.3 The text by Brendan O'Neill was more challenging than the article by Liz Jones and more subtle in its argument. As a result, this question was probably the most difficult on the paper and it was an effective discriminator because it required the candidates to show that they could follow an argument and see the writer's stance on a complex issue. The weaker candidates seemed to assume that Brendan O'Neill must be completely against Fairtrade simply because Liz Jones was in favour. However, his position was more subtle than blunt opposition to an organisation he clearly conceded was well-intentioned in its aims.

He stated that Fairtrade has become 'increasingly common' and he made it clear that he thought its aims were admirable in trying to help people in poor countries. He did admit that Fairtrade does increase the income of poor workers in developing countries but then his reservations began to emerge.

Most candidates saw that he was not convinced that Fairtrade is a good idea and some used their own words with one candidate suggesting that it was 'not all it is cracked up to be'. O'Neill's point about Fairtrade not encouraging mechanisation was important because it led to his argument that it allows poverty and 'back-breaking' work to persist. He argued that the Fairtrade system can become a 'trap' because workers can become 'dependent' on 'charity shoppers' or 'prisoners' of the well-intentioned who are prepared to pay a little more. He clearly thought a 'few pennies extra' did not represent a major advance in the fight against poverty and he clearly thought that Fairtrade really does not change anything.

The final section of his argument switched the focus to Fairtrade shoppers and his view that directing small amounts of extra money to producers in developing countries was really just about making us feel better about ourselves. Fairtrade appeals to our vanity and 'flatters' us but in O'Neill's opinion it does little to improve the lives of the poor.

I was pleasantly surprised by the fact that so many of the candidates did see O'Neill's basic argument. Only the best saw the subtleties but this question was more accessible than I had expected.

- Q.4 This question involved looking across both texts but the rubric offered the candidates a clear structure for their answers. The bullet points are an attempt to give direction and shape to the task and I believe that they have changed things for the better. That said, some candidates still ignore the instructions on the paper, and indeed sometimes the question, in favour of the chaotic jumble which was so common in the past. As I said in the report in the summer of this year, this question does not usually require a lengthy answer but it does require clear thinking and some conceptual grasp of two texts.

The focus here was on the thoughts of the two writers about the impact of Fairtrade on the people in developing countries. There was nothing new or different to read but the question required a relevant selection of material from the two texts and a display of understanding.

Liz Jones' views were relatively clear and straightforward. She obviously felt that Fairtrade had a positive and significant impact, not least in providing workers with financial benefits in the form of better wages and a bonus if they demonstrated environmental concern. She also pointed out the improvement in living conditions with 'wooden houses' rather than slums and better sanitation. Working conditions are safer as the workers have 'protection' and health care. Social benefits such as sick pay and maternity leave improve the lives of people and better facilities for children such as the crèche and school offered hope for the future. There was a lot here and many candidates gathered the relevant information quite efficiently.

However, Brendan O'Neill's views were not quite so straightforward and the subtlety of his stance proved rather elusive for a lot of the candidates. It was perhaps too blunt to assert that he thought that Fairtrade had a negative effect on the lives of people in developing countries but he was certainly sceptical and he did argue that the effect was not at all clear or necessarily good.

He did admit that Fairtrade helps a little with increased wages and income and he also stated that this money can have a beneficial effect because it can be invested in education for the children and other social needs. Most candidates missed this part of his argument and focused too exclusively on the misgivings he expressed.

However, he certainly did express misgivings and point out some of the unintended consequences of this well-intentioned movement. He argued that Fairtrade can leave, or even 'trap', workers in poverty and because it stifles real modernisation and development, workers are doomed to continue with 'back-breaking' work without the benefit of mechanisation. O'Neill argued that, as a result of the small financial incentive offered by Fairtrade, workers in the developing countries can become 'dependent' on the charity of Western shoppers and even our 'prisoners'.

As I mentioned above, the best answers provide enough textual detail to support their conceptual grasp of the two texts and those who do it effectively really can score well here.

UNIT 2 (Writing)

If the performance of the candidates in Unit 1 provided a pleasant surprise, I am afraid that this was not the case in Unit 2. Some very familiar weaknesses were very much in evidence in the writing and a significant number of candidates fell away badly in this unit.

The rubric made it very clear that the candidates should think about purpose, audience and format but care must also be taken with sentence construction, spelling and punctuation. Most of the candidates would do well to remember that one third of the available credit is allocated to this part of the assessment objective.

I also mentioned in this summer's report that time is not such a pressing issue in this unit and it makes sense for the candidates to take a minute or two to plan their writing before plunging into the tasks. The organisation of ideas requires some planning and the assessment takes into account the ability to 'engage the reader' and rewards 'cohesion and overall coherence'. More thought and planning might have improved the outcomes significantly but there is no doubt that it is a lack of technical accuracy and control that undermines most writing.

Q.1 A formal letter of application for a holiday job should not have presented insurmountable problems and the question also provided some prompts.

Some attention was needed to the layout of the letter. I have mentioned before that it is not the most important issue but it is a useful skill to be able to set out a letter properly. Careless errors in layout are often symptomatic of a casual attitude to accuracy which I would not wish to encourage. There were also problems with openings and many candidates found it difficult to avoid excessive, stilted formality or, alternatively, a tone which was too conversational.

A letter of application is no place for false modesty but many candidates needed to remember that self-praise is really no praise at all and a boastful tone does not usually impress anyone. It was important to employ plausible content and not to make extravagant claims which stretched credulity to breaking point. It was not necessary to be an Olympic champion to assist small children with some sporting activities and a working knowledge of the rules would have been enough. Some candidates invented a 'persona' but it was rarely a successful or convincing tactic here. Ironically, it was refreshing when some candidates admitted that they did not have the complete 'skill set', although they were almost always quick to add that they were willing to learn.

The key to this task was to include evidence of relevant experience, skills or personal qualities rather than merely assert 'brilliance' in every aspect of the job. For example, some candidates mentioned that they had done their work experience in a primary school but very few really made the most of it. Too often it was not discussed in any detail at all and no mention was made of how this might have prepared them for a job with children. Similarly, most candidates claimed a lot of sporting experience and expertise but they were often short of convincing, specific detail or any idea of how to make their skills relevant to the post.

It is not easy to demonstrate personal qualities in a letter and mere assertion can be unconvincing. However, the better responses did manage to convey a pleasant personality and show that they were reliable and punctual, although the candidate who claimed that his 'attendance and punctuation' were exemplary had perhaps got himself into some confusion.

- Q.2 It had been some time since I had set a report and it is difficult to do because a report usually emerges at the end of a process which cannot be easily replicated in examination conditions. However, this task allowed the candidates to write about school/college and catering is a subject dear to most hearts. The instruction to organise the answer into paragraphs with suitable headings also helped most of the candidates to give some shape and structure to their work.

Few candidates were struggling for something to write about and they covered a range of issues, often in detail. A surprising number were entirely satisfied with the catering in their school or college and quite a few were absolutely delighted and had no criticisms or complaints at all. However, the candidates were the experts on this subject and many of them took this opportunity to express their views in no uncertain terms. Some complained about the quality of the food and drink available to them but more concern seemed to be directed at the range and choice, although it was difficult to see how the caterers could please everyone. Some lamented the lack of healthy options while others were clearly not impressed by the lack of chips and burgers and felt deprived. The length of queues was a common complaint and, although many clearly did enjoy spending time in the canteen, many complained about lack of space and seating. The size of the portions attracted a lot of comment and very few felt that they were too large. However, the big issue was the price of food and drinks. There were a lot of complaints about what the candidates felt were extortionate prices. The staff received very mixed reviews. Many candidates praised the pleasant, cheerful nature of the dinner ladies, as well as their patience and hard work, but there were others who did not like their surly manners and also pointed to some alarming lapses in hygiene.

The best answers had a critical edge to them but the ability to establish an appropriate tone was important here. Although the energy of those who launched into damning criticism of their catering service could be quite entertaining, sometimes it was rather too blunt. The intended audience was the Headteacher/Principal and I doubt if many of them would have welcomed an intemperate rant. Those who wrote as if they were some sort of 'official' or 'inspector' often failed to impress and the writing became stilted and unnatural.

I have to mention the issue of technical accuracy. It is still a cause for concern and many of the errors we see are very basic. I commented in the summer report that there were no discernible signs of improvement in this key aspect of the work and I am sorry to say that it really is not uncommon to see scripts, even on this tier, which are littered with technical errors which cannot be ignored or dismissed merely as 'slips'.

Controlled Assessment

General Comments

Given that this examination could only be taken by candidates who had 'cashed in' their qualifications in the summer of 2012 and that it was always likely that the main focus for resitting would be on the externally assessed Units, the uptake for submitting new Controlled Assessment was limited. Added to this, the regulations for the November session demanded that all the work was new. There was no opportunity simply to replace individual pieces within the folder. Very often centres entered highly selected groups, often in single figures. Most candidates, though not all, were in the C/D boundary area as established in the Summer Award.

Administration

There were a number of problems with the administrative aspects. Folders often failed to arrive by the deadline and by a week after the deadline there were still centres that had not submitted candidates' marks on-line in order that WJEC's computer could make an appropriate selection of samples for the moderators. On occasion, centres simply resubmitted folders from the summer. These were easily identified since the teachers' and candidates' signatures were accompanied by a February/March date. In these circumstances, centres were given the choice of withdrawing the candidate from the entire examination or facing malpractice procedures. Moderators also encountered the problem of inappropriate 'notes' where the student had detailed structures to follow when writing their tasks. This is, of course, a contravention of the regulations as set out in the Specification and was dealt with in the same way as it was in the summer session. On some occasions, the notes were clearly not the work of the student, instead having been provided by the teacher. Again WJEC intervened in these circumstances.

These problems were, I must stress, limited to a small number of centres and the majority must be congratulated for their efficiency in preparing and assessing their students in such a limited time. I was impressed by one centre which included in the package the folders produced for the Summer examination alongside the new work thus proving that it was indeed 'new'. This is a practice to be encouraged.

GCSE English (not available in Wales)

Shakespeare/poetry task

It is unsurprising that there were no new approaches to this section of the folder given the limited time available to teach and assess the candidates. Most centres used either *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth* as the base text for the Shakespeare work and all, with the exception of one, used a suitable selection of poems from the WJEC Collection, as required by the Specification and set task list. Generally the tripartite structure as I have suggested was employed and the outcomes generally displayed a respectable knowledge of the texts though the linking section was often rather perfunctory.

Different Cultures Prose

As in the summer, the most popular text was *Of Mice and Men* and the most popular task was on Curley's wife. This assignment proved to be a good discriminator since those who were strongest could investigate the subtleties of Steinbeck's writing through his descriptions of the woman while less able candidates could make simple comments based on the surface of the text. Other texts only rarely made an appearance though there was some interesting work on characters (particularly Boo Radley) in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

First and Third Person Writing

There was good use made of the wide range of tasks available for these two tasks and the outcomes were generally engaging. The issue of accuracy in the SSPS (Sentence structure, punctuation and spelling) aspect of the total mark remains a concern and there were occasions when the Content and Organisation mark was inflated, very often pushing into Band 3 without the justification for it. Nevertheless, most candidates obviously enjoy the opportunity that this part of the folder gives them to write in non-textual way and there were some pleasing pieces produced. My main worry was that many of them were fairly limited in length.

GCSE English Language

Descriptive Writing

There were fewer occasions when the writing was overblown and unnatural and this was possibly the result of the nature of the candidature, which contained relatively few very able students where such weaknesses occur. The outcomes were generally evocative of place and contained at least some detail. As in the summer, the weakest students were those who wrote in a narrative way or who failed to investigate detail. First person approaches were less successful.

Narrative writing

I have already commented on this aspect in the GCSE English report and there is very little to add here though there was a tendency for weaker candidates to descend into an action-driven structure where the essential characteristics of the investigation feelings, character development and the creation of atmosphere were lost. As I noted in the summer report, this was particularly the case when candidates chose to write about the title 'Hero'. However, there was much to enjoy here.

Extended Literary Text

The GCSE English Language generic tasks require students to write either about character or atmosphere in relation to any Shakespeare play or one of the drama or novel texts from the GCSE English Literature set text list. There were occasions when candidates wrote about 'theme' (a GCSE English generic task), as was the case in the summer. It is important that the set tasks are read carefully to ensure that candidates are led in the right direction. There was a rather wider range of chosen texts here with *Of Mice and Men* not quite holding its dominant role. Interesting work, for example, on Macbeth's change of character appeared in some centres and occasionally the opportunity was taken to look at characters from some of the less popular set texts.

Spoken Language Study

There were very few entries for this Unit and the work was generally based on established transcripts, particularly the Junior Apprentice extract and JK Rowling interviews. Work was often descriptive rather than analytic and there were occasions when the students got a little too involved with technical 'jargon'.

Assessment

Assessments were for the most part realistic and well supported by in-text and summative commentary. It was necessary, however, to scale a number of centres which strayed outside the new tolerances required by Ofqual. Since there were a large number of centres where the entry was very small indeed, it was often the case that the moderator's marks were accepted by the Standardising Committee.

Speaking and Listening

As an additional entry opportunity, a small number of centres chose to enter candidates for the Unit 4 Speaking and Listening element of the Controlled Assessment. Some of these centres would have been visited in the course of the annual advisory moderator visits during November.

Centres were required to submit outline of activities forms for their candidates to the appropriate moderator, and in many cases these were accompanied by the individual records, although this was not a requirement. Details of tasks were generally appropriate and complied with the requirements of the specification.

The range of achievement was relatively narrow, as might be expected with a relatively small entry of resit candidates. There were no concerns raised by the moderators in relation to these entries, and hence the marks awarded will not be scaled on this occasion.