

GCSE Examiners' Report (Legacy)

English Language
GCSE (Legacy)
Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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Executive Summary

Unit 1: Non-examination assessment Oracy

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessments for Summer 2026 was to provide an opportunity for every candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language whilst demonstrating verbal reasoning skills.

The most effective record keeping sheets were those that included purposeful commentaries which were closely linked to both elements of the assessment criteria within the appropriate band. Centres are reminded that marks cannot be awarded without a declaration sheet signed by the teacher.

There was a continued increase in the number of centres providing audio-visual recordings for both tasks. This was particularly beneficial to the moderation process, enabling moderators not only to assess candidates' reliance on notes but also to observe how effectively they engaged with an audience and interacted with others during the tasks.

The most successful Individual Researched Presentations adopted a persuasive approach or explored a question or viewpoint, providing candidates with opportunities to demonstrate analysis and evaluation. Centres should continue to consider the impact of brevity when awarding marks and take careful account of any reliance on scripts or over-detailed notes when applying the assessment criteria.

In the strongest Group Discussions, candidates responded spontaneously to one another, developed ideas collaboratively and engaged critically with the stimulus material. Candidates should be encouraged to research beyond the stimulus materials so that discussions are informed, confident and supported by relevant evidence.

Unit 2: External Assessment Reading and Writing: Description, Narration and Exposition

This exam was based on the theme of 'Foraging for Food'. Overall, the theme was well received, and attempt rates were high across the paper.

In Section A, Question A8 was the first high tariff reading question on the paper and tested the ability to compare information from Text B and Text C. This was a successful comparison question and there were a number of areas across both texts where clear comparisons about the benefits of foraging could be made. Many candidates were able to range across the texts, finding benefits that were presented by both texts and comparing what was said in each text.

Question A14 was designed to encourage candidates to engage with the language of a text by exploring the impressions created by the writer of the mushroom festival. The ability to use inference skills was crucial in accessing the higher marking bands. Most candidates were able to show some understanding with appropriate evidence selections and offered thoughtful discussion in relation to the question.

In Section B, the attempt rates of question B2 were high with many candidates trying to provide writing which adhered to the recommended word count and had been carefully planned. Task A was a narration writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their experiences to write about a time when they attended a celebration. Task B was an exposition writing task which focused on the ways humans use or misuse nature and this

produced some very detailed responses. Many candidates were able to write from a position of real knowledge and understanding on this topic.

Unit 3: External Assessment

Reading and Writing: Argumentation, Persuasion and Instructional

This exam was based on the theme of 'Vandalism' which candidates seemed to genuinely engage with.

In Section A, question A9 was a familiar question type that usually features on this paper. Those who are most successful when tackling a 'how does the writer' question usually include a balanced combination of evidence, techniques, question focus and explanation.

Question A12 tested the ability to synthesise information from Text D and Text E. Those who understood the requirements and expectations of a synthesis task did not struggle and many completed efficient and detailed responses. Those who scored less well either attempted to compare the information or simply did not read the question carefully.

In Section B, a wide range of engaging pieces of writing were produced in response to both tasks. Question B1 asked candidates to write an article for a local newspaper identifying problems in their local area and persuading people to help solve them. There were many aspects to celebrate when marking this task and the examining team commented on the wider social/environmental awareness of many candidates and their ability to align their own experiences with the task set. Question B2 asked candidates to write a review of something they had listened to, watched or read. This task allowed candidates the freedom to share their views about something that had evoked opinions across a broad range of different text and media types.

UNIT 1: NON-EXAMINATION ASSESSMENT

Overview of the Unit

The purpose of the Unit 1 assessments for Summer 2026 was to provide an opportunity for every candidate to express themselves with accuracy and fluency through spoken language whilst demonstrating verbal reasoning skills. In centres where tasks were appropriately set and candidates were appropriately guided, it was clear that candidates were able to demonstrate oral proficiency commensurate with their ability.

The expected deadline was met by the vast majority of centres. While a small number of centres needed to be contacted to provide outstanding components of the requested sample, these issues were generally resolved promptly. In a few cases, moderators contacted centres to obtain signed declaration sheets. Centres are reminded that marks cannot be awarded without a declaration sheet signed by the teacher. There were also a small number of clerical errors where the marks submitted did not match those recorded on the record keeping sheet. It was pleasing to note that centres responded positively to the guidance provided in the previous Principal Moderator's report. Where incomplete folders were identified, centres generally understood the need to replace these with complete folders from candidates with a similar total mark within the same teaching group.

The most effective record keeping sheets were those that included purposeful commentaries which were closely linked to both elements of the assessment criteria within the appropriate band. Stronger commentaries provided clear exemplification of how candidates had met the criteria and justified their placement towards the upper or lower end of the band. In a minority of cases, commentaries did not make sufficient reference to both elements of the assessment criteria. Some centres supplemented their submissions with assessment sheets of their own design or highlighted and annotated versions of the assessment criteria. While these can provide useful supporting evidence, they should not be regarded as a substitute for detailed commentary on the official authenticated WJEC Record Keeping Sheet. Handwritten commentaries were accepted, but these were often less detailed than those produced electronically, making it more difficult for moderators to follow the rationale behind the marks awarded.

There was a continued increase in the number of centres providing audio-visual recordings for both tasks. This was particularly beneficial to the moderation process, enabling moderators not only to assess candidates' reliance on notes but also to observe how effectively they engaged with an audience and interacted with others during the tasks. It is hoped that this positive trend will continue in any future series.

It was also pleasing to see that most centres submitted the notes used by candidates for the Individual Researched Presentation, in line with the specification. Centres are reminded that notes must be included as part of the sample, even where audio-visual recordings are provided. In the majority of cases, candidates' notes took the appropriate form of brief bullet points or cue cards. However, there were still instances where candidates used very detailed notes or full scripts during task-taking. Moderators also noted an increase in candidates using electronic supporting materials on mobile phones or tablets. This is not permitted under the specification, as such materials cannot be retained by centres for submission as part of the moderation sample. As highlighted in previous reports, the submission of electronic Word documents alongside audio-only recordings is also strongly discouraged, as it raises questions regarding the authenticity of the notes used during the assessment. In a small number of cases, moderators considered that candidates had access to more extensive notes than those submitted. Any instances where candidate notes do not comply with the requirements of the specification are referred to WJEC for further investigation.

Many centres also included the notes used during the Responding and Interacting task. Although the specification does not require these notes to be retained or submitted, their inclusion represents good practice and provides valuable additional evidence to support the moderation process.

Tasks

Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

Presentation topics continued to reflect the interests and experiences of young people across Wales. The most successful Individual Researched Presentations adopted a persuasive approach or explored a question or viewpoint, providing candidates with opportunities to demonstrate analysis and evaluation. A small number of titles, however, were largely descriptive or informative in nature and consequently limited candidates' ability to access the higher strands of the assessment criteria.

It was encouraging to note that the majority of candidates delivered presentations within the recommended five to seven minutes. Where presentations were shorter than expected, many teachers supported candidates by asking open questions, enabling them to develop and extend their ideas. Centres are reminded that all candidates should be given the opportunity to respond to questions, regardless of the length of their presentation. This is particularly important where candidates have not demonstrated sufficient analysis and evaluation during their talk or have relied heavily on notes. Candidates who are not questioned are unable to provide a complete demonstration of their verbal reasoning skills, which may restrict the marks that can be awarded.

The continued use of overly detailed notes and full scripts remains an area of concern. The guidance for the Individual Researched Presentation makes it clear that this is an oral presentation rather than a reading exercise and emphasises the teacher's responsibility to ensure that candidates do not simply read their work. Although this issue has been highlighted previously, there were still instances where candidates were permitted to use inappropriate notes without this being reflected in the marks awarded. Centres are encouraged to devote time to teaching candidates how to prepare effective cue cards and to check that notes comply with the requirements of the specification before assessment takes place.

Across the Responding and Interacting task, all three discussion topics – traditions, extreme sports and the role of dogs in our society - were well represented. It was pleasing to see that many centres continued to respond positively to previous guidance regarding group size, with most discussions involving three candidates. This group size consistently provided the best opportunities for balanced participation and genuine interaction. Where groups contained four or five candidates, some participants found it difficult to contribute fully within the available time. Conversely, discussions involving only two candidates sometimes became sequential exchanges, reducing opportunities for candidates to engage with a wider range of viewpoints. The majority of groups sustained their discussions for the recommended ten minutes.

In the strongest discussions, candidates responded spontaneously to one another, developed ideas collaboratively and engaged critically with the stimulus material. However, some more able candidates inadvertently limited their performance by delivering lengthy prepared contributions instead of interacting naturally with others. Moderators also noted some discussions adopting an informal, conversational style, with little explicit reference to the stimulus material. Where this occurred, candidates had fewer opportunities to draw upon relevant evidence or explore issues in sufficient depth, restricting their ability to demonstrate perceptive analysis and evaluation.

Task marking

Comments on approaches to internal marking

In the Individual Researched Presentation, candidates awarded secure marks in Band 5 demonstrated mature, engaging and highly evaluative responses to complex subject matter. These candidates analysed research and differing viewpoints thoughtfully and used responses to teacher questions to extend and reinforce their verbal reasoning skills. Secure performance in this band was characterised by ambitious and precise vocabulary, together with the confident use of varied and complex sentence structures to communicate ideas fluently. Moderators noted some instances of over-rewarding where candidates demonstrated accurate spoken English but did not consistently employ the breadth of vocabulary or syntactic complexity expected at this level.

Candidates working securely within Band 3 delivered well-structured presentations that moved beyond the simple communication of information to include clear examples of analysis and evaluation. More successful responses also demonstrated an awareness of audience through the use of appropriate rhetorical devices. At the lower end of the band, candidates often relied primarily on factual content, with opportunities for analysis and evaluation emerging only after teacher questioning.

Centres should continue to consider the impact of brevity when awarding marks. Where presentations lasted little more than three or four minutes before requiring teacher questions to sustain the discussion, candidates had often not developed their ideas sufficiently to demonstrate the characteristics of the higher bands. In such cases, centres are reminded that marks within Band 4 are unlikely to be appropriate where presentations have not been sustained.

Centres should also take careful account of any reliance on scripts or over-detailed notes when applying the assessment criteria. In considering Content and Organisation, teachers should judge whether candidates have delivered their presentations effectively and with appropriate consideration of audience. Candidates who remain heavily dependent on extensive cue cards, including notes that closely resemble complete sentences, cannot realistically be said to be presenting confidently. These characteristics are more consistent with Band 3 than the higher mark bands. Similarly, excessive reliance on notes often affects register and delivery, resulting in a presentation that sounds read rather than spoken naturally.

Within the Responding and Interacting task, candidates who demonstrated secure knowledge of their chosen topic were well placed to present ideas coherently and respond effectively to the contributions of others. Higher attaining candidates listened carefully, adapted their responses in light of what had been said and challenged or developed viewpoints with confidence and purpose. The strongest discussions were characterised by perceptive exploration of the stimulus material, supported by relevant evidence and thoughtful reference to wider contexts.

Across both tasks, centres are encouraged to apply the criteria relating to grammatical accuracy with particular care. Moderators continue to observe candidates being placed in Band 4 despite recurring weaknesses in sentence construction, tense or agreement - for example, the repeated use of *'there is'* where *'there are'* is required. Frequent reliance on fillers such as *'like'* or *'y'know'* should also be considered when judging the security of spoken accuracy. While ambitious vocabulary should be rewarded where appropriate, it should be balanced against the overall accuracy and control demonstrated throughout the performance.

Key points to consider ahead of the next Unit 1 submission

Administration:

- Centres should check that all record keeping sheets contain accurate candidate details, marks and teacher signatures before submission.
- Centres should ensure that commentaries on the official WJEC Record Keeping Sheet justify the marks awarded through clear reference to both elements of the assessment criteria, supported by appropriate exemplification.
- Where an incomplete folder is requested, replace it with a complete folder from a candidate with the nearest available mark from the same teaching group.
- Centres should respond promptly to requests from moderators or WJEC to avoid delays to the moderation process.

Notes:

- All notes used by candidates for the Individual Researched Presentation should be submitted as part of the moderation sample.
- Notes must be brief prompts or cue cards rather than detailed notes or full scripts.
- Electronic notes displayed on mobile phones or tablets are not permitted, as they cannot be retained for moderation.
- Although not required by the specification, retaining and submitting notes for the Responding and Interacting task is considered good practice.

Recordings:

- Centres are strongly encouraged to provide audio-visual recordings for both tasks wherever possible, as these support accurate moderation.
- Centres should ensure that candidates are clearly identified at the start of each recording.

Individual Researched Presentation:

- Centres should guide candidates towards titles that encourage analysis and evaluation rather than the communication of information alone.
- All candidates should be given the opportunity to respond to spontaneous, open teacher questions, regardless of the length of their presentation.
- Candidates should be encouraged to sustain presentations for the recommended five to seven minutes before questioning.
- Teachers should check candidate notes before assessment to ensure they comply with the requirements of the specification.

Responding and Interacting task:

- Candidates should be encouraged to research beyond the stimulus materials so that discussions are informed, confident and supported by relevant evidence.
- Candidates should be encouraged to engage naturally with one another rather than preparing extended individual contributions or turn-taking responses.
- The stimulus material should remain central to the discussion and be used as a springboard for the exploration of ideas.
- Where possible, organise candidates into groups of three to maximise opportunities for meaningful interaction.

Internal assessment:

- Centres should work to ensure that the assessment criteria are applied consistently, particularly where candidates rely heavily on notes, deliver brief presentations or demonstrate weaknesses in spoken accuracy.
- When awarding the highest marks for accuracy, centres should ensure that ambitious vocabulary is balanced with overall grammatical accuracy, appropriate register and confident spoken delivery.

The most successful centres provided clear evidence of internal moderation which resulted in accurate and fair assessment across their sample. It was pleasing to see many centres taking note of moderators' reports and making appropriate adjustments to their administration and assessment processes. Some centres were raised as concerns where previous advice had not been heeded. It is hoped that centres will continue to keep these points in mind next year to support the smooth running of the moderation process and ensure that all candidates achieve to their full potential.

As always, if centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these points, they should contact the Subject Officer prior to the submission of samples. Moderators also welcome any information that may support the moderation process, and many centres accompanied their sample with a letter to the moderator to outline the assessment and moderation processes and to explain any substitutions.

The moderating team would like to take this opportunity to thank all centres for the hard work that has gone into preparing the candidates for their assessments and compiling the samples for submission. As always, the moderating team has very much enjoyed listening to an interesting range of presentations and discussions from candidates across a variety of educational settings.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE (Legacy)

Summer 2026

UNIT 2

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Foraging for Food'. Overall, the theme was well received, and attempt rates were high across the paper. The Reading section presented a range of text types across five separate texts. Questions were designed to vary in difficulty and test a broad range of skills across the paper. In the Writing section, the extended writing task provided a choice between narration writing and exposition writing.

The following AOs were assessed across the exam paper:

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested throughout the reading section. Candidates were required to use comparison skills (A8) and evaluate and interpret content (A5, A7, A8, A9 and A14) and edit texts (A15-A17). Careful evidence selection was required across both higher and lower tariff questions as was the ability to interpret meaning.

AO3 Writing – proof-reading skills were specifically assessed (B1). All writing skills relating to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested in extended writing (B2). These are listed on p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at:

[GCSE English Language Specification](#)

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Reading

Text A

Text A was adapted from a statement about foraging for food, made on the Natural Resources Wales website. This was a non-continuous text which defined the concept of foraging and provided a clear introduction to the overarching exam topic. Information was accessible and the text provided a straightforward introduction to the examination.

Questions A1 and A3

These two questions offered a straightforward introduction to the examination. Candidates were asked to retrieve information for both questions. As expected, this proved a straightforward exercise, and most candidates were able to access the available marks.

Question A2

This was the first multiple-choice question on the exam paper. Candidates were required to choose from four options to isolate the statement that was not made by the text. All the statements were based on information from the text, although the third statement 'Foraging is only used to describe picking fruit' was untrue. The text clearly stated the different types of foraging that take place and that it refers to 'food that grows in the wild...as well as other natural products'. The task proved straightforward and success rates were high with over 84% of candidates selecting the right answer. As with all multiple-choice questions across the paper, a very small minority of candidates elected to select more than one of the boxes or failed to make their choices clear. These answers were ineligible for credit.

Text B

This text was adapted from an article on the website of a countryside charity. It contained details on the activity of foraging and the wider benefits that it presents as an activity.

Question A4

This was a low tariff question which required candidates to locate specific information. They were asked when early humans turned to farming. This information was easily located in the opening paragraph of the text. Most candidates were able to select the relevant details – ‘at the end of the Stone Age’. A few responses were too brief in the details given, just referencing ‘the Stone Age’, or too imprecise ‘thousands of years ago’, and were ineligible for credit.

Question A5

This question had a tariff of three marks and asked candidates to explain how the writer makes foraging seem like an exciting hobby in paragraph three of the text. This was designed to be a more challenging question and relatively few candidates were able to achieve all three marks. Some candidates were unable to do more than copy down or paraphrase relevant evidence and this will have restricted their possible achievement. Those who performed well were able to explain key evidence in relation to the question. For example, the writer refers to the ‘edible treasures’ that foragers collect, and many candidates chose to examine this and explain that foraged goods are presented as highly valued items or that the writer presents foraging with the same joy and excitement as a treasure hunt. This demonstrated clear understanding of the evidence through explanation. There were a number of points and areas of explanation available in this short paragraph of text and no shortage of ways in which candidates could access the three available marks. Those who attempted to explain evidence taken from outside of the specified paragraph were ineligible for credit.

Question A6

This was the second multiple-choice question on the exam paper. The question required candidates to choose from four options to explain the meaning of the word ‘ethical’ in the context it was used in the text. The question proved straightforward and around 80% of candidates chose the correct answer which was the fourth choice ‘having a sense of what is morally right’. Credible distractors were included so candidates needed to read the text carefully and, as ever with this question type, look at the phrase in the context in which it was written. The first answer, ‘selecting the healthiest crops’ was the next most popular choice and suggests a lack of understanding of what was read. Although the word ‘healthy’ does appear in the same paragraph as the quote it refers to the state in which plant populations should be left and only a very superficial reading of the text would connect these ideas.

Text C

This text was adapted from an article in a national newspaper and discusses some of the negative aspects of foraging and the difficulties it creates.

Question A7

This question required candidates to engage with word meaning. They were asked what the writer meant with the phrase ‘the act of gathering food in the wild has boomed in recent years’. There was an expectation that candidates engage with the word ‘boomed’ and that this gave the sense that there has been a significant increase in interest in foraging. Examiners were instructed that this may be expressed in quite different ways and advised to be mindful of synonyms and explanations which demonstrated understanding using different vocabulary to that suggested by the mark scheme. Those candidates who were able to explain that ‘boomed’ suggested a sudden or considerable increase in interest in foraging were credited. Many candidates achieved well with some using terms that suggested a

wider awareness of economics had proved helpful. Those who struggled were vague or too general in explanation to achieve the mark.

Question A8

This was the first high tariff reading question on the paper. It tested the ability to compare information from Text B and Text C. Candidates were asked to compare what was said about the benefits of foraging. This was a successful comparison question and there were a number of areas across both texts where clear comparisons about the benefits of foraging could be made. Many candidates were able to range across the texts, finding benefits that were presented by both texts and comparing what was said in each text. The successful answers generally did this in one of two ways. The first was to be led by the comparative points and organise their answer around those points looking at one text and then the other in relation to each individual idea. The second was to look at a number of points from one text (usually Text B) and then look at the same areas in the second text whilst drawing comparisons with the first text. Both of these approaches enabled candidates to score highly and demonstrate the comparative skill required to move through the marking bands. The first of these approaches was perhaps more precise and time-efficient.

There were a few areas where candidates may have restricted their own achievement. This was a comparison question which required the study of two texts. Candidates who only considered one text were unable to make clear progress. Similarly, those candidates who looked at both texts but made no comparative points about the information gained, choosing to focus in isolation on the benefits in each text, were self-limiting in potential achievement. Some candidates also elected to provide an answer to a question which had not been set, and this led them to offering more general comparisons between the two texts, often focusing heavily on the negative aspects of foraging presented in Text C. This demonstrated very limited focus on the set question and will undoubtedly have limited possible attainment.

Question A9

This was a more challenging low tariff question which required candidates to interpret meaning and explain evidence. Candidates were asked to explain in their own words why commercial foraging is seen as harmful. Two marks were available and to achieve both marks candidates needed to make two clear and distinct points. Many candidates will have achieved at least one mark but merged points together in a way that did not enable them to cover two clear areas. The question stipulated that candidates needed to put the explanation in their own words; this was to avoid candidates being able to answer by merely copying evidence from the text and not showing understanding of what had been read. Those candidates who took this approach will have found it hard to achieve.

Text D

This colourful non-continuous text was adapted from an infographic that gave information on wild garlic.

Questions A10 and A12

Both of these questions were designed to test the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information. They were designed to be straightforward questions and this proved to be the case. Candidates were asked to retrieve factual information from different areas of the text. Most candidates were able to access the available marks.

Question A11

This was the third and highest achieving multiple-choice question on this exam paper. Candidates were required to look at four suggestions for how wild garlic might be used and choose the one which was not made by the text. The task proved straightforward and success rates were high with the vast majority of candidates selecting the right answer.

Text E

The final reading text on his paper was adapted from a book written about the world of mushrooms and fungi. In the extract used for Text E, the author writes about the annual mushroom festival which takes place in a town in Italy.

Question A13

This was a straightforward question, which asked candidates to identify the town in which the mushroom festival was held. Very few candidates were unable to complete this question. The only wrong answers reported were from those candidates who wrote 'Italy' or refused to engage with the question at all.

Question A14

This was the second higher tariff reading question on the examination paper and, despite this being the final question set on the reading texts, attempt rates were high. As with last year's Unit 2 paper, this suggests that most candidates had timed the exam successfully to this point.

This question was designed to encourage candidates to engage with the language of the text and explore the impressions created by the writer of the mushroom festival. Ten marks were available. The ability to use inference skills was crucial in accessing the higher marking bands. Most candidates were able to show some understanding with appropriate evidence selections and offered thoughtful discussion in relation to the question. The highest achievers were able to carefully examine the text and demonstrate a wide range of specific impressions which demonstrated perceptive awareness of implicit detail.

There is no doubt that candidates engaged well with this question and many provided examiners with an enjoyable marking experience. There was no shortage of commentary around the idea of the festival turning this small town into 'mushroom mayhem' with many exploring the implications of this in some detail. The passage was rich in descriptive detail, and this facilitated some thorough examination of language, particularly around the physical descriptions of the market and the almost religious zeal connected to the town's devotion to the porcini mushroom. Indeed, there were many interesting and thoughtful comments made in relation to the 'whole place' being 'a hub of mushroom worship'.

Those candidates who struggled to access a range of impressions, perhaps just focusing on the busy nature of the scene, will have made limited progress. Similarly, those who lost focus on the question, in some cases being sidetracked by impressions of the porcini mushroom, may not have given themselves the opportunity to access the full range of marks.

Editing Section - Questions A15-A17

This section did not present anything unexpected. All question types had been seen across past examination series and there was nothing out of the ordinary to report.

Proofreading section - Question B1

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this proofreading question. The text was presented as a recipe for making wild garlic pesto and there were different types of errors (in spelling, punctuation and grammar), to locate and then correct. Although candidates were told to identify five errors it was evident that there were six possible errors for them to find including a colon ahead of the list of ingredients. It was possible, therefore, to be credited for the first five correct error selections (out of six) that were clearly identified within an answer. It was necessary for candidates to make clear which error they were correcting to be sure of receiving the mark. Where candidates elected to include more than five answers, only the first five answers were eligible for consideration. There was little to separate which errors were identified and corrected most frequently,

although 'week's' was probably the most regularly seen and accurately corrected word. Both 'ingrediants' and 'proccessor' were often identified but there were many different alternatives given for the spelling of these words. The message that credit can only be given to corrections which do not make further errors seems to have been widely received. All corrections must appear exactly as they would appear in the text. In this case, for example, that means that the correction of 'Pore' to 'Pour' needed to begin with a capital letter, in the same way that it would have appeared in the text.

Question B2

Candidates faced a choice between a narration writing task and an exposition writing task in the Writing section. Although we have no way of determining which task was more widely chosen, anecdotally examiners seemed to think there was a relatively even balance between the task choices. Attempt rates seemed high with a great many candidates trying to provide writing which adhered to the recommended word count and attempting to carefully plan work.

Task A was a narration writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their experiences to write about a time when they attended a celebration. As ever, examiners were instructed not to be too 'narrow' in their expectations for this question and a great many different types of celebration were seen. Many candidates wrote about family celebrations such as weddings and birthday parties, these were often written in detail, contained lively and/or amusing anecdotes and in many cases seemed very happily remembered and expounded upon. Examiners have been widely entertained by some of these responses and candidates have definitely not shied away from providing elaborate detail on members of their wider family! Other often seen family celebrations came in the form of gender reveal parties and baby showers. Family funerals were not rare and were often billed as a 'celebration of life' event. This was a perfectly valid approach to take for this question and examiners reported some very moving and sensitively handled narration in relation to this type of answer.

Elsewhere, there were many sporting celebrations – whether in the immediate form of a win on the field, or celebrated through awards ceremonies, or by attendance at a mass participation event such as a trophy parade. All of these were valid approaches and contained enough scope for pleasing development of detail. Some candidates elected to write about a festival – again this was perfectly acceptable. Examiners reported marking festival narratives which celebrated music, local galas and more niche events that candidates may have experienced on their travels. These candidates were perhaps inspired by the festival in Text E which was certainly a celebration of the porcini mushroom.

Unfortunately, some candidates elected to base their own celebration a little too literally on Text E. The writing pieces which used the words of Text E but substituted the mushroom for something else that was being celebrated will not have achieved highly. Previous Principal Examiner reports have raised the issue of candidates taking this path (something which they have perhaps seen on social media platforms) and, whilst it does not appear to have become any more widespread than last year, this practice is still in evidence. For the avoidance of doubt, candidates should not copy aspects of what they have read in the reading material (for example, the structure, punctuation and key vocabulary) and change the topic or wording slightly. Although this may result in a slightly different piece of writing, it does not provide them with a piece of their own original writing nor showcase what they can achieve. Little credit is available for those taking this self-limiting approach.

Task B was an exposition task which focused on the ways humans use or misuse nature and this produced some very detailed responses. Many candidates were able to write from a position of real knowledge and understanding on this topic. The task was purposely general in scope, allowing candidates to comment on any aspect of nature. Many elected to base their essay, at least partially, on the topic of foraging and made sensible use of information from the reading section to support the points they were making. Some expanded on this as a topic area and considered many other ways in which humans use or misuse nature. Animal welfare, farming, environmental concerns, the plight of the oceans and humanity's interest in conquering space were only a few of the areas touched upon by students. There were very passionate arguments made regarding the need to protect the environment as well as widespread condemnation of humanity for the ways in which nature has been jeopardised. Examiners reported being impressed by the detail and knowledge that was on offer in some of these pieces.

As with previous years, a few candidates copied directly from the texts. Copied work often used Text C but it was by no means just confined to this text. Some copied answers spliced several texts together, presumably in a bid to avoid detection. Copied answers are very easy to spot (examiners are very familiar with the set texts) and are ineligible for credit.

Timing did not appear problematic, and many candidates wrote extensively in Section B. Indeed, examiners suggested anecdotally that candidates using additional pages seemed more widespread than ever before. This was not always helpful to a candidate's cause though; some seem to write beyond what is necessary in order to fill the time and perhaps lost focus and direction as a result. As has been reported previously, in many cases time is likely to be better spent in the careful planning and proofreading of work.

The use of a word processor in completion of scripts seems to be increasing and this may have proved particularly helpful in the extended writing section to those who struggle to write legibly in examination conditions. It should be noted though that anything candidates can do to make sure their work is adequately spaced, especially between questions, would be helpful to the marking process. Word processed work should also clearly identify which question is being answered. This was not always the case and, whilst examiners will always do their best, work which is presented confusingly can be self-penalising.

Finally, written accuracy remains a significant area of concern for many candidates. This list was produced in last summer's Principal Examiner report and remains valid as an indicator of the likely areas to restrict a candidate's progress:

- limited control of tense and agreement
- verbless sentences
- the omission of basic punctuation like full stops and capital letters
- the prevalence of comma splicing
- basic spelling mistakes – particularly regular homophone errors
- inaccessible handwriting – if writing is illegible, it cannot be marked as accurate.

Once again, these areas of concern are likely to be at least partially responsible for limited writing achievement.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE (Legacy)

Summer 2026

UNIT 3

Overview of the Unit

This exam was based on the theme of 'Vandalism' which candidates seemed to genuinely engage with, especially due to some of the direct focus on Wales. Examiners anecdotally reported a good deal of effort and commitment with good attempt rates across the paper. A combination of continuous and non-continuous texts could be found in the Reading Section and the range of question types ensured varied levels of challenge were posed. Writing tasks saw candidates complete an article and a review to comply with the requirement to produce argumentation and persuasion writing.

Which AOs were assessed?

AO2 Reading – inference, deduction and retrieval skills were tested mostly across a range of lower tariff questions (A1, A2, A3, A4, A6, A7). Candidates were required to use summary (A11) and synthesis (A12) skills during the examination alongside text analysis (A7 and A9). Careful selection of and reference to evidence was required across a range of higher tariff questions (A7, A9 and A12) alongside the ability to interpret texts and use verbal reasoning skills (A3, A4). Sequencing skills were also tested (A5).

AO3 Writing – all writing skills appertaining to the assessment of GCSE English Language were tested. These are listed on p.13 of the Specification document which can be found at:

[GCSE English Language Specification](#)

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A Reading

Text A

Text A was an infographic in the form of a poster with the aim of exploring vandalism in the UK. The text gave a range of facts about vandalism using some supporting statistical information and was intended to provide candidates with a clear and straightforward introduction to the theme.

Questions A1 and A2

These questions tested the ability to retrieve and deduce information from the text. They allowed all candidates to engage with some of the factual content. Precision was necessary, especially with regards to A1, where candidates required a correct number and a link to the correct currency. Success rates were high and candidates were usually accurate in their presentation of the correct answer. A2 asked candidates to find out the percentage of vandalism that is car related and most performed well. As the word 'percentage' was included in the question, they could respond accurately with the number '40' and most did so.

Question A3

This was the first multiple-choice on the paper and required candidates to determine which of the options was 'not true'. The correct answer 'some people vandalise because they dislike cars' was selected by a significant proportion of the candidature with very few giving an incorrect answer.

Text B

This text was taken from a webpage which provided guidance on graffiti removal. The information contained within the text was not presented sequentially and was arranged randomly around an image of someone removing vandalism from what appeared to be a commercial shutter.

Question A4

This second multiple-choice question saw the best success rates of the three multiple-choice tasks. Candidates were asked to deduce the meaning of 'heavy duty' and most selected the correct option 'stronger than usual'. Credible distractors were included and candidates had to read both the phrase and all possible options carefully to receive credit.

Question A5

Candidates should be very familiar with the sequence question on Unit 3. It requires them to read a non-sequenced text and to put the stages into the most logical order. The first step had been given to candidates who then had to sequence steps two, three and four. Most managed to deduce from the word 'start' that the next most logical step was b. A significant number of candidates then correctly selected d followed by c. While most candidates were successful, a minority did not complete the steps according to the instructions given. Some candidates ticked boxes and others wrote out the steps or renumbered them. Following the instructions provided for this question type is paramount for success.

Text C

Candidates seemed to engage well with this resource, a colourful blog written by a graffiti artist. The writer sought to dispel the myth that all graffiti is committed by criminals and shared the tale of his carefully honed craft and environmentally minded outlook.

Question A6

This was a straightforward question for those who read the task carefully. Candidates were asked to identify which subject the writer studied while they were at college. There was a singular request in the word 'subject' which only required one piece of information. The correct answer was 'geography' and the majority were successful in their selection of this subject. However, a number of candidates chose to unselectively copy out a sentence or a series of phrases from the text. While these may have contained the correct answer, a lack of selection and precision rendered these responses incorrect. When a candidate is asked for a singular piece of information, they should ensure that they comply with the requirements of the question.

Question A7

With a mark tariff of five, this was the first extended reading task on the paper. Candidates were asked to give their impression of the writer of Text C. As the text commented on the writer at several different points in their life and referred to the various activities and interests they pursued, it was possible to make a wide range of impressions about them. Candidates who read the text carefully, selected valid details, and were able to infer an impression about the writer based on such details found they made good progress. For full marks, candidates were required to provide a wide range of confident and assured impressions. Impressions that were more literal and straightforward undoubtedly secured fewer marks. Candidates who were unable to move beyond a literal retelling of the text or who made unsupported assertions naturally limited the extent of their achievement focus and therefore the number

of marks awarded. To summarise, a balance of sensible, well supported impressions allowed candidates to accumulate marks.

Text D

Candidates engaged well with Text D (with many citing sections in their writing). The text was taken from an article about the problems caused by vandalism in Cardiff city centre. Many candidates seemed to share the writer's embarrassment about the issues in Cardiff. It appeared that they engaged with the content at all levels in question A9 which was pleasing to note.

Question A8

This question served as a straightforward introduction to Text D. Candidates were required to locate and deduce the number of Snoopy statues that were damaged within a 48-hour period. Careful reading of the text was necessary as other numbers were present within the paragraph which contained the correct answer. Those who were unselective and wrote down more than one number often obscured the correct answer and were likely to be ineligible for credit. The majority, however, were successful in their response to this question.

Question A9

Much has been written in previous reports regarding the approach to adopt when tackling a 'how does the writer' type question. This is a familiar question type and always features on the Unit 3 paper. Those who are most successful when tackling this type of question usually include a balanced combination of evidence, techniques, question focus and explanation. The very best candidates are succinct in the combination of these features and produce sophisticated, well-articulated responses. Those who achieve in the mid-range of the marking bands often cover fewer areas of the text and are less convincing in their explanations. At the lower end of the rank order, candidates become increasingly reliant on narrating the text or begin to spot features and techniques with little sense of the text or the question at hand.

Text D was rich in content, and a wealth of persuasive features and language choices were on offer. Most candidates were able to engage with the damage caused by vandals in Cardiff and could link this to the task. More subtle responses focused on language and inference as they worked hard to appreciate the writer's tone and the impact of the damage done. Many techniques could be genuinely referenced in answers and used to explore the effect of vandalism. Consideration of the impact of the technique was important rather than a technique simply being cited as persuasive.

It is always advisable to tackle the reading for longer high tariff questions in a chronological fashion enabling the production of a well tracked response. Candidates are well-advised to frequently refer to the set question to ensure their response remains focused and pertinent. At the lower end of the cohort, many opted to select evidence and did very little in the way of linking or explaining. Such responses are self-penalising. Please note that the use of bullet points or grids in this type of answer is not recommended as this usually limits the depth of the response and the progress made by the candidate.

Text E

The final text of the examination was taken from an article about the vandalism of art. This text offered a different perspective to the other texts which focused more on the damage and destruction caused by vandals and graffiti as opposed to Text E which sought to educate readers on the different types of vandalism, specifically the deliberate vandalism of art by climate activists.

Question A10

This was the final multiple-choice task on the paper and required candidates to define the phrase 'vent their rage'. Four options were given and the second option was the correct answer. A significant majority opted for option two and possibly used their understanding of the word 'rage' to facilitate their success.

Question A11

The ability to summarise information/details is a valuable life skill. Significant improvements to the way candidate demonstrate this skill have been observed throughout the life of this qualification, which is pleasing to note. As with previous summary questions, those who manage to collect key ideas from the text (based on the task) and compile them in a brief summative document, often through the use of bullet points, perform well.

This question required candidates to read Text E and to summarise the reasons why art is vandalised. There were eight possible areas that candidates could cover and most embraced the instruction to use their own words. The third and fourth points from the mark scheme appeared to be the most popular with many candidates noting that the vandals 'wish to be heard' and 'seek attention'. The seventh bullet 'help the planet' could be expressed in a number of different ways and was also a popular choice.

Some candidates did not read the question properly and embarked on vague responses which simply tried to comment on why people vandalise (without a focus on art). Such responses were difficult to credit. A small minority chose to explain rather than summarise and this approach was also unhelpful.

Question A12

The final question on the paper tested the ability to synthesise information from Text D and Text E. Candidates were asked to 'synthesise the different ways in which people vandalise places and objects. Those who understood the requirements and expectations of a synthesis task did not struggle and many completed efficient and detailed responses. Those who scored less well either attempted to compare the information or simply did not read the question carefully. Brevity or lack of detail was an issue for some.

A synthesis response can be organised in different ways, but it is usually helpful if the candidate makes it clear which text they are taking their information from. It can help the candidate to organise their thoughts and to track what they have included. Most candidates tend to separate their answer into two sections. However, while this is often efficient, it sometimes means they do not demonstrate the ability to collate effectively as required for the top marks.

Please note the following key details about synthesis questions:

- bullet points do not allow candidates to demonstrate their ability to collate information and those who adopt this approach will struggle to move beyond the lower Bands
- answers should be written in full sentences and paragraphs; a table or grid style approach does not demonstrate the ability to collate effectively
- for a synthesis response to move beyond Band 1 (1-2 marks) candidates must include detail from both texts
- quotations or paraphrasing are acceptable when synthesising information
- candidates are not required to name which source the information has been taken from, but most find this extremely useful in terms of organising their ideas and tracking which texts they have used.

Section B Writing

Question B1

A wide range of engaging pieces of writing were produced in response to both question B1 and question B2. The examining team saw the full range of abilities on offer. At the very upper end, candidates were awarded full marks for some exceptionally astute, sophisticated and carefully crafted responses, which were both engaging and insightful. Across the cohort, it was pleasing to note the commitment shown by candidates although a number did not attempt both writing tasks.

B1 asked candidates to write an article for a local newspaper identifying problems in their local area and persuading people to help solve them. This task was more closely linked to the source materials and this meant that some of the ideas generated in the reading materials could potentially be used as a springboard for a wider discussion. Some candidates referred to the odd statistic or idea from the reading materials in their writing, which was good practice and perfectly acceptable. A worrying number of students chose to copy verbatim huge chunks of the resource materials. While some copied out an entire text, others chose to intersperse sections from across all five texts almost to create a new document. As you can imagine, trying to combine random sections of five very different texts did not create a coherent or appropriate new piece of writing. Those candidates who produce basic, but authentic sentences are far more likely to achieve credit than someone who simply copies a text which all examiners are very familiar with.

There were many aspects to celebrate when marking this task and the examining team commented on the wider social/environmental awareness of many candidates and their ability to align their own experiences with the task set. Many spoke sensitively about homelessness and the issues faced by those living on the streets with some thoughtful solutions being offered or a rallying cry for support. Vandalism was a popular topic and candidates from many of the larger towns and cities shared their experience of park destruction and offensive graffiti while candidates from more rural areas spoke about damage to property and theft. Racism and inclusion also proved popular, and it was pleasing to note the maturity and tolerance adopted by many young people.

Question B2

B2 asked candidates to write a review of something they had listened to, watched or read. It was felt that this broad task would allow candidates the freedom to share their views about something that had evoked opinions across a broad range of different text and media types. Reviews varied considerably with many reviewing books, TV programmes, websites, online games, podcasts, blogs and even the materials read during the exam. A review should be a genuine piece of argumentation writing, giving both positive and negatives views about something. It should not be a narrative retelling or a story or experience. The examining team was effusive in its praise for the writing produced for this task with many sharing timestamps when they marked something original or engaging.

Harry Potter was a popular choice both as a movie and a book with candidates usually selecting their favourite book and sharing details about characters, plot and highlights. Anime series were also popular with many candidates able to cite the names of actors, directors and niche details about the anime genre. Books and films studied for GCSE were not uncommon and some candidates were enthusiastic in their praise about the lessons learned and the discussions enjoyed when studying set GCSE texts. Overall, it is safe to say that the young people of Wales have furnished many an examiner with a diverse reading list for the summer weeks ahead.

In all writing, structure, technical accuracy, tone, purpose and audience awareness remain vital. A few moments to plan a piece of writing and the direction it will take usually pay dividends to those adopting this practice. Many candidates do not plan, and the repercussions are often detrimental. Technical accuracy must remain the target for future cohorts as should the sequencing of a piece of writing. While most candidates paragraphed their writing, the absence of a plan was sometimes notable when the response lacked direction or clarity. Many candidates heed the lessons in class and try to demarcate sentences using (as a minimum) simple full stops and capital letters. This approach undoubtedly helps to present a clear overall message to the reader. Tenses remain a concern especially where candidates frequently drift between past and present tense making their ideas a little trickier to follow. Finally, while a range of punctuation is desirable and a necessity for the higher Bands, adding a range of punctuation types incorrectly can often hinder the clarity of a piece of writing.

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